

# Indian Folk Music

Music has always been an important aspect in the lives of Indian people. India's rich cultural diversity has greatly contributed to various forms of folk music. Almost every region in India has its own folk music, which reflects the way of life. From the peppy bhangra of Punjab to Garba of Gujarat to Bhavageete of Karnataka, the tradition of folk music in India is indeed great. Folk music is closely associated with farming and other such professions and evolved to alleviate the hardship and break the monotony of the routine life. Even though folk music lost its popularity with the advent of contemporary music like pop and rap, but no traditional festival or celebration is complete without folk music.

## History

Earliest records of Indian folk music are found in the Vedic literature, which dates back to 1500 BC. Some scholars and experts even suggest that the Indian folk music could be as old as the country itself. For instance, Pandavani, a folk music popular in most parts of Central India, is believed to be as old as the Hindu epic Mahabharata. This incredible claim is backed by the fact that the subject matter of Pandavani deals with the heroics of Bhima, a prominent character from Mahabharata. Since Pandavani's subject matter has remained the same over centuries, this age-old folk music could be as old as the Mahabharata itself! Later on, folk songs were extensively used for recreational purposes and to celebrate special events including weddings, birth of a child, festivals, etc. Folk songs were also used to pass on prominent information from one generation to another. This suggests that these songs could've played a major role before the arrival of paper in India. Since people did not have a solid material to preserve ancient information, passing down important information in the form of songs became utmost important. Hence folk songs were revered by aboriginal people as it not only provided entertainment, but also imparted critical information that could be used in one's day-to-day life.

## Diversification of Indian Folk Music

Like many other aspects of India, folk music too is diverse because of the cultural diversity. While the reason behind its origin and the method of usage remains more or less the same throughout India, the style in which it is sung and the way in which it is perceived differs depending upon the culture of different Indian states. Many of these folk songs were composed by great poets and writers belonging to different parts of the country. For instance, the Rabindra Sangeet or Tagore songs of Bengal are a collection of songs that were originally written by eminent poet Rabindranath Tagore. Folk songs also played a crucial role in socio-religious reforms in many parts of South India. Religious leaders like Adi Shankaracharya

used many such songs to spread his message throughout the country. Similarly, folk songs sung by other religious leaders gave identity to the villages they originally came from and gradually, these songs were cherished and celebrated by the people of their respective areas as their own. Also, many folk songs are associated with a dance form, which is usually performed while singing these songs. Today, almost every Indian state/region has a folk song of its own and some of them are associated with a dance form as well. Mentioned below are folk music of various Indian states.

### **Bihugeet**

This folk music is performed in Assam during the famous Bihu festival. The music is usually accompanied by a dance performance; it is performed thrice a year. Bihugeet is one of the most famous folk songs of Assam and is also popular across some parts of north-eastern India. The song is usually performed by young boys and girls and represents the joyous nature of the Assamese. Many stories are conveyed through Bihugeet and the themes often include nature, love, relationships, social messages and humorous stories.

### **Uttarakhandi Music**

Uttarakhandi music is often performed during festivals and religious gatherings in the state of Uttarakhand. The songs usually convey the importance of nature, bravery of historical characters, stories and important cultural practices of the state. Musical instruments used include Masak Baja, Daur, Thali, Ransingha, Damoun, Dholki, Dhol, Bhankora, Harmonium and Tabla.

### **Lavani**

Lavani is a popular folk music of Maharashtra and was originally performed to entertain the soldiers. The song is usually performed by womenfolk and it conveys information pertaining to society and politics. Lavani is further divided into two types – Nirguni Lavani and Shringari Lavani. While Nirguni Lavani is usually philosophical in nature, Shringari Lavani is sensual and often deals with erotic subject matter that often induces laughter among its listeners. This musical form is also classified based on its listeners. If Lavani is performed in close quarters by a young girl for a set of dignitaries, it is called Baithakichi Lavani. If it is performed in public in front of a large audience, it is called Phadachi Lavani.

### **Pandavani**

As mentioned earlier, Pandavani is a folk song which narrates the heroics of characters from the Mahabharata. This folk music is popular in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Though this age-old musical form is largely neglected by young music lovers of today, it is still being kept alive by performers like Teejan Bai, Jhaduram Devangan, Ritu Verma, Usha Barle and Shantibai Chelak. While Tambura is largely used as an

accompanying musical instrument, it is also used as a prop to explain different characters from the Mahabharata. For instance, the performer often places the Tambura on their shoulder while narrating the bravery of Bhima. While doing so, the Tambura represents Bhima's mace. Other musical instruments used are Manjira, Harmonium, Dholak and Tabla.

### **Bhatiali**

Bhatiali was sung by the fishermen of ancient Bengal. It is said that this musical form was used by the oarsmen and fishermen of Bengal to keep themselves entertained when they didn't have to row their boats with all their might. Nirmalendu Chowdhury is one of the best exponents of this ancient musical form.

### **Music of the Bauls**

During the 18th and 19th century, a set of musicians from Bengal came to be known as the Bauls. The music employed by them was often religious in nature and some were influenced by the tantric sect of the Kartabhajas. Bauls travelled throughout the country in search of the eternal truth. During their extensive travel, they sang many folk songs which later on came to be known as the music of the Bauls. Instruments used while singing these songs are Ektara, Khamak and Dotara.

### [Dandiya](#)

[Dandiya](#) is a dance-oriented folk music that has also been adapted for pop music worldwide, popular in Western India, especially during [Navaratri](#). The present musical style is derived from the traditional musical accompaniment to the folk dance of [Dandiya](#) called by the same name

### Garba

Garba is sung in honor of Hindu goddesses and gods during Navratri. They are sung in the honor of god Krishna, Hanuman, Ram, etc.