

# THE LANGAS

*A folk-musician caste of Rajasthan*

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Rajasthan, western India, is situated on the borders of Pakistan. The state is diagonally divided by the Aravali hills—the south-eastern part forming a hilly tract, the north-western an arid and desert area. Geographically, the Thar desert has attracted the attention of many scholars, Scanty rainfall, recurrence of famine, sparse population, bushy flora and cattle-rearing are the main features of the area. Comparatively, the south-eastern part is more fertile, abounds in rich flora and fauna, is well populated and has an agricultural hinterland. The Aravalis form a long but low-land range of hills with low heights, but the Aravalis have been denuded of soil by rain-water and gales. Dense forests are exceptions in some valleys.

## **Effects on Population**

The desert area of Rajasthan provides a typical economic base for the rearing of sheep and cattle and agricultural work during the few months of the monsoon. Life is difficult and hard but provides long periods of leisure to the people. Most of the inhabitants of Rajasthan are therefore engaged in some sort of activity which helps to while away the time. Though folk songs or folk crafts have their own motivating forces in different types of peasant societies, desert conditions give wider opportunities for the creation of various forms of folk art and for their embellishment. Do we not find that life on river-boats or sailors at sea have more to sing

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This monograph accompanies the album of six 45 rpm discs "Rajasthan Folk Legacy No. I" produced by Rupayan Sansthan, Borunda in Jodhpur district, and is available there. The monograph includes texts of songs and other details not included in this article.

about their fortuitous circumstances and living conditions? Leisure and the risk to life are the two dimensions which interact, and man responds by filling up the moments of leisure by doing something which can distract him from the dangers of life on the one hand, and also motivate him for re-enforcing the fullness of life and the desire to live with joy on the other.

This leisure in turn demands that the vacuum be filled by some activity which can give a fuller life to the inhabitants. The only forms and expressions which enrich their lives are related to the different elements of folklore. Long winding folk tales, legendary heroic stores, varied narratives, folk ballads and folk songs are the main branches of an oral tradition. Folk painting, profuse embroidery, beautification of costumes, love of colour, the decoration of cattle and home-steads, and the ornamentation of domestic material form the traditional plastic arts.

### The Langas

The twelve folk songs presented in 'Rajasthan Folk Legacy No. 1' belong to this desert region. The songs have been sung by three traditional folk singers from the Langa community who are inhabitants of this area. The singers use a chrodophonic instrument known as *Sarangi*—a type of improved fiddle which is played with a bow. Langas use two types of *Sarangi* the *Gujratan sarangi* and *Sindhi sarangi*. The adjectives 'Gujarat' and 'Sindh' denote the importance of two contiguous areas of Rajasthan. Gujarat and Sindh are two separate states on the south-west and west of Rajasthan's border. Gujarat is in India, whereas Sindh now forms a part of Pakistan. The qualifying terms for the *sarangi* as *Gujratan* or *Sindhi* may mean that these musical instruments were once made in these areas. However, the *Sindhi sarangi* is currently available and played in the Sindh area of Pakistan, but the same cannot be said for the *Gujratan*. The folk singers recall that both the *sarangis* were at one time made in Gujarat, but nowadays there are no craftsmen there making *sarangis*. The use and style of *sarangi* playing has left its distinct mark on the style of singing and on vocal embellishment.

### The Sindhi Sipahis

It is important ethnologically to note that Langa is a caste whose main profession is to sing for the families of their patrons. The group of families who have patronised the Langa singers are known as 'Sindhi Sipahi'. The Sindhi Sipahi live in *dhanies* or small villages where they have barely six to ten thatched houses. Each *dhani* is known by the name of the leader of the group or by the name of one of the sub-castes of the community. We find only a few families of Sindhi Sipahis living in the main village which acts as a small market and includes a cluster of different castes. Sindhi Sipahi are mainly cattle-keepers or herdsmen. They own a good number of cows and calves, or sheep and goats. The *dhani* provides them with the facility of big fields as grazing land for their animals. Arid

conditions do not allow them to develop their economy through agriculture. However, they do own a substantial area of land which they can cultivate, if a monsoon is favourable. A good monsoon in this area would mean 2 to 3 inches of rain which would enable them to raise enough natural fodder for their cattle, as well as providing millet (*bajra*) for at least two to three years consumption. However, every third year there is a cycle of famine, and people have to leave their homes or habitat with their herds in search of new pastures.

### Conditions of Life

The conditions of life of the Sindhi Sipahi are not comfortable and they belong to a low stratum of the social hierarchy. The Langas sing for this group of society and receive remuneration in the form of cash or kind. Cattle or camels are common gifts from the patrons to the professional singers. The Langas, as a matter of duty, have to attend functions connected with child-birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies of their patrons. They have also to attend other ceremonial functions on request or invitation. The Langas are respected and are given all the hospitality of a guest by their patrons. They are provided with the best available food, sleeping accommodation and other residential comforts. They are expected to sing during the ceremonies and for longer periods during the nights. The Langas sing songs or narrate folk tales which have excerpts from traditional ballads in the form of sung-couplets, rendered to music. During marriage ceremonies they are expected to lead the procession to the bride's home, singing. A Langa singer, many a time during the ceremonies, is expected to sing either standing or walking. The instrument (*sarangi*) is strapped on to him with the help of a band across the shoulders and he plays dexterously accompanying his song. Exacting patrons sometimes expect them to sing even while travelling on camel-back. There are interesting musical competitions between the singers from the bride's and bride-groom's side. The winner is the one who has the largest and the most varied repertoire of songs competently rendered and using all the typical musical nuances. New songs are composed or improvised at the request of patrons who may demand a variation of the song to be rendered in another style or rhythmic pattern. It is said that a song known as *Balochan* was composed or improvised in such a manner. The patrons are hard task-masters regarding the style and purity of traditional songs. They have the necessary knowledge of the tune, the text and style of singing and insist on its being sung in the authentic manner. They express their displeasure if a song does not follow the known rules of the composition. This has resulted in the preservation of songs in their typical form and has also made it necessary for new learners to adhere to the purity of the traditional song.

### Religion and Genealogy

Both the Sindhi Sipahis and the Langas are Muslims. It seems that both castes changed their religion from Hinduism to Islam sometime

during the period of Aurangzeb's reign. It is also conceivable that the Langas underwent conversion at a later period when they found that their patrons had accepted the new faith which changed their social position to a great extent. The Langas could not continue with their vocation of singing without identifying or aligning themselves with the patron's social group. We collected the genealogy from one of the singers of these records. He gave the names of his family tree as follows:

Noor Mohmad (present)—Khaju Khan-Jharu Khan-Surtan Khan-Ali-Ummad-Kalyan-Jalo-Pancho-Jasso-Thakarsi-Raisi-Dungarsi-Ajayapal-Joganidas-Devidas.

Noor Mohmad informed us that Devidas was the first person in their family to take to singing and was an outstanding singer. He also competently played on the *sarangi* and *turnai*. Langas also relate a legend about Devidas who was a great warrior and fought bravely alongside his master. He was beheaded in a battle but he continued fighting even without a head. It was his *kabandh* (headless-body) which continued to crush the enemy. It is said that it really became difficult to put him out of action or to pacify the dead body. His family members urged that some water of a brown colour, prepared by boiling tree-bark (known as *guli*) sprinkled on him might help to emancipate his spirit. This was done and Devidas left his earthly abode. However the result was that the colour brown became taboo in the Langa community which never uses this colour in their costumes or garments. It is believed that wearing this colour may inflict hardships or invite disaster in their lives. This superstition persists to this day.

### Cross-culture

The conversion of the Langas from the Hindu way of life to Islam brought about a new diffused culture in its wake. All the Muslim ways of life and rituals were accepted but there also remained many ceremonies and rituals of a non-Muslim social texture. Cross-cousin marriage was accepted but matrimonial ceremonies remained as they were. The male folk continued wearing the *dhoti* which was considered a non-Muslim way of dressing. The females continued wearing *chuda*, a set of bangles worn from the wrist to elbow and from elbow to arm-pit. Among Hindu families *chuda* is the sign of a married woman who will discontinue wearing *chuda* only after her husband is dead. Muslim religious practice is against this custom but it has not only survived among the Langas but is strictly adhered to. There are many other ceremonies, rites and festivals which have their source in Hindu customs and are piously followed by the Langas.

The sub-castes of Langas follow the pattern of Rajput castes. The Rajputs have been the ruling caste in practically all the former princely states of Rajasthan. These were integrated as one administrative unit after the advent of independence in India. Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Bikaner states were under Rajput rulers. The sub-castes of Rajputs are known

as Tunwar, Bhati, Solanki, Rathore etc. The Langa caste is also divided in like manner. It has the same names for the sub-castes, e.g. Tunwar Langa, Bhati Langa etc. Sindhi Sipahi have also kept up the division of sub-castes on a similar pattern. However, matrimonial alliances follow the Muslim pattern. Among Rajput families a boy and a girl cannot be married in the same sub-caste, whereas Langas do not have to adhere to this pattern, since the Muslim family law permits or even promotes the idea of cousin marriage. The Langas usually have cross-cousin marriage as a regular practice. Among Rajputs remarriage is taboo but Langas have the regular practice of 'Nata', i.e. widow remarriage. Unsuccessful marriages can be terminated and new alliances can be made. It is only among the so-called high-caste Hindus that the remarriage of widows or divorce are strictly prohibited. But it may also be kept in mind that middle or lower castes allow the freedom of divorce and widow remarriage. These castes form at least eighty percent of the population.

### Style of Singing

Langas have a distinctive style of singing which is quite different from the style of professional singers of other castes. Rajasthan has many such professional social or caste groups whose livelihood is singing alone. In the desert area, Manganiyar is an important caste which has preserved an absolutely different style of singing. They mainly play on a chordophonic instrument known as *kamayacha*. This instrument is played with a bow. The shape and size and playing mode differs from that of the *sarangi*. Some important professional caste groups of singers are: the Bhopas of Pabooji, the Bhopas of Dev Narayan, the Ravals of Charans, the Bhavai of different peasant communities, Dholi, Mirasi, Fadali and Kamad etc. Each of these castes has preserved some important instrument. The Bhopas of Pabooji have the *ravanhatha*, the Bhopas of Dev Narayan have the *jantar*, the Ravals, the *ravaj* and a type of drum called *mardang*, distinctive in its shape, size and mode of playing, the Dholies have *nagara* and *dholak*, and the Mirasis have a different type of *sarangi*. It is very important to note that musical instruments have been preserved through such castes, which adopted them through a social process, preserved them and continue the practice of teaching the mode of playing to following generations. It is difficult to say whether so many instruments could have come down to us without this peculiar adoption by a professional caste in general social organisation for a professional purpose, sanctified by tradition.

### Training Methods

To maintain that Langa songs have their own style and that each professional group of singers has its own style, we shall have to go into the details of the process of learning the songs among these communities. Langas, for one, have a regular tradition of teaching songs to the new generation. The same tradition can be traced in the training process of

Indian classical music through the *guru-shishya parampara*, i.e. teacher-student relation. The teacher is expected to orally transmit the music lessons to his disciple. The faithful presentation of a melody is directly supervised by the teacher. A similar method is utilised for training a student in Indian classical music. India has no tradition of written music which can serve as a basis for lessons in our musical heritage. Every lesson has to be orally transmitted. A Langa teacher also teaches a few songs to his student and keeps him under his guidance. He supervises the rendering of the song to a certain fixed text and particular melody. If the father of a Langa boy is proficient in singing he is the natural *guru* or teacher for the boy. In case the father feels that he can find a better teacher, he may send the boy to another Langa singer who will take the responsibility of imparting lessons in singing and instrument playing. There is a regular rite or ceremony for this occasion. The parents of the boy will have to invite caste members and serve *sharbat* (soft sweet drinks) to the assembly. The expected teacher will be given sweet-water by the eldest person present. The teacher will drink half-a-glass and pass the other half to the student who will drink the rest. The boy will present a shawl to his teacher and start learning the *sarangi* and the songs.

How many lessons in *sarangi*-playing and singing are given? The reply which we receive from the Langa singer is that a teacher gives lessons of a few 'songs' (or tunes) on the *sarangi* and expects the student to be able to play efficiently other tunes and songs also. The song-tunes are not more than two or three. During the learning session a student also participates in singing with his teacher and can learn as much as he can imbibe or remember. The Langas are illiterate and consequently have to memorise the text, which becomes second nature to them. The period of training is never more than a few months to a year. Then the boy is left free to learn songs from wherever he can pick them up. Music lessons are entirely based on the teaching of songs for tunes and not on the notes or musical scale. The Langas cannot name their notes which are classically known as *Sargam* or the Solfa system of Indian music. However, they have their own style of recognising notes based on the two names of *Sa* and *Pa*. *Sa* is known as '*Dadar*' and '*Pa*' as '*Agora*'. The other notes will be recognised as first, second and third from *Dadar* (i.e. *Re*, *Ga*, *Ma*) than *Agora* (*Pa* and again first and second from '*Agora*' (i.e. *Dha*, *Ni*) and finally *Dadar* recurs. All the eight notes are thus completed. It is necessary to add that the discussion regarding the nomenclature of notes is limited to *sarangi* playing and never enters the field of singing. The songs are never structurally understood by the compositional notes or cognizance of *swara-sthan*. The need for names for *swaras*, or musical notes, is only felt when a Langa musician is expected to tune his *sarangi* which has no less than twenty-nine strings. He has to tune all the strings to some desired pitch and here he cannot do without recognising them, whereas songs do not present this problem to him.

### Evolution of Style

The teacher-student relationship and the tradition of transmission by way of oral lessons has its own impact on the preservation of songs and their musical structure. The general folk songs sung by the people have not been learnt by a conscious process of teaching a song and hence are more liable to new influences and changes. Here the process of transmission is on an unconscious plane, whereas in professional singing communities there is a regular practice of consciously cultivating or preparing a boy or person for musical performance. As the qualitative and quantitative efforts on the part of the teacher increase, the musical lessons start systematizing themselves and create the possibility of law and logic. However, although the Langa style of singing follows the *guru-shishya* tradition in giving lessons to new-comers, the training is merely at an elementary initial stage and does not come up to the level where we can categorise it in the classical sense. The Langa teacher never involves himself in giving lessons in musicology but limits his efforts to passing on the melody with its rhythmic structure to the student. And this also for a few songs, he then leaves the student to learn from anybody or anywhere he likes.

Thus, the Langa songs have attained their present form through a process of semi-conscious transmission. This has definitely resulted in stylistic improvisation in songs which mainly abound in small *tanas* (a rapid succession or variation of notes) and *murkies* (embellishment of light type) within the text of the song. These songs have not remained in a logogenic state but have come to a stage of melogenic songs.

The Langa songs can be divided into two parts according to the occasion of singing. They sing during certain ceremonies and they also sing for the entertainment of their patrons. Ceremonial songs have a direct bearing on the occasion, whereas the other songs reflect the urges of human emotions in general. The songs related to the marriage-ceremony deal with either the marriage procession, presentation of ornaments and clothes for the bride, benefaction from other relations, or joyful ridicule of either of the parties against each other in matrimonial alliance and other ritualistic subjects. The same holds true for child-birth and other initiation ceremonies. The songs sung as a matter of general entertainment are related to love, heroic and benevolent themes on the one hand, and the seasons, months and festivals, on the other. The legendary episodes and romantic narratives find a large place in the repertoire of Langa lore.

### Volume of Records

The twelve songs presented in the 'Rajasthan folk legacy No. 1' represent these two types of songs. '*Kotal Ghurhlo*' and '*Torano*' are marriage songs. *Kotal Ghurhlo* gives a vivid picture of the bridegroom's joyful arrival at the bride's home and his auspicious welcome by the hosts. There is a ceremony known as *Toran marano* i.e. the bridegroom is expected to strike

a beautifully made triangular wooden frame (*Toran*) with his sword or with a tree-branch. The occasion has been picturesquely described in the song.

*Savana-ro-hindo* is a seasonal song sung during the rainy season. Savan is the month when the rains begin in Rajasthan and on the third day of this Indian month, the women go to a garden or a grove and make arrangements for community swinging. The song describes the occasion and its gay atmosphere.

*Kurjan*, *Jalalo-Bilalo*, *Hichki*, and *Neendarhli-lag-rahi* are four songs which deal with the subject of the anxious heroine waiting for the arrival of the lover or husband.

*Kurjan* is the name of a bird which flies in migratory flocks, forming different patterns in the sky. The waiting heroine tries to send her message through the birds to her lover or husband who has been away for a long time.

The song *Jalalo-Bilalo* thematically refers to the blinking of the eyes of the heroine—a sign that indicates the hero's imminent arrival. The heroine complains that her lover has not proved to be wise since he is losing the opportunity of enjoying the youthful game of love at the right moment in life.

*Hichki* means hiccup; symbolically it has come to suggest that we get the hiccups only when someone remembers us from a far off place. The heroine complains in this song that she never wanted her husband to leave the village, but now that he has gone and is trying to remember her, she has to suffer the agony of hiccups. She says, 'why dont you return and enjoy a full life ? Every moment of life is wasting my youth as the bird pecks away the millet-grains one by one. Come soon and do not merely remember me, so that I suffer hiccups.'

*Neendarhli-lag-rahi* is a song about a different type of heroine. The hero has gone and the heroine is trying to tempt him to return. She will prepare a swimming pool and request him to come for just one bath. She has made an appetising meal; he may come to taste it. In this song, we feel that the hero has left the heroine after a lover's tiff and the heroine is trying to make up the quarrel with loving gestures of reconciliation.

*Sorath*, *Badila-bega-ajo* and *Lawarji* are parts of various folk-ballads or love tales. It should be mentioned here that these ballads are not rendered completely in song or music. There are only certain portions of the stories which are sung, the rest of the tale is narrated in prose. *Sorath* is the heroine in a love episode with her maternal uncle *Bzenjha*.

*Badila-bega-ajo* is part of *Dhola-Maru*, a famous love story.

*Lawarji* is different from the two above mentioned tales. There is a nomadic community in Rajasthan known as *Jogi*. This caste has a rule that if a person from any other caste falls in love with a woman of this group he must leave his caste and become a convert to the *Jogi* community.



Each person who joins this caste is immortalised in a song about him. Lawarji was a man from another caste. He took to the life of a roaming *Jogi* and thus this song came into existence. The Langa singers in the present recording, say that they have met Lawarji in a camp of Jogis and it was not long ago that he was living amongst them. There are lots of other songs which have dealt with the same theme. *Ismail Khan* and *Varda Charan* are two compositions which have achieved popularity.

*Gorbandh* and *Charkho* are two songs which are not sung on any particular occasion but are rendered joyfully with musical and textual embellishments by the singers any time while entertaining their patrons. *Gorbandh* explains the feelings of a woman who has lost her *Gorbandh*. The *Gorbandh* is an ornament decorated with cowries (shells) and colourful beads and is a camel's necklace. It hangs from the neck to the knees of the camel and swings swiftly when the camel gracefully walks. The woman has lost this 'precious' ornament which was made with immense care and labour. Now, who can bring it back? It was so good, so beautiful, it swung so gracefully that she can never forget it. The rhythmic and swinging effect of the *Gorbandh* can easily be felt in the music.

*Charkho* gives another instance of a humorous situation. The woman says 'while spinning at my spinning-wheel, I have earned so much money that I could purchase a gold necklace and could arrange for the expenses of the marriage of my husband's sister (*Nanand*). See, on the other hand, my husband had gone to another land to earn his daily bread. He has come back with one rupee as his savings and even that was a counterfeit coin when carefully examined by the womenfolk. The husband's younger brother also took a journey for his livelihood but he returned without any money. He came back smoking a *hukkah* and eating *chana* [gram]. The song ends with a metaphorical expression that life is like a spinning-wheel which is made of sandal wood and spins the thread of life incessantly. The spinner of life goes on spinning.

The Langa repertoire of songs runs into hundreds and each song has its own message, its own implications regarding the mode of life to be lived and its own poetic imagery to beautify certain moments of life.

### Nomenclature

A word about the names of the songs or the method by which a title is given may be necessary. There are certain songs which have proper names. Meaning thereby that a single word (title) will be able to denote a particular and definite song. The folk singer and the listener will understand the same song by the title. There is an established communication between two sets of people through such names. *Gorband*, *Charkho* and *Kurjan* are the single-word titles or traditional names of the songs concerned. They will always signify the same song.

Then there are several songs which are known by one general name, for example *Toranio*, in this set of recorded songs in the album does not

mean only the song rendered here but may mean many other songs sung on a similar, particular occasion. Similarly *Bana* (brodegroom), *Bani* (bride), *Ghori* (mare of bridegroom), *Kamana* (songs related to ward off the evil eye on bride or bridegroom) etc. are such names which represent a subject or ceremony and not a particular song. A single title may signify any number of songs.

Thirdly, *Kotal-Ghurhla*, *Badila-bega-ajo*, *Jalalo-Bilalo*, *Savana-ro-hindo*, and *Neendarhli-lag-rahi* are a part of the lines from the refrain—usually accepted as titles by field-workers or the collectors of the songs.

Fourthly, song-names like *Sorath* have some special implication. As elsewhere mentioned, *Sorath* is the name of the heroine in a love story called *Beenjha-Sorath*. *Sorath* also indicated a geographical area, now forming a part of Gujarat, which lies on the south-western border of Rajasthan. It is also a proper noun for a *raga* in Indian classical music and also means a type of couplet in North Indian prosody. Thus in such a song, we have to clarify whether it is the name of the heroine about which the song is sung, whether it is rendered in the concept of a classical *raga* or whether it is composed prosodically in *Sorath* couplets or simply refers to some particular area. The song chosen for the album has two essential meanings: *Sorath*—the heroine, and the other—a classical *raga*. The recorded song of *Sorath* deals with a dialogue between the hero and heroine (*Sorath*) and as well as composed musically in '*Sorath*'—a melody type based on a modal scale.

### Raga-names

It may be surprising to scholars that these folk singers use *raga*-names for their compositions. It is generally and correctly held that the classical *raga*-system has nothing to do with the rendering of folk songs. The *raga*-system is a highly cultivated concept of Indian music with its own laws and logic or measure and reckoning. It is true that the Langa singers use the names of *ragas* in a certain sense but these can hardly be compared with the modal or sonal structure of *ragas* as understood in the classical system. The folk *raga* cannot stand close scrutiny by way of ascendance and desecendence of notes or the typical motif or catch notes of a classical *raga*. Classical *ragas* will not accept any note outside the gamut of their fixed structure or even allow the sequence to change in a manner which may intrude in other similar *ragas*. This test cannot be applied to the Langa concept of a *raga* which is absolutely liberal and the singer is free to move anywhere in the same set of notes or the tune. The *raga* names which occur in Langa songs are as follows:

*Mand*, *Soob Mand*, *Asa Mand*, *Sameri Mand*, *Todi*, *Kafi*, *Salang*, *Sindhi Bhairvi*, *Maru*, *Khamayachi*, *Jangla*, *Goond Malhar*, *Dhani* and *Syam-Kalyan*.

*Mand* and its four musical forms are peculiar to Rajasthan. *Mand* has also found its place in classical music. Names like *Todi*, *Kafi*, *Salang*,

*Khamayachi*, *Goond Malhar*, and *Syam Kalyan* are found in the classical system too. But a general comparison will immediately establish that these folk melodies and names have nothing to do with the classical compositions. However, *Sorath*, *Maru*, *Jangla*, *Mand*, and *Sindhi Bhairvi* present a different picture. They have many musical features in common with the classical *raga* and are fairly similar to classical composition. All these *raga* names are derived from the names of geographical regions of Rajasthan. *Mand* is the name of Jaisalmer region, *Maru* of Marwar, *Jangla*, the Bikaner region and *Sorath* and *Sindhi* represent regions from other states, i.e. Gujarat and Sindh. This might give us a clue about *raga* compositions in the classical system and also explain, to some extent, the essential similarities in folk tunes and the *ragas*. All the compositions which are sung under the nomenclature of a *raga* name do not have separate titles or proper names of songs in practice. It is simply stated that they are singing *Duhas* (a typical couplet) or song in *Soob* or *Khamayachi* etc.

All the twelve songs of 'Rajasthan folk legacy no. 1' are not *raga* songs or named after a *raga* except *Sorath-ra-Duha*. However, it is said that *Badila-bega-ajo* is in *Maru*, *Lawarji* is in *Sindhi Bhairavi*, *Savana-ro-hindo* is in *Salang*, *Jalalo-Bilalo* is in *Saineri Mand* and *Neendarhli-lag-rahi* is in *Soob-Mand*.

#### Duhas

All the songs which have the *raga* names are rendered in a different way from that of general songs. *Raga* songs will always be preceded by *duhas* (couplets) which will have no rhythmic emphasis involved in singing. But as soon as the *Duhas* are brought to a conclusion, the song with its rhythmic structure emerges. The phonograph record of *Sorath* will illustrate this point, where 4 *duhas* are rendered and then '*Papiya-pyara-re*' is sung with gusto in a forceful and rhythmic tempo. The record of *Lawarji* and *Hichki* also have a *duha* each.

It must be understood that there is no limitation to the number of *duhas* to be sung before the song proper starts. *Duhas* related to *Sorath* are nearly 60 to 80 in number. The other compositions also have varying numbers. In all cases the idea or emotions expressed in *duhas* have a direct relation to the subject of the song. If *Lawarji* is a song expressing the desire of yearning love, then the *duhas* will also express the same theme and similar feelings of languishing love. In this way the composition has not only an organic relation between the subject of the two parts of the song but also has a melodic relation based on the folk conception of the *raga*.

It has been said elsewhere that the *duha* is a couplet accepted in Indian classical poetry. The couplet has two equal lines of 24 syllables each, divided at 13 and 11 *matras*. Some experts believe that the *duha* has four verse lines instead of two. The scansion of *duha* is based on the number of syllabic instants (*matra*) in each quarter-verse. In this case, each feet shall consist of 13, 11 and 13, 11 syllabic instants. Prosodically, short syllables

will be quantified as one instant and long as two instants. This metre is very popular in the oral tradition of Rajasthan. It was very late in the history of classical literature that the *duha* found its rightful place amongst other metres. For the purpose of our study, it seems important that the *duha* (a classical poetic form) and the *raga* (a classical melodic form) should have come together. This may help to explain the interrelation between two cultures—the folk and the classical—of the given society.

### Musical instruments

The *sarangi* used by the Langas as an accompanying instrument has its own story to tell and requires some explanation in order to understand the folk content of the musical form as opposed to the classical content or the culture of higher society. It has been said time and again that folk singers do not possess a knowledge of musical scale as it is understood by students of classical music. For a folk singer the tune matters. Anatomy of musical scale has no relevance for the folk musician.

It is here that a problem arises. The tuning of a musical instrument puts an essential demand on the cognizance of a note and its relative pitch. Does this not mean that a folk instrumentalist has to recognise the intervals and difference between the pitches and thus is conscious of the musical scale? The Langa musician and other chordophone instrument players are aware of a musical scale, but at the same time they have their own independent method of recognising the notes of a scale. As has been explained earlier, the word *Dadar* stands for *Sa* and *Agora* for *Pa*. The rest of the notes are counted first, second and third from *Dadar* and then *Agora* followed by the other set of first and second notes. The repetition of *Dadar* completes the octave.

### Sarangi—its features

The *Sindhi sarangi* has the following features:

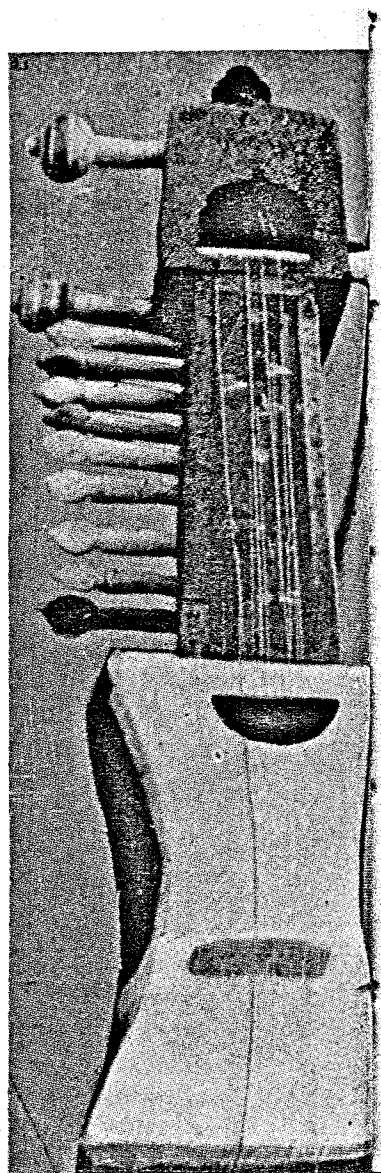
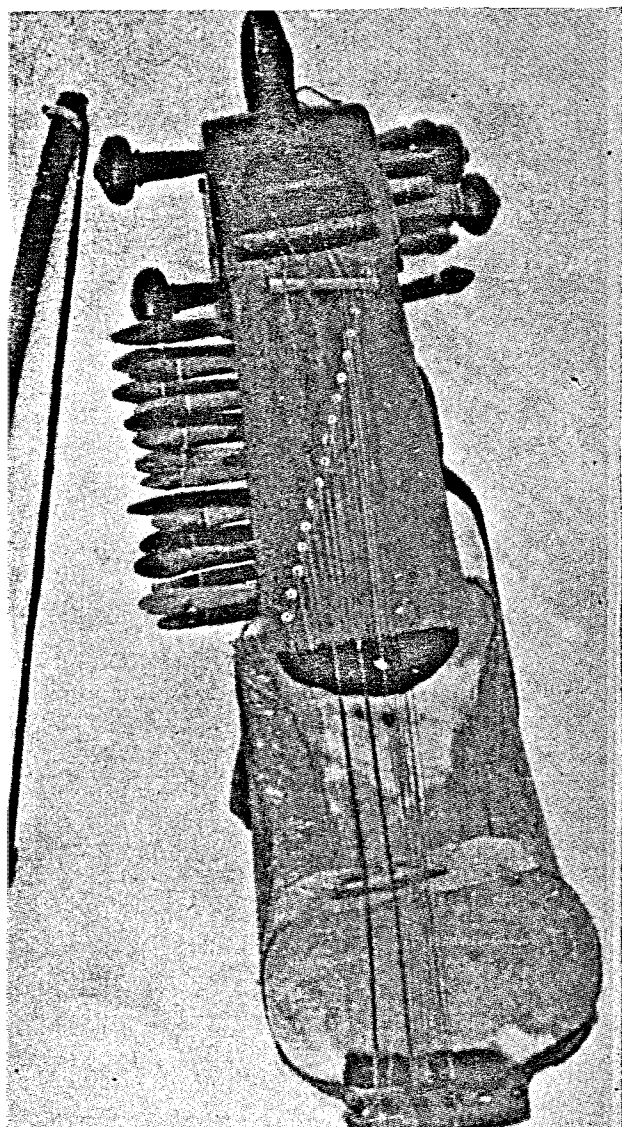
1. There are twenty nine strings on *Sindhi sarangi*.
2. There are four main strings on which the bow plays. No other strings are directly played by the bow. The first two strings (from left to right) are made of steel and the following two strings are made of locally prepared gut. Both the steel strings are tuned to *Sa* (known as Twins) and the gut strings tuned respectively as *Pa* and *Sa* of the lower octave.
3. There are only two proper nouns for notes, i.e. *Dadar* for *Shadaj* and *Agora* for *Pancham*. The rest of the notes are explained in sequential numbers.
4. The division of all the 29 strings is: 4 main strings (*Baja*), 8 sym-

Illustrations: P 17 The Langa singers, Left to right, Shumar Khan, Alladin, Noor Mohmad.  
P 18 Langa Noor Mohmad with Gujratan Sarangi.











pathetic strings just below the main strings (known as *Jhara*) and another set of 17 sympathetic strings below the '*Jharas*' (known as *Jeel*). The difference between '*Jhara*' and '*Jeel*' is important. The *Jhara* strings are tied to the bottom of the *Sarangi* and pass through both the upper and lower bridge and are fixed to the pegs at the head of the instrument. This will suggest that the head of a *Sarangi* has twelve pegs on it. The *Jeels* are also tied at the lower end of the *Sarangi* but they pass through the lower bridge only. Each string is tied to a peg at the side of the instrument. The instrument has small holes in a diagonally drawn line on the middle part of the body and the strings (*Jeel*) pass through it to the pegs. The *Jeels* do not utilise the upper bridge. The Classical *Sarangi* does not have the *Jhara* i.e. middle set of strings. *Jhara* strings are made of brass. The *Jeel* set of sympathetic strings are made of relatively thin steel wire. Conception of *Jhara* is a peculiarity of folk chordophonic instruments.

5. The lower bridge contains 4 main strings on its head, 8 *Jharas* have parallel holes in a small curve, followed by the still lower set of 17 holes which are provided for the 17 *Jeels* or sympathetic strings.

6. While playing the *Sarangi* as an accompaniment, the singer is able to utilise the main strings as a drone and the other notes by the touch of his knuckles. For playing in the lower octave, he has to utilise the first gut string provided at the third place on the *sarangi* which is tuned to *Pancham*.

7. The Langas follow a rule about the juxtaposition of all the twenty-nine strings. They insist that all the upper set of main strings i.e. *Sa-Sa-Pa-Sa* must have *Jharas* so arranged that *Sa* must come under *Sa* and *Pa* under *Pa*. The horizontal distance between them should be able to accommodate the rest of the notes. Similarly the *Jeel* should also keep the same position i.e. *Sa* and *Pa*. *Jhara* strings must have the parallel note under them. The acoustic and resonance principal in the structure of the *sarangi* depends mostly on this rule.

8. There are sets of rules for tuning the instrument. They are known as *Adi Bhelani*, *Kharhi Bhelani* and *Raga-Ragani-ri-Bhelani*. In all cases the main strings maintain the *Sa-Sa-Pa-Sa* but the *Jharas* and *Jeels* change. *Adi Bhelani* utilises two *Madhyams*—the normal and sharp—and avoids *Sa* at the end. The *Jeels* in this set again utilise two octaves for its 17 strings. Two *Madhyams* is the distinguishing feature.

In *Kharhi-Bhelani* *Komal Nishad* is used on the *Jhara* followed by two *komal-nishads* in the set of *Jeels*.

The *Raga-Ragani-ri-Bhelani* is an improved understanding of the musical instrument and it is of potential help to the singer. The third *Bhelani* is arranged according to the need of the composition. Whichever notes

Illustrations: P 19 Langa Shumar Khan with Sindhi Sarangi. P 20 The instruments, left, Sindhi Sarangi right, Gujratan Sarangi (Photos Rupayan Sansthan)



are prominent in the composition find a place in the tuning, but the notes which are not in the melody are not tuned on the *sarangi*. There are only a few Langa *sarangi* players who can convincingly utilise the third set of tuning rules. Langas mostly use the *Adi-Bhelani*, i.e. *Sa-Ma-Ma-Pa-Sa* remain on the sympathetic strings along with other notes.

9. Without an explanation about the bowing system of the *sarangi* the story will not be complete. The *sarangi* is mainly an accompanying instrument and as such, it has to follow the note pattern of the song. The folk songs contain emphases at regular intervals, which are a determining factor in the rhythmic structure of the song. Short intervals and strong accents on every time-unit is a recurring feature in all the folk songs. In practically all folk songs, even if the song is without an accompaniment of any percussion instrument, such emphases of the main beats or bars of the melody can be discerned. The womenfolk of Rajasthan have a repertoire of thousands of songs which are never sung with percussion instruments, and yet all the songs definitely express their rhythmic patterns through the emphasis on syllables in accordance with the time-unit.

#### Impact of bowing

The bow of the *Sindhi sarangi* moves with a jerk to bring out the rhythmic pattern of the song. The bowing is just a transformed rhythm pattern derived from the accentuated time-unit of the song. The use of the classical *sarangi* and its mode of bowing hardly establishes the rhythmic structure of the song or piece of music. The classical *sarangi* player would not use a jerk while bowing up and down with emphases to establish rhythm. Here the bowing is expected to follow the long breath of the singer and the bow moves in a slow prolonged movement. One movement may include as many time-units as possible by the efficacy of the instrumentalist. But the *Sindhi sarangi* or folk instrumentalists do not possess an evolved musical consciousness and consequently remain bound to rhythmic structure.

#### Gujratan Sarangi

The shape and size of *Gujratan sarangi* is smaller than that of *Sindhi sarangi*. It has four main strings—two steel wires and two guts—tuned to *Sa-Sa-Pa-Sa* and a set of eight sympathetic strings (*Jeel*). It does not have the *Jhara* set of strings mentioned with *Sindhi sarangi*. Rest of the details are common between *Sindhi* and *Gujratan sarangi*. A fact has also to be kept in mind that the main string which gives the melodic notes is made of steel. Indian classical *sarangi* and a few other folk *sarangis* use a main string of gut. Steel string is always tuned to a higher pitch as compared to gut string and this results in a singing style with a difference—based on a higher tonal note. This is why the caste-musicians always sing full-throated.

#### Rhythm

The concept of bowing as discussed here can be easily recognised in the

phonogram records. But again, these records may raise a question—why has no rhythm instrument been utilised? The Langa singers, as a matter of tradition and practice, never use any percussion instrument with their singing or instrument playing. It is only during the last few years that singers have used the *dholak* for public stage performances or radio broadcasts. Rupayan Sansthan, however, wanted to remain true to tradition, knowing very well, that our desire for authenticity will not play a large part in future and the Langa singers may take to other ways. But we felt that the best way to present the folk songs for musicological study would be to avoid all those intruding factors which tend to affect the tenor and texture of traditional folk songs.

### Tala

We have given a short resume of the Langa singer's understanding of the classical musical scale. The *raga* system of Indian classical music and the primary concept of *raga* among the Langas has also been mentioned. A third comparison can be made on the basis of the *tala* (rhythm) structure of folk songs sung by the Langas. We can definitely say that the classical system of *tala* does not apply to the folk songs. The emphatic time units and their pre-arranged divisions do not stand up to scrutiny in the folk song. North Indian classical music has recognised many *talas* with varying measures and time units. *Talas* of 4 to 16 *matras* are commonly used. Some rarely used *talas* run into 32 or even more *matras*. Four, six, seven, ten, twelve, fourteen and sixteen *matra talas* are respectively known as *Kahrawa*, *Dadra*, *Roopak* or *Chachar* or *Tewra*, *Jhaptal*, *Ektal*, *Choutal* or *Dhamar* or *Dzepchandi* and *Trital*. Among the same divisions there are few other *talas* also. Each *tala* has its own inner division of time units which changes the movement of rhythm to its own peculiarity. The classical *talas* use three technical words like *khali*, *bhari* and *sam*. Without understanding these three words it will not be possible to understand the structure or *tala* system of Indian music. If we try to apply all these conditions to a folk melody, we find that time-units do not adhere to the rules of classical *tala*. There is no *khali* and it has no *sam* in accordance with its relation to a fixed place in composition. The *sam* is not only an emphatic place in the consummation of a full *tala*-measure but has also to be defined in relation to the melodic structure or *cheez*. The *sam* has to occur on the same syllable of *sthayi* in the song or same *swar* of the *gata* in instrumental music. Variable *sams* have their own rules. Within such rigidity, we can hardly provide rhythmic accompaniment to a folk song. It requires free movement and yet has a discipline of its own.

It may also be interesting to note that Rajasthan's folk songs utilise only three types of rhythm patterns, i.e. 4 *matras*, 6 *matras* and 7 *matras*. Classical terminology will designate them as *Kahrawa*, *Dadara* or *Rupak* or *Chachar* or *Tewar*. But it is very rarely that such classical division or stress can serve the need of a folk song. A thorough study has revealed

that each emphatic accent in a song requires supporting rhythmic beat and it has to leave out the concept of the *khali* from the major part of the *laya* exposition. This is the main reason why classical *tala* cannot be applied to the folk songs because they move rhythmically in a different cycle from that of a fixed *tala*. It is in the second or third cycle of classical *tala* that we find the beat has shifted and no longer coincides with the stressed syllable. Thus, it is very necessary to ascertain the genuine time-unit arrangement of each folk song.

This is also one of the reasons why we avoided a percussion instrument like a simple *dholak* or *tabla*. Many a time, unconsciously folk singers adjust to the subtle *tala* sequence and change the essential character of the melody. Surreptitiously, a *tala* with its own emphases tends to prevail in a folk song. We have found that many a folk song can easily be measured in *dhol* (big drum, played by hand and a stick) beats which essentially mark the main emphasis alone. If *dholak* is used, we have to go into the real division of time units and the emphasis prevailing in the folk melody and not just force the fixed pattern of classical *tala* on the song.

#### Folk poetry v/s Folk song

Finally, this brings us to discuss the structure of folk-poetry as a part of folk-song. How do the musical, rhythmical and poetical structures join together to form a complete whole that is a folk song? How do they react on each other and restrict or allow freedom to different structural units?

It can be said with certainty that a folk song has the repetitive sequence of a melodic structure, followed by a fixed pattern of rhythmic movement. Now the song may have only a single line of verse to each stanza, so that the melody is repeated in the same sequence for every following line. The folk song can also have two, three or four lines to form a stanza or strophé. A number of stanzas will make a song complete. At the same time the lines of the first stanza will be followed musically in the subsequent verses. Melodically, the structure has to confine itself to this discipline. If all the stanzas of a song have to be sung in the same repetitive musical sequence, then will it not be necessary for the stanzas to stick to some form of poetic structure related to the words? Thus, we find that each folk song has a definite and intrinsic discipline of its own in its poetical composition. Each line of a stanza has to conform to each line of the following stanzas.

#### Refrain

While formulating ideas regarding verse in relation to melody, it is necessary to consider the concept of the refrain occurring in the folk songs. In a single foot stanza the question of refrain does not arise. But whenever the song has two or more feet in a stanza, the problem of refrain becomes important. The refrain line or lines do not follow a fixed pattern

in all the songs. Refrain may consist of one line or more than one line. The refrain, which may consist of two or more lines, do not have the same melodic structure as that of the main stanza, although it is based on the same rhythm and sung to a melody constructed from the same musical material.

The problem becomes more complicated when we find that refrain does not necessarily mean only a line but it can also mean a full stanza. It is further problematic to find that sometimes the refrain comes at the beginning of each stanza, sometimes at the end and sometimes in the middle of a stanza. Among the twelve songs presented in the records, we can find all the three variations. The song *Kurjan* has a single line refrain repeating itself at the end of the stanza. The *Gorbandh* and *Charkho* songs have the refrain stanzas at the beginning of the main stanzas. The song *Toranio* has one line refrain in the middle of a stanza.

Musically, refrains are most important for a composition, but poetically they are sometimes meaningful and sometimes not. Many a time they are merely sung for their own sake or for the need of compositional relevance. Half of a song like *Kurjan* does not derive any poetical meaning from the refrain, which only becomes relevant when the heroine addresses the *Kurjan* for taking her message to her lover or husband. The refrain will have to be understood in the context of a particular song and its content.

#### Solo and Group singing

The Langas have kept up the tradition of singing in a group of two to four persons. It is very rare to find a solo singer. Even if we desire to listen to a solo performance, we find that most of the embellishments of the songs have given way to the flatness of the tune. A solo performer cannot even keep up the requisite breath for the time-unit of the composition. All these handicaps are overcome by group singing, and this also facilitates the embellishment and improvisation of the tune. The embellishment of the tune mainly derives its combinations from the way the 'Sarangi' can bring out the notes. It may be that the *sarangi* has played a big role in establishing the style of Langa singers.

The style of group-singing of Langas, and for that purpose all the folk song of Rajasthan, has some freedom for the individual performer. The melody, rhythm and words remain the same for the group but union singing of the chorus type is always missing. It is not a solo song being performed by a group of singers with rigour and discipline of each melodic, rhythmic or poetic pause. There is free introduction, with definite rhythm, and when sung, with or without words, in which the performers one after the another improvise on the melodic pattern, displays to the best of their ability, their skill and inspiration.

#### Musical instruments and Caste

Langas are not only 'sarangi' players; a sub-caste of Langas is

solely devoted to aerophonic instruments like 'sarnai' and 'murla' (a type of 'pungi, a bagpipe of gourd). It may be interesting to note ethnologically that two sub-castes of Langas are divided on the basis of the instrument they play. One sub-caste is known as 'sarangiya Langas' who play the *sarangi* and sing. The other sub-caste is 'Surniya Langas' who mainly play 'surnai' and *murla* with the accompaniment of 'surinda' (a chordophonic instrument played with a bow). Both the sub-castes can eat and drink in each other's home but they cannot marry into the other group. 'Surniya Langas' do not sing; they only play the tune of folk songs and embellish them to a great extent. A detailed study of 'Surniya Langas' shall follow when we prepare another set of records from their musical repertoire. It should suffice here to know that the 'Surniya Langas' use the *surinda*, a chordophonic instrument for the essential purpose of delineating the rhythmic structure and musical accompaniment. The bow of the *surinda* is provided with tiny bells (*ghunghroos*) which are capable of emphasizing the time-unit, with a beauty of sound-texture which emerges from the lightest jerk on the bow.

Our present study is limited to the twelve songs presented as 'Folk legacy no. I' in phonogram records. We hope to present other studies in future monographs on hereditary folk-singing groups of Rajasthan. However, the principle and method of study will remain the same to reach a better understanding of the folk musical heritage and its essential unity based on comparative elements of compositions. These groups have preserved several musical instruments for centuries and the musical limitation or possibilities of these instruments have played an important role in the formation of different styles of singing amongst these castes. A dexterous player can manipulate a good *tana* on an instrument like the *sarangi*, the same has found its place in the rendering of the music. The *Ravanhatha* player has evolved something different. The same is true when we find a *Kamayacha* player embellishing a song. We hope to demonstrate different styles and traditions of Rajasthan's folk music through the project of disc records.

Children's songs, Women's songs, Ritual songs, Tribal songs and various other styles of songs which do not take any support from musical instruments and the folk ballads, folk tales and folk drama will extend our field to the oral tradition of Rajasthan.