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***Jajmani Tradition and Collective Consciousness with reference to  
Langas and Manganiyars***

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**Abstract**

Oral traditions encapsulate the shared experiences and values of a community. Oral traditions are inherently communal, where the notion of individual authorship is subsumed by the collective voice of the community. Folk music, as a form of oral culture, serves as a vessel of communal memory, where the individual creativity of narrators, singers, and performers is intertwined with the collective tradition. Folk music is not merely an artistic expression but is deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of communities. It reflects the collective experiences, struggles, and aspirations of the people, often passed down through generations. The *jajmani* tradition in Rajasthan's folk music is a live example of collective consciousness. It embodies the shared beliefs, values, and cultural practices of the community, deeply integrating musicians like Langas, Manganiyars, and Dholis into the social fabric. This paper explores the *jajmani* tradition and its socio-religious and economic implications. It also discusses that this tradition is not just a model for music patronage in India but is also a unique example of shared collective and orally transmitted consciousness.

**Keywords:** Langas, Manganiyars, Consciousness, Culture, Folk, Jajmani

**Introduction:**

In the context of orality and folk, the notion of collective consciousness and plurality becomes primary. In oral traditions and folk, narrators, singers, and performers accredit their tales and songs to the collective tradition of the Community. This dynamism and collective consciousness is the most distinctive feature of oral cultures. (Joshi 73)

The above statement serves as a pivotal point of departure for understanding the essence of oral traditions. Oral traditions encapsulate the shared experiences and values of a community. Oral traditions are inherently communal, where the notion

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of individual authorship is subsumed by the collective voice of the community. In these traditions, stories, songs, and knowledge are passed down through generations, not as static texts but as living, evolving expressions shaped by the community's shared experiences. Folk songs, as a form of oral culture, serve as vessels of communal memory, where the individual creativity of narrators, singers, and performers is intertwined with the collective tradition. Folk songs are not merely artistic expressions but are deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of communities. They reflect the collective experiences, struggles, and aspirations of the people, often passed down through generations. In oral traditions, the individual singer or performer is a conduit for the community's voice. The notion of authorship is fluid, as songs evolve over time with contributions from multiple voices, each adding to the richness of the tradition. Folk songs also serve as a repository of collective memory, preserving the history, beliefs, and values of a community. This collective consciousness is crucial for cultural continuity, as it ensures that the core identity of the community is passed on to future generations. The collective nature of these songs reinforces social cohesion and a shared sense of identity among the members of the community. The Bhat community in Rajasthan, India, for example, uses folk songs as a means of preserving and transmitting genealogical and historical knowledge. These songs, performed by bards are imbued with the collective consciousness of the community, ensuring that their history and traditions are preserved in a dynamic oral form.

This notion of collective consciousness and plurality is central to the understanding of folk songs within oral traditions. By examining folk songs through the lens of collective consciousness, we gain a deeper appreciation of the role they play in sustaining cultural heritage and social cohesion. According to Durkheim, "Society is not a mere sum of individuals. Rather, the system formed by their association that represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics" (39). Society is more than just an aggregate of individuals; it suggests that when individuals come together to form a society, a new, distinct system is created. This system includes social norms, laws, institutions, cultural practices, and collective consciousness, which shape the behavior and interactions of individuals within the society. Cultural practices are essential in fostering continuity and interrelatedness, providing a bridge between past, present, and future. Theoretical perspectives from scholars like Durkheim, Shils, Bourdieu, and Giddens offer valuable insights into how these practices sustain social cohesion and cultural identity. Through rituals, oral traditions, and artistic expressions, communities preserve their heritage, ensuring that cultural values and traditions endure across generations. Shils highlights that "tradition is fundamental in linking past, present, and future. Cultural practices, such as festivals, rituals, and customs, act as conduits through which traditions are preserved and transmitted, fostering a sense of continuity". (12-15).

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Similarly, Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' suggests that cultural practices are ingrained in individuals through repeated actions and socialization. These practices gradually become part of the collective identity, perpetuating cultural continuity. The *jajmani* tradition in Rajasthan's folk music is alive.

Example of Emile Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness. It embodies the shared beliefs, values, and cultural practices of the community, deeply integrating musicians like Langas, Manganiyars, and Dholis into the social fabric. The *jajmani* tradition, with its socio-religious and economic implications, is not just a model for music patronage in India but is also a unique example of shared collective and orally transmitted consciousness. Before analyzing the *Jajmani* tradition prevalent in the folk music of Rajasthan with special reference to Langas and Manganiyars communities known for their rich musical heritage, let us understand the ritual of *jajman* and its significance in the larger social structure.

The term *jajman* is derived from the Sanskrit word 'yajamana,' meaning 'sacrifier' (as opposed to 'sacrificer') or 'he who has a sacrifice performed.' Etymologically, the *jajman* is the head of the household who employs a Brahmin to perform sacrifices. According to a Hindi dictionary, a *jajman* is defined as 'one who has religious (dharmik) rites performed by Brahmins by providing them with fees, etc.' In contrast, there are numerous terms to describe specialists, who are more like clients to a patron rather than employees to an employer, as the relationship is personal. In Hindi, these terms include *Praja* (also meaning 'creature, descendant, subject'), *Kamin*, *pain*, *puja*, and *kamkarnevala* (workman). Anthropologists study the *Jajmani* system to understand the complexities of rural social structures, economic interdependencies, and the perpetuation of caste-based inequalities. The system illustrates how traditional economies functioned and how social roles were maintained and transmitted across generations. With modernization, urbanization, and economic changes, the *Jajmani* tradition has seen a decline. New economic opportunities and legal reforms have disrupted the traditional patron-client relationships.

The concept of *jajman* has deep roots in Vedic traditions, carrying significant spiritual, social, and cultural connotations. In the Vedic context, the *yajamana* is not just a passive participant but plays an essential role in the sacrificial rituals. He is the one who desires the benefits of the sacrifice and provides the necessary offerings and resources for the ritual to take place. The performance of *yajna* is considered a key aspect of dharma (righteous duty) in Vedic society. The *yajamana* fulfills his religious duties by engaging in these sacrificial rites, which are believed to maintain cosmic order and please the deities. The *yajamana* and the priest (Brahmin) share a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship. The *yajamana* provides material support and respect, while the priest ensures the proper conduct of the rituals, invoking divine blessings for the *yajamana*. The *jajmani* tradition

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reinforces the hierarchical structure of Vedic society, ensuring continuity and stability in social and religious practices.

While social stratification is not unique to India, as all societies have historically categorized their people based on traits, talents, resources, and cultural factors, it is in India that these divisions have solidified into a comprehensive code governing daily life. Initially, divisions arose based on individual and group preferences, abilities, and occupations. Over time, occupational and professional distinctions further entrenched these divisions, with certain occupations proving more lucrative than others, thus creating economic disparities. Traditionally, it became common for sons to inherit their father's profession, making occupational roles hereditary. This linkage of birth and occupation formed the core principles of the caste system in Hindu society. Over centuries, an intricate code of conduct emerged, dictating aspects of life such as meals, migration, marriage, and morals. As a result, the system evolved to include not just birth and occupation but also.

Hereditry and endogamy (marriage within the same caste). These four attributes—birth, occupation, hereditry, and endogamy—became the foundational pillars of the caste system. The *Jajmani* tradition is based on hereditary occupations, and the services are typically provided to the same family over generations, for example. Landowners or higher caste individuals who receive services from service-providing castes such as blacksmiths, carpenters, barbers, washermen, etc. The *Kamins* provided specialized skills and services to the *jamjars*, and in return, they used to get rewards in kind (food grains). The relationship between *jajmans* and *kamins* used to be a permanent and hereditary relationship, i.e., after the death of the *jajman*, his son would be a *jajman*, and the same would be applicable to the *kamins*. The tradition simultaneously shows caste dependency in our social structure. The caste people are known by their caste traits, which continue from generation to generation. Thus, it remained a functional relationship in rural India. The *Jajmani* tradition ensures the economic support of artisan and service-providing castes by integrating them into the rural economy. It also reinforces the caste hierarchy and the division of labor based on caste lines. The tradition often creates a dependency of the *Kamins* on the *Jajmans*, perpetuating social inequalities.

The Langas, Manganiyars, and Dholis are three distinct musical groups that inhabit the Jaisalmer, Barmer, and Jodhpur districts of Western Rajasthan. Traditionally, these groups have been integral in the continuation of the *jajmani* tradition. Within this tradition, they function as clients who receive a share of the patron's harvest and additional gifts on specific occasions. In return, they provide music for various ritual and social functions. Although most of these musicians can be classified as village musicians, it is important to highlight that the distinction between villages and towns in Western Rajasthan is minimal, primarily differing in terms of size. Towns are typically characterized by their impressive forts and

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palaces, whereas villages have the *thakur's* (headman's) dwelling. This dwelling, while less ostentatious, serves a similar purpose as a miniature court. While the tradition of court musicians in palaces has gradually declined over the past twenty years, the hereditary system of village musicians largely persists. For these musicians, performing music remains their primary source of livelihood. Many also own small plots of land and breed livestock, which are often gifts from their patrons. Despite their generally low social rank within the community, these musicians are notably respected and receive exceptional hospitality (Kothari 4).

There are distinctions among these groups in their religious affiliations and the patrons they serve, for example. The Langas are Muslims serving Muslim patrons, whereas the Manganiyars are Muslims serving Hindu patrons, and Dholis are Hindus serving Hindu patrons. Despite these differences, all three groups belong to exogamous clans (gotras), with the Langas further divided into two endogamous sub-castes. Each group possesses its unique musical style, instrumentation, and core repertoire, though they share many common songs. Their repertoire can be broadly categorized into three types: ritual, semi-ritual, and entertainment. Ritual songs and tunes are essential components of specific ceremonies, such as life-cycle events. Semi-ritual songs include praises of deities and patrons, and devotional and festival songs typically associated with general contexts rather than specific rites. Entertainment songs, which cover themes like love, heroism, the seasons, and social customs, make up a substantial part of their repertoire. These are performed at social gatherings, such as parties and music gatherings, which are often held during events like weddings when guests are already assembled.

According to Komal Kothari, "It is important ethnologically to note that Langa is a caste whose main profession is to sing for the families of their patrons. The group of families who have patronized the Langa singers is known as 'Sindhi Sipahi.' Traditionally, the Langas have two categories - Sarangia Langas, who play the sarangi, and Surnaiya Langas, who play the shehnai. The *jajmans* of the Sarangia Langas are Sindhi Sipahis, and those of Surnaiya Langas are Meher Muslims. Presently, they sing for all, as well as in festivals. Sindhi *Sipahi* lives in *shanties* or small villages comprising barely six to ten thatched houses. Each *dhani* is known by the name of the leader of the group or by the name of one of the sub-castes of the community. We find only a few families of Sindhi Sipahis living in the main village, which acts as a small market and includes a cluster of different castes. Sindhi Sipahi are mainly cattle-keepers or herdsmen. They own a good number of cows and calves or sheep and goats. The *dhani* provides them with the facility of big fields as grazing land for their animals. (6-7)

The Langas, traditional musicians of Rajasthan, perform for their patrons and receive remuneration in the form of cash or kind, often including cattle or camels. As part of their duties, Langas attend various ceremonies such as births,

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marriages, and funerals, along with other ceremonial functions upon request or invitation. Despite their lower social rank, Langas are highly respected by their patrons and are treated with exceptional hospitality. They receive the best available food, accommodations, and other comforts. During ceremonies, Langas are expected to perform for extended periods, often through the night, singing songs or narrating folk tales with musical accompaniment. In marriage ceremonies, they lead the procession to the bride's home, singing along the way. A Langa singer might sing while standing, walking, or even traveling on camel-back with a sarangi.

Instrument strapped across his shoulders. Competitions between singers from the bride's and groom's sides are common, with the winner being the one who performs the largest and most varied repertoire of songs, showcasing their musical nuances and expertise. New songs are often composed or improvised at the request of patrons, who may ask for variations in style or rhythmic patterns. The song known as *Balochan* is an example of such an adaptation. Patrons are discerning and demand strict adherence to the traditional style and purity of songs. They possess a thorough understanding of the tune, lyrics, and singing style and insist that songs be performed authentically. Any deviation from the established rules is met with disapproval, ensuring the preservation of songs in their original form. This strict adherence also requires new learners to maintain the integrity of traditional compositions.

A Langa teacher imparts several songs to his students, providing close guidance and supervision to ensure the songs are rendered with a fixed text and specific melody. Typically, if a Langa boy's father is proficient in singing, he assumes the role of his son's guru. However, if the father believes there is a more skilled teacher available, he may send his son to another Langa singer for instruction in both singing and instrument playing. This transition involves a formal ceremony. The boy's parents invite members of their caste and serve *sharbat* (sweet drinks) to the gathering. During the ceremony, the designated teacher receives sweet water from the eldest person present. The teacher drinks half of the glass and then passes it to the student, who drinks the rest. Following this, the boy presents a shawl to his new teacher and begins his lessons on the sarangi and traditional songs.

The teacher-student relationship and the tradition of passing down music through oral lessons play a significant role in preserving songs and their musical structures. Folk Songs, commonly sung by the general population, are mostly not learned through a deliberate teaching process. As a result, these songs are more susceptible to new influences and changes. The transmission of these songs occurs unconsciously, in contrast to professional singing communities where there is a deliberate effort to train individuals for musical performance. As the teacher's efforts become more structured and intensive, the musical lessons become more systematic, establishing a foundation for rules and logic. Although the Langa style of singing adheres to the guru-shishya tradition for teaching newcomers, the training remains

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at a basic level and does not reach the sophistication required to be considered classical. Langa teachers focus on imparting the melodies and their rhythmic structures to the students without delving into musicology. They typically teach only a few songs and then encourage the students to learn further from other sources as they wish.

The *Manganiyars* are another popular community of hereditary musicians who predominantly follow Islam but serve Hindu patrons. Under the *Jajmani* tradition, *Manganiyars* provide musical services for their *Jajmans*, performing at various ceremonies and events such as weddings, births, and religious festivals. In return, the *Jajmans* offer them financial support, gifts, and other forms of patronage. This reciprocal relationship ensures the *Manganiyars'* livelihood and the continued practice of their musical heritage. For the *Manganiyars*, music is not merely a profession but the essence of their identity. Their songs are rich with the nuances of *sur* (melody) and *taal* (rhythm), interwoven with ancient stories, folklore, and wisdom. The true magic lies in the transmission of this heritage through generations via oral tradition. Music is so intrinsic to the *Manganiyars* that it is said even a newborn's cries are in tune. Remarkably, they are never formally taught music; instead, they absorb it naturally as an integral part of their lives. The *Manganiyars*, however, have not always been so aware of the economics of life. For generations together, *Manganiyars*, a Muslim community living mostly in the desert districts of Barmer and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan, have been singing in the homes of their Rajput *jamjars* (patrons), never stepping out of the comfort zone of their goodwill and patronage. It was only in 1978 when Jodhpur-based musician Komal Kothari lent them institutional support, that the *Manganiyars* began to sing outside the state.

The *Manganiyars* also have two types of singers - those who sing exclusively for Hindu families and those who sing for both Hindu and Muslim patrons. More than 1000 *Manganiyar* artists live in villages scattered across Jaisalmer and Sheo Tehsil in Barmer. They are strongly connected to their respective patron families. The *Manganiyars* often settle in areas where their patrons live or relocate because of their symbiotic relationship with their *Jajmans*. Baiyya, a small village about 100 km from Jaisalmer, is home to around 50 *Manganiyar* families whose patrons are Hindu Yaduvanshi Rajputs of the Bhati clan. These Rajputs, whose ancestors originated from Kashi, Mathura, and Prayag, consider Krishna their clan deity. Consequently, the *Manganiyars* of Baiyya have a long tradition of singing Krishna bhajans or devotional songs.

These folk musicians are also traditional genealogists for the *Jajmans*. This genealogical record-keeping through songs is entirely an oral tradition. The *Shubhraj* sung by the communities makes references to the whole of the patrons' families, praising their glorious past and praying for their well-being in the future. Thus, we have seen that folk music in Rajasthan is not just an art form but a vital part of the

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community's identity. It reflects shared stories, histories, and values, reinforcing a sense of belonging and continuity. Music is integral to various life-cycle rituals, such as weddings, births, and Religious festivals. These events are steeped in tradition, with specific songs and musical styles passed down through generations. The relationship between musicians and patrons is reciprocal. Musicians receive support and respect from their patrons, while patrons gain cultural prestige and fulfillment of their traditional roles. Musical skills and patron-client relationships are often hereditary, passed down through generations, ensuring the continuity of traditions. The *jajmani* tradition in Rajasthan's folk music serves as a reflection of collective consciousness, encapsulating shared cultural values and ensuring the transmission of traditions. The *jajmani* tradition integrates various social groups through mutual dependence and cooperation. It also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility in maintaining religious and social order, and tradition plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions.

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