

The Bazigar (Goaar) People and Their Performing Arts

Gibb Schreffler

University of California, Santa Barbara

The Bazigar (Goaar) are a Punjab-based people possessed of unique lifestyle, linguistic, and cultural characteristics that are scarcely familiar to their neighbors in the region. However, few Punjabis have not witnessed one of their *performances* of *some* sort. From their ubiquitous dhol-playing and bhangra dance presentations to their maintenance of older Western Punjabi genres, members of the community have had their hands in Punjab's musical traditions. Bazigar artistes have influenced the development of performance forms to such a degree that they must be recognized as special contributors to modern Punjabi cultural life. This article introduces the unfamiliar Bazigar people while connecting them to their familiar arts.

Many Punjabis and scholars of Punjabi culture may be surprised to learn that the people known as Bazigar have had a very significant influence on Punjabi music and dance as it is experienced in the current era. From their base in West Punjab in the pre-Partition era, Bazigar performers carried both traditions that were unique to their community and those that were typical of the local residents of that area. Since Partition, Bazigar musicians in East Punjab have both maintained fading performance genres and participated on the front lines in creating the new forms that Punjabis the world over have come to consider as part of their heritage. In these respects, the present exposition of the Bazigar and their performing arts reveals aspects of Punjab's music that one will rarely find discussed elsewhere, as well as the Bazigar involvement in practices that are near and dear to many.

The Bazigar are a Punjabi community that is poorly known by outsiders. Who exactly *are* the Bazigar people? Mainstream Punjabi society tends to class them—sometimes dismissively so— as “acrobats” and little more. Likewise, writing about the community is scanty, and Bazigars themselves have had neither inclination nor opportunity (their literacy and education rates have historically been low, and their priorities elsewhere) to remedy that situation.¹ While the focus here is on the Bazigar's performing arts, one finds again that, in Punjabi society, it is difficult to separate the arts from their performers. Therefore, without

intending to present a comprehensive ethnography of the community, I include here a fair amount of ethnographic information with the belief that it is both necessary and appropriate. The fieldwork for this study, since 2000, occurred among individuals from various segments of the Bazigar community all over East Punjab. The most work, however, was with what is called the “Khari” subsection of the Bazigar people and as such this bias may be allowed to compliment the work of Deb (1987) (which I believe to be biased towards the “Panjab” subsection).

In addressing “performing arts” I again seek to negotiate the difficulty in isolating “music” as a topic within Punjabi culture. The Bazigar are performers in a range of forms, and to isolate only those that fulfill a particular definition of “music” is to see only a partial picture of their community and how their arts fit together as markers of their distinctive group identity.

Ethnological Position

“Bazigar” (*bāzīgar*, *bājīgar*, fem. *bāzīgarnī*) refers to a member of a category conceived by and large by outsiders to that category. One will find that the people so described have a different sense of who they are and for which “Bazigar” is not fully adequate. Indeed, when speaking amongst themselves, they refer to their people as “Goaar.” However, the Goaar themselves also make use of the “Bazigar” label and the classificatory notions that come with it when situating themselves among the wider spectrum of Punjabi society (by whom “Goaar” is virtually unknown).

The legacy of colonial literature and its derivatives, coupled with general public unfamiliarity with this minority community, has fostered some misconceptions that require the Bazigar/Goaar be clearly established as an *ethnic* community (i.e. *qaum*, tribe, caste) among other Punjabi communities. In the same respect, they must particularly be distinguished from the Natt (*nattī*). Both the Bazigar and the Natt are popularly associated with performing acrobatics or similar feats, which their names reflect. The term /*bāzī-gar*/ is a word of Persian derivation meaning “one who performs *bāzī*.” *Bāzī*, which connotes “play,” refers in this context to a kind of entertaining performance based on physical acts. The term *nattī* likely derives from a Sanskrit root that connotes “drama” or “performance” (Rose 1914:163). In what would become an influential classification by Ibbetson, the Bazigar and the Natt together constituted the so-called “Gipsy Tribes” of Punjab, a subgroup within the category of his “Vagrant Tribes” (i.e. itinerant groups), and one that denotes those tribes that perform in any way as their main means of income (1883:285). Following, Rose assumed that the terms “Bazigar” and “Natt” were used synonymously “in general parlance” (1914:163). The

argument put forth to support the belief that the terms were synonymous rests on the assumption that Bazigar and Natt are purely *occupational* labels, that is, the individuals labeled as such do not necessarily belong consistently and exclusively to distinct ethnic groups. The variability in usage was thought to be dictated by religious-cultural preference. Thus Rose concluded that the Bazigar were usually Muslim while the Natt were usually Hindu (1911:79).² Furthermore, in underscoring his belief that the Bazigar were only an occupational group, Rose claimed to have heard that Bazigars were “recruited” from various castes—even Brahmins and Jats (*ibid.*).

An attempt to differentiate the Bazigar and Natt groups of the past may also be based on the details of their traditional profession. The accounts from Akbar’s court (16th century) mention both groups. The Natt are described as tightrope-walkers and also players of *duhul* (probably the erstwhile equivalent to the small cylindrical drum *dholak*), while the Bazigar were said to perform feats and do magic (Abu l-Fazl ca.1590:272-3). However, in the later colonial literature, the distinction between the two groups’ professions was considerably confounded.

Some say that the Bázigar is a tumbler and the Nat a rope-dancer; others that the Bázigar is a juggler as well as an acrobat, while the Nat is only the latter,...others again say that among the Nats the males only, but among the Bázigars both sexes perform... (Ibbetson 1883:285)

Recent ethnography presents a different picture. While it does not eliminate the possibility that people now called Bazigar people were, at one time, related to the people now called Natt (as well as to other communities), the contemporary Bazigars in this study identify *only* as Bazigar. Accordingly, “Bazigar” and “Natt” appear as separately listed communities in the government’s current schedule for reservations. Moreover, according to Singh’s data, the Natt may number as few as 500 in total for the Indian state of Punjab and Chandigarh (1998:2596, 2598). This suggests that it is the Bazigar who predominate while the Natt presence (albeit far greater in Rajasthan) is insignificant in Punjab. The idea that Bazigar and Natt refer to groups based on differing religious affiliations also does not hold. As a simple point in fact, the Bazigar in India call themselves Hindus. In terms of specifics of performance, Thind’s more recent writing (1996:32-3) states that the distinctive feature of Bazigar’s routine is jumps on *paṛull* (a raised take-off point) and *paṛī* (a type of wooden plank), in contradistinction to the rope-walking of the “Karnāṭī Naṭṭ.” Whatever the ultimate origin of the terms and what they may have been meant to label a century and more ago, it is clear that at

the present, “Bazigar” and “Natt” are distinct terms that correspond in some fashion to at least two exclusive, endogamous ethnic groups.

Historical Position

The history-based origin stories for the Bazigar are much like those of other erstwhile peripatetic tribes of Northwest India. Bazigars commonly claim to have once belonged to a community of Rajputs from Rajasthan; they have called themselves Rathor Rajputs (according to Thind 1996:31) and Chauhan Rajputs (according to Singh 1999:196). The specific region of origin has been stated as the Marwar area of Western Rajasthan (Ibbetson 1883:288), although according to some tales they may have only occupied that desert area after being unseated from elsewhere, e.g. due to conflicts with Mughal forces (see Deb 1987:17, 22; Singh 1998:340). Bazigar Garib Dass of this study ascribes his people’s origins to the Bajwa clan of Rajputs, not of Rajasthan but of Punjab itself (personal communication, 30 March 2005). He notes, however, that some others of his people believe they came from Brahmans (personal communication, 9 Dec. 2007).

In contrast to many Indian communities that place their origins in antiquity, Bazigars openly state that today’s Bazigar young people represent only the seventh generation of their people. In the documented genealogy of the Vartia clan of Garib Dass, a fifth-generation Bazigar (1939-2010) there were indeed only four generations before him. This would suggest that his clan’s patriarch was born around the 1770s, at my earliest rough estimate, or the 1810s, at the latest. Deb’s report that Bazigars, according to their own telling, had spread through Northwest India in the last two centuries (1987:10), corroborates the idea that the Bazigar as a people likely originated in the 18th century.

By way of literary evidence, there are several uses of “bājīgar” by the Sikh Gurus and other poets in the *Guru Granth*, and by Bhai Gurdas in his *Vaars*.³ In most of these pre-18th century writings, “bājīgar” is rarely used as a proper name or to refer to a specific group of people. Rather, it refers generically to such ideas as “clown,” “juggler,” “jester,” “actor,” “player,” and so forth, often with connotations of deceit or idleness. It is not until the time of Bhai Gurdas (early 17th century) that the term seems to have acquired a more definite usage for a member of an occupational *group*. In one of his verses (*Vaar* 8), “bājīgar” is distinguished from other performers *bahrūpiā* (mime) and *bhand* (jester). A more nuanced use of “bāzīgar” is also found in the *Ā’in-i-Akbarī* from a few decades earlier, in which these performers are distinguished from *Bhānd*, *Bhagatiya*, and (as above) *Naṭ* (Abu I-Fazl ca.1590:272-3). Much later, Varis Shah used the term for a Bazigar woman, *bāzīgarnī*, in his *Hīr*, composed in the 1760s. What is impossible to tell for sure from

these references is if the erstwhile bazigars had yet by the mid-18th century constituted a distinct *ethnic* community. Based on my reading and on the Bazigar's genealogy and stories, I believe the present-day Bazigar community must have emerged somewhat later, most likely as an *ethnic* group first and foremost, to whom was later applied the occupational label *due to* their adopted profession.

That the Bazigar were recognized as an ethnic community of some sort in the late 19th century is underscored by Ibbetson's classification of them as an itinerant group living an autonomous, tribal lifestyle. By the early 20th century, however, some of the itinerant, West Punjab-based Bazigar people started to settle down, especially in the districts Shekhupura and Sialkot (Deb 1987:10). This would have been due to a number of causes, including the restructuring of Western Punjab for the canal colonies project (i.e. from the 1880s) and the government's restrictions on the mobility of "vagrant" communities. At the time of Partition, the Bazigar, being primarily "Hindu," migrated en masse to the Republic of India. Like many other refugees, Bazigars who came to India were first situated in camps. Then in the 1950s and 1960s, they were given colonies or common village land on which to settle (Deb 1987:11). Remarkably, this once-itinerant people based mostly in Western Punjab underwent a wholesale transformation into a stationary people of East Punjab.

Social Position

At the present time, the Bazigar are becoming more and more integrated into mainstream society, while yet maintaining a distinct identity. They may live in huts outside the main settlement—as many still did up through the end of the 20th century—or in government housing colonies. However, this security of a place to stay is still at times threatened, and the Bazigar risk again being ejected, as one periodically hears.⁴

Because of their past and their status as relative newcomers to (settled) village life, the Bazigar's position in Indian society has remained rather ambiguous. The Criminal Tribes Act, in effect 1871-1952, did not in fact include the Bazigar (Thind 1996:54). It was reported in 1960, after the Act was ended and the new designation "ex-criminal" had been created, that the Bazigar, "do not like to be called ex-criminals and have now obtained a writ from the court declaring that they cannot be categorized among the ex-criminal tribes" (Biswas 1960:2). The Bazigar *are* included among the Scheduled Castes in Punjab. However, a survey in two villages in 1970 indicated that in the caste hierarchy people ranked Bazigars above potters, oil-pressers, Ramdasias, and Mazhbis (Harjinder Singh 1977:86). Perhaps not understanding that the caste schedule is ideally intended for bureaucratic purposes, Garib Dass said

that the Bazigar “are not *really* a Scheduled Caste”; the government put them in the schedule, he alleged, because they are a poor community that does manual labor (30 March 2005). The issue of course is that being a Scheduled Caste, while ostensibly defined merely as being eligible for affirmative action benefits, may carry with it the stigma of untouchability. Indeed, in the 1980s, the usual government initiatives designed to assist Scheduled Castes were found to have little effect for the Bazigar due to such assumptions by them that they were not a Scheduled Caste. As Deb explains, the misconception stemmed from the fact that, compared with some other Scheduled Castes, they are not as separated socially from upper castes (1987:11). Furthermore, Bazigars are reported to perceive themselves as of a high social rank, such that they themselves do not accept food from the Chamar/Ramdasia and the Chuhra/Mazhbi (Singh 1998:340). Since at least 2002, Bazigars have lobbied to be dis-included from the list of Scheduled Castes and to be included instead among the Scheduled Tribes. This campaign has made progress. The Punjab government sent a list of a dozen such potential “tribes” to the Anthropology Department of Punjabi University, Patiala, to assess whether that label had any merit in application to them. Dr. Birender Pal Singh, on behalf of the University, concluded in September 2007 that, based on ethnographic details, the Bazigar meet the criteria (chiefly the community’s “nomadic” or “semi-nomadic” nature) to be called a “tribe” (Mohan 2007).

Census data of the 1980s put the numbers of the “Bazigar” at 120,250 in Punjab, 1,389 in Chandigarh, and 57,991 in contiguous states, for a total of 179,630 individuals (Singh 1998:340). Surveys tend to under-represent the numbers in such communities, and around the same time, spokespersons from the Bazigar estimated their numbers at around half a million (Deb 1987:27). In India the Bazigar are found primarily in the states and union territories of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, and Delhi. Within Punjab state, Bazigars were found to be most heavily concentrated in the districts of Patiala, Ferozpur, Sangrur, Bathinda, Gurdaspur, and Faridkot (Deb 1987:13; Singh 1998:341).

The literacy rate for the community in 1981 was found to be 11.30% (18.26% males, 3.99% females) (Singh 1999:196). Less than 1% of those surveyed around that time were found to have graduated from secondary school (Deb 1987:59). This is changing with each subsequent generation. Now it appears, by casual observation, that most people under thirty are literate. Indeed, in some cases, education for the youngest generation, including decent schooling and additional tutoring, is being made a priority. The Bazigar’s attitude towards education is very positive, and the absence of it in the past is explained by lack of opportunity, not lack of interest.

Group Organization

Few outsiders are aware that the people ascribed the label “Bazigar” are not in fact a singular ethnic community. That label, along with the self-referential “Goaar,” encompasses several endogamous groups. Three subsections of the Goaar, similar to but not quite corresponding to “tribes,” were based in Western Punjab before Partition. These are known as the Panjāb (or Panjābīā), the Khaṛī, and the Rāvī. Another subsection, already living on the eastern side before Partition and whom the Western Punjabi Goaar refer to as “Desī Bazigar,” is alleged to have drastically dwindled in number (son of Makkhan Ram, personal communication, 27 Feb. 2005). The Panjab Bazigar had once been situated around districts Lyallpur (Faisalabad) and Shekhupura. They now are generally settled in the center of East Punjab, radiating from Ludhiana and its refugee camp in which many first landed. The Khari Bazigar’s territory had been Gujrat, Sialkot, and other such north-central areas of Punjab. After landing in the refugee camp in Kurukshetra, these people ended up in areas along a strip running along the northeastern side of the Indian state. As for the Ravi Bazigar’s territory, I cannot say much; one supposes they were settled along the southern banks of the Ravi River. They appear to be found nowadays in the more isolated, southwestern areas of Punjab state. The Desi Bazigar are of too insignificant number to generalize; I have met them in district Hoshiarpur.

It must be emphasized that, although I refer to these different groups as “subsections of the Bazigar,” it is the generally etic notion of “the Bazigar community” that is being sectioned as such. From the perspective of the Goaar themselves, these are different groups that have come together under an umbrella classification. In other words, the sense is not that a larger or “original” group necessarily split at some time; these groups of Goaar were distinct “*from the beginning*” (Garib Dass, personal communication, 19 May 2005). Members of a given subsection do not necessarily feel any affinity for other Goaar subsections beyond, perhaps, the bond that the shared experience of marginalization engenders. Indeed, in my conversations with Goaars of different subsections, they showed as much disinterest for individuals of other subsections as they did for people of other caste-communities. Nonetheless, when viewing them from the outside perspective, one *does* find significant shared characteristics—not to mention shared clan names—that make it unreasonable to completely reject the idea of a larger set of related Goaar.

If taken as a whole, there are upwards of 30-40 clans of the Goaar community. Some of the prominent clans are: Vartiā, Jamsherā,

Machhāl, Nāmshot, Dharamshot, Ghanot, Valjot, Lālkā, Dākhīekā, Khīvākā, and Maggharkā. Goaar clans are significant mainly in matters of marriage. Goaars practice strict endogamy within not only the overarching “Goaar community,” but also in most cases within their subsection. And while the latter fact underscores the autonomy of each subsection, instances of exception, where marriage happens between members of different subsections, again shows the relevance of the idea of Goaar community at-large.

Religious Beliefs

The religious beliefs of Goaars do not fit into any neat, established category. In India⁵ they identify themselves as “Hindus,” despite varied and unorthodox practices. In the past, the Goaar’s independent lifestyle meant that they remained only marginally in touch with the mainstream practice of *any* religion. Garib Dass recalled that there were things that, though Hindus, “we did not know we were to do” back in Western Punjab, for instance to consult a pandit when fixing the date of a wedding or naming a newborn child. In that social environment, Bazigars simply decided on a marriage and performed it when convenient, and they named babies as they wanted. However, after settling in India they became a part of the so-called “Hindu community.” This change is reflected in the fact that the names of older ancestors of Bazigars reveal no religious affiliation, while the young generations generally have proper names that follow religion-based conventions.

One can only describe the various beliefs cited by Goaars and their interlocutors. Deb’s study recorded the importance of Kali, for whom there was usually a temple in the center of the settlement, as well as Sati, a memorial to whom is created on the outskirts of villages out of pieces of stone (1987:21-2). In the 2000s, my informants said they worshipped Ram, Bharat, Shiv, the various forms of the Devi, Bābā Bālak Nāth, Yārmī-vālā Pīr,⁶ and the “Panj Pīr.” Owing to their past residence in Muslim majority areas, the Goaar appear to have been influenced by Islam-based cultural practices of their social environment, some of which could be interpreted as religious. Before Partition, Goaars were said to camp on Sakhi Sarvars’s shrine at Dhaunkal (Thind 1996:36). While some sources attribute to them the worship of Gugga Pīr, my mentions of that saint among contemporary Bazigars received mixed responses, ranging from interest, to disapproval, to laughter. More recently, there has been a growing interest in the spiritual movement of Radha Soami Satsang Bias. Devotion to Sathya Sai Baba has also made an appearance. The Goaar practice recitation from the Sikh *Guru Granth* on certain occasions. However, when K.S. Singh states that the Bazigar “have now become Sikh” (1998:342), he must be mistaken. Although one finds a

significant number of Sikh-sounding names in the contemporary population, this reflects incidental preference rather than marking strict adherence to the Sikh faith. Likewise, a number of Goaar men have the normative appearance of Sikh males, but this reflects their local social cohort and personal preferences more than the faith of the community. The Goaar's public names and appearances must be seen as a negotiation with mainstream life, in which their native culture does not quite fit any prescribed category. It would be more accurate to say that many Goaars revere the Sikh Gurus in addition to their other beliefs. That they also admire and elect to adopt Sikh cultural practices is reflected by the trend to solemnize marriages by the Sikh rite of *anand kāraj*—a ceremony that has been cited as simpler and “cleaner” than the fire-based Hindu rite (Garib Dass, personal communication, 4 June 2005).

The Goaar have some religious figures particular to their people. We read of a shrine built in honor of an old Goaar woman in village Sadhaiwala (dist. Firozpur) (Rose 1911:79). Another spiritual site is a temple in village Uddoke (dist. Gurdaspur) that was built in honor of a saint called Bāvā Lāl Ji. Although Bava Lal was a Brahman by caste, the Lalka clan of the Goaar consider him to be their ancestor (Thind 1996:31). Bava Lal is also reputed to have a shrine dedicated to him in Malerkotla (Jaimal of Khanna, personal communication, 15 May 2005). Interviews suggest that this particular saint is only important to the Panjab subsection of Goaar. Another figure revered by some in the community is a Goaar woman born to the Lalka clan in Lyallpur, in the early 19th century. Known as Dādī Desān Devī, her temple in Kurukshetra is the site of a fair to which pilgrims flock each June (Macchal 2009).

Language

The Goaar have a unique language, which they speak amongst themselves. It most likely emerged out of the circumstance of being an independent and relatively insular, tribal community. While not bound to a single geographic area, the language reflects regional features of the Goaar's recent homeland in Western Punjab as well as of Western Rajasthan, from which the community may first have sprung. Most Goaars over the age of forty appear to prefer speaking this language with one another. Those under thirty, while understanding the language, are more likely to converse in the local common languages except when addressing older individuals. The Goaar language is entirely unwritten and had not been significantly documented (in print) at the time of my research.

Goaar language, which speakers call *goāroni ri bolī*, compares well with Punjabi, although it is not mutually intelligible with that language.

It also compares well with Western Rajasthani dialects, having such earmarks as the genitive marker /ro/ and the dative marker /ne/. The phonology of Goaar language is more or less equivalent to Punjabi, including the presence of the retroflex lateral phoneme /l/. There is at least one additional phoneme, a sort of unvoiced palatal fricative (like the “ch” in German *nicht*), found in such Goaar words as /sīç/ (“learn”). The language’s system of lexical tones is also like Punjabi, with one important exception. The phoneme /h/, articulated when in the initial position in Punjabi, appears to be non-existent in Goaar language. In cognate words with Punjabi that have /h/, Goaar language substitutes a tone. The paradigm of vowel-based gender markers is different from standard Punjabi and particularly notable in that feminine nouns and adjectives (direct singular) lack any vowel, e.g. /būdh/ (“old woman”). In all, Goaar language differs from Punjabi dialects most markedly in morphological features and numerous different lexical items. In many cases, Hindi- or Rajasthani-like forms are preferred.

In addition to this unique, everyday language, and like some other tribal communities, the Goaar also have a “secret” language that they use when they do not want others to know what they are talking about. They call it “Pārsī” or “Pashto.” It is a contrived manner of speaking whereby, for instance, some phonemes are swapped with others. However, there are no consistent rules of substitution, nor is it a comprehensive language.

Lifestyle

The Goaar exhibit some lifestyle features that, as a whole, contribute to their being perceived as a distinct people. With the passage of time and change of circumstances (i.e. settlement), aspects of their lifestyle come more and more in line with mainstream society. Nonetheless, in certain details one can still notice a sort of “character” of Goaar lifestyle that is in contrast to their neighbors’.

Before Partition, the itinerant lifestyle of Goaar families consisted of their stopping to camp for one or more months (sometimes up to a year) in an open space on the outskirts of a village or town, before moving on again some ten miles away. In the case of the Khari Bazigar that one meets around Chandigarh, for example, prior to Partition they roamed in a band of some forty households. Garib Dass recalled that they had no fixed migration, though they surely might come back to the same spot if it was a good one. Each family traveled with its own livestock, from which they derived milk and meat, and which hauled their belongings. This stock included, per each household, a couple of camels, up to a dozen goats, and a few donkeys. When packing up to move, the family’s *manjās* (frame-cots) were first overturned and loaded on the camels, one

on each side of the animal. Goaar dwellings were of a type called *sirkī dī jhuggī*, a temporary hut made of reed grass and tree branches. Some individuals still live in this type of dwelling, although they do not roam any longer. Settlements of Goaars in permanent housing nowadays tend to be in small colonies or wards (*bastī*) of 50-150 families, sometimes located within the village, but usually outside the main settlement center.

The Goaar bands of Western Punjab had a set protocol for traveling and earning. On arriving at a new camp, some men from the tribe went to notify the nearby landowners—in whose fields they may have been camping—of their presence. In speaking with the landowners they requested that they be hired to do agricultural labor for them. This point highlights the fact that most such itinerant communities, whatever professions they were uniquely associated with, by the late 19th century relied upon agricultural work for landowners as a staple of their income. During the Goaars' stay at a particular camp, the local villagers also came to know of their presence, and they invited them to engage in sports at which they excelled, like *kabaddī*, *vīṇī pharṇā* (a “wrist-grabbing” game of two players), and wrestling. Goaar performers found opportunities to earn through their performances in music, dance, and on *dhhol*. The activity in which they most specialized, however, was bazi, and the Goaars' presence in a particular village meant the opportunity to organize a performance of captivating feats.

In addition to their earnings from their seasonal agricultural labour, their bazis, and other performing arts, the Goaar subsisted in various ways. Women fashioned objects out of grass, straw, and reed (e.g. bread-baskets, *changer*) for sale door to door. Goaars hunted game, including jackal, hedgehog, deer, and rabbit, in the forests and with the help of dogs (Garib Dass, 19 May 2005). They also raised goats and camels for sale.

In days past, when Goaars were able to focus on bazi as a main occupation, they spent considerable time training. Yet despite the emphasis on it in descriptions of the community, one must be clear that today bazi makes up only the tiniest fraction of the occupations they practice. Just as with Rom musicians in Europe, the developing modern world could not support the Goaars by bazi alone. And as Goaars were compelled to settle down permanently, the idea of a traveling performer was effectively nullified. Thus, after Partition, Goaars shifted to whatever unskilled labor was available, which was mainly agricultural work. In India nowadays, both males and females find employment in constant work such as irrigating the fields, while others only work at reaping during the harvest seasons. Some raise milch cattle, and sell fruits and vegetables on the roadside. Others have small businesses or perform other sorts of manual labor. The Goaar's greatest boon has been the massive popularity of bhangra and other folkloric dances, which has

provided many with better-paying employment as instructors and accompanists.

In the days of itinerancy, Goaar women could be recognized by their long, wide skirts (*ghaggrī*) and heavy anklets. Men's turbans were tied rather distinctively, and they often wore a long sash across the body. These days, most Goaar women wear the standard *salvār-qamīz* pajama-suit; to wear anything else is considered immodest. Men may wear any of the affordable clothing current in Punjab; their older fashion is sported by only some of the eldest citizens.

The Goaar are generally not vegetarians, however most do not eat beef or pork. Just as for other landless communities, who could not grow it for themselves, grain was generally the payment for their labor. Their traditional bread, *gharē dī roṭī*, is baked by placing the rolled-out loaf, not on the typical *tavā* (iron griddle), but rather on the underside of an earthen pot that has been set over the flame (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Goaar women preparing bread in the traditional manner, atop an upturned clay pot, Dadu Majra Colony, 2005. Photo: G. Schreffler.

Bazi

The Goaar's bazi performances consisted of the display of a variety of physical feats—of strength, balance, agility, and courage. In their hey-day, performances of bazi were usually by invitation, especially at annual fairs and festivals. In some cases at least, groups of specific villages were mapped out and assigned to specific clans (Kumar 2002; Singh 1999:200). One account relates that the status of these clans within the

larger community was affected by the number of villages in which a clan could claim performance rights. Such performance rights were viewed as wealth, and in marriage arrangements, the rights to perform in given villages was even given away as part of the dowry (Sumbly 2007). Thus we should not imagine the Goaar were roaming “street artistes” who performed at impromptu moments. For these events the villagers pooled their resources to present the Goaars with gifts of cash, food, and clothing after the performance, in addition to tips given to artistes who performed well. Goaars are also said to have performed bazi for tips at homes where an engagement or wedding was taking place (Thind 1996:32).

A bazi performance began with the beating of dhols, both to enhance the excitement and to call attention to the event. The starting conventions resembled those of Punjabi wrestlers. The bazigars would enter the arena, wearing loincloths and with their bodies massaged with oil. They slapped their thighs and biceps to call attention to their strength. After remembering God and paying respect to the earthen arena, they proceeded to warm up (Sarvan Singh 1996:15). The performance was then ready to begin.

The bazi performance was exhibited exclusively by men, and included feats such as the following.

1. Acrobatics (*kalābāzī*):

- Back flips, handsprings, and handstands.
- *Chaunkī vālī chhāl*. A flip performed on a small platform (*chaunkī*) placed high atop bamboo poles.
- Scrambling up a tall pole that is mounted atop another man’s head (Fig. 2).

2. Jumps (*chhāl*):

- Long jump (*chharappā*).
- High jump (*paṭṛī dī chhāl*). A springy wooden plank (*paṭṛī*) is set into the ground on a raised mound (*parull*). The performer runs and vaults off of the springboard into the air. There may be further conditions, such as clearing a wall of stacked cots.

3. Feats of strength:

- Weight lifting. Various heavy objects were lifted. If necessary, a bamboo pole was attached to the object to facilitate holding it.
- Lifting heavy objects grasped with the teeth.
- Karate-like feats, such as breaking bricks with the hands (Sarvan Singh 1996:17).

- Pressing a narrow iron rod against the body until it bends. The rod may be propped between the neck of one man and the belly of another. In another reported case, the rod may be pressed and bent against an individual's eye (covered by a cloth) (Sarvan Singh 1996:15).

4. Feats of danger:

- Blindfolded swordplay.
- Leaping through a ring laced with sharp daggers and/or wrapped with flaming rags.
- Pipe ride (*nālī dā jahāz, tār dī bāzī*). A greased rope is tied up high to a tree and down, taut at an angle, to the ground. The performer straps a wooden plank (*phaṭṭī*) on his stomach. In a lengthwise groove in the underside of the plank is fitted a metal pipe (*nālī*), through which the rope is threaded. The performer slides quickly down the rope on his stomach, head first without using hands or feet, by means of this conveyance.
- Dangerous variations on flips, such as blindfolded, with a sword in the teeth, or with a weight tied to the feet. *Sūlī dī chhāl* ("the leap of doom") was one such fantastic feat, where the performer was said to perform a back flip on a small platform atop a bamboo pole, some thirty feet up. The performer grasped a flaming sword in his teeth. Sarvan Singh writes that this was the crowning stunt, but that it was so dangerous that some sponsors requested it not be performed lest some tragedy happen in the village (1996:17).

5. Contortions:

- Two pieces of bamboo placed parallel are tied tightly together at their ends. A man squeezes his body through the gap between them.
- Two or three men squeeze their bodies simultaneously through the same metal hoop.
- Flexibility displays, such as bending one's leg up and behind one's neck.
- Several men, climbing upon one another, lock their arms and legs to form a dome with their bodies (Sarvan Singh 1996:16).



Fig. 2. A Goaar bazigar performs a *bāzī* high above the crowd, Jalandhar, 2004. Photo: G. Schreffler.

The Goaar rarely perform bazi today, except for a few groups for special exhibition purposes. A journalist in 2002 was told that only six families in Punjab currently perform bazi (Kumar 2002). When I saw a group of bazigars perform in a parade in Jalandhar in November 2004, it seemed many spectators did not to know who they were. This group, of the Lalka clan, was from a village near Phagwara. The group had been picked up by the North Zone Cultural Centre (Patiala) in 1985, under whose patronage they have also performed in Delhi and abroad in Dubai and Thailand. Given the infrequency of bazi performances, it is usually in other contexts that Goaars are seen performing. The following sections present some of their other performance activities, past and present.

Dhol-playing

Playing the barrel drum, *dhol*, has had a place in the Goaar lifestyle for as long as anyone can remember. They used the dhol to accompany their bazis, as well as in other village contexts like sporting events and dancing. Despite this, before Partition, the Goaar were not known first and foremost as dhol-players. Since Partition, however, they have become one of the main and, in many respects, most influential dhol-playing communities of East Punjab. Moreover, dhol-playing has become one of their staple bread-winning activities, and each generation brings more professionals. Goaars have a strong local presence as dhol-players

in such areas as Chandigarh, Patiala, Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib, Hoshiarpur, Firozpur, Ambala, and Jammu.

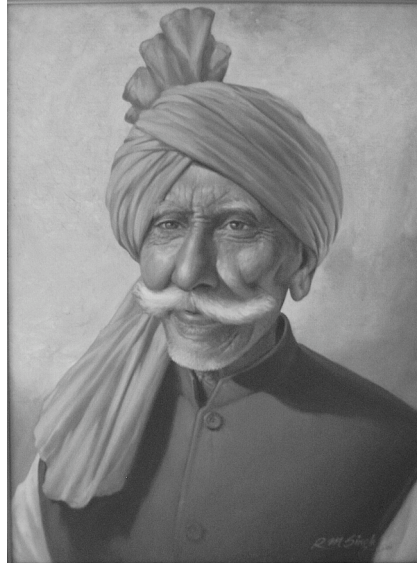


Fig. 3. Portrait of Ustad Bhana Ram, by R.M. Singh.

The Goar started to become a very significant dhol-playing community in East Punjab after the success of Bhana Ram Sunami (ca.1906-1999) (Fig. 3). He belonged to the Valjot clan of the Panjab subsection of the Bazigar people, who came from the erstwhile tehsil of Nankana Sahib. Before Partition, he had been the dhol disciple of a Mirasi, Muhammad Ali, as well as learning bazi from Baba Bura Ram (Pammi Bai 2008). After Partition, Bhana Ram was eventually settled in the town of Sunam (dist. Sangrur). He there emerged as the dhol-player attached to the “first” modern bhangra dance team (see below), and as such he took part in national functions, international delegations, and several films through the mid-1960s. Because he was in place during the formative moments of modern bhangra, he contributed both to its general conceptualization and the specific material (movements and rhythms) that would be used thereafter. Thus being a sort of “godfather of the modern dhol,” he was inducted into the Punjab Sangeet Natak Akademi’s Hall of Fame in 2000.

Other dhol-players in Bhana Ram’s family include his older brother, Mahi Ram, and his son (and student of Mahi Ram), Bahadur Singh (ca.1942-). Though they did not rise to the level of fame of Bhana Ram, it is not the achievements of individuals, but rather the uplift of the whole

Goaar community that is important to observe. Bhana Ram showed the potential of Goars to operate as dhol-players during an era of very specific needs. Folkloric dance was being mobilized as part of the nation-building project, and Goaar dhol-players possessed the knowledge and professionalism to act as co-pilots in its presentations.

Biru Ram (ca.1931-) (Fig. 4), also belonging to the Panjab subsection, but from the Vartia clan (he is brother-in-law to Bahadur Singh), came next in the progression of renowned Goaar dhol-players. His family migrated from district Lyallpur (Faisalabad) in 1947, ending up in the Bazigar ward outside Sanaur (near Patiala). His *ustad* was a Goaar who had lived near him in West Punjab, Piare Lal. In the late 50s and 60s, Biru Ram was a regular feature as an accompanist at many local colleges. In 1960 he accompanied Master Harbhajan Singh's first bhangra team effort at Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi, an event



Fig. 4. *Ustad Biru Ram and son, Manak Raj, Sanaur, 2005. Photo: G. Schreffler.*

at which he made his last appearances in the early 1970s. However, Biru Ram continued to play for and advise college dance teams, contributing much unique knowledge he had received from the older generations of his community. In this way, he helped establish what has become a Goaar niche of working with students. He has been succeeded in his duties by his son, Manak Raj (student of Bahadur Singh). Following the activities of the likes of Bhana Ram and Biru Ram, Goars became the players of choice for college and bhangra presentations in the Patiala area. Today, the colleges in Patiala typically employ Goars from the

surrounding *villages* for their functions, rather than, for example, the Mahasha community dhol-players in the city.

Another major Goaar bloc of dhol-players to shape the Punjabi musical landscape comes from the Vartia clan of the Khari subsection, and had been based in district Gujrat before migrating in 1947. On one side of this dhol-family, now settled around Chandigarh, are the descendants of Ganda Ram, all of whose sons became dhol-players of note. Eldest was Mangat Ram (ca.1917-2007), whose belonging to the older generation was underscored by his vast knowledge of rhythms that these days have mostly gone forgotten from disuse. His time actually came before that of the modern dhol scene, and almost until the final years of his life he was still living in jhuggis. His son Dev Raj, however, based in village Bad Majra (Mohali), is now one of the area's most active professionals. Ganda Ram's next son, Prem Chand (ca.1933-) has a reputation as an aggressive businessman, and in this manner he has secured the position of accompanist in many influential positions. His own three sons, Naseeb Singh, Ramesh Kumar, and Seva Ram, are all very active dhol-players, which one is bound to have seen in college youth festivals. All live in homes in Chandigarh city proper, which gives some indication of their financial accomplishments. The third son of Ganda Ram, Mali Ram (1945-) of Badheri village (Chandigarh), belongs practically to the next generation, having begun playing dhol in 1968 and initially learning from his older cousin, Garib Dass. His own son, Jarnail Singh Mohani, has the distinction of having emigrated to the New York metro area, where as yet few Goaaars have become established.⁷

Another branch of the family (Ganda Ram's nephew) is headed by Garib Dass (1939-2010), who follows Biru Ram in my narrative as one of the Goaar dhol-players who made particular contributions to the development of Punjabi musical conventions. Garib Dass, whose father was not a dhol-player, only landed himself in that career after much struggle and after practicing many types of labor. Initially learning dhol from cousin Mangat Ram in the 1950s, he later became the disciple of "Punjab Champion" Ghuggi Dholi of Amritsar's Mahasha community. Through the 1970s and 1980s especially, he made a great contribution to the developing art of bhangra, having been one of the chosen dhol-players to regularly serve at Republic Day celebrations and other such national events. In recent years, Garib Dass had also perfected the specialized skill of organizing large groups into performances. So for example, in 2001, at the 31st National Games in Ludhiana, Garib Dass led a group of seventy dhol-players. And in 2002, he led a group of 150 students in the Bhag Singh composition, "Vanjara Dance." In the early 1980s, Garib Dass began an international career, going on to play in a dozen countries. This sort of activity is significant for the model it provides other Goaar dhol-players who previously had not much entered

the international sphere. Garib Dass' son Des Raj is also an internationally renowned dhol-player, who tours abroad regularly and for months at a time, for example to accompany popular singers like Hans



Fig. 5. Bicchu playing his father Des Raj's dhol, Dadu Majra village, 2001. Photo: G. Schreffler.

Raj Hans and Babbu Mann. In Des Raj one can see an example of the ensuing generations of modern Goaar dhol-players who have been able to *choose* dhol as a career. Thus, Garib Dass' grandsons are all budding dhol-players, too. By the age of five, little "Bicchu" could already play several rhythms quite well (Fig. 5).

Indeed, young Goaar boys are typically encouraged to try their hand at dhol at an early age. The opportunities that have come with developments in modern Punjab, in which the dhol has become emblematic of Punjabi culture, have made it one of the most comfortable and lucrative professions they could reasonably hope for after generations of marginalization and insecurity. There is the tendency, within the Goaar community, towards informal teaching by one's own relatives, creating a zigzagged line of transmission down from uncles and older cousins. This can be understood as a community's effort to promote the learning and *earning* potential of everyone involved.

In terms of their business strategies, unlike the other major dhol-playing communities the Jogi and the Mahasha, the Goaar do not form markets of offices for their services. Their hiring happens, first and foremost, through word of mouth and long-standing relationships with

college personnel and government officers. Others advertise by setting their dhols out to hang near the roadside, with or without signs announcing their services. Goaar dhol-players of Mohali once had a unique method of advertising their services to the middle-class residents of that town. They would arrange themselves in a row along the steel



Fig. 6. Goaar dhol-players waiting for roadside clients at the Barrier in Mohali, 2004. Photo: G. Schreffler.

“barrier” on the main road that separates Mohali’s Phase I area from Chandigarh. On the waist-high barrier and nearby stones they had painted their names and phone numbers, and they would stand behind the barrier with their dhols propped up on tables (Fig. 6). With this arrangement, it was possible for motorists to drive up alongside and book dhol services for weddings directly from the windows of their cars.⁸ These were among the enterprising young dholis who, armed with a nice shirt, a mobile phone, and a dhol, are determined to make dhol into their sole career. The characteristic playing style of dhol-players from the Goaar community, in some respects, also serves their professional success. They tend to shun flashiness in favor of appropriateness. Theirs is a functional approach, where one’s role as an accompanist or service-provider takes priority over appearing as an “artist” at the center of attention.

Dance

While many today assume that so-called “folk dances” of pre-Partition times were of a wholly participatory nature, they were also performed by professionals for discreet audiences (see for example the statement of Rose 1919:920). Goars danced in this capacity, for which they were once called upon by the landed classes to perform at their weddings. Whether as professionals on display or at their own community functions, Goar artistes are experts at dance. Their skills in this regard have continued to be in demand in the post-Partition era.

Bhangrā

The modern history of *bhangrā* begins with Goars. By the early 1950s, a group from Sunam was staging performances of men’s dance in a new variety routine that would later be dubbed “bhangra.” This is the group that would be go on to be patronized by the administration of PEPSU state to represent that state and later, the state of Punjab, in such national events as Republic Day in New Delhi (see Schreffler 2010:588ff.). The group consisted of young laymen from the Malwa area and Goar artistes whom Partition had forced to immigrate from Western Punjab. Manohar Singh Deepak (1931-2008), then a student at Mohindra College in Patiala, and his older brothers, Gurbachan Singh (1923-1968) and Avtar Singh (1929-2009), were among those that formed the lay component. Equally important as the Deepaks, however, was the Goar component of the group. The Deepak family patriarch, the brothers’ grandfather, Captain Ram Singh, had begun to patronize this clan of Goars, who brought their essential expertise in dance and music to the group. Indeed, being from Western Punjab, it was largely the Goar artistes who taught the Western Punjabi dance forms (bhangra, jhummar, etc.) to the Malwa-based dancers (Bahadur Singh, personal communication, 25 April 2005).

Though modern bhangra has undergone much development, the core paradigm was thus shaped by the Goar artistes. The PEPSU group’s initial performance routine represented “Men’s Punjabi Dance,” with no pretext to representing any one dance wholly and authentically. Instead, it combined elements of various dances. By the time of their milestone Republic Day performance in January 1954, their dance style had been dubbed “bhangra,” to evoke the regional Vaisakhi-time dance of North-central Punjab (Dhillon 1992:20; 1998:116). This was the phenomenon that, once seen by the Indian nation at large, went on to become one of Punjab’s most famous institutions. One sees the influence of Goars most prominently in the bazi-like stunts that were included by the PEPSU group. The group’s cameo appearance in the film *Naya Daur* (1957) is full of tumbling, along with their oft-pictured signature stunt of one man

standing upon a pot that is balanced atop another man's head. Further development of bhangra, including the creation or addition of yet newer rhythms and actions, occurred especially through the hands of Goaar dhol-players who, alone or in collaboration with "coaches," have readied bhangra performances in colleges and at events.

Jhummar

The dance *jhummar*, once found in different varieties in Western Punjab (see Schreffler 2010, chapter 11), has been recreated in modern East Punjab from several influences, in each of which Gouars have had a hand. One of these was actually modern bhangra presentations which, from early on, included (and subsequently canonized) a glimpse of *jhummar*. Dhol-player Bhana Ram and his cohort would have been among the first to create that in the PEPSU team, and their brand of *jhummar* rhythm and action is the basis of a "standard" *jhummar* one sees today. Another important influence on today's *jhummar* was the routine of Pokhar Singh's group from Fazilka (dist. Ferozpur). Immigrants from Montgomery (Sahiwal) district, after crossing the Satluj River at Partition, Rae Sikh Pokhar Singh (1916-2002) and his people continued practicing their regional *jhummar*. In a process similar to that of modern bhangra's staging, they developed a presentation that included glimpses of various regional styles of *jhummar* dance before it was presented on a large-scale at Republic Day in 1961. The dhol accompanist for Pokhar Singh's cohort in the early days was a Goaar, Lakkhu Ram, who had migrated along with them (Kulwant Singh, personal communication, 1 May 2005), and the dhol-player for the group for several decades afterward was another Goaar, Jattu Ram. From the late 1980s, Goaar artistes, particularly from the Chandigarh area, took the reins in preparing *jhummars*. This resulted in a number of milestone performances by Garib Dass and Prem Chand. Of note, in 2000, when Punjabi University, Patiala, was initiating projects to revive and promote *jhummar*, the artiste put in charge of preparing the student group was Prem Chand. The performance event was produced by the University's Theatre and Television Department, who recorded and broadcast it on television. Then in 2001, the University published a follow-up book (Gurnam Singh 2001) that was a transcription of the earlier performance. The book—in essence a sort of codification of Prem Chand's routine—has gone on to be used by student groups in subsequent performances. Aside from the *jhummar* styles they present to others, the Goaar (Khari subsection) also have a style that they consider specific to their own (Fig. 7). It is difficult to assess whether this is something truly unique to the Goaar (and, perhaps, allied communities), or if this was a way for my Khari Bazigar informants to distinguish their naturalistic style, based in

the local style of Gujrat, from the more artificial style of the stage. However, the dance style of older community members does indeed appear distinctive. In the dancing I have seen, the senior Goaars rarely traveled on a course; they locomoted all over the dance area. As a matter of style, most striking in the Goaar dancing is the graceful twirling of the wrists and the overall lightness of gestures.



Fig. 7. Goaar-style *jhummar* dancing at a family wedding in Balachaur, 2005. The dhol-players are Ustad Garib Dass (left) and Ustad Prem Chand. The dancers are Sardari Lal (ca.1925-2007), (left) and Jagat Ram. Photo: G. Schreffler.

Sammī

In the Sandal Bar area, the dance called *sammī* had existed alongside *jhummar*, where it was danced by women. Among its participants in that area were the Goaar. However, practice of *sammī* was greatly disturbed by the Partition of the Punjab. Its Goaar maintainers were estranged from their audience and their lifestyle substantially changed. Biru Ram, of the tribe of Goaars best associated with *sammī*, attests that while before Partition, *sammī* was going on at weddings, afterwards it was rare (personal communication, 29 May 2005). It so happens that, in the late 1960s, a rare performance of *sammī* by Goarnis was staged on the outskirts of Chandigarh. In charge of directing the performance and

covering the dhol-playing duties were Bhana Ram, Mangal Singh, and Mahi Ram (Garib Dass, 12 Dec. 2004). Biru Ram, according to his own account, also helped to prepare the presentation with women from his locality and from elsewhere in the Patiala area (personal communication, 29 May 2005). Reportedly, Indira Gandhi, being in attendance, was delighted by this dance, which she had not known existed (Biru Ram, personal communication, 25 Nov. 2004). After this, however, Goaar women were never to publicly perform sammi again. As Bahadur Singh explained, it was because the tribe does not feel comfortable with their women performing (25 April 2005).

Although a folkloric dance presentation called sammi has since been developed, its performances rarely resemble the sammi remembered by Goaar women. However, some of the arguably most authoritative performances—indeed, most performances one might see—are directed by a handful of Goaar *men* dhol-players of Chandigarh and Patiala areas, who have cultivated sammi as one of their specialties. Some of the familiar names in this regard are Garib Dass, Prem Chand, Mali Ram, and Biru Ram. Garib Dass represented one style of presentation that, if not historically authentic, then was relatively realistic in the way most of the performance remained on one rhythm and to one song. After witnessing the historic staging mentioned above, Garib Dass consulted his knowledgeable uncle, Ganda Ram, and from there developed his presentation. In 1976 he prepared his first sammi for girls at a senior secondary school in Chandigarh (personal communication, 12 July, 2006). Prem Chand's sammi is notable for the similarities it bears to the staged paradigm of bhangra in that the rhythms, songs, and actions quickly shift back and forth. He showcased sammi in England as early as 1987 (personal communication, 3 June 2005). The year 1988 brought both Prem Chand and Garib Dass together under the auspices of the Punjab Cultural Affairs Department. The Department presented a performance of sammi that resulted in an informational brochure and televised performance. Prem's sammi later also became a part of Punjabi University's 2001 text. Following, he was co-charged with preparing the Republic Day presentation of sammi that Patiala sent to New Delhi in 2005. Meanwhile, Biru Ram had been working locally in Patiala, where from 1985 he served as advisor and accompanist to (non-Bazigar) Daisy Walia's presentations of sammi at the Government College for Girls and Punjabi University. Walia also developed her sammi through interviews with Goaar women of Sanaur and Samara (personal communication, 7 March 2005). So it is that any sammi one sees presented in East Punjab, no matter who the creator is, ultimately finds its base in the work and knowledge of Goaar artistes.

Bazigar Giddhā

A familiar type of song and dance circle in Punjab is the *giddhā*. However, few are aware that Goaar women practice a unique form of it. Its verses (*bolāni*) are sung in the Goaar language, and the melodies used to intone them are entirely different from the mainstream *giddhā*'s. Moreover, rather than a solo followed by the cyclic repetition of the final line of verse, the manner of presentation here is a direct, verbatim call and response, back and forth. The dancing of Bazigar *giddhā* is generally different than the *giddhā* of lay communities, too. While the lay *giddhā* consists of constant locomotion with a particular footwork, the Goarnis' *giddhā* contains much graceful whirling of the hands and twisting of the hips. The movements appear even perhaps sexually provocative.⁹ In one movement, for example, a woman wraps her legs around another's waist, leans backwards, and continues writhing as both whirl around. Despite the surprise this open style of dancing might give to laypersons used to the usual *giddhā*, the Goarnis' *giddhā* was not intended to be provocative. It was performed, like other women's *giddhā* in traditional context, only in the company of women. The added flamboyance can be understood in that Goaar women were performing a professional, non-participatory variety of dance that required added entertainment value.



Fig. 8. Goaar women performing their unique *giddhā* at a family wedding, Dadu Majra Colony, 2005. Photo: G. Schreffler.

Goarnis gave a rare public performance of giddha in 1985, when Prof. Rajpal Singh invited a group to the inaugural function of the North Zone Cultural Centre, Patiala. I believe this was the last such performance; Goar men with whom I spoke indicated the discomfort that was caused by this public performance of women from the community.

However, Goarnis still perform giddha in a non-presentational form at community weddings, two of which I witnessed in 2005 near Chandigarh and Balachaur. Each performance occurred at a specified point in the proceedings. After the arrival of the *barāt*, male relations of both families had gone through their formal meeting (*milnī*), of garlanding, gift-giving, and embracing. While the men then went for refreshments, female relations had their own meeting out of doors. A shared giddha followed this (Fig. 8). On each occasion, a particular Goarni, who seemed to be a specialist in such matters, took charge of leading the giddha.

Ṭippṛī

Yet another poorly known dance that can be associated with the Goar is a stick-dance called *ṭippṛī*, from the southeastern side of the Punjab region. Men dance in a circle, clicking their sticks together as they go. In addition—and this is what makes it especially a dance to be watched by others—they might plait long ribbons hanging from above and perform acrobatic movements (Bedi 1992). Video footage, from the personal collection of Paramjit Siddhu, documents the expository nature of some performances, in which dancers somersault across sheets of broken glass in the middle of the dance-circle. And photos from the Sangeet Natak Akademi Archive (New Delhi) document a staging of *tippri* that included fire-blowing.

Traditional Songs

Traditional songs of the Goar consist of both those mainstream dialect songs they have brought with them from Western Punjab and unique songs in the Goar language. These are more or less endangered genres, being that they are memories of the eldest citizens. However, Goars in East Punjab, being engaged in music generally, also do sing the more common songs. And in some spheres, new music (below) in Goar language is being sung.

Like women of other communities in Punjab, Goar women sing unaccompanied songs to mark ritual events, especially at different stages in a wedding, e.g. *suhāg*, *ghoṛīānī*, and *siṭṭhaṇīānī* (see Nahar Singh, this volume). However, these were sung in Goar language, and to distinctly

different melodies. Unfortunately, few Goarnis still remember these songs well enough to perform them. On an occasion where a knowledgeable song-leader was present, I heard them sing songs during the ritual games-playing between bride and groom after a wedding. The “songs” were formally much like the *bolīānī* of their giddha. Frankly speaking, women’s songs were not the focus of my research, and I was unable to assess how these might be distinguished as *Goaar* songs from perhaps other localized songs of Western Punjab. Indeed, Goaar women (like Mirasi women) were said to perform some traditional songs—specifically *ghorīānī*—in a professional capacity for the weddings and childbirths of the lay community.

Older Goaars have memory of Western Punjabi verses forms in the common tongue. In his *Naini Jhanānī*, based on research in the Sandal Bar in the 1930s, Harjit Singh stated that the Bazigar specialized in, and indeed had a hand in developing, the song forms called *mundrī* and *chhallā* (1942:39). Contemporary informants indicated that *mundrī* is not sung much now. As for *chhallā*, Jagat Ram (b. 1920s) of Dadu Majra Colony (Khari Bazigar) was the only individual that I heard perform any. He is one of the rare old Goaars who still remembers many of the old songs and dances. Among the songs better remembered, however, are in the three-line *māhīā* form. Garib Dass suddenly “remembered” a number of these verses in 2007—women’s songs he had not heard for forty years. They are said to be in the melodic style of Southwestern Punjab, *lambe dā tarjī*. The following samples can be heard on the UCSB Center for Sikh and Punjab Studies website.¹⁰

ghare rakhnī ānī gharvanjīānī te
tur giā māhīā ve
mainī hatth pāī mārānī manjīānī te

I place the pots on the pot-racks.
 Since my beloved has gone away O,
 I find myself constantly touching his bed.

koī chādar lasaṇe dī
be chhadḍ giā māhīā
sāḍī nīat nahīnī vasṇe dī

A sheet of fine fabric.
 Oh my beloved left me,
 And I’ve no will to stay.


In addition to the common Western Punjabi genre of *mahia*, there is another type of *mahia* that the Goaar ascribe to their community

specifically. To assess the veracity of this ascription is complicated because, besides the fact that its form seems to correspond to another common verse form, *ḍholā*, available examples are sung in the common language. Nonetheless, its distinctive melodic styles appear unique and, as far as I can determine, this genre has not previously been mentioned in print. Exponents of the genre in East Punjab are Jagat Ram Lalka and Raushan Lal Lalka. The following examples come from a performance by Jagat Ram Lalka in 1997. He begins his performances with a free meter, intoned recitation. He then sings an ever-changing assortment of verses, over the kahirva rhythm, as for example:


*main aithe te ḍhol merā parbat
sāḍī khuī dā pāṇī sharbat
muṛ ke pī māhīā
koī kallī khalogī āṇī
o gam sānūnī māhīe dā
sukk tīlā main ho gāī āṇī*

I am here and my dhol is in the hills;
The water of our well is sherbert.
Come back and drink it, mahia.
You'll find someone standing alone.
Oh, feeling the sorrow of mahia,
I have become like dried up straw.


♩ = 240



main ai - the te dho - l me - ra pa - r - ba - t o sa - di



khu - hi da pa - ni sha - r - ba - t mu - r ke pi ma - hia



ko - i kal - li kha - lo - gi an o ga - m sa - nun ma -



hie da o su - kkh di la main ho gai an

The same sort of verses may also be presented in a different musical style, with the following tune.

bajār vikendī āñ gandalāñ
bajār vikendī āñ gandalāñ
ikrār kitā din pandrāñ
muddtāñ lāīāñ ne
koī kallī khalogī āñ
o gam sānūñ mähīe dā
sukk tīlā main ho gai āñ
o gam sānūñ mähīe dā
sukk tīlā main ho gai āñ

In the market are sold: mustard stalks.
 In the market are sold: mustard stalks.
 We made a pledge 15 days ago;
 It's been so long apart.
 You'll find someone standing alone.
 Oh, feeling the sorrow of mahia,
 I have become like dried up straw.
 Oh, feeling the sorrow of mahia,
 I have become like dried up straw.



Other Professional Performance Arts

Goaars are distinguished as performers in still other musical and dramatic arts. Note in particular how, whereas before Partition these genres may have been associated with other communities, in post-Partition East Punjab the Goaar have filled those roles.

Some Goaars carry on the tradition of professional ballad-singing in the *dastāngo* style or what Thuhi (in this volume) calls *tūmbe-algoze dī gāikī*. While not exclusive to any ethnic community, such ballad-singing was largely the purview of Muslim professionals. Certain Goaars, however, studied with masters of the tradition, and nowadays some of the best-known exponents of the genre in the East Punjab are Goaars. Goaar Sudagar Ram (1923-) originally from district Gujrat, was a disciple of the famous (non-Goaar) Nawab Ghumar. He adopted the Majha-based style of his *ustad*, accompanying himself on *king* (Thuhi 2002:55). After Partition, Sudagar Ram settled in district Kurukshetra, and from 1987 he was a radio artiste (ibid.:56). In East Punjab, the tradition continued with Sudagar Ram's student, a Goaar named Jagat Ram Lalka (1952-) born near Sirhind and now of district Ambala (Thuhi 2002:57). By age sixteen

he had become a student of Sudagar Ram, and after exposure in 1982 he was first called to perform on the radio (ibid.:58). Jagat Ram Lalka uses the small, one-stringed relative to the *tūmbā*, the *tūmbī*. He was one of the most prominent exponents of the dastango tradition in recent years, along with the younger performer Raushan Lal Lalka.

Another performing art that some Bazigars adopted is *naqal*, the theatrical art previously associated with a community of Mirasis. As Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry notes (in this volume), the *naqqāls* operating in the Chandigarh area in recent decades have come from the tribe of Khari Bazigar. This type of rural stage-entertainment was popular until around the 1970s, when television entered the picture. The ubiquitous Prem Chand is the leader of the latest aggregation of the *naqqal* party. He was a student of Chajju, one of seven *naqqals* in the court of the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh (Prem Chand and Party 1992). Prem's group, which includes several other members of the Vartia clan, has performed the "long style" of *naqqal* variety show, in which the players act out dramas like *Hir-Ranjha* and *Keema-Malki*. Pathani Ram, now the *pradhān* of the tribe's highest-level panchayat, used to dance as a *nachār* (female impersonator) in the clan's *naqqal* group. Also associated with the group is Mundri Lal, brother-in-law of Prem. His routine has included a feminine style of dance in which, donning *ghungrū* (bells) on his ankles and twirling a veil coquettishly, he performs steps from *kathak* dance and card tricks. Another versatile artiste is Mehar Chand, a fine singer of the old style who also plays harmonium and other instruments.

Among other Goaar instrumentalists, there have been numerous players of the double-flutes, *joṛiān* (algoza). Most famous among them was perhaps Mangal Singh Sunami (1931-2002) of the Panjab subsection, who played for the first bhangra "team" from PEPSU. Ganda Ram of the Khari, a legendary figure reputed to have lived some 130 years (1868-1998), is known to have played the *sārangī* to accompany women dancers of the Kanjar community. And Mangat Ram used to play the *desī* ("local") form of tabla drums, of which the left-hand bass drum lacks a permanent *siāhī* spot and instead the player must apply a flour-paste afresh each time.

The well-known Sufi singing duo of the Wadali Brothers of Amritsar, Puranchand and Pyarelal Wadali, are claimed by the Vartia clan. The pair were involved in such pursuits as wrestling and drama before they became one of East Punjab's most hailed singing groups (Tandon 2003). Puranchand's son, Lakhwinder, is one of the rising pop singers of recent years. Other pop singers of Goaar background include Dalwinder Dayalpuri and Davinder Kohinoor. It is fair to say that none of these performers, however, appears to his audience with a "Bazigar" identity. One that has, only recently, is Lakhbir Lakha (Valjot) from

Mohalla Dharamkot (Phagwara). He rose to fame as part of a duo with a non-Goaar woman Gurinder Naaz, having won a TV duet-singing competition in 2007.¹¹ Lakha's real accomplishment in that year was a milestone for the Goaar community. This was the release of a commercial album in the Goaar language, *Main Kaain Kahano Aan* (*main kāin kahiṇōi āi*): "What shall I say to you?"

Conclusion

Over their history, the Bazigar or Goaar people have maintained numerous performing traditions, including genres of physical feats, music, dance, and drama. The variety of performance activities speaks to their status as an itinerant people, who constantly had to adapt for survival and, therefore, to learn the arts for patrons of each region.

In this history, the effect of Partition on the Goaar cannot be overstated. It resulted in a dramatic change in their geography and lifestyle. Yet what affected the Goaar also affected Punjabi culture at large. Since Partition and with their displacement, Goaar artistes in East Punjab have played a key role in transmitting Western Punjabi forms. In fact, a great many of the performance forms that are important to Punjabis today are of Western Punjabi origin, including most of the folk dances. Citing a familiar example, one could say that there would be no bhangra as we know it today without the Goaar.

The recent story of the Goaar people shows the drastic changes modernity has brought to one Punjabi community. The Goaar of the 19th century were nomads living at the margins of society. They lacked fixed homes or guaranteed income. While their profession of bazi has been romanticized, in reality they had to rely largely upon sporadic migrant labor for major income. Partition changed the nature of patronage. While bazi became obsolete, new opportunities for performance in state-sponsored forms—especially folkloric dances—presented a lucky break for the Goaar. They were able to establish themselves under government and university patronage by emphasizing their skills in dhol-playing and dance training. With each subsequent generation, playing the dhol has gradually become an escape from the drudgery and backbreaking labor of agricultural work.

One may take the example of the late Ustad Garib Dass and his family. Garib Dass began his life as a boy roaming in Western Punjab on camels, before migrating to East Punjab and starting his working life as a manual laborer. However, with his clan's cultivation of dhol-playing and the training in dance and music he received from his relatives, he was able to become a dhol accompanist during the formative years of bhangra and other staged Punjabi dances. From the 1970s he traveled nationally, and from the 1980s internationally, playing an essential role in the

development of modern Punjabi music. As his prestige and financial status increased, he went from living in straw huts to moving into *pakkā* housing in a colony near Chandigarh. Garib Dass' nurturing of the dhol-playing profession meant his son and now grandsons could more easily adopt it. Together, the family has used these talents to increase their social position and, especially in the case of the youngest, to seek good education. They have even bought a plot of land for the future, something that Garib Dass' nomad parents probably would never have dreamed of. This article is dedicated to this recently deceased master, who was keen that I, as mediator, introduce outsiders to the distinctive cultural riches of his people, and without whose nurturing and friendship I would not have been able.

Despite their strides, the Goaar remain in a relatively marginalized social position; they are isolated even among the Scheduled Castes. There is a dilemma faced by other "tribal" people. As their quality of life improves through integration in society, they "lose" some of the practices that have made them distinct. Pride in their still-unique life-ways sustains them, however. Their identity is clear, even if, as this article has hoped to remedy, it is unclear to outsiders.

Notes

¹ Deb (1987), aided by two Bazigar assistants, conducted a socio-economic survey of the community, beginning in 1981. Aside from this, we read very brief mention of the Bazigar in colonial ethnographies, but the authors of these works seem to have been dismissive of the community; even much of that which was accurate in those accounts at that time has likely changed by the present. At Punjabi University, Patiala, an intriguing project to document a Bazigar community, led by professors Surjit Singh Lee and Dharminder Spolia, had received government funding. At the time of fieldwork, however, it had not yet bore any materials. In my own dissertation (Schreffler 2010), chapter 4 attempted to present a modest exposition of the culture of the Bazigar.

² The implied assumption is that, in Muslim cultural circles, Persian-based words are preferred or more prevalent, and that the same is true for Sanskrit-based words in Hindu circles.

³ These are by: Ravi Das (ca.1398–ca.1448) (Asa, 487); Kabir (1440-1518) (Asa, 482; Sorath, 655; Maru, 1105); Guru Nanak (1469-1539) (Vadhans, 581; Prabhati, 1343; Maru, 1023); Guru Amar Das (guru from 1552-1574) (Maru, 1061); Guru Arjan (guru from 1581-1606) (Gauri, 206; Suhi, 736); Bhai Gurdas (1551-1637) (Vaar 8, 15, 27, 33).

⁴ See for example Bhardwaj 2004; Bumbroo 2008; No author given 2001, 2006.

⁵ I cannot say positively the religious affiliations of any Goars that remained in Pakistan after Partition, although Indian Bazigars speak of relations who got “stuck” in West Punjab and who converted to Islam.

⁶ This refers to a Sufi saint whose shrine is located in the Srinigar district, Jammu & Kashmir.

⁷ Also note that one of the longest established dholi-emigrants to North America, Piare Lal of Vancouver, is said to be a Desi Bazigar (according to Garib Dass, personal communication, 10 Dec. 2007).

⁸ This area was later disrupted by development.

⁹ Nahar Singh has observed, “*In the Bāzīgarnī’s dance, the movements of sex are clearly evident*” (Nahar Singh 1988:53).

¹⁰ [<http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/gharib/2.htm>]

¹¹ The program, airing on the MH1 music channel, was “Coca Cola Jodi No. 1.”

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