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## DOCUMENTARY CHANNEL

# In 'A Delicate Weave', musicians from Kutch stitch together a message of love and peace

Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar's documentary, the third in a trilogy, documents four syncretic musical traditions that attempt to bring down walls of hate.

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A Delicate Weave | School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Songs about love, communal harmony, peace and the journey of life, set in one of India's most stunning regions. We get all this and more in *A Delicate Weave*, the latest documentary from Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar to explore the musical traditions of the Kutch region in Gujarat.

*A Delicate Weave* (2017) is the final chapter in a trilogy after *Do Din Ka Mela* (2009) and *So Heddan So Hoddan* (2014). In the 61-minute documentary, which will be screened in Mumbai on November 24, the professors at the School of Media Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai introduce us to four groups of artists and their musical journeys: the young men of Bhujodi who get together to sing Kabir bhajans, a group of women from Lakhpat who are doing their bit to take forward the tradition of the Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Jiant Singh and his disciples, also followers of Bhitai, and Noor Mohammed Sodha, who plays and teaches the wonderful double-flute.

## A Delicate Weave (Trailer)



A Delicate Weave (2017).

Sufi songs serve the twin functions of enriching the ear and the soul at the same time. Singer of these traditions, therefore, would generally be deeply aware of the rich philosophical universe of the songs.

In *A Delicate Weave*, Monteiro and Jayasankar show us how well-versed the artists of Bhujodi and other villages in Kutch are with the meanings of the songs they sing. In the opening sequence, which gives the film its title, Naranbhai, a carpet weaver and a singer and archivist of Kabir bhajans speaks about one of Kabir's most famous compositions, *Jhini Bini Chadariya*. "Kabir, who was himself a master weaver, said life is like a shawl, a delicately woven one," Naranbhai says. "It is our duty to keep this gift of life, this shawl, unblemished and spotless."

Elsewhere, Jiant Singh explains, again with remarkable ease and clarity, the futility of seeing Ram and Rahim as separate entities – a reading of one of Shah Abdul Bhitai's compositions.

Music forms their "very being", Jayasankar said. "Many of them are unlettered but they can remember thousands and thousands of pages – music is their only connect with the world sometimes."



Naranbhai in A Delicate Weave, Image credit: School of Media Studies.

“What really fascinated us about these traditions is their fluidity, their open-endedness; the way in which many of these artists are unlettered but are so wise,” Monteiro said. “You can sit for hours listening to them rattle off poetry or have long philosophical conversations with each other. For them, their music is not for performing in front of someone else, but their way of being. The compositions inform their worldview and influence what they do. It is a very organic process of relating to the self and the other.”

All the films in the trilogy vividly capture the links between geography, community and music in Kutch. With the Partition, a number of things changed for the pastoral communities that wandered between Kutch and Sindh, which is now in Pakistan. Both regions share a common repertoire of Sufi and other syncretic practices – whether it is Kabir, the 15th century mystic poet, or Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689-1782), the Sindhi Sufi poet.

## Do Din Ka Mela(Kabir) - Muralala Fafal



Do Din Ka Mela (2009).

*Do Din Ka Mela* focuses on two artists from the Meghwal community, a pastoral Dalit group. Mura Lala Fafal and his nephew Kanji Rana Sanjot draw their inspiration from the Sufi traditions of Kabir and Bhitai.

*So Heddan So Hoddan* delves deeper into Bhitai's poetry through the perspectives of Umar Haji Suleiman, a self-taught Sufi scholar and farmer, Mustafa Jatt, Umar's cousin and Usman Jatt, a truck driver and an artist who plays the surando, a five-stringed instrument from Sindh.



So Heddan So Hoddan (2014)

“We first heard about these traditions back in 2008 through a friend who was working on a community radio project organised by the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan,” Monteiro said. “We went there to do a recce and found the socio-cultural fabric so interesting. Nobody seemed to have documented it until then. It also gave us a sense of a different Gujarat, one that is distinct from that of [Narendra] Modi’s. We felt the need to highlight this aspect.”

When the filmmakers travelled to the region, a trilogy was far from their minds. “We realised that many of these traditions are dying out and what’s dying out with them is their traditional wisdom as well,” Jayasankar pointed out. “Wae music, for example, is not a popular form of music but a spiritual one. Its practitioners are in their sixties. Nobody was learning it when we went there.”

The younger generation is not keen on keeping the tradition alive, Monteiro added. “The Sanghatan is doing its bit to try to encourage people to learn through projects like the Surshala modelled on the idea of a school for music,” she said. “In some cases, they’ve been successful.”

It was at the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan’s office that Monteiro and Jayasankar met a number of the artists they eventually filmed. “We were immensely helped by

the community radio project that galvanised a lot of these artists,” said Jayasankar. “Then, on our own too, we have travelled all across the region over the last eight years. So we have been able to identify artists for their specificities.”



The women of Lakhpat in A Delicate Weave, Image credit: School of Media Studies.

Most of the pastoral communities have stopped making a living out of music, and are focusing in working as subsistence wage labourers or farmers. What role does music play in their life today? “I think music for these artists is related to the pastoral way of life and the precariousness of that way of life,” Monteiro said. “Living is precarious for these communities even now, especially since they are no longer nomadic. Kutch itself is a place that is very, very disaster prone. You have either floods, drought or earthquakes. You’ll see the awareness of that precariousness in their worldview.”

There is a deliberate process of erasure with such ancient traditions, Jayasankar added. “There is a strain of thought that is part of modernity which says that traditions like these are worthless and hence, there is no need to replicate, preserve or take them forward,” he said. “But the point is that these are not just musical traditions or aesthetic practices but a worldview that talks about living with the

other and about of tolerance. This worldview is also dying with the music. With the hardening of divides among religions, both Hindus and Muslims, look down upon these traditions because they are syncretic. Wherever Sufi traditions or syncretic traditions have died, the vacuum left is taken over by more rabid religiosity.”



KP Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro.

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A Delicate Weave

Anjali Monteiro

KP Jayasankar

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