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# Gandharva<sup>1</sup> Music and Globalization

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, the paper tries to explore the globalization of music and its impact on folk traditional practices of Gandharva over a period of time. This study is aim to show how the music and performing arts of the Gandharva have been influenced by media, technology, education and transnational relations. Traditional anthropological methods have been unable to present the lived experiences of the people; therefore, we need to switch our study from a single-site ethnography method for multi-sited ethnography to make this study more reflexive. I have chosen migration, fantasy, imagined community, deterritorialization and fluidity of Gandharva culture as the analytical categories to see their culture within the global system.

**Keywords:** Music, globalization, folk songs, fantasy, fluidity, transnational, media, migration and Sarangi.

## INTRODUCTION

Two years ago the sweet melody of sarangi<sup>2</sup> was played in the courtyard near my room in Kirtipur. I immediately rushed out of my room to hear the music of Krishna Bahadur Gandharva. His fine tune compelled me to recall my fieldwork days in Pokhara in 2006. Krishna entertained me through his fascinating musical rhythm with the song of Ramayan and hasaule—laughing song. He told me, I am wandering different streets of Kathmandu playing sarangi, collecting money for his everyday existence and treatment of his wife who was recently admitted to a public hospital in Kathmandu. The location and people are different than his previous place of performing. Krishna was neither working for the media house, nor

for the continuing traditional *jajmani*<sup>3</sup> system. He had different motives, intention and dreams of living in a cosmopolitan city like Kathmandu. Within the half hour I spent with Krishna, I saw different things—music, migration, media, translocalization, imagination and fantasy—in his embeddedness with global culture. Krishna appeared to hold different views in terms of consumerism, songs and music.

This study traces the ethnographic note of Gandharva as wandering bard. In the Year 2062 v.s., I had done ethnographic fieldwork<sup>4</sup> at a Gandharva community in Pokhara with a cross disciplinary team Linguist, Folklorist, Sociologist and myself, an Anthropologist from the Nepali Folklore Society. I was assigned to collect the

1. *Gaine* or Gandharva (minstrel) an untouchable caste (*paani nacalnya choichito halnu neparne*) in Hindu categories (Hofer; 2005: 9). They have different *thar*-clans such as Adhikari, Budhathoki, Kayasta, Kalo Gopal, Kala Kausik, Kalo Paudel, Sursamal, Hunchin Rana, Chulaune, Chhatikora, Mijar, Gayak and Gaine. Most of their *thar* resemble the high caste Brahmin. Mythical evidence depicted that they were the decedents of Gandharva Rishi.
2. A four metal or gut stringed fiddle, modest folk musical instrument, the *Gaine sarangi* is hollowed out of a single piece of wood (Bandhu *et. al.* 2009 and Weisethaunet 1998).
3. A small scale producer can negotiate with grain and livestock with artisans and priests through the labor practices known as *jajmani* (Fortier 1995:1). This was a kind of patron-client relation existing in South Asia through the generations, where high caste people known as *jajman* (patron) and low caste dalits are clients.

social-cultural dynamics of their life. Since then, I have been frequently visited the Gandharva at different places such as a Gandharva cultural center in Thamel, Hotels, restaurants, seminars and public buses in Pokhara and Kathmandu. Gandharva used different places and media such as restaurants, five star hotels, Radio and FM stations, political programs, music videos, cultural programs and modern electronic media to publicize their songs. This paper presents how the Gandharva culture is associated with globalization and the world system.

### Gandharva, Music and Methods

Gandharva is a ministerial musician caste. They wander village to village for begging, singing verities of folk songs in the rural setting (Weisethaunet, 1998 and Bandhu *et. al.* 2009). Their livelihood still depends on the traditional *jajmani* system through the playing of *sarangi* and *arbajoo*<sup>5</sup>. I employed multi-sited ethnography methods for my ethnographic inquiry. I tried to look at the meaning of music and its circulation within the world system in reference to global-local connections. I had recorded the circulation of music, its connections and consumption. I employed the George E. Murcus multi-sited ethnographic method, which suggests "we should move from conventional single-Ethnographic sites to multiple sites of observation, and cross cut the dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global' and the 'life world' and the 'system' (1995: 95)".

I employed unstructured interview, observation, field notes and review of the literatures, which has been published over a period of time. In more than a half decade of my observation I have seen fundamental changes in the life of the Gandharva

in terms of migration, learning the process of music, and the flow of print and electronic media.

### Theoretical Framework

Anthropology of globalization examines the migration, transnationalism, media and technology flow not only to see from a global-local perspective but also from local-global. Arjun Appadurai (1996) discusses five different escape themes such as ethno-escape, idea-escape, media-escape, finance-escape and techno-escape through which culture flows person to person and place to place and able to create imagination, fantasy, interconnection, delocalization and lived experiences. This conceptual apparatus includes such catchwords as flows, networks, hybrids, diasporas, cosmopolitanism, connectivity, speed, time-space compression, uncertainty and contingency (Ampuja, 2010:9). The growth of media such as print and audio-visual media foster migration, transmit knowledge, carry technology and transmit ideas from one territory to another territory. The art, culture and practices could not exist in a fixed location that has been deterritorialized through migration, the flow of technology, media and the Diaspora. Unbounded transnational flows occur (whether of labor migrants, refugees, or tourists). Globalized markets, media (electronic, television), and other public cultural forms moving across national borders and problematizing once salient distinctions between regions and centers-peripheries-all of this appears to demand new scholarly concepts, sites, and methods (Lederman 1998: 247). Based on these reviews we can argue that the process of globalization has connections with internationalization, migration, transnationalism and the homogenization of

4. Our folklore study team spent three months in Batulechaur, Pokhara, popular as a tourist destination and the Gandharva. We also carried out research in Lekhnath, Arghau, Gagangunda of Kanski Districts and Manapang of Tanahun Districts. Since conducting my field work, I observed them in various places of Kathmandu and spent several hours for informal dialogue.
5. This is one of the ancestral and religious musical instruments, which has also four strings as the *sarangi*. *Arbajo* is also known as a male musical instrument and is considered as their original instrument and referred to as the *guru*- teacher of the *sarangi* (Bandhu 2009 *et. al.* and Weisethaunet, 1998).

the nation-state. I try to link the Gandharvas' culture to the cosmopolitan culture by ways of imagination, fantasy and migration.

### Music, Media and De-territorialization

When I searched YouTube on the internet more than 100 files had been uploaded under the title *Gaine*, which contains a variety of songs. These files contained recordings from various places i.e. homes, hotels, restaurants, theaters, concert programs, schools, and recording studios. Their music simultaneously diffuses to other caste groups, like Brahmin, Chhetri and other non-Hindu categories of people and foreigners. Yet, *sarangi* has become more commercialized, likely to be used by any person or in any place and come out beyond the boundary of untouchability. The gender-based notion of *sarangi* has also changed; females have adopted the music and broken the traditional beliefs and practices. Tiki Maya Gandharva was the first women to break the traditional belief associated with the *sarangi*. She recalls her bygone day's story of her life as:

I was born in Bojpur and migrated to Jhapa along with my parents in my early age. I did not get the opportunity to join in school. It is my misfortune. I learnt *sarangi* when I was five years. I broke the traditional notion concerned with *sarangi* that women should not play *sarangi*. I also worked at Kharsang Radio in India and received handsome remuneration, but I was not much interested to work in another country and soon returned back to Nepal. Then, I began to work in Radio Nepal. I sang the song *Dai Sainlo* with Bam Bahadur Karki and played the *sarangi* in the song of my husband Bal Bahadur, Shambhu Rai and Lok Bahadur Chhetri.

Throughout the seven years of my observation, I have found fundamental changes in Gandharva traditional practices. Gandharva ladies are learning *sarangi* at schools and music centers. Most popular schools like St. Mary's and Galaxy teach the *sarangi* as a major instrument in their music courses. Gandharva musician Purna Nepali

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himself taught *sarangi* to students. Galaxy school provided full scholarships to twenty Gandharva girls who came from different districts of western Nepal. Yet, girls are able to learn *sarangi* at Batulechaur under the instruction of Dhan Bahadur Gandharva, they all are school students under the age of fourteen.



Source: Kantipur Kopila Srawan 20, 2070 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szrHWOL7FXM>

One of the above photographs was taken from printed media and another from YouTube. This indicates that these days everyone can read, watch and see Gandharva music across the world through print and electronic media. These pictures provide three key messages; first their music has become delocalizes and deterritorialized, second, *sarangi* is not gender specific and is not concerned with the notion of purity and pollution, third, modern ethnography cannot be confined in the exotic spaces as traditional ethnographers claim.

The issue of deterritorialization of the Gandharva was widely covered by the media since the 1950s and appreciated by the western observer. Over the

last few decades, many western and non-western scholars have done fine works about their culture, particularly focusing on their music (Helffer 1969, 1977, Helffer and MacDonald 1966, Weisethaunet 1998, Parajuli 2049 v.s., Thapa 2030 v.s., and Chettri 1989), which has directly and indirectly promoted their music. *Gaine* music is popular for the international audience, particularly tourists, journalists, researchers, artists, film producers and documentary makers.

The Gandharva moved from village to village to exchange their skill of playing *sarangi* and singing folk songs like *sarumarani*, *mankoilarani*, *malashree*, *ghatana*, *karkha* and *krishna murali* to entertain the villagers. These folk cultures arrived at the position of extinction due to the influence of media, including radio, television and FM channels, print and digital media and the penetration of Hindi, English and modern Nepali songs which lie on the periphery of traditional music and songs. The flow of modern media not only creates crisis in traditional practices such as *khalo* and *bayo* but also changes the traditional patron-client relation. Dinesh Gandharva, a grandson of the famous artist Jhalak Man Gandharva told me:

Sir, we are unable to control the flow of modern songs because of modern media, our generation is interested to modernize our music and songs and commercialize the songs. The youths of my generation are attracted towards modern instruments like guitar and do not have knowledge about the significance of our traditional music. The *Gaine's* traditional folk songs are nearly in an extinct position. The younger generation is left to sing *ragas*, *nirgun*, *mangals*, *karkhas*, *krishna murali*, *dhanfe chari*, *ghatana*, *sarumarani* and *mankoilarani*.

The identity of Gandharva became transformed along with political changes. Popular folk artist and poet Dharma Raj Thapa gave a new title to the Gandharva to respect them and managed jobs for Gandharva at Nepal Academy and Radio Nepal. Since then, they have started to record

their songs; Jhalakman Gandharva recorded *dhanfe chari* and *lahureko gaatha* songs on radio Nepal, achieving massive popularity across the country in 1970s. Their culture was transformed by the expansion of radio, print and digital media, education and the market. Their folk music drew the attention of national and international scholars, folklorists, tourists, musicians, and media persons to record their traditional music, folk songs and ballads. These days Gandharva has founded new job opportunities such as employees in radio stations, music centers, schools, hotels and restaurants. Their songs and music have been internationalized by the research institutions and Universities of the world like CNRS, Columbia University, Yale University, Harvard University and Oslo.

### Music, Migration and Imagine Community

आमाले सोध्लिन्नि खै छोरा भन्निन्  
रजहै खुले भन्दिग  
बाबाले सोध्लिन्नि खै छोरा भन्लान्  
रण जत्दिछ भन्दिग

.....  
Mother might ask where is my son?  
Tell her his leave will start soon.  
Father might ask where is my son?  
Tell him he's going to win the war.  
.....

This heart beats *Lahureko gaatha* most listened song, composed and sings by the popular Gandharva artist Jhalakman Gandharva. This song was widely covered by the media since the date of its inception and its sweetness attracted many people. The Google search engine provides more than 100 files of the same song in video and audio form and more than one thousand people have downloaded files from PRBT and CRBT. This song carries the story of the Nepalese army who is on the battlefield and not only tells a story of pain, memory, poverty, nostalgia and departure from the family but also gives the migration of people. Jhalakman attracted a considerable audience; even a Norwegian scholar has done his Ph.D. dissertation based on his songs and

life history. This example proves how the media boom publicized the songs in the global market and made its culture more public.

Gandharva diffused their art of singing and music of *sarangi* in various places. They have an excellent art with which to articulate the history of national heroes through the *karkha*<sup>6</sup>, for instance, the *karkha* of Jung Bahadur, Chandra Shamsher and the adventure of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa. There is a popular saying in Gandharva community, the son of Gandharva, sage, snake and tiger could not stay in a single place (Bandhu *et. al.* 2009).

Maniram Gaine was probably the first Gandharva to come to Kathmandu with Prithivi Narayan Shah during the process of unification. Maniram had worked as surveillance during the unification. He wandered around Kirtipur in the name of entertainment and worked as an agent for the intelligence agency. After the victory over Kirtipur in 1765, he settled in Kirtipur with the Newar. The Gandharvas played the role of exchanging information, extending heroic awareness and entertaining the masses by producing laughter or cries (Bandhu *et. al.* 2009: 37). Since the migration, Maniram Gaine and his decedents have adopted Newari culture and language; however, they are unable abandon ancestral culture even 250 years later. They played a significant role as the messenger of the kings and were considered powerful resources for the nation. The song of *Nalapani yudha*-Nalapani war demonstrates their sense of patriotism and nationalism. Such patriotism and the national contributions of heroes could be found in the *karkha*.

They have never visited their ancestral land,

though they are excited to share the Gandharva culture and its origins. They organized through the ministerial band; they show their ethnic affinity in rituals, feasts, festivals and public gatherings. Izumi Morrimoto writes, "They travelled over the long route and became deeply involved in the world system; they claimed their village as their location of origin and identity on their imagined World map and narrate nostalgically about this homeland" (Morimoto, 2008: 23). Their imagination is reflected in their cultural artifacts. Benedict Anderson writes, "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each life the image of their communion" (1983: 6). The cultural artifacts, practices, emotion and sentiments bind them whether they migrated to Kathmandu or Chitwan. Kinship ties and affinities bind them. These social capitals (connections) are reproduced in religious ceremonies, rituals, contracts and gift exchange practices. The regular practice of their culture and mastery over the music and singing is based on the *habitus* in Pierre Bourdieu's notion, which is actually associated with *doxic* nature, actually aiding the competency of social performance in the Gandharva's everyday practice. Their nature is largely influenced in accordance with cultural disposition within the certain social structure. The transnational connection of Gandharva through the media, market and other means of modernity have changed their everyday life and become part of the world system.

### Life and Death with Music: A Life Story of Khim Bahadur

In Aswin 20 2062 v.s., I went as part of a folklore study team to Khim Bhadur Gandharva's house to record the short biography of his life at Simal

6. Gandharva composed different *karkhas*, praising the contribution of special power holders. The bravery of national heroes was also praised in the songs. It is also said that the state rulers were forced to sing such *karkhas* either to sustain their ruling periods or get popularity among the people. These *karkhas* are composed in the imagination, for instance, they never had seen Junga Bahadur Rana and his England tour; however they able to compose through the imagination.

Khore at Batulechaur. We heard the sweet melody of *sarangi* and the voice of Khim Bahadur while we were proceeding towards his house; that sweet melody of *sarangi* was matching with echoes of the Kali stream. The song went:

*Phool ko thunga baher aayo ganga ko pani ma*

*Kahile bheta holahai dajai yo jindagani ma*

A bunch of the flower following in the river

Oh! My beloved when will we meet within our life?

This is a popular song of Tara Devi. I asked him do you like this song? Of course, it contains love, passion and affection, which was quite different than their usual folk songs. First he heard this song through the radio. It really stimulates me to engage in this quality of work. Khim Bahadur was born in 1935. He began singing at the age of seven. When he was thirteen years old he recorded the song "*Rani shari saal dhunge man bhari bhan maya timrai chhaa man pari*". He learnt *sarangi* through the inspiration of his maternal uncle. Khim Bahadur could read and write simply. He himself composed several songs, which are not yet recorded. Khim Bahadur was honored with Suba Rajayavisek Padak in 1956. He has received several compliments from people and a medal from the first Chinese president Mao Zedong. Khim Bahadur frequently visited various parts of the country for the performing of his arts. I had also seen him at least three times in Kathmandu in the last seven years. Khim Bahadur is a celebrity in Pokhara, therefore, Pokhreli people invite him to different cultural programs including art and literary programs. He normally sings varieties of songs such as *nirgun*, *rags*, and folk songs. The notion of Dalit change, if we look at the life of Khim Bahadur Gandharva, for instance, he takes his breakfast and tea with high caste people, taking the music classes within the premise of the Binda Basini temple. Khim Bahadur has a dream to preserve the folk tradition, including art, culture and literature, and he has a fantasy of recording his songs in a music video before he

takes his last breath.

### Conclusion

One group of Gandharvas busy in the street of Thamel and the lake side area of Pokhara to play music for tourists and sell them their *sarangi* as a special souvenir from Nepal. In broken English, they invite them to visit the Gandharva art and cultural development center in Thamel. In the evening they might perform in *dohari* restaurants and hotels in Kathmandu where they earn small tips and applause. The second group is busy in the public transportation routes between Mugling-Pokhara and Narayanghat-Mugling, to collect cash amounts from passengers, and the third one is continuing traditional begging practices in the villages. Variations can be seen in their music and performances, though they sing the same songs and play similar musical instruments. Comparing two different places, Anna Stairr writes: a different space entirely from the public bus or the competition stage in front of an audience of thousands; closer to the liminal youth culture of rural, nighttime *dohori*, and indeed meant to evoke such sexualized spaces (2009: 288). The largest number of Gandharva migrated towards the urban and peri-urban areas for better opportunities and the young are dreaming of flying to the United States and Europe. Transnational relations began in 1950, when some French ethnomusicologists and anthropologists recorded the oral history and music of the Gandharva. Later the Japanese and Norwegians started to continue their study. Kathmandu is a dreamland for many people, where they have better chances to record their songs, learn music from training centers and colleges and perform their skills. Through migration, networking, the media, institutions, and excursions to and from the villages, Kathmandu has indeed become a national stage for music, a switchboard connecting different geographical and cultural areas.

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