

Mapping the Relationship of Folk Culture and Modern Media in Pakistan: The Case of the Manganiyar Music from Tharparkar, Sindh

For a long time, folkloric practices – music, dance, poetry, and storytelling - dominated Pakistan's popular culture particularly in its rural areas. With the advent of modern media these practices underwent changes in their socio-cultural location. However, there are areas in Pakistan where these expressive cultural practices coexist in public and private spaces with other commercial media. Among the communities where the traces of folkloric culture are still alive but undergoing transitions is the Manganiyar community of musicians in the Tharparkar district of the Sindh province.

The vast desert land of Tharparkar region is home to the Manganiyar community of hereditary caste of musicians with familial lineages in the Western Rajasthan region of India. Based on their diverse roots - musical influences from the system of ragas based in Eastern classical music and Sindhi *surs* and lyrical inspirations from Hindu and Muslim devotional and mythological themes - the Manganiyar musicians invoke imaginations of the desert's natural environment and its socio-cultural traditions in their music. The Manganiyar musicians historically performed for the Kings and Hindu patrons before partition. However after partition, in the absence of patronage from the patrons who migrated to India and lack of support from the government of Pakistan, most Manganiyar musicians started adopting other professions while keeping their musical traditions alive by performing at local ceremonies, festivals, and *Kacheris*. These musicians also strived to sustain their livelihood and their musical traditions by performing for radio and television and in concerts in other towns or urban centers.

Entrusted with the task of fostering a cohesive national imagination based on culture, national radio and television in Pakistan started incorporating folk music into their mainstream programming. Mai Bhagi, a female singer from the Tharparkar region, became a recognizable voice of the Manganiyar music in the 60s and 70s on radio and TV. Very recently, Mai Dhai, another female performer, shot to national fame when she performed for a fusion-based music show on commercial and online media (sponsored by Coke). She attained international fame when she performed live in a concert in the United States. Both singers' music has been used as sound tracks for TV dramas and films. Media are making new uses for folk music and also transforming it into new hybrid forms. These are moments of ruptures and continuities between the old folk culture and modern media. Media's relationship with the folk culture of the country in general, and that of the Manganiyar musicians in particular, is an important site of inquiry. It is important to research how and to what extent national media culture has been historically shaped by and been dependent upon its deep-rooted folk culture. It is crucial to examine how these musicians are surviving in their authentic unmediated environment and how their interaction with the national or regional media and international exposure are shaping their musical practices, performances, and technologies of production. Lastly, it is also important to look at folk culture's competition in the form of various media and modes of entertainment that have made inroads in the rural public spheres. The purpose of this study is to explore how the tension between old and new ways and negotiations between them are shaping the cultural and media practices in Pakistan.

I will start this research project by looking at the historical archives of folk traditions of Tharparkar in Lok Virsa archives and media archives of PTV in Islamabad. I will then focus on the survey of public spaces in Mithi and Umerkot areas of the Tharparkar district for the influx of various forms of modern and commercial media followed by fieldwork and interviews with the Manganiyar musicians. This summer research will serve as preliminary fieldwork for my doctoral project proposal due in the academic year 2016-17.