1 THE SARANGI FAMILY

1.1 *Classification*

In the prestigious *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* the sarangi is described as follows: "A bowed chordophone occurring in a number of forms in the Indian subcontinent. It has a waisted body, a wide neck without frets and is usually carved from a single block of wood; in addition to its three or four strings it has one or two sets of sympathetic strings. The *sarangi* originated as a folk instrument but has been used increasingly in classical music."[1]

Whereas this entry consists of only a few lines, the violin family extends to 72 pages, leading one to conclude that a comprehensive study of the sarangi has been sorely lacking for a long time. A cryptic description like the one above reveals next to nothing about this major Indian bowed instrument, which probably originated at the same time as the violin. It also ignores the fact that the sarangi family comprises the largest number of Indian stringed instruments.

What kind of sarangi did the authors visualize when they wrote these lines? Was it the large classical sarangi or one of the many folk types? In which musical context are these instruments used, and how important is the sarangi player? How does one play the sarangi? Who were the famous masters and what did they contribute? Many such questions arise when one talks about the sarangi. A person from Bombay—assuming he is familiar with the sarangi—may have a different

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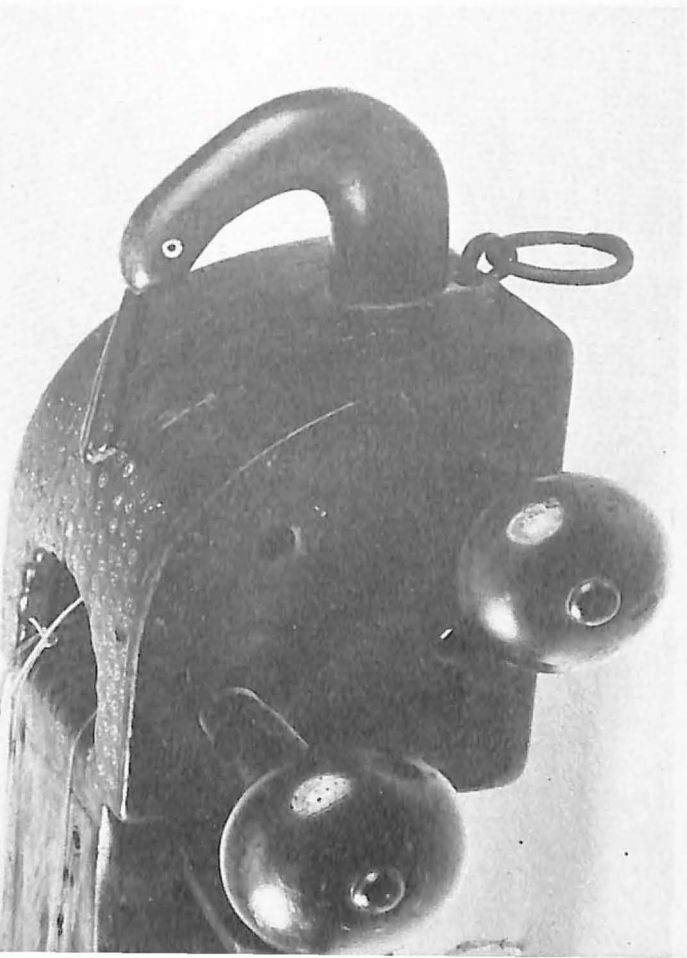

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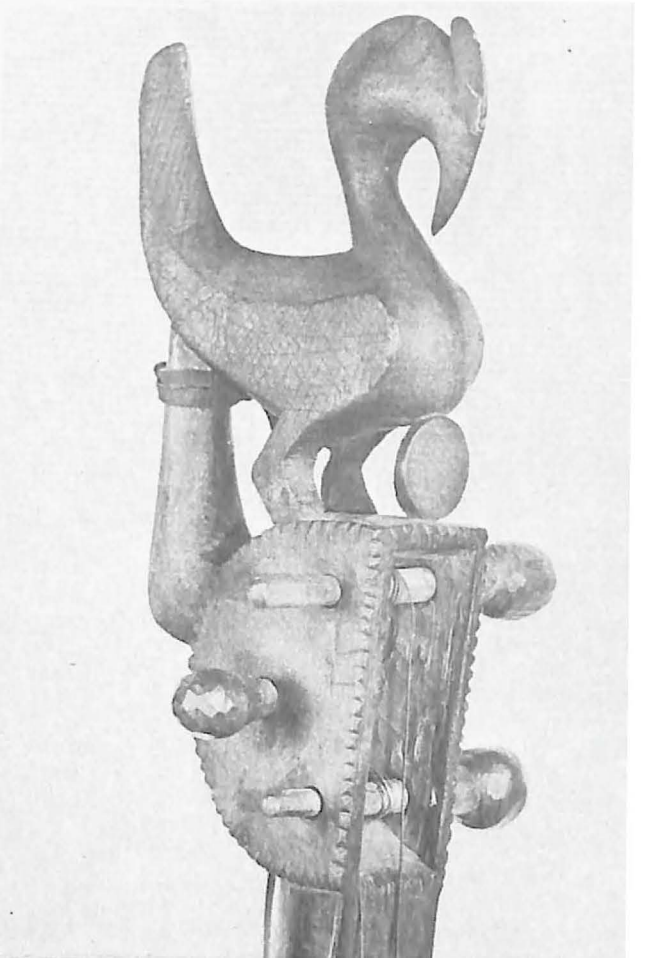

picture in mind than someone from Jodhpur or Srinagar, or a villager from somewhere in Uttar Pradesh or Nepal. Yet the bowed instruments from all these places, whether they are called *sarangi, saranga, saran, sarinda, saroz* or *sananta,* have something in common. They are all variations of the same theme, like branches of an enormous old tree, whose roots extend into Afghanistan in the west, and Manipur in the east. There are primitive tribal types such as the one-stringed *dhodro banam,* and sophisticated types such as the Sindhi *surando* and the classical sarangi which, according to Yehudi Menuhin, "most poignantly, and in the hands of Ram Narayan, most revealingly expresses the very soul of Indian feeling and thought."[2]

Although there are a great variety of shapes, all the instruments belonging to this family share a number of common features:

- They are carved from a single block of *wood;*
- the *belly* (body) is more or less waisted, hollowed out; and
- partly or wholly covered with a *skin* table,
- on which rests the *bridge,* while
- the *stringholder* is an extension of the base of the belly;
- the *neck* is without frets;
- the *head* (pegbox) is more or less hollow with a characteristic arch-or slit-like opening ('mouth') in the front, and with
- three or four (sometimes one or two) laterally inserted *pegs* for the playing strings;
- they are held vertically (*a gamba*) in front of the chest.

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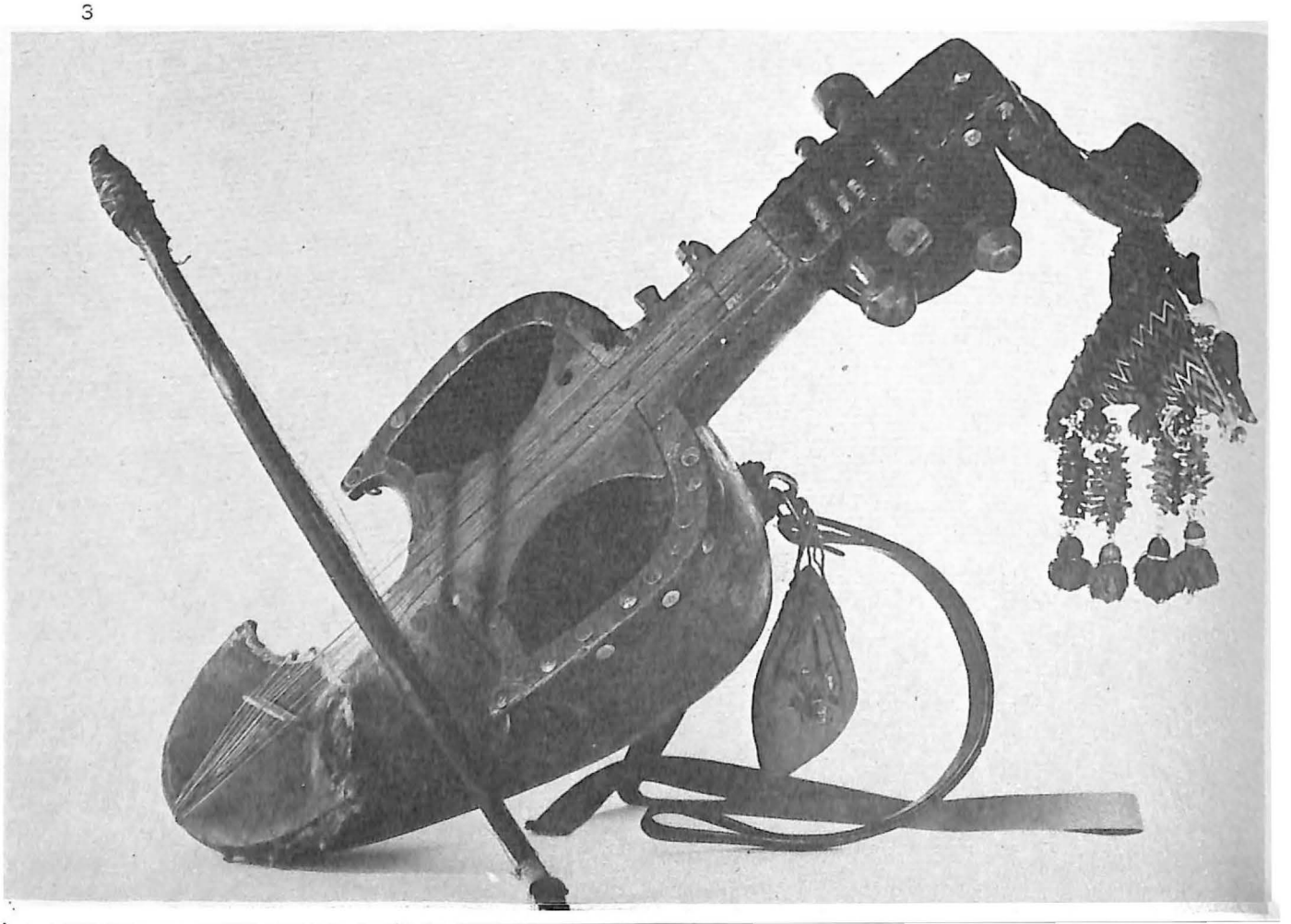

Variations occur in the shape of the belly, the length and width of the neck, and the shape of the pegbox, which is often wonderfully carved, for instance into the figurine of a bird, [1, 2] on the basis of which the instruments can be classified into groups. The size of the instrument, the presence or absence of a number of sympathetic strings (situated under the main strings and supported by the bridge at a lower level), and the playing technique should not be taken into account when separating one type from another. These particular features are variable, even within a well-defined group.

It is indeed remarkable that no two sarangis are alike. This is understandably true for folk sarangis, which always carry the marking of their maker—often the musician himself—and also for classical sarangis. Unlike the *sitar,* for instance, classical sarangis have not yet become standardized, each of them having its own particular characteristics. Some instruments are large and bulky, others slender and light. Some sarangis have a wide waist and others are narrow. Some are handsomely inlaid with ivory, others are plain. Some have 39 resonance strings, others 35, and the smaller instruments 24 or fewer. Even in the instruments built by a particular sarangi maker, one can recognize a variety of shapes and sizes, depending largely on what the artist who ordered the instrument had in mind. If he required an instrument for accompanying male vocalists, he would need a larger sarangi than the one he would use with women singers.

In spite of these variations, a trained observer can recognize where the instrument was built and by whom. Moreover, he can easily make a distinction between different sarangi *species,* such as a Gujaratan, a Jogia or a Sindhi sarangi.

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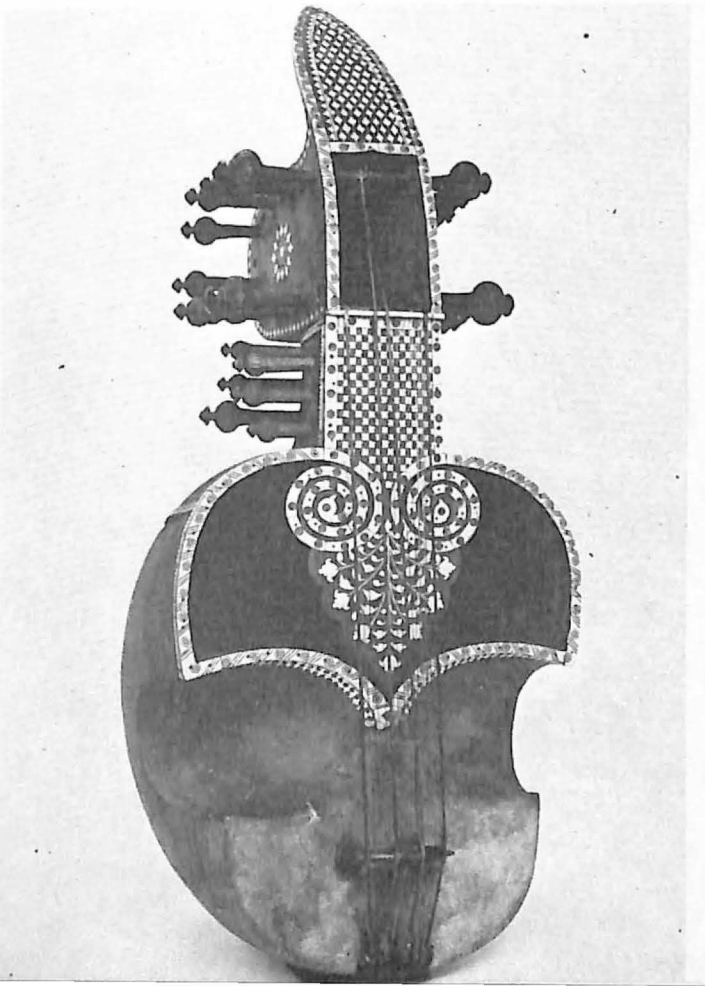

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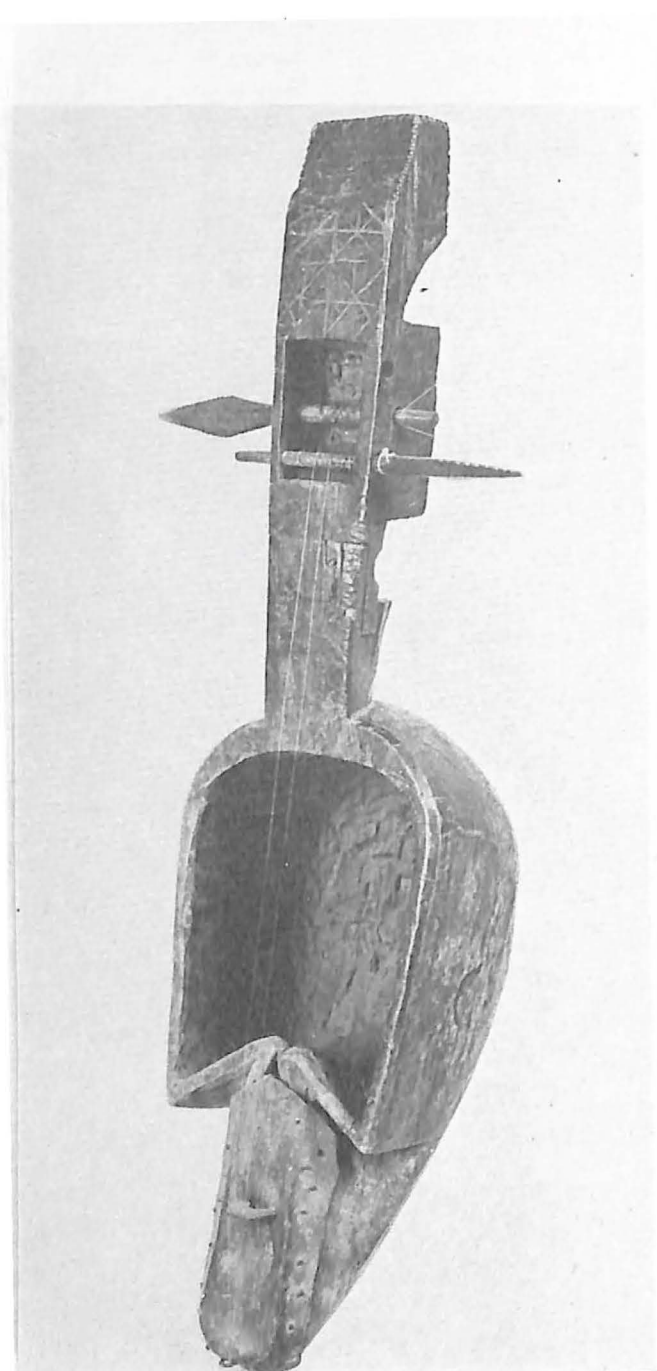
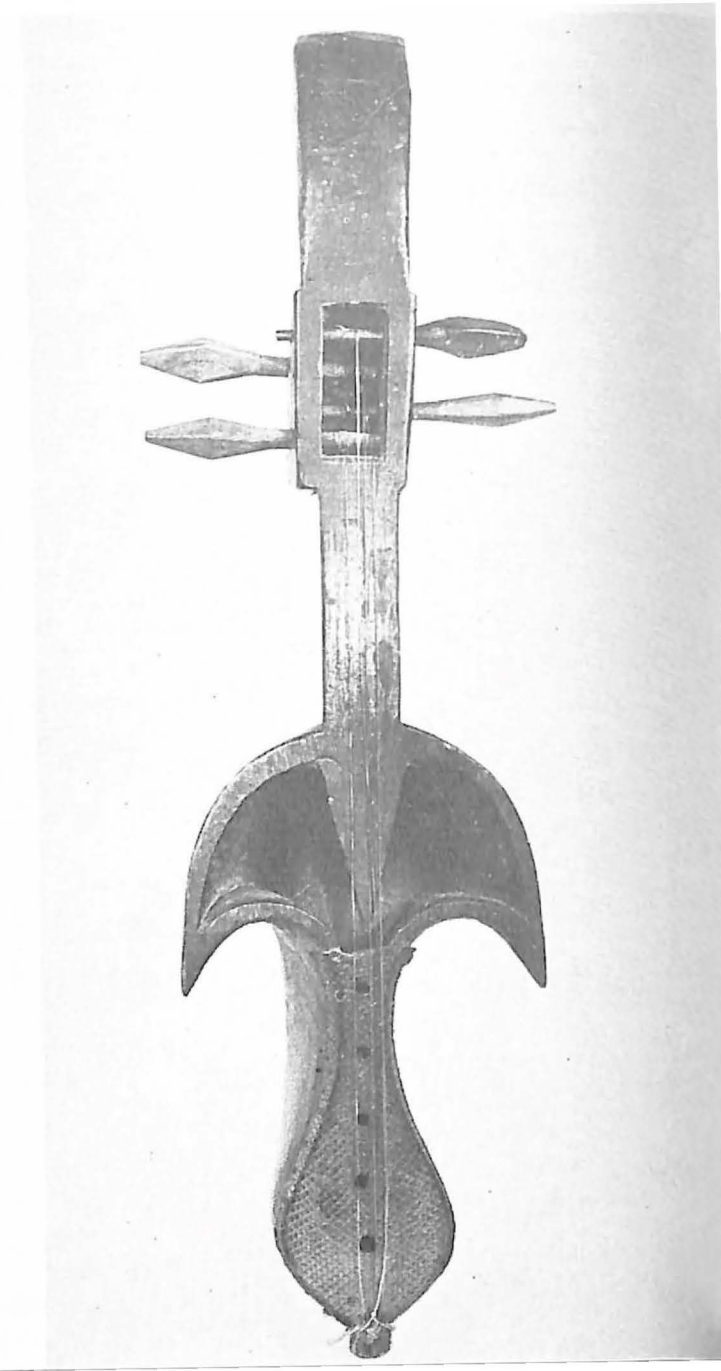
Instruments of one species always have a number of distinguishing features in common (i.e. they are structurally interrelated) and are also limited to a certain location. They are played by well-defined classes of musicians who have preserved the fundamental shape of the instruments over the centuries, and attached a specific name to them, often consisting of two words.[3]

Related species can be ordered into a 'group' (*genus*) which is an artificial category, however, not used by the musicians themselves. Since the 'group' takes only morphological similarities into consideration, it is a subjective class which depends greatly on the intuition of the researcher. Curt Sachs, for instance, although he does not make it very clear, separates *sarindas* from other bowed short lutes in India.[4] K. S. Kothari also makes a distinction between *sarindas* and certain types of sarangis, but he leaves us in the dark about *chikaras*.[5] Depending on the shape of the belly





and neck, this author proposes to classify these instruments into two main groups consisting of three sub-groups which are interlinked through intermediate types.

Although subjective, for theoretical purposes the 'group' is a useful category. It shows that certain types (species) of instruments are closely interrelated and suggests that these types have a common ancestor. As L. Picken puts it:

> Although musical instruments are in most instances artifacts, it is legitimate to refer to their transformation in time as an 'evolutionary' process, based on selection, and analogous to the increasing adaptation of a limb to a particular, specialized function or set of functions. It is the type, rather than the individual, that undergoes transformation—as with biological objects. The analogy with the latter is the more striking inasmuch as the evidence indicates that the process of transformation in instruments is one in which selection operates on relatively small modifications, as in biological selection.[6]

The bowed short lutes which share the nine features listed above are grouped into a family, i.e. the *sarangi family*. In other words, if we refer to 'the sarangi' in a wider sense, for instance in its historical context, it includes instruments which share the above characteristics. If, on the other hand, the term 'sarangi' is used in a narrower sense, for instance in the contemporary context, it refers either to the group of box-shaped sarangis, or the classical instrument as we see it today on the concert platform.

1.2 *Sarindas*

The distinguishing features of this widespread group are a large, deep head, a short neck of approximately the same length as the head, and a ladle- or heart-shaped belly which consists of a lower resonance chamber covered with skin, and a wider, upper chamber, open in the front.

In the *sarinda* species, the beautifully shaped upper resonance chamber functions like a highly arched horn amplifier. In more advanced types—the *saroz* (or *ghichak*) of Baluchistan and the almost identical *surando* of Sind, *surinda* of Rajasthan and *sarinda* of Punjab—the fingerboard descends into this chamber, dividing it into two compartments. [7][3] The three main strings and a variable number of sympathetic strings (usually five or six, laterally inserted into the pegbox) pass over a nut. The first playing string of metal is tuned to the upper tonic *(Ṡa)*, while the middle string of gut is tuned to the tonic *(Sa)* and the lowest string of metal to the fifth *(Ṗa)*. Sometimes a few resonance strings are anchored to pegs fastened into the neck. The bridge is placed in an oblique position on the skin table.

N. A. Baloch observes that the *surando* is played by professional Sindhi bards such as the Maganiyars, Charans and Langas.[8]

> These wandering minstrels used to go around playing the *surando* music and putting people's magnanimity and munificence to test. Their demand was not that of an ordinary mendicant, but rather a sort of officious solicitude. They would use the appeal of the melodious *surando* music to

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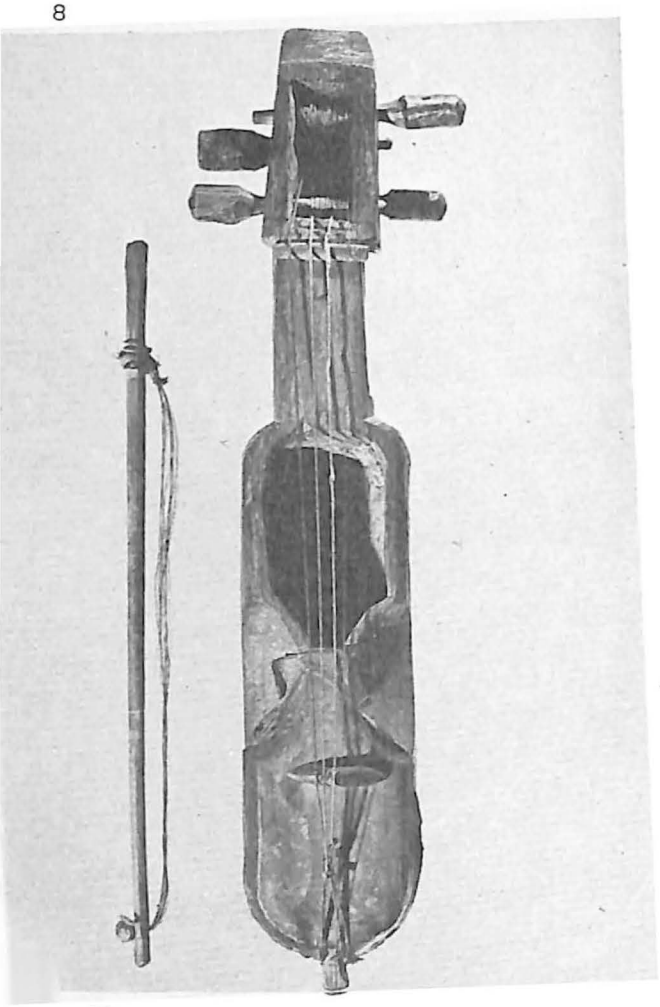

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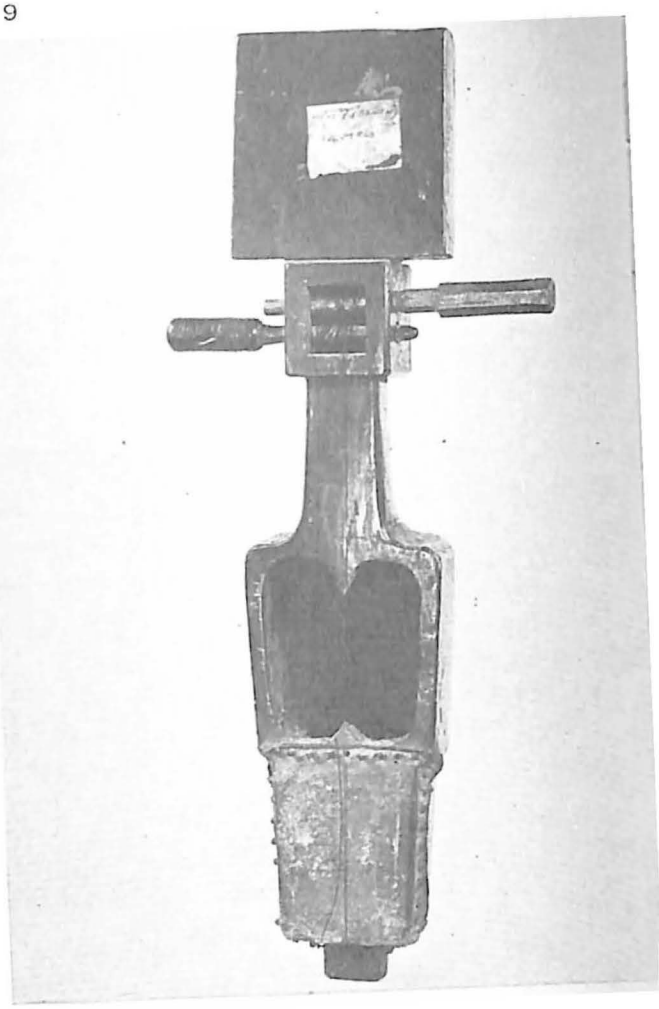

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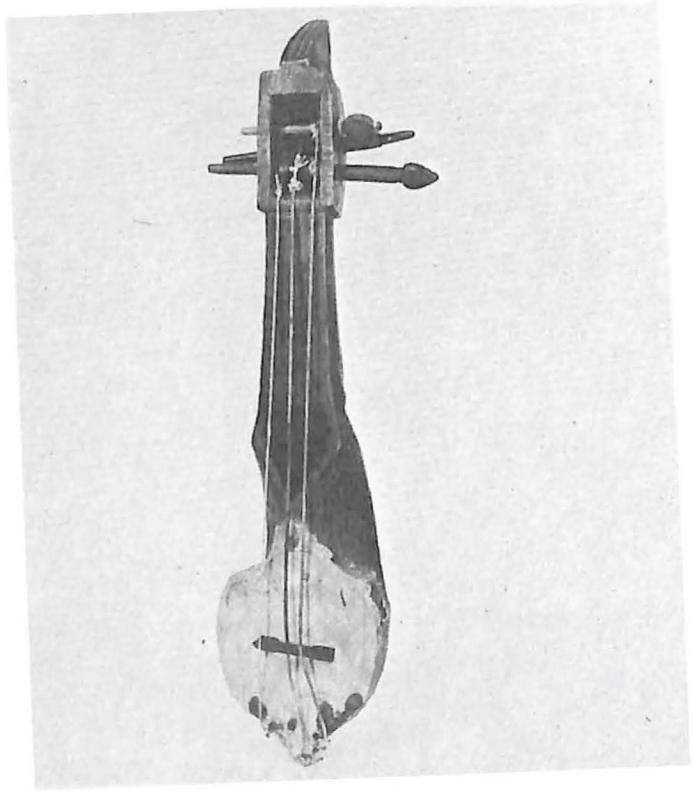

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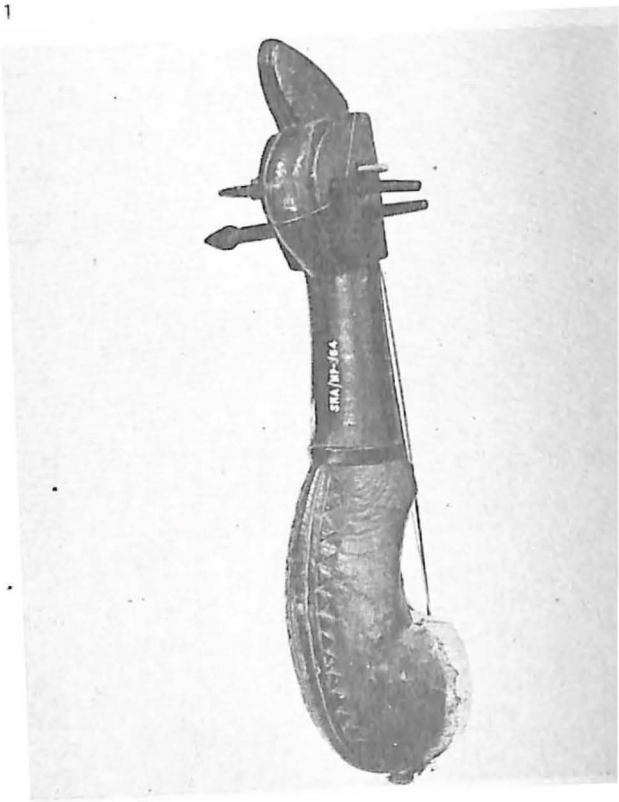

attain their objectives. According to the tradition, the music of *surando* had a devastating effect when handled by master musicians. Once an accomplished bard, named Bijal, by his superb *surando* music, exercised an overwhelming influence on the Samma Chief, Khanghar, the ruler of Junagadh, and asked for his head as a reward. To please him, and to pay homage to the high art, Khanghar sacrificed his life at the altar of *surando* music.

The sophisticated and highly ornamented *Bengali sarinda* resembles the above types, but it has four playing strings of gut and a larger number of resonance strings. [4] In the more primitive *sarinda* species of north-eastern India (Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Tripura), both the nut and sympathetic strings are missing. [5,6] The three playing strings are of gut, silk or metal. The *sananta* of Manipur has four strings, however, and a table of lizard skin with five soundholes.[9][7]

The name, and at first sight also the shape of the body, suggests that the *Nepali sarangi* would belong to the sarangi group. [8] Yet structurally, this instrument, with its short, massive neck and waisted belly, belongs to the *sarinda* group. It only differs from a *sarinda* in that its upper resonance chamber is reduced in size. The *Nepali sarangi* has four playing strings of metal and gut. The first string *(tip)* is tuned to the fifth *(Pa);* the two middle strings *(sur)* are tuned to the tonic *(Sa),* and the lowest string *(ghor)* again to the fifth *(Pa).* It is played by professional singers of the Gaine caste who make a living by begging.[10]

Similar in shape is the small *saranga* of Jammu and Kashmir which vaguely resembles a *chikara,* but does not belong to that sub-group.[11][10] The pear-shaped belly is also divided into two compartments, but here the open, upper chamber is narrower than the lower chamber. The belly tapers off into a short neck, but viewed from the back, belly and neck are separated from each other by a collar, a semi-circular protrusion which is a characteristic feature of the skin-bellied lute *(rabab).* [11] The four strings of the *saranga* (two of steel and two of gut) are anchored to lateral pegs in a deep pegbox.

In the *kamaicha (kamacho)* of Rajasthan and Sind, the collar *(agali)* between belly and neck is much more pronounced.[12][12] However, the huge belly of the instrument is bowl-shaped and completely covered with parchment, which is probably why its name is similar to that of the bowed spike lute, the *kamancha.* In other respects, this instrument is related to the western *sarindas.* On the left side of the prominent head there are three large pegs for the main strings of gut, and on the right side eight small pegs for the resonance strings. All these strings pass over a nut and a wide bridge. The *kamaicha* is played by the Manganiyars.

The *dhodro banam* (lit. hollow instrument), played by the Santal tribals of Bihar and Orissa, is popularly known as the *Santal sarangi* and represents the most primitive type. [9] It is made from the wood of the *guloic* tree which, according to legend, grew out of the flesh of a human being. "Hence the Santals consider this instrument organically related to them."[13]

The *banam* consists of four parts: a belly *(lac)* covered with skin on which rests the bridge *(sadom,* lit. horse), an open chest *(koram),* a short neck (*hotok*)

and a head (*bohok*) with one ear (*lutur*), i.e. the peg. The pegbox is either cube-shaped or indeed carved in the form of a human head. V. Shirali has depicted a number of such instruments which are genuine masterpieces of primitive art.[14]

If nothing were known about the history of Indian bowed instruments, the one-stringed *banam* with its box-shaped resonator could easily be thought to be an ancestor of the sarangi. However, we will see that it is very unlikely that the sarangi originated in eastern India. Rather than representing a 'living fossil', the *dhodro banam* is a regressive form of the *sarinda.* In a personal communication, Onkar Prasad supports this view:

> This I assume on the basis of a reference to the Jugi (yogi) as its mythical inventor, who uses the instrument to beg. A parallel can be observed in Hindu society where the followers of Raja Gopichand (a mythical figure) and Bhartrhari (a historical figure), known as yogis, are to be seen travelling around with a sarangi, begging in the villages of northern India, particularly Bihar . . . It is not so surprising that the Santals, who were always in close contact with the Hindus, derived the idea of constructing such an instrument from them. To support my argument, I would like to add the following observation which I made in and around Shantiniketan—Shriniketan. A few Santals there have copied a Western violin which they probably saw in the house of a Bengali . . . Their violins are usually one-stringed and much cruder and simpler in shape than the Western ones.

Although it is difficult to indicate the place of origin of the *sarinda,* it is obvious that this instrument reached its highest development in the area covering the Punjab, Rajasthan, Sind, Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the eastern provinces of Iran. Most probably it migrated from there to the east of India. "There is little

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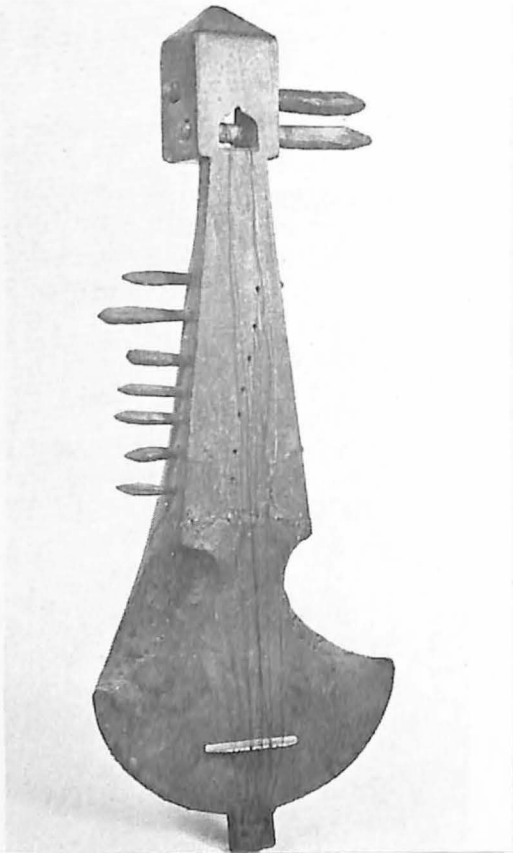
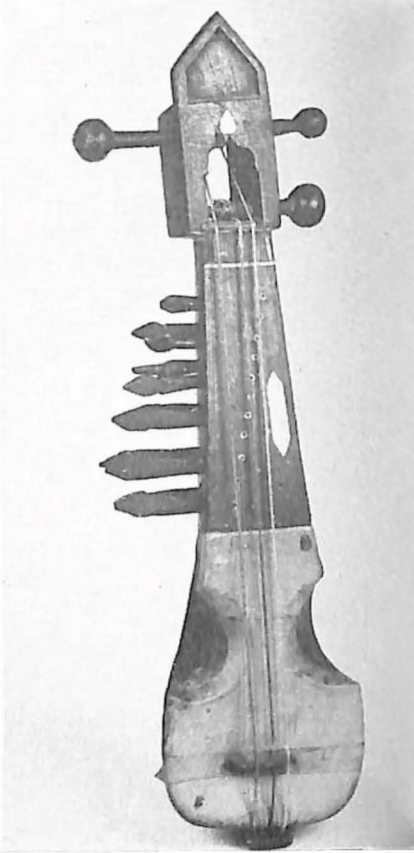




doubt", writes Curt Sachs, "that these fiddles came from a horse-breeding country in Central Asia."[15] The Kazakh *kobyz*, the *kobuz* of north-western Uzbekistan and the Kirghiz *kiyak* are indeed closely related to the *sarinda*. In these instruments, the lower resonance chamber of the belly is closed by a piece of skin, whereas the upper chamber is round (in the *kiyak*) or heart-shaped (in the *kobyz* and *kobuz*), and open in the front. The neck is short but arched, and the large, massive head has two laterally inserted pegs. In the *kiyak*, the strings of unwound horsehair are "tuned a fourth or a fifth apart . . . [and] not pressed against [the neck] in playing, so the sounds produced are actually the harmonics."[16] "Formerly", writes K. Vertkov, "the *kobyz* was the instrument of *bakhsys* (witch-doctors) and only men were allowed to play it."[17]

An instrument which has probably become extinct, the *derh* (*pasli*) *sarangi* of Punjab and Rajasthan, is an interesting intermediate type between the *sarinda* and sarangi groups. The body consists of an upper resonance chamber which is open and oval in shape (like the *kiyak*), whereas the much narrower lower chamber is covered with parchment. However, the neck is much longer than that of a *sarinda*, and the pegbox is cube-shaped. B. H. Baden Powell (1872) reports that "it has four strings, three of steel wire, and the fourth of thick twisted copper wire, and is played with a rude bow. This instrument is only to be found in villages, and is said to be much used in Marwar."[18]

1.3 *Folk sarangis*

The sarangi group, which includes the largest number of types and the most advanced Indian bowed instruments, can be divided into two sub-groups. The first one consists of *chikaras*,[19] which have the following distinguishing features: a pear-shaped, waisted belly, completely covered with skin, gradually tapering off into a hollowed-out neck of approximately the same length as the belly. The head is relatively small, and rectangular or trapezoid in frontal aspect. Usually there are three playing strings of metal or gut, and the nut is often missing.

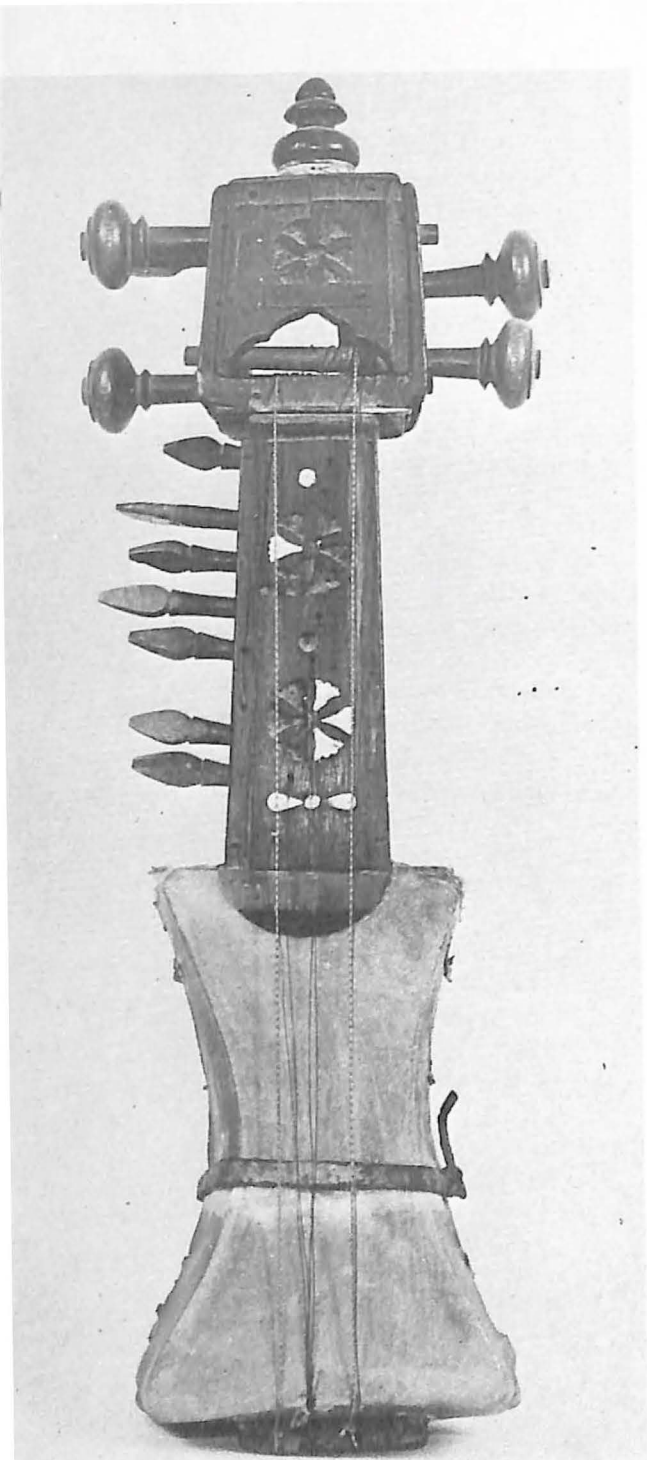
The *chikara* played by the Meos of Alwar district in Rajasthan represents one of the more primitive types.[20] It has only three metal playing strings. Equally crude is the *chikara* of the Pradhans of Madhya Pradesh, in which the neck is a little longer than the body. Besides the three main strings of twisted wire, there are three resonance strings.[21] Another tribal *chikara* of Madhya Pradesh has only two main strings of bronze and steel, but seven resonance strings.[22][13] The shape of its belly is like that of the *sarinda*, but upside down.

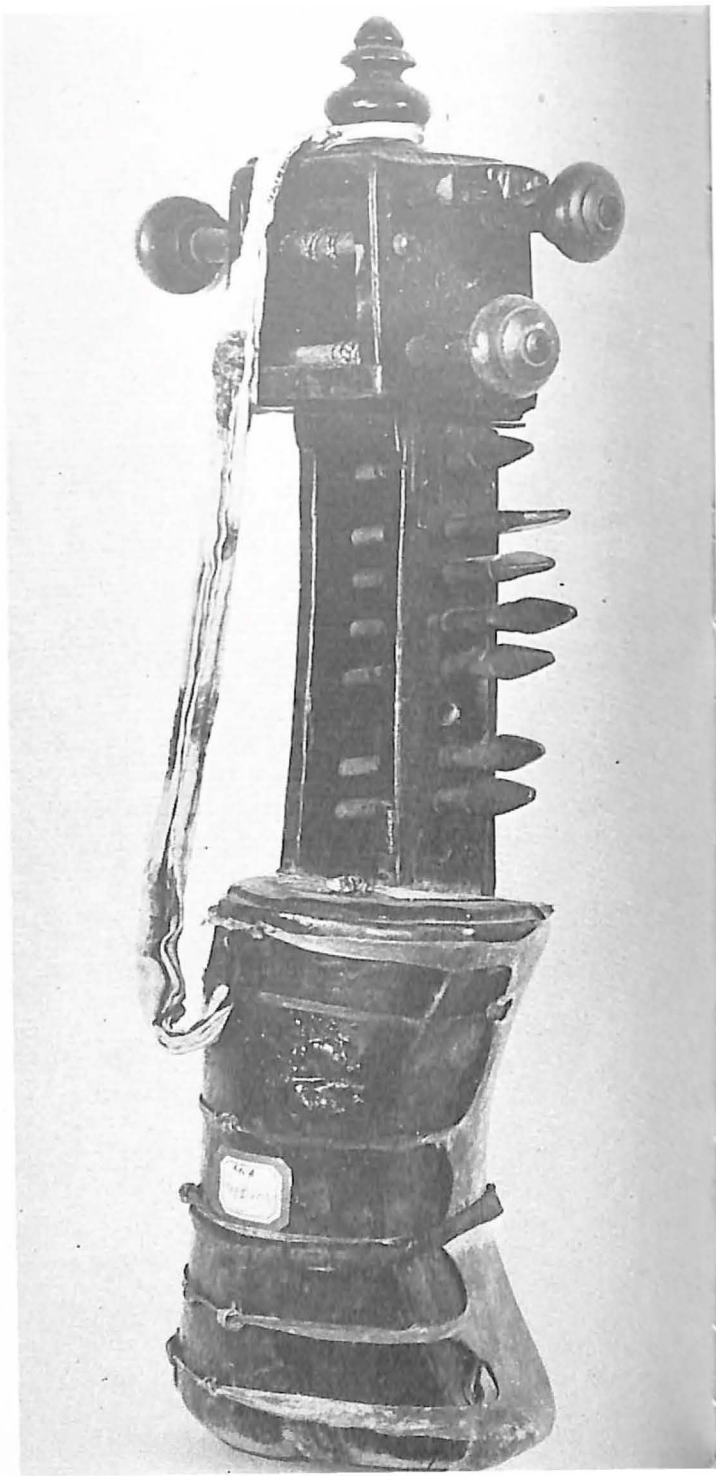
More advanced *chikaras* are sometimes referred to as sarangis or *kingras*, and often played by fakirs or yogis, mendicant musicians who beg and sing religious songs.[14] In addition to the three playing strings of horsehair or gut, there are five to eleven sympathetic strings, which are anchored to pegs mounted in the neck.[23] Some of these instruments are beautifully decorated. [vii, xii]

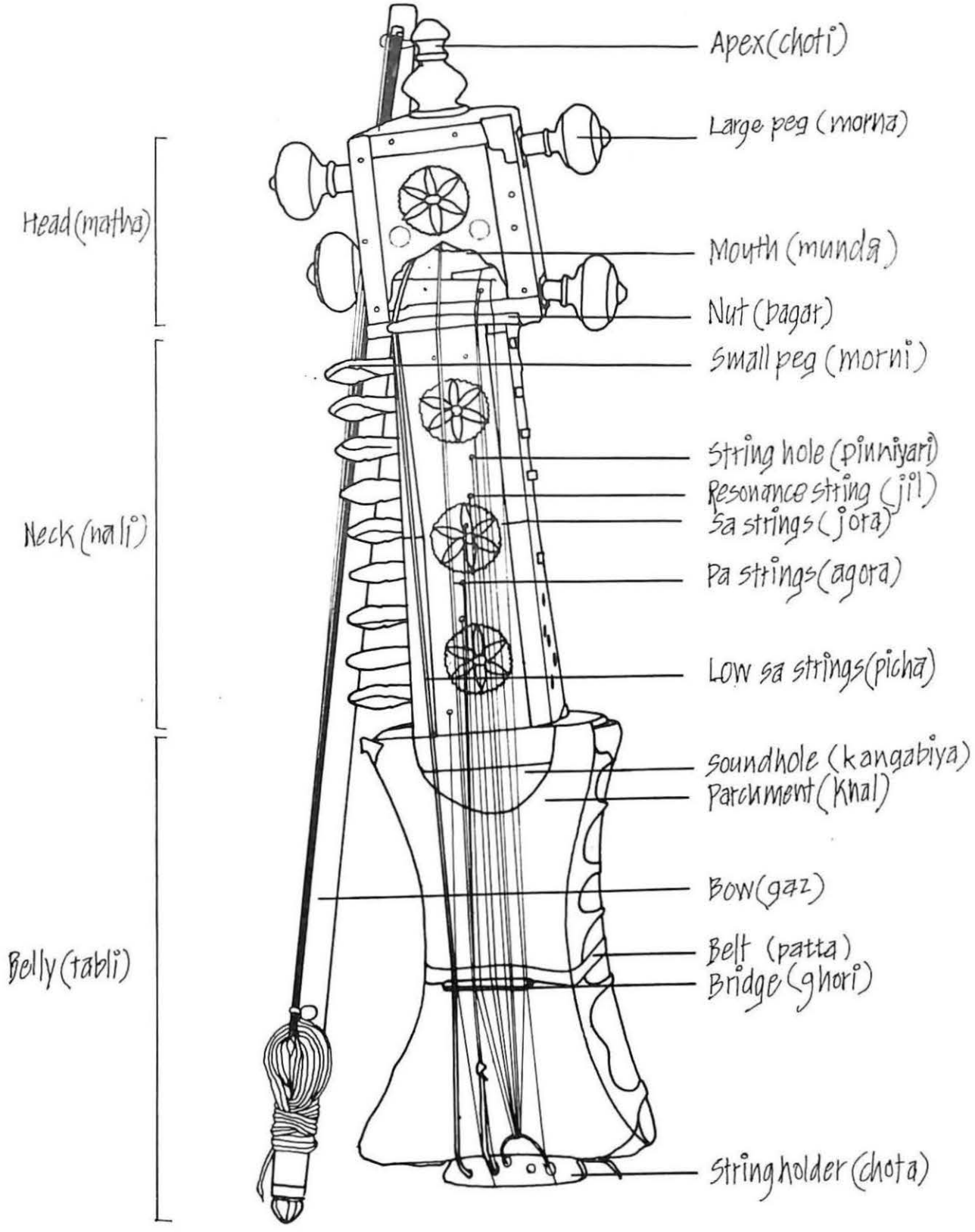
Unlike the *chikara*, sarangis are characterized by a half-cylindrical, box-shaped belly (covered with parchment), the sides of which are more or less incurved in the front, and a hollow neck of approximately the same length as the belly, but clearly separate from it. In the cubic head there are three or four lateral pegs

to which the main strings are attached. Although no comparative study of folk sarangis exists, it would appear that the majority of such fiddles are to be found in north-western India, particularly in Rajasthan. The large *chempreng* of Tripura seems, therefore, out of place. Its belly is shaped like a half-cylinder but not waisted, and covered by the epidermis of a palm leaf.[24]

One of the most archaic-looking sarangis is played by the Pauva of Sihori district in Rajasthan.[25] The pegbox is carved like a face, and the three strings (hanks of horsehair) seem to represent a tongue sticking out of a grinning mouth.







The parts of a Gujaratan sarangi

The *Gujaratan sarangi* of Rajasthan is a much more sophisticated fiddle, and the prototype of the classical sarangi. [15, 16, xviii] It is played by the Langa musicians who inhabit the desert area, and must have survived virtually unchanged for hundreds of years.[26] The head (*matha*) of the Gujaratan sarangi has four large pegs (*morna*) to which are attached two strings of steel, and two of gut. From the mouth (*munda*, lit. head) they pass over a nut (*bagar*), down to the main bridge (*ghori*), and are fastened to the base stringholder (*chota*).

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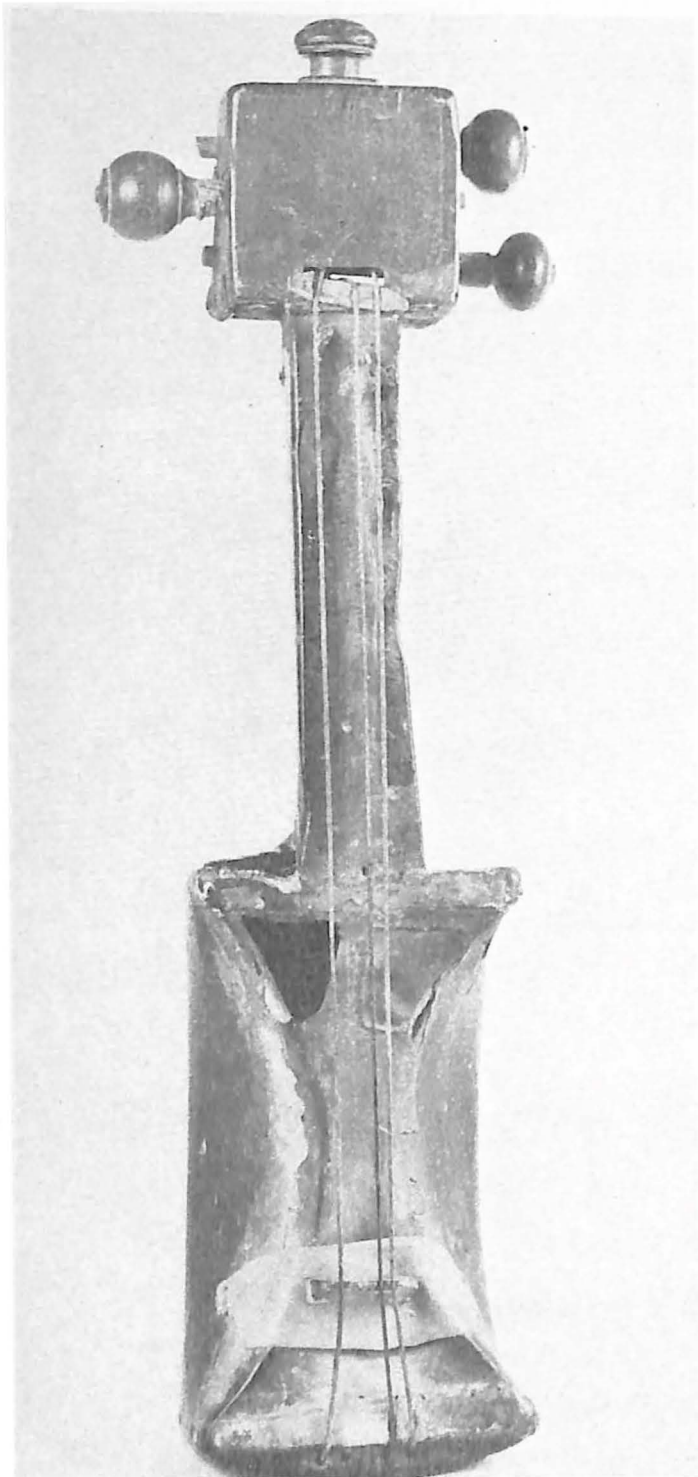

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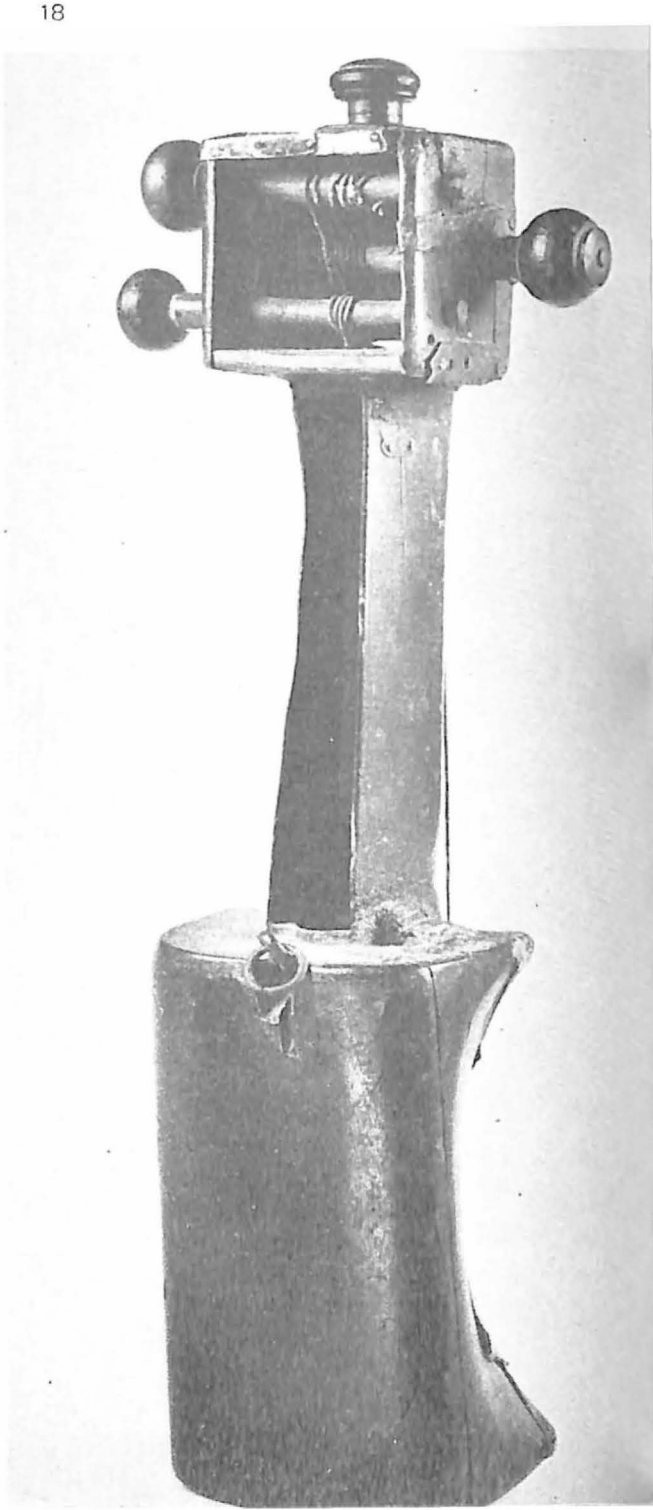

The first steel wire is the main melody string and is always played together with the second string, which serves as a drone. This pair (*jora*) is tuned to the tonic (*dadar*), whereas the third (*agora*) and lowest (*picha*) playing strings of gut are tuned respectively to the fifth and tonic of the lower octave. Eight or nine resonance strings (*jil*) of thin steel wire are attached to lateral pegs (*morni*) which are mounted in the neck (*nali*). They pass through a diagonal series of holes (*pinniyari*) in the fingerboard, and then through a row of holes pierced into the bridge, and are attached to the stringholder. The belly (*tabli*) is covered with parchment (*khal*) and a leather belt (*patta*), placed between parchment and bridge, serves as a reinforcement. A shoulder-strap is tied to a metal ring driven into the belly, and at the other end to the characteristic carving (*choti*) on top of the head. A lump of rosin is ingeniously stuck to the body of the instrument, as one usually finds with folk fiddles.

There is a great similarity in shape between the Gujaratan sarangi and the *Jogia sarangi* of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. [17, 18, 26] This one has three main strings of gut, however, and is characterized by a slender neck and a narrow Waist. Except for a narrow groove through which the strings enter, the head is almost completely closed in the front. Some Jogia sarangis have a series of resonance strings, other have none.

In the small *saran(g)* of Kashmir the waist is even narrower. [19] It has a deep body, like the Kashmiri *rabab,* and both instruments form part of a folk musicians' ensemble which performs *chakari.* The *saran* has four playing strings, two of steel and two of gut, and eight to ten sympathetic strings.[27]

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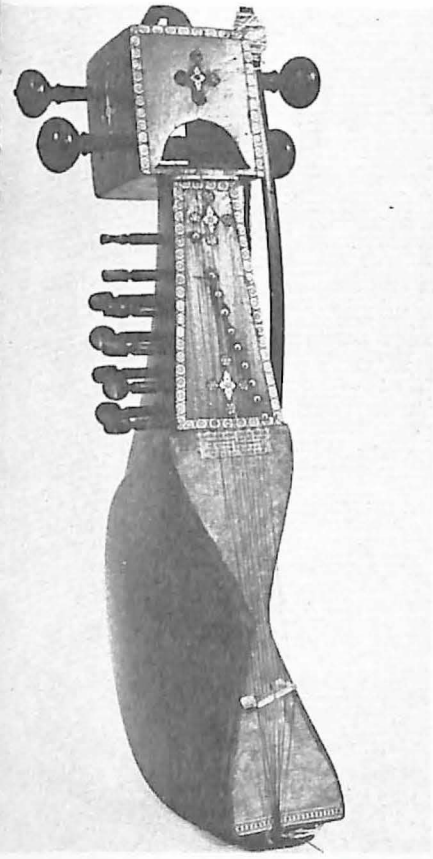

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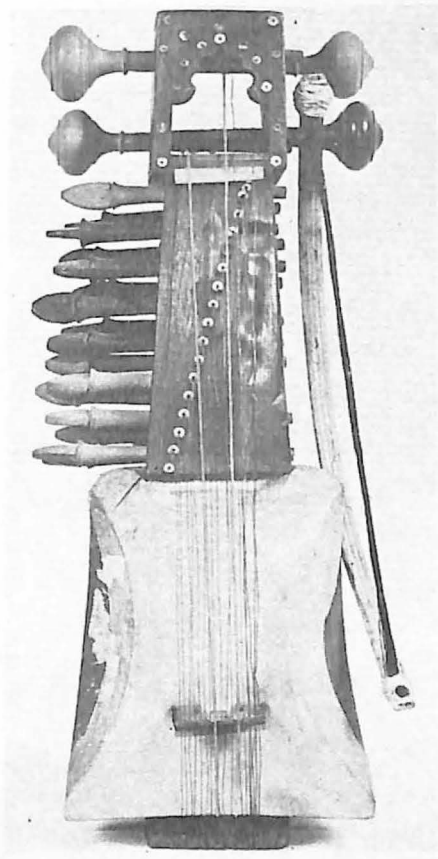

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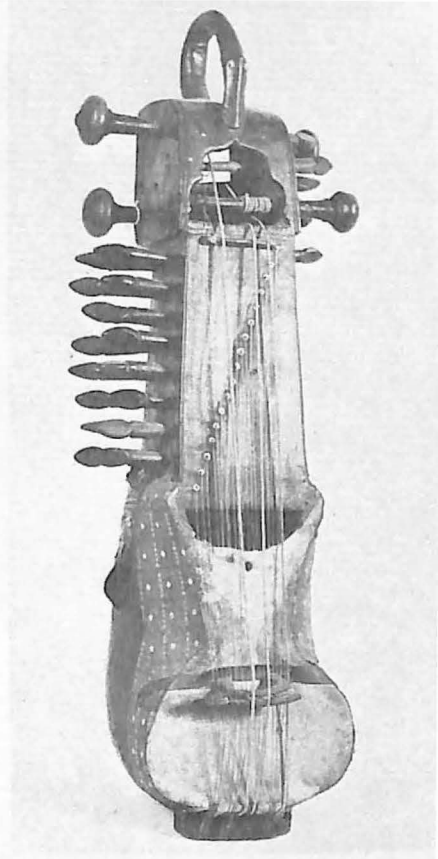

In the *Jogia* and *Dhani sarangis* of Rajasthan, the number of resonance strings has increased to 11 and 17 respectively, as a result of which the neck has become wider than in the formerly mentioned instruments.[28] [20, 75] There is such a striking resemblance between these sarangis and the small classical types of the last two centuries, that it is almost impossible to distinguish one from another.

The idea of increasing the number of sympathetic strings seems to have reached its limit in the large *saranga* of the Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and the almost identical *Sindhi sarangi* of Rajasthan and Sind.[29] [21] In the former instrument there are up to 18, and in the latter as many as 25 resonance strings. One set of steel wires (*jil*) corresponds to those of the Gujaratan sarangi. Another set of brass wires (*jhara*), attached to crudely-fitted pegs in the sides of the head, passes over the nut (slightly beneath the main strings) and through a second level of holes in the bridge. Instead of being rectangular, the body of the *saranga* and *Sindhi sarangi* is rounded. Mounted on the pegbox is a carving of a swan's head. Undoubtedly these particular fiddles are very advanced folk instruments; in previous centuries, smaller varieties with fewer resonance strings were used in classical music.[30] [70, 71] We will see, however, that classical sarangis have solved the problem of where to place extra resonance strings, in another way.