

Classical Music in the Rajasthani Folk Tradition : The *Langa-Manganiar* Music

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Abstract

There is a particular singing style of Rajasthani Folk music in western Rajasthan, which is sung by the two communities called Langa and Manganiar. Though the singing style is known for its regional characteristics and called Rajasthani folk but when we go deep in the nuances and techniques of this singing or playing (instruments) we can feel the very fragrance of Classical Music in this Langa - Manganiar Style. This write up is an endeavour exploring these characteristics in the Langa - Manganiar Music.

Keywords : Langa-Manganiar; Ragdari; Sufi.

Introduction

Jaisalmer and Barmer region has a special place in terms of Rajasthani folk music. The most vibrant and evocative music originates from the Thar Desert of Rajasthan. Manganiars has arresting vocals and they are the ocean of traditional melodies pouring emotion to the whole culture of the world. The people here compose very succulent and soulful songs to entertain the mind on this dry land. In these songs, along with folk songs, tales, puzzles, poetry, rain and other seasons are filled with feeling of animal bird and social relations, stories of legendary battles, heroes and lovers engender a spirit of identity, expressed through music.

According to the opinions of folklorists and experts, the folklore of Jaisalmer - Barmer is very ancient, traditional and pure, which is sung in a banded form. The soulful, full throat voiced communities Langa and Manganiars music generations has always been looked after by the aristocrats and prosperous families. Both sing in the same dialect, but their style and repertoires differ, shaped by the tastes of their patrons.

They cover every single thing of their daily life, household, nature and farming and from birth to death every aspect of life in their music. Manganiyar's songs are devotional, as well as the stories of births, valour and sacrifices of their patron's ancestors. They sing a song series called Halaria on the occasion of birth. At the time of marriage, Vinayaka, Sohar, Ghani, Cuckoo, Ralotobnalla, Rejo, Kalangi, Paro, Balesar etc. are prominent on various occasions from the establishment of Ganesh to the bride's home. Apart from this, songs of the fair, songs of savan, Ghoomar etc. are prominent. The folk music of this place is also characterized by the singing of emotional songs even on death, in which sympathy is expressed towards the families of the deceased, describing the qualities of the deceased. These songs are sung by women only. They sing farming songs like Jeero, Paudino, Chirmi, Neebuda etc. They Sing Kurja, Koyaldi, Kagaliyo, Suvatyio mentioning birds and their love for nature.



People associated with this art are found in Barmer and Jaisalmer districts of India and in Sindh province bordering Pakistan. They are a group of hereditary professional musicians. There are more than one and a half thousand Manganiyar folk artists in about 150 village dhanis in Barmer and Jaisalmer districts of Rajasthan alone. The main earning source of Manganiyar of the western region of Rajasthan, especially Jaisalmer and Barmer, is Singing and Playing. Manganiyar caste is of original Sindh junction. It is a Muslim caste. The Main instrument of Manganiyar folk art is Kamayacha and Khartal.

Kamayacha



They are Muslims, but sing hymns to Lord Krishna in Hindu folklore music. "The universal appeal of Manganiar music the theatre around it is easy to understand : it is raw, full throated, the lyrics are drawn from local ballads and subtle Sufi and Bhakti poets and the percussion is exhilarating. You will almost never catch a false note or slip in the rhythm and the music is, at all times, honest, and above all there is the dramatic stage presence and energy of these consummate performers, especially the sure footed children with their **Khartals**." ¹

They have adopted an integrated culture composed of a mixture of customs and way of the life of both Hindu and Muslims communities. Therefore, the names of many of these, for example, Shankar Khan and Krishna Khan, also indicate the coordination between the two religions. Their secular music is appreciated not only in India but all over the world. The melodies of their music are heard all over the world.

The Rajput kings patronized their art. Their art flourished during the Rajput period. Their ancestors, carried this art generation after generation for centuries. By the time the melody of their music crossed the borders and began to resonate all over the world and its appreciation is everywhere. The music of Manganiars is a mixture of Hindustani and Sufi music tradition. Muslims and Hindu families have been connected to each other for generations here. Manganiars compose and sing songs for their Yajamans i.e. Patrons.



The story of the Manganiars is incomplete without mentioning Langa. Their patrons have been Muslims. They also sing at their shelter home on the occasion of the birth of children and in wedding ceremonies. The Patrons of the Manganiars have been Rajputs of the Bhati and Rathore dynasty, while the Sindhi, Muslims are the Patrons of Langas. Manganiars sing the hymns of the Hindu god, Lord Krishna and pray for their grace, while the Langa sing Sufi.

Talking about Langas, there are two types of them. One, who plays Sarangi and called Sarangia Langa. The other one plays an aero-phonic instrument similar to Shahnai which is called Surnai and therefore they have been called with the name 'Surnaia Langa'. Surnaia Langa also plays Murali (gourd pipe) and Satara (double flute).



Satara (double flute)
Surnai



Sindhi Sarangi

There is an interesting fact about Surnaia Langa that they don't sing to earn money. They only play instrument and specifically wind instruments, but does not sing. Their Patrons are Mehar Muslims whereas Sarangia Langa are patronised by Sindhi Sipahis.

In the house of sindhi sipahis, hymns of Hindu deities are sung. A baby boy's childhood is considered as Krishna. On his birth, songs of Krishna's pastime (*Leela*) associated with Gokul and Mthura are sung. In Manganiars there are also two types of group found likewise in Langas. One sings only for Hindu hosts use the *Kamayacha* instrument with their singing and those who sing for both Hindu and Muslim host use the *Jadi ki Sarangi* with their singing.

Manganiars are often found in Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bikaner Jodhpur and Jalore districts. Manganiars literally means one who earns living by begging, but Manganiars found in sindh province are called Mirasi, which is a respectful address for all Muslim professional singers. Although these literal meanings no longer have much relevance in today's scenario, and Manganiars are generally recognized as a group of professional singers.

According to an interview of Kheta Khan to Deccan Chronical "The community primarily comprises Muslims and their songs are in praise of the Hindu deities. Khan elaborates. That's how it has always been. We belong to Jaisalmer where a Hindu Goddess is worshiped. There is one particular festival where a huge puja for the Goddess is held. The puja never commences until someone from the Manganiar community sings, also the first prasad of the puja is given to us." ²

Material :

Classical Element in Langa-Manganiar Music

India has had a rich tradition of Music since ancient times, with new styles embracing changes over time. There are many styles of singing counted in Hindustani classical music. One such style is the Khayal singing which developed in the medieval period. Before that, Dhrupad singing was popular in terms of classical singing. Here we are discussing singing of Khyal because many techniques of this singing also reflect in Langa Manganiar singing.

Khyal Gayaki was born in the Mughal courts, and the singers were patronised by the Mughal Emperors. The same way Manganiar families

have been maintained by Rajput kings and their respective elite. The way Khyal singing continued in the hereditary tradition, this learning was also passed on by the Langa Manganiar singers to their sons, grandchildren, nephews etc.

Khyal singing was an oral tradition prior to the invention of the notation writing method by Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande in the 19th century. Langa Manganiar singing is an oral tradition even today. If we look closely at the Langa Manganiar singing, the loud and bold recital of their aalaps at the starting and in the middle of a melody / song is very much alike classical singing.

In the same way, sometimes they use the rapid-paced taans (singing of notes rapidly) with fine antics in their singing and sometimes the taans with bassful ghamakas (singing of notes with bass and heaviness in voice). For example the following is a link of Ustad Rana Khan and Naseer Khan's recital of 'Radha Rani De Daro Bansi Mori' Bhajan, clearly be understood the nuances of Classical vocal in this song.

Ex : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQAj6BGZCU4>³

Jugalbandi of musical instruments is another element that appears like a component of classical music in Langa Manganiars style.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWYXdv-IMQs>⁴

The above mentioned link is Jugalbandi style of Langaas compared to the 'Classical Music Jugalbandi' (link given below)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMJCTsIUoCU>⁵

It is clearly seen that the style of performance and one after another rapid strokes in both folk and Classical style are quite similar.

Their compositions and literature is traditional and they too have creations like devotional, romantic composition or description of seasonal beauty likewise of Classical Vocalists.

See the use of Raga Vrindawani Saranga in a monsoon literature composition.

<https://youtu.be/0VkaxVEgiAc>⁶

Every small and big aspect which happens in day to day common routine in public life is reflected in the literature of these compositions. This is the most important feature of these folk compositions.

Technique of Recital :

Accompany of sarangi or sindhi sarangi is quite alike to the *sangat* of sarangi with Indian Classical Music.

<https://youtu.be/h7UFdtHhSO0>⁷

In this video we can see the technique of Sarangi performers is meeting up the characteristics of a Classical Sarangi musician. The introductory *aalap* is having an influence like the *silsilewar badhat* (detailing of raga) in Classical recital of Sarangi. The Played raga is *maand*, and at a point the use to *tivra madhyam* in raga is absolutely giving the playing a classical touch. Again the very texture is drove by Komal Rishabh in the same performance. This is something closely similar to the term *aavirbhav-tirobhav* in Hindustani Classical music in which the use of any particular note with some specific *raagdari* method can create an abrupt but beautiful change in the previous raga and emerges a new one.

Raagdari in Manganiar Singing :

It is said that in Langa Manganiar singing style 6 Ragas and 36 Raginis principle is used, which is quite similar to North Indian Classical Vocal theory of medieval period.

The root cause of such a long tradition of folk songs in Rajasthan is the Castes and Communities residing in Rajasthan who earn their livelihoods only through song and music. Their songs are refined, soulful and varied. Like classical music, we find *Sthai* and *Antara* in this form too. Similar to *Khyal* and *Thumari*, they are also decorated with small *taans*, *murkis* and special strokes. These songs are sung in ragas like *Desh*, *Sorath*, *Maru*, *Paraj*, *Kalingada*, *Jogia*, *Asavari*, *Bhairavi*, *Mand*, *Bilawal*, *Peelu*, *Khamaj*, *Sarang*, *Malhar*, *Todi*, *Sohni* etc.

Classicalism in the singing of Langa Manganiars does not mean that it should also be bound like the parameters of classical music, since it is a folk music genre, so it is a free singing style beyond the strict rules of classical mode. Most of them have a mixture of two to three ragas. Pure *raagdari* or purity of *swaras* in a fixed raga structure is not seen here, but

still the concrete form and base of the ragas in the folk songs is as similar as to the form used in the *Raagdari* pattern of Classical Music.

Talking Raagdari in Langa Manganiar songs, one have to be very clear about the fact that the singing or playing style of Langa Manganiar is itself called *Gayki/ Baaj or Shaili* same as it is called in case of Gharana singing of Hindustani Classical Music. To understand the Classical and Folk blend of this particular style observation of *Maand* or *Maad* is must. *Maand*, which is a raga in classical music but in Rajasthani folk songs it is a singing style (specially with reference to Langa Manganiar singing), which is based on *Maand* raga. But this raga does not have only one form or fixed ascending descending pattern in Langa Manganiar singing. In Rajasthan various types of *Maand* are sung. Here the *Maand* sung in Udaipur region will be different from the *Maand* sung in Jodhpur region. And the *maand* sung in Jaisalmer, Barmer or Bikaner will be different from the *Maand* of Jaipur, Shekhawati or Haroti region.

It is considered that centuries ago *Maad* was the name of Bikaner region and the singing style of this region is called *Maad* or *Maand*. There are approximately nine to thirteen types of *Maand shaili* in Rajasthan. Whereas in Indian Classical Music *Maand* is classified as a Raga having *Vakra Chalan* (zigzag pattern). Notes as follows - sa ga ma, pa dh ni SA, dh ni pa, ma dh pa, ma ga re sa.

(indication : Small letters = middle octave/ gamut ; Underline = *Komal Nishad*/ flat note ; Capital letter = Higher octave/ gamut)

Other than *Maand* there are some other ragas i.e. *Desh*, *Malhar*, *Saranga* and *Sorath* which are used in the most of the folk compositions of Langa Manganiars.

There are some example of folk songs based on ragas...

'*mori sava laakh ki loom...*' this song is based on *malhar* as it seems in the notation - sa ni, sa re, re pa, pa re re pa pa ma re sa sa (all notes of middle octave) these particular *swars* used in this song and the underlined *swar sangati* of pa and re denotes to *Malhar* raga.

The same way '*kesariya balam aavo ni...*' is a *maand* raga song using the swars - ga ma pa dh, pa dh ni SA dh ni pa, pa dh pa ni dh pa ma ga re ga sa, sa re ma ma, pa ni dh pa (SA in capital letters is of Higher octave, other notes of middle octave. Underlined ni refers for *komal nishad*). One song

Nimbuda Nimbuda seems to be based on Bilaskhani Todi.

Rajasthan is known for its folk songs having the sacred relationship between music, monsoon, trees, birds, lakes, fruits and so many other day to day life things. Manganiars have a rich repertoire of monsoon music. Jaisalmer and Barmer regions often plagued with drought, its been a tradition that the Manganiars were asked by the Rajput rulers to sing and pray in the temples for rain. This singing was accompanied by the instruments like Kamayacha, Khartal, Sarangi etc. If the Manganiars get success to fascinate rain the rain by their singing, their Patrons would praise them with gifts, clothes, food and money in abundance.

The community singers also sings bhajans for lord Shiva in the holy month of Sawan as well. The subject of singing is very vast for this community. It can be divided in two major sections. One is the folk music sung by the general public on the occasion of social festivals, birth, marriage, reception, farewell, rites, Gangaur, Holi etc. And the other in Praise of kings and feudatories and their Folk music sung for fun. The expressions of folk songs sung on festivals and social gatherings are very sweet and touching. Songs like Idoni, Kangasio, Gorbandh, Panihari, Olyun, Hichki, Supna, Moomal, Kurja, Kajaliya, Kaga, Jeera, Pudina, Chirmi etc. are sung with flourishing in all the villages and are ornamented with various ragas like Mand, Sarang, Malhar, Kafi, Bihag Peelu, Khamaj, Bhairavi, Asavari, Desh, Sorath and so on.

Folk songs like Kurja, Peepli, Ratan, Rano, Moomal, Ghughari, Kevda etc. are sung in Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bikaner Jodhpur areas mostly. The community singers here have a unique voice quality which is due to ecology and topography of western Rajasthan that they have full throated voice and high pitch. In the plains like Jaipur, Kota, Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli and Dhaulpur difference in the tone of voice and in the themes of the song is seen.

Olyun is one such folk song which is often sung prominently by Langa and Manganiars on the farewell of daughter (of patrons) in marriage ceremony. Apart from this, there are various subjects on which folk songs are composed. Idoni is a song sung while going to fetch water. Idoni is the base/ stand of very long cotton cloth after folding it to put the pitcher over the head to carry water at home from well/ stepwell or ponds. A few words are as... '*Mhari sava laakh ri loom gum gai Idoni*'. (My long precious pitcher base is lost). Similarly '*Kangasio*' is a make-up song ... '*Mhare ch-hail bhanwar ro kangasio panihari le gai re*'. (my friend is teasing me by taking

away the comb gifted by my husband)

'Kaga' is one such song in which the beloved in separation considers a crow sitting on the terrace as an omen for the arrival of her husband. The lyrics of the song are – '*ud ud re mhara kala re Kagla*'.

Kurja is a song where newly married wife is alone at home and her husband is away to foreign for a business trip. It is considered that the Siberian Crane is called Kurja in Rajasthan. In such condition the lady sends a message through Kurja bird to her beloved saying 'O bird Kurja please give my message to my beloved and send him soon at home'. Lyrics are – '*Kurja e mhara bhawar mila do ae*' Supna and Hichki songs also share the similar theme as the Kurja.

Gorbandh is the ornament of camel's neck subject to songs in Shekhawati region. '*Mhara Gorbandh Nakhralo*' being one of them.

The another one is '*Jeero*', the farmer women, being troubled by the difficulty in the cultivation of cumin, forbids her husband from the farming of cumin. The lyrics of the song – '*O jeero jeev ro bairi re, mat bao mhara parnya jeero*'

The songs are also based on seasonal themes. There are songs for shiny summer season having the lyrics '*tavda mando pad ja re, gori ro najuk jeev sooraj badal me chip ja re...*' (O sun please be calm and soft, my beloved is very tender O sun please hide behind the clouds)

In the month of *shravan/sawan*, while swinging on the swing *Hinda* is sung, where *Hinda* is referred to swing itself. '*sawaniye ro Hindo bandhan jaye*' .

Rain brings a lot of hope in Rajasthan. Especially in western Rajasthan, which has often been plagued by drought. Here the rain brings a special wave of joy for farmers, old people, children and lovers. For example, in the most popular rain song *Balam ji Mhara Jhirmir Barse Meh*, the beloved is sad because her husband's departure to abroad. The rain has come which is bringing her feelings of love to the peak but till now her husband has not come back and she alone is shedding tears in his memory. It is an expression of such mixed feelings, in which the beloved feels very happy remembering the old moments spent with her lover during the rainy season and at that very moment she get lonely after finding herself alone.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwh7X8iqSxU> ⁸

The same emotion we find in the lyrics of Pt. Sanjeev Abhyankar's vocal recital of Raga Miyan ki Malhar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsLHEGh5J4w> ⁹

where the lyrics are saying -

Ghanghor ghata chhai

Raah takat apno pritam lalita akulaai

(The Sky is dark with the dense clouds, and the lady is disconcerted while waiting for the return of her beloved)

Thus the folk songs have included a wide range of themes, most of which have been traditionally sung by the Langa Maganiar community.

Sufi Element in Langa-Manganiar Music

Langa Manganiar singing also contains some Sufi characteristics and nuances. Because it is often people originate from Sindh province hence the ecology topography and natural skills due to environment fills a Sufi texture in their voice by birth. There is no velvet voice and mellifluous subtle movements in their throat, yet their singing has fascinated the whole world today. It is the divine voice of this folk art only which established this cultural heritage from the village/ *dhanis* of Barmer, Jaislamer in the western Rajasthan to Albert Hall in London. Their voice with an attractive obsolescent and the whole group in form of chorus gives the impression of Sufi *qawwals*. At the same time the subject of his singing is folk songs as well as *Nirguna bhajans* of Kabir or *Ayal* (Sindhi hymens) which fully highlight their sufi texture. They call them Sindhi *Qalams*. Mostly Shah Latif, Bulleshah, Farid and some other compositions are sung.

For example, a Sindhi Ayal - <https://youtu.be/XMqx9jsjkVE> ¹⁰

Their songs are called as *Qalam* and their stories called *Kissa* in which love stories of Umar-Marvi, Heer-Ranjha, Sasvi-Pannu etc. are very popular. Their team consists of male members of the family including Uncles, brothers, cousins and nephews. They mostly use Kamayacha or a rare instrument Sindhi Sarangi in accompany.

Their Natural high range of voice and rhythm on Dholak place them very

close of Sufi singers, but they beautifully blend all these qualities with Rajasthani folk accompanying with instruments like Kamayacha, Khadtal, Morchang, Sarangi or Ravanhattha etc. The resonance of the Cymbals is reflected in their voice and depict all the nuances the complexities the singing style.



Non-availability of teaching methods among traditional musicians

The work of passing the skills of music to their next generation is going on in a traditional hereditary way even today in Langa Manganiars. There are no schools or gurukuls to learn this style. This is more or less the same way of oral tradition which was followed by the classical musicians in the Mughal courts, but still the non systemized process of passing the nuances of Langa Manganiar singing is different and unique in itself. It is after the independence of India that the walls of gharana systems began to collapse and it could be available for every common man, thus the Guru-Shishya parampara were founded. But it not so with Langa and Manganiar because they have no system of transmitting their musical knowledge to any person outside of their social context. It is the community only which saved the precious Indian cultural treasure till today.

We know that in Hindustani music there are gharana traditions such as Gwalior, Jaipur, Agra, Kirana, where the characteristics of certain gayki are taught through a particular structure and pattern to the disciples even outside their lineage and community through the Guru- Shishya tradition but in Langa- Manganiar singing style there is neither any tradition like *Guru- Shishya Parampara* nor any special structure or format to teach this singing style.

Langa Mangainars pass on their singing to their sons, brothers and neph-

ews by inheritance in their own community, and they themselves do not even know when the new generation naturally imbibes all the characteristics of singing without being in the process of learning. Thus being self-employed, the Langa- Manganiar community appears to be less dependent on the social structure and more contributing to it.

According to an interview of Kheta Khan to Chronical – “The Manganiar community follows the oral traditional and their songs are recorded. But in their hearts and minds. “All the music and songs we have were taught to us and we have listened to so many compositions that we now just remember all the songs. We just have to listen to a song once and it stays with us”, says Khan.”¹¹

According to Rustom Bharucha in his book Rajasthan : an oral history, which is a compilation of conversation with Komal Kothari (Pioneer for the revival of this fading cultural tradition Langa – Manganiar Music) – “For thousands of Manganiars and Langa the *Jajmani* (patronage) system remains their primary source of income. Even those among them who cannot sing will have to be supported by the patrons because it is assumed that this man’s son or grandson may be able to sing in the future, regardless of the quality for the singer’s voice or musicianship. The obligation to patronize the musicians on hereditary grounds is quite different effect from the performing art situations, where it is the more proficient musicians and singers who get selected for the tours or for concerts in five star hotels and other tourist venues.

This kind of selective opportunity does not exist for the Patrons of traditional musicians. And it is for this very reason that the entire musical system of the Langa and Manganiars has been able to survive as a caste institution otherwise it would have broken down a long time ago.”¹²

Result and Discussion

Concluding the whole dialogue. It can be said for sure that the Langa Manganiar Music is the Treasure of Indian Cultural Heritage and a beautiful blend to two different culture in very harmonious way through music. They are corroborator of the deep rooted customs of both Hindu and Muslim societies. There is no other Style of singing can be found having so many qualities. The folk of Langa Manganiar is a beautiful blend of Indian Classical and Sufi Music which should definitely be preserved and as there is no specific method of teaching this art should be placed in main stream to be taught and learn and to transmit to upcoming generations as

much as possible. This art should be given such respect and livelihood that the community would not leave such a treasure for white collar jobs.



Pic : A group of Langas. The elders transmitting the Art to their little kids.

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