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**The Culture and Music of the Kalbeliya, Bopha, and the Hereditary
Professional Folk Musicians of Rajasthan**

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will discuss the culture, music, musical habits, and particular instruments of the Kalbeliya (Kalbelia), Bopha (Bopa), Langha (Langa), and Manganiyar (Merasi) castes and tribes of Rajasthan, in Northwest India. I argue that Rajasthan, despite not crossed by the two main silk roads, shares several cultural and musical characteristics with Central Asia that were exchanged through tributary and secondary trading and migrating routes. I purposely chose the Kalbeliya, Bopha, Langha, and Manganiyar people because of those numerous and quite evident cultural similarities to the people of Central Asia, located further North and Northwest of Rajasthan. The Kalbeliya and Bopha are some of the original Gypsies, still practicing a nomadic way of life, either as dancers, epic and storytellers, musicians, entertainers, or snake catchers and charmers. The Langha and Manganiyar are Muslim hereditary professional musicians, a tradition and caste that goes back to the 12th century. Their music, dance, and culture are transmitted orally, from master to apprentice, within the same family lineages throughout history until modern days. Epic poems of that region are the inspiration and lend a significant amount of the text of their songs and performances. They play the Pungi, the Ravanhattha, the Sindhi Sarangi, and the Kamaicha, unique wind and bowed string instruments that produce the aural characteristics of that territory, the distinctive sounds of the Thar Desert.

RAJASTHAN - “Land of Kings”ⁱ - Geography – Religion – Economy

Rajasthan, the largest Indian state by area and the seventh-largest by population, is located in the Northwest part of the territory. The area covered by the state equals 10.4% of the entire geographical territory of India. On the Western region, it encompasses the extensive and arid Thar Desert sharing a border with Punjab’s Pakistani provinces to the Northwest and Sindh to the West, along the Indus-Sutlej river valley. Rajasthan also borders five other Indian states: Punjab to the North; Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to the Northeast; Madhya Pradesh to the southeast; and Gujarat to the Southwest. In addition to the Thar Desert, occupying the western portion of the state, the Aravalli Range runs North-South across the state, occupying most of the Central and Eastern portions. Due to the Desertic climate, the primary sources of irrigation are wells, tanks, and the Indira Gandhi Canal, which crosses the Thar desert from North to South. The Central and Eastern

parts of Rajasthan are better irrigated and more fertile than the Thar Desert portion. 88% of the state's population is Hindu, 10% Muslim, and the remaining 2% is divided among Sikhs, Jains, Christians, and Buddhists (Rooja, Rima, 2006).

The economy of the state is diverse and based on agriculture (wheat, barley, soy, sugarcane, legumes, oilseeds, cotton, and tobacco); livestock farming (goats, sheep, cattle, camels, and buffaloes - milk, wool, and meat); industry (automobile, technology, food processing, and cement); mining (zinc, lead, silver, copper, jasper, marble, and wollastonite); and tourism, both national and international (palaces, forts, temples/dargahs/shrines, fairs, festivals, and the associated handicrafts).

HISTORY OF ROMANI PEOPLE – Gypsy Diaspora

Frequently known as Roma or Gypsies, the Romani people are an Indo-Aryan ethnic group, conventionally nomadic, settling and inhabiting mostly in the Eastern and Southern regions of Europe as well as in the Americas. Hypothetically, the diaspora of the Romani originated in Rajasthan and ended in the Iberic Peninsula. Later, in the 19th Century, the diaspora expanded to the Americas (Achim, Viorel, 1998). Although there are no written records about Rajasthan's Romani diaspora, there is evidence based on strong similarities between contemporary European and Indian groups concerning DNA and languages spoken (Rajasthani and Romani share commonalities with Hindi and Sanskrit). More evidence is found in the roots of the Romani language, locating its origins in India. Romani and North Indian languages share morphological characteristics and a large part of the basic lexicon, for instance, body parts and daily routines. To be more accurate, Romani shares the basic lexicon with Hindi and Punjabi. It also shares many phonetic features with Marwari, while its grammar is closest to Bengali.ⁱⁱ

In December 2012, genetic findings appeared to confirm that the Romani came from a single group that left northwestern India about 1500 years ago (Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab regions) and migrated West as a group. The Romani reached the Balkans about 900 years ago and then stretched further West, spreading throughout Europe. The scientific team also found the Romani to display

genetic isolation, as well as “differential gene flow in time and space with non-Romani Europeans.”ⁱⁱⁱ

RAJASTHANI FOLK MUSIC

Rajasthan, one of India’s most visited states, is known for its lively culture and historical traditions, including a large variety of dance forms and folk music. The folk music of Rajasthan is fundamentally improvised and influenced by the Hindu and Muslim (mainly Sufi) cultures of surrounding areas of Pakistan’s Sindh province and neighboring states of Gujarat, Punjab, and Haryana. The inspirations, melodies, and lyrics of Rajasthani folk songs are often derived from the narration of day to day activities, storytelling, and feelings drawn from the modest lifestyle, including difficulties, of its people. Being the habitat of different nomadic and sedentary tribes, Rajasthan is bestowed with various dances, music, religious songs, puppetry, storytelling, and epics. Nearly every village in Rajasthan is permeated with activities involving all these cultural manifestations. Folk music playing, singing, and dancing are ubiquitous in different parts of Rajasthan, each one with particular styles and characteristics. Most Rajasthan musicians live in poverty and are considered ‘untouchables’ or ‘Dalits’, one of the lowest castes of Indian society. They have been denied access to education, healthcare, and political representation throughout history. However, they have always been proud of the assigned hierarchical artistic activities, continually improving their living conditions. The different tribes, castes, and communities of Rajasthan contribute to the emergence of extensive folk music styles. Among the musician castes of Rajasthan, the Manganiyars (Mirasis), Langas (Langhas), Bhopas, and Kalbelias (Kalbeliyas or Saperas) are highlighted in this article.

In Rajasthan, music is part of the livelihood, not a mere hobby or a simple entertainment form. In the Thar Desert region, a famous proverb describes that the hereditary musical families’ babies already sing before learning to talk.^{iv} Children learn the rudiments of music from a very early age by being immersed in constant music-making and practice environments. It is common to spot children in the desert villages singing and playing instruments, practicing, and rehearsing for their future careers as professional musicians. Some traditional hereditary musician families include children, as young as four years old, in their professional performances for various audiences. The

interdependence and mutual exchange between communities and musicians, as a fruitful relationship, is fundamental to the cultural philosophy of Rajasthan. Music is omnipresent in celebrations, rituals, acts of grief, and festivals. At the same, symbiotically, the musicians depend on the community for their perpetuity. Musicians, singers, dancers, and other performers have been fundamentally essential to the Rajasthani culture, even with the adversity of making a living as artists.

Women Musicians of Rajasthan ^v

Rajasthani folk music also incorporates women as protagonists, both as performers and composers, playing an essential role in influencing the rich musical repertoire of the region. The women's repertoire portrays their most personal domains, revealing their share on rituals and religion, family life and relationships, gender roles, and sexuality. There are two categories of women musicians in Rajasthan, the professional and the non-professional. While the women professional musicians perform in public in exchange for alms and remunerations, the non-professional women musicians perform in their privacy and immediate communities as a sign of cultural identity. Since the 19th century, influenced by the British colonial era's gendered Victorian values and behaviors, women have been overlooked and prevented from performing in public spheres. There have been a few particular exceptions in women musicians' cases accompanied by their husbands or family members. The few women who challenged this Victorian colonial standard were condemned or looked at with disdain by their immediate societies. After India's independence from British rule, this costume remained unaltered as men from different social levels and castes continue to control and dictate the social and gender norms of their communities (Padhi, Smiti, 2015) (Bharucha, Rustom, 2003).

Three types of traditional folk music of Rajasthan are worthwhile describing. ^{vi}

Panihari Songs: sang by hardworking women with lyrics describing their daily life chores, primarily centered on the strenuous task of fetching water from distant wells, which are essential activities belonging to the desert culture of Rajasthan. The songs praise the rain, flowing river waters, and splashing waves as sacred and limited commodities of the arid region. Panihari songs

also incorporate texts depicting the unappreciated household errands and duties, romantic stories of love, and problematic family members (Padhi, Smiti, 2015).

Maand is one of the most popular and sophisticated folk music styles in Rajasthan. This original folk form of vocal music, based on various classical ragas, describes the fame and magnitude of epic folk heroes and Rajput kings (rulers of different castes from the Indian subcontinent) from the history of Rajasthan. The lyrics of the Maand songs focus on narratives of the Rajput leaders' countless and significant triumphs and war heroes and great warriors of the epic wars fought in Rajasthan territory. Maand songs usually follow a particular set of norms influenced by Hindustani music types. They begin with a free improvised introduction (alap), outlining the raga and setting the tune, which is followed by a recited verse (dooba) and melodic variations (taan).

Gorbund (Gorbandh) is a renowned and celebrated form of traditional folk music depicting the process of preparing decorations and ornaments for camel saddles, one of the most traditional desert steed forms. The Gorbund songs are frequently performed on Kaharwa rhythm (an 8-beat pattern), which creates movement and enhances the beauty and simplicity of the innocent lyrics.

Rajasthani folk music is also infused by devotional songs called Bhajans, which play a crucial role in influencing and molding the state's overall culture. Meera Bai, the great Hindu mystic poet and devotee of Lord Krishna, composed numerous Bhajans in the 16th century that remains particularly popular among Rajasthan's rural districts and communities. Singers of Bhajans usually belong to itinerant musician communities and are frequently supported by the villagers who participate in their performances. Additionally, Rajasthani folk songs include subject topics encompassing celebrations of harvest, changes of seasons, and the arrival of Monsoons. Moreover, the oral tradition of epic narratives telling events and accomplishments of war heroes like Pabuji and Devnarayan will be described in-depth in a subsequent chapter.

Musical Instruments of Rajasthan

The stories of daily chores, hardship, love, heroes, and war sung by raw, husky voices are frequently accompanied by unique regional musical instruments that generate the characteristics

of nomadic and gypsy music, symbols of the Thar desert. The mastering and expertise in playing these instruments is a hereditary task passed on from generation to generation within families. This mission typically involves extensive performance (storytelling, music, and dance) exposure, experience, and imitation, instead of any strict formal tutoring. Each tribe or caste belonging to the different regions of Rajasthan has a trademark sound, peculiar to the styles played and to the set of associated musical instruments. This variety of musical instruments used in Rajasthani folk music are classified into three groups: Chordophones-Stringed (bowed and plucked), Aerophones-Wind, and Percussive (membranous and non-membranous). In Appendix I of this article, there is an explanation of each of these musical instruments. While different tribes and castes share various percussion and wind instruments, the stringed instruments are specific to each, creating distinct ensemble sounds and images. Following is a description of the exclusive stringed musical instruments used by the Bhopas, Manganiyars, and Langhas (the Kalbeliyas do not use stringed instruments) (Bharucha, Rustom, 2003).

The Ravanhattha is used by the Bhopas while performing the Pabuji Ki Phad epic. It can also be used as a solo instrument or accompanying vocal songs. This modest instrument is one of the oldest spike fiddles played with a bow and might well be a modern violin's precursor. The Ravanhattha is held up and has a long bamboo neck with a coconut shell attached to the bottom serving as a resonance cavity. Two main strings are bowed, one made of horse-tail hair and another made of metal. There is also a variable number of sympathetic metal strings added. The sound of the 'Ghungroos' (bells) attached to the bow is a distinctive characteristic of the Ravanhattha (Desai, Subhadra and Kasliwal, Suneera, 2008).

The Kamaicha is used by the Manganiyars from the Jaisalmer desert region of Rajasthan. Also used by Manganiyars across the border, in the Sindh province of Pakistan, the Kamaicha is a bowed stringed instrument carved out of a block of mango tree wood or Indian rosewood. Its body is large, rounded, and covered with goatskin producing a pronounced low-end resonance ideal for melancholic melodies. The three main bowed strings are made of goat gut, and the remaining fourteen strings are metallic and sympathetic. The Kamaicha is played with a horse-haired bow called Gaj.

The Sindhi Sarangi is a bowed stringed instrument used by the Langhas. The Sindhi Sarangi sound resembles a tone similar to the human voice and is used to accompany vocals. It is usually carved out from a single block of Tali or Sheesham wood with a skin-covered resonator. The Sindhi Sarangi has three or four main strings made of goat gut and other seventeen to twenty-two sympathetic strings made of metal wire. The horsehair bow usually does not have ghungroos or bells attached, but some variations exist showing their presence. Langhas are Muslims and, at times, use the Sindhi Sarangi to accompany the singing of Sufi devotional music (Meddegoda, Chinthaka Prageeth, 2018).

RAJASTHANI FOLK DANCE ^{vii}

Rajasthan, just like other Indian states, has its unique folk dances. Each region of the state has its distinctive form of folk dance that can be traced back to rural and nomadic traditions and rituals. Dancers and musicians from nomadic tribes of Rajasthan have been sustained by patrons since the Middle Ages and perform on different occasions for their benefactors. A significant collection of folk dances is still very present nowadays in rural and urban centers of Rajasthan, serving as one of the highlights of tourist attractions. The primary source of inspiration to all the folk dances of Rajasthan is the Thar desert and all the possible reminding associations: lifestyle, hardship, nature cycles, fauna and flora, colors, sounds, historical heroes and rulers, deities, and divine figures.

Ubiquitously, Rajasthani folk dances are remarkable expressions of feelings of delight infused with colorful costumes and accessories. Together with each tribe and region's traditional folk music, the results are exhilarating and authentic art forms. Tribal women and men from the Thar Desert region practice faithfully the dance traditions since childhood, learning the fundamentals and movements from elderly family or community members. Rajasthani folk dance originality has been maintained for generations following these family traditions. In addition to the humble desert inspirations and the challenging movements that enhance the dances, the exciting and vividly colorful costumes and the variety of adorned jewelry worn by the dancers are crucial to the performances' overall splendor. Some of Rajasthan's most traditional and popular folk dances are the Ghoomar, Kalbeliya, Bhavai, Kathputli, Kacchi Ghodi, Gair, Chari, Chang, Fire Dance, Drum

Dance, Terah Taal, and Dandiya. In the Kalbeliya chapter of this article, that particular dance is explained (Padhi, Smiti, 2015).

KALBELIYA AND BOPHA – The Gypsies of Rajasthan

The Kalbeliya and Bopha are nomadic tribes of Rajasthan moving around the region for centuries, establishing self-made tent communities as temporary settling villages (deras). While the Kalbeliyas traditionally make a living as snake catchers, Snake charmers, and dancers, the Bopha are musicians, bards, minstrels, and priests of historical epic narratives. Throughout history, these tribes of artistic entertainers were invited and hired by rulers, kings, and wealthy families to supply exotic performances, even being conventionally considered “untouchable” as part of the lowest castes of society. The specific tasks and roles performed by members of the lower castes granted them the minimum economic conditions to survive. In the case of the Kalbeliyas and Bophas, it is music, dance, and charming snakes. Other family members who are not directly the entertainers themselves perform other habitual everyday duties like taking care of the cattle and camels, fetching water, planting, and collecting fruits and vegetables.

The Rajasthan nomadic gypsies are also known, locally and broadly, for their distinctive and inherent appreciation of fashion and style. For them, fashion is not only part of the performing art culture and lifestyle; it is a matter of tribal identity that has been perpetuated for generations. Each tribe, even sub-groups, have their trend, design, and technique to combine colors, fabrics, and ornaments to their clothes. The distinctive fashion trademark of each tribe is notorious at gatherings, celebrations, and festivals, where originality and self-esteem play an equal role in the performances of music and dance. Since the disappearance of royalty and wealthy patrons, the Kalbeliya and Bopha gypsies had to rethink their subsistence. Nowadays, they survive as semi-itinerant performers in festivals, fairs, touristic towns, and attractions. Nevertheless, their music and dances continue to be part of an ancestral tradition passed on through generations without formally recorded literature or explanatory textbooks (Bharucha, Rustom, 2003).

The Kalbeliya and their Dance (Kalbeliya or Sapera Dance)^{viii}

One of the most extraordinary curiosities about the Kalbeliya tribe is their direct association with one of the most poisonous animals of the Thar deserts, the cobra. For Hindus, the cobra is revered as a sacred animal, a companion, and an ally of Shiva, one of the ‘Trimurti’ (Hindu Trinity) gods of Hinduism^{ix}. Kalbeliyas have traditionally been snake charmers, catchers, trainers, and venom traders. They have also been healers, using the cobra’s venom to prepare alchemical potions and tonics for different purposes, including curing snake bites. In 1972, India’s government implemented the Wildlife Protection Act, where the King Cobra and Naja Cobra were included as vulnerable species. It became illegal to hunt, catch, and keep them, which some Kalbeliyas still do not follow nor conform. With their first profession in jeopardy, Kalbelias adopted dance and music performance as primary sources of livelihood. It is customary nowadays for the Kalbeliya men to carry cobras in baskets from door to door in villages while their wives sing and dance, begging for alms (Robertson, Miriam, 2004).

The Kalbeliya dance is the most effective and expressive identity form of this nomadic snake charmer tribe. Women are the only performers of the Kalbelia dance, while men exclusively play the musical instruments. While dancing, the women sing improvised, spontaneous poetry with lyrics that tell folkloric myths and fables of their tribe and desert life. The Kalbelia dance movements mimic a cobra’s actions and manners with flexible bends, spins, crawls, and vigorous contortions. Always resembling the snake, the dancers captivate and enchant the audience with carefully rehearsed acrobatic moves. The result is an exceptionally sensuous folk dance. A particular set of attires characterizes each Rajasthani folk dance. The Kalbelia dancers’ outfits are stunning, always in black and dark red as primary colors but full of vibrant and colorful embellishments, laces, embroidery, and mirrors that imitate the sparkling snakeskin. The blouses are called ‘Angrakhi’ and the long flaring skirts called ‘Lehengas’ or ‘Ghagras.’ The women also wear a sheer called ‘Odhani,’ covering their heads and faces. The costume is not complete without henna on their hands and large numbers of traditional shimmering jewelry and bangles made of gold, silver, brass, ivory, and beads. The striking high point of the Kalbeliya dance happens during the upbeat sections, when the women spin,

swirling their skirts and creating an eye-catching mixed colors effect (Joncheere, Ayla, 2015 and 2017).

The Kalbelia dance is accompanied by the 'Poongi' ('Been,' or 'Murli'), a woodwind instrument built out of a gourd and traditionally used to charm snakes. The 'Poongi' is the most traditional Kalbelia music instrument, and its sound is the trademark of that tribe. Other diverse traditional percussion instruments of Rajasthani folk music are also used in Kalbelia music and dances, including the Dafli (Daf, frame drum), Dholak (double-headed drum), Damaru (Dugdugi, double-headed drum), Khanjari (headed tambourine), Manjira (small finger cymbals), Khartal (Wooden clappers), Morchang (Morsing, Jaw Harp), and Ghungroo (metallic bells attached to the ankles) (Meddegoda, Chinthaka Prageeth, 2018). The Kalbelia dance develops through tempo acceleration, always from a slow start to an upbeat conclusion. In 2010, the Kalbeliya folk songs and dances of Rajasthan were declared part of UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.^x

Bhopa - Bards and Priests of the Epics of Pabuji and Devnarayan ^{xi}

The Bophas are a nomadic tribe of entertainers and bards, once known as the Thar Desert's official epic reciters. Bophas used to perform to the rulers and Maharajas of Rajasthan as storytellers, healers, and ultimate priests of the art of narrating ballads and poems. Their songs and narratives were believed to have divine capabilities to help the sick, support the troubled, and promote comfort. Bopha bards are often illiterate but masters of storytelling, memorization, improvisation, and captivating audiences. Nowadays, their art is dying; only a handful of the remaining older generation continue to wander around Rajasthan's desert region, reciting the historical epics of Pabuji and Devnarayan. The younger generations survive as itinerant musicians and poets circling through fairs, festivals, and touristic destinations. They can perform for donations and sell the Ravanhatthas and other musical instruments that they make themselves. Like the Kalbeliya, the Bopha is one of the lowest castes of Rajasthan, living in interim camps and sometimes as trespassers.

The traditional Bopha priest-singers carry around a painted scroll called ‘Pabuji Ki Phad’ (or just ‘Phad’), portraying several episodes of the epics of Pabuji or Devnarayan. When the Bopha bards arrive at their performance destination, they unroll the ‘Phad,’ straightening it vertically as an altar’s background. The ‘Phad’ becomes and functions as a temple in itself. In the past, a full performance of either Pabuji or Devnarayan epics took several consecutive nights from dusk to dawn, interpolated with folk songs, tea-drinking, and interaction with the audience. At present, only fragments of the Rajasthani epics are recited by Bhopas for one night (Smith, John D., 2015).^{xii}

The Epics of Pabuji, Devnarayan, and their Phad Ceremonies

The Pabuji Ki Phad, translated as the ‘Screen of Pabuji,’ is the name given to a ceremony involving three-starred crucial elements: the epic narrative of Pabuji, the sacred ‘Phad’ scroll depicting the episodes, and the Bopha priest. The epic of Pabuji is a story describing the outstanding achievements of Pabuji, a 14th-century Rajput hero, warrior, and folk-deity revered among the Bhopa community of Rajasthan. The Bhopa (also the priest-singer’s name) plays the Ravanhattha fiddle, which he crafts by himself, to accompany the reciting narrative. The ceremony is done as a couple of husband and wife; the Bhopa (husband) sings various episodes from the narrative of Pabuji while the wife (known as Bhopi) holds an oil lamp to illuminate the painted area of the scroll being portrayed. The Bhopi also sings sporadic segments of the episodes together with her husband. The verses’ delivery is always musical, chanted in a Rajasthani dialect, mixing Marwari, Gujarati, and Kutch. Occasionally, a Dholak drum is played by a junior family member to provide rhythmic variation and support for the Ravanhattha (Wickett, Elizabeth, 2010).

The overnight Pabuji Ki Phad performance combines folk singing and dancing intermixed with interactive interludes with the audience in front of the ‘Phad.’ The purpose of the all-night performance is to evoke the presence of the folk deities, terminating only towards dawn. The entire Epic of Pabuji Epic works as a religious poem citing 4,000 verses. If recited in its entirety, the epic of Pabuji takes five nights with 8 hours of performance each to be completed. These days, it is not fully recited anymore (Smith, John D., 2015) (Kothari, Komal, 1982).^{xiii}

The epic of Devnarayan tells the chronicles and triumphs of another historical folk hero of Rajasthan: Devnarayan, a Gurjar warrior, born in 911 AD and worshiped as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Written much earlier than the epic of Pabuji, this celebrated narrative is also historically notable and admired, particularly among the Gurjar community near the Pakistani border. The Devnarayan epic ceremony, following the same routine as the Pabuji's, similarly utilizes painted 'Phads,' but these are longer and wider. The Devnarayan 'Phad' requires worship and reverences even when unrolling and rolling, usually by the sound of blown conch shells (Shankh). Men and women of the community attend the performances of the Devnarayan epic. For the women, Devnarayan is seen as a reincarnation of Lord Krishna; thus, they sing spontaneous songs related to baby Krishna whenever he is mentioned during the epic recitation. It is customary for temples dedicated to Devnarayan in Rajasthan to reproduce the 'Phad' paintings as statues and portraits throughout their buildings as a praising devotion.

Usually, the epic of Devnarayan is recited by two Bhopas, the main Bhopa priest-singer (Patavi), and his assistant (Diyala). The Diyala is always ready to help the Patavi with an oil lamp to illuminate the exact 'Phad' area being narrated. Moreover, the Diyala Bhopa also sings fragments of some segments. Instead of the Ravanhattha, Bhopas of Devnarayan play the 'Jantar,' a rare and distinctive type of fretted portable veena with two resonators made of gourds or wood.

The epic of Devnarayan is one of the highly admired sacred oral narratives of Rajasthan. It is also one of the longest, encompassing 335 songs and 15000 verses. It is expected for a professional Bhopa to remember everything by heart. ^{xiv}

The 'Phad' is treated with the highest respect and veneration by the Bophas, who make daily offerings to it. As a tradition, the 'Phad' is transferred to a family relative or a member of the same tribe when the Bopha priest who owns it retires. The purpose is to treat the 'Phad' as a sacred hereditary possession. As the Phad gets faded and worn, distinguished artists are responsible for repainting and repairing it. These artists dedicate themselves meticulously to this artistic craft. In being damaged, ripped, or tattered, the Bopha performs a proper sacred ceremony to reduce or withdraw its divine power. Afterward, the 'Phad' is permanently immersed in the Pushkar lake's holy waters or the Ganges river (Bharucha, Rustom, 2003).

HEREDITARY PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS (Manganiyar and Langha castes)

The folk music of Rajasthan comprises different musician tribes and castes. Aside from the Kalbeliya and Bhopa nomadic tribes discussed previously, another two main sedentary (and semi-sedentary) castes deserve a specific and detailed article devoted to their explanation and analysis: The Manganiyar and Langha, both traditional hereditary professional musician castes (Jairazbhoy, Nazir A., 1977). Their music has been maintained by aristocrats, landowners, and wealthy families of Rajasthan for centuries. Rajasthan rulers are notorious for their support of the arts throughout history, promoting the arts and keeping music and dance flourishing in their living environments. Manganiyars and Langhas have distinguished musical styles and repertoire, but both speak and sing in the same Rajasthani dialects. Although both castes are constituted of Muslim musicians, a significant portion of their repertoire address, honor, and worship different Hindu deities, especially during Diwali and Holi festivals. Depending on the patronage, repertoires can be shared and merged between the two castes in this day and age. A crucial difference between both is in the use of specific bowed-stringed instruments in their ensembles. Manganiyars play the Kamaicha while Langhas play the Sindhi-Sarangi. All the other wind and percussion instruments are shared between the musician castes (McNeil, Adrian S., 2007).^{xv}

The Manganiyars come from the Thar Desert region, the Western portion of Rajasthan. They are a hereditary caste of professional Muslim folk musicians supported by patrons for generations delivering musical entertainment in exchange for money, goods like livestock, and gifts. The main sponsors of the Manganiyars are Hindu Rajputs and affluent families, their repertoire range from Sufi chants and ghazals to songs devoted to Lord Krishna. They have been musicians in Rajput courts of the past. Their function was of performing music and songs at war times, before and after battles, in vigils, and mourning. The Manganiyar music style showcases the steady presence of the secular desert traditions and the rulers' sacred religion. Religion, gallantry, and folklore have been perpetuated through music by the Manganiyars since the Middle Ages. Manganiyar means "one who begs," directly pointing to these artists' low caste origin and position. Nowadays, they have proudly adopted the new identity of 'Merasi,' which translates simply as "Musician" to avoid derogatory terminology (Ayyagari, Shalini, 2012).

The Langhas also come from the Thar Desert region of Rajasthan. Langhas (meaning ‘Song Givers’) are skillful musicians and expert singers with a special talent for delivering poetry. They were initially Hindus that converted to Islam during the 17th century AD. Deeply influenced by Sufism and the worship of Sufi saints, Langhas perform mostly at functions and events for Muslim audiences, specifically the Sindhi Sipahi community from Western Rajasthan, Gujarat, and parts of Pakistan. It is a continuous tradition since the times they performed for the Muslim Rajputs. The Langha musicians are considered ‘kings’ by their supporters; most of them are landowners, farmers, and livestock breeders. Occasionally, these patrons offer plots of land for the Langha families to settle. Langhas are also notorious for their improvisation skills filled with rich instrumental and vocal ornamentations.

Music for the Manganiyars and Langhas is an oral tradition, learned and transmitted through a master-apprentice connection, mostly within the same families. Music is also present since childhood in the lives of the Manganiyars and Langhas through daily activities and functions, public and private, such as weddings, childbirths, mourning, planting, harvesting, and other celebrations. There is a particular repertoire of songs to each occasion where feelings of joy, hope, sadness, ambitions, and worries are expressed regularly. They also sing songs about the local Rajputs, past battles in the region, the Desert, and in praise of warriors and patrons. Manganiyars and Langhas play an essential role as cultural protectors and guardians of folk songs, music, narratives, and family histories through oral tradition (Bharucha, Rustom, 2003).^{xvi}

CONCLUSION - Parallels and Similarities to Central Asia

Since the 2nd century BC, the major Silk Road routes of Central Asia and the Arabian Sea maritime trade routes existed concomitantly. Independently, they serve as continuous and stable paths of a commercial merchandise exchange between different regions.^{xvii} The overland development of other major and secondary trade itineraries connecting the maritime to the primary Central Asia routes included two important pathways alongside what is known today as Indian and Pakistani territories. One of these connecting routes was alongside the Indus-Sutlej rivers’ valley (nowadays Pakistan); the other route ran diagonally across the northern portion of today’s India, south of the Himalayas, alongside the Ganges river valley, linking Central Asia to the Bay of Bengal. The Silk

Road and its other trade routes and tributaries not only served as commercial exchange channels but also as courses for the circulation and dissemination of culture (performing and visual arts, gastronomy, fashion), religion (Islam, Buddhism, Christianity), and different philosophies (ethics, aesthetics, logic, epistemology, metaphysics).^{xviii}

With the physical connection established through these trade routes, Central and South Asia started sharing expanded culture, religion, and philosophy. The territory of what nowadays is Rajasthan was crossed by one of these secondary trade routes, which allows us to draw various parallels and similarities of lifestyle and culture between those regions. Among the resemblances relating Rajasthan to Central Asia we can highlight: the geographic topography of desert and mountain ranges; the arid climate; the tribal nomadic culture based on pastoralism and transhumance migration^{xix} (moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle - Dry/Wet aspect of seasons more critical than temperature in Rajasthan)(Gooch, Pernille, 1992); the existence of urban centers where the sedentary traditions, values, and culture prevails; the substantial incidence of Sufism (and trance/ecstasy), its artistic manifestations attached to Islamic religion and practices; folk music being influenced by classical music forms and norms (raga being melodically and structurally similar to the modal framework of maqam); the use of similar musical instruments (bowed spike fiddles and lutes, percussion, harmonium); the occurrence of storytelling and musical performances involving heroic epics as forms of transmission of poetry and oral tradition; the existence of impromptu improvisation in the performance of poetry, music, and dance; the presence of tribes and castes of professional hereditary musicians disseminating their traditions via Ustad-Shogrid routine (master-apprentice); and the small but steady presence of women musicians, either as professional performers or as community and tribe preservers of folk traditions.

APPENDIX: Music Instruments ^{xx}

Bowed-Stringed: Sindhi Sarangi (used by the Langha), Kamaicha (used by the Manganiyar), Ravanhattha (used by the Bopha).

Plucked-Stringed: Ektara (one-string lute), Tandura (Veena Tandura, Chautra), Jantar (used by the Bhopa), Bhapang (Khomok, one-string instrument attached to a membrane drum).

Aerophonic: Alghoza (pair of flutes), Shehnai (double reed oboe), Pungi (Been, Murli, double flute with reeds).

Percussive: Dafli (Daf, frame drum), Dholak (double headed drum), Damaru (Dugdugi, double headed drum), Nagara (Naghara, kettle headed drum), Khartal (wooden clappers), Khanjari (headed tambourine), Manjira (small finger cymbals), and Ghungroo (metallic bells attached to the ankles).

Other: Harmonium, Morchang (Morsing, Jaw Harp).

(Meddegoda, Chinthaka Prageeth, 2018)

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