

Story behind the Saarangi

By Srijana Thapa

Nepalese folk music will be incomplete without praise of the Saarangi. Traditionally, the Gandarvha/Gaine communities of Nepal are associated with playing this four-stringed musical instrument. They are the only ones who know how to both make and play the Saarangi. Gandarvhas are socially marginalised as Dalit but they proudly play their Saarangi and sing the songs depicting real life stories. In the old days they were the source of news as they travelled to different villages and towns singing the tales of war, relationships, politics, poverty etc.

For some Gandarvhas, playing Saarangi is the source of their living but, due to the social exclusion and also the availability of other career options, most of the Gandarvas do not play Saarangi today. The other reason is the lack of proper musical learning technique and no written source to learn to play the instrument. This is the major cause of its downfall in modern Nepalese music industry.

However, because of the popular social media like Youtube and Facebook, locals take and post videos of Gandarvhas playing Saarangi in public. Saarangi has also become popular among other music lovers, and therefore is played by other communities in Nepal. This shows the empowerment of Gandarvhas and the protection of Nepalese musical instrument Saarangi.

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