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The Search for the 'Essence' of Bhangra through Panjabi heritage.

Hardeep Singh Sahota

A portfolio consisting of a performance DVD, a hardcopy of an interactive timeline and
Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts by Research.

University of Huddersfield

2011

Abstract

This research examines the concept of Bhangra from my perspective as a practitioner and supported by ethnographic research. The thesis explores the foundational elements that constitute the art form of contemporary Bhangra. It looks at the historical developments of dance, of music and of spiritual essence. It suggests a time at which these elements fused together in the form of Malkit Singh's '*Gur Naal Ishq Mitha*'.

This historical development is also represented in an interactive online timeline that charts other pioneering artists, poets, saints and Gurus who have contributed to its evolution. A performance was devised that pulls together all the elements explored within the thesis culminating in an experience that encapsulates the diverse nature of contemporary Bhangra within the Panjabi diaspora.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my Grandfather, the late Phuman Singh Sahota, whose songs have helped shape my identity and have given me a deep respect to the folk arts of Panjab. He also gave me the 'Sahota' gene; whereby Bhangra has become an integral part of my being.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first of all 'Waheguru' (God) from whom I acquire divine inspiration. A loving thank you to my wife, who became my '*Ardangani*' (other half of my soul), especially throughout the performance period. An embrace to my children who have helped with their continued support and patience.

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to my research supervisor and mentor, John Britton, who gave me this unique opportunity to take my passion for dance and channel it into academia. Thank you also to Professor Paul Ward who encouraged me to grasp every available opportunity. I am indebted to the commitment and professionalism of Pat Hill whose guidance was invaluable.

Finally, the artists, singers, dancers and academics alike who gave up their valuable time willingly to accommodate me for the ethnographic oral interviews that took place for this research. Their sincerity and knowledge about their art was extremely insightful and very inspiring. It has been my privilege to have met legendary artists from the world of Bhangra and to have made many new friends who have helped me along the way.

From the bottom of my heart I thank you.

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An Essence of Bhangra

Touching the ground to honour Mother Earth they evoke the spiritual essence of their fertile land that has bestowed abundant harvests. The fields of golden wheat witness the steady, regal pace of the dancers, as they slowly gather speed.

As fine dust is raised high into the air, dancers begin to move with exploding vibrancy, energy and zeal. Their costumes are myriad colours with intricate embroidery that shimmers in the heat of the Indian sun. The thundering sound of the dhol drum being played resonates through every kernel of the body. These are the Bhangra dancers from the land of the five rivers, the Panjab.

These are the visions in my mind's eye that evoke my cultural and spiritual heritage when I touch the floor before any Bhangra-dance performance. I am an artist and active practitioner of the art form of Bhangra, which has formed an integral part of my life and my identity. It has a multi-layered history and has evolved in modern times to form a crucial element in most Panjabi social interactions. It has both physical and emotional benefits, as it promotes fitness, reduces stress and gives enjoyment. Through Bhangra, spirituality can be expressed; through Bhangra, sexuality can be expressed. It is a natural, earthy dance with warrior rhythms that seduce the dancer and the audience. Bhangra is being able to shed your inhibitions completely, to move to the music, without any hesitation, not thinking about a particular move. At best a dialogue through body movements is achieved; it becomes instinctive, spontaneous and interactive. Gesturing through Bhangra-moves with fellow dancers inspires a connection with them, and for me, personally, the realisation of a connection to a higher spiritual plane.

What is Bhangra? There have been many suggestions made to me throughout my life to give explanation to this art form, but for me as a second generation British Sikh I have to look back at my childhood and analyse the music and dance of the time that has formed my perception of Bhangra. The research suggests that one of the defining moments in

contemporary Bhangra occurred with the release of Malkit Singh's '*Gur Naal Ishq Mitha*'¹ in 1986. The first sound on this track is a pulsating dhol beat; this sound stamped the way Panjabi music would move forward in the UK and the Bhangra industry worldwide and for future generations. Malkit emulated the sounds of the Panjabi harvest and presented different strands of music, cultural and oral traditions and what we know of Bhangra came together at this point; but the story behind 'the birth' of Bhangra runs much deeper than this, as what is experienced is not just music and dance. We must begin to look at the foundational elements that have synthesised to create this form that is termed 'Bhangra' by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the South Asian diaspora. Exploring the historical, spiritual, academic and secular components of the Panjab, as well as how the language evolved, we may head towards a better understanding of Bhangra's archetypes.

As a dance practitioner from a Sikh background I have often encountered discouragement and objections to the practice and performance of Bhangra from orthodox Sikh family members and community elders with strong religious opinions. I find a great contradiction when people whom I love and respect deeply because of their religious commitment tell me that Bhangra has little or no worth. It is a fact that the Arts from the Panjab are not celebrated in the same illustrious way as they are in the West, especially as Bhangra has strong associations with the caste of '*Mirasis*', (low-caste minstrels) from the Panjab. Therefore a clear tension remains between Bhangra's cultural traditions and the Spiritual traditions of the Panjab that will be explored within this thesis.

Bhangra originates from the South Asian region of Northern India – namely Panjab² which is often cited as India's 'bread basket' due to its fertile land and wealth of crops. Its history dates back to having one of the earliest civilizations to be found on the planet and has since witnessed some of the world's greatest empires from the Aryans to the invasion of Alexander the Great, the Moghul Raj and the British Empire. Equally it has given birth to some of the greatest of world faiths such as Buddhism and the path of the Sikhs.

¹ Gur Naal Ishq Mitha (Love is sweeter than jaggery), from Malkit Singh's album '*Nach gidde vich*', Please see VIRSA Timeline entry – '1986' < <http://www.dipity.com/Hardeep/Bhangra/> >

² Panjab – Land of the five rivers, an article on SikhNet points to clarify the issue on the correct pronunciation of the word Panjab; "Language can be important, especially when dealing with Britain's colonial past, and Mr. McDonnell clarified an issue of pronunciation of the word Panjab. Many of his Panjabi friends and colleagues advise him that the terms "Punjab" and "Punjabi" are colonial mispronunciations of the more exact pronunciations "Panjab" and "Panjabi". He has apologised for this mispronunciation and spelling and it is documented in the Hansard, that the correct spelling and pronunciation should be "Panjab" and not Punjab, which misleads and does not reflect the Land of Five Rivers. Article:< <http://www.sikhnet.com/news/its-panjab-not-punjab-opinion.>> Daljit Singh 10th June 2010.

Many suggest that Bhangra's history dates back many hundreds of years:

The Greeks, rivals of the Persians, also coveted the Punjab. Throughout the time of 500-300 BC, several Greek scholars wrote of the area, describing a fertile land with numerous rivers. In 326 BC Alexander the Great and his armies seized the "prosperous plains" of the Punjab. Although Alexander died only nineteen months later, the region remained under the control of other Greek rulers for several hundred years. Meanwhile, the *Mauryas* came to power in India, bringing with them a time of "artistic achievements". Some scholars believe Bhangra originated during this time with the battles with Alexander. (Kelly and Thind)³

Scenes of this art form in its raw vibrant embodiment were once witnessed primarily around Vaisakhi,⁴ the harvest festival that falls in April, and marks the Indian solar New Year: 'Bhangra is the climax of the hard season of harvest when farmers celebrate by singing and dancing to Bhangra songs, and the beats thanking the heavens, for what rich crops they have reaped.'⁵ Over the centuries Bhangra found its way into an array of occasions such as weddings and times of family and community celebrations.

When the British Raj exited India, the Panjabi population was uprooted through the great partition⁶ and the years that followed saw vast numbers of families emigrating to the United Kingdom, Africa and Canada to seek out brighter futures. They brought with them their Panjabi heritage and culture, of which Bhangra had become an integral component. Over the last fifty years of industrialisation and technological advancements Bhangra has likewise developed its own music industry and has flourished despite the ever-changing whims of the 21st century. Bhangra today is no longer just a traditional folk music and dance; it has become one of India's greatest musical exports because of its vivacious energy and pulsating sound.

It has evolved over time and found new avenues of expression as it interacts with other musical genres to become an art form that is now celebrated on the world stage. Anjali Gera

³ This article is the most referred to within many online resources that describe Bhangra's history. Clint Kelly and Jasjeet Thind ; Extract from article <http://www.apnaorg.com/test/new/article_details.php?art_id=147>

⁴ Please see VIRSA Timeline entry – '1699' < <http://www.dipity.com/Hardeep/Bhangra/> >

⁵ Vaisakhi Celebrations & Birth of the Khalsa. Paramjit Singh

⁶ In terms of size and rapidity, the Partition of India in 1947 constitutes one of the greatest instances of voluntary and involuntary mass population migration in modern history. Estimates of migrants between 1947 and 1951 as a result of Partition range from 10 to 18 million, roughly the number of persons currently under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' mandate of concern². Estimates of deaths associated with Partition range from 200,000 to 1 million. A Demographic Case Study of Forced Migration: The 1947 Partition of India. Please see VIRSA Timeline entry – '1947' < <http://www.dipity.com/Hardeep/Bhangra/> >

Roy describes it as, 'Bhangra, the loudest Asian sound in global pop' and adds 'Some love it; others consider it a sonic assault. Some like it pure; others a preference for remixes.'⁷

Currently Bhangra encompasses different elements of auditory and kinetic art in the form of music and dance. It can be found in many of its forms such as *Panjabi Sangeet* (music from the Panjab), British Bhangra (music from the Panjabi diaspora), remixes with mainstream singing artists and sound samples within the media to illustrate the Indian identity. Bhangra dance groups can be seen at weddings, *melas*,⁸ inter-college and university dance competitions, and recently a stage musical in the form of '*Britain's Got Bhangra*'.⁹

Bhangra in Academia

Despite its success Bhangra has lacked the academic study it richly deserves. Current research usually centres on the development of Bhangra music here in the UK. Dr Dudrah's *Bhangra: Birmingham and beyond*¹⁰ is an example of one such study. This project widens the research to include the musical foundations in its homeland of the Panjab and traces the musical influences from the past that underpin what is now heard and understood as contemporary Bhangra. The word 'Bhangra' itself provokes different definitions from different people; in the West the term Bhangra is given to the music:

bhan·gra[bahng-gruh] noun: A type of popular dance music combining Punjabi folk traditions with Western pop music, fusing traditional drum-based music with elements of reggae, ragga, hip-hop, rock, soul, and dance. (dictionary.reference.com)

Whereas in Panjab's past, Bhangra has always been used to describe the dance:

Bhangra is a beautiful dance form performed with zest, enthusiasm and energy. It is one of the most lustrous forms of dance that engulfs one's creative liberty to an altogether different level. (www.indianzone.com)

The modern use of the word sometimes combines both integral elements of music and dance. Understanding its current perception helps to define the essence of Bhangra; this research, therefore, explores the etymology of the word 'Bhangra'. A variety of definitions

⁷ Anjali Gera Roy, *Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond*.

⁸ Mela is a Sanskrit word meaning 'gathering' or 'to meet' or a Fair. It is used in the Indian subcontinent for all sizes of gathering and can be religious, commercial, cultural or sports. In rural traditions melas or village fairs were (and in some cases still are) of great importance. This led to their export around the world by south Asian diaspora communities wishing to bring something of that tradition to their new countries. Coming of Age: Celebrating 21 Years of Mela in the UK: Irna Qureshi.

⁹ The musical Chart's the rise of British Bhangra in the UK from the sequin clad 80s through to the R 'n' B fusion of the present day. The cast includes award winning performer Shin: the lead singer of Bhangra band DCS; Sophiya Haque (*Coronation Street*, *Bombay Dreams*); Natasha Lewis (Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd*); Rakesh Boury (*We Will Rock You*) and Rina Fatania (*Deranged Marriage*, *Bombay Dreams*). The story is written by Pravesh Kumar, artistic director of Rifco Arts and behind the theatre company's earlier hit shows.

Britain's Got Bhangra – Rifco Arts

¹⁰ Rajinder Dudrah, *BHANGRA Birmingham and beyond*.

from both Asian and wider communities suggest positive and negative connotations. For this report the music of Panjab will be referred to as '*Panjabi Sangeet*', and Bhangra-dance will be used as an 'umbrella' term that sums up different dances from the Panjab region. The term '*Bhangra*' will be used when describing the art form of both music and dance in its modern combined usage.

As generations pass much of Bhangra's history is also being lost to time as significant factors in the development of Bhangra are only known amongst Panjabi elders through oral and practical traditions. The lack of written evidence of Bhangra's history has prompted ethnographical oral interviews¹¹ with the most significant artists – in the UK and Panjab – that played a part in shaping the sound of Bhangra through their music. Legendry artists such as Kuldeep Manak, Pammi Bhai, Malkit Singh and A.S.Kang give their first-hand experience creating a unique perspective on how some of the changes occurred when they did. This was complimented with a modern viewpoint from UK based artists such as Shin, from the band DCS, and international music producer Amritpal of Tigerstyle to give a comparative view of contemporary Bhangra practices.

This understanding is extended by a close analysis of Bhangra's relationship to spirituality in order to provide some validity to the communities in which it is found. There is a clear dichotomy of legitimacy and value in the Sikh community and the broad spectrum of views that surrounds Bhangra. An underpinning of historical links with spirituality helps us to acquire a greater understanding and awareness of Bhangra and the Panjabi culture to which it belongs.

¹¹ Please refer to Appendix (1) for DVD of ethnographic oral interviews.

Intentions

The aims of this study are to gather discussion and response to the following questions:

- What does Bhangra mean? How has it come to mean different things to different people?
- What are the relationships that exist within the foundational elements of Bhangra?
- Who are the pioneering artists that shaped the soundscape of modern Bhangra?

Methodology

In order to answer these questions a multi-disciplinary approach to the fieldwork was conducted in the form of primary research through oral ethnographic interviews, gathering qualitative data through an online questionnaire¹² and secondary source data through on-line forums and resources based in the UK, Canada and the Panjab, as well as published works by academics in the field of *Bhangra*; and through personal observations. The lack of rigorous academic literature within the field of Bhangra has meant that many of the sources referred to within this report are inevitably internet based and therefore efforts are made to filter through these unreliable sources in order to find some clarity. This historical outlook has been supported by the development and dissemination of an on-line questionnaire that has given an overview of what is understood by the term Bhangra. Links with historical and academic institutions such as the V&A Museum, The British Library and Colleges and Universities in the Panjab were established. Here secondary source visual recordings that were collected during anthropological studies during colonial rule in India, and since preserved in their archives were unearthed and used to inform my performance and interactive on-line timeline.¹³

¹² Please refer to Appendix (2) for questionnaires.

¹³ Many of the artists referred to below are represented in the online interactive timeline. To access please follow the hyperlink: <http://www.dipity.com/Hardeep/Bhangra/>

VIRSA – Timeline

This timeline charts the changing sound of *Panjabi Sangeet* that has now become known as Bhangra. This resource maps out significant moments in the history of Panjab and includes key information on pioneering musicians, singers, poets, saints and the Sikh Gurus, all of whom have inspired the ‘sound-scape’ of Panjab. Supporting information on these contributors mentioned throughout this document may be found through a hyperlink to the timeline within the footnote below. The entries are made so that the reader may make reference to the visual information based on the subject being referred to creating interaction between the written work and the online research.

VIRSA – Performance piece.

The information gathered for the timeline also informed the performance piece titled ‘VIRSA – Looking Back to Move Forward’¹⁴ (see *fig.1*). VIRSA is a Panjabi word that describes the cultural and social heritage of the people of ‘*Sanjha Panjab*’, which is the geographical area of pre-partitioned India. The performance piece seeks to reflect the foundational elements found in the history of Bhangra through the two art forms of music and dance. This performance is an important element of the research as it brings together spiritual and secular ideologies and theories and presents them as an experience that cannot be written down on paper.



Fig.1. Photos from the VIRSA performance.

¹⁴ Please refer to Appendix (3) for performance DVD.



The following exploration will be divided into three chapters;

- The first will explore the etymology of the word Bhangra, the musical traditions of Panjabi Sangeet along with the evolution of the Panjabi language and its links with spiritualism.
- The second will give insight into the connections between spiritualism and the art form of dance; both will acknowledge key contributors to the development of the art form.
- The third chapter looks at the formalisation of the Sikh Identity and the impact it had on the music and dance of the Panjab. It will also chart the pioneering artists that influenced the soundscape of Bhangra.

Chapter 1. THE MUSIC – Exploration of Panjabi Sangeet.

In this section I will look at the historical developments that chart key individuals in the region of Panjab and their impact on Panjabi Sangeet, which in turn influenced Bhangra. The contribution of the Sikh Gurus to link spirituality to music and dance will also be analysed. A starting point for this research was to ascertain the British Asian community's perception of what Bhangra means. This was gauged through responses to a questionnaire that was disseminated through an on-line program. The sample was aimed at young Panjabis of Indian and Pakistani heritage, as these are the main consumers of Bhangra, although responses from other ethnic groups were recorded. It was clear that the word Bhangra is more commonly associated as a form of music, with the added clarification of music from the region of Panjab, India. These are typical responses from the questionnaire:¹⁵ "Proud Panjabi music, the sound of dhol, happiness, it's fun!" "Up-beat, catchy music that makes you want to get on the dance floor...proud Panjabi music, the sound of dhol." Many other responses were inclined to refer to Bhangra as a dance form, "Showing happiness through body language," as well as descriptions of, "The title Bhangra was given to the dance form that depicted the working life of farmers." There were also responses that described the characteristics of Bhangra as both music and dance, "Traditional music that is celebrated through Indian dancing at a special or cheerful occasion." And "The title Bhangra was given to the dance form that depicted the working life of the farmers within the fields throughout the harvest season."¹⁶ This illustrates that there is some confusion over the definition of the word Bhangra; that it has two main ideas associated with its title: music and dance, and the misperception continues with what the word Bhangra actually means.

Etymology of Bhangra

Given this confusion we must begin to explore the origins of the word Bhangra in its practices, music and dance. It is important to present perceptions of what the word Bhangra actually means to different people. To gain a better understanding of the negative connotations surrounding the use of the word Bhangra, we must first explore why its

¹⁵ Quotes taken from Question Pro Internet survey conducted 9/16/2010: please refer to Appendix (2).

¹⁶ Quotes taken from Question Pro Internet survey conducted 9/16/2010: please refer to Appendix (2).

definition has evolved to what is known today. We must also explore the vernacular use of Bhangra to appreciate any changes that may have occurred. It is only through the search for authenticity that we can persevere to gain a more positive light on the use of the word Bhangra.

When exploring the etymology of the word through oral interviews, there is a common occurrence that the word is somehow associated with the consumption of Cannabis. ‘Bhang, an intoxicant drug, being high, people getting merry and then dancing.’¹⁷ The Britannica Online Encyclopedia states that:

The dance was associated primarily with the spring harvest festival Baisakhi, and it is from one of the major products of the harvest—*bhang* (hemp)—that bhangra drew its name.

It can be clearly seen that misinformation such as this does little to clarify Bhangra’s definitions as hemp has not been cultivated in this region to any great extent. Although it can be found naturally all around and especially in areas of stagnant water, it cannot be regarded as a ‘major product of the harvest’.¹⁸

Owing to such definitions the majority of the Panjabi population believe that the word ‘Bhangra’ is a derivative of the word ‘Bhang’ which is part of the cannabis plant that is used in India as part of an intoxicant drink, food preparation or even smoked during Hindu religious ceremonies. Therefore the status of ‘Bhangra’ lives on the edge of disrepute. Some modern Bhangra artists openly propagate this belief such as the music producer Panjabi MC who uses the iconography of cannabis throughout his album covers and sounds of drug usage throughout his music.

Navdip Kandola, a prominent film maker, suggests that when the word ‘Bhangra’ is broken down into two parts ‘*Bhang*’ (meaning cannabis) and ‘*Urah*’ (similar to Urah meaning to throw into the air) this suggests the consumption of Bhang. He also points to a correlation between ‘Bhang’ and the worship of Shiva, as it is said that Shiva keeps himself intoxicated

¹⁷ Quotes taken from Question Pro Internet survey conducted 9/16/2010: Please refer to appendix (2).

¹⁸ The state of Punjab produced 22.61% of the India's total production of wheat (15.5 metric tons), 10.78 % of rice (9.1 metric tons) and 12.4% of cotton (1.19 thousand bales) in the year 2000-01. No wonder, Punjab is rightly called India's breadbasket for its huge production of wheat. The other main vegetables and fruits grown in abundance in the state of Punjab are potatoes, chilies, oranges, pomegranates, apples, peaches, figs, mulberries, apricots, almonds, plums, mangoes, grapes, pears, litchis and lemons. Sugarcane, maize and cotton are grown in abundance in Punjab as well as barley, millet, oil-seeds, carrots, peas, beans, onions, turnips, cucumbers, and melons. Scorching heat during the summer months sometimes destroy the vegetation but with the downpour by southwest monsoon the entire land returns to its lush green color. <<http://www.mapsofindia.com/punjab/geography-and-history/soil-and-vegetation.htm>>I accessed 8th October 2010

so the world remains safe from his wrath. Shiva is said to be an inspiration to the sect of Sikhs called the '*Buddha Dhal*' order of *Akali Nihang* Sikhs as they evoke the warrior spirit of Shiva. Some of these 'warriors' consume Bhang through '*Sukha* – Peace giver' also known as '*Shaheedi Degh*' or 'Drink of the martyrs, (this is a drink made from crushed almonds, milk and cannabis). Bhang has also been used in the preparation of '*pakore*' (*Bhajis*) but is very rarely smoked amongst Sikhs as smoking is strictly forbidden.

On the contrary the Sikh historian Dilbadshah Singh, also of the *Buddha Dal*, takes the enunciation and phonetics of words very seriously as slight digressions can change the meaning of a word dramatically. He states that the word 'Bhangra' when spoken correctly in Panjabi should look more like 'Bhungrā'. Therefore this correct pronunciation casts uncertainty over the 'Bhang/cannabis' theory. Using the similar words through *Shaster-Viddiyha*¹⁹ training, words such as '*Ang-Bhung*' – ('*Ang*' meaning limbs) and '*Bhung*' meaning break or to take apart, or '*Tre-Bhung assan*' (Three parts of the body), highlights that there is a marked difference to the word 'Bhangra' and the correct pronunciation of '*Bhungrā'. The word '*Bhung*' is used as broken or as separation of different parts of the body. '*arha*' would then mean to voice or to sing as used in the Rajasthani *Dhadi viddiyha*, (knowledge of the Dhadi musicians). '*Gharka*' is a word that describes the act of singing out aloud, to 'sound out' and to move and is pronounced in the same way as '*arha*'. It is interesting that the phonetics of an Indian word spoken in the Western world can become misleading, such as 'Bhungra' then becomes 'Bhaangra', and the emphasis is shifted to the 'an' part of the word.*

This theory is further supported from an online article which points out that:

The word in turn is a derivative of the verbal root 'bhanj,' perhaps originally 'bhranj,' meaning to break, or dissolve from which we get the German 'brechen' and English 'break'. In Sanskrit we also find (the related) 'bhangura' meaning 'apt to break, fragile, transitory, perishable, bendable. (Chronological History - Bhangra and its Origins)

¹⁹ Sanatan Hindu Sikh Shaster Vidiya is the secret Indian battlefield art of the traditional Sikh warriors, the Akali Nihang Singh Khalsa Sikhs of North India. <<http://www.shastarvidiya.org/index2.jsp>>

Amritpal Singh (a.k.a. Pops) from the international music production duo ‘Tigerstyle’ is well versed in Sikh musicology and has his own theory on the definition of the word ‘Bhangra’:

I try and dissect things and then try and make them back up, to try and get a greater understanding for myself of what it means. *Bhūngrā* to me, if you look at the word “Bhung” it basically means to break or destroy something and I think the dance Bhangra means that if you look at the Panjabi tradition of harvesting Vaisakhi and celebrations, that’s where the word comes from. The cycle of what the farmer goes through and the hard work which then lead to the celebration. So the term “Bhungra” means to me the ‘Break’ in the cycle, to then begin again.²⁰

This ideology gives weight among the critics of the artists that have tried so hard to move away from the derogatory connotations that are brought through with the ‘Bhang’ cannabis theory. The afore mentioned Bhangra artist, Malkit Singh, was deeply displeased when an album of his was released on the continent and they had used image manipulating computer software to include stars and spirals over his eyes making him look drugged. When he complained to the record company they replied that this is what they were led to believe as the meaning of Bhangra. This is a degrading stereotype that is being picked up and propagated by individuals and communities who are ill informed. Only through academic research will empowerments take place for the art form of Bhangra to be shown in a positive light. This may explain partly why there is a clear division between the spiritual and secular Sikh institutions, a theme that will be further explored in the following sections. However, first, in order to examine where these divisions arise from, it is important to trace the foundational elements within the roots of Bhangra, through the exploration of the Panjab and its history, language, and poetry of the land in order to give this context.

Land of the Five Rivers.

Panjab is gateway to India as it lies on the Northwest frontier. Therefore, there has always been a martial tradition amongst the indigenous people of the land, as they had to protect their native land from invaders passing through. Over the centuries it has seen invasions from Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Turks Afghans and the British, and of these invading armies some of them would be made up of multicultural races such as the army of Alexander the Great.²¹ This has created a ‘multilingual’ melting pot for language, Sanskrit,

²⁰ Ethnographic oral Interview with Amritpal Singh, Scotland: 05/09/10. Please refer to Appendix (1).

²¹ Information from ‘History of Punjab: gives a more comprehensive look at the turbulent history of the Panjab: <Comprehensive text of Punjabi History’ www.punjabonline.com>

Pharsi, Persian, Panjabi and Gurumukhi, to name but a few. This upheaval throughout the centuries would bring about its own distinct changes and influences. Spiritual complexities also existed internally with influences from Hinduism, Buddhism and the Sikhs Gurus and their intersection with external religious forces such as Sufism,²² Islam, and much later with Christianity. The characteristics of the indigenous 'Jatt'²³ farming community and culture evolved through a synergy of the ecology of the land, nature and cycles of war. Music has played an important part in this evolution.

For centuries there have been two main types of music in the Indian realm; the first was known as 'Marghi'²⁴ and the other was known as 'Deshi'.²⁵ Marghi has clear devotional aspects and is less likely to be part of social life, whereas Deshi has tendencies to reflect daily life and social dialogue. In particular, the influx of 'Sufi'²⁶ music from the Middle East brought about a new sound through an array of new instruments, rhythms, social structure and philosophies on faith. Sufism blurred some of the boundaries between the two types of music, as the art forms of music and dance were seen as a key aspect of spirituality. The Hindu Bhakti Kaal²⁷ movement, which had made its way up from Southern India into the Panjab region also propagated devotional prayer through the medium of music and dance. Therefore it is important to remember that a clear distinction cannot be made between the religious and the secular as the ebb and flow of musical traditions will influence each other and inform the soundscape of the land.

²² Through the centuries Sufis contributed hugely to Islamic literature for example Rumi, Omar Khayyám and Al-Ghazali's influence extended beyond Muslim lands to be quoted by Western philosophers, writers and theologians. Sufis were influential in spreading Islam particularly to the furthest outposts of the Muslim world in Africa, India and the Far East. - http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sufism_1.shtml

²³ Today, there are about 30 million Jatts living in North-western South Asia who follow Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. The breakdown figure for each of these three great faiths of South Asia is roughly the same. An interesting point to note is that even though they are divided into these three groups, they still identify themselves as Jatts. In Sikhism, Jatts form a substantial majority (over 70%) and this majority is very visible among the Sikhs residing in western countries. <http://www.jattworld.com/online/library/books/preface>

²⁴ Professor Surinder Singh of Raj Academy: Please refer to Ethnographic Oral interview Appendix (1).

²⁵ Professor Surinder Singh of Raj Academy: Please refer to Ethnographic Oral interview Appendix (1).

²⁶ Sufism, or *Tasawwuf* as it is known in the Muslim world, is Islamic mysticism (Lings, Martin, *What is Sufism?*, The Islamic Texts Society, 1999, pg 15). Non-Muslims often mistake Sufism as a sect of Islam. Sufism is more accurately described as an aspect or dimension of Islam. Sufi orders (Tariqas) can be found in Sunni, Shia and other Islamic groups. http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sufism_1.shtml Accessed on the 12th March 2011.

²⁷ The Bhakti movement in Medieval India is responsible for the many rites and rituals associated with the worship of God by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of Indian subcontinent. For example, Kirtan at a Hindu Temple, Qawalli at a Dargah (by Muslims), and singing of Gurbani at a Gurdwara are all derived from the Bhakti movement of medieval India (800-1700). "The word bhakti is derived from Bhakta meaning to serve, honour, revere, love and adore. In the religious idiom, it is attachment or fervent devotion to God and is defined as "that particular affection which is generated by the knowledge of the attributes of the Adorable One." The concept is traceable to the Vedas where its intimations are audible in the hymns addressed to deities such as Varuna, Savitri and Usha. However, the word bhakti does not occur there. The word occurs for the first time in the Upanisads where it appears with the co-doctrines of grace and self-surrender." (Heritage of the Sikhs, Harbans Singh - <http://www.sikhnet.com/news/bhakti-movement-800-ad-1700-ad>)

In the next section I will explore the contribution made by the Sufi Saints and Sikh Gurus in enriching the arts through poetry, literature and music in the Panjab, as this is often understated due to the facts being overshadowed by their religious status.²⁸

Sufism in the Panjab

Over 800 years ago in the 12th Century the mystical Sufi saint, Farīduddīn Mas'ūd Ganjshakar, commonly referred to as 'Baba Farid Ji',²⁹ through his profound poems in reverence to God brought the language and literature of the Panjab to new heights. Before his works the Panjabi language was thought of as primitive, and a less refined folk language, as it was usual for scholars to use Persian or Sanskrit to express academia.³⁰ Panjabi language and poetry was even more intensified through the works of the Bhagat Kabir Ji,³¹ which also influenced the Bhakti movement as it spread into Northern India from the Southern states in the 15th Century.

A new manner of '*praying*' swept across India in the 15th century A.D. For the first time, ordinary men and women expressed their '*devotion*' to god, through simple lyrics, group singing and dance. This was a very big change from the ritualistic practices of earlier times. Devotion to the legend of Radha-Krishna spread like a fire across the length and breadth of the land. This was called the *bhakti* movement. *Bhakti* literally means devotion. In Uttar Pradesh, in an area called 'Braj', the *raas-lila* developed. The raas-lila was a combination of music, dance and narration. Several people participated in it and the many legends of Shri Krishna and Radha were enacted. Kathak was the style used by the raas-lila groups for the dance element in the presentation. (Indian Classical Dance & the Bhakti Movement)

²⁸ Three traditions are distinctly marked in Punjabi literature up to the end of the nineteenth century. The Sikh religious tradition popularly known as Gurmat tradition is based on the poetry of the Sikh Gurus as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs. The Sufi tradition of literature and thought has been an equally dominant component of Punjabi literary traditions and culture. Sheikh Farid, whose poetry is contained in the Guru Granth Sahib, marks the beginning of this tradition. But it is the superb poetry and chaste Punjabi language mainly of Shah Hussain and Bulle Shah, which is responsible for making it popular most powerful tradition of Punjabi writing and singing. There is the third tradition of Kissa poetry, of balladeers of singing tales of love and romance. The first available Kissa in Punjabi is by Damodar on the popular folk-narrative of Heer, written in the dialect of Jhang. The Kissa poetry reaches its peak of glory with Waris Shah's Heer, which continues to be the one of the most popular literary compositions in the Punjab. < http://www.lisindia.net/punjabi/Punjabi_lite.html > A more detailed structure can be found through the exploration of the interactive timeline.

²⁹ Hazrat Baba Fariduddin Ganjshakar, a Muslim Sufi, is generally recognized as the first major poet of the Punjabi language and is considered one of the pivotal saints of the Punjab region. Revered by Muslims and Hindus, he is also considered one of the fifteen Sikh Bhagats within Sikhism and his selected works form part of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh sacred scripture. < <http://www.babafaridji.com/> >

³⁰ Sanskrit, Arabic, Turkish and Persian had historically been considered the languages of the learned, the elite and used in monastic centres; Punjabi was generally considered a lesser refined folk language. Although earlier poets had written in a primitive Punjabi, there was little beyond Punjabi literature besides the range of traditional and anonymous ballads. By using Punjabi as the language of poetry, Farid laid the basis for a vernacular Punjabi literature that would be developed later. < <http://www.babafaridji.com/> >

³¹ Bhagat Kabir – (1441-1518) was a Devotee, Saint and Gurmukh born in Uttar Pardesh, India. He was a monotheist and follower, probably founder, of Gurmat. He was a Muslim. There are 227 Padas in 17 ragas and 237 shlokas of Kabir in Guru Granth Sahib. He is revered by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, some Sikhs even use the word Guru in reference to Kabir. Like other Devotees, Kabir did not believe in Ritualism, the worshipping of Dieties, Brahmanism or the Caste System. < http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhagat_Kabir >

This movement was radical as it empowered the indigenous people and promoted communal prayer for everyone to experience through the medium of song and dance. (see *fig.2*) This, with the steady development of the Panjabi language, saw new traditions evolving a synthesis with the established schools of thought such as Sufism; developing new complexities in the ever-evolving ecology of social structure and culture of the Panjab.



Fig 2. Rajasthani miniature painting depicting Krishna and Radha dancing in the rain with three girl musicians. Illuminated 17th Century manuscript.

A New Vision for Humanity

Born in the heart of Panjab, the most important figure for the Sikhs, Siri Guru Nanak Dev Ji,³² (see *fig.3*) used the Panjabi language of the people to explain the nature of God and the ways of life to the common man in its spiritual simplicity. He paved the way for the heterogeneous society at the time becoming more homogenous through innovative thought and divinity. He understood the importance of the power of music to reach the soul and so expressed his vision of the 'One eternal creator' with the help of his Muslim friend from the *Mirrasi* order, Mardana, who accompanied the Guru on his odysseys playing the rebab. (see *fig.4*) Some historians³³ attribute the invention of this instrument to Guru Nanak as it was previously called the 'Narad-Veena', before the Guru asked a prominent Sikh of the time, Bhai Faranda, to manufacture and adapt the instrument in the more robust form of the *rebab*.



Fig. 3. Painting depicting Guru Nanak Dev ji on the right presenting the gift of the 'rebab' to Bhai Mardana.

³² 'Me, the bard out of work, the Lord has applied to His service. In the very beginning He gave me the order to sing His praises night and day. The Master summoned the minstrel to His True Court. He clothed me with the robe of His true honour and eulogy. Since then the True Name had become my ambrosial food. They, who under the Guru's instruction eat this food to their satisfaction, obtain peace. By singing the Guru's hymns, I, the minstrel spread the Lord's glory. Nanak, by praising the True Name I have obtained the perfect Lord.'

Guru Nanak, The founder of the Sikh Faith, Pauri, Sisi Guru Granth Sahib Ji: 150. < <http://www.sikhs.org/guru1.htm>>

³³ Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha writes in his *Mahan Kosh* that the Rebab was previously known as 'Narad Veena' or 'Ravan Veena' It was a favourite instrument of the sage Narad and Goddess Saraswati. Although this instrument may have a divine background, Guru Nanak and the Sufi Fakirs have brought this instrument down to the level of the general public.: Gur Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh, Page 441



Fig 4. Detailed depiction of Bhai Mardana playing the 'rebab'.

The language of the land that the Guru employed to express his divine poetry became known as Gurumukhi (from the mouth of the Guru). This Gurumukhi script was subsequently formulated by his successor. The script is now the most common way of writing the Panjabi language and it was standardised in the 16th Century by Siri Guru Angad Dev Ji.³⁴ Unlike Sanskrit, which was unpronounceable by the everyday Panjabi inhabitant, Gurumukhi became a modern day Sanskrit, simple and straightforward for the common people to understand. This helped move away from the Bhramical hierarchy that existed, making education and religious thought and freedom accessible to everyone and not just for those that held power.

Compilation of the Sikh Guru's Poetry

A pivotal point that helped shape the soundscape of Panjabi folklore occurred 400 years ago in the creation of the Aadh Granth Sahib:³⁵

³⁴ The second Guru of the Sikhs Guru Angad invented the present form of the Gurmukhi script. It became the medium of writing the Punjabi language in which the hymns of the Gurus are expressed. This step had a far-reaching purpose and impact. First, it gave the people who spoke this language an identity of their own, enabling them to express their thought directly and without any difficulty or transliteration. The measure had the effect of establishing the independence of the mission and the followers of the Guru. Secondly, it helped the community to dissociate itself from the Sanskrit religious tradition so that the growth and development of the Sikhs could take place unhampered and unprejudiced by the backlog of the earlier religious and social philosophies and practices. This measure, as shown by the subsequent growth of Sikhism, was essential in order to secure its unhindered development and progress, as it required an entirely different approach to life. < <http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/gurus/nanak2.html> >

³⁵ The Guru Granth Sahib is truly unique among the world's great scriptures. It is considered the Supreme Spiritual Authority and Head of the Sikh religion, rather than any living person. It is also the only scripture of its kind which not only contains the works of its own religious founders but also writings of people from other faiths. The living Guru of the Sikhs, the book is held in great reverence by Sikhs and treated with the

This was the gift from the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Siri Guru Arjan Dev Ji,³⁶ in the shape of a musical structure. The majority of his work took place in the town of Gowindwal, as he grew up he moved to Taran Taran and then he settled in Amritsar, it was there that he compiled the 'Aadh Granth' and his contribution to the holy scripture was using the shabads (hymns) in conjunction with the regional and social structures to express them. The raags (musical notation) he used were from folklore, for example 'Marge', 'Dhukari, Vadangs. This is the first recorded reference to Panjabi deshī music, (Folk music). There is no known musical reference to Panjabi folk music before this time. There are 31 raags that represent the folk element in the Sikhs Holy Scripture the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, including 22 Vaara (ballads) that have been preserved in their original form, 9 Thunia such as 'Dhunde us Raja ki Thuni,' The social structure of the Panjabi land changed and became more visible.³⁷

An investigation into the development of the 'spiritual-sound' in the Panjab highlights a marked alteration from this peaceful and reflective expression to one of a pro-active martial sound.

The Sound of the Sikh Martial Tradition

This change occurred when Siri Guru Arjan Dev Ji became the first Sikh martyr through his execution at the hands of the ruling Mughals. His son, Siri Guru Har Gobind Ji,³⁸ along with the Sikhs of the time, took up arms to defend themselves from the tyranny that pervaded throughout India. Along with a new martial tradition that was being honed amongst the Panjabis, Guru Har Gobind was propagating a different type of musical foundation. It was the sound that had originated from Rajasthan and the lineage of Bhatts'.³⁹ For centuries,

utmost respect. Sikhism rejects idol worship, so the Guru Granth Sahib is not worshipped as an idol, but rather emphasis is placed on respect of the book for the writings, which appear within. Guru Granth Sahib is a collection of devotional hymns and poetry, which proclaims God, lays stress on meditation on the True Guru (God), and lays down moral and ethical rules for development of the soul, spiritual salvation and unity with God. < <http://www.sikhs.org/granth.htm>>

³⁶ Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, was the embodiment of Godly devotion, Selfless Service and Universal Love. He was the treasure of celestial knowledge and spiritual excellence. He substantially contributed towards the welfare of the society. He stood steadfastly for the principles he believed in, sacrificed his own life, and attained a unique and unparalleled martyrdom in the history of mankind. <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Guru_Arjan>

³⁷ Professor Surinder Singh of Raj Academy: Please refer to Ethnographic Oral interview Appendix (1).

³⁸ Guru Hargobind was born at Wadali village in June 1595 and was the only child of Guru Arjan Dev. He was invested with the Guruship on May 25, 1606 just days before his father's martyrdom. From a young age he was educated in the sciences, sports and religion as his father had insisted. Baba Buddha was responsible for overseeing the Guru's religious teachings. During the Guruship ceremony Guru Hargobind respectfully declined to wear the Seli (woolen cord worn on the head) which had been passed down on each successive Guru since Guru Nanak. Instead the Guru asked for a sword. Baba Buddha, never having handled a sword before, placed it on the wrong side of the Guru. Guru Hargobind noticing this, asked for another sword saying "I'll wear two swords, a sword of shakti (power) and a sword of bhakti (meditation)." Henceforth the Guru would always carry two swords to symbolize his dual role of holding secular power (Miri) and spiritual authority (Piri). <<http://www.sikh.com.au/sikhgurus/hargobind.html>>

³⁹ During medieval times Bhatts (ballad singers) were of every ruler in India their job was to compose and sing martial songs. With their narrative and descriptive poetry of war, their songs and music led the warriors to the battlefield. Marching to the battlefield to meet their enemies, they would narrate to them the heroic deeds of their forefathers, who had laid their lives for the honour of the motherland. They recited the martial poems and aroused passion of the heroes for war and love for the motherland. The compositions of the Bhatts attached to

conflict in villages would be vocalised initially though the shouting out of curses at each other's village doorways. This in time developed with music, bigger battles raged as musicians would sing war ballads. Known as '*Gharkha*', they became '*Boliyan*'⁴⁰ (rhyming couplets) as they found their way into the Panjab. The Rajasthani instruments such as the *Sarang* then became the *Sarangi*.⁴¹ The *mirdang* drum was substituted with the *Dhad* 'hand-drum'. These war ballads became more widespread and were sung around campfires during celebrations once the opponents were defeated. This changed form as the Rajput's dynasties died out.

The musical art form of '*Dhad-Sarangi*' therefore is not exclusively a spiritual music as its origins are of folk music and folklore. '*Dhadi-Vara*' is a part of the narrative paradigm reflecting an oral history and passing on ideas and social structure of one's history and stories of forefathers. This style in the Guru's court was known as *Vaars*, (warrior ballads). Guru Har Gobind introduced this style to the Sikhs, as it was a great way of inspiring '*Bir-Rass*' (the martial spirit), due to its upbeat sound and the passionate evocation of different senses. We know of two great musicians of the time, Nathu and Abdullah; they were the first official *Dhadis*⁴² in the Guru's court. *Dhadi-Jatha* (groups) still perform this style of ballads in Gurudwaras, although the art form is in decline. An influx of the sound of the *Sarangi* can be found in recent Bhangra music productions, the most prominent example is of – Dr Zeus' '*Sachiya Suniya*'.⁴³

the courts of the latter Sikh Gurus, which are now included in the Guru Granth Sahib are eulogies to the first five Gurus.
<<http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhatts>>

⁴⁰ Boliyan or Bolis are couplets that are sung in Punjab. A Boli expresses situations, their emotions and their typical situations. Usually a boli is sung and introduced by one woman, and then the other girls form a chorus. These boliyan are usually passed down generation by generation orally. This forms a continuous and successive chain, each generation being taught by their predecessor. It is through this process that boliyan have refined and passed on from long ago. Now, boliyan have been fused with Bhangra music to spread all over the world to North America, Great Britain as well as Australia and New Zealand and mixed with all the cultures it interacts with. This has created a modern, urban style bhangra genre that is listened to by more than just North Indians. < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boliyan> >

⁴¹ The sarangi is the most important bowed stringed instrument of North Indian art music. Its name is widely believed to mean "a hundred colours" indicating its adaptability to a wide range of musical styles, its flexible tunability, and its ability to produce a large palette of tonal colour and emotional nuance. The sarangi is revered for its uncanny capacity to imitate the timbre and inflections of the human voice as well as for the intensity of emotional expression to which it lends itself. In the words of Sir Yehudi Menuhin: "The sarangi remains not only the authentic and original Indian bowed stringed instrument but the one which... expresses the very soul of Indian feeling and thought."<
<http://www.sarangi.net/>>

⁴² Even today's Dhadi music as well as tradition Kirtan has often copied songs from popular culture. I have heard tapes of AKJ- Akhand Kirtini Jatha dhadhis copying music of famous Kuldeep Manak songs, making their message more appealing to the mass Panjabi market.

⁴³ Released on the album 'The Original Edit', Sachiya Suniya won the title of Best Song 2005.

Saint Soldier – Siri Guru Gobind Singh Ji

In the 17th Century, the tenth master of the Sikhs, Siri Guru Gobind Singh Ji⁴⁴ was an accomplished warrior who had a profound passion for poetry and music. Though his works he wanted to reflect the changes of mood the soul encounters during life and so he 'seasonalised' the structure of the hymns that were being recited. This is shown in the colourful spring festival of '*Holi and Holla Mohalla*', the sense of renewal and celebration around '*Vaisakhi*' in the Spring, the warm relaxing Summer months, and of course the dark autumn Winter months. He wanted to expand his knowledge of poetry and music and therefore held a court with 52 poets, from across the land. (see *fig.5*) He would send some poets out to bring back new instruments, sounds and rhythms. He would then spend up to four hours a day studying their '*Kavvis*' (poems). There is even a '*Faranghi*' Taal, a Western beat, which can be found in his *Sarabloh Granth* ⁴⁵ (The Book of Iron), thus marking the arrival of the British in India.



Fig 5. Painting depicting

Guru Gobind Singh Ji

in his royal court.

⁴⁴ Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the tenth Guru of the Sikhs he was born at Patna Sahib in 1666. The most important contribution of Guru Gobind Rai Ji to Sikhism was the formal baptism ceremony. On Vaisakhi day, March 30, 1699, Guru Gobind Rai Ji started forming the Khalsa by baptizing the 'Panj Pyara', or the five beloved ones. Then Guru Ji asked them to baptize him. It was at this time that Guru Gobind Rai Ji became Guru Gobind Singh Ji. After baptizing hundreds of people, the Khalsa was ready. The Khalsa was a big step forward for the Sikhs. After being formed, the Khalsa fought many battles to defend themselves against mighty Mughal armies who were far superior in numbers and equipment. Another major contribution of Guru Gobind Singh Ji was compiling the Adi Granth, which included verses from the first five and the ninth Gurus. <http://www.infoaboutsikhs.com/guru_gobind_singh_ji.htm>

⁴⁵ The Sarbloh Granth is a poem that recites the story of gods and demons, and is said to be the work of Guru Gobind Singh. Sarbloh Granth literally means "*the Granth or Scripture of all-steel or iron*". The Akali Nihang tradition who make use of the Granth holds that whereas the Guru Granth Sahib is the embodiment of "*Shaant Ras*" (essence of peace), the Dasam Granth and the Sarbloh Granth are the embodiments of "*Bir Ras*" (essence of war). They believe that the difference between the Dasam Granth and the Sarbloh Granth is that although "*Bir Ras*" is born in the Dasam Granth, it is in the Sarbloh Granth where the individual warrior achieves an everlasting, final and complete lethal cutting edge advantage in this sphere of "*Bir Ras*". <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sarbloh_Granth>

The Troubadours of the Panjab.

The term '*Mirasis*'⁴⁶ refers to the caste of singing troubadour, or minstrels from Northern India, many of whom were Muslim. They were the custodians of the musical arts of the Panjab as well as the art form of dance. Some through their patronage and service in the Sikh Kingdom were bestowed the status of '*Rababi*' (musicians of the Rebab) within the Guru's court, without having to convert and become Sikhs themselves. This highlights an evolution of caste, as musicians of a low caste would be given a noble status because of their musical talent as well as the recognition of the lineage of *Mirasis* from the time of *Mardana* during the life of *Guru Nanak*. An anecdote shared by the *Rababi* bard '*Bhai Ghulam Muhammed Chand*'⁴⁷ recalls someone belittling *Mardana* by asking whether he belonged to the '*mirras*' caste. *Guru Nanak* affectionately answers that he belongs to me, '*Mersa-Si*' (He was mine/my beloved). In rural areas the *Mirasis* entertained Panjabi folk through humour, satirical dialogues, music and dance. They also found employment in the royal courts where two or more musicians would perform throughout moonlit nights, using their singing abilities to generate an exhilarating atmosphere. Historians sometimes overlook the contribution of the *Mirasis* to the spirit of Panjab and their significant role through their music both spiritual and secular.

The Great Lovers of the Panjab.

One question for contemplation is whether the Gurus would have only allowed spiritual music to be played around them during their time in Panjab or whether Panjabi folk music would have been played and permissible. Panjabi folk music has always drawn upon an array of subject matter from everyday life on the farmlands from tilling the soils and rejoicing at harvest time, to love and family relationships. A recurring theme throughout the centuries has been the great tragic love stories from the Panjab, which reflect the joy and

⁴⁶ The significant role of *Mirasis* in the cultural life of Punjab cannot be ignored. They were known as *Bhand* or *Naqqal* (actors), their profession being to make others laugh by enacting humorous anecdotes. They were mostly Muslims. They used to lead a very rough and rustic life, and formed a very poor section of Punjabi society. In times of yore, they were encouraged and patronised by feudal lords and sometimes found employment in big and small courts. They, entertained people with their pungent witticisms, mimicry ('*Swang*'! humorous and satirical dialogues, rough dances and pantomimes. They were good story-tellers. In lean times, when patronage was lacking from aristocracy and nobility, they earned their livelihood by entertaining the commoners on weddings, betrothal ceremonies and other auspicious occasions. It is unfortunate that all the colour and vivacity of everyday life in Punjab has vanished on account of partition. Those happy memories still linger in the minds of Punjabis who are above fifty years old. Only some families of *Mirasis* survive around Ludhiana and Jalandhar while the rest have given up their ancient art and have moved over to some other jobs to earn livelihood. <<http://www.eknoor.net/mirasi.php>>

⁴⁷ *Bhai Ghulam Mohammed Chand is a descendant of Bhai Mardana Jee Rababi, who spent the majority of his life serving Guru Nanak Dev Jee and playing the Rabab alongside the Guru.*

suffering of lovers which are similar to Shakespeare's 'Romeo & Juliet' in the Western world. Four of the most famous are *Heer-Ranjha*, *Sonhi-Mahewal*, *Mirza-Sahiban* and *Sassi-Punnu*.⁴⁸ These stories are intrinsic to the Panjabi psyche and are referred to in the Sikh's *Siri Dasam Granth* (Holy Scriptures of Guru Gobind Singh), and are still to this day heavily referred to throughout contemporary Panjabi folk music. Illustrated below is a passage from *Suriya Partap Granth*, which gives an intrinsic link to Panjab's folklore and spiritual heritage:

The 'Sakhi' chronicles an evening when *Guru Gobind Singh Ji*, at the city of *Anandpur*, overhears a 'Dhadi' singer outside the walls of the fort during the night. The musician is singing a ballad of the love story 'Sassi-Punnu' loudly with passion and happiness throughout the night. In the morning when the Guru holds court he calls forth the singer that he had heard. Some Sikhs that were dissatisfied with the man take him by the arm and bring him before the Guru. With his head bowed before the Guru he admits to what he was singing expecting a reprimand, as he wasn't reciting *Bani* (spiritual music). On the contrary the Guru asks him to sing the ballad again as it was pleasing to him. The singer is shy and apprehensive and kindly declines as he says that he could not possibly sing it in your exalted presence. The Guru then says that a partition will be put up so that you may recite this beautiful ballad once more without hesitation. The other Sikhs are dismayed and ask what the purpose of these kinds of love songs are and what are their relations to Sikhi? Guru Gobind Singh Ji replies that you must listen about the sacrifice made in this story and the message of the supremacy of eternal love.⁴⁹

Guru Gobind Singh Ji laid an unlimited emphasis on the expression of love for mankind and the infinite creator. In his hymn '*Tav-Prasad Savaiye*, (The praise to God), from his composition *Siri Dasam Granth*, (p13-15) the Guru states that; 'Only those who love, realise God'. This is a sophisticated, philosophical statement as it simplifies the wisdom of almost all religions in one phrase: '*Only those who have experienced love, can realise God*'. During one of the darkest passages in Guru Gobind Singh Ji's own life he came to a point where his home at *Anandpur Sahib* has been laid siege to by *Mughal* forces and he is forced to leave. Through the storm under the darkness of nightfall his family is separated through crossing the surging river '*Sirsa*'. Over the forthcoming events he loses his four sons and his mother in unprecedented circumstances. It is here at the last point where he has lost everything and is resting his head on a clay earthen pot in the jungle of '*Machiwara*'(see fig.6); where he

⁴⁸ For further information on the Great lovers of the Panjab please refer to Appendix (5).

⁴⁹ Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth 1843, authored by 'Kavi Churamani' Bhai Santokh Singh, Doyen of Nirmala Sect, it is popularly known as 'Suraj Parkash' and is a voluminous classical medieval source of Sikh History and Philosophy.
<http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sri_Gur_Pratap_Suraj_Granth>

recites the poem, *'Mittar piyare nu.'*⁵⁰ It is within this poem that some academics⁵¹ believe that Guru Gobind Singh Ji also makes an indirect reference to *Heer* as she is from the village '*Khere*'. She is remembered for knowing of the anguish and pain of separation from her true love *Ranjha*, therefore the suggestion is made that the Guru has used this pain of longing as an analogy for himself and how he felt pain and suffering caused by the separation from his beloved Lord, '*Waheguru*'.



Fig 6. Depiction of Guru Gobind Singh Ji in Machiwarra Jungle, Painting by: Bhagat Singh Bedi

‘ਮਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਨੂੰ ਹਾਲ ਮੁਰੀਦਾਂ ਦਾ ਕਹਿਣਾ ॥
ਤੁਧੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਰੋਗੁ ਰਜਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ਓਢਣ ਨਾਗ ਨਿਵਾਸਾਂ ਦੇ ਰਹਿਣਾ ॥
ਸੂਲ ਸੁਰਾਹੀ ਖੰਜਰੁ ਪਿਆਲਾ ਬਿੰਗ ਕਸਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਣਾ ॥
ਯਾਰੜੇ ਦਾ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੱਥਰੁ ਚੰਗਾ ਭੱਠ ਖੇੜਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਰਹਿਣਾ ॥’
(ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ, ਆਖਰੀ ਅਧਿਆਏ, ਫੁੱਟਕਲ ਸ਼ਬਦ)

⁵⁰ This is the beautiful shabad by the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh recited in the Machhivara forest when the Master was separated from everyone; not everyone because the connection to the Lord remain strong as always. The Shabad is present in Dasam Granth Sahib read here. From Mukhaarbind of Guru Gobind Singh ji; this Shabad was sung by him on the night of the cold Winter when Guru Sahib jio had earlier in the day led the Khalsa forces in the battle of Chamkaur where Guru ji fought with the huge army of enemies of Khalsa Panth. His sons embraced martyrdom in front of his own eyes fighting for Khalsa ideals. Guru Sahib ji in this shabad yearns for remembrance of Waheguru in spite of hardships and tough times. <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bani_of_Guru_Gobind_Singh>

⁵¹ Ethnographic Oral interview with historian Dildadshah Singh. See Appendix (1)

Mithr piaarae noo(n) haal mureedhaa dhaa kehinaa //
thudhh bin rog rajaaeeaa dhaa oudtan naag nivaasaa dhae hehinaa // sool suraahee
kha(n)jar piaalaa bi(n)g kasaaeeaaa(n) dhaa sehinaa // yaararrae dhaa saanoo(n)
*saathhar cha(n)gaa bhat(h) **khaerriaa** dhaa rehinaa //*

(Poem from Siri Dasam Granth, Akhari Adiyae 'Futkal shabad')

One must realise that religion is an evolving area of social interaction therefore it gives rise to linkages between the religious, political and secular discourse. This is a key feature when analysing poems and literature and understanding why the Sikh Gurus made such references to the love of Heer Ranjha.

Sikh Scholars.

*Bhai Gurdas Ji*⁵² was one of the most eminent literary personalities in the history of the Sikh religion. He was an accomplished theologian, poet and the scribe of the *Aadh Granth*⁵³. Being well versed in Indian religious thought; he was able to elaborate on the tenets of the Sikh Faith. The Gurus themselves regarded his works as a 'key' to unlock the deeper understanding of the Sikh Holy Scriptures. *Bhai Gurdas* has compared *Heer* and *Ranjha's* love to the devotion and love of a prophet and disciple for God.

⁵² Bhai Gurdas is considered the first interpreter of Gurbani. His writings are considered key to understanding the Sikh Holy Scriptures. He wrote 40 vars (ballads) and 556 kabits (both forms of Punjabi poetry). These writings are considered the best specimens of Sikh literature and philosophy. He also had the opportunity to be the scribe of Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth, the holiest Sikh scripture that was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh Guru, in 1604. <http://searchgurbani.com/bhai_gurdas_vaaran/introduction>

⁵³ In 1603 when all the compositions were collected the Guru selected a quiet and shaded place at the banks of the sarovar Ramsar in Amritsar to complete his work. While Guru Ji dictated the sacred hymns, Bhai Gurdas Ji inscribed them in Gurmukhi script. The Granth Sahib was completed in July 1604. The greatest glory of Guru Granth Sahib Ji is its universal scripture free from bias and prejudice. It is the only scripture of its kind, which enshrines in it the hymns of saints without distinction of race, religion, caste or creed. In the Guru Granth Sahib are enshrined the hymns of six Gurus, thirteen Hindu bhagats (saints - Trilochan, Naamdev, Ramanand, Surdas, Baini, Sadna, Kabir, Ravidas, Parmanand, Ravidas, Sain, Dhanna, Pipa and Jaidev), five muslim divines (Sheikh Farid, Bhikhan, Mardana, Satta and Balwand), a Sikh devotee (Sundar) and twelve bards. <http://babavadbhagsingh.com/the_adi_granth>

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥ Ikonkaar Satigur Prasaadi ॥

One Oankaar, the primal energy, realized through the grace of divine preceptor

੧ : ਲੇਲਾ ਮਜਨੂੰ ਆਦ ਪ੍ਰੇਮੀ। ਲੇਲੈ ਮਜਨੂੰ ਆਸਕੀ ਚਹੁ ਚਕੀ ਜਾਤੀ।

The lovers Lana and Majanu are well known in all the quarters of the world.

1 ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੨੭ ਪਉੜੀ ੧ ਪੰ. ੧ ਸੋਰਠਿ ਬੀਜਾ ਗਾਵੀਐ ਜਸੁ ਸੁਘੜਾ ਵਾਤੀ।

The excellent song of Sorath and Bija is sung in every direction.

2 ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੨੭ ਪਉੜੀ ੧ ਪੰ. ੨ ਸਸੀ ਪੁੰਨੂੰ ਦੇਸਤੀ ਹੁਇ ਜਾਤਿ ਅਜਾਤੀ।

The love of Sassi and Punnu, though of different castes, is spoken of everywhere.

3 ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੨੭ ਪਉੜੀ ੧ ਪੰ. ੩ ਮੇਹੀਵਾਲ ਨੇ ਸੋਹਣੀ ਨੈ ਤਰਦੀ ਰਾਤੀ।

The fame of Sohni who used to swim the Chenab river to meet Mahival is well known.

4 ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੨੭ ਪਉੜੀ ੧ ਪੰ. ੪ ਰਾਂਝਾ ਹੀਰ ਵਖਾਣੀਐ ਓਹੁ ਪਿਰਮ ਪਰਾਤੀ।

Ranjha and Hir are renowned for the love they bore each other.

5 ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੨੭ ਪਉੜੀ ੧ ਪੰ. ੫ ਪੀਰ ਮੁਰੀਦਾ ਪਿਰਹੜੀ ਗਾਵਨਿ ਪਰਭਾਤੀ ॥੧॥

But superior to all is the love the disciples bear their Guru. They sing it at the ambrosial hour of morning.⁵⁴

There is a clear differentiation of the love that is shared between human beings and the love for the divine. Although Bhai Gurdas states that the latter is the way forward to spiritual advancement, at no point does he suggest that the qualities of love found within the folklore are a derogatory of expression of love. Bhai Gurdas would also have used the affection between these lovers as a point of reference, which creates a framework in order to express the abstract form of love.

Many Panjabis believe that the stories of the Great Lovers are part of imaginary Folklore, yet increasing evidence⁵⁵ points towards the actual existence of the lovers *Heer Ranjha* and more poignantly their demise. Folklore was taken and reinvented through literature works by prominent poets like *Kavi Kalidaas*, *Daulat Ram*, *Damodar Das Arora*, *Bulleh Shah* and *Warris Shah*. In *Damodar Das Arora's* interpretation of the classic tale of '*Heer Ranjha*', he suggests that he is a contemporary of *Heer Ranjha* and that the story unfolds in front of his eyes, 'ਆਖ ਦਮੋਦਰ ਆਖੀ ਢਠਾ ਹੋਵਵ ਲਗੀ ਲਝਾਈ- *Akh Damodar Akheen Dittha Howan Laggi*

Larai.' What is interesting is that as the stories are told and retold throughout the centuries

⁵⁴ Bhai Gurdas Diyan Vaara: Laila, Majanu, the lovers Vaar27-Pauri1, <http://searchgurbani.com/bhai_gurdas_vaaran/vaar/27/pauri/1/line/5>

⁵⁵ Heer Ranjha's burial tombs can be found in the village of Jhang. It is the principal city of Jhang District, known historically as Sandal Bar in the Punjab province of Pakistan. It is situated on the east bank of the Chenab river, about 210 kilometres from Lahore and 35 kilometres from Gojra. <<http://www.glowpakistan.com/Page-Detail.php?id=293>>

the stories get more sensationalised. By the time of *Warris Shah's* interpretation, subtle undertones, connotations of carnal pleasure override the celestial 'angelic' status given to the lovers previously in *Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Dasam Granth*. He even went as far as removing *Ranjha's* name from the title and calling his work '*Heer – Warris Shah*', and also retells the story making himself part of what is going on.



Fig.7. A depiction of Akali Sikh warriors being entertained by dancing girls in a palace. Circa 1770. This image may be deemed controversial by Orthodox Sikhs as it shows dancing clearly being enjoyed as an art form. A greater understanding is needed to unpick painting but what is known is that Sikhs had gained a foothold in the Panjab for a short period. This prosperity is presented to the viewer through the reflection of enjoyment through art, faith, music and culture, found within this painting.

Summary

This section creates an analytical framework where connections can be made between the musical art form of Panjabi Sangeet and the influence it gave and acquired from Panjab's religious and secular history. As we have seen there are many strong musical influences that do not arise from within the Sikh Kingdom such as music from the Sufi world and the Hindu Bhakti movement. These worlds become entwined through a relationship that began with Guru Nanak bestowing the honour to a 'lower-caste musician' and friend to discontinue singing the praises of the aristocracy and instead to sing praises of the divine. Guru Nanak proclaimed that he did not recognise the distinctions of caste and creed, as these were man-made 'labels'. These 'labels' of secular distinction to control people⁵⁶ would in turn lead to many inappropriate abuses throughout India's history including the pivotal formalisation of the Sikh Gurudwara Act in 1925, as discussed in the third section.

The argument for 'Culture vs. Religion' is not a new one, nor is it merely an isolated phenomenon within Sikh institutions and the practitioners of song and dance. Examples can be found within other world faiths⁵⁷ such as the strict restrictions imposed on Gregorian chanting by the Catholic Church through the 'counterpoint' system in the Middle ages and the Islamic 'Shariah' law that forbids the practice of music and dance. Where Orthodox views would discount the value of spiritual links that are to be found within music and dance, it is possible to illustrate that these can be important expressions of faith. The key aspect found for direct and indirect links with spirituality in Panjabi Sangeet is evident through the role of the 'Love Legends' such as Heer-Ranjha. Their contribution to Panjabi folklore should not be underestimated as their tales of sacrifice for love permeate many different expressions and art forms in the Panjab, from paintings to poetry to the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs. Regrettably their status, which at one time was one of apotheosis, has over time been marred by reinvention to fit into a downward spiral of convention and commercialisation; this is why it is difficult to see these spiritual links within references made to the 'Lovers' in the modern format of Panjabi Sangeet.

⁵⁶ Ethnographic Mapping and the Construction of the British Census in India: Kevin Hobson.
<<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/article/castesystembib.htm>>

⁵⁷ There is much debate to be found on a range on online forums regarding popular culture in the form of music and negativity that faces these musical practices. Mixing The Sacred & The Profane: Gospel vs Secular Culture...Music <
<http://www.spiritualforums.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13549>>

Chapter 2. THE DANCE – Exploration of Panjabi Bhangra.

In this section I will first of all explore the spiritual elements that exist within the art form of ‘*Lok-Naach*’ (folk dances) of Panjab and references found within historical Sikh scriptures. This knowledge will be further extended with an analysis of the primary instrument used within Bhangra, the dhol, looking at its history and connections with the sacred. The folk dances of Panjab will also be examined including Bhangra’s female counterpart – Giddha; and how Bhangra dance evolved from a dance performed by farmers in their fields to becoming part of India’s National Identity through popular culture and its commercialisation.

Spirituality of Panjab and the Art Form of Dance.

Dr Alka Pande author of ‘From Mustard fields to disco lights’⁵⁸ argues that at the time of the Gurus there was no need for dancers but a demand from warriors, therefore dancing was shunned:

I wouldn’t personally say that it was linked to spirituality because my definition of spirituality is when there is a great detachment and you are preparing and transiting to another way of living.⁵⁹

In contrast, the Sikh historian, Dilbadshah Singh, supports the spiritual links to Bhangra:

The word “*Mastpuna* or *Mast-hunna*” is used in the *Aadh Granth* and “*Mast*” (happiness) is applied to dancing as it is in the Sufism. Dancing is a very spiritual form. Baba Sheikh Farid, whose works are embodied in the *Aadh Granth Sahib* danced through the wearing of a series of metal bracelets and hitting them with a stick through the movement of the body. *Bhagat Kabir Ji* also mentions “*Jhoomna*” which is the spinning around on an axis and meditating on God’s name. A derivative of this word still exists in the Panjabi folk dance “*Jhoomer*”⁶⁰. *Kaal Naach* started from “*Natan Narayan*” who is mentioned in the *Aadh Granth* that is where Lord Shiva turns into *Kaal Naach* the “Dance of war/destruction.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Dr. Alka Pande, *Mustard fields to disco lights*, Folk Music & Musical Instruments of Punjab. (1999)

⁵⁹ Ethnographic oral interview with Dr Alka Pande, England: 24/06/10, please refer to Appendix (1).

⁶⁰ A lively folk dance from the Panjab region of Multan, Sandalbar and Baluchistan.

⁶¹ Ethnographic oral interview with Dilbadshah Singh, England: 29/11/10, please refer to Appendix (1).

The Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

There is a strong argument for spirituality being inherent in the foundational elements of Panjabi Sangeet and Folk dances of the Panjab as links can be found in the Holy Scripture of the Sikhs, The Siri Guru Granth Sahib. It refers to dance and dancing in a variety of ways and in different contexts. There are six key exemplars that can be found within its pages. The first is dance as a metaphor for the journey throughout life. Our existence in the world is sometimes referred to as the dance of life and when we do not follow truth, our dance in life only results in pain and suffering. 'For the sake of Maya, they set the stage and dance, but they are in love with duality, and they obtain only sorrow.' (Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji - SGGSJ, p.122) The 'dance' is an important metaphor in the Sikh religion. Sikhs believe that when they develop a relationship with God, the dance with reincarnation, mortality and sorrow comes to an end. 'Says Nanak, one who meets with the True Guru, does not have to dance the dance of reincarnation again.' (SGGSJ, p.884)

The Guru Granth Sahib also teaches that through dancing alone enlightenment will not be achieved, and that the name of God must be carried in your heart to create a union with the universe. 'For the Gurmukh, loving devotional worship is the way to the True Lord. But the dances and the worship of the Hypocrites bring only pain.' (SGGSJ, p.364) There are also examples of divine beings and demi-gods, which dance in the heavens; 'The angels, the Siddhas, the beings of spiritual perfection, the heavenly heralds and celestial singers meditate on You. The Yakhsha demons, the guards of the divine treasures, and the Kinnars, the dancers of the god of wealth chant your glorious praises.' (SGGSJ, p.455) The Guru Granth Sahib evocatively describes God as an eternal dancer, keeping the 'Dance of Life' in motion. 'You Yourself sing, and You Yourself dance. You Yourself blow the bugle.' (SGGSJ, p.1252). These examples illustrate the positive perception of dance as a spiritual form.

Throughout my life I have been made to feel at odds with my passion for dancing. Some Sikhs when trying to insist that there is no link between dancing and spirituality will refer to the following quote that describes the human mind as something which dances to the five thieves, which comprise of lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride. 'The love of Maya makes this mind dance, and the deceit within makes people suffer in pain.' (SGGSJ, p.122). The dance of the mind is something we should aim to control through devotional worship and meditation. 'Channel your dancing mind in devotional worship.' (SGGSJ, p.121). This may be perceived as a negative comment on dancing and is often cited by Orthodox Sikhs to

make a claim that dancing is forbidden for Sikhs and is a sin; a closer look reveals that the quote refers to the dancing mind rather than the dancing body as associated with Bhangra. It is therefore the deed of sinful thinking that should be controlled, no matter what you are doing, be it working, dancing or going about your daily life. What is important for me as a practitioner of this art form and a Sikh is that the mind is kept clear with positivity throughout my actions even when I am dancing:

‘Make me the slave of the Lord’s slaves, so that my mind might dance in Your Love.’ (SGGSJ, p.169).

Epiphany through dance

One personal example of the link between spirituality and dance occurred on a visit to an Indian orphanage. As group we had raised a significant amount of money to donate; there was a roof top reception with an electrifying air of celebration on behalf of everyone involved. There was a dhol player playing with might and enthusiasm and in and amongst all the happiness and emotions there was one gentleman who was throwing his hands in the air and dancing whilst chanting at the top of his voice, ‘*Waheguru, Whaheguru, Waheguru!*’ (Wondrous Lord). This may have been regarded as highly unorthodox but it epitomised the meaning of *Nihaal* (intoxicated in heavenly and ethereal bliss). The gentleman seemed to be imbued with so much joy and happiness that he was almost in a trance-like state. The repetition of ‘*Waheguru*’ over and over made it hard to resist and we were drawn to join in with Bhangra dancing whilst expressing an unbridled passion to God and thanking Him for the moment. The Guru Granth Sahib teaches that when the mind is attuned to God through devotion then every action is blessed and considered a form of worship: ‘The Gurmukh laughs and the Gurmukh cries. Whatever the Gurmukh does, is devotional worship. Whoever becomes a Gurmukh contemplates the Lord. The Gurmukh, O Nanak, crosses over to the other shore.’ (SGGSJ, p.124). ‘The Gurmukhs sing, the Gurmukhs dance and focus their consciousness on the Lord.’ (SGGSJ, p124). ‘O people, O victims of this Maya, abandon your doubts and dance out in the open. What sort of hero is one who is afraid to face the battle?’ (SGGSJ, p.338). ‘Your veil shall be true only if you skip, dance and sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord.’ (SGGSJ, p484) ‘I dance, and make this mind dance as well. By Guru’s grace, I eliminate my self-conceit. One who keeps his consciousness focused on the Lord is liberated: he obtains the fruits of his desires.’ (SGGSJ, p.506). These extracts support the premise that dancing is a legitimate and valid form of worship.

Origins of Contemporary Bhangra Dance

In this section I will examine the foundational elements of Bhangra-dance and the main instrument that instigates the dance, the dhol, which was also the driving force for my practical performance piece. When setting the scene for my performance I wanted to take a deeper look back into the ancient sounds of India. I employed my interpretation of '*Paanch-Shabad*',⁶² which are the five primordial sounds that are the 'doors' to the six chakra points within the human body. As well as a 'conch' shell being blown to consecrate the performance space, I play the 'Damaroo' (monkey-drum), which is an ode to Shiva as it is the instrument he uses in his cosmic dance of creation:

According to Hindu mythology, the *Taandav* (the frenzied dance performed by Lord Shiva, in grief after his consort Sati's tragic demise) symbolizes the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, birth and death. His dance is therefore the dance of the Universe, the throb of eternal life. (www.indiaheritage.org)

Ancient civilisations from India and around the world give reverence to the primordial art form of dance. Dance is thought to have been one of the earliest types of communication in the history of the human race.

Dance is a universal human behavior, one associated with group rituals (Sachs, 1937; Farnell, 1999). Although it is depicted in cave art from more than 20 000 years ago (Appenzeller, 1998), dance may be much more ancient than that. Dance may in fact be as old as the human capacities for bipedal walking and running, which date back 2–5 million years (Ward, 2002; Bramble and Lieberman, 2004).

Bhangra dance is a unique and distinct style from all of the dances from the Indian sub-continent. When people danced in these ancient times they would have danced in ways that were instinctive to them. For example the things that they did in everyday life would be the building blocks of their dance, such as the cutting the crops reflecting natural, agricultural types of movements. For example the throwing of the seeds which is known as '*shittey*' or the flow of rivers and the grace of movement branches drifting in the wind. Hence it is said that Bhangra was born out of the farmer celebrating all the hard work, sweat, and toil he spends in the cultivation and harvest of his crops, or even rejoicing after a successful hunting expedition. Bhangra is an agricultural dance that exudes '*Bir-Rass*' (martial spirit or essence of war). In its earliest incarnations its participants would dance bare-chested with a row of dancing bells around their waist. Others would dance with one leg in the air to test their stamina. Therefore it promotes physical strength, self-assurance and virility. There

⁶² The Panch Shabad, the five primal sounds, vibrate in that blessed house. This Shabad is by Guru Amar Daas Ji in Raag Raamkalee on Page 917: Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji

are therefore positive health benefits Bhangra can bring, as these virtues can be a vital part of daily life to keep healthy. Other benefits dancing has are that it instils discipline and develops the qualities of '*Jinda dil*' (having patience), when learning this art form professionally and then gives '*Naranjan*' (peace of mind) through the happiness when one is performing Bhangra. Therefore it is clear that Bhangra is a distinct masculine art form originally for men to show who they were by expressing their youth and showing off power and vigour.



Fig.8 Photo of a dhol drummer playing the dhol.

Divinity of the Dhol

The history of the *dhol*⁶³(see *fig.8*) drum is integral to Bhangra as its beats and rhythms have informed the movements of the performer and warrior alike over the centuries. The *Dhanghar* people, one of the oldest existing communities of India trace their lineage back to the times of the *Mahabharata* are credited to giving the gift of the '*Dhol*' to the world.

It has provided the world with one instrument, which has acquired importance in modern day music too- Dhol drum. This instrument is cylindrical in shaped carved

⁶³ The dhol drum was used in war and then later in Punjab, North India, to keep farmers going at work. This drum became the ground roots of Bhangra music as we know it today. Johnny Kalsi <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/world/onyourstreet/dholhistory.shtml>>

out of wood covered with male goatskin on one side and female goatskin on the other. It has cultural importance in the Dhangari civilization for being an inspiration and celebration. It is considered auspicious and is played during the weddings, public commotion and festivals. The celebrations are known to last throughout the night or couple of days in a stretch. They have various rhythm and tunes on which the entire composition is based through which spiritual messages are sent. People of this civilisation also offer playing of this instrument as a prayer to the God. Considering the scientific and spiritual aspect the tunes of dhol provide the vibrations equivalent to 'OM', which is considered an auspicious part of Indian ethnicity. The vibrations created are also known to have healing and meditative effect.⁶⁴

The *dhol* also has mystical links through *Sufism* as for centuries its drumbeats have been a vital element in the ceremonies of the great *Sufi* mystics and their followers. The rhythms of *dhol* were developed to catalyse the mind of the devotee as he is seeking a spiritual trance.⁶⁵ In its simplest form the dhol was used to gather and inform the rural communities of important news similar to the English 'town crier'; or it was used during times of happiness to such as wedding celebrations. Other incarnations of its practice established the *dhol* as an integral part of War; from its earliest use centuries ago in '*Qingh- Pelwani-Akahre*'⁶⁶ (wrestling arenas), to the warriors of the *Kshatriyas* as well as the *Akali Nihangs*⁶⁷ (Sikh warrior-saints). The *Akalis* along with their spiritual training are well acquainted with the martial tradition of '*Shaster-Viddiya*'. The art of this type of warfare is usually accompanied with the sound of the 'Dhol beat' which is the primary instrument used in Bhangra. It is used through training as well as helping with co-ordination and also because the beat of the drum taps into the primordial psyche of the warrior. There are some examples of movements that correspond with both the Bhangra dance and *Shaster Viddiya* one of which is the '*thapee*'. This is when a sword master slaps the inside of their thigh before displaying his swordsmanship; the move is nothing short of a power show. The percussion sound therefore has to be very upbeat to carry a powerful message. In battle the

⁶⁴ The Dhangar caste population is mostly located in the Indian state of Maharashtra. The literal translation of the name Dhangar is "The one who is wealthy". The word Dhangar is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Dhenu' i.e. Cow. These are people who migrate with flocks of cow and sheep's to make a living and are addressed by different nicknames like Dhangar, Dhangad and Dhanpal. During the times of hardship some Kshatriyas went to the mountains and hills with their sheep's and cows and stayed in the forests. These people are called Dhangars.

<http://abhanganaad.in/dhanagari_dhol.aspx >

⁶⁵ Sufi artists claim that the dhol is a derivative from Middle Eastern instruments, further info on the dhol and its Sufi links: Dhol Information (Drum, Subcontinent, Ropes, Dohol) <<http://www.infinitesongs.com/dhol/encyclopedia.htm>>

⁶⁶ A comprehensive history of the dhol can be found at: Dhol Evolution Part 1; YouTube Interview with Ustad Lal Singh Bhatti:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4AcWdUgk4g>>

⁶⁷ Akali Nihangs: Time of origin: Mythological beings (via Chandi di Vaar) can be traced to 'Sat Yuga' (Age of Truth) as soldiers of Chandi. According to oral tradition, Akali Nihangs were informally known as 'Baba Bhuda Bhuda Dal' during the establishment of the Akal Takht (circa 1606). Renamed 'Akali Nihang' circa 1680's. Formally known as 'Bhudha Dal and Tarna Dal in 1735 Akali Nihangs are the oldest orthodox Khalsa institution within Sikhism. <http://www.sarbloh.info/htmls/article_samparda_nihangs.html>

dhol drum would be mounted on camel or horseback, and sound during warfare as well as regulate the pace combat and would continue throughout not stop until the end of the battle. The following quotes are from, '*Chandi di Vaar*',⁶⁸ from *Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Dassam Granth*:

- The warriors engaged in battle after the **dhols**, Sankh (conch shell horn) and Nagara (kettledrums) were sounded. With fury in her mind, Durga remembered the goddess Kalee.
- The hour of battle arrived and the kettledrums rumbled in excitement. The flags mounted upon lances began to fly and the radiant banners were shimmering. As the boom of the **dhols** and kettledrums filled the air, the demons with long matted hair were becoming intoxicated (by the sounds).
- The **dhols** and kettledrums beat and the battle between the armies commenced. The furious bands of demons rose up. They took spears in their hands and were making their horses dance about. Durga killed many and fell them on the battlefield.

Depictions of these epic battles are enhanced with the narrative of the sounds of the *dhol* drum, and highlight the link between the sound and '*Birr-Rass*' the 'essence' or 'nectar' of war. Residues of this '*Birr-Rass*' can be felt when performing Bhangra dance to the *dhol* drum and a union of the musician and the performer become one through the sound.

Folk Dance of the Panjab.

Dr Jageer Singh Noor, an esteemed academic who has spent over ten years in the field of research into the folk dances of the Panjab suggests, that the dance of Bhangra can be traced to the '*Sialkot*' region, which now resides in Pakistan. This is due to '*Sialkoti*' Bhangra being very prominent in old '*boliyan*' songs from the 19th century. The basic instruments used in its original form were the *dhol*, the *iktara* and the *surta*. The '*Satluj*'⁶⁹ river created a physical barrier for Bhangra to stay in that area until the displacement of partition. Bhangra dance is not seen in Pakistan in the same way it was once celebrated, although there are still

⁶⁸ Chandi Di Vaar (The Ballad of Chandi) or Var Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki (In some birs, the title is Vaar Durga ki) by Guru Gobind Singh, is the fifth Bani (composition) in the Dasam Granth. It is the Gurmat story of the titanic contest between Chandi and other Hindu Devtas (lit. bright, shining ones) on the one hand and the demons on the other hand. Guru Sahib used the Ballad to explain the principles of Gurmat (the Guru's way). <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Chandi_Di_Vaar>

⁶⁹ Sutlej River is the longest of the five rivers that flow through the historic crossroad region known as the Punjab in northern India as well as Pakistan, and is located North of the Vindhya range, south of the Hindu Kush segment of the Himalayas, and east of the Central Makran range in Pakistan. Its source is in Tibet near Mount Kailash and its terminus in Pakistani Punjab near the port city of Karachi via the Indus: <<http://www.whereincity.com/photo-gallery/lakes-and-rivers/sutlej-river-283.htm>>

pockets of folk dances to be found such as *Jhoomer* around the area of the river Ravi and Dhamaal in the Jammu area. Geographically these areas are very important as the five rivers of the Panjab made sure that the fertility of the land has always been at its prime.



Fig 9. An early depiction of Bhangra being performed by dancers in a circle around the dhol player.

Dr Noor explains, ‘The sight of Bhangra dance in its original form would differ to what is seen today. In its heyday the ‘*dhollie*’ (*dhol* drummer) would stand in the middle and a circle of dancers would then be created around him. (see *fig.9*) The initial dancer/singer would place his hand on the *dhol* sing a ‘*boli*’ (verse or rhyme) and then the dancers would start to dance, slowly at first and then gradually quickening their pace after each couplet sang. The dancers would also reply to this *boli* with their singing in the same tempo and speed:

Desh Panajb de munde suni de, hekha rakede thania, katte hokhe paun boliyaan, muche raked de kharia. Ral mil ke paun Bhangra, Sende na kise diyan taria. Arre' gher' nal na gal karde', viyah ke liyonde pariya. Vela dharam diyan jugo jag rhean harria, vela dharam diya.'⁷⁰

An old Panjabi '*boli*' that makes reference to the sons of the soil that sing and dance and keep an upright moustache, and the virtues of marrying angels and always ready to uphold their faith. The narrative structure of these '*bolis*' or '*boliyan*' would be based on sharing current news, talking about warfare, if crops had failed, the birth of a child or wedding celebrations.

Different Incarnations of Bhangra Dance.

Looking at sub-genres of the dance and the music what comes to light is initially believed to be different regional variations of the same art form that have remained at one point in time art forms in their own right. For example *Ludhi* may have been a fashionable '*lok naach*' (folk dance) of the people in region at one point but over time it lost its popularity yet remnants of it are still found in popular Bhangra dance today. As people move from one area to another the sound and dance of Bhangra has been influenced over the years, Bhangra also embraces movements and gestures from other folk dances. There is a rural folk dance that is called '*Bhagi*' '*Bhagga*', which is perhaps another place where the word may have originated.

There is a culmination of different styles and different forms of Bhangra found throughout Panjab; some have moved away from mainstream Bhangra and become estranged, yet have a distant affiliation with Bhangra. One such example can be found in parts of Patiala in the southern region of Panjab called '*Dandaas*'; when performing, 'small baton-sized sticks' are used, similar to the '*Daandiya*' that is still performed throughout Rajasthan. Other folk dances have moved closer to mainstream Bhangra and have become amalgamated within it. '*Jhoomar*' is an example of this and originates from the '*Maaja*' region. Slowly its dance moves have been assimilated within Bhangra. Other changes through these types of interactions are instruments and 'props' that did not originally belong to Bhangra. '*Shikke*' is one such example as this instrument was brought in from *Malwai Giddha*, from the *Malwha* region, as dancers standing at the back could initially carry on the clapping beat.

⁷⁰ Ethnographic oral interview with Dr. Jageer Singh Noor at his residence in Phagwara, Panjab, please refer to Appendix (1).

Slowly this has been incorporated into Bhangra and has become an integral part of any performance. The only thing Bhangra dancers would necessarily have originally would be the '*Dang*' (similar to a shepherds crook); this was the main element as it was usually carried as a makeshift weapon if the *Jatt* farmer ever got into a fight.⁷¹

Giddha – The Female Counterpart of Bhangra.

Giddha⁷² dance is a Panjabi folk dance in its own right but is referred to as the female equivalent to Bhangra. It started off as a pastime, *boliyan* would be sung whilst doing chores, about the chores themselves or family relationships, and other facets of humanity. It was a shared experience that also proved to be a vital part of escapism. The dancers sang and danced to traditional folk songs that have been sung for decades and have gradually found their way into mainstream Bhangra songs over the years. An enactment of traditional Giddha takes place within VIRSA - my performance piece,⁷³ where the dancers sing their *boliyan* in traditional acoustic style. During their piece they place sesame seeds into a fire, as this represents an old Indian pagan ritual of receiving the blessing of fire at the beginning of the winter solstice. The women of the Panjab radiate culture from their clothes and jewellery; they wear '*Phulkari*' shawls that were hand made. One of the most marked differences is how male dancers used to perform Bhangra and womenfolk used to perform Giddha and these two were very separate. Nowadays it is has become common to observe women dancing alongside men in Bhangra; this transition is also conveyed in the performance.

An interesting phenomenon within Giddha is how women masculate themselves by dressing up as men whilst dancing. They tie their headscarves around their hips and take on male personas. Their characteristics change entirely as the lyrics they sing become audacious, cheeky and brash. Growing up on farmland they are attuned to nature and what happens

⁷¹ Please refer to Appendix (1) for DVD of ethnographic oral interviews.

⁷² The dancers enact verses called *bolis*, which represent folk poetry at its best. The subject matter of these *bolis* is wide ranging indeed – everything from arguments with the sister-in-law to political affairs figure in these lively songs. Aside from the drums, the rhythm of this dance is set by the distinctive hand-claps of the dancers. Giddha is a very vigorous folk dance and like other such dances it is very much an affair of the legs. So quick is the movement of the feet in its faster parts that it is difficult for the spectator even to wink till the tempo falls again. The embroidered -duppattas- and heavy jewelry of the participants whose number is unrestricted further exaggerate the movements. The vitality of Bhangra can also be seen in the Giddha dance of the women of Punjab. This dance translates into gestures, *bolian*-verses of different length satirizing politics, the excesses committed by husbands, their sisters and mothers, loneliness of a young bride separated from her husband, evils of society or expressing guileless deep love.

⁷³ Performance DVD, 10mins:32secs. Please refer to Appendix (3).

out in the fields. They sing '*settiniya*' which are boliyan that are recited from the girl's side to the boy's side when they arrive to a wedding; these are incredibly coarse and lewd. Dr Alka Pande⁷⁴ during an interview remarks; 'Your ears would turn red with embarrassment whilst listening to them, but this also shows the freedom enjoyed to be able to speak one's mind and to be able to express sexuality through song.'

On the other hand *boliyan* can also hold religious content as at most weddings the women folk start off their *boliyan* by remembering Guru Nanak and ask him for their blessing and for him to bring happiness to the wedding household. A Gurudwara Sahib exists in Southern India where the women of the village sing *boliyan* and dance outside the Gurudwara sahib in remembrance of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's visit there during one of his voyages:

Dharti jett gareeb na koi, Koi Inder jett na data. Bhrama jett na pandit koi, Koi Seeta jett na mata. Laxman jett na jatti na koi, Ram jett na prata. Babe Nanak jett pavt na koi jin Harr ka naam pashatta. Duniyan maan kardi rab sabna di daatta, duniyaan maan kardi.

On the land where no-one is poor, there is no-one like Idra, There is no pandit like Bhrama, no mother like Seeta, no-one like Laxman or Ram, no-one like Baba Nanak who the whole world pays their respect to.⁷⁵

Second and third generation Panjabi girls in the West are becoming increasingly less likely to know many of these traditional *boliyan*, as a good command of the Panjabi language is needed to express them. Another change to the structure of *boliyan* is that you very rarely get the question and answer form of *boliyan* that was heavily prevalent at the turn of the century. This is where one singer would sing a couplet and someone else would give the reply through song. Many modern day male singers in the UK have used *boliyan* and created songs from them, changing the style and structure of the traditional *boliyan*.

Bhangra and India's National Identity.

Another recurring theme throughout modern Bhangra music has been the inspiration given by Sikh freedom fighters of the past; most prominently, Sikhs such as Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Shaheed Udham Singh who played an integral role in the Independence of India from Colonial rule, incurring martyrdom through the supreme sacrifice of their lives in 1931 and

⁷⁴ Ethnographic oral interview with Dr. Alka Pande author of 'Folk music and Musical instruments of Punjab. Please refer to Appendix (1)

⁷⁵ Boli recited in Ethnographic oral interview with Dr. Jageer Singh Noor at his residence in Phagwara, Panjab. Please refer to Appendix (1).

1940 respectively. The events that followed saw Hindu and Muslim politicians take the opportunity of Partition to further divide and create a separate country of Pakistan. A parting gift by the British was an indiscriminate line drawn through the heart of the Panjab tearing it into two parts; one for the Muslims within Pakistan, and the other left to the Hindus in Hindustan, without a homeland given to the Sikhs:

Sikhs played so important a role in the British Indian Army that many of their leaders hoped that the British would reward them at the war's end with special assistance in carving out their own nation from the rich heart of Punjab's fertile canal-colony lands, where, in the "kingdom" once ruled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), most Sikhs lived. Since World War I, Sikhs had been equally fierce in opposing the British raj, and, though never more than 2 percent of India's population, they had as highly disproportionate a number of nationalist "martyrs" as of army officers.⁷⁶

Its population was uprooted with reports up to 18 million people displaced and up to 1 million deaths are said to have occurred between the times of 1947 – 1951. (see *fig.10*) The Panjab witnessed unprecedented carnage and kinship between communities turn to 'blood-lust'.



Fig 10. Photo showing Panjabi migration during partition.

⁷⁶ There is much evidence of the effects partition had on India's population; harrowing scenes of death and despair have been captured through film and photography during the transition; I have selected a milder more poignant image to highlight partition. Article on the India-Pakistan Partition 1947 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/indo-pak-partition.htm>>

Indian cinema post-partition was heavily geared towards nation building and social realism. It worked hard to gain a national identity for the new independent India. The 'Golden Age' of Indian films expressed social themes dealing with subject matter such as the working-class and suburban life in India. Although Bhangra was given a new home in Indian cinema because of its exhilarating and uplifting sound of the Panjab, Sikhs were not given exclusive acting roles. For the most part the portrayal of Panjabi *Jatts* in the films was extremely stereotypical. For example, the convention was a strong, jovial, hospitable man that was rather naïve, almost buffoon-like. This typecast 'Panjabi' within Indian cinema has been a constant thorn in the Sikh psyche for decades until recent Panjabi roles that have had some serious acting weight behind them have paved the way for a much more positive and dynamic representation of Sikhs and the art form of Bhangra.

Manor Deepak (see *fig.11*) was a key player in the early development of Bhangra in Indian cinema as he was a dancer with a great reputation because of his charisma, stage presence and his mastery in Bhangra dance. His family moved to the state of Patiala where his Grandfather was the A.D.C. to the ruler of Patiala State at the time. Deepak developed a passion for Bhangra dance whilst studying at college. During this time Deepak felt that the art form of Bhangra was in a degenerating state especially after the atrocities of partition. He took it upon himself to set about a revival of this folk dance. In the early 1950s he set about finding other like-minded dancers to try and bring Bhangra to the National stage. Along with his older brothers, Avtar and Gubachan, Deepak with the help of Chaman Lal Rana as choreographer, formed a core group made up of six men as well as having a team of 'Baazigar' (street performers) and acrobats. Amongst this troupe of 'Baazigars' was one of the greatest Dhol players, his name was Ustad Bhanna Ram Sunami. He was the legendary drummer that accompanied the first ever professional Bhangra 'team' to perform in front of the Maharaja of Patiala at a cattle fair in the village of *Theari*. The Maharaja was greatly impressed by their performance as so were the crowds; so much so he gave 5,000 rupees as a reward so that they could purchase whatever they needed, such as costumes and props to enhance their performance.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Please refer to Appendix (1) for DVD of ethnographic oral interviews.

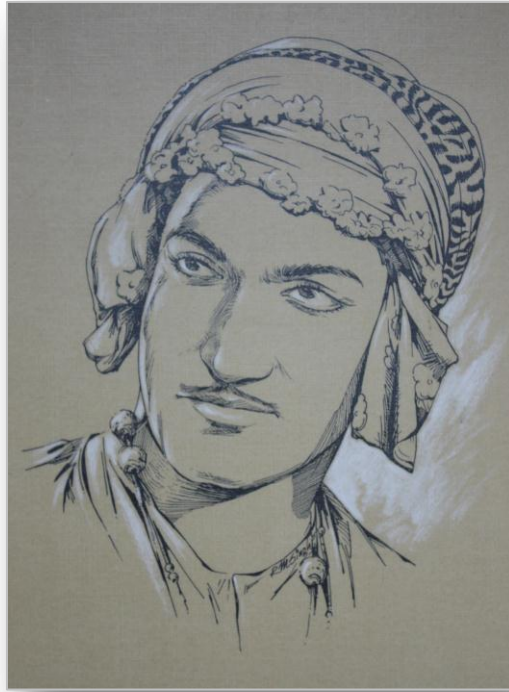


Fig 11. Sketch of the artist Manor Deepak; Note the original style of turban with **two** side tufts showing that represent goats ears.

Their next big performance came when they travelled to Delhi representing 'PEPSU' the (Patiala and East Panjab States Union) at the Republic day parade in 1952. The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was also present and was taken aback by the sights and splendour of India's first professional Bhangra team. He was asked to wear a turban and join in the festivities, which he gladly did. It was at this point that Bhangra was brought to the Nation's attention.

1955 witnessed new heights in Bhangra taking its first steps onto the world stage, as five of the team members, along with other artists were flown to China as part of the first cultural delegation to visit the communist state. They had been sent to represent India and strengthen relations between the two countries. They performed both traditional Panjabi singing and dance. An eyewitness account from Gurnam Singh in his book, *'East of Indus'*⁷⁸ makes commentary on another special performance that also took place in 1955. This occurred when the Soviet party secretary Nikita Krushchev and premier Bulganin came to

⁷⁸ Brard. G. S. S. (2007). *East of Indus: my memories of old Punjab*. New Dheli, India: Hemkunt Publishers

inspect the construction of the *Bhakra* Dam on the Sutlej River in Panjab. Some Bhangra practitioners recall this as the point where Bhangra became synonymous with the Panjabi identity as it was seen as one of the greatest cultural contributions from the Panjab.

Bhangra in Popular Culture

Bhangra graced the silver screen for the first time when Manohar Deepak performed in the 1956 film '*Jaagte Raho*' and again with his full Bhangra team plus acrobats in '*Naya Daur*' - 1957. The power of Indian cinema made it inevitable that Panjabis would be synonymous with the dance of Bhangra and Giddha. Nargis, the leading lady of Indian cinema at the time, remarked after seeing these men perform Bhangra: 'This is the first time I have seen men dance like real men!'

Bhangra soon sprang up in various colleges around the region of the Panjab, *Amritsar*, *Bhatala*, *Jalahndar*, *Patiala*, *Faridkot* and *Ludhiana* and soon filtered into the Universities as students moved up into them. Over the course of the last few decades Bhangra has become highly choreographed due to it finding its way out of the villages and fields and onto the stages of academic institutes as part of competitions and performances in front of audiences. It is here where Bhangra has become increasingly concentrated and ever more popular.

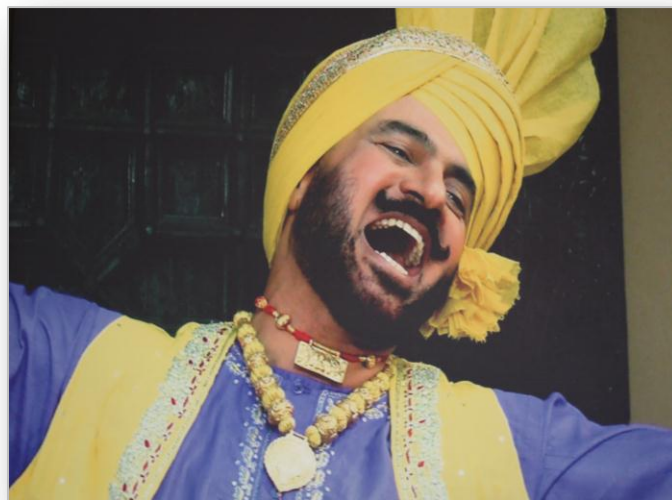


Fig 12. Photo of PammiBhai; note the modern Bhangra turban with a turla, (tuft at the top).

Paramjit Singh Sidhu (see *fig.12*) known more popularly as ‘Pammi Bhai’ is an expert on Bhangra and a torchbearer for the art’s true essence to be preserved through study and practise. He explains that the evolution of Bhangra dance brought about by college performers drew upon popular culture for inspiration whilst trying to preserve representations of an authentic Panjabi lifestyle; the former would in time inevitably subjugate the latter. In an interview Pammi Bhai gives a further detailed account of the changes that have occurred over the last few decades:

So-called coaches started to bring in variations of moves, beats and started changing the costumes. Influence from Hollywood and Bollywood would crop up mutating Bhangra from its original essence. In other words spoilt it. It became more of a stage show to a point where there would even be a drama being played out and then some dancing was done. They made such a framework that they dramatised Bhangra. (see *fig.13*) Bhangra that has been born out of men of the earth should try and keep the essence of it alive and keep its spirit strong. The style and enjoyment in which it was performed should stay in its original format. We need to look after our heritage of our folk dances.⁷⁹

He goes on to explain that dancers have boasted to him about how they can execute over seventy moves in eight minutes, his reply is that: Even a trained monkey can do that, there is no grace no expressions in what we see today. This statement made by Pammi Bhai was a key motivator in the choreography of my performance piece, as I wanted to express the trend of movements gaining speed across time.



Fig 13. Photograph of Bhangra dancers performing on stage in front of a mock up tank. (circa 1977).

⁷⁹ Paramjit Singh Sidhu, Ethnographic Oral Interview, please refer to Appendix (1).

Commercialisation of Bhangra

The practical element in the performance seeks to showcase the development of Bhangra dance over time. The Bhangra dance section at the beginning is played out in a circle taking the time to respond to the *dhol* beat and focusing on the moment and sound of the music being played. As the pace of the music gets faster over the course of the presentation, the movements reflect the changes that have taken place in its history. For example the movements have become much more refined and 'slick' in their presentations. Performances have become deeply choreographed eliminating the risk of mistakes, as the honour of the college/university would be at stake. As more and more rival Bhangra dance teams would compete against each other, the time frame they had to compete in has slowly decreased. Therefore most teams spend no more than twelve minutes delivering a Bhangra routine. These time constraints have directed the dance to become exaggerated, over excited and almost frenzied. They seem to throw away moves, use excessive energy, which might be better channeled into the passion of the moment. There are usually a set number of participants that all have a similar stature and age. There is an avid concern for originality so therefore more and more gimmicks are being used, even magic tricks. There is also a high level of commercialism as Bhangra schools are increasingly geared to make money from either teaching the dance or performing in front of an audience. Modern Bhangra dancers in the West diaspora are now far removed from the Panjab, as they are not doing the same things their forefathers did, such as long morning walks to the '*khoo*' (well), manual labour through fieldwork, the exploration of colours and textures, cooking on an open fire, so the dance has lost much of its natural rhythm. Bhangra dance must therefore be learnt, as modern life-styles have led to body movements becoming restricted and time scheduled. Some dancers who have a natural rhythm showcase this through their natural fluid movements. Others find this difficult and a common occurrence within the practice of some contemporary Bhangra dancers is that their movements may seem contrived as they become increasingly technical. Bhangra moves must therefore be learnt, but features within the performance, such as '*Nakhra*' (facial expressions), must come from within the dancer.

Summary

When one attempts to define dance and its essence one realises the difficulty in doing so. My own experiences documented in this section are both subjective and particular; and through them I can make a firm link with my practice, my faith, as well as the history to which it belongs. We have learned that the Sikh Holy Scriptures reflect an array of definitions for dance that can be used as possible guides; most prominent of which reflects the description of God as a dancer. Other references relate to dance as a powerful analogy for a positive expression of the life-force within. The bond between the primary instrument and that of different faith groups and their utilisation of the dhol has been explored; these have formulated a deeper understanding of different dimensions that are to be found within the history of the ever-popular dhol drum. Marking key points such as the influx of refugees from Western Panjab during partition, along with their style of Bhangra dance and how this art form was carried forward by its torchbearer, Manohar Deepak, creates a series of events that define the evolution of Bhangra dance. This helps to shape a more detailed picture of Bhangra's past. (see *fig.14*) As a practitioner I constantly seek richer forms of representation within my art and this section has brought together a range of elements that have been previously examined within separate fields of study. This new knowledge is a manifestation of a coalescence of the religious, spiritual and the secular.

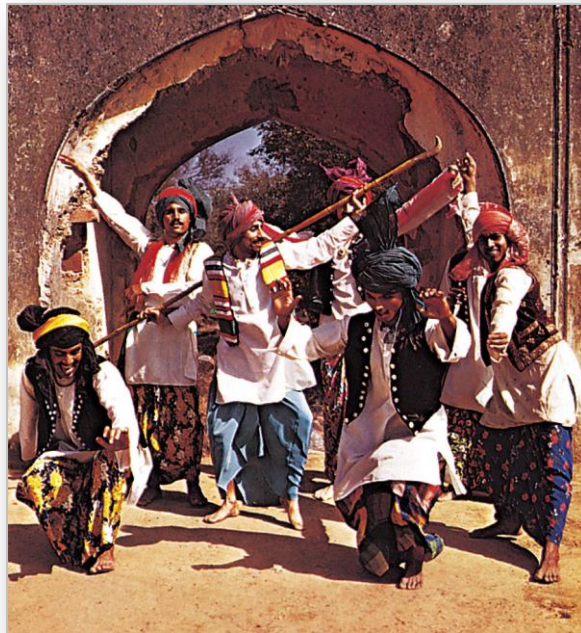


Fig 14. Photograph of Bhangra dancers in the Panjab.

Chapter 3. BHANGRA in the 20th Century and the Sikh Identity.

Prelude to the British Raj and their Impact on the Sound of Panjab.

During the times of *Banda Singh Bahadur*⁸⁰ the Sikhs were split into *Missls* (military groups) and for many years records were not kept due to Sikhs being constantly on the move due to persecution from the ruling Mughal Dynasty. This bleak period of Panjab's history is referred to by its native people as the 'dark-age'. When *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*⁸¹ took the throne, there was a new force invading India, making its way up from the Southern regions, in the form of the East India Company. The development of the two parallel art forms of Panjabi Sangeet and Bhangra dance and their complex relationship with spirituality changed when this external force with the mind-set of ruling the country arrived to the Panjab.

There were immediate consequences as the soundscape of the Panjab changed through new music recording technologies such as the Gramophone. As Western ethnographers tried to record the sounds found in Panjab, they realised the high resonating vocal sounds, the 'Gharka' or 'Hekkh' (very loud and high pitched) sound that the Panjabi singers use along with the Dhol drum proved difficult to record because of sound levels being excessive. Some artists got used to using the microphone and toned their style of singing. Western instruments too were introduced such as the Piano and the 'Vaaja' (the Harmonium), which to this day is still used predominantly in Sikh *Gurudwaras* around the world and Panjabi folk music. Luckily the change was more incidental and Panjabi folk music through its resilience still managed to keep hold of much of its raw energy. We can state that positive outcomes came in the form of the beginning of the recording industry within the Indian sub-continent and Panjabi Sangeet being archived through ethnographic recordings so that we may still refer to them today. This is a nominal token compared to what was lost, as we will explore in the following passages.

⁸⁰ Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716). Eighteenth century Sikh warrior who for the first time seized territory for the Khalsa and paved the way for the ultimate conquest of the Punjab by them. <<http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/sikh-political-figures/banda-singh-bahadur.html>>

⁸¹ Maharaja Ranjit Singh (13th November 1780 - 27 June¹ 1839) also called "Sher-e-Punjab" ("The Lion of Punjab") was the first Maharaja of the Sikh empire. <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Maharaja_Ranjit_Singh>

Panjab in the Early 1900s

This section will draw upon a wide range of unexplored historical and ethnographic sources to provide an insight into the word Bhangra and why Orthodox Sikh institutions have a clear distaste for Panjabi folk musical traditions.

Although early British colonisers of India were motivated mainly by greed:

By the beginning of the 19th century this type of attitude had begun to change. A series of conquests expanded the territory held by the British and the idea of responsible trusteeship began to creep into the thinking of the individuals charged with governing British India. The freebooters of the 18th century were giving way to the bureaucrats of the 19th century. Ironically, it is highly debateable which of the two, freebooters or bureaucrats were the most dangerous to the people of India. Treasure can be replaced. Cultures, once tampered with, are nearly impossible to reclaim.⁸²

Although far from the 'Nanakanien' utopia Guru Nanak dreamed of – Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs living together in unison – the Panjabi population enjoyed mutual understanding and a celebration of a shared heritage that had organically developed throughout the centuries. More specifically the Panjab population had formed many fluid and dual religious boundaries that were common and acceptable. These consisted of overlapping religious identities such as *Hindu-panthi* (Hindu Sikh), *Sikh Keshdhari* (a baptized Sikh), *Sanatan Sikhs* such as the *Nirmala*, *Udasis* and *Seva Panthis* and more important to this research Muslim *Rababis* that saw themselves as musical philanthropists serving the Guru. During the British 'Raaj' of the Indian Empire, not one Hindu temple or Mosque had been taken under the control of the British, however soon after the annexation of Panjab the British immediately took control over the major Sikh centres of Panjab. The British had already begun to reaffirm caste identities in efforts to arrange various castes in order of precedence. A common policy for the British was administered to the land of Panjab, -'Divide and Rule'. The formulation of a 'Sikh' identity was instigated that was more 'palatable' to the British and those in power; a systematic exclusion of all non-Sikhs had begun. The key signifiers for the Government and the ruling overlords used to define a 'Sikh' were the wearing of a

⁸² Ethnographic Mapping and the Construction of the British Census in India: Kevin Hobson.
<<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/article/castesystem.htm>>

turban and the baptism through *Amrit*. This catastrophic⁸³ invasion was a ploy to bring order over an organically integrated society.

At the behest of the British, the Singh Sabha⁸⁴ movement in the early 19th century played its part in shaping the way of what is thought about Bhangra from the perspective of Sikh institutionalism. Amritpal Singh Attwal⁸⁵ suggests that structure, rules and order were brought in the 1920s by the movement to try and reaffirm the Sikh identity as there was an increasingly heavy evangelising activity by the Christian and Hindu sects in the Panjab region. The Gurudwara Act of 1925 was a way of formalising a Sikh '*Rehat Maryada*' (Code of Conduct and convention), and was implemented by the ruling party of the time, the SGPC.⁸⁶ Within the document a particular section denotes:

- a) Only a Sikh may perform Kirtan in a congregation.
- b) Kirtan means singing the scriptural compositions in traditional musical measures.
- c) In the congregation, Kirtan only of Gurbani (Guru Granth's or Guru Gobind Singh's hymns) and, for its elaboration, of the compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal, may be performed.
- d) It is improper, while singing hymns to rhythmic folk tunes or to traditional musical measures, or in team singing, to induct into them improvised and extraneous refrains. Only a line from the hymn should be made a refrain.⁸⁷

Instead of looking deeper in to Sikhdom's past, this orthodox regulatory system gave precedent to the use of the harmonium, as it was easily learnt by a non-specialist in music. This laid down the foundations towards the stagnation of varied spiritual music that had been composed, and had always been expressed through an array of stringed instruments during the Guru's times. The impact was two-fold; firstly the onus was given to *Kirtan*

⁸³ The 1.5 billion Indian Holocaust under the British is the greatest catastrophe and greatest crime in human history.
<<http://www.stateofnature.org/humanCostOfEmpire.html>>

⁸⁴ To quote Sardar Harbans Singh in *The heritage of the Sikhs* "The Singh Sabha which followed them had a much deeper impact. It influenced the entire Sikh Community and reoriented its outlook and spirit. Since the days of the Gurus nothing so vital had transpired to fertilize the consciousness of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabha by leavening the intellectual and cultural processes brought a new dimension to the inner life of the community and enlarged its heritage. Starting in the seventies of the last century, it marked a turning point in Sikh history. It touched Sikhism to its very roots, and made it a living force once again. The stimulus it provided has shaped the Sikhs' attitude and aspiration over the past one hundred years.<<http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/events/singhsabha.html>>

⁸⁵ Ethnographic oral interview -29/10/2009, please refer to Appendix (1).

⁸⁶ SGPC: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee - A statutory body comprising elected representatives of the Sikhs concerned primarily with the management of sacred Sikh shrines under its control within the territorial limits of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and the Union territory of Chandigarh. <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Shiromani_Gurdwara_Parbandhak_Committee>

⁸⁷ THE CODE OF SIKH CONDUCT AND CONVENTIONS, CHAPTER V, Kirtan (Devotional Hymns Singing by a Group or an Individual), Article VI.
<http://www.sgpc.net/rehat_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html>

‘religious Sikh hymns’ to be played on the *Tabla* and harmonium (a relatively modern instrument from the West) creating a simplification of musical structures heard within the Gurudwaras. Secondly, the musicians or minstrels of the *Rabbabi*⁸⁸ order (the first of whom was *Bhai Mardana* life-long companion of *Siri Guru Nanak Dev Ji*) were of Muslim descent therefore also made to leave the Guru’s court as non-Sikhs were not given permission to perform *Kirtan* at the *Harimandar Sahib*,⁸⁹ or any other Gurudwara’s under the SGPC’s control. It is at this point Bhangra with its links with the ‘*Mirrasi/Rabbabi*’ order was ‘thrown out’ out of ‘Sikhdom’.

Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, one of the most eminent academic scholars of the time, was asked to compile an encyclopaedia for the Sikhs. It was a monumental task that took him fourteen years to compile; when the ‘Guru Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh’ (encyclopaedia of the Panjabi language) was published it was considered revolutionary in terms of its influence and its expert level of scholarship. On reading the Mahan Kosh it is perhaps surprising to note that there are no references to the word Bhangra as a dance form.⁹⁰ This begs the question of whether this is deliberately omitted because Bhangra had become taboo because of its links with the ‘*mirrasi/rabbabi*’ order. The image on the following page (see *fig.15*) illustrates that the anthropologist Arthur, witnessed the common Bhangra dance in the fields of Panjab and is clearly dated 1838, therefore we know that the word was in common use around this time.

⁸⁸ Rababi Kirtan Tradition is an integral part of Gurmat Sangeet. Before partition, Rababis were regular Keertan performers at Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar and different Gharanas of Rababis were actively engaged in the Kirtan practice. < <http://www.sikh-heritage.co.uk/arts/rebabiMardana/RebabiMardana.htm> >

⁸⁹ Sri Harimandir Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple in Amritsar is the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion. Also known as the Shri Darbar Shaib, it is in the center of the old part of Amritsar. The Golden Temple sits on a rectangular platform, surrounded by a pool of water called the Amrit Sarovar from which the City is named. <<http://www.amritsar.com/harmandirsahib.shtml> >

The British authorities also banned the singing of a popular couplet “*Raj krega khalsa aaki rahe na koe*: “Ultimately the Khalsa shall triumph and no one shall be able to defy” at Darbar Sahib. It was composed in the early eighteenth century when the Mughals put a price on the heads of Sikhs and, bounty hunter Hindus were bringing cart-loads of heads of Sikhs to Lahore. <<http://sikh-spectrum.com/112006/doris/ch12.htm> >

⁹⁰ The Mahan Kosh entry of Bhangra refers to a plant and not the dance: *ਭੰਗਰਾ* - *bhangarā* - ਸੰ. ਭ੍ਰੰਗਰਾਜ. ਵਿਜਯਸਾਰ. ਇੱਕ ਪੌਧਾ, ਜੋ ਬਹੁਤ ਕਰਕੇ ਬਰਸਾਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ. ਇਸ ਦੀ ਜੜ ਅਤੇ ਪੱਤਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਰਸ ਅਨੇਕ ਦਵਾਈਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵਰਤੀਦਾ ਹੈ. ਪੁਰਾਣੇ ਲਿਖਾਰੀ ਸਿਆਹੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਦਾ ਰਸ ਪਾਇਆ ਕਰਦੇ ਸਨ. ਦੇਖੋ, ਸਿਆਹੀ ਦੀ ਬਿਧਿ. #ਬਹੁਤ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦਾ ਖਿਆਲ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਦਾ ਰਸ ਸੇਵਨ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਲ ਚਿੱਟੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਅਰ ਇਸੇ ਕਾਰਣ ਸੰਸਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਦਾ ਨਾਮ ਕੇਸਰਜਨ ਭੀ ਹੈ. *Verbesina prostrata* | ੨. ਭੰਗ ਦੀ ਫਿੱਲ ਤੋਂ ਬਣਿਆ ਇੱਕ ਮੋਟਾ ਵਸਤੂ.



Fig. 14 Bhāngrā dance, recorded by Arthur in 1838.

Fig. 15. Image from the book; 'The cultural heritage of Punjab'

This depiction of Bhangra dance is very insightful to how Bhangra was not only performed but what was worn during the dance for example the simple white robes and the style of turban worn. The movements also seem to be centered around a circular formation. The onlooker laying down in the foreground seems to be accompanied by three other men who seem uninterested in the celebrations occurring behind them.

Evolution of Bhangra music.

This section aims to trace the recent history of Panjabi Sangeet within the last few decades and uncover the point at which it became known as Bhangra music. It will chart the pioneering artists, musical instruments and the evolution of Bhangra music. Spiritual links formed within the artists' musical practice will also be explored.

Music from Pre-partition 'Sanjha-Panjab'.

As a young Sikh growing up in the UK my knowledge of Bhangra and a shared heritage of Panjabi Pakistani singers was minimal. Many young Indian Panjabis are unaware of great Pakistani singers such as Inayat Ali Khan and Alam Lohar who sang classic Panjabi songs, such as 'Jugni', which was then later covered by Kuldeep Manak and then Malkit Singh and the great 'Challa' which was later replicated by Gurdas Mann in his own style.

Exploration of vinyl records within the dusty vaults of the avid collector, Ashok Bansal⁹¹, in the Panjab unearthed a treasure-trove of recordings, many of which have not been heard in recent times. The discovery of a rare recording made during Colonial India was a real jewel for my portfolio of work. The singer who created this record was 'Fazal Shah',⁹² recorded in 1935, many years before partition, making him one of the earliest recording artists of his time. As modern Punjabi audiences have not have heard his music before, nor know who he was, these earlier artists have not been credited for their pioneering contribution to Panjabi Sangeet. Those that know their Panjabi music can distinguish a clear lineage between the crackly old records and new contemporary recordings. Not much else is known about this artist, even what he may have looked like, as initially records only stated the name of the artist and the song title. It is evident that his lineage of singing style derives from *Kavishari* (minimum or no instruments), as vocals are the most prominent feature in his recordings. Bhangra dance cannot be done to this type of music as the enjoyment of *Kavishari* style singing is through listening, although this style of music has subsequently informed modern Panjabi Sangeet.

⁹¹ Ethnographic oral interview with Ashok Bansal at his residence in Patiala, India, (1/07/2010): Please refer to Appendix (1).

⁹² Please refer to VIRSA performance DVD – 15:08 mins: Appendix (3), or alternatively, VIRSA timeline to hear Fazal Shah '1935', Appendix (4).

In 1948 the female Panjabi singer, Surinder Kaur, (also referred to as the nightingale of the Panjab, see *fig.16* below) recorded songs for the film '*Shaheed*' (Martyr), which made her a household name through the power of Indian Cinema. Kaur recorded many duets with some of her contemporaries such as Assa Singh Mastana and Didar Sandhu as well as her sister Parkash Kaur. It is of interest that the supplication hymn '*Ardaas*' that is sung in all Gurudwaras around the world during the main service, is sung in the melody of Surinder Kaur's '*Kaala-Doria*' (Black hair braid).



Fig 16. Painting of Surinder Kaur.

Other prominent recording playback singers working in films such as '*Naya Dyr*' were the likes of Mohammed Rafi. From the small village of Kotla Sultan Singh near Amritsar, this playback singer created great enchantment when he sang Panjabi folk songs in such a strong and soulful voice. He went on later to become the biggest recording playback singer for Indian cinema therefore his Panjabi roots and contributions are often overshadowed by his other accomplishments throughout his illustrious career that spanned forty years. His music and vocal style has been an important factor in the development and the propagation of Panjabi Folk music throughout the Indian sub-continent. Shin from the Bhangra band DCS

is a prominent UK based singer, and acknowledges the influences of Rafi, through expression of a high regard for him when asked about major influences to his singing career.

In an interview Shin states:

Rafi Saab as he was known popularly throughout the Bollywood film industry is my idol, and he was no doubt the best male playback singer that there ever will be. He was the first voice I remember hearing as a very young kid singing those popular songs when I used to go to the cinemas in the early 60's. His is the voice that inspired me to sing then, and it inspires me even today. His is the voice I tried to emulate and I not only learned to sing but I also learned to speak Hindi and Punjabi in the process. His technique, versatility, strength and subtleness as a singer are attributes I still strive for today and if I can become half the singer he was, then I would count myself blessed. He is one of the immortals of Bollywood playback singing.⁹³



Fig 17. Photograph of 'Rafi Saab'.

⁹³ Ethnographic oral interview with Shin, 18/03/11. Please refer to Appendix (1).

The Godfather of Panjabi Sangeet

The 1960s saw the rise of Panjabi singers of whom Lal-Chand Yamla Jatt (see *fig. 18*) was one of the most popular. He brought the sound of the '*Ek tara*' (singled stringed instrument) and his enigmatic voice to the masses through his recordings. He is generally thought of as the '*Ustad*' (master) of modern Panjabi folk music and is usually credited for 'starting it all off,' as the works of Fazal Shah are not common knowledge to many. Other lesser-known contemporaries of Yamla Jatt were Chandi Ram Wallipuria, Mohd Siddique Rampuri, Harcharan Grewal, Daleep singh Deep, Nirmal Singh Nirmal, Ramesh Rangeela, and Bir Chand Gopi. Contrary to popular belief regarding there being an under representation of female singers in Panjabi folk music, in its heyday there were many female singers prevalent such as the aforementioned Surinder Kaur, Parkash Kaur, as well as Jagmohan Kaur, Seema, Rajinder Rajan, and Swarn Lata to name just a few. It is precisely because of the active presence of so many strong female artists on the scene that there were so many strong duets. Examples of these can be found on the timeline, artists such as Kartar Ramla and Narinder Biba who then went on to record two songs with Kuldeep Manak and Seema. Other successful recording 'couplings' were Mohd Saddique with Ranjit Kaur and Surinder Kaur singing alongside Asa Singh Mastana. A prominent dhol player emerged in the shape of Master Harbans Lal Ji who played alongside Jagmohan Kaur and K.Deep during later live performances; however, like most 'dholies' he did not gain the privilege of appearing on their recordings.



Fig 18.

Painting of Ustad

Lal-Chand Yamla Jatt

Playing his Tumbi.

The Indo-Pak War broke out in 1965. It is through these wars that much resentment between the two countries has built up. Many of the songs in the Panjab started focusing in on '*Desh-Bhagti*' (National pride) and the dialogue between the lover and her soul mate that has gone off to war and the yearning for the safe return of their lover. The duets also focused on relationships although dialogue was playfully ambiguous. Singers would employ the roles of family relationships '*Jijja-Sali*, *Deor-pabhi*, *Jett- parjai*, (sister and brother in-laws) to talk about attraction to the opposite sex. This is rarely found in modern day Panjabi folk song lyrics as the interactions amongst lovers are much more direct. Songs relating to bachelorhood that were also once prevalent in Panjabi folk music of this era are not to be found in modern Panjabi Sangeet.

Bhangra Recordings.

Early records did not make reference to the term Bhangra, as the music being created fell under the category of *Panjabi Sangeet*. These songs were made primarily for the listener and dancing was not an obvious consideration to motivate the music being made. The format being used to disseminate the music up to 1969 was the gramophone record or '*Pathar De Record*' (record made of stone) as it was referred to in the Panjab. On these records they did not have credits for the music director or producer, only the recording artist, and it would state clearly '*Panjabi Jatt Gana*', (Panjabi Jatt song), and not Bhangra. Original records were sold in brown sleeves and had no picture of the singer therefore it makes it difficult to be able to visualise what the artist looked like. Expression of spirituality for the Panjabi musician was once seen as one and the same; this is due to an interesting feature on the early gramophone records where there was usually only enough recording space for two songs, one on either side. It was therefore common for some artists to record a '*Dharmik geet*' (religious song) on one side and then a traditional '*Panjabi geet*' (folk song) on the other. Records changed format to 45rpm smaller records, and moved towards vinyl material. Long play (LP) records gave a way for artists to record more songs on their albums. Since these earliest recordings most major musical artists would pay homage to God through the singing and recording of '*Dharmik geet*',⁹⁴ as it was then and still is now a common avenue for singers to begin and refine their musical talents in the local

⁹⁴ One such example of an early recording of '*Dharmik Geet*' is Surinder Kaur's : Sant Sapahee (Album) Chum Chum Rak.

Gurudwaras, before embarking on their musical careers in the field of popular culture. Once established as a recording artist they will often show their gratitude for their success by dedicating an entire album to *Dharmik geet*,⁹⁵ recording songs based on Sikh history. Some artists held a strong status in both the religious and popular circles of music. One such example was Amar Singh Shonki who remained a traditional Sikh bard of the ‘*Dhadi jatha*’ order yet sang ‘*Lok Kathava*’ (*folk poetry*) as well as ‘*Dharmik*’ (Sikh devotional) songs. One of the more famous songs attributed to Shonki is ‘*Aaja Bhabi chootle*’ (Come and swing sister-in-law), which has been covered by the contemporary Panjabi folk singer Manmohan Waris.

In the 1970s Kuldeep Manak (see *fig.19*) pushed the format of ‘*Panjabi lokh Kissa*’ (Panjabi folklore) similar to the ‘*Dhadi*’s of the past. Instead of using the traditional instruments of *algoza* and *dhad* that were commonly associated with that style of singing, he used the ‘*tumbi*’,⁹⁶ a smaller version of the ‘*ek-tara*’, which became his signature instrument. With an unprecedented high voice he soon became one of the most influential Panjabi folk singers of our time. He built up his repertoire from his own songs and those written by the lyricist Dev Tarikyanwalla. The subject matter usually drew inspiration from the love tragedies of the Panjab, *Heer-Ranjha*, *Sassi-Punnu* and *Sonhi-Mahewal*. His LP *Tere Tilon Ton* brought Kuldeep Manak much fame. As media such as radio, television and music became more prevalent and affordable to the common man, this paved the way to the birth of Panjabi ‘folk’ stars of which Kuldeep Manak has become the all-time greatest. Speaking about the link between the art form of Panjabi Sangeet and spirituality Kuldeep Manak affirms:

Inspiration comes from Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Bhai Mardana. If you don’t know Guru Nanak you don’t know anything. The music tradition started from him and is a gift from God. It runs through your blood.⁹⁷

This statement is of no surprise when one understands Manak’s *mirrasi* heritage, which traces its musical heritage to Bhai Mardana.

⁹⁵ Pioneering artists and contemporary Panjabi singer alike have recorded ‘Dharmik albums’ examples such as Lal Chand Yamla Jatt’s: Satguru Nanak Teri Leela Neyari, Amar Singh Chamkila’s: Baba Tera Nanakana and Jazzy B’s: Sikhi Khandiyon Tikhi

⁹⁶ The Tumbi (Punjabi ਤੁੰਬੀ tūmbī) is a traditional North Indian instrument from the Punjab region. The high pitched, single string plucking instrument is associated with folk music of Punjab and presently very popular in Western Bhangra music. <Google web definition.>

⁹⁷ Ethnographic oral interview with Kuldeep Manak, 11/08/10. Please refer to Appendix (1).

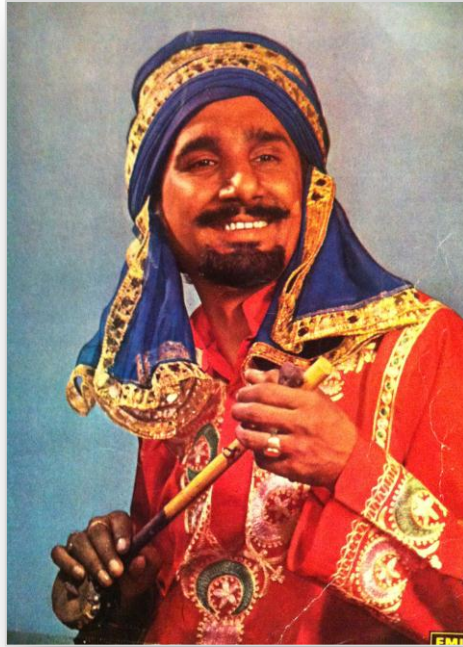


Fig 19. Photo of Kuldeep Manak

From his self-titled record: 1980.

Sufism Reprise

Gurdas Mann who rose to fame during his live performances, in the 1980s, recalls in a television interview with channel PTC⁹⁸ that a boy who was travelling with Hakam Sufi Ji came to his house in Patiala looking for instruments such as the ever-popular tumbi. He noticed a Dafli hanging up in the shop. Mann adds:

As soon as I picked it up I automatically started playing it as I was used to playing beats on a flat surface like a table from my college days. When I heard the sound it enveloped me and I became one with it. He asked the price and the shop keeper told me it was twenty-five rupees. I bought it home and straightaway started singing songs with it.

The year was now 1981 and bringing his new sound and style that was heavily influenced from the '*Suffiyana Qallam*' Gurdass Mann released his LP record with five songs *Dil Da Mamla*, *inj ni karinde*, *Ki banu Duniya da*, *Mamla Gadbad Hai*, *Tutt Gayi Tarhak Karke*. Each one an instant hit, his popularity was so powerful he was able to create a full-length feature film of the same name in 1984 based on the stage play he had written

⁹⁸ Television interview with channel PTC <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOfsMwOBKws&feature=related>>

Clear links can be made with songs that originated in ‘Sanjha-Panjab’ (shared Panjab). Influences can move freely between man-made borders of Pakistan and India between artists on both sides of the border. Panjabi singers are likely to re-envision songs in their own style trying to keep the essence of the original. An extremely popular song is *Challa*, a song popularised by Gurdass Mann in the film ‘*Long da Lishkara*’. Before him Jasdev Yamla had sung this song in an earlier film, ‘*Putt Jattan de*’; and before him Jagmohan Kaur sang it also. The original recording artist for this song is Inayat Ali Khan, a prominent singer of pre-partitioned Panjab. Charting this one song highlights the nature of Panjabi music as it crosses borders, genres and generations, as *Challa* is still re-envisioned time and time again in modern Bhangra music.

Turbulent Times in Panjab

The singer Dhunni Ram used to write songs for other leading artists during the eighties. He began singing himself and on one particular occasion he had a program in Chandigarh near Burail jail. He was listed as Dhunni Ram along with some other artists, Sanmukh Singh Azaad presented him to the audience as Amar Singh ‘Chamkila’ (one that shines/shimmers) and so a new star was born. In his short life Chamkila changed Panjabi folk music forever. He started off his career singing duets with Surinder Sonia such as ‘*Takue Te Takua Kharke*’, then along with Miss Usha before taking the world of Panjabi Sangeet by storm with his collaborations with female singer Amarjot (see *fig.20*). Taking any of his LP’s and analysing his lyrics it is evident that he had exceptional poetic density. He spoke to the common man about the hardships of life, God, strife with family and friendships, his love of alcohol and most controversially of all the desire for woman though extra marital relationships. His language was aimed directly at the life of the villagers, aiming his music at the grass roots of the community, as he did not sing about big cars or fancy clothes but everyday objects like the humble bicycle.

Panjabi Sangeet saw a new heyday and through the advancement of modern technologies like the audiocassette and VHS video, music became much more accessible to the common man through ‘reel-to reel’ recordings which made the dissemination of music easy and instant. Artists like Chamkila witnessed unprecedented popularity amongst the Punjabi community as his music spread like a wildfire through these new mediums. The people of

Panjab loved him as he kept things ‘real and raw’. He achieved this by keeping complete artistic control over his work and output.



*Fig 20. Photo of singers
Amar Singh Chamkila
and Amarjot.*

Chamkila was gunned down as he arrived at one of his performances. The true motives of the gunmen are not known but speculation points towards jealousy of a mentor as a disciple became even more popular than him. Others believe he was shot by Sikh militants who were offended by his derogatory lyrics and that he was leading the youth astray. One of the legacies Chamkila leaves behind in popular Panjabi folk music is the inherent preoccupation of the grittier elements of the modern world where alcohol and womanising are celebrated much more than Panjabi tradition.

Many orthodox Sikhs still complain bitterly about contemporary Bhangra music being derogatory and damaging to the people of Panjab. An extremely important fact for anyone wanting to understand any negativity aimed towards the art form of Bhangra is that much of today's Bhangra lyrics are heavily dominated with the promotion of excessive drinking that has ironically become part of the Panjabi's secular identity. The lyrics of most artists reflect what is happening within society at that point, as it caters for a need. It was in the 1980s and still the case now that Panjab has been flooded with '*Theka*' (alcohol shops) and the Government has issued liquor licences without any stringent control. Research shows

that up to '73.5% of Punjab's youth is addicted to drugs. A multimillion drug nexus operating under the noses of the Border Security Force, The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, The Narcotics Control Bureau and the Intelligence Bureau, leaving them as mere bystanders to Punjab's erosion. The yearly consumption of alcohol in Punjab is touching 29 Crore (290,000,000) bottles making it one of the highest per capita consumers of alcohol in the world!'⁹⁹ (www.documentarywire.com 20/02/11). So Bhangra is blamed for the youth being misled but in fact it could be that Bhangra is simply reflecting the life they lead. There is a strong argument that musicians and recording artists have a moral duty to address this situation and to be more sensitive about propagating the right message to the youth of Panjab.

The 1980s were a turbulent time in the Punjab as there were mass anti-Sikh movements in India which culminated in the attack on the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, the Harimandir Sahib in June 1984.¹⁰⁰ The desecration that ensued saw the sacred temporal throne of the Sikhs, the *Akal Takht*, reduced to rubble by tanks from the Indian Army. Estimates for the loss of life that incurred within the complex reached 2,000; innocent pilgrims shot dead by forces of the Indian Army, on orders given by the Indian Government. In a revenge attack, the Prime-minister, Indira Ghandi, who had given these orders was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, which in turn led to thousands more Sikhs being massacred across the region of Panjab and the Delhi riots in the same year. It was this dark chapter in Panjab's recent history that pushed any form of happiness such as Bhangra into the shadows and so became ever more separated from the Sikh *Panth* (Sikh nation). During the 1984 riots many artists added fuel to the fire of community resentment and hatred towards the Indian government; they felt that Sikhs within the Panjab had been systematically discriminated against by the Hindu majority. Some artists tried to douse the fire of hatred through music such as Mohammed Siddique, Aman and Jagmohan Kaur; '*Lagai Nazar Panjab nu: is ki nazar ataro, lek ke mircha is te sir to varo*'. (The evil eye has cast its gaze on our Panjab, take a chilli and take it over her forehead to remove the curse.)

⁹⁹ A short documentary uncovers Panjab's obsession with the consumption of alcohol: <<http://www.documentarywire.com/glut-the-untold-story-of-punjab>>

¹⁰⁰ In early June 1984 the Indian Army invaded one of the most historic of all Sikh Gurdwaras, the Darbar Sahib complex at Amritsar Punjab to flush out Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale a Sikh leader and his followers who had made the Gurdwara complex their refuge. The ensuing destruction and loss of life marked one of the darkest chapters of the later 20th century for Sikhs. <<http://www.sikhmuseum.com/bluestar/>>

Babbu Singh Mann recorded a song in London written in the form of a letter being sent to a friend in the Panjab, in it he asks why you haven't sent me a letter for such a long time. His friend from India replies;

Door Vasende yaar asi tenu khat ke likhiye? Ithey kuj ni liken hare oh tenu khat ki likiye? Pechle hafte eke me dassa ki anhoiee hoee, yaar tere mehboob de ghar da ji nehe bacha koi. Kal antam ardaas unna de ho jaana hoi, kehl smapat sara, oh tenhu ke likha. (Friend from afar what letter should I write? There is nothing left to write about here, what can I tell you about what happened here last week. Dear friend no one survived in your beloved's house, yesterday their last rites were read, dear brother what can I write?)¹⁰¹

The eminent singer Gurdas Mann recalls in an emotional interview¹⁰² how the beauty of Panjab has been ravaged through time as its borders once reached Afghanistan. When news reached him of the attack of the Harimandir Sahib in 1984 he was in Canada, and about to perform at a large concert arena, as his manager insisted that the show must go head. Standing in front of thousands of Panjabis awaiting a performance he recalled that his Grandmother had once explained to him that when there was a death in the neighbourhood then it was only right to not put the Radio on as a mark of respect. With hands folded he asks the audience; 'How can I perform when there has been a death within our own house?' He was applauded for his sincerity and audiences left without any resentment.

The Development of Panjabi Folk Music in its Diaspora.

There has been a degree of study of Panjabi folk music carried out by myself here in the UK. Two key artists were interviewed; both were instrumental in the development of Panjabi Sangeet here in the UK, but more importantly their music reinvigorated the native industry in the Panjab. These interviews prompted a need to isolate the key features that pointed towards the word "Bhangra" becoming heavily affiliated with the music being produced. One of the earliest and most successful pioneering artists in the UK is the award winning A.S.Kang.

¹⁰¹ Translations throughout have been my own words, other than those of historical Sikh texts.

¹⁰² The full interview can be seen through YouTube video: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VG9AS0EHG6E>>

In an interview at his residence Kang recalls:

On the auspicious occasion of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's 500th anniversary of his birth (1969) and I remember seeing a Giaani Singh Surjit, from Gravesend. When I heard him sing it awoke a special part inside of me and made me feel that I too should begin to sing. I began writing and performing songs. I went to the HMV studios in Delhi, India to record 'Gidhiyan Di Rani' as there were not many professional Panjabi recording musicians here in the UK. At the time there was a trend for singers in the Panjab to sing duets, the solo musicians such as Kuldeep Manak were huge at that time; he sang using the style of 'Kalyia'. I wanted create to something new.¹⁰³

When '*Gidhiyan Di Rani*' (Queen of the Giddha) was released in 1978 it showcased a fresh traditional soundtrack with an array of Panjabi musical instruments that were beautifully arranged, although the dhol was still omitted. During live performances and weddings Panjabis would want to dance and express merriment; therefore percussionists would stick '*thilyia*' slithers of bamboo sticks to play on the '*dholki*' so that it would emulate the sound of a dhol drum, but without any of its overpowering sound. The album was so successful Kang became the first UK based singer to break back into the Indian market.

The Birth of British Bhangra Music

The reality of pinpointing an exact moment in history as the definitive 'birth' of Bhangra music could be deemed absurd, but we can make the argument that there are key signifiers to establish a conscious shift in the art of Bhangra. We establish that although the primary instrument of Bhangra, the dhol, had been present in Panjabi songs from the Indian Cinema for decades, it is of interest and importance that the dhol was rarely found in early recordings of *Panjabi Sangeet*. The first of two defining moments in the history of *Panjabi Sangeet* evolving into 'Bhangra' music occurred in the Panjab within Panjabi cinema with the release of the 1981 film, *Put Jattan De* (sons of the Jatt), sung by Surinder Shinda. It showcases the atmosphere of the 'Roshni Mela' a three-day annual festival in *Jagaraon*-Panjab. Dancing horses, camel races, farmers, water canals, lush fields and Bhangra dancers are used to set the scene for this song. Bhangra scenes from '*sanjha*' Panjab are certainly not seen with such vigour anymore; the artistic directors of the film made key references back to a rural way of life.

¹⁰³ Ethnographic oral interview, (10/09/2010): Please refer to Appendix (1).

The song's main lyrics hark back to this rustic lifestyle, starting with the statement; '*Putt Jattan de balounde bakre!*' (The sons of Jatts call forth the goats!). Other more serious aspects of the song's lyrics reflect the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters Shaheed Udham and Bhagat Singh, and during this section the tempo of the song is slowed down. This part of the song is a key point in my performance presentation¹⁰⁴ as it brings together the spiritual and the secular expressions of thought found in Panjabi folk music. This song has achieved a high status within Panjabi music and become an archetype to the extent that it is now seen as Bhangra music's unofficial anthem.¹⁰⁵ However, it lacks the musical drive of being a track to perform Bhangra-dance to, as the dhol only makes a fleeting appearance within the heavy 'filmy' musical overtones in the structure of the song. It set the foundations for other artists within the genre to emulate and celebrate the changing sound of Panjabi Sangeet.

The sound of Panjabi films in the 1980s provided interconnections for Panjabi singers, musicians, lyricists and film directors to push the artistic boundaries of exhibiting *Panjabiyat* (the Panjabi identity). The 1984 Panjabi film '*Yaari Jaat Da*' employed a rendition of the song, '*Gur Naal Ishq mitha*' sung by Vinod Sehgal and Savita Sathi. The arrangement of the song consisted of male vocal singing and female '*boliyan*' couplets. As I referred to in the introduction, one of the most marked events in the history of Bhangra in Britain occurred in 1986 when the singer-songwriter, Malkit Singh, took this song and reinvented it into what could be regarded as the first 'Bhangra' song of the art form in the Panjabi diaspora:

I wanted to take the music back to its roots. In the song '*Boliyan*' (more affectionately known as *Gur Naal Ishq mitha*) the main instruments you hear is the Dhol with a harmonium accompaniment. I wanted to make a traditional Bhangra dance track. Most songs followed existing convention of being three to four minutes in length. I wanted to create a track where if the groove got you dancing you didn't feel like stopping, therefore the song is nearly twelve minutes long. I also tried to use the word 'Bhangra' in my songs also. Songs like '*Vekhe ke club wich beti kurri kalli menu Bhangra paun nu Ji karda*', (seeing the girl in the club made me want to dance Bhangra), and then again with my other super-hit song, '*Dholiya Dhol utte dagga laye oye' hath kan uthe rak boli tu payio' pavan Bhangra, kushi de vich gaunda, Panjab mera rehe vasda*'. (Keep blasting that dhol drum, and

¹⁰⁴ Please refer to VIRSA performance DVD, 23:15mins, Appendix (3).

¹⁰⁵ The impact of this song is marked by the fact that over the last couple of decades this song has been played by most Panjabi dj's, including myself, at wedding/pre-wedding celebrations towards the end of the evening as a climax. *Putt Jattan De* is a song that celebrates Panjabi pride making it a firm favorite amongst the masses.

keep singing those rhymes, I am going to keep dancing to the Bhangra and sing with happiness, may my Panjab live forever).¹⁰⁶

The song title itself refers to '*Boliyan*' that is the main vocal expression of singing rhyming couplets whilst Bhangra dance is being performed. There is a raw edginess that is accomplished by the fact that Malkit has 'stripped-down' the track to its bare elements of the dhol, a harmonium and uplifting handclaps; this makes the sound intimate and reminiscent of Panjabi nuances. He takes the role of both the male and female decisively, singing '*boliyan*' lyrics to create a new foundation, drawing upon inspiration from a vast pool of historical folk stanzas that would normally be reserved for the womenfolk of Panjab. Harking back towards the homeland was relevant as the majority of Bhangra music being produced in the UK during the 'electric-eighties' was heavily influenced by Western technologies such as synthesisers, music machines and excessive use of samples in striving to sound more British. The song has a very traditional Panjabi structure; an ode is first offered to the Lovers of Panjab and their sacrifice to love, before moving into *boliyan* that beckon a response from the audience in their participation of 'Oh-Hoh!' a term that conveys and creates meaning through antiphony, through its call and response between artist and audience. This song has had a huge impact on the dance floors of the UK and equally has inspired modern artists such as Bally Sagoo to remix it for audiences of a new generation. Its recent reincarnation came in the form of a rap version by the artist Bohemia in 2009.

Moving against the trend of the 'glitzy' pop culture that was emerging, Malkit defied convention by wearing full traditional Bhangra outfits during wedding and stage performances making him the first Bhangra artist to do so in the UK, when most other singers were wearing three-piece suits or shiny sequined shirts. (see *fig.21*) He adds to this affirmation of his identity through the use of his given spiritual name 'Singh', given to all Sikhs by command of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. It was a common feature that other artists would so readily use their 'caste/clan' surname or their first name alone: 'On my first album I even had my village name of '*Husainpurri*' on there but then I thought that that would be what I would become known as so I took it off and stuck to Malkit Singh.' This is important as it signifies his strong link with his culture and faith:

¹⁰⁶ Ethnographic oral interview, (11/07/2010): Please refer to Appendix (1).

It makes me proud when I was awarded my MBE from the Queen and when I remember that it was announced that I was being awarded it 'for service of Panjabi music' when I heard the work Panjabi being said in Buckingham Palace my eyes welled up.¹⁰⁷

Singh's identity includes his religious views and speaking of Bhangra's spiritual nature, he states that:

You can learn instruments of many varieties but the gift of being able to sing is a God given gift. When using your vocals you have to remember God and therefore it becomes a 'Bhagatti', even during my performance I remember God so that he may give me the strength to give my best. Even on the way home Waheguru's thoughts are in my head as the sound still reverberates in my ears and mind, remembering to thank him and that I remember that I will be doing this once again the day after and so on. In the past dancing was used as a form of worship.¹⁰⁸

His music reflects rich academic thought and the distinct Panjabi identity also known as '*Panjabiyat*', through his deep understanding of Panjabi culture and Folklore.



Fig. 21. Photo of the Malkit Singh during a live performance.

¹⁰⁷ Ethnographic oral interview, (11/07/2010): Please refer to Appendix (1).

¹⁰⁸ Ethnographic oral interview, (11/07/2010): Please refer to Appendix (1).

Summary

This section provides us with a chronological snapshot of the pioneering artists that have made Bhangra music possible; it is through their artistic vision that the music of Panjab has been propagated on a worldwide stage. It has been a privileged task to build an interactive timeline along with this research that highlights the work of these artists. I had some degree of expectation that I would be able to trace the musicians that I was already aware of, although the remarkable discovery of a Panjabi folk singer that dated as far back as 1935 exceeded my expectations. Even though I have not explored Bhangra's development in the last two decades I have built this information into the interactive online timeline. It can be noted that a clear lineage can be traced from these early recordings of Fazal Shah to those of Kuldeep Manak in the nineteen seventies, to contemporary Bhangra music being produced from artists such as Jazzy B and more recently from the work of singer JK.

It is with great optimism that Panjabi music has sustained its momentum both in the UK and in the Panjab. Even throughout the turmoil of 1984 recording musicians gave voice to the people through artistic expression, rising once again from the ashes of burning Panjab. For this research the exploration of music within Panjabi cinema has been narrow as much can be discovered from its exploration; the intention was to highlight links with the Panjabi film industry and the UK Bhangra industry through the work of Malkit Singh and in particular his revolutionary song, '*Gur Naal Ishq mitha*'.

Conclusion - Bhangra in Renaissance

In the final analysis one of the three most critical aspects of my research was to find a clearer definition of the word Bhangra. This clarification has been explored through different perceptions of it, its etymology and its use. Before embarking on this research I had never analysed what Bhangra actually meant, whether it was a form of music or a dance. I had always seen them as one and the same. I had grown up with the opinion that the word was linked to the consummation of 'Bhang'. This belief is no longer the case as the research shows there is a much stronger argument for the word being associated to the Sanskrit description of 'Broken' or to 'Break'. One thing is clear; that its definition is no longer purely about dance, and through the integration of the word into Panjabi Sangeet over the last few decades, it now refers to both the music and dance of the Panjab. Therefore, for the Panjabis in the West, there is a legitimate intention to describe their musical heritage with the label of Bhangra.

In the spiritual links that have made an impact on the sound of the Panjab we have seen that as well as religious movements such as *Sufism* and the *Bhakti Kaal*, the Sikh Gurus contributed greatly to the musicology of the land in the form of 'Gurmat Sangeet'. They employed popular folk songs as well classical *raags* to narrate the expression of the Divine. They created synthesis through music and musical instruments which were used primarily to disseminate the message of God. This includes the playing on the *rebab* by Bhai Mardana during Guru Nanak's time; the *siranda* and *israj* during the period of Guru Arjan Dev, the *dhad-sarangi* for *Vaar* singing during the period of sixth Guru, and the *tanpura* during Guru Gobind Singh Ji's time. These instruments and rhythms found their way naturally back into secular Panjabi folk music. We see that the expression of music is held in the highest regard, most notably the expression given to the name of God by Guru Nanak: 'WAHE-GURU' 'WAH' which is usually translated as 'Wow' or 'wondrous'. In its truer context the term is still used to express gratification after listening to a sublime piece of music or poetry.

Although throughout Sikh history there has not been a marked period of time where the Arts could be fully realised, persecution by the ruling Empires has had an adverse effect on the shape of Panjabi music. It is notable that the most dramatic changes were provoked by the colonisation by the British Empire and their obsession with reinforcing the caste system

in order to control the masses. The passing of the *Gurudwara Sikh Act*, where the Sikh identity was being formalised, pushed the Muslim *rababi* musicians away from the Gurudwaras. Improvisation was seen as a challenge to orthodoxy. The banning of improvisation by the religious hierarchy was deeply symbolic and illustrated the enforced divisions created.

All three phenomena, the British colonisation, the *Gurudwara Act* and partition were to clearly label and differentiate Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs so that they could be categorised and then split into their individual groups. During partition no 'promised land' was given to the Sikhs who remained in India. Since then the Indian government has been the subjugators of its own people, and as discussed earlier this climaxed in the 1984 massacre at the Harimandir Sahib.

My own perception of Bhangra has been altered by research into different genres and ideologies. The ethnographic oral interviews have given great insight and awareness of the artists and their knowledge and experiences in the world of Bhangra. The findings indicate key elements that have been explored within contemporary Bhangra dance; we can see that there once was a marked difference between the male form of the dance and the female form which is no longer the case as the art form of Bhangra is now enjoyed by both men and women. Within Bhangra's foundational elements we can trace influences from Sikh, Muslim and Hindu traditions. These in turn have influenced the different spiritual and secular themes found within Bhangra, and at times they have occasionally merged. This shared heritage between faiths is the reflection of pre-partitioned Punjab and this appreciation can be found amongst those that create, perform, listen to and dance to Bhangra. My Grandfather, the late Phuman Singh Sahota, gave a great example of the synthesis found within Panjabi Sangeet and Bhangra, as he would often recite spiritual '*Dhadi*' music at the Gurudwara, preceding a wedding perhaps, and then later on during the celebrations he would sing songs from Panjabi folklore.

Talking to community elders, enthusiasts, musicians and Bhangra artists I have come to the conclusion to credit Malkit Singh as the one artist, of many, that made a concerted difference in the development of the history of Bhangra. He is the one that had a clear vision of what Bhangra music should sound like and made rigorous efforts to make sure he captured its authenticity.

The Bhangra Renaissance can be seen in the popularity of the Bhangra dance more so than the music, as the music bands left behind the Bhangra dancers when they first started out in the UK and it was these performers that kept that rich cultural tradition with all its values alive through their performances. They are the ones who are now helping bring that positive energy back in to mainstream Bhangra. Although Bhangra dance teams are very much the driving force of the Renaissance, young British Bhangra musicians such as Tigerstyle, and Gypsy Aujla and Foji are striving to enhance this revitalization through positivity and informed connections of Bhangra's history. In the Panjab, artists like Sartinder Sartaj are still using influences from Sufism of the past to inform his poetry and music to further enhance and celebrate Panjabi Sangeet to a worldwide audience. Theoretical and research based studies have been, and are still being, carried out by academics across the globe, from Harry Mann in Canada, to Rajinder Dudrah in the UK, to Anjali Gera Roy in India and Tomohiro Kurita in Japan. Bhangra has become a worldwide phenomenon due to globalisation, and remains for the most part in the custodial hands of the Panjabi Sikhs, due to their liberal open-minded approach to music and dance, and their energy and determination to celebrate life.

As a contemporary artist, I started this process by touching the ground to remember to pay respect to Mother Earth and evoke my spiritual ancestry that comes from the land of the five rivers; and now after this two year research process I have come to the realisation that the true essence of Bhangra is to be found within the dhol beat. It is through this sound that the movements of Bhangra are created. It is only when this instrument filters into the recorded sound of contemporary Panjabi Sangeet that the musical tradition adopts the name and slowly becomes known as 'Bhangra' music. The dhol has always had historical links with the spiritual and the art of war, from its earliest use within wrestling arenas and then in *Shaster Viddiyha*. The duality of the instrument is inherent in Panjabi culture. The dhol is the place where these things come together; the martial, the spiritual, the traditional, the driving ecstasy of the dance, the dhol is the place where the influence of different religious traditions come together, such as Sufism Hinduism and Sikhi. The driving beat has given birth to modern Bhangra music where performance and symbolism meet in a secular/spiritual explosion.

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Appendix 1

Sample of Ethnographic Oral Interviews
that took place in either English or Panjabi.

Appendix 2

Sample of Online Questionnaire responses taken from
'Question-Pro' Internet Survey Concluded on 09/16/2010.

Appendix 3

VIRSA – Performance DVD

(All timings within the Thesis are set to the University Recording)

VIRSA – Performance DVD

(Personal recording of a higher quality than that of the University recording
due to low light levels during the performance)

VIRSA – Performance Photo CD

(Photographs taken before and throughout the performance
captures the finer detail of the peice)

Appendix 4

VIRSA – Hardcopy of interactive timeline.

Full resource of 150 entries with videos and further info can be assessed at:

<http://www.dipity.com/Hardeep/Bhangra/> or alterniatvly by signing in at www.dipity.com

Username – hardeep

Password hardeep1

Appendix 5

Further information on

The Great Lovers of the Panjab.

1. Heer Ranjha is the most famous true love story of Indian & Pakistani history. Similar to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, it tells a story of two Muslim lovers: Heer Saleti & Dido Ranjah; whose families were in conflict with one another and became separated for many years. Heer is known to have been an extremely beautiful woman with a wealthy father named Chuchak. Ranjha was the youngest of four brothers, all of whom were married except him. In his late teens he set off to find work in a distant village where he met Chuchak who offered him a job taking care of his cattle. Having met Ranjha, Heer became mesmerized by the way he played the flute in the field with the cows every day, and eventually she fell in love with him. For his part, Ranjha fell in love with Heer at first sight. They would meet each other secretly for many years until they were caught by her parents who found out who Dido Ranjah really was. Her parents were very angry because of the feud between their families. Heer was married against her will to another man, while Ranjha was left broken hearted; and left to walk the quiet villages on his own until he eventually met Gorak, a Yogi (devoted believer in God). Having entered Gorak's tilla (shrine), Dido Ranjah could only think of his departed lover. Being emotionally scarred, he voluntarily became a Yogi. Reciting the name of the lord on his travels around the Punjab, he found the village of Kher where he was reunited with his devoted lover, Heer. They both escaped and came back to Heer's home Village, where her parents finally agreed to their marriage and to end the conflict between the two families. The marriage preparations went well; but on the wedding day, Heer's vengeful uncle, Kedoh (who had a limp from having been beaten by Ranjha's brothers many years earlier), poisoned her so the wedding wouldn't take place. Having heard this news, Dido Ranjah rushed to aid Heer but was too late... and she died in his arms. Dido Ranjah's heart was broken, and he also died, holding his beloved Heer to his chest.

<<http://www.bonzasheila.com/stories/heerranjha.html>>

2. Sohni was the daughter of a potter named Tula, who lived in Punjab near the banks of the Chenab River. As soon as the Surahis (water pitchers) and mugs came off the wheels, she would draw floral designs on them and transform them into masterpieces of art. Izzat Baig, the rich trader from Balakh Bukhara, came to Hindustan on business but when he saw the beautiful Sohni he was completely enchanted. Instead of keeping mohars (gold coins) in his pockets, he roamed around with his pockets full of love. Just to get a glimpse of Sohni he would end up buying the water pitchers and mugs every day. Sohni lost her heart to Izzat Baig. Instead of making floral designs on earthenware she started building castles of love in her dreams. Izzat Baig sent off his companions to Balakh Bukhara. He took the job of a servant in the house of Tula, the potter. He would even take their buffaloes for grazing. Soon he was known as Mahiwal (potter). When the people started spreading rumors about the love of Sohni and Mahiwal, without her consent her parents arranged her marriage with another potter. Suddenly, one day his barat (marriage party) arrived at the threshold of her house. Sohni was helpless and in a poignant state. Her parents bundled her off in the doli (palanquin), but they could not pack off her love in any doli. Izzat Baig renounced the world and started living like a fakir (hermit) in a small hut across the river. The earth of Sohni's land was like a dargah (shrine) for him. He had forgotten his own land, his own people and his world. Taking refuge in the darkness of the night when the world was fast asleep Sohni would come by the riverside and Izzat Baig would swim across the river to meet her. He would regularly roast a fish and bring it for her. It is said that once due to high tide he could not catch a fish, so he cut a piece of his thigh and roasted it. Seeing the bandage on his thigh, Sohni opened it, saw the wound and cried. From the next day Sohni started swimming across the river with the help of an earthen pitcher as Izzat Baig was so badly wounded, he could not swim across the river. Soon spread the rumours of their romantic rendezvous. One-day Sohni's sister-in-law followed her and saw the hiding place where Sohni used to keep her earthen pitcher among the bushes. The next day her sister-in-law removed the hard baked pitcher and replaced it with an unbaked one. At night when Sohni tried to cross the river with the help of the pitcher, it dissolved in the water and Sohni was drowned. From the other side of the river Mahiwal saw Sohni drowning and jumped into the river. This was Sohni's courage, which every woman of Punjab has recognized, applauded in songs:

“Sohni was drowned, but her soul still swims in water...”
<<http://www.sadapunjab.com/punjabi/sohni-mahiwaal.html>>

3. Mirza was the son of a KharraJat of Danabad, a town on the banks of the river Ravi. He was sent to live with his aunt (Mother's Sister) to do his schooling. Mirza did not do well in school, his mind never being on studies. His teacher threatened to send him back home. On seeing this, Mirza's cousin Sahiba started helping him with studies. They started spending a lot of time together, and gradually fell in love. Mirza grew up to be a strong, muscular, handsome youth, while Sahiba blossomed into one of the greatest beauties of the community. Then Binjal, Mirza's father came to take him away and have him trained as a warrior. After Mirza left, Sahiba's father pledged her hand in marriage to a powerful Chandher family. Mirza and Sahiba both tried to convince her father to rethink his decision, but he was adamant. His word once given could not be taken back. Even after this Mirza told Sahiba not to worry. He promised to help her run away with him. A night before Sahiba's wedding, Mirza came to her house and they ran away. The next morning, Sahiba's brothers and the would-be groom chased after the runaway couple. They caught up with them and Mirza came under heavy attack. After fighting bravely he was killed. Seeing him die, Sahiba plunged a dagger into her chest and died on her lover's body.
<http://www.beatofindia.com/forms/mirza_sahiba.htm>

4. Sassi was the daughter of the King of Bhambour in Sindh, Pakistan. Upon Sassi's birth, astrologers predicted that she was a curse for the royal family's prestige. The King ordered that the child be put in a wooden box and thrown in the River Indus. A washer man of the Bhambour village found the wooden box and the child in the box. The washer man believed the child was a blessing from God and took her home. As he had no child of his own, he decided to adopt her. Sassi and Punnu meet When Sassi became a young girl, she was as beautiful as the fairies of heaven. Stories of her beauty reached Punnu and he became desperate to meet Sassi. The handsome young Prince of Makran therefore travelled to Bhambour. He sent his clothes to Sassi's father (a washerman) so that he could catch a glimpse of Sassi. When he visited the washer man's house, they fell in love at first sight. Sassi's father was dispirited, hoping that Sassi would marry a washer man and no one else. Sassi's father asked Punnu to prove that he was worthy of Sassi by passing the test as a

washer man. Punnun agreed to prove his love. While washing, he tore all the clothes as, being a prince, he had never washed any clothes; he thus failed the agreement. But before he returned those clothes, he hid gold coins in the pockets of all the clothes, hoping this would keep the villagers quiet. The trick worked, and Sassi's father agreed to the marriage. Punnun's father and brothers were against his marriage to Sassi (Punnun being a prince and she being a washer man's daughter), and so, for their father's sake, Punnun's brothers travelled to Bhambhor. First they threatened Punnun but when he didn't relent, they tried more devious methods. Punnun was surprised to see his brothers supporting his marriage and on the first night, they pretended to enjoy and participate in the marriage celebrations and forced Punnun to drink different types of wines. When he was intoxicated they carried him on a camel's back and returned to their hometown of Kicham.

The next morning, when Sassi realized that she was cheated, she became mad with the grief of separation from her lover and ran barefoot towards the town of Kech Makran. To reach it, she had to cross miles of desert. Alone, she continued her journey until her feet were blistered and her lips were parched from crying "Punnun, Punnun!". The journey was full of dangerous hazards, which lead to her demise. Punnun's name was on Sassi's lips throughout the journey. She was thirsty, there she saw a shepherd coming out of a hut. He gave her some water to drink. Seeing her incredible beauty, dirty lustful thoughts came into his mind, and he tried to force himself on Sassi. Sassi ran away and prayed to God to hide her and when God listened to her prayers, land shook and split and Sassi found herself buried in the valley of mountains. When Punnun woke he was himself in Makran he could not stop himself from running back to Bhambhor. On the way he called out "Sassi, Sassi!" to which the shepherd replied. The shepherd told Punnun the whole story. Then Punnun also lamented the same prayer, the land shook and split again and he was also buried in the same mountain valley as Sassi. The legendary grave still exists in this valley. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai sings this historic tale in his Sufi poetry as an example of eternal love and union with Divine. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sassui_Punnhun.>



Heer-Ranjha



Sassi-Punnun



Mirza-Sahiba



Soni-Mahewal