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MUSA GULAM JAT AND JODIA PAWA - FROM SINDH TO BANNI

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***Abstract:** The history of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial India is replete not only with changes and movements of people across numberless borders but also with their stories of life that have been re-made and re-told over and over again. Although these sometimes have not been recorded in written form, myths and music have always served as oral vehicles of transmission of culture for migrant and nomadic communities. This paper explores the connection between one man’s music, cultural and ethnic background, and the geographic environment that offered him and his community a home to which he would constantly return. Shri Musa Gulam Jat is renown for his unparalleled expertise in playing the double flute thus opening possibilities for him in Western European countries such as France, Germany and Britain. Member of a nomad community, the Jat community, and himself a nomad since the age of twelve, Musa Gulam Jat has settled in the Banni area of Kachchh, Gujarat, India, close to the Indian-Pakistani border. Having changed places and multiple homes in search of food for his cattle, Musa has always kept his instrument - Jodia Pawa - along, with which he refined the sound of the double flute playing Sufi music, the music of his ancestors. Since there is no much academic work on Musa Gulam Jat’s art if at all, most of the information obtained for this article is based on the testimony and writings of Shri Umesh Jadiya of Bhuj, Kachchh, himself an artist and ethnomusicologist.*

***Keywords:** Musa Gulam Jat, Jodia Pawa, Sufi music, community*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon for migrant or nomad communities to carry along their culture, customs and art. Unlike in a Western context in which the encounter of cultures may generate fracas and sometimes even open conflict, the type of cultural encounter tackled in this paper illustrates how history, migration, art and religion co-exist in harmony. The particular physical space referred to is called Kachch¹ - a district of the state of Gujarat, India situated in the most north-west part of the state. Characterised by dry desert-like weather with scarce sources of water, Kachchh is bounded in the north by the Indian Ocean, by the Gulf of Kachchh in the south while the east and the south east are crossed by the Great Rann and the Little Rann of Kachchh respectively, two deserts inhabited only by nomadic communities that survive on cattle

breed (buffaloes, goats, sheep, camels). In the north part of the Rann stretch the Sindh and Thar deserts of Pakistan. It is significant to note that the Indian-Pakistan border appeared only post Partition (1947) when Pakistan formed as a self-governed state which generated an exodus of people to and from the newly-born Pakistan. Sindh itself was divided in the Sindh of Pakistan and that of India. Entire families have been also divided by the new border which determined the Indian government to allow Hindus living in Pakistan to abandon their homes there and move to India. Concomitantly, Muslims who wanted to go and live in Pakistan could do so as well.

In this process there were also some migrant communities from the Sindh of Pakistan that crossed the Indian border mainly in search of food for their cattle. Shri Musa Gulam Jat, the protagonist of this account, comes from the Jat community, the Khalita group whose traditional caste occupation include barber and musician²,

¹ Previously known as the princely state Cutch, later on (1947-1956) called the Kutch state, it is now a district of the Gujarat state. All spellings - Cutch, Kutch, Kachchh - are accepted.

² <https://www.therai.org.uk/film/volume-ii-contents/less-ons-from-gulam-asian-music-in-bradford>

from a family of herders. If one googles the name 'Musa Gulam Jat', one finds one short recording of of Musa playing his *Jodyia Pawa* and very few details about him as a traditional flute player. Musa - as he is known among those who knew him - is probably the best player of *Jodia Pawa*, the double flute, according to all available data obtained from online sources, newspapers and to Shri Umesh Jadiya, my interlocutor. Musa Gulam Jat has lived mainly in the Banni area, in Gujarat. As I was already in India at the time I found out about him, I set to Bhuj, the district headquarters of the Kachchh district, in order to find out someone who could give me more information about Musa and his art. Having visited Bhuj and the Kachchh Museum in 2013, as part of my doctoral programme, I settled a meeting with Shri Jadiya, the museum director who knew Musa personally. Since Musa passed away last year (2015) in October, I could not meet him face to face, therefore the only genuine information about him that I could obtain was from Shri Umesh Jadiya.

2. MUSA GULAM JAT'S ANCESTORS - THE JAT COMMUNITY

The specific geographical area envisaged in this paper is called Banni, mainly populated by communities engaged in cattle breeding: the Jat, Mutwa, Node, Korar, Sameja, Sama, Sumra, Raishipotra, Halepotra and Bambha communities (Jethi, 2014: 10).

Shri Musa Gulam Jat comes from the Jat community in Banni, Kachchh, that migrated from Pakistan to India, along Sindh. As Umesh Jadiya explains in his book entitled *Kachchh*, 'the term "Jat" has been used to describe a multitude of groups with different cultural and ethnic background living in parts of northern India and Pakistan' (Jadiya, 1997: 26) but almost instantly he adds that 'the Jats who live in Kachchh are particularly conscious of their identity as a group and their sense of unity comes from a perception of shared historical tradition and a belief in common ancestry' (Jadiya, 1997: 26).

According to Asher and Talbot (2006), "Jat" is a label applied to a wide-ranging, traditionally non-elite, [a] community which had its origins in pastoralism in the lower Indus valley of Sindh (269). Khazanov and Wink (2012) and Wink (2003) also refer to the Jats' origin as a people from the Indus river-valley of Sindh that migrated north into the Punjab region, Delhi, Rajputana, and the western Gangetic Plain in late medieval times (cf. Wink 2004). Both Wink (2003) and later Wink and Khazanov (2012) state that these people were, back in the seventh century, a pastoral-nomadic

population raising cattle from which they derived their livelihood (177). Wink (2003) also went deeper into the history of migration of this population asserting that a part of it migrated to Iraq, others to the north in Pakistani Punjab, while others came to India. The same researcher notices that the Jats became rather sedentary peasants between the 11th and 16th century as they 'continued to live in the thinly populated *barr* country between the five rivers of the Panjab, adopting a kind of transhumance, based on the herding of goats and camels' (92-93). Umesh Jadiya notices that the Jats, as most herders, became pastoralists in time taking up farming while still depending on their herds (2).

Religiously, the Jats can be of either Hindu, Muslim or Sikh faiths, while socially they are classified as Other Backward Class (OBC) in India. The Jats living in Kachchh are entirely Muslims (Jadiya 1997, Jethi 2014). Nonetheless, religion does not represent a socio-cultural barrier between people in general and cultural circles in particular. The Jats that arrived in Kachchh migrated from Half, in Iran, about five hundred years ago (Jethi, 2014) and reached the Rann of Kachchh becoming known as the Gharasiya Jat (id.). There are two other clans of Jats: the Dhaneth Jats (cattle owners) and the Fakirani Jats (devoted to the study of the Koran) (Jethi, 2014).

Musa Gulam Jat is a Muslim and a Fakirani Jat who migrated with his family when he was only twelve from the Sindh of Pakistan. They moved to various places in the Banni area where forty Jat hamlets were put up. In time, the family became more sedentary and returned to settle in one of these hamlets, in an area called Nani Banni, the Nana Luna village. Just like the Jats' migration route from Iran, Iraq, Afganistan, Pakistan to Kachchh, the double flute changed its name from *Donali* (in Afganistan), to *Satara* (Pakistan), to '*Algora*' (Pakistan and Rajasthan), according to Shri Umesh Jadiya. Musa brought along from Pakistan his instrument, the one we know it today as the *Jodia Pawa*.

3. *JODIA PAWA*, SUFI MUSIC AND THEMES

As Shri Jadiya told me, the study of musical instruments is comparable, and therefore as important as that of history and literature because it speaks of various aspects of the culture of a society, as well as of its various religious taboos and worships. Along with other folk musical instruments - *Surando*, *Sundari*, *Bhorrindo*, *Kani*, *Morchang*, *Santar*, *Nagara*, *Nagfani*, *Jodia Pawa* expresses ways of life, spirituality and tradition but they are now fast on the way to extinction.

Jodia Pawa or the double flute is usually made of sesum wood or *Tali, Ker, Kau, Sopari* (the word for ‘mouth freshner’), rose wood or of bamboo and prepared on lathe. In order to protect it from breakage, a copper wire is wrapped on some parts of the *Jodia Pawa*. It is a pair of flutes of the same size (20 to 22 inches) generally blowing both flutes simultaneously which is very strenuous for the player. Popularly called *Alghoza* or *Alguja*, *Jodia Pawa* is made up of a male flute called *Nar* and a female one, called *Madi* or *Mali*. Shri Jadiya describes it as follows:

Nar has eight equi-distant holes for maintaining a drone or Sur. The Madi weaves the melody on this base over twelve holes on top which fingers move. Of the twelve holes of the Madi, only the upper six are used functionally to manipulate music while the lower six are left open and free. (9)

In order to obtain different melodious notes, the artist uses wax which is stuck on the mouth of various holes, thus temporarily blocking them. Shri Umesh Jadiya asserts that the *Jodia Pawa* is exclusively made in the Sindh of Pakistan, therefore whoever wants to get one, s/he needs to order it from there. As Musa asserts in the documentary, one year the monsoon was so heavy that the rains took away almost all of his belongings, including the *Jodia Pawa* he had from his father. One can see how distressed he felt for losing it although the deepest concern was more linked to Musa’s dependability on the *Jodia Pawa* as the main source of income for his family and to the fact that herding is necessarily done along with the playing of the flute. It is not said in *Notes from the Desert*, but I was curious to find out what Musa did without his *Jodia Pawa*. Shri Jadiya told me that a friend of his, Shri Agni Hotri, a journalist from Pakistan managed to replace Musa’s old instrument with a new one so that he continued playing and living the kind of life Musa had always led so far.

The type of music played by Musa is Sufi music. Sufi music is played on a maximum of 36 notes out of which Musa himself could play fifteen on a double flute - an instrument that is not exclusively played by Sufi artistes. Musa played it as a Sufi artist. In the only documentary made on Musa Gulam Jat, *Notes from the Desert* (directors mohan Hari and Ramesh Soni), in which Umesh Jadiya was a researcher and co-ordinator, Musa asserts that he is the follower of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (a Sufi Saint of Sindh) who created a series of poems known by the name of Surs and musical themes (Rag Raginis). In *Notes from the Desert*, Musa demonstrates his virtuosity by playing parts of

the eleven Ragas that he could play³ out of a total of thirty-six contained in Sufi music: *Rano, Manz, Telang, Bhairavi, Kuari, Sorath, Fateh, Asa, Sarang, Malhar, Hussaini*.

Some of the themes illustrated in Musa’s Ragas are presented by Shri Umesh Jadiya in his book on Kachchh. Thus, the one called *Rano* can also appear as *Mumal and Rano*, the story between two mortals who fall in love with each other, who lose that love which in the end is re-interpreted as endless love for all humans, irrespective of caste and class. The story starts with a prince who falls in love with a beautiful maiden called Mumal. As the girl does not return his love, the prince goes away to become a yogi of the *Lahutis* type (who are said to have seen glimpses of God). As Rano meets the yogi, he is told to go to the waters of Kak where he will find love. Rano indeed falls in love with Mumal, marries her, but soon has to go far away. When he returns, he finds someone else sleeping beside Mumal which makes him leave her. Many years after, a messenger announces his arrival saying ‘Whoever comes to Rano is welcome regardless of caste and class’.

Another song is called *Sorat*, telling the story of a king’s power of self-sacrifice only to gain more understanding: *Sorat* is the name of a queen (or of a region governed by that queen, now called Junagadh, according to Shri Jadiya); Sorathenchains the king, Rai Diyach, who is once visited by a minstrel; wishing to pay the minstrel for his beautiful song, the latter only wants to take the king’s head; the king agrees but when the minstrel returns, he gives back the head and says ‘Sorath is dead’, symbolising that the queen was no more and the king has a different thinking.

A third theme is the theme of hope, *Asa*. This song celebrates godly power when man submits self entirely to it: ‘No one, who is loaded with “self”, will ever see the other side’ (26). This is a religious message encouraging people to appreciate selflessness as one step towards God’s ‘kingdom’ (heaven). Shri Jadiya continues by saying that ‘one should have strong hope, implicit faith, utter resolution, and keep a divine “Lawyer” within one’s soul so as to ready for Judgement day’ (id.). In order to accomplish this, yet another message is deployed: ‘destroy coarse multiplicity with unity’ (id.).

One last theme presented here is *Sarang*, meaning the rainy season - the only one that celebrates elements of the weather. For herders, the rainy season is both awaited and feared. If rains are too heavy, the waters can wash away everything,

³ Musa states that he can play twelve Ragas and the documentary contains only eleven.

including the little belongings of those such as Musa Gulam Jat. Nonetheless, rains are a source of joy and happiness for cattle owners and agriculturists as they depend almost entirely on their crops and their cattle, which need vegetation to graze. If *Asa* celebrates the 'God-lover', *Sarang* praises the 'God-reminder' (rain) and by lightning and thunder which announce the coming of the rain. The sound of the *Jodia Pawa* would be joined by the poet's verse: 'O! Rain, were you to take lessons from my poor eyes, your drizzle would never stop. Remembering "the Beloved", my tears flow night and day' (27-28).

3. CONCLUSIONS

The music of Shri Musa Gulam Jat celebrates the spirit of living rather than one particular community. As it is explained in the documentary on Musa, it also feasts the coming of the monsoon, a crucial natural phenomenon for herders such as Musa. It is indeed more important for nomad communities who survive on their cattle to set their homes in places where there is enough water for the cattle than to worry about religious majority populations. India in general and Kachchh in particular are made up of a great variety of communities with their own habits, culture, languages and religions, and all live together in peace. Even more than this, nomad communities lead a unique lifestyle in harmony with nature, a lifestyle conveyed through the music played by artistes such as Musa. I thought of him as a member of a very small minority population (Muslim) in Gujarat as well as of a very poor community. Asking Shri Jadiya why Musa did not go back to Pakistan, I was told that there were not good enough reasons for him to return to the Sindh of Pakistan.

Shri Musa Gulam Jat had become an Indian citizen with rights and obligations. Even if he could have found a solution to return to his native place, he would most probably not have wanted it. As an Indian of OBC (Other Backward Classes), he could benefit from governmental help which he would not have gotten from Pakistan. He obtained legal documents from the Gujarat state and access to the ration card used for buying food, kerosine and other goods from governmental shops. Gujarat is also known for its extremely hot and dry climate and for heavy rains during the monsoon which make the life of nomad communities very difficult: during the hot season, they have to move home very frequently in search of grazing lands; during heavy rains, they must temporarily settle on hilly areas to avoid the floods. Additionally, these are minority communities. In spite of all these

obstacles, Musa and his community stayed put thus contributing to the variety of cultures and traditions of the area rather than disrupting it. Due to his expertise in playing the *Jodia Pawa*, he also contributed largely to the good renown of Kachchh both in the country and abroad.

In the documentary called *Notes from the Desert*, the voiceover tells the audience that Musabhai, as he was known by those closer to him, was invited to play and teach in various countries in Europe, especially in Germany and Great Britain. Another documentary, from 1986, called *Lessons from Gulam* combines the study of musical enculturation and education⁴. The same source explains that Musa also taught *qawwali*, a form of Muslim devotional music found in India and Pakistan and also a genre of media-disseminated popular music. Shri Umesh Jadiya acknowledges that Musa used to run an amateur *qawwali* group (called *Saz aur Awaz*, 'Music and Song').

After having his slice of the Western world, Musabhai returned to his community. In *Notes from the Desert*, he admits that 'our land is our very own dear to one's heart. There is no greater pleasure than playing in our own country for our own people. After all, it's our motherland' (*bharat* = mother, motherland). These words are filled with more than just patriotism. They reflect an artist's hybrid identity who is concomitantly aware of his origins (he is a Fakir Jat from Pakistan), proud of being an Indian from Kachchh - 'our land', the one that gives him the needful, and an artist.

The documentary shows the tough life conditions of the artist and his community as well as other complications (such as his wife's heart condition) that require amounts of money that are out of Musabhai's reach. The prizes and awards he won over the years - he was approved artist of All India Radio, Bhuj, a 'B'-high grade artist⁵, he won the Gujarat State Pride Award from the Government of Gujarat (1995), the invitations to perform in important gatherings - e.g. Heritage India Magazine, in Pune (Maharashtra), did not help Musa improve his own and his family's life. Unable to ask Musabhai directly, I must be satisfied with Shri Jadiya's belief that music helped Musa Gulam Jat surpass his condition of migration and with Musa's own words in *Notes from the Desert*, where he says that after all, he is a Fakir, a free soul who lives in the present and for whom the future only resides in his music. His

⁴ <https://www.therai.org.uk/film/volume-ii-contents/lessons-from-gulam-asian-music-in-bradford>

⁵ In India, the hierarchisation of artists is the following: 'A'-grade artist (the highest), 'B'-high grade artist and 'B'-grade artist.

greatest wish was to be able to pass on the playing of the *Jodia Pawa* to other generations but, as Shri Umesh Jadiya acknowledges, it is harder and harder to teach the new generation the beauty of folk traditional music.

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