

# Talking drum of Mewat, twin flutes of Thar: Meet the Rajasthani folk artistes honoured with Padma Shri award

Hamza Khan  
Jaipur, January 25

RAJASTHANI FOLK artistes Gafuruddin Mewati Jogi and Taga Ram Bheel were on Sunday announced as recipients of the Padma Shri awards in the 'unsung heroes' category.

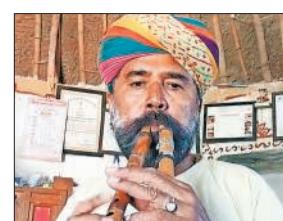
Gafuruddin, 68, is known for folk and traditional music, particularly the bhang. Also known as the 'talking drum', bhang is a rhythmic percussion instrument made of a hollow dry pumpkin shell mounted with goatskin.

Hailing from the Mewati Jogi community, Gafuruddin received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award last year from

President Droupadi Murmu. In its citation, the Akademi said that Gafuruddin "also happens to be the last surviving folk artist who knows and performs all the 2,500-plus dohas of Pandan ka kada (Mahabharata)".

"I learnt bhang from my father, Budh Singh Jogi. We used to perform together; he used to play jogiya sarangi, and I would play bhang alongside him. One of my uncles used to be on harmonium, another on dholak," Gafuruddin told *The Indian Express*.

Gafuruddin traces his lineage to Ismail Nath Jogi, said to be a disciple of Gorakhnath, one of the nine Navnaths; Ismail recited the kalma and became a



(L-R) Gafuruddin Mewati Jogi and Taga Ram Bheel

Muslim. "We are Muslims, but we sing Shivji ka Byavla, Pandan ka Mahabharat... Lok Ramayan is known as Lanka Chadhai here locally; we sing all this and go to temples and also pray at mosques," he said.

Over a career spanning six decades, Gafuruddin has many commendations to his name for playing and promoting bhang. He has also travelled extensively to perform in India, as well as in Australia, Canada, France, England, Germany and Japan. He said he performed before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, just before the

Covid lockdown.

Like Gafuruddin, Taga Ram Bheel, in his early 60s, plays a unique instrument, the algoza. A double flute made of bamboo, the algoza works on the same principle as a bagpipe; one of the two flutes usually plays a continuous drone while the other plays different notes.

As per Anahad Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to empowering folk artists and preserving the vibrant folk music of India\*, Bheel lives in Mool Sagar town, just outside of Jaisalmer, and learnt the instrument when he was a child by stealing his father's algoza in his absence. He has been playing the instrument since he was

10 years old and has spent 30 years of his life in the jungles of Ranthambore.

Taga Ram bought his first algoza when he was 11 and learnt it by himself by coordinating the tunes. In 1981, at the age of 18, he gave his first stage performance in Jaisalmer. Renowned folk musician who has been performing at Rajasthan's Desert Festival since 1981, Bheel has featured in several programmes for All India Radio, Jaisalmer. Honoured with invitations from Nehru Yuva Kendra Sansthan and Rajasthan Tourism, he has toured across India and abroad, performing in over 15 countries, including France, the US, Japan, and Russia.

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Historian S Irfan Ali, who met Tully frequently at the India International Centre, said: "He always said, 'Irfan, we will talk in Hindustani'." Tully especially loved the dialect of western Uttar Pradesh, he said.

Former broadcaster and former India Habitat Centre director Sunit Tandon recalled:

"He had a wonderful sense of humour and a very acute understanding of Indian society." Tully's long-running BBC Radio 4 programme "Something Understood" revealed that dimension – reflective, philosophical and spiritually curious. "Those were beautiful programmes," Tandon said, "...dealing with poetry, music and philosophy. They showed his intellectual and spiritual side." Importantly, Tandon added, "he could criticise without being unkind – an art that is lost nowadays."

Ratish Nanda, CEO, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, met Tully almost every day at the Sunder Nursery during the pandemic. "...Over the past six years, whenever he was well, Mark would be found in the park enjoying – nature, birds and visitors."

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The discussion between Jaishankar and the bipartisan US Congressional delegation is a significant step towards mending ties between the two nations.

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