

Musical Patterns of Kamaicha; A Bowed Folk Instrument of Rajasthan

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Abstract

Kamaicha, as suggested by the name, is a bowed instrument found in western region of Rajasthan, mainly in three districts i.e. Jodhpur, Badmer and Jaisalmer. The Instrument is specially played by a musical community called **Manganiyar**. Manganiyar is a small community living in rural areas and not much exposed to the urban society.

The instrument Kamaicha, made of local material, looks as if a rudimentary one, but the musical patterns presented on it are very complex, leaving the listeners bewildered whether to keep it in folk music or not? Apart from main playing strings, there are a few supporting or drone strings called Jhare or Jhare -ke-taar which rest on the main bridge, and are responsible for creating bigger sound.

Manganiyars present Ragas like Kalyani, Khamaichi etc. which have little or no resemblance with our classical Ragas. They have their own Tala system also having three, four and five beat patterns, which also have a little resemblance with our classical tala system. They do not have solo presentation of instrumental music but while performing, the vocalist provides ample space to instrumentalist; culminating in an instrumental ensemble presentation somewhat like a 'Tanni Avartana' piece.

Accompaniment by Kamaicha & Dholak goes parallel to vocal music instead of following it, making various musical patterns and designs. Use of Tihai is common in Kamaicha, while Laggi and Ladi type tala patterns are played upon Dholak in the end of each Vocal/Instrumental passage /piece.

The objective of this paper is to bring forth the complex musical patterns of Kamaicha and analyze the beauty of its music.

Key words are; Kamaicha, Maganiyars, Jhara or Jhare -ke -Tar Kalyani, Khamaichi, Tanni Avartana, Tihai, Laggi and Ladi.

Rajasthan is a state of diversity and variety. There are varieties of cultures, foods and beliefs. Owing to geographical and various other environmental reasons, Rajasthan was isolated in comparison to other states and has been able to sustain and nurture the tradition for centuries. Because of desert, much of agricultural work cannot be done and people are engaged in many kinds of activities other than agriculture, which help them earn their livelihood. Thus a vast range of folklore developed and flourished and has come down to us from generation to generation.

Rajasthan is formed by a cluster of several princely states. The traces of diversity among these merged states can still be seen in the lives of the natives. In these states, dialect changes and their music as well, the folk epics change and along with them even the musical instruments change. The melodic structures and also the patterns of renditions change. With such vast variety and diversity, it becomes almost impossible for any one to understand or to analyze the whole gamut of folk music and folk epics of Rajasthan. Even documentation of each and every form with its varied styles of renditions is a big task.

The feudal set up of medieval times paved way for the patronage of professional musicians, which in turn gave rise to a large number of hereditary professional singing communities, which are being maintained and sustained till date. Presentations of these singing or professional musician communities are of high caliber. A commonly sung song when sung by these artists undergoes a total transformation and emerges as the most beautiful song of the desert area. Musical instruments play an important role in their rendering. Though, for most of the times, they are used for accompaniment, still, they play a significant role in the rendition of a particular style, giving the rendition a high professional colour. Most prominent musician communities are Langa, Marganiyar, Damani, Dhari, Mirasi, Kalbelia, Dholi, etc.

Each professional caste group of Rajasthan whose livelihood is singing, playing and dancing has a distinctive style of its own, which is quite different from others. Interestingly all these communities have kept their singing styles, their instruments and repertoire intact, and the techniques used on these instruments have neither changed nor intermixed for the last many decades.

One important aspect of these instruments is their close association with the society at large. Each instrument belongs to the musicians of a particular community, who in turn perform for a particular section of the society. In return, this particular section of society or the community patronizes the musician community. This kind of patronage is also hereditary and is continued from generation to generation.

In India, bowing instruments have a very rich and old tradition. Various types of bowed instruments are found here in classical as well as in folk traditions. There are many bowed instruments and more than ten types of Sarangis played among various tribes and musician castes in Rajasthan, and amongst these many are quite developed. Considering the deep rooted rich traditions of these various bowed instruments, scholars attribute the origin of bowed instruments to the north-western region of Indian subcontinent, spreading through the desert area and up till Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Kamaicha [slide1] is one of the most developed bowing instruments of Rajasthan, presently prevalent in the western region, predominantly in three districts i.e. Jodhpur, Barmer and Jaisalmer. It is also found in Sindh and Pakistan. Kamaicha, as the name itself suggests, is an instrument played with a 'Kaman', means

the bow.[slide2] There is an instrument named Kamanche, prevalent in Central Asian Countries, which is a spike fiddle. Kamanche of Egypt and Sindh is also supposed to be the bowed ones. Curt Sachs describes Kamanga-a-guz, Kamanga-farh of Egypt and Kamanga-a-guz of Turkistan and Kashmir. All of these are referred as spike fiddles. In Kashmir now-a-days, this instrument is also called Saz-e-Kashmir. Curt Sachs also discusses a kind of Rabab with a quadrilateral frame, called Rabab-al-maganni, or a singer's fiddle. (Pg. 255) alongwith Kamanche.

Sarmaya-I-Ishrat written in 1875 in Delhi, in which writer Sadique Ali Khan speaks about an instrument, calling it Kamanche.[slide3] He also says that the instrument is especially popular in the



Figure 3

various Sarangis in his book 'The Voice of the Sarangi', places Kamaicha in the category of Sarinda. On page 67 Joep Bor again refers to a type of bowed instrument described in 'Sangitanarayan' of mid 18th century, the description of which somehow matches very much with the present day Rajasthani Kamaicha. Later he concludes that the instrument described is more like a Chikara. He further says that Chikara is related to the Rabab. He also discusses the 'Collar' which is prominent in Rabab (and also in Kamaicha). As an evidence, Joep Bor gives a photograph of a painting of Bundi style, which again resembles the present day Rajasthani Kamaicha.[slide 4]



Figure 4

Surprisingly Komal Kothari, the renowned folklorist and an authority on Rajasthan, also keeps the Rajasthani Kamaicha in the category of a Chikara and suggests that the prototypes of this instrument can be found in Central Asian Countries. Rajasthani Kamaicha, although called a folk instrument of Rajasthan, is not found all over the Rajasthan and is not played by everybody. In fact it is restricted to western region of Rajasthan in four districts i.e. Barmer, Jallor, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer and played only by the Manganiyar community. The name of the community is derived from the term 'mangna' means 'to beg'. The one who begs is called Manganiyar, but slowly it became the name of a community. Manganiyars are a professional musician community who earn their livelihood by singing and playing. These musicians are attached to Rajput, Mahajan, Khatri, Singara, Kumhar, Prajapat, Suthar, Sami, Darji, Khavas etc. castes who are their patrons. The patrons are mostly Hindu but Manganiyars are Sunni Muslims. The system works like this that each Manganiyar family has 4 to 5 families of patrons. These patron families take care of the well being of these musicians' families and in return these musicians sing and play at all the festivals and family functions at their patron's place. At the time of a marriage or a child birth or any other family gathering, these musicians have to be present, the duration of these festivities can be some times for days and weeks.

district of Punjab. The instrument Sadique Ali describes and also gives a picture of the same is more like a Dilruba, having a body of Sarangi and a neck of a sitar. It has Tarab strings too. The only difference is that it is larger than a Dilruba. According to Allyn Miner some other writers confused Kamancha or Kamanche with Taus as well, which also has combined features of Sitar and Sarangi. According to Allyn Miner, Kamancha or Kamanche is the name of a Persian bowed instrument of the spike fiddle category, which is also called 'Ghichaks' and was present in Mughal India

in medieval era. Joep Bor in his description of



The main playing instrument of Manganiyars is Kamaicha. Though

there is no written evidence of the history of the community playing the instrument, but in oral tradition, they link their genealogy with the time of Akbar and Tansen. This means that the instrument is with them for more than five hundred years. According to Komal Kothari, the instrument has not much changed for last over hundred years and earlier also it was not much changed. It may be presumed that the instrument is almost the same as it was about 500 years ago.

Kamaicha of Western Rajasthan is a non fretted bowed instrument.[slide5] The resonator, the finger board and the peg box scooped out from a single log of wood. The wood preferred is of mango tree. Unlike other bowed instruments and Sarangis, the scooping of the whole body is done from the upper side. The round shaped shallow resonator is covered with

goat skin whereas the narrow, almost rectangular neck (finger

Figure 5

board) is covered with a thin plate of wood. The open peg box is round and decorated. The instrument has three main playing gut strings and eight to eleven steel drone strings (also called Jhare-Ke-Taar) placed on the same height on a long, standing thin bridge of about four and a half inch long. It is played with a bow made of Sheesham wood and is fitted with a bunch of horse hair. Sometimes there is a set of four sympathetic strings, placed under the main playing strings.

The most unique feature of the folk string instruments of Rajasthan i.e. Kamaicha and Sarangi is that most of the times these instruments are played by the singer himself, who happens to be the main musician as well. While a Kamaicha player is singing and accompanying himself, he provides two types of accompaniment during his performance: First, he is singing and playing and second, while he is not singing but only playing. The role of string instruments is first to provide the drone, the basic note and secondly to provide long rest periods to the singer. Therefore when the artist is singing he only provides drone to himself whereas the non singing passages are longer, brilliant and colourful.

Bowing & playing techniques of Kamaicha [slide6] are quite different from the Sindhi Sarangi and Ravanhatta, the other two major string instruments of Rajasthan, because of the structure of the

KAMAICHA

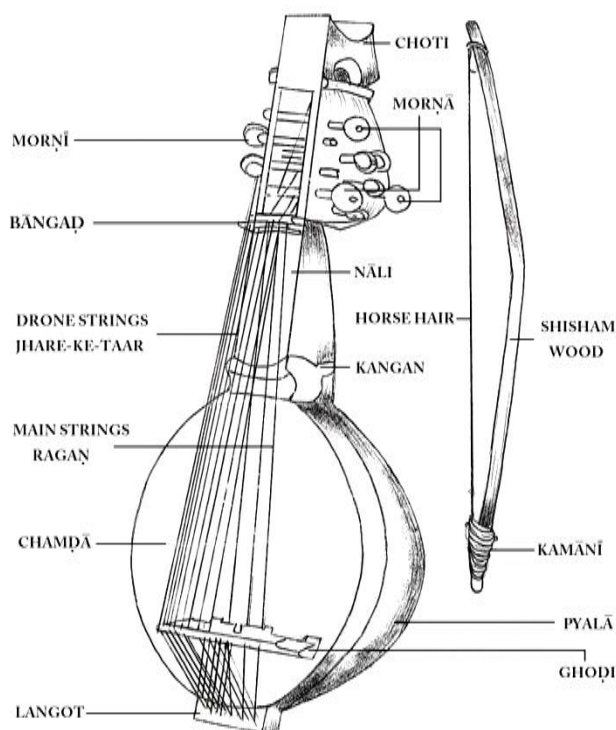


Figure 6

instrument. Although the left hand finger techniques have some similarities to Sindhi Sarangi, the main difference lies in the bowing. Kamaicha has a roundish resonator and there is hardly any space for dipping the bow, whereas Sindhi Sarangi and Gujaratan Sarangi have a waist to facilitate the player to dip his bow. Another characteristic feature of Kamaicha is that the instrument has eight or even more drone strings which rest on the main bridge on the same height as the main strings do. Therefore the bow touches all the strings each time while going and coming. This action gives Kamaicha a bigger volume than the other bowing instruments. The bow of Kamaicha is long a little semi circular and held in a very different manner to give more emphasis on rhythm. Because of its round and heavy body the tonal quality of Kamaicha is deep and the sound it emits is resonating.

One more important point is that in the making of Kamaicha two round shaped wooden sticks of approximately of 2/3 inch thick, are fitted inside the resonator called 'Hiraniya'[slide7] before putting the parchment. These are more or less like bracings and are put to strengthen the resonator, but must be having some tonal value also.

The thickness of the main playing strings is as follows: main strings made of guts of goat. Traditionally first string is of 13 twines, second string is again of 13 twines and third string is of 11 twines. Steel strings are of 28 gauges. Now-a-days gut strings are also made of 20, 17 and 14 twines respectively.

1st string is tuned to lower Sa

2nd string is tuned to lower Pa

3rd string is tuned to middle Sa

The drone strings or Jhare-Ke-Taar which vary in number between 8 to 11 are tuned to Dha Ni Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa.

As discussed earlier, the instrument is called 'folk' but the music played on it is quite sophisticated.

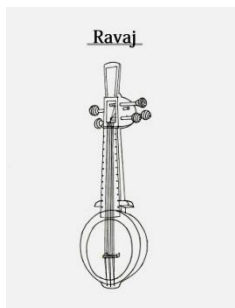


Figure 8

According to late Padmabhushan Shri Komal Kothari, Manganiyar musician present a genealogy of twenty one generations which almost goes to the time of legendary musician Tansen, which means that the instrument and its tradition is well established for last more than 500 years or so."

In a way it seems true, because looking at the tradition of Manganiyar community and their

rich repertoire, their style of singing and technique of playing all show very strong signs of a long and well developed musical tradition. If we study deeply we would also find that they have their own rules and regulations and a full fledged training system. The discipline amongst the musicians and the regard they have for their senior musicians, reminds one of the ages old Gharana system of Khayal genre of Hindustani music. There is quite a similarity between Dhrupad Rabab and Kamaicha and one wonders whether there is any connection between these two. There is another instrument called 'Ravaj',[slide8] similar to Rabab, which was also prevalent in Rajasthan



Figure 7

till the middle of the 20th Century.[slide9] It was a plucked instrument and was attached to a folk theatre called 'Rammat'.

Child birth, wedding and death are main life cycle events when these musicians perform at the patron's house. Festival, like Holi, Diwali and other important events in the patron's family also are the occasions to bring these musicians at patron's house. Patrons have different ways of paying for their services. Important and compulsory gifts are offered for different ceremonies, reward for good rendering is also given. Patrons also share the expenses of any wedding or death in the family of musicians. Patrons also share their pastoral and agricultural incomes with these musicians on yearly basis. Thus the musicians do not have to find any other means of livelihood. The system also nourished very strong emotional ties between the musicians and the patrons, and latter strictly guarded the tradition of these musicians, demanding the purity and authenticity of the presentations. Patrons also used to dissuade them to perform any where else. To please their patrons these musicians also were very careful to maintain an authenticity in their music and protect their music from the influence of other musical traditions. Even communities living together in the same village did not exchange musical ideas.

The contents of Manganiyars songs are mostly of life cycle ceremonies. Child birth and marriage are two main subjects of many compositions. However there are many types of ceremonies which go on for long periods, thus many aspects of human life are also dealt in their songs. Festival songs, beliefs in God and Goddesses, seasons of the year, etc. provide other subject matters to their songs. Long epics are also rendered by these musicians like Sasi-Punnu, Dhola-Mar, Mumal-Mahendra etc.

The music of Manganiyar is Raga based, which brings them near to the tradition of classical music of North India. However the Raga singing in folk music is not as strict as in classical music tradition. There are common names of Ragas between these two but musically are dealt quite differently. Some of the Raga names of Manganiyars are – Sorathi, Khammachi, Soob, Todi, Sarang, Sameri, Bhairavi, Kalyan, Asa, Maru, Veshvas etc. Manganiyars sing different songs in these Ragas having the themes of Byaha, Bannara, Riyan, Mehafil, Kalali, Halariya, Savan and Bhajan.

Kamaicha is an advanced instrument. Although mainly used as an accompaniment for vocal support, still almost all the musical nuances which could be played on any sophisticated instrument, can also be played on the Kamaicha. It has got lower and upper octaves, can accompany all the vocal idioms and has the potential to be established as an independent instrument, like a solo instrument, because it has got the element of improvisation into it.

As discussed earlier Kamaicha accompaniment is of three kinds. When a person is singing and also playing the instrument, he uses the instrument only as an aid or as a help to his vocal rendition. It is not necessary that he would repeat the full melody on the instrument. What musical patterns he would play with the rhythm, or do not make any use of rhythmic aspect, all these things would make different musical patterns. The second kind of accompaniment is also provided by the singer to himself but that is when he is not singing but only playing. At this time he can explore much leisurely and also can fill the gaps with rich musical motifs and patterns. The third kind of accompaniment is when one man is singing and another is accompanying. At this time the vocal is followed by the instrument, which has a lag of a fraction of second. A good accompanist may enhance the concert by suggesting new melodic patterns and also can inspire the main artist with new ideas. Whereas a bad accompaniment can disturb the vocalist and can also spoil his mood. Accompaniment is always done for filling the silence periods, that is when the vocalist is not singing. Accompanist may repeat the whole melodic form, or can play some new consistent melodic structures and patterns. This kind of accompaniment is called 'Ang-Bharna'.

A very strong forte of Marganiyars is the rhythm. The bow and the bowing of Kamaicha are such that it supports in making varied rhythmic patterns. Thus sometimes the accompaniment is more of creating rhythmic patterns than the melodic. This would make a different situation. In this, the accompanist would only keep the rhythm of the 'Chhanda' of the song and bowing pattern would suggest the 'bols' or the lyrics of the song.

Solo playing of Kamaicha is not very developed yet. Whatever is sung is played, which means these artists do not have any separate repertoire for the instrument. Therefore while playing a solo item they follow the order of vocal rendition. In vocal music Dohas are presented in the beginning, thus while playing solo item as well, they also play Doha at first. These Dohas are sung without any rhythm and in a slow tempo. Since vocalists have to adhere to the words while singing, instrumentalists have an advantage because they do not have words and thus they have plenty of space for improvisation here and hence, this part of playing can easily acquire a style of Alapchari. Some senior Kamaicha players like Sakar Khan, Kevat, Chanan etc. make use of this situation and could improvise for quite some time. After playing Dohas for a while, the song starts. Along with this the Dholak, the rhythmic instrument also joins them. This is again a new situation and a talented musician can take lots of advantage of this. He can make melodic rhythmic patterns without any repetition of presentation for some time. After the presentation of the song the 'Lehera' starts. Lehera is somewhat like Paltas and if played in a fast tempo it gives an impression of Tana, although these are not Tanas. At this point the song disappears and fast tempo melodic exchange takes place between the artists. The Dholak player provides various rhythmic patterns. Many a times a solo Kamaicha playing is also accompanied by another two very strong rhythmic instruments of Manganiyars Community: Khadtaal and Morchang. These two instruments provide various Tala patterns and also emit various kinds of sound modulations. The fast tempo and the space given to them by the main artists provide them ample opportunity to show their virtuosity. This crescendo can be understood as a Laggi or a Tanni Avartana, making a crescendo in the end of the performance. However, this kind of solo Kamaicha playing can only go up to 8 to 10 minutes and not more. The 'Layakari' or the 'Bhadat' is not yet developed in their system.

One more important point is to be mentioned here about the accompaniment they provide to their vocal music. This differs from our Hindustani accompaniment system, in the sense that the accompaniment these musicians provide is not after the vocal but sometimes parallel to vocal. While the vocalist is singing, Kamaicha also keeps playing in the upper or lower octaves providing various wave pattern of notes, making 'Samvad' with the main melodic line of the singer, similar to the orchestra playing in film songs. Many a times, the accompanists start with the main singer, making different musical patterns and come back to the main melodic line with the singer, in the end.

Although their terminology is very limited still they have some words to denote a few techniques like: for bowing they use a term 'Gaji', for left hand technique they have a term 'Meendi.' For bridge and upper nut they have terms Ghodi and Bangad. These musicians do not have names of the seven swaras of the scale. They have only four names: Dadar for Shadj, Agore for Pancham, Dyodha for Madhyam and Adhak for Rishabh. While tuning their instrument they first tune the basic note Dadar i.e. Shadj, then tune the other strings in relation to this string like first string from Dadar, second string from Dadar, third string from Dadar. After then the first string from Agore (Pancham), second string from Agore and so on. They also tune the flat and sharp notes in this manner. They play and sing in all the three octaves and use all the twelve notes in every octave. They identify the sound although they cannot name it. These musicians do not have terms like Mandra and Taar, instead

they use terms Aadi and Khadi means horizontal and vertical. Their music can only be understood in these concepts of horizontal and vertical.



All the musicians, singers, players and even the Dholak players also are familiar with the song and its rendering. While playing, the accompanists also sing along with the main singer/singers, like Qawwali presentations.

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The music of Marganiyars is brilliantly embedded with rhythmic movements. Various rhythmic patterns can be found in their music which comprise mainly of permutations and combinations of three, four and seven beats. These musicians have their own Tala system and its rules. But the Tala of 4 or 8 beats can have

various kinds of fractions or sections (Vibhag) like 2+2+2+2 or 2+2+4 or 4+4 etc. seven Matra Tala can have fractions of 3+2+2 or 3+4 or 4+3 or even 2+2+3 etc. The Bols can also vary. For example – Keherva or a 8 beat Tala can have various Bols like :-

धि- -ता धि- -ता क त्रिक धिन ता Or धिन धिन ध ता तिन ता ध ता

7 beats Bols can vary as follows :-

धि धि ध धिन त्रिक ता ता

धिन ध त्रिक धिन धिन ध त्रिक

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