

# A New Vegan *Khol*

Dr K Varadarangan's *third percussion instrument sans leather and wood*



Left head



Vegan *Khol*

Photos courtesy: Dr K Varadarangan



Right head

The *Khol* is a two sided Indian drum popular in the northern and eastern parts of India. It is generally used for devotional music especially by the devotees of the Hare Krishna movement.

The conventional *Khol* consists mostly of clay or terracotta shell and the drumheads are made of cow skin. *Khols* with wooden shells are also available, and in recent times they have also been made from other materials such as brass.

What is described here is a vegan *Khol* developed indigenously by Dr K Varadarangan of Karunya Musicals, Bengaluru, on the lines of the vegan percussion instruments Mridangam and Tabla developed by him previously. (See articles in *Compassionate Friend* Monsoon 2017 and Monsoon 2018 issues.)

Although a synthetic *Khol* had already been developed by Sri Ishan Das of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and is currently available in the market, the *Khol* recently developed at Karunya Musicals beautifully replicates the authentic sound of the original clay *Khol* with animal skin. The drum head incorporates a special design which produces a high pitched sharp, cutting tone which a traditional *Khol* produces. Another important feature of this new vegan *Khol* is that

it is easily tunable since there is access to the tuning screws from outside the instrument.

Beauty Without Cruelty had an important role to play in the creation of this vegan *Khol*. When Sri Bharat Chandra Dasa (Author and Ex-National Co-ordinator for ISKCON, Ministry of Sustainable Development) wrote to BWC seeking guidance in developing an alternative to the traditional *Khol* made from animal skin, BWC immediately put him in touch with Dr Varadarangan who had successfully researched and produced the vegan Mridangam and Tabla instruments.

Sri Bharatji promptly approached Dr Varadarangan and discussed the possibility of him developing a *Khol* without animal skin.

A few months later, the new vegan *Khol* was born!

Sri Bharatji provided the logistics support required to develop the vegan *Khol*. He obtained the required shells for developing the prototype and arranged meetings with experts to test the product. The research, development and complete design including all the component parts were done at Karunya Musicals, whereas Sri Bharatji took the instrument to several places and showed it to experts.

## Features of the SRI *Khol*/Madhura Mridanga

Conventional clay-leather <i>Khol</i>	Vegan <i>Khol</i>	Advantages of the Vegan <i>Khol</i>
The drumheads use skins of cows	No animal skins are used	No killing of animals
Shells are made of clay	Shells are made of fibreglass	Shells are very sturdy unlike the clay shell which is very fragile
Tonal quality varies from instrument to instrument	Excellent tonal clarity and resonance	Consistent tonal quality across samples
No tuning arrangement	Can be tuned easily	This is a very important value added feature
Re-heading the shell has to be done only by a Mridanga craftsman	Heads are detachable and replaceable	Heads can be replaced by the users themselves
Pitch of the instrument shows large seasonal variations and fluctuates with changing temperature and humidity	Pitch does not change with seasons and remains stable even under changing temperature and humidity	Avoids frequent retuning and adjustments
Heads cannot be cleaned easily	Heads can be cleaned with a moist cloth	Heads can be cleaned with a moist cloth, which is unthinkable in the case of the animal skin heads

The initial feedback was quite encouraging but the sound was still not up to the mark. However, after a lot of experimentation, the head improved dramatically and the tonal quality came very close to, and possibly exceeded certain aspects of the tone of the traditional clay *Khol*.

This SRI *Khol* or Madhura Mridanga has a fibreglass body with synthetic drum heads. The right side head is very high pitched and produces a sharp, cutting, melodic tone. There are 10 tuning screws that can be used to adjust the pitch of the instrument to the desired level. Tuning is not possible in a traditional *Khol* because it simply lacks a tuning mechanism. With this tuning capability, the SRI *Khol* gets elevated to the status of a

classical music instrument rather than being just a folk or bhajan instrument. Tuning can be accomplished with the help of a spanner supplied with the instrument.

The left head which is much larger than the right head produces a base pitch that compliments the high pitch of the right head. The left head can also be tuned to a specific pitch within its range and has 12 tuning screws.

The SRI *Khol* or Madhura Mridanga is manufactured and marketed on a large scale by Tamaltree Enterprises Pvt Ltd under an arrangement with Karunya Musicals.

**For further information visit:**

[www.karunyamusicals.com](http://www.karunyamusicals.com)

<https://madhuramidanga.com>