

Bhajans and folk musical forms as an intangible asset of India - the Digital media angle on the unexplored avenues of Indian music in the new era, with special reference to Rajasthan

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Abstract:

The art & culture of Rajasthan has always been presented in the form of forts and architectural geniuses, primarily considering it as a land of sand dunes with a mix of Rajput culture and folk traditions. This article highlights the Bhakti traditions that are followed by the masses but have not been covered anywhere by the print or digital media. The spirit of this land and its natives, is what keeps these traditions alive, which is also finding its way into major research works from the literature and musical perspectives in today's era, thereby throwing light on the untouched avenues of Rajasthani music, art, culture and traditions.

Keywords- *Bhakti traditions, Dadupanth, Karni Mata Chirja, temples of Jaipur & Bikaner, Rajasthan, Chirja, Govind dev ji temple, digitalization of Rajasthani folk*

INTRODUCTION

“Runecha ra dhaniya, Ajmal ji kunwra, mata Maina De ra laal, Rani Naital ra bhartaar, mharo helo suno ji Rama Peer”¹

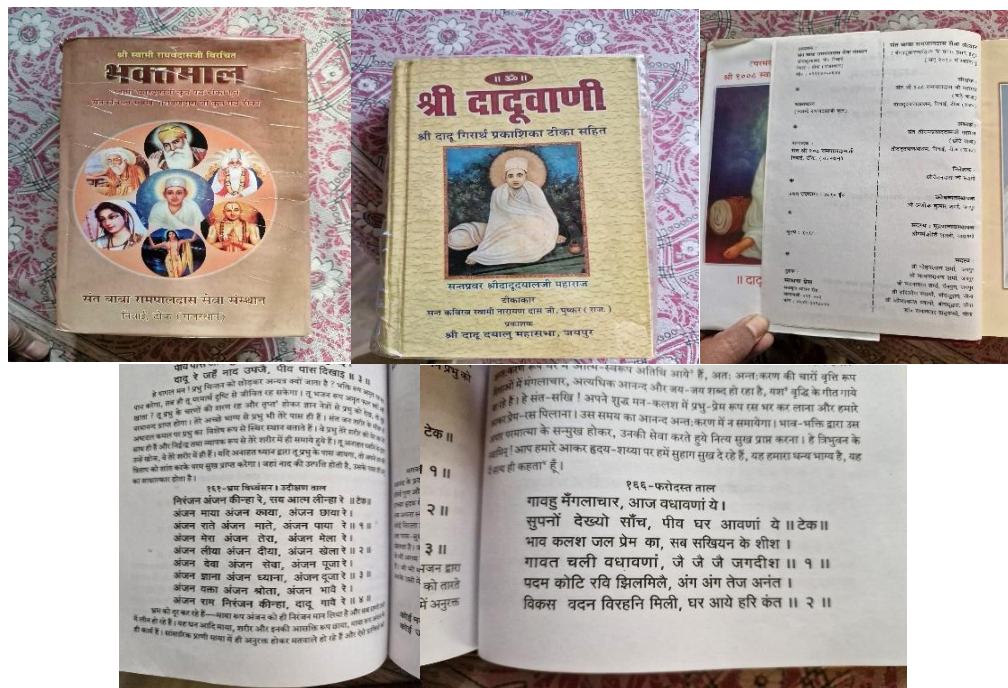
Meaning, the head of the village Runecha, the blessed son of respected Ajmal ji, the dearest child of his mother Maina De, and the doting husband of Queen Naital, O lord Rama peer, I call upon you, please answer my cry for help.

The above lyrics are from the famous folk bhajan/devotional music of Rajasthan state, India, dedicated to a highly revered deity Ram Dev baba, equally respected by people of all religions and communities in and around the state. The deity's main shrine located in the small village of Runecha, in the desert of Rajasthan, sees a major gathering every year, on the occasion of his birth anniversary, where prayers are answered, faiths are re-established, and the sanctity of devotion is displayed.

Such is the story of almost all religious and devotional traditions in approximately all states of India. India's bhajans and folk musical forms breathe as the nation's unseen heartbeat, raw voices carrying prayers, triumphs, and sorrows from dusty lanes to temple steps. These oral gems—Jagar chants in misty hills, dhol-thumped harvest reels, sarangi wails under desert stars—slip away under city lights and smartphone scrolls, yet digital media flips the script. From Rajasthan's rat temple of Deshnok tehsil, district Bikaner to the smart cities Jaipur, and Jodhpur and other regions of, the masses reflect upon their faiths as religiously, as any other society, on every occasion. The bhajan tradition that was developed under the Indian Bhakti movement is not merely an expression of

religious faith; rather, it has also functioned as a carrier of social consciousness and moral values. In the Bhajan tradition of Rājasthān, various saints adopted the path of devotion and Bhakti through either Nirguṇa or Saguṇa path, wherein the amalgamation of music and literature plays a significant role in nurturing the seeds of knowledge, devotion and renunciation amongst people. Words awake people and music gives emotional and spiritual depth to their experience.

Dadupanth Tradition-



In the Saint tradition of India, Dādūpanth represents a spiritual lineage whose bhajan tradition has continuously elevated the level of spiritual consciousness in society without institutional promotion, media visibility, or integration into the global religious marketplace, thereby nurturing social harmony, ethical values and self-realization. In an era where traditional art forms increasingly find space on digital platforms, in documentaries and through cultural reporting, the music of Dādūpanth presents an important case for understanding how spiritual traditions are represented, interpreted and communicated to wider audience. Among the various saintly traditions that evolved on the soil of Rājasthān such as Mīrā, Rāmdās, Pīpā, Rañ gajī and many more, within the broader perspective of the bhajan tradition, Dādūpanth has a distinct place as a Nirguṇa philosophy practitioner, where spirituality, poetic expression and musical practice merge in a living synthesis. In the sixteenth century, Dādū Dayāl was a spiritual leader whose teaching inspired his followers, but he did not instruct his disciples to establish a formal sect. After his Nirvāṇ, his followers gradually organized themselves and became “Brahmā Sampradāya” later on during the Ācārya period of Fakīrdās jī, it was renamed to “Dādūpanth or Dādū Sampradāya”.² In the medieval era, Sant Dādū Dayāl was known to be the chief representative of the Nirguṇa saint tradition. The Nirguṇa Bhakti lineage articulated by Sant Dādū Dayāl focuses on the Nirguṇa (attributeless), Nirākār (formless), Nāma-Smaraṇa with the understanding of the absolute as unmanifest, self-realization and detachment as the fundamental basis of sādhanā. The core of his

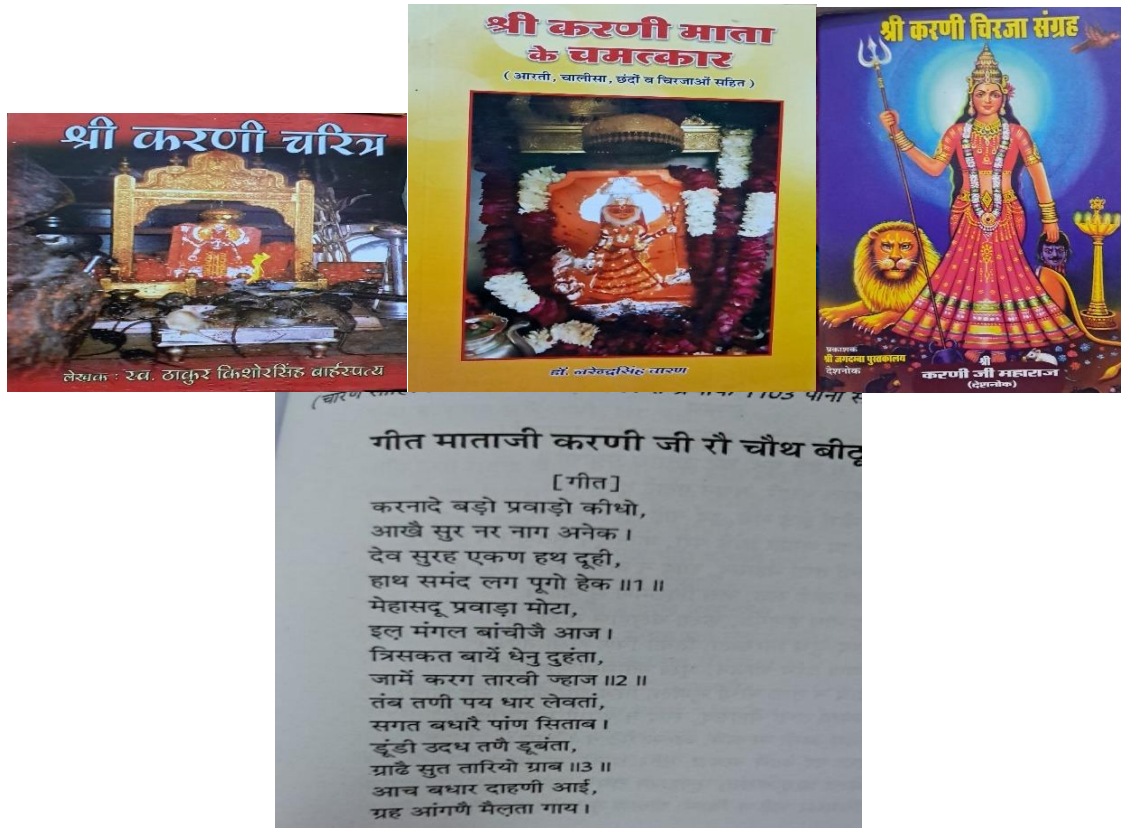
spiritual practice was the worship of Nirākār Brahmā (formless Brahmān), self-control, non-violence and truthful conduct. Inspired by the preceding saints such as Kabīr, Ravidās or Nāmādev, the preaching of Dādū (Dādūvāṇī) has its own independent philosophical perspective. The teachings of Dādū clearly opposes external ritualism, casteism and religious pretensions. It is not only seen in Dādū's teachings but also his disciple followed his path of eternal truth in their Vāṇī such as Sundardās, Rajjab, Bakhnān, Vājind and many more. **The LiteDādūpanth** holds an important position in Rājasthān's literature. Not only Dādū Dayal but 43 out of his chief 52 disciples wrote Grantha, Vāṇī, Verses. Most of those scriptures are either not available or are in a fragmented condition, or exist only in partial form. In Dādūvāṇī, 12 languages have been used which are; Hindī, Urdū, Fārsī, Sarāīkī (Sindh, Pākistān), Gujarātī, Marāṭhī, Braj, Khārī Bolī Hindī, Pañjābī, Rājasthānī (includes different provinces such as Dhūḍāḍ, Mārvār, Mewār, etc.) Saṃskṛta and Arabī.³ At that time, there was no particular national language as such, regional languages were prevalent. A devotee would ask questions in their mother tongue, depending on their region they came from, and Dādū jī would respond in the same language. This practice led to the use of twelve different languages in Dādūvāṇī. This practice helped document and preserve multiple regional languages within a spiritual and literary context and giving them cultural and literary legitimacy. It also reflects the universality of Dādū's message- devotion and spiritual guidance were not limited by language, caste and region.

In the traditional bhajans of the Dādūpanth, spiritual content and textual meaning take precedence over musical virtuosity. The music is intentionally simple and restrained, ensuring that the devotional message remains at the forefront. Unlike musical forms that emphasize ornamentation, improvisation, or technical display, Dādūpanthi bhajans prioritize clarity of words, precise pronunciation, and the heartfelt expression of emotions. This approach allows listeners to feel the devotional sentiment. The choice of ragas complements this contemplative style, favouring serious, calm, and reflective melodies such as Bhairav, Todi, Malkauns, Āsavari, etc. These ragas naturally evoke introspection, detachment, and meditative focus, reinforcing the inner spiritual experience promoted by Dādūvāṇī.

It is important to note that **Dādū Ji himself did not compile Dādūvāṇī**. His disciples, including Rajjab, Mohanjī Dāftārī and Jaṇ gopāl, collected his verses and organized them into the text as it exists today.⁴ Out of the approximately **5,000 verses spoken by Dādū**, only **2,565 were recorded** which were organized in **34 Ang**, and **444 bhajans** were arranged into **27 Rāgas**, including Rāg Gauṛī, Malī Gauṛī, Kalyāṇ, Kānhadā, Ādānā, Kēdar, Marū, Rāmkalī, Āsavārī, Sindūrā, Dēv Gaṃdhār, Kālīṅ gādā, Parjīyā, Bhānmānī, Sārang, Tōdī, Husainī Baṇ gāl, Nat Nārāyaṇ, Sōrath, Guṇḍ, Vilāval, Suhā, Vasant, Bhairū, Lalit, Jaitāsī, and Dhanāshrī.¹⁴ The meticulous organization reflects both the discipline and the devotional purpose underlying the Dādūpanthi tradition.

Dādūpanthi music also presents a contrast to mainstream media culture, which often favours spectacle, performance, and entertainment value. The subtlety, depth, and reflective nature of these bhajans can be overlooked if not presented thoughtfully. To convey their spiritual and cultural significance, it requires sensitive and informed coverage, emphasizing the contemplative and devotional essence rather than merely highlighting musicality or showmanship.

The Chirja of Karni Mata, Deshnok, Bikaner-



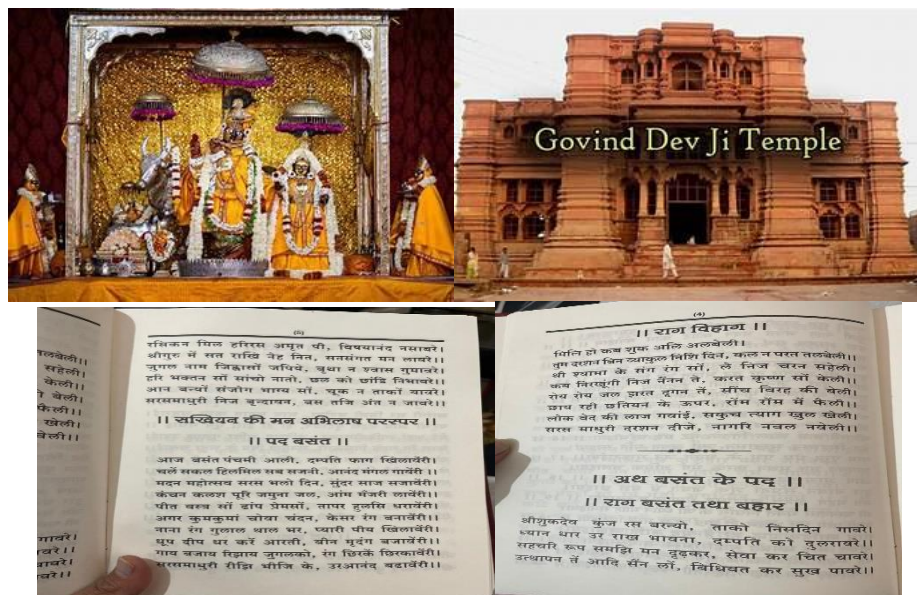
Karni Mata, also known as Ridhi Kanwar or Ridhu Bai, is believed to have been a 14th–15th sage, and an incarnation of Goddess Durga. She is said to have been born in 1387 CE in the village of Suwap near Phalodi, about 100 km from Deshnok, into a Charan family. (Traditionally, Charans are bards, or court poets and genealogists.)⁴ It is said that Ridhi Kanwar was in her mother's womb for 21 months, and her coming was foretold by Goddess Durga herself, who appeared in her mother's dreams. Upon performing many miracles while growing up, Ridhi Kanwar was given the name Karni Mata.⁵

Historical details of her life are scant, and much of what is known about her comes from oral tradition and hagiographies, portray her as a spiritual leader who performed miracles and supported rulers including Rao Jodha, the founder of Jodhpur, and Rao Bika ji, the founder of Bikaner. The present structure of the Karni Mata Temple was commissioned in the early 20th century by Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner.⁶ The priests at the Karni Mata temple have traditionally been Charans, who trace their lineage to her family. The community maintains custodianship of the temple. Karni Mata is also deeply venerated by Rathore Rajputs, the dominant warrior caste in the region. Her blessings to Rao Jodha and Rao Bika, both Rathore kings, led to many Rajput clans in Rajasthan considering her their royal protector and family deity.⁷ Her reputation as a just, miracle-working saint who protected her people transcends caste, and her temple offers equal access to devotees. Locally known as *kabas*, rats are believed to be incarnations of Karni Mata's family members. Legend has it that when her stepson Laxman, also known as Lakhan, drowned, Karni

Mata asked Yama, the god of death, to revive him. Yama relented and allowed him and other members of her lineage to be reborn as rats, avoiding the cycle of death and rebirth.⁷

The devotional songs dedicated to the Goddess are called *CHIRJA*⁸, found in Marwadi language, the written script of which is in Hindi language. The songs are based on the generosity and miracles of the goddess. Surprisingly, all the Chirjas have a rhyme and rhythm composed to them, and sung with utmost faith and dedication during regular Artis and Navaratra paksh. The marwadi dialect in this region of Rajasthan is heavily influenced with the cross border connect between India and Pakistan, as the geographical location of this shrine is some 538kms only.⁹ Although, extremely famous as a rat temple in Rajasthan, the media coverage of these Chirjas and devotional songs of Karni mata temple is not as popularly done as the other major shrines and temples of India, with their own Bhakti sangeet style.

The temples within the periphery of the old fort area of Jaipur, Rajasthan-



The old city of Jaipur has numerous temples where , musical service is a compulsory part of the daily puja. Ashtayam seva of Shri Govinddev ji temple, which was previously done, following the strict norms of Indian classical music, eventually got replaced by the devotional songs in folk language, dedicated to the Lord . Several scriptures mention the names of Ragas, but the language of padas, remains native. Govind Dev Ji Temple is a 'Gaudiya Vaishnava Tradition' temple dedicated to Govind Dev Ji (another name for Lord Krishna) and his wife Radha. The history of the temple dates back to the 18th century when the idol of Lord Krishna, known as Govind Devji, was brought to Jaipur from Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh by King Sawai Jai Singh II, the founder of Jaipur. The idol is believed to be the incarnation of the deity of Lord Krishna from Vrindavan. It is one of the most sacred and important temples for 'Vaishnavite devotees'.¹⁰ Pioneers of Indian Classical Music , such as Pandit Jasraj, Vidushi Kishori Amonkar, Vidushi Ashwini Bhide Deshpande have dedicated their bhajans to the deity with utmost love and purity of emotions. Late Vidushi Kishori Amonkar's "Mharo pranaam , baanke bihari ji"¹¹ and Late Pandit Jasraj's "Laal

Gulaal Na Maaro Ankhan me”¹² and “Rani tero chir jiyo Gopal”¹³ are specimens of such gems of devotional music. Despite all the limelight, there are several other temples in the same vicinity and area, where regular musical service for the deity’s entertainment are done, to seek blessings. Various LP records, Coke Studio, Spotify and Sangeet Natak Akademi have taken up the task of showcasing the beautiful traditions with conferences. Although initiatives have been made after the boom of digitization.

COVID emptied patron courts; virtual "Rhythm of Desert"¹⁴ gigs streamed Anwar Khan to homes worldwide, crowdfunding 2,000 artists. Rupayan Sansthan digitizes analogue tapes with AIIS¹⁵, while schools train young Langas alongside maths. Internet Archive hosts Paris tour reels, Spotify presents qawwalis. VR Thar fests with sand-vibe haptics; AI transcribing spontaneous verses into lyric apps for global poets mimicking nomadic flair. Other albums have also been released but, global media is yet to share the rich heritage, on a plethora of platforms. The traditions are not just carried out as a mundane activity but is still fervently conducted and preserved by the locals and other devotees with their heart and soul.

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