

## The Indian Oboe Reexamined

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### The Debate regarding the Appearance of the Oboe in India

In this article we propose to reignite a debate regarding the shawm *śahnāī* or *surṇā* that had been started by Nazir Jairazbhoy in 1970<sup>1</sup>, and taken up by him again in 1980<sup>2</sup>, in response to interesting suggestions by Deva<sup>3</sup> and Dick<sup>4</sup>. Jairazbhoy had initially argued that the oboe (*surṇā*) is “an extension of the Near and Middle Eastern *surṇāy*, which had been imported into India by the invading Muslims”<sup>5</sup>. However, after some clarifications by Deva<sup>6</sup> and Dick<sup>7</sup>, who pointed out that another kind of oboe (*madhukarī*/*mohorī* / *muhurī*) existed in India before the *surṇā* / *śahnāī*, Jairazbhoy modified his earlier conclusion somewhat:

Had I written, however, that an oboe was introduced into India, and extended the date of its introduction by two or three hundred years, my statement would perhaps have been more acceptable. The prior existence of an oboe-type in India would not, however, have prevented wandering bands of musicians employing the *surṇā* from entering India with their instruments. Some of them may have accompanied invading Muslim armies. In the course of time, the *surṇā* tradition evidently spread through most of India and Pakistan probably ousting *mohorī* the in many areas, so that we now find the *mohorī* restricted, for the most part, to the less accessible tribal areas of Eastern India.

That is, Jairazbhoy attempts to preserve the hypothesis that the *surṇā* oboe tradition was of Middle Eastern origin, even though he accepts that oboes already existed in India before the advent of Muslim culture in India. He had some reasons to do this:

(1) As pointed out by Dick, shawms of various kinds are widespread throughout Asia, including the Indian subcontinent. They often have purely local names, but there is also a very widespread distribution of what are clearly variants of the same term, related to the word *surṇā*. Jairazbhoy gives an extensive list of these variants from several different countries:

Macedonian, zurla; Turkish, zurna; Arabic, zamr and surna (also (suryanai); Iraqi, zurna (?); Persian, sorna (surnay); Afghanistani, sornai; North Indian, shahnai; South Indian, nagasvara; Sinhalese, horana(va); Burmese, hnè; Javanese; sruni;

<sup>1</sup> Jairazbhoy, N.A., A Preliminary Survey of the Oboe in India, *Ethnomusicology* 14(3):375-88.

<sup>2</sup> Jairazbhoy, N.A., The South Asian Double Reed Aerophone Reconsidered, *Ethnomusicology*, January 1980, pp. 147-156.

<sup>3</sup> Deva, B.C. The Double-reed Aerophone in India, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 7:77-84.

<sup>4</sup> Dick, A.A., The Earlier History of the Shawm in India, *The Galpin Society Journal*, Number XXXVII, March 1984, Pp. 80-98.

<sup>5</sup> Jairazbhoy, 1980, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> Deva, B.C. The Double-reed Aerophone in India, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 7:77-84.

<sup>7</sup> Dick, A.A., The Earlier History of the Shawm, *op. cit.*

Atjeh, srune; Batak, sarune; Dayak, serunai; Cambodian, sralai; Malayan, sernai; Sumatran, srunè; Chinese suonah.<sup>8</sup>

Dick relies on Sachs<sup>9</sup>, who follows Farmer<sup>10</sup> in declaring that the word *surṇā* is originally Persian for 'festival pipe'. If that is the case, then on linguistic grounds, we can argue for a Middle Eastern (specifically Persian) origin for the oboe, which was to be carried into India in Islamic times.

(2) The *surṇā* also appears Middle Eastern at first sight because of its association with instruments and genres which are claimed to be Middle Eastern as well. Thus Jairazbhoy argues that

There seemed to be little doubt that the first of these, the *śahnāī/ surṇā*, was connected with the Near and Middle Eastern tradition involving the *surṇay* and the accompanying double-headed drum, *duhul*, since the Indian *shahnāī* is often associated with a drum, *dhol*, similar to the *duhul* both in name and structure. Further, the Indian *shahnāī* is often associated with a pair of kettle drums, *naggārā* (cf. Arabic *naqqārah*), and the Palace gateway *naubat* tradition. "Naubat" is evidently derived from "nauba", which was, according to Farmer (1929; 153-4), an Arabic orchestral suite as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD.

A similar point was made by Dick:

The name 'festival pipe' would have referred to the loud strident tone of an outdoor band instrument, and indeed in the Islamic world and areas influenced by Islam the shawm is often of this character, played in military, ceremonial or other open-air bands along with drums (pre-eminently kettle-drums) and trumpets or horns. The name of the band itself and of other instruments played in it are often also derived from Arabic or Persian; in India, the band is known as *naubat* or *nahābat* (from Arabic) or else *naqqāra-khāna* (Arabo-Persian), while the kettle-drums are called *naqqāra*, *naqqāra*, or *tabal*, all ultimately Arabic, and the barrel or cylindrical drums *dhol* and *dholak*, often found in Indian folk bands, may relate in name to the Perso-Turkish *duhul*.

Thus we see that in addition to the linguistic argument given above, based on the derivation of the word *surṇā*, an argument is made for the oboe being a Middle Eastern innovation introduced into India, deriving from its context as part of a Middle Eastern ensemble. Arguments based on the evolution of the structure of the oboe itself are not given either by Dick or Jairazbhoy, whose papers then go into great detail into linguistic and textual arguments, some of which will be examined below.

Dick also proposes an etymology for the oboe *mohorī*: which has now been accepted as pre-dating the *surṇā*;

The most likely derivation of the name is the Arabic term MIZMĀR; The Arabs had conquered Sind in 712 AD, and other Sanskrit texts describe Arabo-Persian military instruments that had been disseminated in India, such as the *tumbakī* (i.e.

<sup>8</sup> Jairazbhoy, 1970, p. 386.

<sup>9</sup> *Die Musikinstrumente Indiens und Indonesiens*, Berlin, 1923, pp. 154-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Studies in Oriental Musical Instruments, Second Series*, Glasgow, 1939, pp. 76-84.

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*dombak*: kettledrum) and the *bukkā* (trumpets). The Sanskrit forms *madhukarī* etc are false re-Sansritizations.<sup>11</sup>

Again the second oboe is regarded as being Middle eastern in origin, on linguistic grounds, and on account of association with other instruments also regarded as Middle Eastern.

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<sup>11</sup> The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, ed. Stanley Sadie, Volume Two, pp. 597-8, (entry on *Mahvarī*)

### Difficulties with the Present Consensus

The etymology of the word *dhol/duhul/ dhol* is itself the subject of some debate. Two excerpts from the Groves Dictionary of Music entries, both co-authored by Dick, will make this clear:

(a) The name *dhol* does not, as has been stated, derive from the Sanskrit *dhola* – a late, post-medieval form which postdates the appearance of the Persian drum name *duhul* or *dohol*, at the Turko-Afghan court of the Delhi Sultanate from the 13<sup>th</sup>-century onwards. The diminutive suffix in *dholak* is as much Persian as Indo-Aryan. Nonetheless, though these Persian names are widespread in the Indian subcontinent, only in some cases can they be said to denote drums of Persian origin.<sup>12</sup>

(b) Though the name *dholak* is Persian, it does not (unlike *duhul*, the Persian derivation of *dhol*) seem to occur in the earlier Sultanate records. Both the *dhol* and the *dholak* types can be traced to the ancient and medieval indigenous drum PATAHA, given even more prominence than the *mṛdaṅga* in classical sources.<sup>13</sup>

We see that in spite of the supposed Persian origin of the words *dhol / dholak*, they are applied to instruments not necessarily Persian in origin. A different kind of difficulty presents itself in the case of the *madhukarī/ mohorī/ muhurī* which Dick has derived from the Arabic *mizmār*, as mentioned above.

Aside from the obvious difference between the word *mohorī* from the word *mizmār*, we can see that no scribal error could confuse the Arabic spellings of the (مهری) with the (مزمار). Besides, if the word *mohorī/ mizmār* is supposed to be an Arabic loan into Indic, which dates to pre-Islamic times, we are left with the task of explaining why Central Asians or Persians would pass onto India an Arabic word that would only become current centuries later with the advent of Islam. Also the word *mizmār* which could only come into India via Iran, does not seem to be used as the name of a folk instrument in Iran (or Baluchistan and Afghanistan), but only as a literary word.

There are also difficulties with Jairazbhoy's etymology for the word *surṇā*, because the word (and the instrument) is attested in Sri Lankan Pali literature, a century before the advent of Islam into South India.<sup>14</sup>

The difficulties with the suggestion of a Middle Eastern origin for the *surṇā/ mohorī* are not only linguistic. While Jairazbhoy regards the oboe in Indonesia as being of Middle Eastern origin on linguistic grounds, it has been attested there before contact with Islam, as the specialist on Indonesian music, Jaap Kunst, would write:

Such shawms, and instruments closely akin to them, are found in a large part of the archipelago. The *selomprèt*<sup>15</sup> originated from the Persian-Arabian culture

<sup>12</sup> The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, ed. Stanley Sadie, Volume One, pp. 560-2, (entry on *Dhol*)

<sup>13</sup> The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, ed. Stanley Sadie, Volume One, pp. 562-3, (entry on *Dholak*)

<sup>14</sup> Society in Mediaeval Ceylon (The State of Society in Ceylon as depicted in the Saddharma-ratnāvali and other Literature of the Thirteenth Century) M.B. Ariyapala, Colombo, Ceylon, 1968, pp. 260-261. Also, Ethnomusicology: Its content and growth and Ethnomusicological Aspects of Sri Lanka, C. De S. Kulatillake, Colombo, 1991, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> The name *selomprèt* is derived from the Dutch word for trumpet. But the instrument dates to times before colonization by the Dutch.

(surnai, turned in the archipelago into serunai, as in Sumatra, or saronèn, as in Madura and East-Java), but, as is evident from its occurrence in Java in the Hindu-Javanese period, in Bali and in the Batak country, was adopted also by the non-islamized groups of the population.<sup>16</sup>

Notice that even Kunst regards the Middle Eastern *surnā* as the original instrument, overriding his own observation that sculptures show that it existed in Indonesia in pre-Islamic times.

We have seen above the Middle Eastern *naubat* ensemble has been regarded as the source of the *surnā*, *dohol*, *naqqāra*, etc. However, as in India, even in lands to the immediate west of India, peoples of Indic origin are found to be *almost exclusively* associated with these instruments. In several instances even their caste-names are related to analogous caste names in India. Thus for instance in the Northern Areas of Pakistan (territory disputed by India and Pakistan), musicians (called Dom in the Shina language) play the double-reed *surnai*, the fipple flute, or the transverse flute, the *dadañ* 'double-headed drum' and the *damal* 'pair of kettledrums'. This combination is widespread throughout Central Asia and the Islamic world. (The term Dom does not indicate a single group, but refers to several endogamous groups, which are all at the low end of the social hierarchy.)<sup>17</sup>

The ethnomusicologist John Baily in his study of musicians in Herat, Afghanistan, found that the

the *surnā* and *dohol* were played only by members of a small ethnic minority who called themselves Gharibzadeh and who followed a number of low ranking professions, most typically that of barber<sup>18</sup>

The Gharibzadeh were contemptuously called *jat* by the Pakhtuns, a name which recalls the Indian origins of the Gharibzadeh.

More importantly, the drum-shawm ensemble is very prevalent in temples in precisely those regions of India where Islam made the least impact, such as in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and in the Himalayan regions. This fact has been noted by Chauhan<sup>19</sup> who studied folk music in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. Most musicians of the drum-shawm ensemble attached to temples in that region hailed from the caste Domangs (blacksmiths and goldsmiths).

The conclusion that the drum-shawm ensemble, with its related instruments, had to be a later development in Indian musical culture has been made based on the non-occurrence of the names of some instruments in classical (pre-Muslim) Sanskrit sources, and their subsequent mention in later (post-Muslim) Sanskrit sources. Thus, for instance, Dick concludes that the *cukkā* mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century *Saṅgītaratnākara* is a misreading for the Arabic word *būq*. He also proposes that it should be read in Sanskrit as the *bukkā* (and it is in this form that it has entered the Grove Dictionary of Music!)

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<sup>16</sup> J. Kunst, *Music in Java: Its history, its theory and its technique*, Third, enlarged edition, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973, p. 238.

<sup>17</sup> The *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Volume 5, South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent, Alison Arnold, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York and London, 2000, entry on Northern Areas of Pakistan, Anna Schmid, p. 795

<sup>18</sup> John Baily, *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Music in the city of Herat*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 102

<sup>19</sup> *The Music of Kinnaur*, I.E.N. Chauhan, (Census of India, 1971, Miscellaneous Studies: Ethnology – Tribal Music, Series 1)

However, the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Indo-Persian text *Lehjāt-e-Sikandershahī*<sup>20</sup> (written in North India, based on Sanskrit sources no longer extant) confirms the existence of an instrument called the *cukkā*, which answers to the description of the *mohorī* but is smaller in size. (*Cukkā* spells as (ڪڙڪا), and cannot possibly be confused with *bukkā* (بوق)). Thus the possibility that the drum-shawm ensemble was already well known in India (but may have been adapted to the *naubat* ensemble) cannot be discounted. Sykes, who studied the ‘gypsies’ of Khorasan working in the *Naqqarkhana* of Herat concluded that they were recruited from castes of hereditary locksmiths, and retained some words of Indic origin in their speech which was different from the ambient Persian language.<sup>21</sup>

As early as 1970, Felix Hoerburger had noted that the similarity between the court orchestra of the Mughal court and the drum-shawm folk ensembles may indeed be more than coincidental, but it is not possible to decide which is the original one and which is a later development:

But the question whether the latter represents a stunted version of the former or the court orchestra was a sophisticated version of an old folk orchestra must remain open.<sup>22</sup>

It is to this open question, and to an attempted resolution of the difficulties noted above, that the next few sections are dedicated.

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<sup>20</sup> *Lehjāt-e-Sikandershahī*, Edited by Shahab Sarmadee, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1999

<sup>21</sup> P. Molesworth Sykes, “Notes on Musical Instruments in Khorasan, with Special Reference to the Gypsies,” *Man*, Vol. 9 (1909), pp. 161-164.

<sup>22</sup> Felix Hoerburger, *Folk Music In The Caste System Of Nepal*, 1970 Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council, p. 144.

### Linguistic Arguments: Uses and Limitations

It may be worthwhile to devote a little attention to the question of the validity of using linguistic arguments to support research into issues relating to music. Since linguistic evidence is ‘soft’ and must be used with caution, it may be useful to look at a few examples of how far linguistic arguments may be pushed.

The names of things may change from place to place, and from one time period to another, even in the same place. The *Vīṇā* in ancient Indian texts often referred to a harp, but in later Sanskrit texts came to acquire the meaning of ‘lute’, or ‘zither’. The *rabab* in Indonesia refers to a fiddle, but in North-West India and Afghanistan, the word refers to a short lute. Going further east, in Iran, the *rabab* is again a fiddle and it retains the meaning of fiddle in Turkey and Egypt. The student who may regard the history of the word as indistinguishable from the history of the instrument, would be at a loss to explain how a fiddle could change into a lute and back, as he traverses the world map mentally. The possibility that words are used imprecisely, or variously, must never be overlooked.

The musicologist must justifiably reject a study that confuses the harp *Vīṇā* with the lute *Vīṇā*, or does not distinguish the fiddle *rebab* from the lute *rebab*. However this does not mean that linguistic evidence is always misleading. The names and words used to refer to instruments can often give valuable pointers to their origin and development. It is hardly possible to regard as a coincidence the fact that several unrelated languages use very similar words for the oboe—Albanian ‘*zurna*’, Persian ‘*surna*’, Malay ‘*serunai*’, Chinese ‘*suona*’, Sinhalese ‘*horanawa*’. Why would a Thracian language like Albanian have a word that so resembles a word, for the same object, in a Malayo-Polynesian language such as Malay? The reader may object that could be coincidence – after all, the Malay word ‘*mata*’ and the Greek word ‘*mata*’ both happen to mean the same thing, namely, ‘eye’.

To answer these objections, we may note that the musicologist can walk on surer ground, if the leaps of faith are shorter in space and time. Comparing Albanian ‘*zurna*’ with Malay ‘*serunai*’ may not be enough to rule out coincidence, but comparing Albanian ‘*zurna*’ to Turkish ‘*zurna*’, Persian ‘*surna*’, etc., strongly suggests that the word (if not the instrument also) spread across cultures. Also by refraining from comparing very ancient texts with modern, the musicologist may avoid confusing the *Vīṇā* the harp with *Vīṇā* the lute. Also different words for the same things in neighboring cultures must be compared to confirm whether the borrowing is indeed cultural or merely linguistic. Thus for instance, the Javanese fiddle *rebab* (which has an Arabic name), existed there before the advent of Islam, and may have been prototype from which the Khmer and Thai variants of the instruments were derived.<sup>23</sup>

In the example of the ‘*surna*’/ ‘*zurna*’ above, migration of the word does not by itself prove the migration of the instrument. Sometimes cultures borrow words for objects they are intimately familiar with. The French words for ‘sheep’ and ‘bull’ gave English the words ‘mutton’ and ‘beef’, even though the English were quite familiar with these things even before the Norman invasion. Sometimes cultural transfers may take place through intermediaries, even though two cultures do not directly interact. That was the case when two words ultimately of Sanskrit origin, entered the English language as ‘candy’ and ‘sugar’, before any Englishman ever came into contact with an Indian. Also,

<sup>23</sup> The Traditional Music of Thailand, David Morton, University of California Press, p. 96

words sometimes may return to lands they originated in, after sojourning in foreign countries, in modified form. Such is the case, for instance, with the Indic word for 'sandalwood', *chandan*, which has returned to Indic (Urdu-Hindi) in its Arabic form, '*sandal*'.

Also, the use of a word from a particular language for a cultural item need not always imply the origin of that item in that same culture. For instance, the famous genre of poetry *Masnawî*, is Persian in origin, in spite of its Arabic name.<sup>24</sup>

With these caveats in mind, we now take up the following section.

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<sup>24</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. VI, Fascicules 111-112, (1989), p. 832.



### **Linguistic Arguments Relating to the Dhol**

Though it has been claimed above that the *dhol* /*dohol* is of Persian origin, its many forms in Indic languages do not support that contention. In most Indian languages, from Sindhi to Bengali, from Punjabi to Marathi, the word has a retroflex and aspirate ‘d’.<sup>25</sup> Both features are unknown in Iranian. While it is possible to explain the existence of the word in the Indic languages adjoining the Iranian area as being due to an Iranian loan form, it is hard to claim that every north Indian language would have chosen to modify the Persian word *dohol* identically – by dropping the epenthetic ‘o’ and changing the dental ‘d’ to a retroflex. This is especially unlikely since Indic languages have dentals as well as retroflexes, and Indic languages could easily borrow dentals too.<sup>26</sup> The reverse borrowing direction is quite plausible – an Indic retroflex would be changed into a Persian dental, and an epenthetic vowel would be introduced to break up an aspirate. While it is comparatively easy to rule out Iranian as the source of the loan-word *dohol*, it is not possible on the basis of linguistic evidence alone to rule out the possibility of the word being cognate to both Indic and Iranian.

An example of these arguments has been given by the poet Ghalib, an acknowledged master of both Persian and Hindi (Urdu). In a letter to one of his disciples, Ghalib points out that the sixteenth-century Indo-Persian poet ‘Urfi had used the Persianized form *jakar* instead of the Hindi word *jhakkar* (gale, hurricane). The Persian form of the word replaces the Hindi aspirate by its unaspirate counterpart, and the retroflex *r* by the closest Persian sound *r*.<sup>27</sup>

Thus we must reject the claim that the word *dhol* /*dohol* is definitely of Iranian origin, in favour of an Indic or cognate origin. We now examine whether there are any textual sources for reconsidering the received etymology of the word *dhol* /*dohol*.

### **Evidence from Indo-Persian Textual Sources**

In the days since the early papers on the oboe and the drum were written, several Indo-Persian sources on music have been discussed in the literature, mostly in the writings of Shahb Sarmadee, who has edited the 14<sup>th</sup>-century *Ghunyāt-ul-Munyā*<sup>28</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup>-century *Lehjāt-e-Sikandershahī*.<sup>29</sup> Both these texts on Indian music have sizeable chapters on Indian musical instruments. All the instruments we have discussed above have been mentioned in these texts, with detailed comments in some cases.

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<sup>25</sup> A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages, R.L. Turner, London, 1966, p. 318.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, Persian words such as ‘dil’, ‘duniya’, etc have been borrowed by various Indic languages such as Sindhi, Punjabi, Hindi etc. without changing the dental to the retroflex, to say nothing of the retroflex aspirate. It is true that sometimes Indic languages choose to substitute retroflexes for dentals (e.g. the English word ‘ticket’ is borrowed into Marathi as ‘tikīṭ’ and into Hindi as ‘ṭikaṭ’) and occasionally an aspirate is introduced into a borrowed word, (e.g. Kashmiri borrows the Persian ‘pairahan’ as ‘pheran’; Dakhni Urdu changes Urdu ‘bahin’ to ‘bhen’). But it is highly improbable that languages as diverse as Sindhi and Bengali, which have interacted with Persian quite independently of each other, have all borrowed the Persian word, but modified it in an identical manner.

<sup>27</sup> Urdu Letters of Mirzā Asadu’llāh Khān Ghālib, Translated and annotated by Daud Rahbar, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 78-79

<sup>28</sup> Ghunyāt-ul-Munyā (Persian), Shahab Sarmadee (ed.), Asia Publishing House, 1978

<sup>29</sup> Lejhāt-e-Sikandershahī, Edited by Shahab Sarmadee, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1999

The *madhukarī* is said to be shaped like the bud of the flower *māltī*, from which it presumably takes its name. The *Lehjāt* explicitly says that the *madhukarī* resembles the *shahnāī*. The *kāhala* is said to be like the *dhatūra* flower. The *tundakī* and the *cukkā* are said to be similar to the *kāhala*, except for their size which is two and four hands long, respectively.<sup>30</sup>

The author of the *Lehjāt* translates the Sanskrit *bherī* as the Persian word *dohol* (*bherī ya'anī dohol*), which would seem to indicate that what the Persian-speaking author understood by the *dohol* was known as the *bherī* at that time. The *Lehjāt* also provides us with some clues about the drums *niśān* and the *tumbakī*. The author says that “*niśān* is what the *damāmeḥ* is called” (*nishān damāmeḥ rā goyand*). The *tumbakī* is smaller in length than the *niśān*. The *tumbakī* is what is called the *naqqāreh* (*tumbakī rā naqqāreh mikhānand*). Both the *niśān* and the *tumbakī* are played in pairs (pp. 509-510).

The word *dohol* could have referred to any drum. It is a general word for the drum. An example of this use is found in the *Ghunyāt-ul-Munyā* which refers to the *Bherī* as ‘*dohol-e yek dast*’ (a drum one hand long).<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the *dohol* (*Bherī*) being referred to is not *the dohol*, but simply *a dohol*, that is, a drum. Also, there is also no reason to suppose, as Dick does, that the *tumbakī* of the Sanskrit sources was a “false re-Sanskritization” of the Arabic *dombak* (kettledrum). The *tumbakī* is clearly regarded as synonymous with the *naqqāreh* in the *Lehjāt*, and not as the *dombek*. Thus it may have been no innovative introduction into the Indian music scene.

In its section on the wind instruments, the *Ghunyāt* names four instruments similar to the oboe (or the trumpet, which is not distinguished from the oboe): *muhurī*, *kāhalī*, *būq* and the *tittarī* (pp. 61-62). The *muhurī*, *būq* and the *tittarī* are explicitly compared to the *kāhalī*. They differ only in size: the *kāhalī* is three hands long; the *muhurī* is one hand and four fingers long, while the *būq* is four hands long, and the *tittarī* is one hand long. The last named instrument is played in pairs. While the *kāhalī* is made of bronze, the *muhurī* is made of wood. The *kāhalī* is (shaped) like the *dhatūra* flower.

We see that the early Indo-Persian texts on music do not give any indication of the recent or foreign origin of the instruments of the oboe family. The wider end of the *madhukarī* (lit. ‘honey-bud’) is said to be in the form of a *dhatūra* flower by both the *Ghunyāt* and the *Lehjāt*. Dick has argued that the Sanskrit form *madhukarī* is a hypersanskritism derived from the Prakrit form *muhurī*, which is itself supposedly derived from the Arabic word *mizmār*. We have already argued the implausibility of this etymological derivation. There is no reason to discard the more natural explanation that the *madhukarī* is indeed named for the flower from which it derives its shape.

<sup>30</sup> *Lehjāt-e-Sikandersshahī*, Edited by Shahab Sarmadee, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 482-3.

<sup>31</sup> P. 54

### Proposed Etymology and History of the *sur-nāl*

If the received etymologies of the *sur-nāl* lead to contradictions, a new etymology is called for. Before we suggest another, it is useful to recall what the pioneering scholar in this field had to say. Though the north Indian oboe is much smaller than its South Indian counterpart *nāgasvara*, Jairazbhoy regards them as being essentially the same instrument. He regards the South Indian term *nāgasvara* as being etymologically related to the *sur-nāl*. He resolves it into the *sur* and the *nāl*, and points out that the prefix *sur* is often interchanged with *svara*, which appears in words such as *surmaṇḍal/ svaramaṇḍal* (the trapezoidal zither). Jairazbhoy points out that the *nāgasvara* is also known as *nāyanam*, and argues that this word is also related to the *nāl*- part of the term *sur-nāl*.

While Jairazbhoy's suggestions are all eminently reasonable and plausible, it may be better to suggest the etymology *sur-nāl* as the original, and to regard the *sur-nāl/śahnāl* as being a variant name. The *sur-nāl*, raised to the status of a "classical" instrument is identified with the *madhukāl*, which is a name derived from the physical description of the instrument. We propose that the *nāgasvara* is a different, though related, instrument. This is because the words *horana* and *nāgasura* are both mentioned in Sri Lankan Pali literature, in the same texts, in the context of wind instruments.

The term *Nāl*, *Nāl*, *Nāl*, and variants are attested in various Indian languages in the sense of 'tube', 'pipe' etc.<sup>32</sup> In Sind, the *naddu* (*nadd*, *naṛ*) is an instrument named for the reed plant and refers to a piece of hollowed reed open at both ends. The same term is also found in lands contiguous to Sind such as Rajasthan and Baluchistan. The term also survives in the *donal* (sometimes spelt *do-neli*) of southern Baluchistan,<sup>33</sup> which refers to a pair of end-blown reed-pipes, one of which provides a drone, and the other plays the melody.

While the *nadd* is only regarded as a folk instrument, it demands considerable skill, and in Sindh, it has been elevated to a high degree of sophistication. The instrument (or its name) is of considerable antiquity, judging by the fact that the *Nāl* is named in the Rig-Veda (RV 10.135.7), and regarded by the authoritative traditional commentator on the Rig-Veda, Sāyaṇa, as being similar to the flute (*venu*).<sup>34</sup>

The proposed term *sur-nāl* is actually attested in its inverted form *nāl-sur* in Baluchistan.<sup>35</sup> In a recognizably similar form, it appears in Kinnaur in the Himalayas as *Sharnal*.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Saddharma-ratnāvaliya*, a thirteenth-century Pali source from Sri Lanka, the *davura* is mentioned along with other instruments of the *bera* (drum) variety. The *bera* is a term related to the Sanskrit *bherī*, and is applicable to a wide variety of drums. The drum *davul* is mentioned in the Thūpavamsa.<sup>37</sup> Also, as argued before, the term *horana* for the oboe is also attested in the same text. This argues against a suggestion

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, the standard reference, Turner, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> See, Northern Areas of Pakistan, in *The Garland Encyclopaedia*, Volume 5, page 783.

<sup>34</sup> *Bhāratīya Sangīt Kā Itihās*, Thakur Jaideva Singh, (Premalata Sharma (editor)), Sangeet Research Academy, Calcutta, p. 33

<sup>35</sup> *The Baloch Cultural Heritage*, Jānmahmad, 1982, Karachi, p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> The Music of Kinnaur, I.E.N. Chauhan, (Census of India, 1971, Miscellaneous Studies: Ethnology – Tribal Music, Series 1).

<sup>37</sup> Society in Mediaeval Ceylon (The State of Society in Ceylon as depicted in the *Saddharma-ratnāvaliya* and other Literature of the Thirteenth Century) M.B. Ariyapala, Colombo, Ceylon, 1968, pp. 260-261.

made by Jairazbhoy that the *surnāy* tradition, along with the *duhul/dhavul/tavi*<sup>38</sup> drum, may have been introduced to South India along during the time of the Madurai Sultanate dating from the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

The *sur-nāl* and the *dhol*, being folk instruments, are not usually represented in the more sophisticated literature, where their place is taken by the words *madhukālī* and the *paṭaha* respectively. As pointed out by Jairazbhoy, in the hilly interior regions of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, the *mohorī* is called *sonai* by castes such as the Dom, which he took as confirmation that the hill *mohorī* is an extension of the North Indian *śahnāī* tradition. In our view, this is equally a confirmation of the identity between the *sur-nāl/śahnāī* and the *mohorī/madhukālī*, the terms being used interchangeably in regions most shielded from innovations dating to the Muslim period and in folk music contexts.

### Dispersion of the Surnā-Dohol in lands west of India

In the preceding sections, we have outlined the reasons for proposing an Indian<sup>40</sup> origin for the *surnā-dohol* ensemble. The task of explaining its diffusion in lands west of India is facilitated by the observation that peoples of predominantly Indic origin, who are disproportionately represented in the sphere of music-making, live all over the Middle East and Eastern Europe.<sup>41</sup> These are the Roma of Europe and the Domari of the Middle East and North Africa. Their Indian roots are now the subject of a scholarly consensus, though the exact time of departure from India, and the route they took, is not yet completely understood.

Peoples of Indic origin have long been resident in the Middle East. Both forced and voluntary migrations of Indian peoples to western lands are well-known in history. As early as the ninth century, Al-Jāhiz (776-869) who wrote, among other things, about “the socio-cultural traits of the different non-Arab ethnic groups settled in Baghdad”, attested to the presence of Sindhis who were employed as cooks, gold-silver smiths, bankers, musicians, elephant boys, and in particular excelled in cooking and music.<sup>42</sup> “According to Jāhiz, the fullness and flow of voice was a quality, characteristic particularly of the songstresses of Sindhian extraction.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The *tavi* is a drum that is played as an accompaniment to the *nāgasvaram* in South Indian music, especially in temple music. Jairazbhoy has noted that sculptures depicting the drum as it is today are found in sculptures in South India dating from the twelfth century. Thus, Jairazbhoy argues that while the indigenous drum eventually replaced the Middle Eastern drum, the Middle Eastern name was retained. (Jairazbhoy, N.A., A Preliminary Survey of the Oboe in India, *Ethnomusicology* 14(3):382. ) However, the presence of the drum and its name in Sri Lanka obviates the need to postulate this Middle Eastern connection.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> The term Indian is used in the in the broadest sense of the term, including the lands which are now incorporated into Pakistan.

<sup>41</sup> In his exhaustive manner, Jairazbhoy had discussed this possibility in his 1980 paper. But he also contemplated the possibility that the oboe may have been brought by bands of musicians in Islamic times. (Jairazbhoy, N.A., The South Asian Double Reed Aerophone Reconsidered, *Ethnomusicology*, January 1980, p. 155.) But this postulate is unnecessary to explain the distribution of the oboe in India. In fact, the earliest history of Sind, the *Chach-nāma*, explicitly states that the victorious Arab invaders were greeted by a drum-shawm ensemble which was earlier unknown to the Arabs (Baloch, N.A., *Development of Music in Sind*, Hyderabad, 1973).

<sup>42</sup> *Development of Music in Sind*, N.A. Baloch, Sind University Press, Hyderabad, 1973, pp. 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, quotation from al-Jāhiz: *Risalat Fakhr al-Sudan ‘ala al-Bidan*;

The origin of these peoples is at least partly accounted for by a migration of an Indian community of musicians into Iran in the fourth century AD, which is recorded in the *Shâh-Nâme* of Firdausi, but also confirmed by four other histories of Iran (with some qualifications as mentioned in the footnote):

...Based upon the epic Shah Nameh by the 11th century Persian poet Firdausi, the first Roma have, for the past century and a half, been widely supposed to be the descendants of ten thousand musicians and entertainers (another account says 12,000) who were given by the 5th century King Rao Shankal (or Changal) of Canodj and Maharaja of Sindh, to his son-in-law, Bahram Gur, a Sasanian ruler of Persia, as a gift to his court in AD 439. "The music festival on the occasion [of the wedding of his daughter to Bahram Gur] became an event of great significance; subsequently, at the Emperor's request, Rao Shangal sent a large troupe of Sindhian musicians, called Luri, to him and they laid the foundations of the Sindhian Luriyan music in Iran" (Baloch, 1981:94).

Firdausi's account indicates that they were still a presence in Persia five centuries later. Today, a population known as Luri, Luli or Nuri (plural Nawar), whose own name for themselves is the Dom, lives in several countries throughout the Middle East, and speak an Indian-based language, Domari (Hancock, 1995:28-31). Even though Firdausi's account by the Sassanid historian Mirkhond, by the Arab historian Hamza of Ispahan (AD 940), by the Mojjmel al-Tevarik (AD 1126), by Minhaj-us-siraj in his Tabakat in-Nasiri (AD 1259) and that by Tarik-Guzideh (AD 1329). Muhammed Ufi's account in his Jami' el-Hikayat (AD 1211) tells a slightly different story, but also identifies musicians sent to Persia from India.<sup>44</sup>

The name Luri/Luli is also recognizable in the caste-name Ludi/Lodi/Loḏī which refers to people living as tinkers, metal-workers, and musicians who are also referred to as Doms. (The Iranian anthropologist Ali Akbar Jafarey derives the names of this caste from the Indic word *lohri* (ironsmith).)<sup>45</sup> It is the members of this caste that supplies the musicians of Baluchistan.<sup>46</sup> And a similar name is applied to the hereditary musician castes of the Northern Areas of Pakistan.<sup>47</sup>

The drum-shawm ensemble (with regional variations in the instruments and their names) are largely monopolized by the descendants of these (mixed and possibly

<sup>44</sup> The Indian Origin and Westward Migration of the Romani People, Ian Hancock, (International Romani Union, Occasional Paper No. 38, Spring 1997).

This quote is correct only in its broad conclusions. The Roma and the Domari are now known to be the product of distinct migrations from India, a conclusion reached by Hancock on the basis of comparison of the Roma and Domari languages with Middle Indic languages (Ian Hancock, private communication).

<sup>45</sup> *Iran: Gahvâreh-ye Farhang-e Farhanghâ*, Ali Akbar Jafarey, Rah Avar, Vol. XI, # 40, Autumn & Winter 1995-96.

<sup>46</sup> See *The Social Organization of the Marri Baluch* by Robert N. Pehrson (Compiled and Analyzed from his notes by Frederik Barth), Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York, 1966. Also *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Volume 5, entry on *Balochistan*, Sabir Badalkhan, pp. 773-784.

<sup>47</sup> See, Northern Areas of Pakistan, in *The Garland Encyclopaedia*, Volume 5, page 794.

originally distinct) peoples. In Baluchistan Lawrence Picken who has made a study of folk music in Turkey finds that in most provinces of Turkey, such Thrace and South-Eastern Turkey, the *davul-zurna* tradition is relegated to the Roma. What is more, Turkish musicians cannot be persuaded to take up these instruments on account of the social stigma associated with them. In the provinces of Adana and Gaziantep, another nomadic group called the Abdals is also represented among shawmists and drummers. (Ethnic Turk musicians do dominate in other ensembles and music genres.)<sup>48</sup> But the Roma's preponderance is not restricted to Turkey alone:

In Hungary and Romania, it is predominantly gipsies who now play in ensembles derived (as it seems – see Ciobanu, 1959, 123 f., and Lloyd, 1963/64, 17) from the mehterhane maintained by Greeks, who ruled Romania on behalf of the Turks in the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

As another example we may cite the musicians of the *surla-tapan* tradition in Macedonia, who are almost all Roma, (though there have been some Macedonian Slav musicians as well.)<sup>50</sup>

To be sure, the Roma and Domari have also imbibed the cultural influences of the lands they came to inhabit, and their music reflects the music of their host cultures in large measure. However, languages can be picked by non-native speakers, as a result of contact at frontiers, or by immigrant communities living in the midst of host populations; but very specialized skills like music are transmitted from one generation to another. Transfer of music would have been even more improbable as compared to language transfer in pre-modern times when music-recording was unknown. These circumstances would have contributed to the retention of musical knowledge in communities specializing in music. The fact that music-making in several lands, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and Baluchistan, is restricted to specialized musician castes, is in itself not surprising. The fact that a disproportionate number of these musician castes, and even of the musician communities in Eastern Europe, are of Indic origin, is a matter that should evoke special interest, since this means that the musics of these different lands may be related in ways that cannot be attributed to cultural transfer alone, and may have something to do with inheritance from a single tradition.

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<sup>48</sup> Laurence Picken, *Folk Musical Instruments of Turkey*, Oxford University Press, London, 1975, pp. 98-100.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 508.

<sup>50</sup> Timothy Rice, *The Surla and Tapan Tradition in Yugoslav Macedonia*, *The Galpin Society Journal*, Number XXXV, March 1982, Pp. 122-137

### **Conclusions:**

In this paper we have tried to examine the origin of some musical instruments, especially the *sur-nā* and the *dohol*, the drum and oboe (shawm) which is widespread in India and in the Middle East. By examining Indo-Persian sources on music, we were able to derive much information which is not attested in pre-Muslim Sanskrit texts, and which only appear in post-Muslim Sanskrit sources. This information points to a continuity in the Sanskrit literature, interrupted only by the non-availability of some texts dating from the early Muslim period. These texts may be unavailable to the historian of music, but their legacy is preserved admirably if not completely in Persian translation. The evidence preserved in pre-Muslim Pali literature from Sri Lanka also provides a supplement to the information lost owing to the non-availability of Sanskrit texts on music from the early Muslim period. Specifically, we conclude that the origin of the oboe *sur-nā* is to be found in the *sur-nāl*, which is distinct from the *nāgasvara*, a related but different instrument restricted today to South India. The existence of the terms *sur-nāl* and the *ḍhol* in the classical Sanskrit has gone unnoticed because they are disguised as the more sophisticated terms *madhukalī* and *paṭaha*, respectively.

This identification explains the use of the related terms *horana* and *davula* in the Pali literature of Sri Lanka, and the existence of the oboe in Sri Lanka and Indonesia before contact with Islam. It also explains the use of the drums and oboes in temple ensembles even in regions which were not much influenced by Islam, such as Kinnaur in the Himalayas, and the prevalence of the *sur-nāl* / *śahnāī*/*mohorī* among Ḍom castes in such remote and widely separated regions as Kinnaur and interior Orissa.

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