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Dr. Anamica Dubey
Assistant Professor, Shri
Baldev PG College Baragaon,
Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

A study on the folk musical heritage of the Bundelkhand region with special reference to Chhatarpur District

Anamica Dubey

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Abstract

Folk music can be defined as the music that grows naturally within a community, doesn't follow any written pattern at the initial level, but is passed from generation to generation by listening and repeating. This music reflects the social and cultural lives of the people and their history. Folk music embodies the essence of Indian culture, being both ancient and including contemporary elements. Folk music exhibits continuity, as songs performed by several individuals undergo modifications in melody, lyrics, and rhythm. This process is primarily achieved through three distinct approaches: Folk music preserves ancient traditions and links contemporary generations with the past through songs, musical instruments, and dances that embody memories, narratives, or values from prior generations. Folk music provides individuals with the opportunity to express their creativity and sustain the genre. Over time, several songs, instruments, and dance forms diminish. The music cherished by the community is commemorated and promoted. The incorporation of elements into a community's musical traditions is dependent upon that community's preferences.

Through this study, an effort is made to explore the cultural meaning, historical depth and artistic continuity of Bundeli folk musical instruments in the shadow of the broader Lok tradition. Special focus is given to show how these instruments bridge past and present, the way they are represented in temple art during Chandela's, and how they continue to form living tradition deeply connected to the identity of the local communities. In this paper mainly Chhatarpur District of Madhya Pradesh and its nearby areas will be discussed.

Keywords: Bundeli music instruments, Chandellas, folk tradition, percussion, vibratory, resonator and pneumatic

Introduction

In this article, a qualitative and traditional approach is used to understand the Bundeli music instruments. I have collected information through local musicians, observed folk performances. And read books, articles and online material to know how these instruments are linked with the culture, community life and the problems they face today. The methodology used for this article is historical, based on both library and field survey. Primary sources such as the temple sculptures and a good number of books, articles and journals are already published related to this article and this material is used as secondary sources.

Chhatarpur is a district in Madhya Pradesh also known as Bundelkhand. The local language spoken in this area is Bundeli. It is very popular in Bundelkhand that the language, dietary practices, and customs of its people undergo significant changes within a 30-kilometer radius. The region formerly governed by the Chandellas, presently recognized as Bundelkhand, continues to exhibit a notable degree of tradition continuity.

Folk songs are intricately intertwined with the social norms and rituals that permeate everyday life, as well as the festivities associated with them. Solah Sanskaras, an integral component of Hindu tradition, are commemorated with considerable allure within the local populace of this particular place. The holy days of Amavasya, Poornima, and Makarshankranti, which have garnered significant popularity since the era of Chandellas, continue to be observed with fervor by individuals. The festivities of various communities, such as the Diwari nritya of the shepherd community, hold significant cultural value in nearly all sections of this region and present-day Bundelkhand.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Anamica Dubey
Assistant Professor, Shri
Baldev PG College Baragaon,
Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Additionally, it is specifically conducted at the Kalinjar Nilkanth temple during the Kartik Poornima festival, in accordance with the folk tradition of fostering art and culture.

In Bundelkhand, each ritual is accompanied with a ceremony, and a distinct style of singing and playing instruments is observed. From the moment of a child's birth until their demise, it is customary for every ceremonial event to be accompanied with music. During prenatal development, a melodic composition is employed to safeguard and foster the well-being of the fetus. Upon the child's birth, they enthusiastically sing the song 'SOHAR', which translates to 'Ghia Bina Homai Na Lage, Lalan Bina Sohare Maharaj'. Women from the local community and family members gather to commemorate the event, creating a pleasant ambiance. Subsequently, Dholak and Jhunjhuna ensue.

Akati or Akshay Tritiya is a festival celebrated by unmarried girls, where they perform marriage of gudda and gudiya (dolls made of clothes) with great enthusiasm sing akati songs one such eg. of song is 'akati poojan kaise jaaon se bara tare tare libauaa', In this song the girl which was married earlier and as she is mature now her bridegroom has come to take her to his home on the other hand same day she has to go to perform wedding of her doll, at this juncture she sings this song.

As the child matures and undergoes different Sanskars, there are specific melodies associated with each ceremony. During the marriage ceremony, a comprehensive set of rituals and songs are performed. For instance, when the groom arrives at the bride's home, they sing GAARI (*Hare Baans Mandap Chaye, Siyaju Kha Ram byahan Aaye*) at the entrance. In this context, the bride is regarded as Goddess Sita, while the groom is regarded as Lord Rama. The individuals aspire to embody the principles espoused by Lord Ram and Sita in their personal lives through the act of singing songs dedicated to the forthcoming couple's entrance into the Grihastya Ashram. In these songs dholak is often used as accompanying instrument.

Upon the bride's arrival at the groom's residence, a traditional variety of song known as DAADRE (*Mein Dekhon Tera Mijaaj Balam*) is performed, wherein the bride engages in playful song-making with the husband. At this ceremony along with other women relatives the bride is also asked to show her singing skills. In this manner, the songs serve as markers for significant life events.

Another instance illustrating the correlation between humility and animals occurs when a woman is engaged in the task of grinding her wheat and happens to encounter a mouse. The individual performs the song "CHAKIYA GEET" (*Mori Chakiya Ke Geraon Ger Chukharva Kaiso Nauno Phire Andhiyare Mein*), in which she expresses her appreciation for the luminous gaze of the mouse as it roams the nocturnal landscape.

The role of nature has consistently had significant importance in the lives of individuals. Bundeli songs are performed over various months, Faag is sung in Falgun month (spring season), with CHAITEE and BILWARI being sung during the summer months, while SAWAN, KAJARI, JHOOLA, and RAACHARE are being sung during the Mansoon season. During the winter season, festivals typically commence, during which the Kartik Geet is sung in the month of Kartik. Marriage songs (Gaari, Dadre, Banna-Banni) are sung during wedding ceremonies

and several varieties of bundeli songs are sung in day today life.

Below is compilation of several Bundeli instruments varieties ^[1] some of them quite similar to instruments depicted in temples made during Chandella period ^[2] which were made in Ninth to Eleventh centuries CE. The instruments are categorized into four main classes based on their material composition and sound production methods: percussive, pneumatic, vibratory, and resonator.

Percussion Instruments: This category comprises all instruments that are covered with skin, all of which belong to the Avanadhi group. They are also referred to as Memberophones or Charmaja, as they are created using animal skins.



Fig 1: Dholak

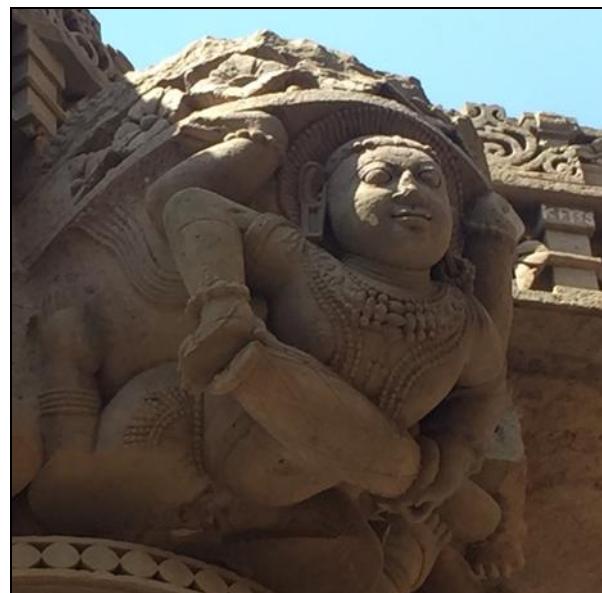


Fig 2: Dholak, Neelkanth temple mandap, Kalinjar

Dholak: It is a variety of drums. It is very popular instrument of this region often used by male and female, is used in many folk songs and dances performed in this region, especially in folk songs Sohar, Dadare, Allaha, Devi Bhaktein, Hori, Diwari etc. Many depictions of instrument

similar to Dholak is seen in temples made during Chandellas. Figure 2 is located on the pillar of mandap lying in front of Neelkanth Mahadev temple at Kalinjar. Here the flying kirat is playing an instrument similar to dholak.



Fig 3: Nagadiya

Nagadiya: The Nagadiya is a significant percussion instrument in Bundeli folk music and dances, made of clay or mud and animal skin. It serves as a rhythm source and accompaniment, often performed alongside other instruments like the dholak, harmonium, and tambura. The Nagadiya's dynamic rhythmic patterns harmonize with Bundeli melodies and dances, making it essential for celebrations, festivals, and gatherings. It represents the region's rich heritage and shapes the distinctive auditory and rhythmic characteristics of its music and dances. Played with sticks, it is an essential instrument of diwari dance.



Fig 4: Dhol

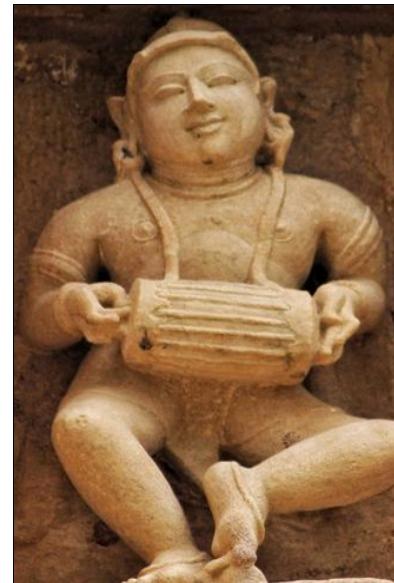


Fig 5: Dhol, Sub temple, Lakshman temple, Khajuraho

Dhol: It is a big variety of dholak, often played in devotional and cultural processions. In local tradition during festivals these dhol players go door to door to play dhol and collect offerings. Dhol is played in both happy and sorrow occasion, though the beat pattern changes and people are able to recognize by the beats the occasion of drum playing. Figure 5 is depicted on the south-western sub temple of Lakshman temple, which is situated in western group of temples at Khajuraho. The sculpture is depicted on the upper panel near to the shikhar of the temple, it closely resembles the dhol [3] in Figure 4, which belongs to present scenario.



Fig 6: Pakhawaj

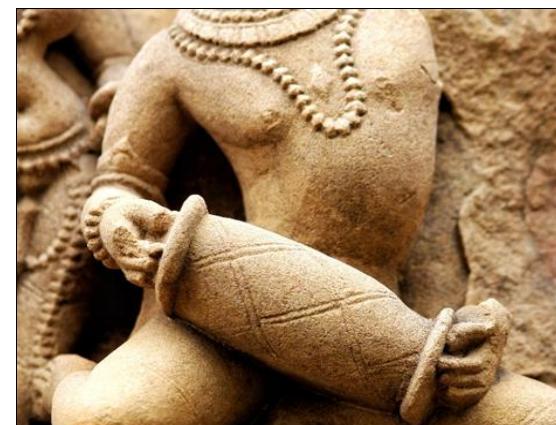


Fig 7: Pakhawaj, Chitragupta temple, Khajuraho

Pakhawaj: This instrument also known as Mridang, it is an accompanied instrument, quite popular instrument of this area. Often used in Jhula geet of sawan in Bundelkhand. A close resemblance to this instrument is seen in Chandella



Fig 8: Khanjri, Chitragupta temple, Khajuraho



Fig 9: Khanjri

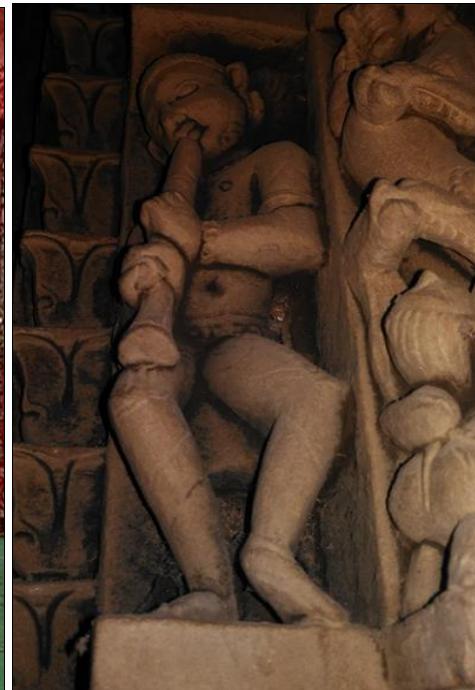
Chang or Khanjari: Khanjri is one of the simplest Bundeli folk instrument. It is a circular disc, covered with animal skin from one side. Generally local artist uses monitor lizard skin to make the instrument. It is also known as Duff; similar instrument is seen at different places in temples made during Chandella's reign. Figure 8 lies on the lower panel on the outer northern wall of main mandap at Chitragupta temple. This instrument is quite popular in

devotional performances.

Pneumatic: Pneumatic instruments are recognized by various names, including Sushira Vadya, Vayuja, or aerophones. They are classified as wind instruments. These instruments utilize air to generate sound, either directly or indirectly. When air passes into the instruments, it vibrates and generates sound at varying intensities.



Fig 10: Ramtula (Artist Dulichand, Chhatarpur) **Fig 11:** Sahnai, Chitragupta temple, Khajuraho



Turahi or Ramtula: This instrument closely resembles the Sehnai often depicted in Chandella monuments. Figure 11 below is seen on the left side of garbhgrih door lintel at chitragupta temple at Khajuraho. Ramtula is a bundeli folk instrument especially blown during wedding procession or festive occasions in the bundelkhand region. It is blown almost at the start of every manglik (sacred) occasion. There is a popular proverb in Bundeli “*Babba bajan lago ramtula*,



Fig 12: Bansuri

Bansuri or Flute: It is very popular instrument of this region; small children are often seen playing this instrument. The instrument is also quite popular among shepherds' various depictions of this instrument are seen in temples of Khajuraho. Figure 13 is depicted on the middle panel, north-east corner outer wall of mandap left hand side at Lakshman temple, Khajuraho. Flute is accompanied instrument of Bundeli Kartik, Faag, Dimariyai and Diwari songs. The picture below (Figure 12) is of a local villager seen playing flute in corner of temple, for his entertainment. Both the figures have close resemblance in playing pattern though have a great difference of nearly thousand years.

Bin: Snake charmers, or sapera in local language play the Bin, also called the been or Pungi. The pungi originated in Indian folk music. India values it for religion and music. They often show snake dance by the means of playing this instrument. Snake charmers do it on the street. The pungi is originally prepared from dried bottle gourd. Gourd necks are often carved for aesthetics. The other end has two bamboo or reed pipes. One pipe has seven holes for melody and the other for drone. Beeswax secures the pipes to the gourd allowing pitch adjustment.

“*Chalo dekhiye Dula*” [4], which often means that the ramtula instrument has commenced let us join in the bridal procession to see the bridegroom. In Bundelkhand, these musical instruments were intricately linked to the caste system, with certain instruments associated with specific classes. Local residents assert that Ramtula is linked to the banskari community, with several artists perpetuating this practice for numerous years.



Fig 13: Bansuri, Lakshman temple, Khajuraho



Fig 14: Sapera Playing Bin



Fig 15: Bin

Algoza: This is also a wind instrument, it is played during Diwali dance festival, which is locally known as diwari, a

part of this dance is known as chatpie (played with sticks), like marshal dance. At present this instrument is rarely seen and getting less popular as it is very difficult to play. Only artist perfect in this art could play this instrument.

Vibratory Instruments: The instruments that utilize stretched strings to generate sound are referred to as tantu vadya, chordophones or Vibratory instruments. It is believed that these types of instruments originated from the hunter's bow. The early stringed instruments resembled the shape of a bow.

Ektara or tambura: This region reveres the Tambura as a traditional instrument. It has a thin neck and spherical bottle gourd body. The calabash made of bottle gourd is covered by monitor lizard skin. Bundeli folk music uses a single metal or silk tambura string. When played delicately, it creates a continuous drone that complements vocals and other instruments. Its ambient tones enhance the emotional depth of classic Bundeli folk songs about love, heroism, and rural life. The Tambura's lyrical presence unites communities and maintains Bundelkhand's rich musical history for future generations, whether accompanying exuberant festivals or solemn rituals. A close resemblance to this instrument is seen at the outer wall of Lakshman temple (Figure 15).



Fig 16: Tambura



Fig 17: Tambura, Lakshman temple, Khajuraho

Sarangi: Sarangi played in nearby areas of Chhatarpur is quite similar to tamura, the major difference between sarangi and tambura is, tambura is played by hands while bow shape arch in which horse hairs are used often called gaj is used to play this instrument. The calabash of sarangi

is small in size and made of coconut shell. Coconut shell is covered with animal skin. Ghungroos are often attached to the stick. It is very popular instrument of Kachhiyai, and Dhimariyayi folk songs.

**Fig 18:** Sarangi**Fig 19:** Jhaanjh, Matengeswar temple**Fig 20:** Jhaanjh, Chitragupta temple, Khajuraho

Resonator: The instruments that exist in pairs of the same size and magnitude are referred to as Ghanvadya or Resonator. The shapes may be flat, oval, or cup-like, featuring a central hole. They are secured with a cotton rope. The flat parts are engaged by clashing them internally.

Jhaanjh: Traditional bundeli music uses a huge, flat metal disc called "Jhaanjh", as a resonator. Bronze or brass cymbals provide a bright, ringing sound when struck. They are vital to folk and devotional music. It is seen commonly in Chandella art, The Figure 18, below is depicted on the

lintel of garbgrih, left hand side. Jhaanjh is very popular Bundeli folk instrument. From 8 to 16 inches, jhaanjhs vary in diameter. A musician can strike them rhythmically by holding them in each hand with loops or straps on their centers. Jhaanjhs clashing generates a sharp, resonant sound that adds color and dimension to music.

Manjira: This is a devotional instrument of Bundelkhand, they are small metal disc, struck together to produce sound. Their use is quite popular in Devi Bhaktein, Alha singing and other folk devotional songs.

**Fig 21:** Folk Instrument Manjira**Fig 22:** Jhalar, Duladeo temple, Khajuraho

Kaseru or Jhalar: It is a hanging bell, beaten with sticks to produce sounds [5]. This instrument is very much in use in daily temple worship (Arti) [6]. It is also depicted in door lintels of many temples made during Chandellas. Figure 20 is depicted at the door lintel of Duladeo temple garbgrih at Khajuraho, the artist is holding Jhalar in his left hand and standing in a playing position holding striking stick in his right hand. At present also Jhalar playing is very commonly practiced in devotional ceremony of many temples in Bundelkhand region.

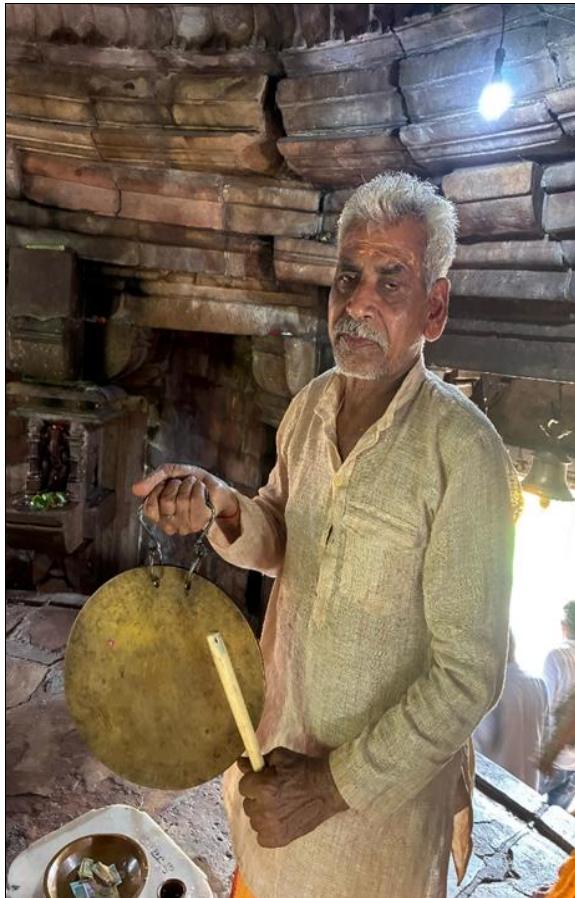


Fig 23: Jhalar



Fig 24: Kartal, garbgrih, Lakshman temple, Khajuraho

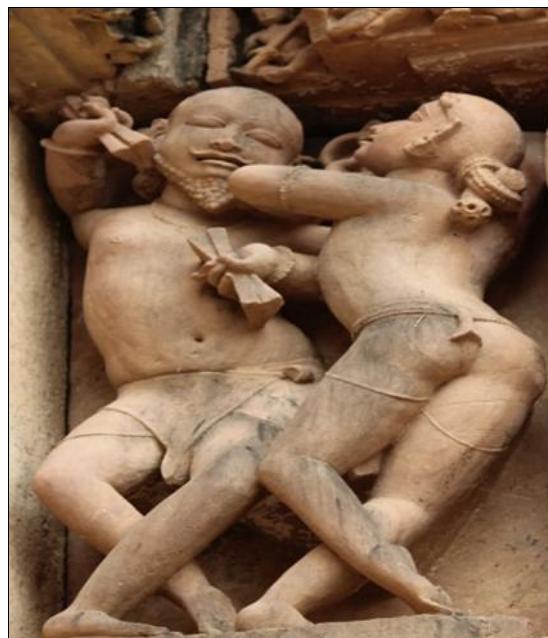


Fig 25: Kartal, Lakshman temple



Fig 26: Kartal



Fig 27: Kartal Folk performance

Chatkola or Kartal: Kartal (castanets), is a kind of Ghan vadya it is also used as a Bundeli folk instrument, popular in devotional songs [7]. Similar to this instrument is seen in Lakshman temple, Khajuraho at two different places. Figure 22 lies on the garbhrih door lintel while Fig. 23 is seen on the central panel, outer south facing wall of Lakshman temple at Khajuraho. It comprises a pair of wooden blocks or frames, each equipped with little metallic discs that produce a jingling sound when struck together. Grasp one pair in each hand and clap regularly to produce crisp, resonant beats. This instrument is widely utilized in accompanying Bundeli traditional folk songs and dances. The figures below represent a long tradition of this instrument in devotional practices from the Chandellas to the present society in Bundelkhand.



Fig 28: Chimta

Chimta: This instrument is similar to tong used in cooking, but is big in size the two metal plates are struck together to produce rhythm [8]. A ring is attached to one end. It is used as accompanying instrument in Allaha gayan.



Fig 29: Jheenka

Jheenka: It is a very simple type of Ghan Vadya, primarily used in devotional and folk music of Bundelkhand region. It is made of wooden frame with several pairs of metallic discs

fixed between two bars. When the frame is shaken by artist during performance the metallic discs strike each other, producing a jingling sound. It is mainly used in bhajan, kirtans and Bundeli folk performances.



Fig 30: Ghungroo (Diwari Dance)



Fig 31: Ghungroo, sub temple, Lakshman temple, Khajuraho

Ghungroo: Ghungroos suspended in threads [9] are used as accompanying instruments in devotional songs and dances of Bundelkhand region. The picture below belongs to diwari

dance played in Matangeswar temple of Khajuraho at the festival of Diwali here artist is seen playing Ghungroo. This instrument seems to be quite popular in Chandella music tradition one such similar depiction is seen in Lakshman temple, Khajuraho (Figure 29). Both the pictures depicted below has a close resemblance in pattern of Ghungroo playing as well as the dress of the artist also has resemblance.

The folk tradition of Bundelkhand represent a significant yet, often unexplored element of India's incredible cultural heritage. These traditions are preserved in lived practices, rituals and music instruments that have prolonged their significance for centuries. To understand this continuity, we need to recognize the Indian concept of 'Lok', which is often translated as "folk" but it has much deeper philosophical and cultural view.

Lok in Indian context, is not merely the non-elite or rural; it symbolizes the collective consciousness, the traditions deeply rooted in the soil (motherland), and the spirit of people passing through generations. Different from the western dichotomy of "folk vs. Classical,". Lok in Indian concept disobey such binaries. It refers to the zone of culture, lived experience and artistic expression that has synchronized with and influenced classical traditions throughout history.

The continuity of folk tradition (Lok Parampara) in this region is apparent in the replenished use of traditional musical instruments such as Dhol, Mridang, Sarangi, Khanjari, Ramtula, Bansuri, Tambura, Nagadiya etc.

The use of these instruments in local gatherings, festivals and devotional performances, are not modern inventions but the descendants of musical instruments depicted in the temple art over a thousand years ago. The temples built during Chandellas mainly at Khajuraho and nearby areas stand as a visual archive of this continuity. The temple art depicts musicians and dancers engaged in performances using musical instruments that closely resemble those still in use in folk traditions of Bundelkhand today.

It is not just the longevity of the instruments themselves, which makes this connection remarkable but also the cultural ethos presented by them. These instruments are part of a vibrant oral and performance tradition that has survived centuries of social, political and technological change. The musical practices of Chhatarpur region of Bundelkhand and nearby areas are living evidence to the flexibility and adaptability of Lok sangeet (folk music), where oral knowledge systems have preserved, musical structures, rhythmic patterns and instrument making techniques without depending merely on formal documentation.

Bundeli folk music instruments are an integral part of Bundeli cultural heritage, deeply engaged in the customs and devotional practices of Indian society. Instruments like Jhaanjh, Jheenka, Khanjri, Jhalar and Shankh (Conch shell) have played a keen role in temple ceremonies, mainly during Arti (prayer rituals). These instruments are not merely tools for creating sound, they carry symbolic meanings, spiritual energy and an integral connection to the land and community. The rhythmic sounds produced by these instruments enhance the devotional atmosphere, creating a sense of sacredness and collective participation among devotees.

In Present times, the use of mechanical or electronic devices that produce the sounds of these instruments has increased a lot, it is influencing both rural and urban temples. These

devices are gradually replacing the presence of traditional artists. This shift seems to be serious concern, not only for the survival of indigenous musical traditions but also for the authenticity of devotional experiences. The live performances of musicians and sound of Bundeli folk instruments generate spiritual vibrations that connects with the devotee's emotions and helps to create a heartfelt prayer environment.

The use of mechanical devices in sacred music practices risks reducing these vibrant traditions to mere symbolic gestures. It lacks the emotional engagement offered by traditional artists. It also reflects a broader disconnection from cultural roots and traditional knowledge of artisans passed down through generations. Preserving the traditional Bundeli folk music instruments use in devotional practices is very essential for the survival of cultural heritage and also for the spiritual integrity of religious observances. Promoting the use of traditional Bundeli music sustains community identity, supports local artists and keeps alive the lived performances for which mechanical devices can never be a substitute.

Modernization and Globalization is continuously overshadowing regional art forms; hence the preservation of traditional folk music along with instruments becomes crucial. These instruments are not only tools for merely producing sound; they serve as living links to our incredible cultural heritage. They embody memory, belief and social connection. By documenting, studying and reviving the use of Bundeli folk music along with instruments, we are preserving our priceless part of human heritage that serves as a link to our roots and fosters cultural diversity in an ever-modernizing world.

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