

## CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY OF PAKISTAN

### MANGANHAAR COMMUNITY

#### WHAT MAKES MANGANHAAR A UNIQUE COMMUNITY AMONG PAKISTANI CITIZENS ?

Mangnahaar is an ethnic community, *zaat*, which traditionally had been assigned the task of carrying on the musical traditions for the area. They are Muslims living in Sindh and are spread across the border in Rajasthan in India. They are known for their talent in singing and have inherited a repertoire of folk songs, mostly in their own language, Marwari but also in Sindhi and Gujrati.

There are several theories explaining their name and their origins, but most common in our country is that *mangan* means to beg and *haar* means the one that does that task. The name indicates the humility and spirit of sharing their talent like mystical faqirs and jogies. Manganhaar were never known to literally beg but had a proper system for providing their musical services through a complex system of patronage and collective community support.

In Pakistan Manganhaar communities live mostly in Sindh but also in southern Punjab. They are stretched over the two deserts, Cholistan and Thar. The areas with more concentrations are Thatha, Badin, Mirpurkhas, Umer kot, Mithi, Sanghar, Nawab Shah, Sukkur, Ghotki, Tando Mohammad Khan, Tando Allayaar, Hyderabad and Karachi . Their lives are reflective of vulnerabilities of the desert communities coupled with lack of recognition of their identity and value.

Their community has its own sub ethnic groups like Daga, later, Kareth, Sanjaat, Dedhro, Bed etc. However in past they also associated very closely with the ethnicity of their patrons. Some, getting tired of the low social status given to Manganhaar, moved away from music, took the ethnicity of their patrons and started calling themselves as Samma, Mirani or Jatoi.

In their traditional dress they look like peacocks wearing colourful turbans and vests. Women wear colourful *ghagras* and *choli* with white bracelets all over their arms. Due to the pressures of the mainstream, gradually, they are trying to blend in and therefore, wearing whatever the mainstream Sindhi society wears. At times they speak more Sindhi than Marwari and try to change their ethnicity in their desire to be like everyone else. However, at heart they love music and their language which is very rich in poetry.

Many of the Manganhaar community members live in poverty but some have joined universities and are moving out of Sindh in search of employment and other opportunities.

They carry with themselves a talent and a heritage that they can still associate with and be proud of.

### WHY SHOULD WE LEARN ABOUT MANGANHAAR?

We Pakistanis are a diverse community with different ethnicities, linguistic groups, traditions, music and sub cultures. We need to acknowledge our diversity which is our strength and needs to be celebrated. Manganhaar are a talented community with unique traditions that they inherit. All Pakistanis need to know them, recognize their uniqueness appreciate their music and proudly propagate it as Pakistani music.

Our young generation will only learn about our diversity if they are exposed to this information about various communities of Pakistan. It is the responsibility of the parents as well as the state institutions to let our younger ones know of various sub cultures of Pakistan, our languages and the variety in our folk music. Our young generation needs to acknowledge it, own it as theirs and be proud of it. While the young generation of Manganhaar community also needs to know that they are one of the most precious treasures of this country and regardless of what field of study they pursue and what profession they decide to take they should carry the pride of being associated with the Manganhaar community.

### WHAT WAS THE TRADITIONAL ROLE ASSIGNED TO MANGANHAAR?

The phenomenon of stratification of the society in South Asia in the form of castes and sub castes is well known. One component of this system was creation of occupational castes that the nobility created for their convenience. The cobblers, gardeners, barbers, musicians etc were made into sub castes to ensure quality services, where the skills are passed on from generation to generation. A whole group of sub castes which were associated with providing services of music and other forms of entertainment were also created. The names differed from area to area and with their specific functions, but all of them with their fellow castes related to other occupations were couched in the lowest strata of the hierarchy. Brahmins taking the upper crust, *Kashatria* included the ruling elite and *Vishnu* basically covered the business men, taking care of the economy. The service providers of all sorts were given the lowest tier.

The caste system crumbled down with the change of religion among the communities, from Hinduism to Islam but the terms and to a certain extent the stigma associated with the “lower castes” survived. In the current scenario of Pakistan, we all are bound by the constitution to be equal citizens and such castes and sub castes are not recognized in our constitution in relation to the status of citizens. These labels like Manganhaar are more closely associated with the sub cultures that a community had developed over the years. Some of these communities like gardeners have long left their traditional professions and have integrated with others after getting education. However they maintain the label and the pride for the sense of belonging to

their collective community. They follow the marital patterns of only marrying their children in their own group or related sub groups. They also use the loyalty to that specific ethnic group when in trouble or when mobilizing for elections to get votes. In addition to that there might be some cultural features related to rites of passage or ceremonial foods, etc they might retain in their communities.

Communities like Manganhaar have retained more of their cultural traditions and therefore their name is not just a label. They have actually retained the musical traditions and carried them over from generation to generation. Though their system of patronage has dissipated and the economic support for them to continue with their profession is not so sound, they have still retained their talent.

Traditionally, Manganhaar were responsible for the musical entertainment for important social occasions like weddings, religious ceremonies, celebrations, birth rituals etc. Manganhaar basically lived as small groups with their patrons. Their patrons were from other ethnicities. In past mostly Hindus but later also Muslims. The next generations of their small group would get attached to the next generation of their patrons, thus their lives were almost like a sub set attached to the lives of their patrons. This was also a part of their identities as they were introduced as Manganhaar of such and such patrons. These patrons were called Raj. In Rajasthan the tradition was the same but the patrons were called *jajman*. At times a family would send one or more of the younger Manganhaar with the dowry of their daughter so that they would serve her in the family of the in-laws.

The main role of the Manganhaar group was to sing for the patrons at their childbirth ceremonies – birth celebrations, naming, and circumcision (in case of Muslim patrons) – Wedding ceremonies – at all rituals, with wedding procession, departure or reception bride and bride groom, Religious celebrations – Hindu festivals and worship ceremonies (in case of Hindu patrons) festivals and shrines *urs* (in case of Muslim patrons), and any other celebrations – welcoming special guests, entertaining the family etc..

For this they had a set pattern of payments. These payments were not like modern day pragmatic transactions but were wrapped up in rituals and traditions themselves. In Sindh the economic exchange with all such occupational sub castes is referred to as *aahat*. The most commonly known is called *Warsand*, which is the agricultural share given to the service providers by the landed patron. Mangahhaars of a particular patron would thus get an annual share of grains from their crop. Each family of the patron's larger family contributes and separately gives a share from their crop directly to the Manganhaar group which they collect by going door to door.

In addition they have a) customary cash payments which are tied to certain occasions. Customary payment is consider their right for being at different occasions. For example **Ghor**, money showered on the bride or the groom when **hina** is put on their hands, or when they are dressed up for the occasion or when the groom enters the brides house etc. Only Manganhaar of that patron family has the right over that money. Similarly there is a set payment for doing specific ritualistic tasks called **Laag**. For example, when gifts are sent by the groom's family to the bride's family the Manganhaar who accompanies the gifts and plays at the occasion is given a payment as lag by the groom's family. When the groom's procession is received by the relatives of the bride, the sisters get some gifts and money from the groom. The Manganhaars of the bride's side also get a *laag* from the groom's family at the occasion. There are numerous such occasions where the lag is determined by the tradition and is paid more like the right of Manganhaar rather than a payment.

When Manganhaar of a patron family took the wedding invitations to other families they received a payment called *Neend* from those families. The patron also gave him cash, clothes and a turban for providing that service.

Rewards at various occasions were also a part of compensating them for their services. These come in the form of clothes, a goat or some gold ornament.

In addition to playing the music Manganhaar in their traditional role were assigned other tasks also. One that is mentioned above was taking the invitation to the relatives of the patrons for a wedding ceremony. Manganhaar were also responsible for mediating a marriage agreement between two parties. They were the ones to take the message of one party to the other, especially for the Hindu patron families.

They were also considered keepers of the folk poetry, where they had memorized folk tales, poetry for the praise of their patron's family and that for praising the heroes of the area.

Manganhaar were also the keepers of the genealogy of families. They recited the names of the dead ancestors in a musical form to remind the family of their lineage. All this was done orally without any written record.

### WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE MUSICAL HERITAGE OF MANGANHAAR?

The singing style separates Manganhaar from all other types of folk singers. They carry in their voice and style of singing the vastness of the desert and the pain of their hardships. They have memorized an amazing repertoire of Marwari folksongs. Nothing is written, neither the compositions nor the lyrics. It all is transferred from generation to generation.

The types of songs they sang in their traditional role, consists of three categories:

- a) Folk songs, which include songs for all kinds of celebrations for the weddings, festivals and ceremonies. It also included folk songs of separation, pain and love, which reflected their emotions in everyday life.
- b) Story telling. This category included long epics sung in praise of heroes or to describe historical or cultural events and at times tales of love.
- c) Devotional songs. This included the poetry of the mystics sung in their own unique style, mostly at shrines, *darga*.

Among the musical instruments *Khamacha* is the most indigenous to this group. This is a bow instrument with a big circular resonator. It has 10 – 17 thinner strings and three thick strings made of ----- . The bow is made of tail hair of a horse???? In Pakistan very few *Khamacha* players are left, however, there are no *Khamacha* makers.

For percussion they mostly use *Dholak* and *Dhol*. *Chapriyoon*, two pieces of wood, are also skillfully used for rhythm.

Other instruments played at times include: Sarangi, table and yaktarra. Benjo and harmonium, though not indigenous to the area have found their way into the folk music and are played by them also.

The mainstream society's values of conservatism and gender biases have influenced them. Their women used to be an important part of this tradition are now pushed inside the homes. Very few families still continue with the tradition of women performing in public and at celebrations, but most of Manganhaar families have only focused on their boys to carry on the tradition.

#### WHAT ARE THE CURRENT CHANGES IN THEIR TRADITIONS?

After the partition of India and Pakistan the strict tradition of Manganhaar to live and serve their patron family somewhat broke down. Many of the Hindu families who were their patrons moved to India and many of those who stayed back lost their riches. Some of the Muslim patrons remained intact, however, the general economic patterns also influenced their relationship with these families.

Gradually the number of Manganhaar who lived on providing music services without the patrons to the community collectively increased and those who were strictly attached to patron families decreased. They retained their role of providing music at shrines, weddings and other ceremonies was certainly retained in general for a long time.

In our mainstream society today music does not have the place it should have had. The wave of conservatism and fundamentalism has pushed us in a situation where people do want to listen to music in their cars and on television but do not recognize it as an essential and well respected aspect of life. The trends of disowning our own things and adopting and copying aspects from other culture as superior has also damaged the process of development of our own traditions of creative expressions. Even today when we go to the music shops in our urban centers we would find **Bollywood** music more than the mystical or folk poetry of Pakistan.

The Manganhaar community faced several stigmas; one of being associated with Hindu patrons pre partition, second, to be closely associated with music and third, to come from a lower strata of sub castes. The new version of Islam that was introduced by Zia ul Haq stigmatized all creative expressions including all performing arts, especially for women. From a more dogmatic religious minority these values started catching roots in the mainstream urban people. Professionals who sang became more and more stigmatized.

The younger generation tried to move away from music. The awareness of their unique folk music was so little that people invited them to Sindh popular songs only. The younger talent of this community focused on the **ghazals** and film songs and did away with the own repertoire. Many left this field and joined other professions. For any ethnic group changing their occupation is not a problem as it is quite logical that the younger community members would pursue education and move ahead in life in different fields. But the problematic part was being ashamed of their label. A community with such rich tradition was hiding from others their association with this community.

The saddest part was that due to the stigma many families and young ones changed their ethnic group. They felt ashamed of admitting that they were Manganhaar. It was unfortunate that due to ignorance of our people and misconceptions about musical traditions the real talent of Manganhaar community and the precious treasures that they were hanging on to were not recognized.

Manganhaar community never got the kind of support and nurturance that their counter parts got in India. Today the langas and Manganhaars of Rajasthan are performing world over while Indians take pride in their unique folk heritage of Rajasthan. The world knows India and many other countries through their cultural performances while Pakistan's international image is much worse than what the reality is.

### **EFFORTS TO REVIVE THEIR UNIQUE FOLK MUSIC TRADITIONS**

Seven years ago, a group of cultural personalities who were a part of the Folklore Society of Pakistan decided to facilitate the revival of Manganhaar community's folk music. After researching such communities, the situation in the country in relation to folk music and the

specific situation in Sindh they felt that the traditional method of passing on the musical heritage from one generation to the other needs to be strengthened. It was also decided that the taste of the public needs to be developed for such folk music to create a market and thus an incentive for this community to continue their niche in the society for such music.

Two baithaks of *ustads* were selected to form the hub of teaching the young Manghanaar their own traditional craft. One baithaks was of *ustad* Mohammad Shafi in Umer kot and the other was of *ustad* Rasul Bukhsh Abro in Rohri. The *ustads* were asked to focus on teaching younger members of the Manghanaar community *Marwari* songs and compositions that had been a part of their indigenous heritage.

The Folklore Society of Pakistan promised them that once their students were somewhat prepared the Society would select the best ones and present them to the mainstream society in a big festival and competition organized in Karachi. The students would competed each other and the best ones will get awards. The Society would ensure presence of opinion makers and good media coverage so that these young artists can be promoted nationwide.

This revival movement of Manghanaar started with a big festival in 2002 where        students of the two baithaks were presented. In addition one part of the program was a music festival of their celebrated artists. The first program was a breakthrough. Young artists mesmerized the audience in the magical context that was created by the Society.

Soon the annual Manghanaar Music Festival became a well established tradition in Karachi. Media friends recognized it as something that they felt fully in partnership with and propagated on their television channels. It became a popular event not only among the elite of Karachi but also the *Marwari* speaking communities who would travel from all over Sindh to attend the program in Karachi.

The Baithaks of not just the two *ustads* but many more started filling up. Young Manghanaars viewed their own traditions with a renewed respect and wanted to learn from their elders. The elders found this renewed respect from their young ones very charming as they geared up to remember more and more songs for them.

The Society did a professional recording of this Festival and released a set of two DVDs in the market every year. In addition several audio albums were produced of their unique music and distributed through an elite national production house, Radio City, as well as a mainstream distribution company in Sindh, Thar Production House. The intention behind these productions was to popularize the Manghanaar folk music where mainstream society would start appreciating it and would expose their younger generation to it and secondly to create a market for these singers to actually use their art for their livelihood.

A whole cadre of singers and musicians is now being prepared in several of these *baithak*. They are not only properly being trained in their own indigenous singing but are also confident and proud members of Manganhaar community. They have started getting invitations to perform from other platforms, not only in Pakistan but also from India. Their DVDs and audio albums have served the purpose of promoting their singing well.

In the last two years the Society with the help of European Union also arranged for socio political training sessions in these *baithak* just so that they understand the political aspects of the social issues they face and are able to deal with those issue within themselves, through their interaction with policy makers and their links with media. This has started to show results. When talking to media the artists not only talk about their poverty but state their desire to acknowledge their community with respect and get the rights which every citizen of Pakistan is entitled to.

### WHAT COULD BE THE FUTURE DIRECTION?

Quoting a well respected musicologist of Pakistan, S. M. Shahid who after seeing the Festival where young children between ages 8 to 15 performed with full confidence in front of the audience said, “ The feeling I am having is what those digging for oil must have had when they finally found it or those looking for treasures in caves after years of excavation would have had on the day they actually found it. I feel that I have found a gold mine”

Manganhaar community is free to pursue whatever profession they want and pursue any field of education but ignoring the talent they have and the potential for setting precedence in music for the young generation would be a big loss.

Those in Pakistan who love music and think that any normal societies cannot live or develop without creative expression should join hands and promote such traditions. The young ones from this community should be seen as role models for young children of other communities and thus music should be popularized in its folk, classical and many other forms indigenous to our area. At the same time excellence should also be sought from among these to have a cadre of trained and high quality singers. Care needs to be taken that the musical traditions are supported and not a few singers, therefore a broad based movement encouraging the younger generation to develop interest in listening to and practicing music should be a priority.

Perhaps that is what will take our nation away from where we have reached in terms of everyday violence and brutalities.