The Present of the Past: The Outlook for Folk Music in India

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The world of Indian music is witnessing an unprecedented boom. Music has become big business. The market is flooded with cassettes, CDs, and VCDs. People are spending more money on music than ever before. Television channels are purveying music on a huge scale. Folk music, too, has got a boost, or so it would seem. Some folk artists have become celebrities. There is an ever-increasing give-and-take in the field of music. 'Fusion', real or fake, is in. Folk tunes, suitably doctored, are becoming hits. A great deal of popular music is drawing its inspiration from folk music. And yet, internally, the founts of folk music are drying up, and its streams are becoming diluted and polluted. The blooming flower carries a canker in its heart.

To understand this phenomenon, we have first to understand the nature and content of folk music.

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Folk music is essentially the home-made music of the individual who is at the same time fully incorporated into a group. That is why the music of the individual becomes that of the group and vice versa. The original creator mostly remains anonymous, and the group adds to and embellishes the music in the course of its repeated performance.

But folk music also contains many strata and many types of creators and carriers. At the top end, a folk tradition may have very accomplished professional musicians whose art often borders on classical music in terms of dexterity and devices. The Laṅgās and the Māṅgaṇiyārs of Rajasthan, for example, represent this stratum. But in Rajasthan itself, there are other groupings of musicians who are also professional, or whose profession includes music in an important way, who neither exhibit the 'classical' nuances associated with the Laṅgās and Māṅgaṇiārs, nor lay claim to musicianship of that order. (Both kinds of groups are usually associated as entertainers and purveyors of ceremonial music with various caste groups of patrons—by appointment, so to speak. They constitute distinct castes.)

However, though folk musicians of the professional strata are the most prominent and visible, these strata only constitute the topsoil of Indian folk music. The much larger part of the world of folk music consists of music of the non-professional variety. The music of agriculturists, pastoral groups, artisans, and so on is practised non-professionally, even though these occupational groups may also have their own professional musicians. A large part of the music of the countryside is of women, who have incessantly poured their sorrows and joys into simple, impromptu ditties. This, too, is folk music. However, non-professionally practised folk music may share its repertoire to a large extent with professional musicians; the distinction may lie mainly in the greater and better use of instruments, and the inherited and acquired virtuosity of the professional music-makers.

Folk music is essentially village music. Our towns and cities of today were also large villages to begin with. Folk music remains there as a vestige of the past, or by virtue of a continuing interaction with the surrounding countryside. There is also an urban folk music, which is in the main a self-conscious and sophisticated version of the music of the countryside.

Folk music is essentially situational. It has been the music of the unlettered, untutored, uninhibited masses. The professional musician in this sphere, too, has been voicing the feelings and thoughts of the common man or woman, and projecting his or her imagery, only with greater finesse and command over his musical resources. Classical music, on the other hand, is the music of the individual, and *for* individuals with a cultivated receptivity. The classical musician may have a lineage and a following, but his or her music is not the music of a group.

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The above remarks about the nature and content of folk music are only intended as a background for a consideration of the contemporary scenario in respect of folk music in India. A clarification may be added before we start:

There can be and there has been a lot of debate about categories of music. It has been customary to distinguish between tribal and folk music. However, the difference between the two, generally, is more of degree than of quality, and with the gradual opening up of hinterlands, the difference has tended to diminish. In any case, we are more concerned here with the living reality of folk music today than its theoretical aspects, and, from that point of view, the predicament which tribal or primitive, and folk or rural, music face today is the same.

With this in mind, let us now consider the overall situation and try to formulate some remedial measures. To illustrate the points I shall be making in this article, I have provided examples drawn exclusively from my own experience of about four decades in the folk music of Rajasthan. However, my experience may well be similar to those of colleagues in folk music elsewhere in the country.

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To begin with, it would seem that while folk music of the uppermost stratum is flourishing, and the fortunes of many, if not all, accomplished professional folk musicians are rising, the art of the common village musician as well as the music of the common man are in decline. The accomplished professional folk musician, who often has full-fledged classical musicians as cousins[1], knows the art of performing for cultivated listeners and takes to the stage as fish take to water. As he is impeccable in his performance, his appeal is instantaneous and universal. Indeed, in the art of such performers, folk music seems to join up with the popular music of the day. Some other robust entertainers, such as the Kañjars and the Kālbeliyās of Rajasthan, also manage to stay afloat. But the ordinary musician or entertainer who is losing his traditional clientele—the Jogī, the Bhopā, the balladeer, the village Dholī, the puppeteer—does not know where to turn to. It is also to be remembered that the average village musician has been regarded as a menial, and usually belongs to the lower castes.

Further, singing has often been equated with begging[2]. So the children of these traditional musicians, some of whom today have had the benefit of a formal education, are no longer willing to take to the lowly and increasingly unremunerative profession of their forefathers.

Thus, while no one seems to be aware or caring, scores of musical traditions and lineages, each with its distinctive styles, songs and instruments, are dying out. These traditions also encompass dance and operatic forms. This denouement is being hastened by the disruption of linkages between performers and their patrons. For example, the Rāwalon kī Rammat, a folk opera of Rajasthan, is now virtually extinct because the Rāwals used to perform it only for their patrons—the Chāraṇas—and the occasions for performances within this restricted ambit slowly but surely reduced. Of course, modernization, urbanization, the cinema and television form the general backdrop to this story of decline.

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The widespread use of the harmonium constitutes a collateral calamity. Folk song does not slavishly follow its instrumental accompaniment. But today, the new trend is to sing 'according' to the harmonium. This not only engenders stilted, stereotyped, mechanical singing, but it also eliminates distinctive notes, nuances, and *harkats*. For example, the older women musicians of Rajasthan effortlessly employ *giṭkarī*—a sort of yodelling—in their singing; one cannot imagine this device being reproduced on the harmonium, and then replicated by a human voice. Similarly, folk music employs many shades of notes which cannot fit into the harmonium's fixed intervals. This also applies to the decoloration and typification which results from folk music being performed to the accompaniment of 'classical' instruments, played by artists ignorant or disdainful of the folk genre, over the radio or otherwise in an urban setting. To give just one example of harmonium abuse, the ballad of Ḍholā of eastern Rajasthan, southern Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, when accompanied on the harmonium, is only a shadow of the Ḍholā rendered with a Chikāḍā, a kind of Sāraṅgī with a deep, sombre sound.

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The toll in terms of the basic folk music of the tribe or village is even more devastating. Folk music is both a product and component of folk life. It even becomes one of the means by which a community holds together and articulates its identity. With the spread of modern education, urbanization, the displacement and scattering of various communities, and a general falling apart of the traditional socio-cultural matrix, the continuity and creativity of folk music are in peril. The professional folk musician may yet get a new patron-audience in the changed circumstances. But the basic folk music is essentially home-made, something you create for yourself and your own community. If you cease to have the urge and the inspiration and the response and resonance provided by your enlarged self—the community—then the fount dries up. Creator and listener then become dependent on externally provided entertainment—television, for example. And because folk music inheres in the individual and his community, it cannot be borrowed or lent *qua* folk music. Thus popular music, like music from films and the music purveyed by pop musicians today, is

not to be confused with folk music, even where it draws upon the latter.

There is still a lot of folk music around in rural areas, and among tribes or groups which still retain tribal characteristics. 'Tribe' for my purpose includes castes and groups like the Gūjars, Ahīrs, Kahārs and Dhobīs, who have all had their distinctive songs, styles, instruments and dances, and not the Scheduled Tribes alone. But this heritage is inexorably being circumscribed or even snuffed out. One culprit is the kind of education we impart. This education begins by alienating the child from his or her cultural roots. A Mev boy once told me: "*Paḍhāi aur Pelī* [a short flute used by the Mevs to accompany their high-pitched singing] *kā kyā sāth*?" (Education and the playing of the Peli do not go together.)[3] Tribal students today are, generally, either averse to or unable to join in singing and dancing. The teacher from an urban background who teaches music to village children is himself or herself often out of tune, whereas tunefulness is invariably a characteristic of all folk or tribal music. An abetting factor is the taboo which caste councils are often found placing on singing and dancing. This mimics the mores of the upper castes, who neither sing nor dance, but only attend performances as audience. Public dancing by women of lower castes is today considered to be demeaning, and this again reflects upper-caste norms of behaviour. So resolutions are passed and diktats handed out: You will not dance or sing in public; if you do so, you will have to pay a heavy fine[4].

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Thus it would appear that notwithstanding all the hoopla associated with folk music, the invisible nine-tenths of the world of Indian folk music—the subsoil, so to speak—is in jeopardy. Governmental and other agencies active in the field of folk music are unfortunately following a stage-bound, entertainment-oriented course with a pronounced urban bias. But this helps nobody except for the already stage-savvy professional folk musician. The larger part of our folk music (which also includes dance and opera) is not really cut out for the stage, particularly the urban stage, managed by people who do not know much about folk music and care even less.

I will give you an example. An enterprising institution in Jaipur has been presenting programmes focused on the folk music of the Braj region of Rajasthan over the past several years. Unfortunately, the programmes have tended to be limited to a few popular items, some of which have spectacle value, and some popular artists. Therefore I persuaded the organizers to cast their net wider and to present to their audience some authentic forms of Braj music which were less often encountered in the city. And one year they were good enough to invite a group to perform the famous Kanhaiyyā or Gīt. Hardly had the performance begun than the group was hooted off the stage by an audience which knew nothing about the form and could not follow the speech of the performers. On the other hand, when the Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur (of which I was then the Director-General) organized a similar event at Weir, a small township in eastern Rajasthan, the Kanhaiyyā and other songs were performed for two days with great enthusiasm, and were heard with rapt attention. There was only a token catalytic monetary input from the government. In a festival of folk music at Jahazpur in Rajasthan, we were even able to get some Mīṇā women to sing—something

which would be unimaginable in a folk show staged in an urban setting. In a similar event at Rajgarh, also in Rajasthan, we were able to listen at length to, and marvel at, the strongly evocative playing of (and singing with) the Pābū Māṭās—two differently tuned, membrane-covered pitchers played in tandem by two performers. If at all presented in an urban event, the Māṭās would be treated only as a queer and exotic curiosity. Indeed, in such stage shows, the many distinctive and 'small' instruments are tending to be *shown* rather than played. At one grand *tamasha* in Mumbai, we were treated to the spectacle of hundreds of small and big instruments, each with a different natural pitch, being played together. Folk music is in real danger of being reduced to a farce.

'Performance' is a part of folk music, but only a minor part. For the rest, it is a way of celebrating life—with the performers themselves becoming the audience. But our major effort today goes into arranging folk extravaganzas for urban audiences. The adverse effects of this activity are to be seen even in the performance of professional folk performers who distort and dilute their art to win the favour of the ignorant, fashionable elite in the cities[5]. This stage culture is even affecting our classical music. But, for the average rural artist, the artificial environment of the urban stage is totally alien and stultifying. The Jawahar Kala Kendra once tried to revive the Bhawāi operatic form of Rajasthan. The initial show at Chittauri-khera near Chittaurgarh was very successful. But when the same artists performed in Jaipur, they were pale shadows of their true selves[6].

So, folk festivals in the cities, which have become a vogue, tend to degenerate into tamashas which are as painful for those who know and care as they are deleterious for the folk forms concerned. Moreover, they often present a mélange of mismatched pieces: the fast-paced and gusty renderings are interspersed with subtle and leisurely ones which are not meant for public performance at all. As it is bothersome to scout for genuine performers and to teach them 'stage manners', resort is increasingly taken to pseudo, all-purpose urban folk artists who present banal, varnished parodies of the original forms[7]. More and more folk music is beginning to sound more and more alike. It is becoming increasingly difficult to tell the genuine from the spurious, and, as things are going, the genuine folk music that remains may also be corrupted and lost. Middlemen or contractors of folk music have emerged in large numbers. It has become a flourishing trade.

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We cannot wish away stage shows, nor should we deprive folk artists of the attendant monetary benefit and the opportunity of visiting cities and gaining a wider exposure. In fact, there is a genuine need for preparing stage shows of the type represented by Folklorico of Mexico. But it has to be realized that folk shows in urban areas, or travelling troupes, can only be a very small part of the total agenda that needs to be drawn up for the preservation of folk music in India. The essential need is to tend the flower-beds: as long as the flowers are there, some of them can be displayed in the drawing rooms, too. But it is the continuity of folk traditions in the countryside that needs to be ensured—through regional folk music festivals, through extensive guru-shishya (teacher-disciple) programmes, and by other means. If folk forms survive in the countryside, they can always be presented on the urban stage as

well. Unfortunately, however, it is easier to organize programmes in the cities, get outsize grants for them, and, incidentally, to hog the headlines and get into the good books of this or that VIP. It is the unglamorous and more taxing work of preservation and development of artistic traditions out in the field that tends to be neglected. However, it will be very worthwhile at the start to collect and disseminate information about Folklorico-type experiments[8], on the one hand, and the root-nurturing, drip-irrigation-type endeavours of other pioneering organizations in the field, on the other hand, and to duplicate these efforts elsewhere in the country.

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The argument in favour of folk festivals in the countryside is likely to be met with the stock objection: 'But, Sir, why do you want to restrict rural people to watching their own traditional performances? Are you not aware that they also want to see and enjoy the newer and more attractive forms of music and dance already available to people in the cities?' In theory, this counter argument may appear to be incontrovertible. In practice, the truth is different. In spite of increasing exposure to urban life, rural people are still attached to their inherited, artistically enriching, local forms, irrespective of what we, the rootless, self-appointed, urban messiahs of 'culture' may think[9]. As for the newer forms, no one can prevent their dissemination even if one wanted to. The problem lies in ensuring a place for old, time-honoured, indigenous forms of expression in an evolving commonwealth of forms; and the real hurdle here is not the rural population, but the self-centred, ignorant, and callous framers and executors of cultural policies and practices. What we really need is a knowledgeable cultural administration that really cares.

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It is true, of course, that cultural philistinism is no longer a purely urban phenomenon. The decline of the great semi-urban operatic form, the Nauṭaṅkī of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, into a nauseating and pathetic cabaret cannot be ascribed to the doings of urban stage managers alone. There has been a process of cheapening and debasement of the folk arts even in their own territories and without overt urban culpability. I have been witness to two abominable performances of Rasiyā Daṅgal at Mathura and Kaman—places which would be regarded as strongholds of the culture of the Braj region. Even in the villages of this region, it is now becoming increasingly difficult to listen to the Ḍholā or Jikrī devotional songs, or Jhūlnā compositions, rendered with their old richness and appeal. Even in the great cattle fairs of Rajasthan, performances of the Khyāl—an operatic form—now tend to be interrupted more and more by flimsy song-and-dance numbers and comic interludes in response to demands from the rowdier elements in the audience[10].

However, this *sui generis* malaise, too, calls for greater awareness and initiative on the part of our cultural administrators, and points to the need for a major drive to nurture the wilting roots of the folk arts.

At this point, we may take note of three possible approaches to the living heritage of the folk arts in general, and folk music in particular.

Fig. 1. A typical Jogī of Rajasthan. Jaipur, 1973.
Photograph: Vijay Verma

All legends by Vijay Verma

Fig. 2. The Mev boy to the left is the one who enlightened me about the Pelī being the antithesis of 'paḍhāī'.

Fig. 3. It was one of these boys at the fair at Khurra who informed me about the "government's" fine-formula for dancing and singing at fairs. The boys could not, of course, allow this 'law' to restrain them from having a go!

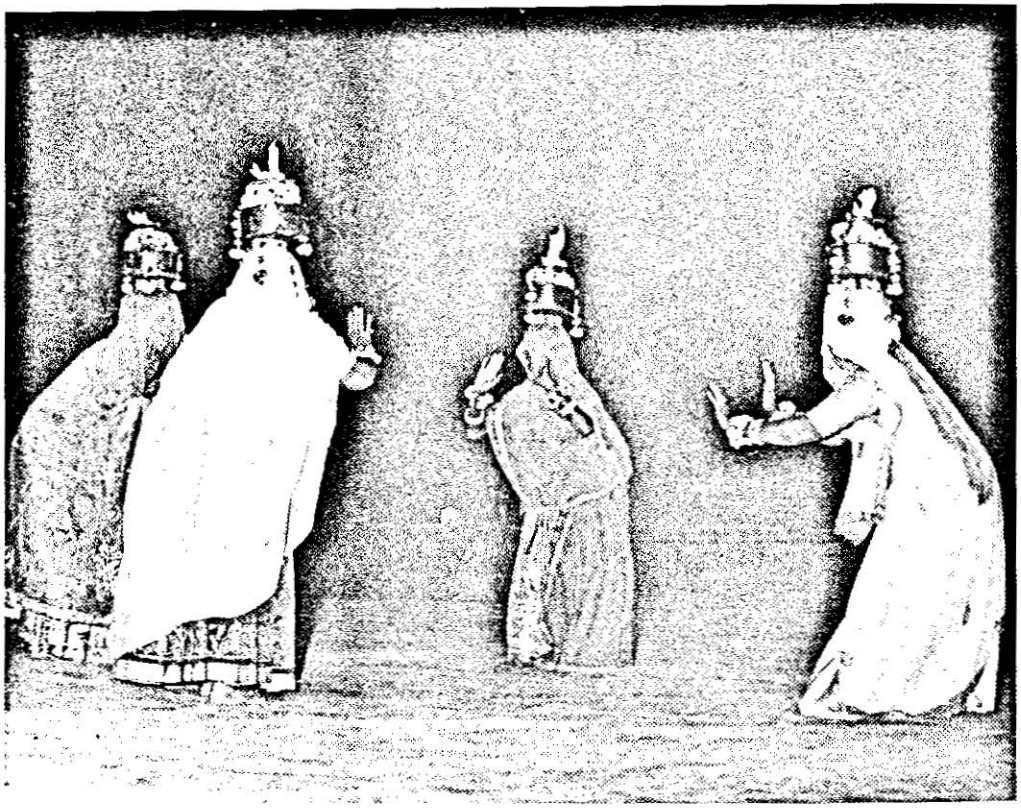
Photographs: Vijay Verma

Fig. 4. A Pabū-bhopā reciting the *paṛ* ('painted ballad') of Pābūji to the accompaniment of a dance of sorts by a child. Pali, Rajasthan, 1982.

Photograph: Vijay Verma

Fig. 5. This is a typical example of the acrobatic performances which are now passed off as the Bhawāi dance of Rajasthan. The *veśas* or skits constituting the true Bhawāi dance-drama did include an element of acrobatics, but only incidentally.

Sketch: Vijay Verma

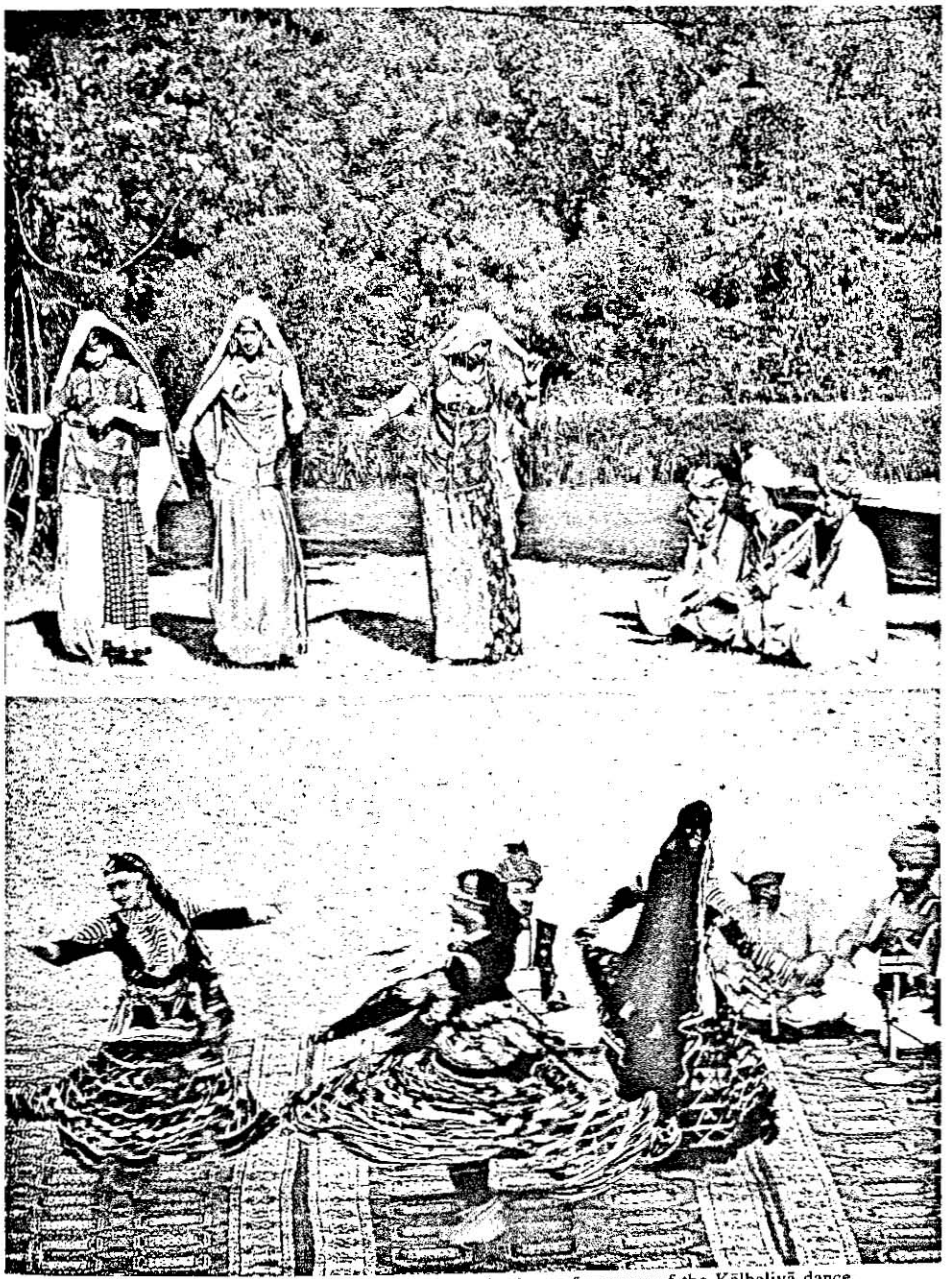


Figs. 6 and 7. Charī (pot)-dance as it used to be performed. The photographs are of a performance by the famous troupe of Phalku Bai of Kishengarh, Rajasthan, in the early 1970s.

Photographs: Courtesy Directorate of Public Relations, Rajasthan

Fig. 8. Charī-dance as it was seen being performed at Jaipur, Rajasthan, in 1998. Note the difference made by the change in stance.

Photograph: Courtesy Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur



Figs. 9–14. The change wrought over the years in the performance of the Kālbeliyā dance.
Photographs 9–13: Vijay Verma; photograph 14: Courtesy Department of Tourism, Rajasthan

Fig. 15. The traditional Terah-tālī dance of Rajasthan. The dance is performed sitting, the dancer striking cymbals tied to various parts of her body with those held in her hands. Lodrawa (near Jaisalmer, Rajasthan), 1981.
Photograph: Vijay Verma

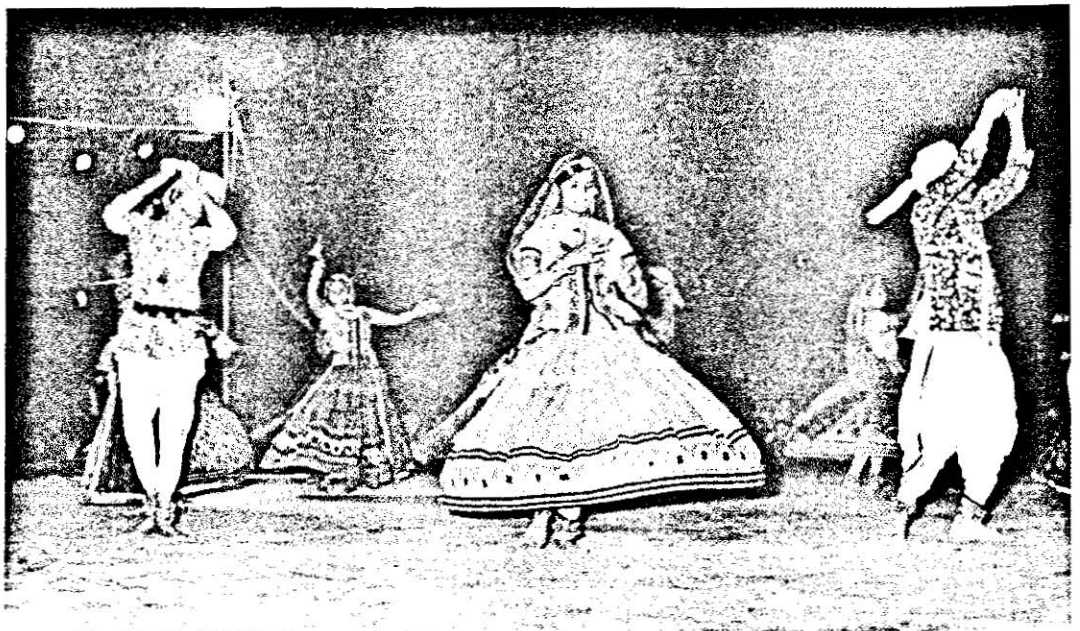


Fig. 16. The Maṅjīrā dance evolved from the traditional Terah-tālī dance by the Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur. The picture shows a performance in the early 1970s.
Photograph: Courtesy Directorate of Public Relations, Rajasthan

The first possible approach is the archival one: You document and record, in all possible ways, as much as possible of a fast-declining and largely doomed artistic tradition, for the information and pleasure of the coming generations as also for sociological and ethnomusicological analysis. This may be called the Taxidermist's Approach or the Museum Approach.

Then, you may adopt a second, more ambitious and challenging, approach and try to preserve, against heavy odds, as much as possible of the living traditions, in the forms in which they now survive, despite changes in, or even loss of, the socio-cultural environments that may have brought forth and sustained those artistic traditions. This may be called the Conservationist's Approach, or, crudely put, the Zoo Approach.

In the third place, you may have a conscious Adaptive Approach: You innovate and you experiment, distilling the essence of folk forms in newer forms, suitably moulding them to suit emerging circumstances and tastes, with or without the forms in question being in real or perceived danger.

All three of these approaches have their own merits. To put it differently, all three will have their votaries depending on the proponents' artistic sensibilities and capabilities. Consider, for instance, the late Devi Lal Samar's efforts to preserve the Ghūmar dance and the Gawarī dance-drama of the Bhīls—both performing arts of Rajasthan[11].

The Ghūmar dance is a choreographed adaptation of the Lūr and similar folk dances. The Rajwāḍī Ghūmar (Ghūmar of the royalty) had several regional versions and was especially stately and slow-paced. Ghūmar was specially associated with the Gaṇgaur festival and the marriage ceremony of the royalty. In the 1950s, Devi Lal Samar was instrumental in getting Ghūmar included among the dances presented at the annual public observance of India's Republic Day. Since then, Ghūmar has become exceedingly popular in schools, and is performed at various functions.

This is an excellent example of adaptation, and illustrates how a form can be given a new lease of life by being drawn out of its restricted context, which was soon bound to change anyway. However, the revival has had its shortcomings as well: the popularized stereotype tends to miss the elegance and versatility of the Rajwāḍī forms. The variety of *tālas* and songs is lacking, and the dance is invariably performed to the accompaniment of the popular '*Mhārī ghūmar chhai jī nakhrālī, ghūmar ramvā mhai jāsyāṅ*', set to the Keharwā tāla of eight beats. Thus, it becomes necessary to document fully the surviving Rajwāḍī forms with all their subtle nuances and wealth of tālas and songs, in order to serve as models to which the popular version may turn for inspiration, enrichment, and course-correction.

The Gawarī dance-drama was even more tradition-bound and context-confined: it could be performed only during a particular season by selected players under a specified discipline in specific villages. On top of that, many social reformers opposed its performance. Therefore Devi Lal Samar paved the way for the performance of Gawarī outside its traditional sites, and beyond the pale of its conventions. Still later, Bhanu Bharati utilized the form in plays for the contemporary stage. However, this new Gawarī could not be expected to recapture the original performance and its ambience. In such circumstances, documentation, as well as attempts to keep the original religio-ceremonial observance alive, if only as a specimen, would also be simultaneously called for[12].

There have been many remarkable and successful efforts at adapting folk forms. The famous song from the film *Ramrajya*, '*Bhārat kī ek sannārī kī hum kathā sunāte hain*', was based on Kuchchhi-Kafi. '*Sun bairi balam*' from *Bawre Nain* employed the Rāgini of Haryana. Bulo C. Rani, Khem Chandra Prakash, Ghulam Mohammed and others have made admirable use of the folk music of Sind and Rajasthan. In the field of theatre, too, remarkable use of forms like Nauṭankī and Tamāshā has been made.

In fact, such adaptation has always been attempted in the arts, perhaps out of a conscious or unconscious desire to blend the old with the new, and to retain for the future as much as possible of all that was beautiful in the past. Some form of art is dying at any point in time, and some new form is always being born. The only difference is that today, while many new forms are being created, an immeasurably large chunk of our heritage is in the process of meeting a relatively sudden end, and in an unprecedented manner. Evolution over time may now be replaced by a sudden overwhelming of various art forms. The main body of our folk music is sure to die with the transformation of the villages. Who will sing Hīḍ songs when cattle cease to have their present importance in rural life? Already there is news that in some villages of Jaipur district, they are now worshipping the tractor instead of oxen on a certain festive day. The songs of the Jāntā or Chakkī (millstone) will surely die out when the practice of grinding grain at home goes into desuetude[13]. However, one has yet to hear of folk songs about the tractor, or the calculator, or the computer.

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So, a very large chunk of folk music will soon be a thing of the past, as we have known all along. In this situation, all the three approaches mentioned earlier in this article have to be assiduously employed. Documentation and recording, particularly of the more endangered varieties of music, have to be done on a very large scale[14]. Already, one is getting to miss the old mellow and rounded voices: almost invariably, youngsters today are not half as good as their elders.

Notes have to be exchanged. Mere academic debate has to be cut down to the minimum. It has to be ensured that research and documentation start playing a more meaningful role in the task of sustaining living forms. Experiments made in the direction of making folk music a part of the school curriculum have to be studied and replicated. The same can be said about attempts made in some countries to organize local ensembles and choral groups, reserving some days of the year to relive the past in all possible ways, i.e., by singing and playing old music, dressing the old way, cooking food as in the past, and so on.

The classical musicians of India tend to shun folk music: training in classical music starts by shutting out all that has been musically meaningful in the initiate's experience. Our musicians may like to recall that much that is today part of the heritage of classical music had its beginnings in folk music. The surviving masters of folk music have to be provided with students they can train. Competitions at various levels—from the village level to State level—have to be organized. Festivals of folk music have to be organized on a large scale in rural areas.

But, above all, it is necessary that the government, and leaders of society in various

walks of life, assess the dangers of the current situation and realize the magnitude of our peril.

What is at stake is not just the corpus of folk music. More crucially, it is the creativity—the earthy, ingenuous, robust yet soulful creativity of the common person—which folk music stands for. And the dice is loaded all too heavily, the contest is so uneven: the humble folk song versus the video album; folk dance versus Madonna's 'Drowned the World' show, which resembles a Hollywood musical, a George Lucas movie, and blue film all rolled into one. Truly, it is as though Tarzan is pitted against a modern army, armed, verily, to the teeth.

NOTES

1. An excellent example of this is provided by the Mirāsīs of Alwar, Rajasthan (see front cover). These Mirāsīs are the ubiquitous professional folk musicians of that region. But one family of Mirāsīs, hailing from Chikani village near Alwar, went on to produce Ustad Rajab Ali, the great classical musician of Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. Often, a court musician of a native state had cousins less well-endowed or simply less lucky, who were employed as musicians with subordinate village landlords of that state.
2. The Galāleing Jogīs of the Bāgaḍ region, comprising the districts of Dungarpur and Banswara in Rajasthan, are well known for their rendering of the ballad of Galāleing (Gulab Singh) and other songs. In 1979, when I came across a group of these Jogīs during the famous Beneshwar fair and requested them to sing, their first reaction was this: "*Sir, we have given up begging*". In Ajmer, Rajasthan, during the 1950s, we had a Jogī who would visit our home periodically, sing a few devotional songs and depart with the alms given, without asking for them in so many words. Sagar Nath Jogī of Churu, Rajasthan, who was my informant for the ballad of Nihālde, once described his calling as "*ākāśī vrtti*"—as open and uncertain as the sky. As a matter of fact, a 'begging' relationship is implied in the very manner of describing a performing group's relationship with its patron-clients—such and such, such and such '*ko māṅgte haiṅ*'. '*Māṅgnā*' in Hindi means to ask, to seek, and the word 'Māṅgaṇiyār' thus literally means one who asks (for alms). On the other hand, the word invariably used for the patron is '*dātār*', i.e., the munificent giver. Figure 1 shows a typical Jogī with his accoutrement.
3. The conversation took place on the 28th of December, 1979, in the course of a journey by road from Delhi to Alwar (Fig. 2). A little further on, however, I did get some Mev children, apparently not so conscious of their student status, to talk and sing to me while sitting in a field alongside the road.
4. On the 8th of April, 1982, I had a very interesting bit of information given to me by a boy at the fair at Khurra in Rajasthan. According to him, a male of a particular community was to be fined Rs 101 if found dancing in a fair, while a female, if found to be similarly guilty, had to pay Rs 51. When I asked my informant who had made this rule, his ingenuous answer was—the government! When asked why, for heaven's sake, would the government ever take such a step, his rather sagacious and irrefutable rejoinder was this: "*Kaiyyāṅ to ghāṭā pūrā kare*"—well, hasn't the government somehow to tide over its deficit! (Fig. 3).
5. The Laṅgās started the practice of having a boy put up a hybrid dance performance to accompany their singing. This practice has been picked up even by the Bhopās of Pābūjī, something quite inconsistent with the essentially devotional character of their recitation of the ballad of Pābūjī, a warrior-saint, using a painted scroll (Fig. 4).
6. The true operatic dance-drama, Bhawāi, is not to be confused with the acrobatic performances now being passed on in the name of Bhawāi (Fig. 5). According to one view, the Bhawāis of Gujarat may have migrated to that state from Rajasthan.
7. Minor details count for a lot in the realm of folk music and dance, and in the shift from the genuine to the spurious, it is precisely such crucial and characteristic details that are lost. For example, the Charī- or pot-

dance earlier used to be performed with a slight, graceful, stoop as shown in Figures 6 and 7. But now, uninitiated urban novices will most likely be found performing the dance with their backs stiffly erect. (Fig. 8).

Yet another example of such coarsening is provided by the Hele kā Khyāl festival held annually at Lalsot in Rajasthan. The festival generates a lot of enthusiasm and goes on non-stop for about thirty-six hours. However, the presentations are now dominated by cheap diatribe and mudslinging in song, called *phaṭkebāzī* in local parlance; earlier, Hele kā Khyāl was known for its sober poetic narratives woven around subjects drawn from mythology.

8. An example of Folklorico-type initiatives in India is the troupe raised by the Lok Kala Mandal of Udaipur, Rajasthan, under the guidance of the late Devi Lal Samar, the founder of that institution. The troupe consisted, mainly, of artists employed by the Lok Kala Mandal. Its repertoire consisted of various folk songs and dances as well as operatic dance-dramas. A stage show somewhat similar to Folklorico's is 'Dharti Dhorāṅ Rī'—the Land of the Sand Dunes—developed by the late Kaushal Bhargava of Jaipur, Rajasthan. This show combines commentary and projection of slides with live performance of various dances. A more glossy and less authentic version of the show is now performed by Mumbai-based performers under the direction of Shri Sachin Shankar. The shows put up by the famous Calcutta Youth Choir offer yet another example of endeavours in this direction.
9. This is borne out, *inter alia*, by the tremendous success of the Gair dance festivals organized around the Holī festival every year at Samdari and Kanana in Barmer district and at Bhilwara in Rajasthan (see inside back cover). When the Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, helped in reviving the popular Saṅgīt Daṅgal festivals at Dausa and Bandikui in Rajasthan, which had remained suspended for a number of years, in 1992, the efforts made by the Kendra, and the events themselves, were greeted with immense local enthusiasm, and attracted eager participation. The pity, indeed, is that urban cultural administrators are largely ignorant of such local festivals as the Daṅgal and of the performances to be witnessed at such events, and are therefore content with what middlemen of music bring them, so long as the performance is stageworthy and goes down well with urban audiences and gullible foreign tourists.
10. The process of, and the stages in, the transition of a folk dance from its own humble rural setting to the glamorous urban stage are amply illustrated by Figures 9 to 14. These photographs are of three separate performances of Kālbeliyā (the snake charmer's) dance of Rajasthan. Figures 9 to 12 show the dance as seen and photographed by me in 1979 at a Kālbeliyā camp in Udaipur. Figure 13 shows a performance put up for me by Kalunath and party at Jodhpur in 1983. Figure 14 shows the dance as it is now invariably performed: the accent here is clearly on loud dress and a lot of pirouetting and striking picturesque poses to the accompaniment of a few popular and catchy songs, at the cost of the vast and characteristic repertoire of the past.
11. Reference may be made to the article 'Lok-kalā: Naye Sandarbhon kī Pakad' (The Folk Arts: Taking Stock of New Contexts) published in the August 1980 issue of *Raṅgāyana*, the monthly journal of the Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur.
12. Whereas the Gawarī has benefited from adaptation, the Bhawāi dance-drama of Rajasthan has suffered an eclipse because of its reluctance to adapt. In the article referred to above, Devi Lal Samar speaks of how he tried to persuade the Bhawāis of Rajasthan to step out (like their Gujarati counterparts) of their traditional context, where they performed only for their traditional patrons. But the Bhawāis demurred, and, as their traditional patrons became indifferent to this art form over the years, the Rajasthani version died out. Figures 15 and 16 present another example of a welcome adaptation: a Maṅjīrā dance has been evolved by the Lok Kala Mandal out of the Terah-tālī dance, which is performed sitting by women of the Kāmaḍa community of Rajasthan.
13. Yet another example of a 'death foretold' is provided by the Bārā or Biriyā songs of Rajasthan. The form is associated with the drawing of water for irrigation from a well with the help of a big leather container called *charas*. The Bārā couplet is sung by the person standing near the rim of the well, and the end of the refrain is a signal for the other person, handling the bullocks, to unhook the rope so that the charas can again be lowered into the well (see back cover). However, with the coming of electric pumps for irrigation, the charas

mode of drawing water is dying out, and with that the Bārā is also becoming a thing of the past. Unless we sit up and do the necessary documentation or otherwise arrange for the transmission of the Bārā as a living form of folk song, the future generations will have no means of knowing about this wonderful example of poetry and music becoming inhering, humanizing ingredients of human life and endeavour.

14. While on the subject of documentation, we should note that it is also extremely important to collect and conserve old 78-rpm gramophone records. It has to be realized that in many cases it is these records alone which represent many pristine forms and songs, since lost or much watered down. By way of examples, one may cite the many Māṇḍ recordings by Wazir Khan of Jaipur and such other stalwarts as Jassi, Kalloo, Khushali, and Lalita Bai of Jodhpur, Osiyan, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner respectively. In the case of operatic forms, the same may be said of the recordings of Chirawi Khyāl made by Saliya Nai Khilāṛī. All these recordings date back roughly to the 1930s; collecting them has been a major source of satisfaction to me.

The actor Khurshedji Mehrvanji Balivala (1853–1913), wearing medals awarded by his patrons and fans.
Source: *H. D. Darukhanawala*, Parsi Lustre on Indian Soil *(1939)*.