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# Introduction to the **BALARAM MRIDUNGA**

**DURYODHANA-GURU DĀSA**



Introduction to the

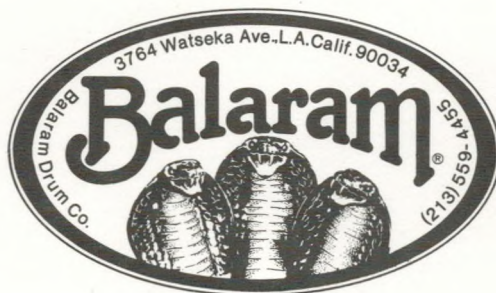
# **BALARAM MRIDUNGA**

**DURYODHANA-GURU DĀSA**



**THE BHAKTIVEDANTA BOOK TRUST**  
New York · Los Angeles · London · Bombay





Readers interested in the subject matter of this book are invited by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness to correspond with its Secretary.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness  
3764 Watseka Avenue  
Los Angeles, California 90034

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Printed in the United States of America



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By the enthusiasm and mercy of our spiritual preceptor, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, the joys of playing and singing traditional Indian spiritual music have been brought to the Western world and experienced by thousands of people. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted everyone to have the opportunity to learn how to play mridunga, since it has been traditionally used to glorify the Supreme Lord in song and dance. In fact, he requested that thousands of mridungas be produced for this purpose. The seeds of this desire are now bearing fruit, and in this book, we are offering help and encouragement to the many people who will seek some proficiency in playing the mridunga. We are hoping that this humble endeavor will aid in fulfilling the desire of His Divine Grace.





## Introduction to the Mridunga

The history of the mridunga drum dates back thousands of years, to ancient India during Vedic times. A reference is found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, one of the eighteen major *Purāṇas*, or histories of the planet earth, which states that mridungas were in use during the time Lord Krishna was on the planet, thousands of years ago: *viṇā-veṇu-mṛdaṅgāni puraṁ praviśati prabhau* (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto Ten, Chapter Fifty, verse 38).

The term *mridunga* comes from the Sanskrit language. Two principal meanings of the word have been given by scholars. The first meaning is derived from *mrid*, which means "clay," and *anga*, which means "body." Hence, we have a drum whose body is made of clay. The second meaning is derived from *mridam*, which means "while beating," and *ga*, which means "to go." Hence, we have a drum which is beaten while walking. The drum is designed to be played while walking or dancing.

The original purpose of the mridunga, as well as all other ancient Indian instruments, was to accompany chanting of sacred prayers as a form of worship. These sacred prayers were further divided into two particular categories: bhajan (devotional songs) and kirtan (congregational chanting of the names of God).

Although the clay mridunga's brother the wooden mridungam is used in classical and popular music in present-day India, the clay mridunga has maintained its stature as a folk instrument and continues to be used primarily for folk music, which in India is synonymous with spiritual music.

Our new Balaram Mridunga is a replica of the clay mridunga with some contemporary modifications and innovations. Today, there are only a few expert mridunga makers left in India. Consequently, mass production is not possible, and a high standard of quality is difficult to maintain. But, thanks to contemporary materials and production techniques, we are now able to make the exciting sounds of this drum available to discriminating professional musicians, as well as musicologists, and people in general.

Let us discuss some of the modifications and innovations found on the new Balaram Mridunga in relation to the standard clay model.

Tuning is a most important consideration, especially among professional musicians. The clay mridunga can only be tuned by tugging away at some thirty leather straps around the perimeter of the

drum, which is a long and tedious process and can only be done by someone with specialized training. On the new Balaram Mridunga, tuning is made quick and easy by means of a tuning key in conjunction with tuning bolts on either head. This is a feature which it shares with Western drums.

The heads themselves are made of top quality Mylar plastic, which resists breakage and change of weather much better than hide heads. If a head should break due to abnormal use, it can be quickly and easily replaced with another.

The rim, or pagri, which surrounds each head on the clay drum is made up of baked clay covered with hide. This proves to be a very hard surface when struck by the hand and fingers and takes some time and a few calluses to become accustomed to. On the new Balaram Mridunga, the pagri is padded with a cushion of rubber, thus eliminating painful beginners' strokes.

Finally, the fragility of baked clay is familiar to all, and traditional mridungas, being made of baked clay, are easily broken. However, the new Balaram Mridunga is made of modern, resilient fiberglass, which will never break with normal use.

In the Sanskrit language, *Balaram* designates great strength, and the Balaram Mridunga is truly an instrument to last a lifetime.

There is an interesting story in this connection. About five hundred years ago in India, in the province of Bengal, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared to propagate the congregational chanting of the names of God (kirtan). The Muhammadans, who were in political power at that time, disliked Chaitanya's methods of making such spiritual music. A few local townspeople complained to the city magistrate, who was known as the Kazi. The Kazi then proceeded to the home of Chaitanya's most noted followers and easily destroyed their clay mridungas. To retaliate, Chaitanya amassed an army of kirtan performers, who surrounded the Kazi's residence playing thousands of mridungas and other instruments. Thus the Kazi was forced to submit to the people's demands for uninhibited kirtan performances.

Although contemporary musicians are seldom faced with such uncooperative listeners as the Kazi, still the need is there for a mridunga to last a lifetime!

Combining the best of the Eastern musical heritage and modern Western technology, the Balaram Mridunga will meet the requirements of even the most demanding musicians.



## The Purpose of the Book

The purpose of this book is both to introduce the basic playing techniques of the Balaram Mridunga and to enable the Western percussionist to practically apply these unique sounds. As new sounds are introduced, simple exercise patterns will be provided. More elaborate rhythmic patterns will then be presented.

Theory and practical application of Indian classical music and its various components, such as tal (rhythm), etc., will not be discussed in this book. We are merely endeavoring to acquaint the Westerner with this exciting Eastern instrument by providing traditional rhythmic patterns (thekas) which can be used in their original folk context (bhajan and kirtan) as well as in various forms of contemporary Western music.

## Construction of the Mridunga

The Balaram Mridunga is constructed according to the traditional dimensions of its ancestor, the clay mridunga.

The dayan, or small head, is 3" in diameter. The bayan, or large head, is 7" in diameter.

The center patch on each head is called the syahi. Its function is to eliminate overtones and to enable the tuning of the drum. The syahi is made of urethane elastomer.

The drum heads are made of Mylar plastic. They are weather-resistant and readily replaceable if they should break through abnormal use.

The pagri, or rims of the drum, are made of rubber, which provides a cushion for the hands, and the rings which hold the heads on the drum are made of steel.

Finally, the shell itself is made of fiberglass.

## Tuning the Drum

By removing the rubber pagri, the tuning screws surrounding the head will be exposed. Tuning is done with the tuning key provided.

Avoid tuning one head of the drum while the other head is resting on the ground, for this will inhibit the resonance of the head you are tuning. Always make sure both heads are off the ground before tuning.

Tighten (or loosen) each screw very slightly (from 1/8 to 1/4 of a turn), going around the circle until the desired pitch is reached. Strike the head after every adjustment in order to hear the result.

The bayan (large head) should be tuned first since change of pitch of the bayan tends to affect the pitch of the dayan (small head). The preferred pitch depends upon the individual, although a recommended combination is tuning the bayan to the tonic and the dayan a perfect fifth up.

Also, when playing the drum, talc powder should be applied to the hands to reduce friction, thereby promoting faster response.

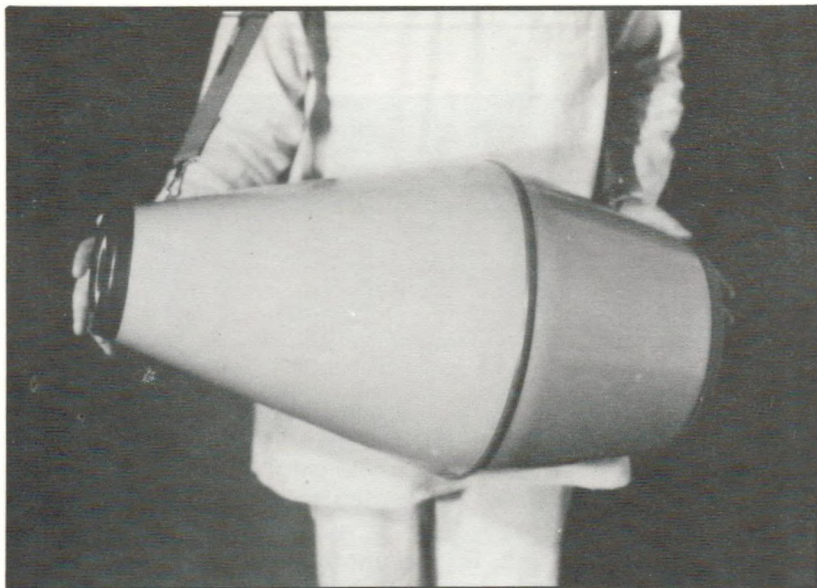
## The Bols of the Mridunga

In order to express a theka (rhythmic pattern) or musical phrase, mnemonic syllables called bols are used. In India, bols replace a written form of notation and are used by musicians as a means of memorizing a repertoire. In this book, both bols and written notation will be provided. Recitation of bols enables the expression of the technical as well as rhythmical elements of a particular composition. Simply by hearing the bols recited, a knowledgeable musician would be able to reproduce them into actual performance. The bols depict the strokes that are used, and to some degree demonstrate the variety of sounds obtainable on the mridunga. Right hand, left hand, and combination strokes are distinguished by means of the bols. Other than such connotations, they have no literal meanings.

In India bols are more or less standard from place to place. Some minor differences may be encountered when comparing the practices of different schools.

The following table of bols may not conform with the pronunciation or manner of execution encountered among other mridunga schools. However, they do reflect common practices.





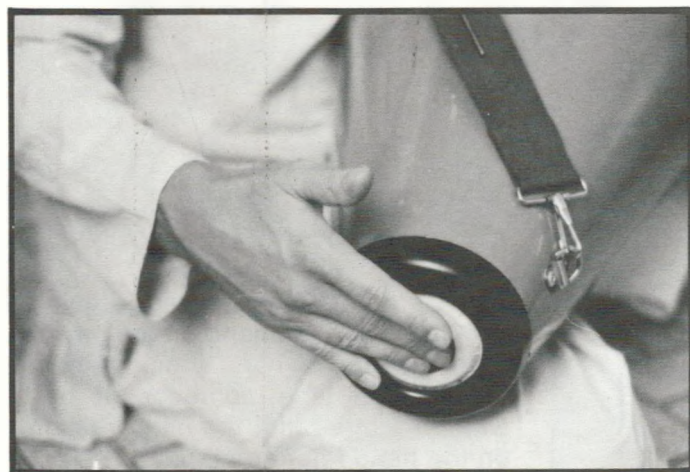
## Playing Position

The strap of the drum is worn across the right shoulder. The right hand strikes the dayan (small head) and the left hand strikes the bayan (large head).

## Execution of the Bols



1. **ta** This stroke is played with the index finger of the right hand on the dayan, or small head. The middle joint of the index finger contacts the rim, while the tip of the index finger simultaneously contacts the syahi. This is a resonant stroke, so immediately upon contact, the finger is allowed to rebound off the head.

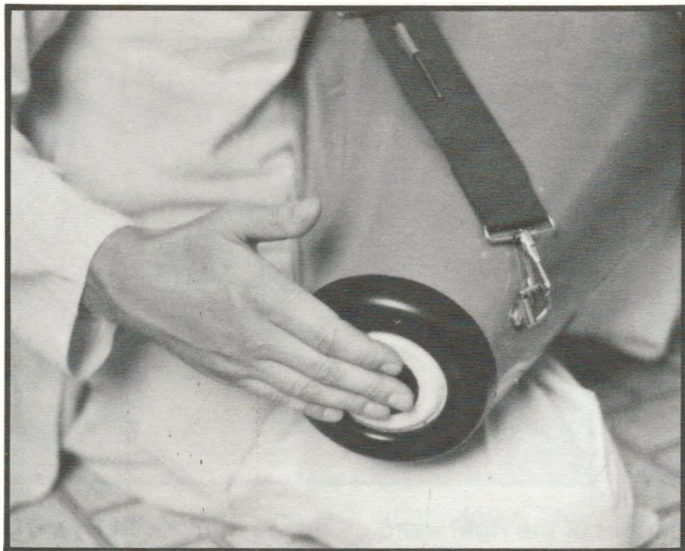


2. **ti** This stroke is played with the second and third fingers of the right hand on the dayan. The tips of the second and third fingers contact the syahi, where they are allowed to remain in order to produce the non-resonant tone.





3. **ri** This stroke is played with the index finger of the right hand on the dayan, in the same manner in which *ti* is executed. It is also a nonresonant stroke. *Ti ri* is a standard pattern which is frequently used. The sequence may be reversed (*ri ti*) according to the discretion of the player.



4. **tak** This stroke is played with the first three fingers of the right hand on the dayan. The middle joints of the fingers contact the rim, while the tips of the fingers simultaneously contact the syahi. The fingers should be slightly cupped in order to produce a "pop" sound. Because this is a nonresonant tone, the fingers are allowed to remain in contact with the head.

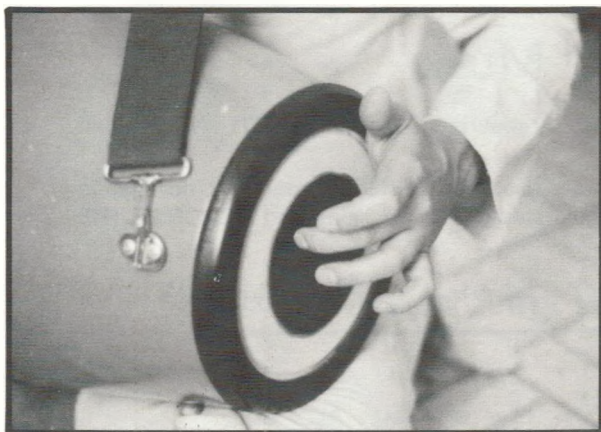


5. **ka** or **ki** This stroke is played with the entire left hand on the bayan (large head). The hand should remain flaccid. This is a nonresonant bol, which requires that the hand remain on the head after striking.





6. **ge** This stroke is played with the three central fingers of the left hand on the bayan. The uppermost part of the palm at the base of the fingers should contact the rim, or pagri, while the tips of the three fingers should simultaneously contact the syahi. This is a resonant bol, so immediately upon contact, the fingers are allowed to rebound off the head.



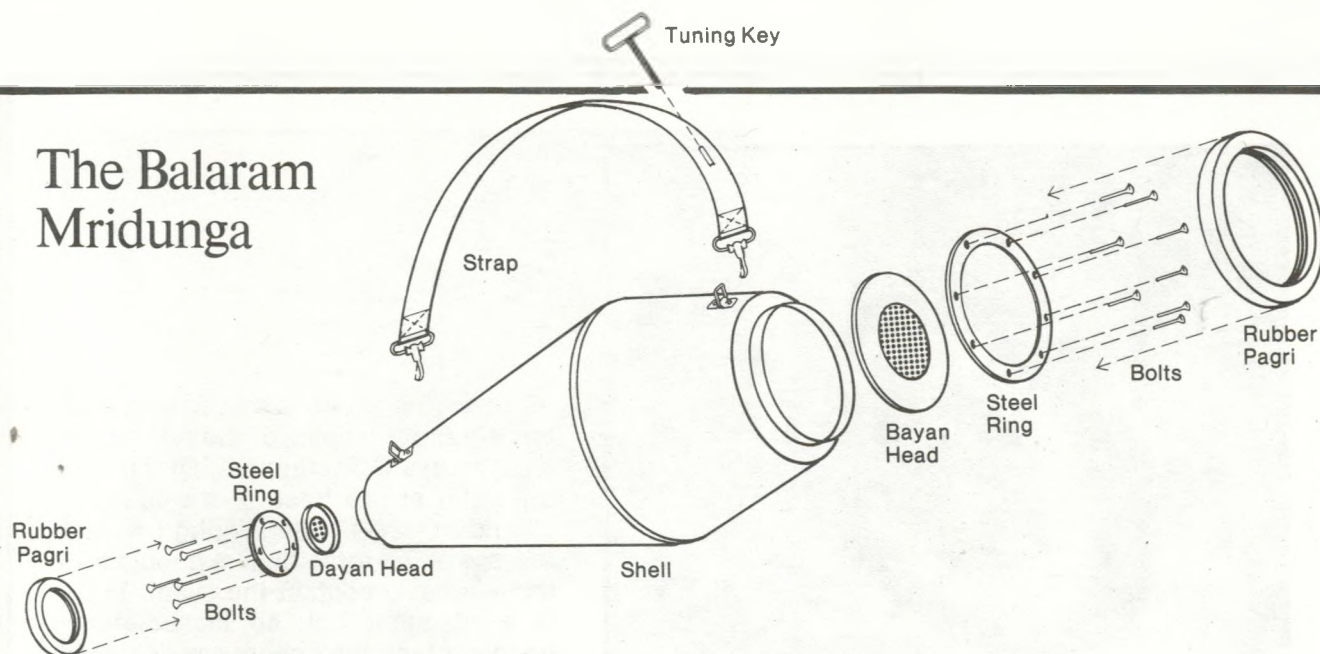
7. **ghin** This stroke is played with the middle finger and the base of the palm of the left hand on the bayan. The wrist is allowed to rest gently on the rim while the bent middle finger plays a resonant stroke on the syahi. Immediately following this, the base of the palm is pushed across the head from the outer edge to the midpoint of the syahi. This will produce a bending of the tone.



8. **ghi** This stroke is played with the middle finger and thumb of the left hand on the bayan. The wrist is allowed to rest gently on the rim while the bent middle finger plays a resonant stroke with a downward motion on the syahi. Immediately following this, the side of the curved thumb is pushed across the head from the top to the bottom of the syahi. This will produce a bending of the tone.



## The Balaram Mridunga



## Rudiments of Music

A MUSICAL SOUND is called a TONE, and has four distinct properties: LENGTH, PITCH, POWER and QUALITY.

To indicate the length of tones, characters called notes are used. These NOTES bear specific relation to each other as indicated by their names. The student should study the chart below and MEMORIZE THE RELATION OF THESE NOTES TO EACH OTHER.

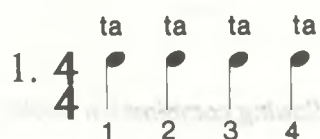
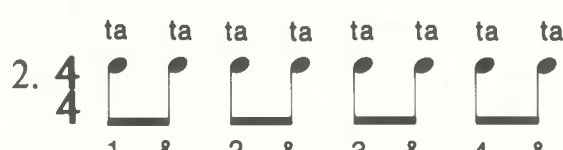

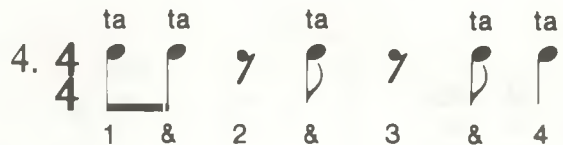
	1st beat	2nd beat	3rd beat	4th beat
Whole-note	[Musical notation: one whole note spanning the beat]			
Half-note	[Musical notation: two half notes]		[Musical notation: two half notes]	
Quarter-note	[Musical notation: four quarter notes]		[Musical notation: four quarter notes]	
Eighth-note	[Musical notation: eight eighth notes]		[Musical notation: eight eighth notes]	
Sixteenth-note	[Musical notation: sixteen sixteenth notes]		[Musical notation: sixteen sixteenth notes]	
Thirty-second note	[Musical notation: thirty-two thirty-second notes]		[Musical notation: thirty-two thirty-second notes]	

TO INDICATE SILENCE, characters called RESTS are used, which bear the same relationship to each other as do notes. STUDY THE CHART BELOW.

Whole note	Whole rest	Half note	Half rest	Quarter note	Quarter rest	Eighth note	Eighth rest
4 counts	4 counts	2 counts	2 counts	1 count	1 count	½ count	½ count
Sixteenth notes	Sixteenth rests	Thirty-second notes	Thirty-second rests				
¼ count		⅛ count					

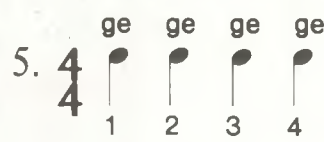
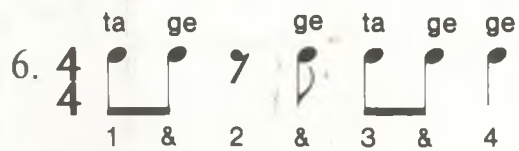
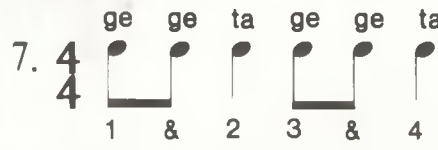
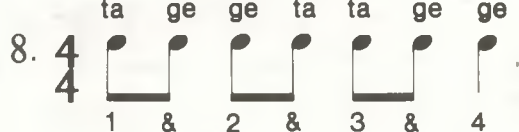
## Lesson 1: Introducing the bol 'ta'

---

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

## Lesson 2: Introducing the bol 'ge'

---

5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 



## Lesson 3: Introducing the bol 'dha'

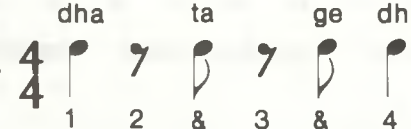
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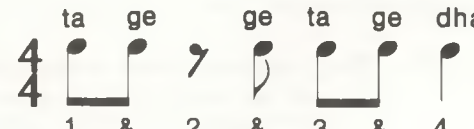
9.    
 1 2 3 4

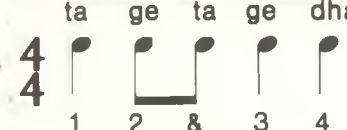
*Please note the following combination stroke:*


**dha=ta + ge**

10.    
 1 2 & 3 & 4

11.    
 1 2 & 3 & 4

12.    
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

13.    
 1 2 & 3 4

14.    
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

## Lesson 4: Introducing the bol 'ka' or 'ki'

---

15.    
 1 2 3 4

16.    
 1 2 & 3 & 4

17. dha ta ge ka ta  
1 2 & 3 & 4

18. ta ka ka ta ge ge  
1 & 2 & 3 & 4

## Lesson 5: Introducing the bols 'ti' and 'ri'

19. ti ti ti ti  
1 2 3 4

20. dha ta ka ti ge  
1 2 & 3 & 4 &

21. dha ta dha ta ka ti  
1 & 2 & 3 & 4

22. dha ka ti ge dha dha ka ti ge  
1 & 2 & 3 4 & 1 & 2 3 & 4 &

23. ti ri ti ri  
1 2 3 4

24. ti ri ge ti ka  
1 & 2 & 3 & 4



25. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

26. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

## Lesson 6: Introducing the bol 'tak'

---

27. 
  
 1 2 3 4

28. 
  
 1 2 & 3 & 4

29. 
  
 1 2 & 3 4

30. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

31. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

## Lesson 7: Thekas (rhythms) employing the phrase 'ti ri'

---

32. 
  
 1 2 & 3 & 4

33.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ka ti ri ti ge  
 1 2 & 3 & 4

34.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ka ti ri ge ta ti ri  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

35.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ge ti ri ti ri dha ge ti ri dha ge ti ri dha ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

36.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta dha ti ri dha ta dha ti ri dha  
 1 & 2 e & 3 & 4 e &

37.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ge ka tak ge dha  
 1 & a 2 & 3 & 4

38.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ge dha ta ka ti ge  
 1 & a 2 & 3 & 4 &

39.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ge dha ti ri ka tak ge  
 1 & a 2 & 3 e & 4 &

40.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ge ka ti ri ge ti ri ge  
 1 & a 2 & 3 e & 4 e &



41.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ge dha ti ri ti ri tak ge  
 1 & a 2 & 3 e & a 4 &

42.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti ri ge ti ri ge ti ri ge ti ri ge  
 1 e & 2 e & 3 e & 4 e &

43.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ta ti ri ti ri ti ta  
 1 2 & 3 & a 4 e & |  
 ta dha ta dha ka ti ri ka ti ri ge  
 3 & 4 & 1 e & a 2 e &

Lesson 8: Introducing the phrase 'ti ri ki ta'  
 This phrase is used often in mridunga thekas.  
 Note that the final 'ta' is played like 'ti'.

---

44.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti ri ki ta ti ge ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

45.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ka ti ri ki ta ge  
 1 2 & 3 & 4 &

46.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti ka ta ge ti ri ki ta  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

47.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti ka ti ri ki ta ta ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

48.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti ri ki ta ge dha | ti ri ki ta ge dha  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

49.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ki ta dha ti ri ki ta ti ka dha  
 1 2 & 3 & 4 | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

50.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ge ti ri ki ta ti dha | ti ri ki ta tak  
 1 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 2 & 3 & 4

51.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ge ge ti ri ki ta ge ge | tak ka ti ta  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 4

52.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ti ka ti ka dha ti ri ki ta ge ti ta ge  
 1 2 & 3 & 4 | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

53.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti tak ge dha ti ri ki ta ka ti ta ge  
 1 2 & 3 & 4 | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

54.  $\frac{4}{4}$  tak ge ti ri ki tak ge | ti ri ki tak ge ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

55.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ge dha ti ri ki ta ta ge  
 1 & a 2 & 3 e & a 4 &



## Lesson 9: Thekas employing the phrase 'ti ta'

56.   
 1 2 & 3 & 4 &

57.   
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

58.   
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

59.   
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

60.   
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

61.   
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

62.   
 1 2 & 3 & 4 | 1 & 2 & 3 4

63.   
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

64.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ka ti ge dha ta ka ti ta ta ka ti ta ta ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

65.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ri ti ta ka tak ge  
 1 & a 2 & 3 & 4 &

66.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha dha ti ta ti ri dha ti ta  
 1 & 2 & 3 e & 4 &

## Lesson 10: Introducing the bol 'dhit'

67.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta dhit dha ta dhit dha  
 1 3 2 & 3 a 4 &

Please note the following combination stroke:  
~~dhit~~ = tak + ka

68.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dhit ge ge tak ka ti ta ge ta ka ta ge ge ti ta ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

69.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ta ge dhit dha ti ta  
 1 & a 2 & 3 4 & a

70.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ti ta dhit ta ti ta dhit ta ti ta dhit ta ti ta ge  
 1 a 2 & 3 a 4 & | 1 a 2 & 3 a 4 &

71.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ti ta dhit ta ge ti dha ge  
 1 a 2 & 3 & a 4 &

72.  $\frac{4}{4}$  dha ge dhit dha ti ri ki ta ti ka  
 1 & 2 & 3 & a 4 e & a

dhit dha dha ti ri ki ka ti ri ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 e & a 4 e &

## Lesson 11: Introducing the bols 'dhi' and 'dhe'

73.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti ri dhi ti ri ti ri dhe  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & *Please note the following combination stroke:*  
 dhe=ti (ri) + ge  
 dhi=ti (ri) + ka

74.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ti dhi dhi ti dhi dhi ti dhe  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

75.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta dhi ti ri dha ta dhi ti ri dha  
 1 & 2 e & 3 & 4 e &

76.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ge ti ta ge dhe ta ge ti ta ge dhe ta  
 1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

77.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ti ta dhit ta ka dhi ta ge  
 1 a 2 & 3 & a 4 &



## Lesson 12: Introducing the bols 'ghin' and 'ghi'

---

78.

79.

80.

81.

82.

83.

## Lesson 13: Thekas in 3/4 time

---

84.

85.

86.  $\frac{3}{4}$  dha ta ka ti ge  
 1 2 & 3 &

87.  $\frac{3}{4}$  ta ki ka ti ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 &

88.  $\frac{3}{4}$  dha ge ti ta ka ti  
 1 & 2 & 3 &

89.  $\frac{3}{4}$  ti ri ki ta ta ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 &

90.  $\frac{3}{4}$  dha ti ri dhe dha dha ta dha ti ri ti ta dhi ta  
 1 & a 2 & 3 & | 1 & a 2 & 3 &

## Lesson 14: Thekas in 6/8 time

91.  $\frac{6}{8}$  ge ti ta ka ti ta  
 1 2 3 4 5 6

92.  $\frac{6}{8}$  ge ti ri ta ka ti ri ta  
 1 2 & 3 4 5 & 6

93.  $\frac{6}{8}$  ti ri ki ta ti ka ti ri dhit ge  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 6



94. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 &

95. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 4 & 5 & 6

96. 
  
 1 & 2 & 3 4 & 5 & 6

## Lesson 15: Thekas in 4/4 Shuffle or Swing

97. 
  
 1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

98. 
  
 1 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

99. 
  
 1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

100. 
  
 1 & a 2 3 a 3 a 4 & a

101.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ki ka tak ge ge  
 1 2 & a 3 4 & a

102.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ka dhi dha dha ta ka dhi dha dha  
 1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

## Lesson 16: Syncopated Thekas in 4/4

103.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ki ka ti ta ge ge ta ki ka ti ta ge ge  
 1 e & a 2 e & 3 e & a 4 e &

104.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ka tak ki ka tak ge ge ti ta ge ge ti ta ka  
 1 e a 2 e a 3 e & a 4 e & a

105.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ka ge ka ta ka ge ka ta ge ge  
 1 e a 2 e & a 3 e a 4 e &

106.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ta ki ka ki ta ge ti ki ka tak ge  
 1 e a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 &

107.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ki ka ti ki ka ti ge ge ti ta ge dhit dhit  
 1 e & a 2 e a 3 e & a 4 e a

108.  $\frac{4}{4}$  ge ki ka ta ge ge ti ta ki ka ta ge  
 1 a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a



