

**Music in Public Space
Gujarat—a Case Study**
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- **Second Conference “Qualitative diversity research: Looking ahead”**, 19-20 September 2006, K.U.Leuven, Leuven, Belgium. Contact person: Maddy Janssens, maddy.janssens@econ.kuleuven.ac.be, and Patrizia Zanoni, patrizia.zanoni@kuleuven.ac.be
- **Third Conference “Diversity in cities: Visible and invisible walls”**, 11-12 September 2007, UCL, London, UK. Contact person: Valeria Papponetti, valeria.papponetti@feem.it
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Music in Public Space Gujarat—a Case Study

Summary

The paper presents a perspective on the role of the arts in cultural dialogue, which reflects on the situation in Gujarat, India, which has been the destination of people of diverse background and cultural practice for centuries. As External Partner of the European Union Project on Diversity, the paper invites us to look at how diversity is managed in arts production in a country, which has embraced plurality as the core of its identity. Contemporary Gujarat has carried on its tradition of cultural and religious diversity with Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Jews, all having their individual expressions of culture. This essay shows us in the analysis of music production how the distinctive characteristic of multicultural India rests not, as we would assume, on the creation of blend of cultures, a synthesis of some kind or compressed into an overarching motif of religion or caste; rather acceptance and understanding of difference underlies times of social cohesion and peace. The examination of music production in Gujarat observes how music composition is handled, propagated, managed and sponsored in a situation where synthesis is seen as a sign of tension, and where the public assertion of distinct religious identity is the desired norm, particularly in urban centers. The paper evaluates the extent to which music situated in the public arena accommodates cultural diversity in two cities in Gujarat, Baroda and Rajkot, each with rich musical traditions and diversity, but very different histories. It tries to gauge, in a fine tuned comparison, the different motivations behind the organization of public concerts in these two cities, in terms of variety in form, style, performer selection, quality and sustainability against the background of the loss of distinct cultural identities in one city, and their celebration in another.

Keywords: Arts, Music, Cultural Dialogue, India

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Music in Public Space

Gujarat—a Case Study*

Gujarat, a state in the western coast of part of India, has been a destination for people of diverse background and cultural practice at least since the Indus Valley Civilization penetrated into the region in 2400 BCE. While invaders, conquerors and settlers from the north-west brought with them different lifestyle, language, art, music and crafts, the state's long navigable coastline and trade with Africa, the Arab countries, South Asia and later Europe, made it a centre not just for exchange of goods but also for interaction of ideas and expertise, understanding and acceptance of difference—difference in social structures and mores, day to day living and most important, in the practice of religion. By the time India became independent in 1947, the region had played host among others, to the Aryans, Mauryas, Indo-Greeks, Guptas, Huns, Arab traders, Parsi refugees from Iran, Islamic invaders, Siddhi slaves turned businessmen from Africa, East India Company merchants and other European traders, and finally, the officials of British India.

Contemporary Gujarat carries on this tradition of cultural and religious diversity with Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Jews, all having their individual expression of culture. However, the cultural composition that constitutes the societal milieu here depends not just on religion but on a complex profile of geographical location¹, climate, migration pattern, political environment, i.e. not only current politics but whether the area was part of the British colony or of a princely state, its caste make-up and tribal affiliations. Even in a simple matter like hand embroidery, designs, stitches and yarn, delineate caste, tribe, region and religion. These differences not only define for a person her role, place, responsibility and commitment to society, they also, to a great extent, determine her approach to the 'other.' Along with the difference, there is also a common pool of culture, a commonality natural among people who have lived side by side for generations. The synthesis, however, has not been without underlying resentment and tension. True, multiple identity is a factor in everyone's life, but where religious and caste divides are strong, as they are in Gujarat, in times of stress the

multiple identities get compressed into one overarching motif of religion or caste. It is as if there is a compartmentalisation of the prejudice itself. Perhaps this is the distinctive characteristic of multicultural India.

The region is a strange mixture of great social cohesion, interaction, understanding and acceptance of each other's values, as also of intolerance, regionalism and religious extremism, especially between Hindus, the majority, and Muslims, the largest minority, an opposition that started way back in 635 ACE when a naval expedition sent by the governor of Bahrain raided the city of Bharuch². Long periods of peace and harmony get interspersed with periods of unrestrained violence as in 1969, 1993 and 2002, with clashes of different magnitudes in between. A kind of seesaw of attitudes operates as a regular feature, and even patronage of art forms can depend on which side has the upper hand for the moment.

It is often said that music is a unifying force and India's composite culture is best expressed through this art form. Muslim vocalists singing stories of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and Hindu singers not shying away from compositions praising the benevolence of Allah are cited as examples. The fact that followers of the Sufi and Bhakti traditions where music is a strong element, have the same search, a kind of oneness with God through a search for the perfect note, adds greater weight. With all that, has the practice of music really been a no-conflict zone?

Gujarat is rich and varied in all three standard genres of music, namely popular, devotional and classical. Folk music in its multi-faceted variety is a natural expression of joy, sorrow and incidents of everyday life and while its style/content may be caste, creed and region-specific, its practice has been open and inclusive. It requires no specific patron, nor is it necessarily restricted to any private domain. The very nature of its spontaneity, however, opens itself to the danger of external influence, groupism and change in character, as family structures change, rural-urban boundaries fade and a cry for religious identity emerges. The role of public and private sponsors then assumes significance.

A rich variety of devotional music comes from the fact that no religion here is a monolith, their different sects and subgroups have specific rituals and songs. One would expect religious music to have exclusive pockets almost by definition; they often do, but they are so interlinked with folk festival and rituals

that the composers, performers and audience can cut across barriers of caste, creed or social and economic strata. In recent years, however, a trend to publicly assert religious identity has led to a change in attitude and outlook, specially in urban areas. Religion does draw a heavy line in this part of the country, not only in the creation of art forms but also in their propagation, management and sponsorship.

Classical music³, strongly patronised in some parts of the state, has an old tradition; it is strict in its form and line. Innovation is restricted and relatively new. Although it flourished through the closed system of family knowledge called '*gharanas*'⁴, there are so many musical forms and such wide variations within the parameters of the classical system in, say, voice production, pluck or bowing of the string, compositions, conceptions of raga, method of improvisation, use of tempo, that the diversity is almost tactile. Till the 1930s much of the arts in North India flowered because of patronage by the princely states and the elite. With the rise of nationalism in the late 19th century, an attempt was made to break open the barriers so that anyone could learn, perform or listen and by the time the country became independent in 1947 a new era in the performance and propagation of classical music was already under way.

After the merger of the princely states with independent India the central government stepped in as the chief patron of the arts and made a deliberate attempt to preserve and encourage the diverse strands of the arts. With the All India Radio (AIR) and state run *Akademis* (cultural bodies) as major sponsors, music and dance festivals, major art exhibitions for the public, became annual features in the central and state capitals. 'National Integration' through a cultural mix became the general motto. However, since the 1970s private and corporate sponsorship have taken almost centre-stage creating its own dynamics.

This paper evaluates the extent to which music situated in the public arena accommodates cultural diversity in two cities of Gujarat. It tries to gauge the motivation behind the organization of public concerts in terms of variety in form and style, performer selection, quality and sustainability, specially in the light of the changed patronage and a different social awareness that leads to a

greater questioning of the 'other', the 'other' being Hindus and Muslims towards each other. Although diversity comes from many sources, our concentration has been more on the music and musicians of these two communities and their interrelationship. This was important because Hindus being relatively new entrants to the practice of art music, a field dominated by Muslims for centuries, the struggle or clash for performance space has been intense. The study is being done in the context of the 'city', the city being a socio-economic-cultural microcosm, symbolic of an urban centre with sub-urban feeders.

For detailed investigation we have identified Baroda⁵ and Rajkot, two major cities of the state with rich musical traditions and diversity in terms of religion, language, arts and crafts, community performances and celebrations. Geographically quite far apart, they provide strikingly different pictures, possibly because of their location and accessibility but more likely because of the very different history the two have had.

Baroda boasts of a modern, cosmopolitan society, with an immediate pre-Independence history of a far-sighted, benevolent ruler who used cultural tools such as museums, classical arts and public performance to sensitise, modernize and mainstream its people. Under the enlightened rule of Maharaja Sayajirao III (1875-1939) the city flowered as a centre of learning, development and progress. He brought in numerous scholars, academicians, thinkers, writers and musicians to his Court, established libraries, schools for women, the Baroda College for higher education. (1881), started a Radio station, a railway, and in a sense, planted the seed for cosmopolitanism, that continues to remain alive even today.

Rajkot is a large city in a region called Saurashtra in the western part of Gujarat. A royal principality ruled by the Jadeja clan and surrounded by numerous small princely states⁶, the ruler's influence on public life was insignificant. With the establishment of the Rajkumar College in 1872 for the education of princes in the pattern envisaged by Lord Macaulay earlier in the century and the ever-present British Resident supervising political currents and guarding against possible sedition, the insularity of the princely families became even stronger. Away from the main trade and rail routes, Rajkot remained

remote and isolated, its people developing further what was their precious heritage—intricate craft work and robust folk music and dance with an amazing range of tune, rhythm, movement and colour. It now has greater contact with the outside world but folk music is still the mainstay of the city's arts.

There is a basic difference in the ethos of the two cities. While Baroda is much more cosmopolitan than Rajkot, communal tensions run high in Baroda. Rajkot's Muslim community has been able to integrate itself better with the majority milieu, possibly because of their smaller number rather than as an attempt to resolve underlying issues. In Baroda the ghettoization is much sharper, not just in terms of the physical existence of the communities but also in the attitudes. To the extent a communal psyche affects sustainability of diversity, and therefore the future of multicultural communities, its impact becomes almost central to this study.

The methodology of data collection for the work was through detailed and comprehensive oral history, accessed via interviews of artists, musicians, concert organizers, researchers, sociologists and historians and people connected with the performing arts from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in each city. Our questionnaires focused on their impression of whether the attitude towards cultural diversity is undergoing a change in the city they live and work in and if so, how it is affecting the musicians, the audience and the agents, if any. We also sought their opinion on the kind of future they envisage for the different genres of music with their multiple variants and more importantly, the economic prospects of a career in music for its practitioners. In addition, we analysed the vast programming data of All India Radio (Baroda-Ahmedabad and Rajkot) Doordarshan and programme sheets of various institutions to assess how far in present-day Gujarat, music in public space works towards projecting the diversity that has been an innate characteristic of the music of this region.

II

We begin with All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (DD, television), government-managed broadcasting and telecasting vehicles, which

are the largest and most comprehensive supporters of music in the public sphere. Both AIR and DD follow a Broadcasting Code that states categorically that AIR's goal is to promote a common national outlook and foster the diverse culture of the country through information, education and entertainment.

Broadcasting in India is dominated by the AIR with its commercial wing, Vividh Bharati. AIR is a national service, broadcasting in 24 languages and 146 dialects in the Home services and 17 national and 10 foreign languages in the External services. It is interesting to note that the AIR signature tune was composed by the Hindu Dinkarrao D. Aemal, the Muslim Zande Khan both Indians, and the Polish Walter Kaufmann, under the supervision of Lionel Fielden, then AIR's British chief, and Ali Bukhari, the Indian Director. The tune, basically played on a violin and a *tanpura* (a drone instrument), was reminiscent of 'a call to gather', often compared to a muezzin's call to prayer (*azaan*). There can hardly be a better example of diversity and harmony

On an average, AIR broadcasts more than 900 hours of different kinds of music every month including Hindustani classical vocal and instrumental, light classical, simple songs, devotional, folk and regional music, Hindi film songs, Gujarati film and theatre songs, choral songs, secular, nationalist, and non-religious festive songs. Vividh Bharati provides entertainment for nearly 15-17 hours per day. The Hindi film industry (popularly called Bollywood) has a major influence on AIR, controlling more than one-third of the music broadcasting time (almost 400 hours). Bollywood itself is a very powerful symbol of unity, employing talent from every corner of India, irrespective of caste, community, religion, language, gender. Muslim actors may accept roles of devout Brahmin priests, Hindu actors those of Mughal emperors; Muslim singers could celebrate the mischief of child Krishna and Hindu singers pour passion into a qawwali. The diversity they thus celebrate, in terms of song content, category and singer is enormous.

Mindful of the listener diversity in Gujarat, AIR (Ahmedabad, Baroda, Rajkot) includes Marathi programmes for Baroda and Urdu programmes in Ahmedabad, and programmes based on popular music in Rajkot since the local people enjoy that the most. The following chart shows the importance of music and also the different genres of music aired by AIR whether in Baroda or Rajkot.

AKASHVANI - Music					
	Programme name	Description	Total time/week (minutes)	Total time/month (minutes)	Hrs./month
1	Bazm-e-gazal	Gazals	30	90	1.3
2	Swar Sagar	Classical Music	120	960	57.5
3	Classical Music	Secular	60	480	
4	Classical Music		60	480	
5	Classical/ light classical music		15	180	
6	Saturday National Programme of Music		90	360	
7	Sunday Night Concert	Secular	90	360	
8	Shehnai	Instrumental music	21	630	
9	Akhand Soor	folk music on request	60	480	
10	Rang Rang Vadaliya	Regional	30	120	
11	Lok Sangeet	folk	60	480	
12	Lok Sangeet	Folk	90	1080	
13	Lok Varta/Lok Diaro	folk	30	120	
14	Sunday masti	film songs for children	20	80	391
15	Farmaish (film song)		30	120	
16	Visarta Soor	old film hits	60	240	
17	Gulmohar	Hindi Film	210	6300	

Songs

18	Namaskar Aakashvani Phone in farmaish	On Request - Hindi film songs	120	960	
19	Old Film Songs	Film Song	105	3150	
20	Jai Bharati	Film songs for Troops	420	12600	
21	Sponsored Porg/Gujarati Geeto		210	6300	
22	Geet Gurjar	Gujarati film songs on request	30	120	107.5
23	Old Theater Sogs	gujarati	15	30	
24	Haveli Sangeet	Gujarati - regional	15	45	
25	Ramcharitmanas Gaan	Religious	70	2100	36.25
26	Qawwali	Regional	15	30	
27	Sugam Sangeet	Secular	90	2160	
28	Sugam Sangeet	Secular	150	3600	179
29	Sugam Sangeet	Secular	120	2880	
30	Swar Sangam	Light music	70	2100	
31	Desh gaan	Nationalist	5	20	
32	Gandhi Vandana	Nationalist	15	20	
33	Suprabhatam	Nationalist	14	420	95.16
34	Vandana+Gandhi Vichar	Nationalist	175	5250	
35	Sanghan Shikshan	Group Song instruction	20	80	2
36	Vrund Gaan		10	40	

Source: AIR files, Baroda

Telecasting came to India rather late, and blossomed when colour transmission began in late 1982. With the opening of air waves to foreign channels in early 1990s, television saw an unprecedented growth in channel development, news telecasting and home entertainment.

The Indian Government-owned Doordarshan (DD) is one of the largest terrestrial networks in the world, with 362 million viewers in homes, and working along a three-tier system – national, regional, local. While the national programming is always in Hindi, regional and local programmes are in the state language or the predominant dialect. For example, Ahmedabad DD (regional) would telecast in mainstream Gujarati language, but Rajkot DD would have a major chunk of its programming in Gujarati-*Kathiawari* dialect. There is also a 24-hour Gujarati channel, beamed to 31 countries (with considerable non-resident-Gujarati populations) and to rural areas with an equal mix of educative-informative-entertainment content. Music is an essential feature of almost all programmes for, other than the regular music broadcasts, even the agriculture-based programmes are supported with folk forms. Traditional forms of music, dance and drama are employed to address a variety of socio-economic issues like unemployment, caste discrimination, health issues, female foeticide, girl-child protection and so on. The channel always has special programmes corresponding to the numerous Indian religious and secular festivals.

While there are no diversity laws in this field, both AIR and DD have a strict format for the selection and grading of artists, with two sets of audition where names and other details of the candidate are withheld. Not only is the selection procedure blind, the number of times an artist is presented in a year is according to guidelines set by a central authority. There is hardly any room for expressing personal preference or prejudice. Both institutions support a very wide range of talent in the performance arts, from teenaged artists in the youth programmes to veteran musicians in the national programmes. The artists also get a vast platform this way because of the vast audience that come from all walks of life, irrespective of education, wealth, rural-urban divide, class, gender, creed and caste. This inclusive nature of AIR and DD, both from the perspective of performer and listener, offers a rare kind of sustainability to diversity in musical forms and their performers.

III

The scenario changes when we leave the ambit of state patronage and move over to the domain of private, specially corporate, sponsorship. Vadodara is reputed for organizing classical music in public space. During the Gaekwad period, the best of court musicians performed in open concerts, music was played in municipal gardens, atop city gates, even in the hospital as a balm to the dreary life of a patient. The state's interest in different forms of music was so high that one court musician was sent to England in the 1890s to learn orchestral music, who on return put together the Gaekwad Band to play for the public every Sunday.

Although the major public events stopped after Independence, music programmes as small community events continued with funds collected from local residents and business houses, a close relationship between the financier, organiser, performer and the audience being their strength. The intimacy of the ventures and involvement of all the concerned parties ensured an objective choice of performers, variety of style⁷ and authenticity of the genres presented.

With the entry since the early 1990s of large sponsors, often from outside the city, there is a disjuncture between the funding agency, the organiser, artists and the audience, the organiser sometimes being an event manager rather than a connoisseur and the sponsor's interest revolving more around the advertisement panels than the actual details of the concerts. When music festivals are commercial ventures; mass appeal and image building initiatives are crucial; public relation exercises, use of the media, networking in different cities to work out circuits then become essential tools for promoting a few chosen artists. The same artists are presented over and over again, as happens in Baroda with certain institutions. In an art where the yardstick of what is good is rather elusive, an uninitiated audience as consumers can be swayed by brand names. The fact that there is no system of 'agents' in India for classical music and the artists themselves need to do their publicity, gives the educated, worldly-wise musicians an advantage. While quality is not necessarily compromised, what is compromised is diversity.

The era of mass appeal also erodes certain features of traditional styles. While innovations are made to impress and attract a large audience, the

techniques tend to get standardised. For example, in today's world, it is fast tempoed virtuosity (*taans*) that creates wonder and popularity so that the slow deliberate expansion and evocation of a raga and composition become an experience of the past. This reminds one of the musicologist, Thakur Jaidev Singh's comment, "Dhrupad was sacrificed at the altar of *layakari* (rhythmic acrobatics) and *kheyal*'s demise will come from the cacophony of *taans*."⁸ (vocal acrobatics)

In Baroda programmes organised privately are ticketed, free, by invitation or by membership and they vary widely in their attitude to diversity. Saptak is a leading private institution for the teaching of classical music in Ahmedabad, not far from Baroda and every January it holds Gujarat's most celebrated and well-attended festival of music, with twelve days of unadulterated classical music and a grand finale with the most vibrant performance of traditional folk music. A survey of Saptak's concerts over the last twenty-five years shows that its programmes are meticulously planned to include the very distinguished artists as well as fresh talents and cover a wide range of styles, with some of the best musicians of India in the audience. It has possibly the richest and the most varied archive of music in this part of the country. And all this is done with private collection of funds and cooperation of students and teachers. When asked, a Saptak patron remarked, "Selection of an artist depends solely on her ability; her religion and other personal data never even enter our mind."⁹

Ghargharika, in Baroda, is an excellent example of a fruitful co-operation between the public and private sectors. A small private institution for the propagation of dance, it collaborates with Gujarat Government's department of culture to present dancers from all over India in this city. While the funding and the selection are made by the state with diversity as primary consideration, the organizing is done entirely by Ghargharika. Because of the patronage of government, not just the currently popular styles but unusual dances from distant regions like the *Chhau* of Mayurbhanj and Seraikela or the *Sattariya*, a temple dance of Vaishnav priests of Assam, are also presented.

Sanidh, another organisation in Baroda is a good example of co-operation between the private sector and a small private body trying to promote classical music. While taking an interest in the programmes, the funding

agencies never interfere in the planning of the concerts so that Sanidh is able to maintain its secular outlook and plan programmes balanced between well-known musicians and artists, instruments or musical styles whose appeal has now waned. The Maula Baksh Trust in Baroda deliberately presents a secular image in the choice of its trustees and in programming its annual music festival, where talks by scholars stressing the importance of communal harmony, specially in the field of music is a regular feature. The rich variety of music and dance of India has been the inspiration behind the efforts of these small organizations; prejudice has played little part. It is interesting to note that these four institutions are run by people who are trained musicians and dancers themselves.

Unfortunately this is not the whole story and discrimination comes in surreptitious ways. There are inward-looking, membership-based associations whose ticketed programmes are for the general public but the selection of performers is restricted to one particular community, limited styles or even region. Commercial ventures cannot subscribe to this but by taking a narrow view of nationalism and identity small organizations can justify their prejudice, specially when members have similar predilections and they are supported by institutions with parochial, non-secular agendas.

Political parties too tend to play a pro-active role. Their cultural wings arrange programmes of young and aspiring local students of the performing arts. By giving encouragement and a platform, even to the not-so-trained and talented, the party can inculcate its political philosophy, usually sectarian. This kind of networking at grassroots level by sectarian groups leads to not just a disdain by the young for certain sections of performers, especially the '*gharana*' ones as they are Muslims, or say instruments like the *sarangi* because it is somehow associated with Muslim singers and courtesans, but also to a degree of insistence that the music of the majority community is the only true one. The solidarity of the majority community is on occasion, expressed through musical compositions. Classical music texts never ask social or political questions but by incorporating stories of Hindu myths and legends, a sectarian thrust can be given.

The *gharana* musicians have their own outlook. They had kept the art tightly closed with an attitude that no one other than their family members could

present authentic ragas in authentic style. A *gharana* artist received inherited wisdom, any outsider was an '*ataai*', one to whom the art had been taught and one who could never attain the *gharana* standard. They often looked up to the 14th century musician-scholar-composer Amir Khusro as their inspiration¹⁰, rather than Bharata¹¹ and the *Natyashastra*.

The impact of the music that the Muslim rulers had brought has been contested for some time now and there are territorial battles over origin, ownership and purity of Indian classical music. So much so that a composition can become a prayer to 'Allah' or 'Hari', the Hindu god, depending on where one is performing or whom one is teaching. Even the authorship of songs comes into dispute as there is no copyright in the oral tradition. For over a century now Hindu musicologists who believed in theory and *gharana* members whose concern was performance have confronted each other, each claiming superiority. An unresolved tussle, it continues to be a bone of contention. The problem possibly is that while none can deny the ancient pre-Islamic origin of the theory and system of classical music, when one names "any Hindu musician today, his or her school of music can be traced to a Muslim Ustad¹²."

Rajkot presents a contrast. Classical music has not gained much ground though its value is well acknowledged. It has long standing music schools like the Rashtriya Shala (1921), Sangeet Natya *Bharati* (1953), and a few private teachers, mainly for degree-oriented music education rather than the traditional private lessons on a one to one basis. Earning potential is a very major issue in this area and the long training time that classical music demands and the uncertain 'payback' promise are not risks many are willing to take. One reason for the decreasing number of students of classical music is that the media, radio, television, the film industry have created so many levels of opportunities that students are willing to learn just enough to get an entry into these sectors, rather than go through the rigour of becoming a pure classical artist.

Large-scale sponsored programmes have not entered Rajkot yet and even small Music Conferences are few and far between. The two private organisations, Sangeet Sabha and Sur Milan continue to make the efforts for organizing programmes on a regular basis but they have not been very successful. Considering the limited interest in classical music in Rajkot, Sangeet

Vidya Bharti's achievement in terms of presenting the best of artists with a wide range of styles is remarkable.

Rajkot may not be a thriving centre for classical music but the musicians here are serious, dedicated, and totally secular. Feroze Khan, a multi-talented and well-respected classical artist says "In Rajkot all of us from different communities live in harmony. We look and feel united."¹³ Appu Khan, a classical violinist, finds Rajkot very conducive for his art and feels no marginalization as a Muslim. He has been able to take advantage of the newly booming entertainment industry, so that between teaching and recording for the AIR, films and television he has enough opportunities for work.

The listening public is larger in Baroda but the absence of the younger generations in the audience makes one skeptical about the future of classical music in this city. There are no teachers or performing artists of any standing here, it was therefore not possible to find out how musicians themselves react to the changing scenario of today's world. The few Muslim artists one encounters feel marginalized and in view of the uncertain career opportunities that musicians face, especially in the current atmosphere of tension, they would not like the next generation to carry on the family tradition. To quote one informant in Rajkot, "In another twenty years there will be no Muslim artists of classical music."¹⁴ Exaggerated as this may be, it is true that the legendary singer of Baroda Court, Faiyaaz Khan's grandson is today a plumber in Baroda city!

IV

Gujarat has an extraordinarily vibrant folk tradition that varies from region to region and community to community¹⁵. Music, dance, art, craft, design are intrinsic to the life of people of Gujarat; group songs invoking the benediction of a particular deity, music on occasions of the rites of passage, a song to counter the monotony of work, colour and form to decorate community space or a dance together to celebrate the coming of monsoon, define to a great extent, the identity of a Gujarati. Amidst all the variety, the *Garba* has special status. It is a circular dance accompanied by intense singing and rhythmic clapping where people come together in hundreds to worship the Mother Goddess. The *Garba* circle denotes equality, a coming together that permits no hierarchy. In fact, many of the songs celebrate the creativity of 'low caste'

crafts people and their essential contribution to daily life, like the potter (who makes the *garba* pots representing the Mother), the gardener (who brings Her flowers), the jeweller (who shapes her ornaments), the weaver (who makes her garments) and so on. It is thus the most inclusive of folk and devotional form of music, open to whoever would like to join.

The variety in *Garba* comes from its connection with the life and work of different communities. Only women of communities who generally carry head-loads would dance with the earthen pot (representing the Goddess) on their heads, or nomadic tribes and farmers used to physical work would participate in very vigorous dances with extremely forceful singing. Brahmin and Vaishnavaniya (upper-caste and aristocratic) women do a more elegant dance with trained singers and the Nagar Brahmin women do not dance at all but sit in a circle singing the *garba* to different kinds of clap. There are special *Garbas* for men, who follow Mother Goddess and the theme of their songs can never move away from the glory of their Goddess.

Baroda is well-known for its *Garbas* during Navratri (the first nine nights of waxing moon of the month of Ashwin (September-October)). The small local ones are still there but as the dwelling areas of different communities and castes are quite separate, these celebrations are compartmentalised. Large-scale open air *Garbas* are a different matter. They are organised by major sponsors as commercial activity, attracting on occasion over 10,000 participants at the same venue. Even though they are essentially religious events, their intimate connection with folk music and their festive spirit are really the attraction. There is no bar to entry either as participant or audience as long as the gate fees are paid. Even the singers of these deeply devotional prayers to the Goddess can come from any community; excellence is the only criterion. To a great extent the entry of major sponsors and the exposure of the music on an organized platform have erased much of the original religiosity and even the dance has undergone a change. It no longer follows the time-honoured patterns of steps and the stress is more on regular fast beat drumming rather than the traditional intricate claps. Visually, the *Garbas* are a delight.

Even though Gujarat is notorious for communal tensions, Navratri still brings the communities together. In 2006, Navratri fell in the month of Ramzaan and in spite of the gruelling fast of the day, Shoaib Pathan (of

Baroda), would offer his evening *namaaz*, break the fast and go straight to sing the *Garba*. He loves the tune of the songs and enjoys playing a background music on the keyboard. Javed Sheikh echoes the sentiment, “This is my favourite festival and I never feel out of place here.”¹⁶

Bhajan Mandlis have the opposite outlook. The mandlis are group of women, generally housewives and not trained in music, who sing devotional songs set often to simple tunes and beats. They are invited to sing on celebratory and festive occasions as well as on days of religious importance, both in private homes and in public venues. In Baroda, as in Rajkot, they search out similar groups so that the performance circuit becomes larger than just their own neighbourhood. These are highly caste-based associations with membership restricted to neighbourhoods, inbred social groups, particular economic status and even which God (Krishna, Amba, Shiva or any other) is pre-eminent. They do not appreciate the presence of other castes and faiths in the audience and if there are any, these outsiders are barred from ‘moving closer’ to the group. Whatever social capital the group activity may produce, it is highly susceptible to separatist ideas and is counterproductive for the maintenance of any long-term harmony.

Qawwali, the devotional music performed at Sufi shrines of the Chishtia order, is an open community event. Sung at *mazaars*, (tombs of sufi saints) the full-throated singing of the lead artist, accompanied by side singers, percussion and other instruments, praising Allah (*Hamd*), the Prophet (*Naat*) and Khwaja Saheb Ajmeri (*Mankevat*) has captivating energy and appeal. Baroda was once famous for its qawaals, both Hindu and Muslim, with frequent programmes at *mazaars* and at non-religious venues, recalls Nur Jehan Begum, a well-known singer of the city. Frequent riots in the last two decades, have turned qawaali into a hazy memory. People are now hesitant to stay for long in communally sensitive areas, specially when twenty-four hour television channels offer an easier alternative. In any case the influence of Hindi films has robbed the qawwali of its essentially mystic poetry and serious music.

In contrast, the ghazal, a popular style of poetry, even more popular when sung, has fared better. For 80 years poets of successive generations have met at the same place in the old city everyday and at the same time of 7.00 P.M., “to speak freely under the open sky.”¹⁷ Khalil Dantevji, a well-known

poet of the city looks at *mushairsa* as “one of the culturally strong platforms to bring communities together—poets come from all kinds of religious backgrounds, as do people in the audience. Literature has a tremendous capacity to build bridges.”¹⁸

Maanbhatt, that flourished in Baroda from the 17th century onwards is another dying art. The Maanbhatt, the storyteller, relates tales old and new with great passion and drama while playing the Maan, a copper pot. It is theatre, music, history, philosophy merged in one. The only surviving artist Dharmiklal Pandya explains, “Tales of history and myths were presented to the society by these bards as one man theatre so that people could learn history and ancient scriptures only by listening, it was education through entertainment. There was nothing religious about it. It was a people’s tradition, a people’s theatre.”¹⁹ There is little demand for the Maanbhatt now since it is a rather slow, time-consuming art that is irrelevant in a largely literate world which is often impatient of tradition. And as the city moves towards becoming a globalised metropolis, music of the moment takes over, giving the DJ/Casio (processional bands) an edge over the storyteller.

Rajkot is different. Its insularity helped it sustain the practice of popular and devotional music of the common people, an exuberant celebration or observance of the milestones of their lives, with no line of demarcation between caste or community. The ordinary people of the region, poor as they are, have similar battles in life and hence the same pantheon of gods, ‘secular’ gods worshipped for the well-being of the village, against snake/scorpion bite, health of family especially of children and domestic animals. And since every singer of devotional songs takes the name of ‘Bhagat’ (devotee/devoted), it is quite impossible to detect his caste or community. For example, it is not easy to tell that the first name of the well-known bhajan singer-composer Abhram Bhagat, was originally Ibrahim. Calling oneself the ‘devoted’ was perhaps a strategy for the minority communities to protect themselves while trying to be a part of the mainstream, a wider kind of sanskritisation in some sense.

Fareeda Meer is a unique artist who believes that diversity need not lead to divisiveness. She is a popular Rajkot –based folk singer belonging to the Muslim Meer community where women are barred from singing. She has not

only defied the ban and taken music as a profession but has also specialized in the devotional songs of the Hindus, specially praises to the Mother Goddess. Her home named 'Ma' (Mother) has a temple inside and she is the President of a Cow Protection Committee. "Ram and Allah are one and one can go to the temple and to the *dargah*, both."²⁰ is her belief and she finds in this the strength to withstand whatever criticism she may face.

To understand the variety and viability of folk music, one needs to talk to Joravarsinh Jadav who promotes and documents the performance arts of Saurashtra. He has formed artiste-groups with over 5000 members and presents them in formal concerts to make the arts economically viable. Although there is some artificiality in presenting the music of the soil in an urban milieu, the transfer is absolutely necessary to ensure its survival.

He says, "Village communities celebrate both joyous and tragic occasions with songs, often performed as part of rituals. Songs and dances are different for different communities as well as for specific occasions for which they are performed. Some songs are sung by certain communities only, who are invited for performances by other communities, usually in the same village. This kind of give-and-take reminiscent of the *jajmani* system, exists in all villages. For instance, the women of the *Langa* and *Mer* communities sing the ritual *marasiya* songs that describe a deceased person. On the occasion of a death, they are invited by the bereaved family to 'perform' and paid in cash or kind to do so."²¹ Folk forms are often quite fluid when it comes to making transitions from one community to another and one caste to another. The *marasiya* song, for instance, could have 'migrated' from the elegy, the *mersia*, of the Muslims of the same region.

In Saurashtra, there is hardly an activity that is not accompanied by a song. In the words of Jyoti Bhatt, "Community activities have always been a part of social life of India because festivals give opportunities for social interaction. In an arid land like Saurashtra singing and dancing come naturally when rains come. And then whenever women have any fasts, like 'jagrans' (all night rituals) or other celebrations, they practice the *Garba*."²² Throughout the year they gather to celebrate religious festivals such as Janmashthami (birth of Krishna), Navratri, or Holi (the colour festival) and secular celebrations like village fairs. Even men have their exclusive melodies, the *Prabhat na Geet*, the

song of the morning. The list is endless but they are all inclusive community events, rather than individual to groups, castes, religion or sometimes, even to the village.

V

This has been an extended enumeration of various styles of music, their performers and performance space. In view of the shift in attitude in the region towards people, lifestyle, language, locale, caste and religion other than one's own, it was important that we examine whether the trend in the field of music, the supposed area of synthesis, is also towards exclusiveness and exclusive identity. Everyone seems to agree that the government sponsored radio and television programmes offer a cross-section of the plurality of culture that is the pride of this country but otherwise, as in most matters in India, it is not possible to arrive at a definite answer; the pulls are in several directions.

In Rajkot, the tradition of harmony continues despite the subterranean attempts to make the society less tolerant through the work of Bhajanmandlis or adherence to strict caste codes on certain religious occasions. "In Saurashtra, there has been historically a great deal of social and religious harmony and it has not changed much," says Jyoti Bhatt²³. This is what helped Fareeda Meer to survive with her unusual philosophy and enabled non-Gujarati musicians to carve out well-respected niches for themselves.

Baroda paints a complex picture. A fast growing industrial city, its cultural side is tame, lighting up only during the nine nights of Navratri. Apart from *Garba*, there is little folk music and "even the *Garba* is more like a 'remix' with changed steps, songs, tune, and rhythm. Many of the singers now do not know the language, its cadence, its enunciation well so that the intimate relationship between the language of the region and its indigenous music is lost", observes Mukesh Bhatt.²⁴

Even religious music treads a narrow path by limiting programmes to Bhajans, that too of the Krishna cult. Since the music is kept simple and repetitive or taken from films to make it accessible to a larger public, here too cadences and other musical values are lost. Some informants also feel that because of its popularity, Bhajans are used as vehicles for transmitting divisive politics, as the *Garba* had been earlier. In the 1970s, to commemorate the 1969

riots, a *Garba* called the *Hulladiya* (riot) *Garba* used to be performed by the local community at a spot where a Muslim *Dargah* has been razed²⁵.

Classical music is where the complexities arise; interviews give contradictory reading. Some feel that presenting perennial favourites like sitar, sarod and khyal in vocal is enough because the variation among individual artists gives ample choice. Besides, in a music that is so improvised, each recital is a novel experience. Most informants differ and feel that concerts in public fora do not represent the wealth that art music has and however subtle it maybe there is an anti-Muslim bias. The bias, of course, does not affect the top artists, not only because of the excellence of their art but because of the sponsorship, advertisement and gate money they can bring in. Nurjahan Begum had said, “Music has no religion”²⁶; it is certainly true for the very successful ones. When we climb down a rung or two, it is not so simple. But is it only religious bias?

Despite claims to the contrary²⁷, music is a commodity that is marketed and much of the programming depends on successful negotiation and transaction. The unprecedented growth in the entertainment industry in recent years has had a fallout on all genres of music. Even the strictly for temples style like the Haveli Sangeet has commercial counterparts, and television stations vie with each other to slot devotional Bhajans. There is a much higher demand for classical music, be it for government sponsored or private music festivals, films, television, or advertisement jingles. All this has resulted in an unusual rise in fees and when one adds to that the high cost of travel and other incidentals, the expenses for a single concert becomes far too much. With the financial crunch Baroda’s institutions face there is no choice but to reduce the number of programmes and work out a package with the artists for lower fees and a chain of recitals in nearby towns. Once this understanding is reached it is easier to invite artists of the same group more often. Indian classical music is demanding on its listeners, presenting familiar artists and known styles, even known compositions make for comfortable listening. Funding is indeed a problem in Baroda; the private sector entrepreneurs do not seem to be interested and while the non-resident Gujaratis contribute much to the buoyancy of trade, their interest, if at all, is in something tangible like the visual arts.

The supply side is also limited for there are not many new entrants in the field of classical music and those who take it up professionally tend to follow

only the styles that are already popular, a kind of risk aversion policy. Besides, ‘the economics of modern age has influenced young musicians to join film music’, says R.C.Mehta²⁸.

However, diversity there always will be for it has been a natural, not imposed phenomenon. Some styles will be sustained, new ones will evolve, a few will wither away; the point is to examine whether music is given a place beyond ethnicity, religious discord and caste- communal consciousness. There is no denying that Baroda is a fractured city. The 2002 riots have left a legacy of fear, unease and disillusionment. The artist Ghulam Sheikh remembers the city as one where different people, different ideas were accommodated without conflict. A younger artist, Indrapramit Roy comments, “The faith of Baroda being a welcoming city was shaken by the post-Godhra [2002] riots. It is not a question of safe or unsafe, it is about the feeling of belonging.”²⁹ Roy could not work for several months and when he did, it was a haunting image of a little girl’s dress on fire.

Muslims tend to withdraw into a shell of their separate identity. Rarely do they cross the line and attend cultural programmes. In the largest *Garba* in Baroda, with about 5000 young men participating, there is just one Muslim³⁰ who comes to dance and only two families that come as spectators. Muslim musicians have always had an internal conflict regarding the legitimacy of music in Islam, the current call for adherence to a purer and stricter Islam makes this conflict more intense. Few rise above this like the *Garba* singers mentioned or Farida Meer, most find following the strictly religious path more reassuring.

The first school in India for teaching classical music was started in Baroda in 1886 and Maula Baksh, the founder, had “envisioned a music that was non-sectarian, multilingual and religiously inclusive.”³¹ Baroda today is a riot-prone city, where the prejudice and lack of trust Hindus and Muslims harbour towards one another influence the politics of art management. This is not a recent phenomenon. As early as in the late 19th century part of the nationalist discourse had used cultural tools to effect a polarization of the two communities. In 1975 Raja Sourindra Mohun Tagore wrote ‘Fifty Stanzas in Sanskrita in Honour of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales’ set in different ragas. Translated by the author himself here is the forty- second stanza set to raga Hindol:³²

“By thy ancestors, the insolent and profligate Mussulman princes were at once eradicated; and we were thus delivered from their terrors, as in days of yore, men were delivered by the gods from the dread of the demons.”

In 1908, V.D. Paluskar³³ was heard saying, “Our ancient music has been destroyed by these Muslim singers and I am devoted to wresting our music back from them...”³⁴. Maula Baksh had died in 1896; by early 1900s Paluskar’s connection with Baroda and its music school became strong and his influence, long lasting. Had Maula Baksh lived longer and had his vision survived, Baroda might have given us a different story.

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Footnotes:

¹ “Where there is water, you don’t see crafts”, Ela Bhatt, OHI, Patel, April 16, 2006.

² Yagnik and Sheth, p.40

⁵ The new name is Vadodara.

³ Classical music denotes North Indian Classical Music.

⁴ The major gharanas in vocal are Gwalior, Agra, Rampur, Kirana, Jaipur and Patiala. There are offshoots of these six and now there are individual styles that reject the gharana concept. Similar family styles exist in instrumental music.

⁶ There were 217 princely states.

⁷ In vocal, dhrupad, dhamar, khyal and tarana have been the most well-known. Khyal, tarana and some forms of light classical music like thumri and dadra are

currently the popular forms. In instrumental, the sought after instruments are the sitar, sarod, tabla, flute, and santoor. The shehnai, veena and sarangi are no longer as much in demand.

⁸ Lecture, Akash Ganga, Bombay. April, 1979.

⁹ Praful Anubhai, OHI Patel, January, 2006.

¹⁰ Archive, Dartington College of Arts, Interview of Amir Khan.

¹¹ Bharata's Natyashastra is considered the original treatise on the performing arts.

¹² Rafiq Zakaria, The Asian Age, January 15, 2004.

¹³ OHI, Barodwekar, November 2006.

¹⁴ Harikant Sevak, OHI, Barodwekar, February, 2007.

¹⁵ It is difficult to separate devotional music from the folk forms; they are therefore discussed together in this section.

¹⁶ Times of India, September 26, 2006.

^{17& 18} OHI, Barodwekar, September 2006.

¹⁹ OHI, Patankar, August, 2006.

²⁰ OHI Patnakar, September 10, 2006

²¹ OHI, Patel, April 2006.

²² OHI, Patel, August 2006.

²³ OHI, Patankar, May, 2006.

²⁴ OHI, Patankar, August, 2006.

²⁵ Patel, P.J.: Baroda Riots, manuscript, 1983,p.14

²⁶ OHI Barodwekar, September,2006.

²⁷ A lot has been written about the spirituality of Indian music. Musicians themselves speak about music as away of reaching God. It may be so but it is also a profession.

²⁸ OHI, Patel, April 2007.

²⁹ OHI, Patnakar, September 2006.

³⁰ Girls do not have to register, so it is not possible to give their number.

³¹ Bakhle, p.46

³² Tagore, p.119

³³ Musician, institution builder.

³⁴ Bakhle, p.231

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