

## The Wind Instrument of Kutch



As sweeping changes wash through Kutch, folk music traditions struggle to survive in the hands of dedicated masters. Here are three musicians who have defied the times they live in. Musa Gulam Jat, Surat Nath and Osmangani Kumbhar persist.

Among the numerous folk musical instruments that survive in Kutch today, wind instruments such as the flute, jodiya pawa, narr, murli, nagfani, borrindo and sundari are perhaps the most engaging. However, these are not necessarily the most popular. In fact, most folk instruments barely survive the pressure of change. If they somehow do survive, it is because of the exceptional dedication of a handful of musicians. To understand the implication of this, it would be necessary to know a little about them and their commitment to their instrument and the tradition to which each belongs.

There is nothing more hauntingly beautiful than the notes of a jodiya pawa as they float out along the semi-desert breeze and dissolve into the quiet blue. These full bodied notes are made possible by a pair of flutes that are played simultaneously. Of similar length and proportion, one is commonly known as nar (male) and the other madi (female). The nar with its eight equally spaced holes provides the sur (tune) whereas the madi creates the Taal (beats) with its twelve holes. Interestingly, only the upper six holes are fingered whereas the lower six are left open and unattended. This combination creates an exquisite interplay that entralls.

Made from rosewood and other harder woods, it is carefully crafted (sometimes on a lathe) and then oiled to ensure clearer tonal quality. Copper wire is finely wound around selected parts of the instruments to protect them from damage.

Even though it is considered to be a well known traditional instrument of Kutch, it neither originated from the region nor is it made here. Across time it was brought by people from sheep and cattle herding communities from Sind and the North West when boundaries of nations were not marked and freedom of movement was the order of the day.



**Musa Gulam Jat Playing His Jodiya Pawa**

Musa Gulam Jat is considered to be the foremost player of the jodiya pawa in Kutch. He learnt to play the instrument from his father when he was fourteen years old and worked away at it whilst he herded cattle, at fairs, on feast days, in melas. Then went out to perform in Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Pune, Nagpur, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Delhi. It was curiosity and not appreciation that greeted him wherever he went because his instrument was an oddity, his music quaint. Neither fitted into the changing needs of his audiences. It was his performances in England, France and Germany that opened new possibilities for him.

Shunning the glamour of success because it has, according to him, corrupted the true spirit of his music, Musa has now settled into a pastoral life of cattle herding. The quiet semi desert expanses of northern and north western Kutch provide him with the right atmosphere for nurturing his music. Withdrawing from public life he now plays for himself, his family and his community in and around Dayapar, north-west of Nakhatrana.

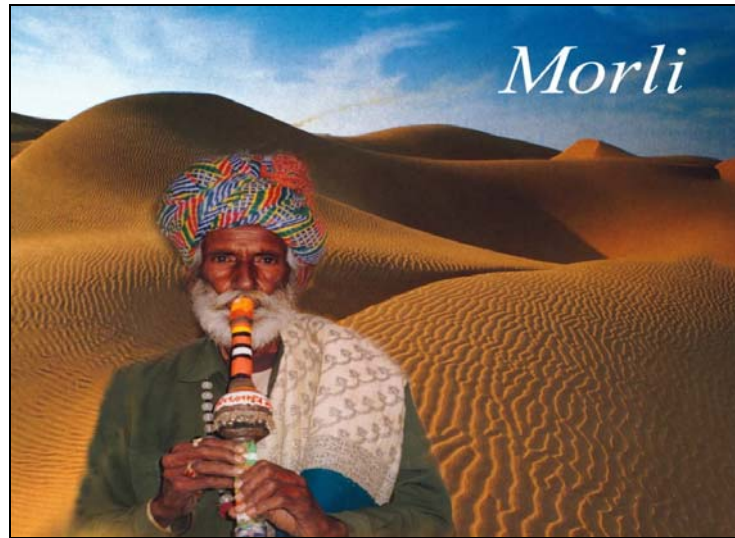
And so the tradition of the jodiya pawa lives on, protected by Musa Gulam Jat. His attitude isn't unusual. It is in fact quite common to most musicians who are committed to playing traditional instruments. The rhythms of their everyday family and community life play important nurturing roles. This is evident in another wind instrument player of Kutch – the distinguished musician Surat Nath.

He belongs to the Vaghdi Nagar, near Bachchau and he lives with his family in a settlement just outside Kukma, south of Bhuj.

Like Musa, Surat Nath has traveled far and wide across the length and breadth of the country and even beyond, to Europe and South East Asia. But none of this has affected him in anyway. Success has slipped off him like water does over a duck's back. Unlike Musa, he persistently makes forays into the world outside because he feels that he needs to ensure that the murli is seen as an instrument that is capable of playing pure music. For far too long, he feels, has it been associated with snake charming.

Passionate about his music, he refuses to accept that traditional aesthetics are receding with the onrush of contemporary tastes. In fact, he is an interesting mixture of the old and the new.

Rooted in his family and community, Surat continues to travel out and perform. And once he has done that he retreats to his familiar environment. It is from there that he gets his sustenance.



**Surat Nath Playing His Morli**

It's quite like the sort that snake charmers use across the country. Made up of two parts. The upper half is known as the murli and mainly consists of the hollow shell of a gourd that is like a sound box and the lower half has twin reed pipes called 'per', meaning foot. The left per with its eight air vents is used for producing melodies – one is called shahid, the other wichu, and then ti-tari, murhala, sur, baach, dhukkar and cheech. The right pipe here is called madi sur ji nail – and is mainly used to improvise a supporting tune...and see here, these two pipes are joined to the sound box with wax.

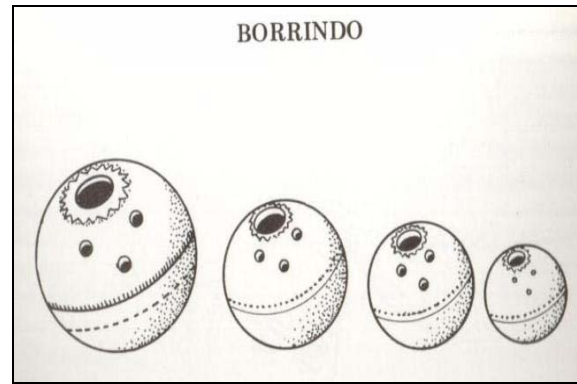
There are many traditional styles of music played on the murli. Two kinds of dhammal, one is gogay-poti and the other sadhaeen-poti and two kinds of lahro, one is naro or narr and the other is gajishahi lahro. It's not used only to charm snakes like most people think... it's a musical instrument, made originally in Sind...'

Community music is common among the Vagdis who are known to gather around a fire in their open air settlement and play their murlis. It is quite unimaginable that such creative sharing still exists in a world of cut-throat competition.

Of course, this isn't quite the case with the borringo which neither has a specific community context nor a dynamic tradition. But somehow it has survived time and remains an inscrutable remnant of some ancient time. This hollow baked clay egg-shaped instrument remains a constant source of entertainment for children and adults alike.

Even though this may seem to be a fairly simple and basic instrument, borringo makers are here. The finest among them is Osmangani Kumbhar. This 29 year old potter took to making the instrument when he was still in his early teens. Umesh Jadiya, the regions dynamic traditional supporter, discovered this young man's skills and encouraged him to become a master borringo maker.





**Borrindo**

His enthusiasm is infectious. Given half a chance he will take a willing visitor through the whole cycle of Borrindo making which begins from a clay pit in a hillside set in scrubland on the outskirts of Bhuj. There are two types of clay that are found in this clay pit. The hard sort, which has to be beaten with a wooden baton to powder and then passed through a sieve... or the soft sort which is crumbly and easily powdered.

It is a magical experience watching Osmangani spin a lump of clay into a perfectly shaped borrindo on the wheel, sensitive and firm hands gently guide the shape into being then carefully detach it from the mother lump and place it to dry in the sun after neatly nipping a hole on the topmost part of the ovoid.

Left through the day to partially dry, two holes are then made towards the base of the instrument. Then they are coloured and fired. The next morning, he carefully extracts them from the firing pit, placing them side by side, fresh and ready to produce amazing bird sounds and basic melodies.

But Osmangani doesn't stop there. He picks up a borrindo when it has cooled and gently holding it in the palms of his hands, lovingly turns it over. Then raising the instrument to his lips he blows horizontally across the topmost hole, playing his fingers over the two holes at the base. Sounds emerge haltingly at first, then steady themselves and start flowing. A lump of clay makes music in the morning air as the city of Bhuj bumbles along with its everyday cares.

Surat Nath, the foremost Murli player of Kutch, is no more.

