

## The Musical Legacy of the Classical Musicians of the Jodhpur Durbar during the Reign of Maharaja Hanwant Singh

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### Abstract -

The musical culture of the Jodhpur Durbar reached a remarkable stage of refinement during the reign of Maharaja Hanwant Singh. His patronage of classical music preserved the rich artistic traditions of Marwar and strengthened the cultural identity of Rajasthan in the mid-twentieth century. The court of Jodhpur became an important center where eminent vocalists, instrumentalists, and folk performers received encouragement and recognition. Under the Maharaja's guidance, the Durbar maintained the age-old system of royal patronage that had historically nurtured Indian classical music and safeguarded hereditary musical traditions.

The musicians associated with the Jodhpur Durbar represented diverse gharanas and musical styles, including dhrupad, khayal, thumri, and devotional compositions. Court performances were organized during royal ceremonies, festivals, and cultural gatherings, creating an atmosphere where music flourished as both entertainment and spiritual expression. The Durbar musicians not only demonstrated technical mastery but also contributed to the preservation of rare ragas and traditional compositions that may otherwise have disappeared during the period of social and political transition after Indian independence.

A significant aspect of Maharaja Hanwant Singh's musical legacy was his balanced appreciation of both classical and regional folk traditions. The interaction between court

musicians and local folk artists enriched the musical landscape of Marwar and produced a unique synthesis of refined classical aesthetics with the vibrant cultural expressions of Rajasthan. Instruments such as the sarangi, kamayacha, tabla, and sitar gained prominence through court performances, while oral traditions continued to be transmitted from one generation to another.

The contribution of the classical musicians of the Jodhpur Durbar extended beyond the royal court. Their performances inspired future generations of artists and helped establish Rajasthan as an important cultural region within India's musical heritage.

Many musicians trained under royal patronage later became respected teachers and performers who carried forward the traditions of the Durbar into modern concert platforms and academic institutions. Thus, the reign of Maharaja Hanwant Singh represents a significant chapter in the cultural history of Rajasthan, where royal patronage played a crucial role in sustaining Indian classical music during a period of rapid modernization and changing political structures.

**Keywords:** Jodhpur Durbar, Maharaja Hanwant Singh, Indian Classical Music, Marwar, Royal Patronage, Rajasthan Culture, Gharana Tradition, Folk and Classical Synthesis, Court Musicians, Musical Heritage

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The musical world of Maharaja Hanwant Singh's court was not limited to formal concerts and rigid ceremonial traditions. It was a living, breathing cultural environment in which music shaped daily life, royal celebrations, spiritual devotion, and social

interaction. Every performance carried emotional and symbolic significance, and the atmosphere of the Jodhpur Durbar transformed music into an experience that connected artists, patrons, and audiences at a deeply human level

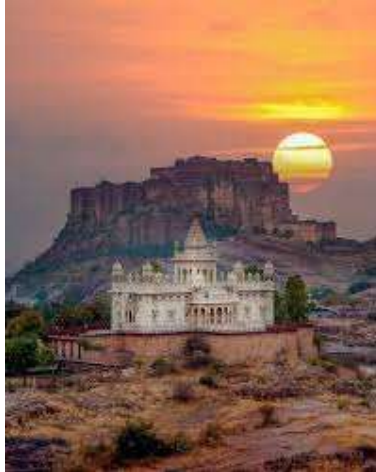
[1]. [Pic1 Maharaja Hanwant Singh of Jodhpur\(1947-1952\)](https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce3ybhlvP6O/) <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce3ybhlvP6O/>



Among the most important cultural events in the royal court were the mehfil, the carefully organized musical gatherings that represented the highest form of artistic presentation in princely India [2]. These were not ordinary performances but occasions of prestige and refinement where musicians displayed years of rigorous training before knowledgeable audiences. The main durbar hall of Mehrangarh Fort often served as the venue for such gatherings. The hall itself, illuminated by chandeliers, decorated carpets, and flickering lamps, created an atmosphere of grandeur that enhanced the emotional effect of the music [3]. Hours before the actual performance began, musicians would quietly

assemble inside the palace chambers. Some tuned their sitars or sarangis with extreme concentration, while tabla players tested the resonance of their drums. Vocalists often sat in silence, mentally preparing themselves before presenting a raga that demanded complete emotional and technical control. There was always an undercurrent of anticipation. Court performances were not casual affairs; they were moments where artistic reputation, royal prestige, and centuries of musical tradition came together in a single space [4].

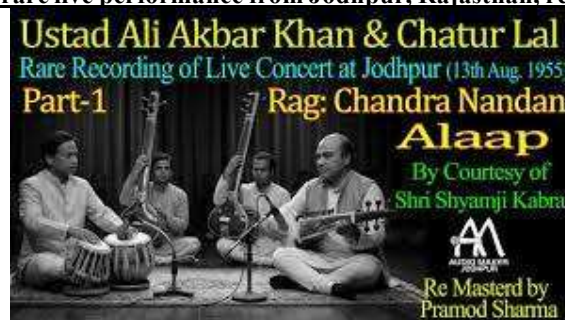
**Pic2 Mehrangarh Fort of Jodhpur [https://www.instagram.com/p/C2\\_bKHCoxeH/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C2_bKHCoxeH/)**



When Maharaja Hanuwant Singh entered the durbar hall, the atmosphere changed immediately. Court etiquette required all present to rise in respect, and ceremonial music often accompanied his arrival. Unlike rulers who treated music merely as entertainment, Hanuwant Singh listened with genuine understanding and sensitivity. Musicians knew that

their patron possessed enough musical knowledge to appreciate subtle improvisations, difficult rhythmic patterns, and innovative interpretations of ragas [5]. This awareness encouraged artists to perform with exceptional dedication because they were presenting their art before a listener who truly valued musical excellence

**Pic 3 A historic musical dialogue between two legends. Watch Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (Sarod) and Pandit Chatur Lal (Tabla) in a rare live performance from Jodhpur, Rajasthan, recorded in 13th Aug. 1955.**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeYAMsYhhOs>

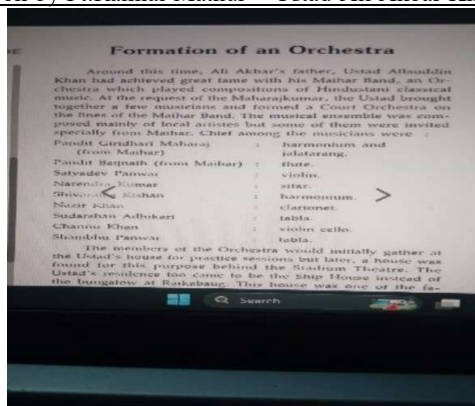
A traditional mehfil at the Jodhpur court generally followed a carefully balanced sequence. The evening frequently opened with a dhrupad performance, whose majestic and meditative character suited the dignity of the royal setting [6]. Dhrupad singers unfolded ragas slowly and systematically, allowing listeners to absorb

every tonal movement. After this came khayal performances that introduced greater emotional flexibility and imaginative improvisation. Instrumental recitals on sitar, sarangi, or flute often concluded the gathering, leaving audiences immersed in the lingering emotional atmosphere created by the music [7].

One of the most celebrated musical evenings remembered in connection with the Jodhpur court occurred during the Diwali festivities of 1950. Contemporary descriptions portray the palace glowing with hundreds of oil lamps while musicians performed deep into the night [8]. On that occasion, Ustad Nathulal presented Raga Shree, a raga associated with devotion and serenity. His slow elaboration of the raga gradually transformed the atmosphere of the hall, creating a sense of spiritual intensity among listeners. As the performance progressed into faster rhythmic passages, audiences reportedly became captivated by the emotional depth and technical brilliance of his singing [9]. At the conclusion of the performance, Maharaja Hanuwant Singh honored the vocalist with traditional gifts, including a shawl and gold coins, gestures that symbolized royal

respect for artistic mastery [10]. Music at the Jodhpur court also played a vital role during official state ceremonies. Visiting dignitaries, political guests, and foreign representatives were often welcomed with elaborate musical presentations designed to showcase the cultural sophistication of Marwar [11]. Such occasions demonstrated that music functioned not only as art but also as a symbol of political prestige and regional identity. Shehnai ensembles frequently performed during ceremonial arrivals, while court vocalists and instrumentalists entertained guests during banquets and formal receptions [12]. Through these performances, the Jodhpur Durbar communicated refinement, hospitality, and continuity with ancient traditions.

Pic 4, Excerpts from the book by Pt. Ramlal Mathur- "Ustad Ali Akbar Khan-My Guru, My Training"



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Religious festivals formed another important dimension of court music. Celebrations such as Janmashtami, Holi, and Diwali were marked by devotional singing and special musical gatherings dedicated to spiritual themes [13]. During Janmashtami, musicians performed bhajans celebrating Lord Krishna, blending classical techniques with devotional emotion. Unlike formal concerts that emphasized technical virtuosity, these gatherings often focused on collective participation and spiritual connection. Maharaja Hanuwant Singh himself was known to participate in devotional music sessions, listening attentively and occasionally joining in singing [14]. Such moments dissolved the rigid hierarchy of court life and created an atmosphere of shared faith and emotional unity.

The more intimate baithaks held in the Maharaja's private chambers represented perhaps the most intellectually stimulating aspect of the court's musical culture [15]. These late-night gatherings differed significantly from formal mehfil. Only a small number of trusted musicians, scholars, and close

associates attended. In this relaxed environment, artists felt free to experiment with unusual ragas, innovative compositions, or complex rhythmic structures that might not have suited larger audiences [16].

These baithaks often extended until dawn, with discussions about music continuing long after performances ended. Musicians debated the finer points of raga interpretation, the emotional character of particular notes, or the relationship between rhythm and improvisation [17]. Hanwant Singh actively encouraged such discussions because he viewed music not merely as entertainment but as an intellectual and spiritual discipline. His curiosity and informed participation strengthened the bond between patron and artist, creating an atmosphere where creativity flourished naturally.

One memorable baithak involved Ustad Rais Khan, disciple of Ustad Mohammed Khan (Mewati Gharana) and nephew of Ustad Vilayat Khan (Imdadkhani Gharana) presenting a newly composed piece in Raga Marwa, a raga famous for its serious and introspective mood [18].

**Pic 5** Usatad Rais Khan <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/ustad-rais-khan-1939-2017-the-man-who-made-the-sitar-sing-dead-passes-away-4646729/>



The composition employed an uncommon fourteen-beat rhythmic cycle that challenged both performer and accompanists. As Rais Khan explored the raga through delicate melodic phrases and intricate improvisations, the Maharaja reportedly requested certain passages to be repeated so he could fully appreciate the rhythmic complexity involved [19]. The performance eventually evolved into a detailed conversation between artist and patron about innovation in classical music. Such interactions reveal the unique intellectual environment of the Jodhpur court, where rulers and musicians collaborated in sustaining artistic excellence. The changing seasons also shaped the musical calendar of the Jodhpur Durbar. In Indian classical music, particular ragas are traditionally associated with specific times of day and seasons of the year [20]. The

arrival of the monsoon carried enormous emotional importance in Rajasthan's desert landscape, and musicians celebrated it through ragas such as Megh and Malhar, believed to evoke clouds and rain [21]. During these seasonal performances, listeners experienced music not only as sound but as an emotional reflection of nature itself. Winter evenings often featured serious and meditative ragas performed in the warmth of palace chambers, while spring festivals brought lighter compositions celebrating renewal, romance, and joy [22]. These seasonal traditions connected the artistic life of the court with the rhythms of nature and the agricultural realities of Rajasthan. Music became a way of marking time, expressing gratitude, and reinforcing the cultural connection between the royal court and the people of Marwar.

**Pic 6** [https://www.instagram.com/p/CzSNRj6BMHP/?img\\_index=2](https://www.instagram.com/p/CzSNRj6BMHP/?img_index=2)



Accompanists played a central role in maintaining the artistic quality of these performances. Tabla players and sarangi accompanists were not passive supporters but highly skilled musicians capable of responding creatively to every improvisational turn taken by the soloist [23]. The relationship between vocalist and accompanist required deep mutual understanding developed through years of collaboration. A skilled tabla player could intensify the emotional energy of a performance through rhythmic dialogue, while a sensitive sarangi accompanist could mirror the emotional nuance of the singer's voice with extraordinary precision [24].

At the Jodhpur court, accompanists were highly respected because everyone understood that great performances depended on collective artistry rather than individual brilliance alone [25]. Many visiting musicians reportedly praised the exceptional quality of accompaniment available at the Durbar. The collaborative spirit among artists contributed significantly to the court's reputation as one of the most refined musical centers in Rajasthan. The atmosphere surrounding these performances reflected a larger philosophy of art that defined the cultural life of the Jodhpur Durbar. Music was considered a medium capable of elevating the human

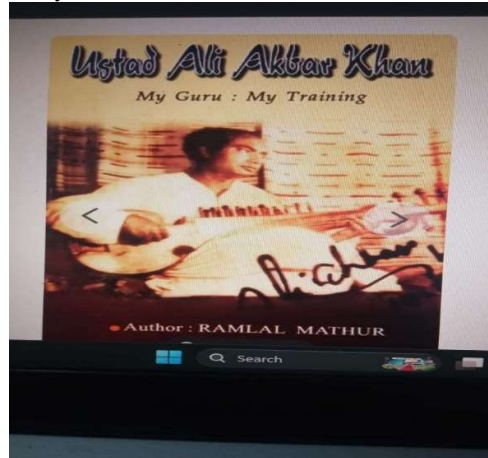
spirit, preserving cultural memory, and strengthening social bonds [26]. Court musicians were therefore treated not simply as entertainers but as guardians of a sacred artistic inheritance. Their work required discipline, creativity, emotional sensitivity, and profound respect for tradition.

Even today, the memory of these musical gatherings survives in Rajasthan's cultural consciousness. Festivals held at Mehrangarh Fort continue to evoke the atmosphere of the old court, reminding audiences of a time when music occupied the center of royal and social life [27]. The legacy of Maharaja Hanwant Singh

and his musicians endures because their performances represented more than artistic achievement—they symbolized the harmonious relationship between culture, patronage, spirituality, and human creativity.

Pt. Ram Lal Mathur's book "Ustad Ali Akbar Khan - My Guru, My Training" [28] is a valuable memoir-like tribute that documents the life, musical philosophy, and artistic associations of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, as the court musician of Jodhpur royal Durbar during the reign of Maharaja Ummaid Singh (1904-1947) [29] and then his successor Maharaja Hanwant Singh (1947-1952) [30], through the eyes of a devoted disciple.

Pic 7 Excerpts from the book by Pt. Ram Lal Mathur- "Ustad Ali Akbar Khan-My Guru, My Training"



[Exotic India Art listing](#)

The book not only presents Khan Sahib's personality as a guru but also introduces readers to the remarkable artists who shaped and enriched the Maihar gharana tradition while residing in the quarters allotted by the Royal majesty Maharaj Hanwant Singh, near the old Ship House .



**Pic 8** <https://www.instagram.com/p/CI5bF7wFniP/>

Written with affection and reverence, the narrative preserves memories of an era when Indian classical music was transmitted through rigorous discipline, oral tradition, and spiritual dedication. Mathur's writing reflects admiration rather than mere documentation, making the text both biographical and emotional. Ustad Ali Akbar Khan later emerged as a global ambassador of Indian music through concerts, recordings, and the

establishment of the Ali Akbar College of Music in California. His belief in lifelong practice is reflected in his famous statement: "If you practice for 10 years, you may please yourself." [31] ([National Endowment for the Arts](#)). Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's disciple from Jodhpur were, Pt. Damodar Lal Kabra, Pt. Brij Bhushan Kabra, Pt. Ram Lal Mathur, Jaidev, Shambhu Pawar etc. [32]

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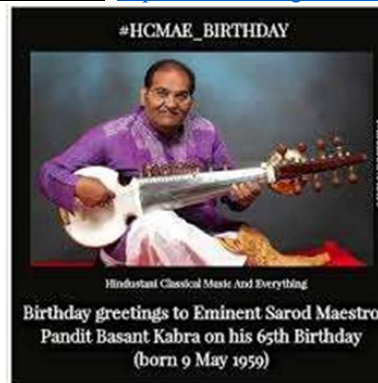
Pic 9 Pt. Damodar Lal Kabra <https://www.facebook.com/uniquemusicworld2021/posts/remembering-pandit-damodarlal-kabra-born-17-march-1926-died-4-august-1979-eminem/1169748168513807/>



Pic 10 Pt. Brij Bhushan Kabra <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLWxleDtLnP/>



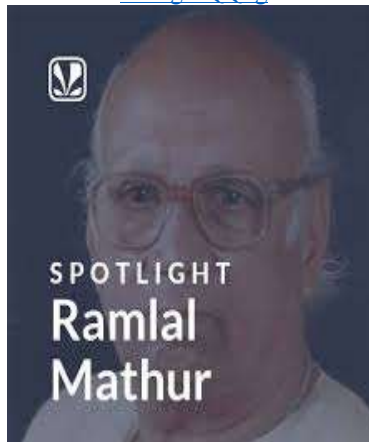
Pic 11 Pt. Basant Kabra <https://www.instagram.com/p/C6vHvS5tri/>



Pic 12 Music Director Jaidev <https://www.facebook.com/100066611738766/posts/tributes-to-a-true-music-genius-the-great-jaidev-on-his-31st-death-anniversary-t/1860279780747182/>



Pic 13 Pt. Ramlal Mathur <https://www.jiosaavn.com/featured/ramlal-mathur-spotlight/vxpwcECtp0-clEngHtQQ2g>



Mathur's portrayal of these artists emphasizes humility, devotion, and surrender to music rather than fame. He describes music as a sacred inheritance passed from guru to disciple through years of discipline. A memorable observation associated with Ali Akbar Khan states that true artistry comes only after decades of sincere practice and spiritual maturity. ([Itihaas](#))[33]

To conclude, the classical musicians of the Jodhpur Durbar during the reign of Maharaja Hanwant Singh played a crucial role in preserving and enriching the musical heritage of Rajasthan. Through royal patronage, court performances, and the transmission of traditional gharana practices, they strengthened the cultural identity of the Marwar region. Their contributions promoted the continuity of dhrupad, khayal, and folk-influenced classical traditions, leaving a lasting influence on regional musicology and performance culture. The artistic environment fostered under Hanwant Singh reflected a harmonious blend of devotion, refinement, and creativity that continues to inspire contemporary scholars and musicians alike.[34,35]

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