CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The endless search for SA: spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music
Authors	O'Brien, Dara
Publication date	2014
Original Citation	O'Brien, D. 2014. The endless search for SA: spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
Rights	© 2014, Dara O'Brien - http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/
Download date	2026-11-06 03:26:02
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/1864



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The endless search for SA: spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music
Author(s)	O'Brien, Dara
Publication date	2014
Original citation	O'Brien, D. 2014. The endless search for SA: spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
Rights	**© 2014, Dara O'Brien** http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/
Embargo information	No embargo required
Item downloaded from	http://hdl.handle.net/10468/1864

Downloaded on 2015-07-10T10:45:56Z

ucc Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire University College Cork, Ireland

UCC LIBRARY

THE ENDLESS SEARCH FOR *SA*: SPIRITUAL IDEOLOGY IN HINDUSTĀNI MUSIC

DARA O'BRIEN

Submitted to Dept. of Music, School of Music and Theatre,
University College Cork
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2014

Supervisor: **Dr. Mel Mercier**
Head of Department: **Prof. Jonathan Stock**

© 2014
Dara O'Brien
All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract……...……**iii**
Declaration……...……...**iv**
Acknowledgements……...……...**v**
Language, Referencing, and Transliteration……...……...…..**vii**
Note on Musical Transcriptions……..……**viii**
List of Figures……..…….…..**xi**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Statement of Thesis…….….**1**
Sources, Fieldwork, and Methodology……...…**2**
Central Themes: Dichotomy, Unity, and the Beyond Experience…….……**13**
Related Studies: Situating my Research Within the Field…….**19**
Relevance to Contemporary Research: Embracing Subjective Experience.…..**26**

CHAPTER 2: THE QUESTION OF RELIGION, AND THE CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF SPIRITUAL IDEOLOGY

Introduction……..……..…..…..…**29**
The Question of Religion……..…….…....**30**
The Representation of Spiritual Ideology in Literature and Musicology..…....**42**

CHAPTER 3: THE ENDLESS SEARCH FOR *SA*: HINDUSTĀNI MUSIC AS A PHILOSOPHY OF SOUND

Introduction…….…….…..**48**
Nāda-Brahma: Sound as Primordial Essence……...……...…..**51**
The Principle of Unity……...….**59**
The ‘Manifest’ and the ‘Unmanifest’……...…**69**
Rāga Improvisation as a Mediator Between the Profane and the Divine.....…**72**

CHAPTER 4: THE CONCEPT OF *RĀGA*

Introduction……...……**88**
Defining and Describing *Rāga*……...……...…**90**
The Origins of *Rāga*: Mythology, Evolutionary Models,
and Numinous Associations…….……...…**103**
Conclusions and Final Thoughts: *Rāga* as a Unifying Principle…...……..…**124**

CHAPTER 5: TRANSMISSION

Introduction……..……**132**
The Traditional Learning Process…….…...……..…**134**
Pedagogy in the Current Era…….**147**

CHAPTER 6: PRACTICE: WHERE PRAGMATISM AND IDEOLOGY CONVERGE

Introduction……..……**155**
Terminology: *Riāz, Sādhanā,* and *Chilla*…….…..…..**157**
Practice Routines and Lore…….…..**161**
Religiosity, Presence, and Devotion: *Riāz* and Quality of Focus……..…...**166**
The Science of Practice: A Paradigm of Efficiency
and Methodological Progression……..……**182**
Where Pragmatism and Ideology Converge…….……**205**

CHAPTER 7: PERFORMANCE: THE PRESENTATION OF *RĀGA* AND THE DICHOTOMY OF MUSIC AS 'DEVOTION' AND MUSIC AS 'ENTERTAINMENT'

Introduction……...…**212**
An Age Old Debate, Sustained and Reconfigured Through Time……...…**214**
Ideological and Philosophical Perspectives on the
Presentation of Hindustāni Music……..…..**220**
The Many Faces of *Rāga*: Performance Context(s) and the
Musician-Audience Relationship…….…**242**
Conclusion…….……..…….…**269**

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND CENTRAL THEMES

Introduction……..……...…**271**
Central Themes……..**272**
The Endless Search for *Sa*: Final Thoughts……...……**276**

Bibliography…….……**277**

THE ENDLESS SEARCH FOR *SA*: SPIRITUAL IDEOLOGY IN HINDUSTĀNI MUSIC

Abstract

This dissertation centres on philosophical attitudes presented by North Indian classical musicians in relation to the concept and experience of *rāga* improvisation. In Hindustāni music, there is a dynamic tension between ideology and pragmatism, devotion and entertainment, fixity and improvisational freedom, and cognition and visceral experience. On one hand, *rāga* is an embodied methodological template for the creation of music. On the other hand, *rāga* improvisation is conceptualised as a path to metaphysical experience and as an evocation of an ineffable divine presence. A masterful rendition of *rāga* is both a re-enactment of a systematic prescribed formula and a spontaneous flow of consciousness. This study presents these apparent dichotomies to highlight ideological concerns, while simultaneously contextualising philosophical idealism in relation to pragmatic realities. A central paradigm is the manner in which pragmatic concerns are elevated in status and given spiritual significance.

The dissertation begins with a view into historical and religious context. The discussion continues with a speculative investigation positing co-relations between Hindustāni music and central tenets of Indian philosophy, considering how *rāga* improvisation may manifest as a philosophy of sound. The study then explores the concept of *rāga*, a modal and conceptual construct that forms the heart of Indian classical music. The final three sections ground the subject of spiritual ideology within the life experience of Hindustāni musicians: 'Transmission' looks at the learning and enculturation process, which encapsulates values intrinsic to the ethos of Hindustāni music culture. 'Practice' explores the discipline, science and experience of musical practice, revealing core ideological concerns connecting spirituality to musical experience; and 'Performance' examines the live presentation of *rāga* improvisation, and the relationship between music as 'entertainment' and music as 'devotion'. Both ethnographic and musicological, this research is the culmination of various fieldtrips to India, extensive interviews with Hindustāni musicians, fifteen year's *sitār* training, and the study of relevant musicological and philosophical texts.

Declaration

I, Dara O'Brien, declare that all the work in this dissertation is my own, unless otherwise stated, and that none of the work was used for the attainment of any other degree.



……..
Dara O'Brien

Acknowledgements

I am eternally grateful to whatever may have led me to the exquisite and fascinating world of Indian classical music.

I am humbly indebted to all who have taught me Indian classical music and *sitār* over the past fifteen years, including: Ravi (Varanasi), Amrendra Jha (Varanasi), Subroto Roy Chowdhury (Kolkata/Berlin), Jagdeep Singh Bedi (New Delhi), and Richard Smitheman (USA). I wish to express a special and deep gratitude to my principal teachers: Sri Sougata Roy Chowdhury (Kolkata), and Paṇḍit Kushal Das (Kolkata). Their generous and patient guidance is central to my research in terms of both content and meaning. I also wish to thank Sougata's wife Julie for the loan of her bicycle (and her husband), and Kushal Das's wife and son for their kind hospitality.

I thank all my informants for their time, for being open and receptive to my research, generous with their thoughts, and honest with their feelings. The study would not have been possible without the kindness of the following participants: Sadanand Amonkar, Premanand Shanu Amonkar, Angshuba Banerjee, Jagdeep Singh Bedi, Dr Vinay Bhide, Rana Subhojit Brahmachari, Swapan Chaudhuri, Sougata Roy Chowdhury, Subroto Roy Chowdhury, Paṇḍit Kushal Das, Nimai Das, Sabir Khan, Amit Kumar Das, Nasir Desai, Subhash Fatarpekar, Dr Amrendra Jha, Nikhil Joshi, Alam Khan, Sabir Khan, Nilandri Kumar, Matthew Noone, Rageswar, Sam Randhawa, Debojyoti Sanyal, Joyeeta Sanyal and Richard Smitheman.

I am especially indebted to my supervisor Dr Mel Mercier for his warmth, guidance, and patience. His consistently positive and reinforcing attitude has been an inspiration. His expert mentorship was always coupled with a keen intuitive insight. He enabled an open and interactive channel of communication and maintained the indispensable ability to cut through complexity in a clear and coherent manner.

Thankyou to my examiners Prof. Jonathan Stock (University College Cork) and Dr George Ruckert (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) for their valuable time, and for sharing their considerable expertise. Their productive critical engagement supported me in the creation of a more cohesive work.

An extra special thank you to Mairéad for her love, belief, and support.

I am deeply grateful to my family for always accepting me for who I am.

A special word of gratitude to my colleagues and friends in the Indian Classical Music Society of Ireland: Sadanand Magee, Sudipto Das, Samukta Das, Philip Horan, Matthew Noone, and most of all, Yameema Mitha, who also assisted with some translations.

Thanks to all the musicians I have shared and co-created Indian music with, especially: Sougata Roy Chowdhury, Debojyoti Sanyal, Dermot Sheehan, Sadanand Magee, Colin Durham, Joyeeta Sanyal, Colm Hassit, Ciro Montanari, Matthew Noone, Ciaran Murphy, Sudipto Das, Philip Horan, Yameema Mitha, Conor Guilfoyle, Ellen Cranitch, Raj Padam, Vivek Arora, Rob Perry, Stephen Maguire, Eamon Cagney, Rana Subhojit Brahmachari, Eile *tablā*, Steve *sitār*, Antonio *sarod*, Tonyho dos Santos, Alex McMahon, Udit Pankhania, Rod Parry, Koushik Chandrashekar, Yameema Mitha, Claudia Schwab, Utsav Lal, Thaddeus Ó Buachalla.

I thank all my students of Indian classical music and *sitār*, in UCC, UL, and elsewhere, for bringing an extra layer of meaning to this ongoing journey.

Thank you to Dr John Feely, Dr Aileen Dillane, Dr James Kippen, Prof. Jonathan Stock, Dr George Ruckert, and Dr John Morgan O'Connell for pointing me in useful directions.

Special Thanks to Sue, Connie Menezes, Kelly Boyle, Carmel Daly, John Hough, the people of 'Friendly Visits', Sangita Lal, Dr Paul Everett, Aoife Granville, Mick Wright, Eoin O'Brien and a big thank you to Irene Buckley for her wonderful and patient assistance.

Finally I thank you for reading this, for without you, it remains mere ink on wood, or binary in computer code.

Language, Referencing, and Transliteration

‘Hindustāni music’ refers to the tradition of North Indian classical music. The related, but separate tradition of South Indian classical music is known as ‘Karnatic music’. This study is principally about Hindustāni music, but when I make a statement that can be generalised to refer to both traditions, I use the term Indian classical music to denote the sum of the two traditions.

When quoting a Hindustāni musician from an interview, whether conducted by myself or someone else, I have chosen to mark this by using their full name in the reference. I do this to highlight and privilege these voices in the work. To me, referencing them by their surname only is somehow dehumanising, and simply feels wrong in the context of this study. For other quotations, including extracts of writing by Hindustāni musicians, I use the standard approach of second name only, by author. Other language concerns are discussed in Chapter 1 under ‘Fieldwork considerations and representation’ (pp.7-10).

Technical terminology from the traditions of Hindustāni music and Indian philosophy are italicised, other than proper names such the names of *rāgas* or deities. Words from Indian languages, notably Sanskrit and Hindi, are transliterated as though written in *Devanāgarī* script and diacritical marks are employed to guide the reader to the correct pronunciation. It must be noted that due to variant pronunciations some inconsistencies are inevitable.

Note on Musical Transcriptions

Musical examples in this work are transcribed using Indian '*sārgām*' notation in parallel with staff notation for maximum accessibility. I also include a reference for the frame of *taal* (rhythm), marking the rhythmic cycle, where appropriate. In Chapter 6, I include additional markings detailing technical aspects of *sitār* playing and particular ornaments.

For all examples I choose the note C as the tonic, *sa*. This is arbitrary and is a standard chosen to make the transcriptions easier to follow. In practice, the location of *sa* is dependent on one's instrument (or voice). *Sa* on a *sitār* is generally between C sharp and D; on a *sarod* it is usually C.

The notation system used in Indian classical music, known as '*sārgām*', is very similar to 'sol-fa' used in the West. Each degree of the scale is assigned a name.

Full name	**Abbreviation**	**Notation**	**Sol-fa equivalent**	**Scale Degree**
Shadj	*sa*	S	Doh	first (tonic)
Rishabh	*re*	R	Ray	second
Gandhar	*ga*	G	Mi	third
Madhyam	*ma*	m	Fah	fourth
Pancham	*pa*	P	Sol	fifth
Dhaivat	*dha*	D	Lah	sixth
Nishad	*nee*	N	Te	seventh
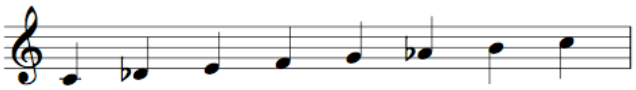
***Shuddh* - natural** 'pure' (*sa* and *pa* are always *shuddh*, notated 'S' and 'P')
***Komal* - flat** (*komal re*, *ga*, *dha*, or *nee*, written 'r', 'g', 'd', 'n'- flat 2^{nd}, 3^{rd}, 6^{th}, 7^{th})
***Tivra* - sharp** (*tivra ma* is written 'M' - sharp 4^{th}, *shuddh ma* is written 'm')

A dot below a note denotes the low octave; a dot above denotes the high octave; no dot denotes the middle octave.

| = phrase mark, used to separate distinct phrases from each other, no rhythmic value.

All musical examples in this study centre on two *rāgas*, Rāga Bhairav and Rāga Yaman. The scales (*thāts*) for these *rāgas* are:

The '***Bhairav Thāt***': the scale used in Rāga Bhairav



Sārgām: *sa re ga ma pa dha nee ṡa*

Shortened for notation: S r G m P d N Ṡ

The '***Kalyan Thāt***': the scale used in Rāga Yaman



Sārgām: *sa re ga ma pa dha nee ṡa*

Shortened for notation: S R G M P D N Ṡ

Ornaments

R G = '*meend*' (bending pitch), glissando or slide from *re* to *ga*.

= '*gamak*' rapid movement between pitches: G G R S = R G R G R S

***Mizrab* strokes** (right hand stroking patterns '*bols*' for stringed instruments):

| = *Da* = up stroke (on a *sitār*)

— = *Ra* = down stroke (on a *sitār*)

✓ = *chikārī* string stroke (high rhythmic drone strings)

Rhythmic Notation

All examples that are set to a rhythm cycle (*tāla*) are set to the common cycle of *teentaal*, a sixteen beat rhythm cycle. *Teentaal* is divided up into four '*vibhags*' or sections of four beats. These sections look like bars of four beats in staff notation, but this is deceptive. The Indian classical conception of rhythm is cyclical, made up of repeating cycles of beats. The most important beat is beat one, known as *sum*, illustrated with an 'X'; another significant point in the time cycle is the '*khāli*', the half way point in *teentaal*, illustrated with an '0'. *Bols* ('words') are mnemonic devices used mainly for the memorisation and notation of rhythm. They illustrate the sound of the principle percussion instrument in Hindustāni music, the *tablā*.

***Teentaal* (16 beat cycle)**

Frame:	X (*sum*: beat 1)				2 (*tālī*)				0 (*khālī*)				3 (*tālī*)			
Bols:	| dha	dhin	dhin	dha	| dha	dhin	dhin	dha	| dha	tin	tin	ta	| ta	dhin	dhin	dha |
Beat:	| 1	2	3	4	| 5	6	7	8	| 9	10	11	12	| 13	14	15	16 |

S = one note in a beat / SS = two notes in one beat.

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Paṇḍit Kushal Das……..…….……**6**
Figure 1.2: Sougata Roy Chowdhury and Udit Pankhania live in concert……..…..**6**
Figure 3.1: Typical *tānpurā* sequence……..……**66**
Figure 3.2: An example of repetition and reduction……..……..**77**
Figure 4.1: *Bhairav Thāt*……..……**92**
Figure 4.2: *Aroha-Avaroha*, Rāga Bhairav……..……**93**
Figure 4.3: *Chalan*, Rāga Bhairav……**93**
Figure 4.4: *Sārgām*, Rāga Bhairav……...……**94**
Figure 4.5: *Pakaṛ*, Rāga Bhairav……...……..……..…...**96**
Figure 4.6: *Vilambit Teentaal Gat*, Rāga Bhairav……...…….……**99**
Figure 4.7: *Drut Teentaal Gat*, Rāga Bhairav……...….**100**
Figure 6.1: Pictures in 'Hemen & Co.' musical instrument shop (Kolkata).....**168**
Figure 6.2: Practice Chart, Part I ('1st half').……**185**
Figure 6.3: Practice Chart, Part II ('II Part') ……**186**
Figure 6.4: *Vani* exercises……..**187**
Figure 6.5: *Sapat*……**188**
Figure 6.6: *Palṭā* ……...…….**190**
Figure 6.7: *Palṭā*, descending pattern……**192**
Figure 6.8: *Jhālā*……...…**194**
Figure 6.9: *Gamak* A - technical exercise ……**195**
Figure 6.10: *Gamak* B - repertoire……....……**196**
Figure 6.11: *Meend* exercises……...….**199**
Figure 7.1: Paṇḍit Jasraj in concert (New Delhi, January 2000)...……..……...**225**
Figure 7.2: 'A Tribute to the Living Legend Ravi Shankar'…….….**229**
Figure 7.3: Kushal Das live, Kala Mandir (Kolkata, January 2009)...……...**243**
Figure 7.4: Clay statues of goddess Sarasvatī on sale (Kolkata, January 2007).....**245**
Figure 7.5: Sarasvatī shrine, Late Market (Kolkata, 23rd January 2007)…..…….…**246**
Figure 7.6: Sarasvatī shrine (Varanasi, February 2000)...…….……**247**
Figure 7.7: Sarasvatī watching over a dance competition (Varanasi, 2000).....…..**248**
Figure 7.8: Sarasvatī being carried to the River Ganga (Varanasi, 2000)……...…...**249**
Figure 7.9: Sarasvatī shrine, Kushal Das's family apartment (Kolkata, 2007)…..…**250**
Figure 7.10: Alam Khan, The Dover Lane Music Conference (Kolkata, 2009)…...**257**
Figure 7.11: 'Sitting' with *rāga* in the home environment (Dublin, 2007)……..…**264**
Figure 7.12: The influence of performance context……...**267**

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Statement of Thesis

This study is an exploration of the spiritual ideology and philosophical ethos pervading the culture of Hindustāni music. Many Hindustāni musicians perceive *rāga* improvisation as a spiritual discipline, and as a gateway to an experience of the divine. The principal goal in this research is to explicate the conceptualisation and experience of exponents of the tradition in relation to this ideal function.

Throughout the dissertation I present a number of apparent dichotomies in the culture and practice of Hindustāni music: ideology and pragmatism; devotion and entertainment; fixity and improvisational freedom; cognition and intuition; the sacred and the secular; and the 'tangible' and 'intangible'. I explore the dynamic between these apparent dichotomies. At times they appear functionally related, and at times irreconcilably polarised. Viewing these apparent dichotomies serves to highlight ideological concerns, while simultaneously contextualising philosophical idealism in relation to pragmatic realities. I formulate a process of understanding through the mediation of dichotomy. This paradigm reflects aspects of Indian philosophy, and my own enculturation process, and I use it here as a model to uncovering the ineffable, enigmatic and subjective world of human experience.

This study is the culmination of a number of fieldtrips to India, extensive interviews with Hindustāni musicians and fifteen year's *sitār* training. This field research is coupled with the study of Indian philosophical texts and relevant musicological and ethnomusicological literature. This dissertation compliments research in the areas of Indian musicology, philosophy, ethnomusicology, ethnography, and performance practice.

I first consider the relationship between spiritual ideology and religion, along with issues of representation and the construction of ideology. I then present a speculative investigation positing co-relations between Hindustāni music and central tenets of

Indian philosophy. I continue with an exploration of the concept of *rāga*, the melodic principle of Indian classical music. I consider how *rāga* mediates between philosophical, aesthetic and technical concerns, and assimilates these disparate elements under one broad conceptual umbrella. The second half of the dissertation is structured to reflect the stages involved in the musical life of exponents of the tradition. In Chapter 5, 'Transmission', I discuss the learning and enculturation process. Pedagogical methodology encapsulates and perpetuates values intrinsic to the culture, codified through the ancient system of *guru-shishya paramparā* ('master-disciple succession'). In the current era, these values are in conflict with modernity as new approaches and attitudes to learning have emerged. In Chapter 6, 'Practice', I explore the discipline of a musician's private practice, idealised in the tradition as a form of devotion. Through outlining ideology relating to practice, along with the details of a musician's practice routine; I consider a number of ways in which pragmatism and ideology may be functionally related. Finally in Chapter 7, 'Performance', I examine the live presentation of *rāga* improvisation. This chapter is framed around an apparent dichotomy between music as 'devotion' and music as 'entertainment'. This dichotomy has recurred as a persistent theme in my conversations with musicians and serves to polarise and amplify ideological concerns regarding the presentation ethos of Hindustāni music and the dynamic relationship between musicians and audience.

Sources, Fieldwork, and Methodology

The primary research for this study was conducted during four fieldtrips to North India between 1999 and 2009, carried out in three major urban centres, and hubs of Hindustāni music: Varanasi, New Delhi and Kolkata. I spent my time learning and practicing music, meeting and interviewing musicians, attending concerts, and becoming immersed in the culture of Hindustāni music and the wider milieu. My fieldwork includes extensive interviews with Hindustāni musicians and I draw on these narratives as a primary source throughout the dissertation. My research also includes an on-going, in-depth training on the North Indian classical *sitār* over a period of fifteen years.

The narratives of Hindustāni musicians

Central to my research is an explication of the narratives of Hindustāni musicians, specifically in relation to philosophical perspectives on musical experience, and the conceptualisation of spirituality in Hindustāni music. For my interviews, I cast the net wide to include Indian musicians across a range of social demographics, locations, age groups and religious affiliations (although the majority of my interviewees are Hindu). A range of different instrumentalists is represented, including *sitār* players, *sarod* players, and *tablā* players. Some vocalists and other instrumentalists also add their voices to the discussion. A number of my interviewees are professional musicians living in Kolkata, the central locale of this study. This is where my principal informants and teachers live: Paṇḍit Kushal Das (*sitār*) and Sougata Roy Chowdhury (*sarod*). Das and Roy Chowdhury are both exponents of the *Maihar Gharana*. A *gharana* ('family tradition') (Shankar 2007 [1968], p.175) is a school of style or lineage of tradition. Belonging to a particular *gharana* means that you are part of a tangible and distinctive socio-musical family and lineage.[1] The fountainhead of the *Maihar Gharana* is the celebrated Ustad Baba Allauddin Khan (circa 1862-1972). My research represents the *Maihar Gharana* more than any other *gharana*, and musicians from the *Maihar Gharana* have a prominent voice in my research. Interviews with Hindustāni musicians, not conducted by myself, also feature strongly in this study. Many of these interviews are in the public domain but have rarely been explicated (for example Roy 2004; Desai 2009). Evident among the voices included in this work, not interviewed by me, are Nikhil Banerjee (1931-1986), Ali Akbar Khan (1922-2009) and Ravi Shankar (1920-2012) – three luminaries of the *Maihar Gharana*.[2]

[1] A musician identifies himself with the *gharana* to which his *guru* belongs and becomes part of that *gharana* in time. The fact that my principal teachers belong to the *Maihar Gharana* defines the style, repertoire, and corpus of knowledge I have learnt. I have a strong sense of 'belonging' to the *Maihar Gharana*. This is reflected in my research.

[2] The tradition in diaspora also informs my research. I have interviewed musicians of Indian descent based in the UK, Germany and the USA, but these voices are largely peripheral to the research. An example of one such musician who does feature in this work is Alam Khan, son of Ali Akbar Khan. Born and reared in the USA, his voice mediates between that of an insider and an outsider. He is immersed in the tradition, yet he is an outsider to the wider cultural milieu of India. I have also interviewed a few non-Indian musicians from the emerging 'global' tradition, in Ireland, UK, and the USA. These include musicians who have taken up the art of Hindustāni music, but are not originally of the culture, similar to myself. These voices provide an interesting counterbalance to the perspectives of 'native' informants. Their responses are generally more related to the direct experience of music practice and less entwined with Hindu religiosity and the politics of 'authenticity' and 'pedigree'. However, ideology and religiosity are often still present in these 'non-native' exponents. These voices are peripheral in the research, and the interviewees do not feature in the work itself.

The narratives of Hindustāni musicians eloquently portray philosophical and ideological attitudes to the concept and process of *rāga* improvisation. Exponents of the tradition express strong beliefs about music and spirituality, alongside accounts of rigorous training and the realities of professionalism. My research reveals a plurality of concepts and beliefs regarding spirituality and the practice of Hindustāni music. The discourse suggests that spirituality permeates almost every aspect of Hindustāni music including origins, pedagogy, practice, performance, and function. A number of central themes pervade the narratives of Hindustāni musicians, and are presented in this study. These include the ethos of surrender, the agency of *rāga*, an ideal quality of focus, the experience of divine presence, transcendental experience, *rāga* as a vehicle to an experience of the divine, and the principle of unity.

A plurality of voices

One of the most intriguing aspects of my research is the plurality of expression in the narratives of Hindustāni musicians.[3] Although many musicians state that 'spirituality' is central to the tradition, the subject invites personal interpretation, and individualistic and eclectic responses.[4] In order to honour and represent this rich plurality of expression appropriately, I have endeavoured not to contrive a 'universal theory', or seek a substantive 'conclusion', where one may not be justified. The plurality of expression negates any possibility of a comprehensive paradigm equating Hindustāni music with spirituality. Nonetheless, my research reveals a fascinating spiritual ideology and philosophical ethos pervading the culture of Hindustāni music. Through a unique and adaptable philosophical worldview, Indian musicians offer compelling answers to some of the deepest questions regarding the meaning of musical experience, and at times manage to qualify the ineffable.

[3] The plurality of Indian thought was observed as early as 1914 by one of the first Western musicologists to explore Indian music, Fox-Strangways: 'There is, it is said, no statement which will apply to the whole of India except the geographical one that it is east of the Suez' (1965, p.7*)*.

[4] This plurality is evident in the chapter called 'Music and Spirituality' in Shiv Kumar Sharma's autobiography (Sharma 2002, pp.155-168). In this short section, the *santoor* player – as only a single voice in the tradition – touches on a wide range of subjects including religion, Hindu mythology, philosophical scholarship, the experience of performance, musical maturity, spirituality versus materialism, mysticism, luminaries of the tradition and the connection between love and spirituality. The fact that the topic is looked at from so many angles does not necessarily mean there is contradiction between the different perspectives. Rather there is a plurality of thought where inter-related ideas get layered on top of each other.

Sitār training: a window into Hindustāni music

Mantle Hood recognises two different modes of discourse about music – the language mode of discourse and the music mode of discourse (Hood 1971). They communicate different facets of music and function in different ways. Both are valuable and a balance between the two is desirable for the fieldworker. This balance is achieved through learning how to play the music that is being studied, and thereby gaining access to an insider perspective. Hood called this 'bi-musicality' (ibid.). I have been learning North Indian classical *sitār* for fifteen years. This experience has motivated, guided, and informed my research profoundly.

My fieldwork also includes participant-observation. The learning process has facilitated close access to exponents of the tradition; my teachers are my greatest informants. In the Indian context, the relationship between teacher and student is of particular interest, having been codified over hundreds of years. It reveals values that I feel privileged to have inherited from by teachers, and which feed my research. Although I have had various teachers over the years, my two principal teachers (and informants) are Paṇḍit Kushal Das and Sougata Roy Chowdhury.

Kushal Das, affectionately known as Kushal-da ('*da*' meaning 'respected father'), is a highly regarded professional *sitār* player from Kolkata. His grandfather, Bimal Das was a well-known *esraj* player, and his father (Sri Sailebn Das) and uncle (Sri Sanatnu Das) are respected *sitārists*.[5] His *guru* is Professor Sanjoy Bandopadhyay. I received *sitār* lessons from him at his family apartment in Kolkata during 2006, 2007 and 2009, and periodically at my own home in Ireland via web-cam since that time.

[5] The *esraj* is a bowed instrument particular to Bengal in the Northeast of India.



Figure 1.1: Paṇḍit Kushal Das (Kolkata, February 2006)

Sougata Roy Chowdhury is a little younger, in his late thirties. I met him while he was on tour in Ireland in 2006. I have been learning *rāga* from him on a consistent basis ever since, in India, Ireland, France, and Italy.[6] He is a *sarod* player. His mother, Ajanta Roy Chowdhury, is a vocalist, but not in a professional capacity. His father, Sarbari Roy Chowdhury, was a famous sculptor with a deep passion for Indian classical music. He had a close friendship with some of the most esteemed masters of Indian classical music. Sougata remembers when Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, and other eminent musicians used to visit the family home. He is steeped in the tradition.[7]



Figure 1.2: (Right to Left) Sougata Roy Chowdhury (*sarod*); the author (*tānpurā*); Udit Pankhania (*tablā)* (University College Cork, Ireland, November 2010)

[6] Sougata does a European tour each year, which gives me the opportunity to spend time with him.
[7] Sougata Roy Chowdhury's first *guru* was the late Dhyanesh Khan, son of Ali Akbar Khan; his current *guru* is the *sitār* and *surbahar* player Paṇḍit Santosh Banerjee.

Contact with my teachers has been indispensable to this study, but my experience of *sitār* practice and performance has also been illuminating. Learning the music not only sheds light on the generative and cognitive structures of Indian classical improvisation, but for me, internalising the language of *rāga* and the system of improvisation is an on-going process of cultural embodiment. This active embodiment of the tradition has guided my line of enquiry into the realms of musical process and experience. Reflections on my own experiences of learning, practicing and performing *sitār*, have helped me ground spiritual ideology in musical practice.

Fieldwork considerations and representation

Fieldwork is fundamental to my research, lending essential support to the analysis of literature and the narratives of Hindustāni musicians. The enculturation process, the embodiment of tradition through learning to play the music, and academic research are all symbiotically linked in a supportive network. Helen Myers emphasises the value, to the fieldworker, of being as close as possible to the inside, while also keeping this relationship 'marginal' (1992, p.29). In her article, 'Fieldwork' (1992), ethical issues and scientific scrutiny are weighted up against the advantages of bi-musicality and participation. According to Myers, 'the successful fieldworker achieves a balance between participation and observation' (ibid., p.31). One of my challenges is to negotiate the space between myself as a Hindustāni music practitioner, and the field of inquiry as other. Interpretation is a constant companion in my research and the dialectic between emic and etic is often at play. Sometimes we can get blinded when we get too close to the subject, yet at the same time this closeness is indispensable to the study of human meaning. At worst, a fieldworker's influence can unknowingly lead to reflexive self-fulfilling conclusions. However, despite this cautionary note, I concur with Myer's central thesis that 'in fieldwork we unveil the human face of ethnomusicology' (ibid., p.21).[8]

[8] It is tempting to say that my own experience learning the *sitār* helps me steer my research closer to an insider sense of meaning, while also negating orientalist presuppositions (Said 1978). However, the closer I examine the relationship between my practice and my research, the more I realise the hermeneutic inevitability that I am the architect of truth, constructing meaning along the way. My own subjective experience is a motivator, guiding my line of inquiry, and meaning is filtered through me through a process of selection, interpretation, and representation. My enculturation process has engendered a sense of identity along with a curious religiosity that has gradually consumed me. I now often practice *sitār* in front of an image of the goddess Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of music and learning, just as my teachers do. Gestures like this put my own impartiality at grave risk, infected by

Other sources that inform this study include examples of emic representation in the form of websites, album covers, and literature. My broader fieldwork experience also adds up to essential 'source material': attending concerts, spending time with Hindustāni musicians, and absorbing myself into the culture of the tradition. Performance context, iconography, subtle mannerisms, and the manner in which musicians talk about music, all contain symbolic meaning and cultural significance. Sometimes, that which is left unsaid, is more significant than what is said. According to Geertz, cultural meaning is largely made up of 'piled-up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way' (1973, p.7). Sifting through this complex matrix of symbolic meaning is a delicate operation, and a fieldworker has to negotiate a number of considerations. These include issues of selection, interpretation, and representation, and the inter-subjective and performative aspects of fieldwork (Clifford 1986; Barz 1997, p.45).[9]

There are also language considerations, including, in my case, the use of English, and the disparity between musical experience and discourse about musical experience.[10] Nicholas Cook discusses how words can be deceptive, and can carry connotations separate from the intended meaning:[11]

> Words and images rarely, if ever, quite express what they are meant to. They distort the experiences they are meant to represent and often carry with them false or unintended meanings or they can leave out the finer shades of what was intended to be expressed. (Cook 1990, p.1)

---

romantic ideology; but my contention is that research as lived experience contains more heart and more intrinsic meaning than detached analysis.

[9] 'It has become clear that every version of an "other," wherever found, is also the construction of a "self"' (Clifford 1986, p.23).

[10] English became the official language of India in 1835 (Powers 1965, p.1) while it was under British colonial rule (this status was revoked when India gained its independence in 1947). Over time a distinctive dialect of English has developed in India. This dialect exhibits a distinctive turn of phrase and vocabulary. I have not edited or attempted to reshape interviews. This would be unrepresentative of both the experience of India and of the nuance this dialect can convey. Writer Salman Rushdie coined the phrase 'the chutneyfication of English' in reference to this dialect (Rushdie 1981; Banerjee 2002). This distinct dialect is recognised in the Oxford English Dictionary with the inclusion of another term, 'Hinglish': 'a variety of English used by speakers of Hindi' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2007). English is widely spoken in India today, especially among the middle and upper classes of society to which many Hindustāni musicians belong. Teaching foreign students and touring abroad has become a professional necessity for many Hindustāni musicians today, fostering a good command of the language. There are also a large and rapidly increasing number of publications on Indian classical music, and Indian philosophy written by Indians in English. These include Shankar (1968 and 1997); Bagchee (1998); Sharma (2006); Menon (2007) and many more.

[11] See also Seeger (1977).

These issues are exaggerated when people are using a language that is not their native tongue.[12] Adding to these concerns further, it must be considered how I may bring my own linguistic and cultural connotations to the process of interpretation, possibly misrepresenting the intended meaning through a lack of understanding of the nuance of an Indian's use of English. However, through extended fieldwork experience, and the excellent command of English exhibited by my principal informants, these issues have been reduced to a minimum.

Another issue with language is evident in this study: the difference between experience and the expressive capacity of language, a dilemma long recognised by many ethnomusicologists:

> At the heart of the problem lies a gap between the descriptive, scientific, language-encoded methods used to study music and the vivid, deeply moving, often unarticulated inner experiences we have performing or listening to it. (Rice 1994, p.3)

This challenge is amplified when language is used to express metaphysical experience, experience that may be beyond the referential constraints of linguistic process. The popular Indian philosopher, Ramakrishna (1836-1886), points to an apparent paradox. How can you verbalise that which is beyond words? How can you reason that which is beyond logic? In the context of Indian philosophical discourse, how can you speak the ineffable?

> Nothing can be said about the absolute and unconditional! No sooner do you speak of it than you define the Infinite with concepts of the finite, the Absolute with concepts of the relative, and the Unconditional with concepts of the conditional. (Ramakrishna cited in Yesudian 1976, p.55)

Written sources

Written sources include Indian philosophy, Indian musicology and relevant research in the areas of ethnomusicology and Indian musicology. I will now briefly outline some Indian philosophical and musicological sources that I refer to in this dissertation. I survey relevant contemporary research at the end of this chapter under the heading 'Related Studies: Situating My Research Within the Field'.

[12] While English is becoming increasingly widespread in India, it is not the mother tongue of most Hindustāni musicians. Prominent languages spoken by Hindustāni musicians are Hindi and Urdu, along with local languages and dialects such as Bengali, Marathi, and Gujarati.

Indian philosophy

'Philosophy' in the Indian context does not necessarily correspond to the logical, rationalist and detached positioning of 'Western philosophy'. The term '*darshana*' meaning 'to see' or 'insight' is arguably a more appropriate term in the Indian context than the term 'philosophy' (Muesse 2011; King 1999, pp.24-41; Shastri 1957 [1976], p.18). *Darshana* refers to 'a vision or sighting of the sacred' or it can refer to 'any school of Hindu philosophy' (Muesse 2011, p.197).[13]

The term 'Indian philosophy' refers to the various traditions of philosophical thought originating in the Indian subcontinent. These traditions are generally synonymous with Hindu thought and relate to *vedic* literature, the foundational texts of Hinduism.[14] However, Indian philosophy is a vast subject with many diverging interpretations and interconnecting traditions, including Hindu philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, Jain philosophy, and atheistic materialism (Sharma 2006).

Indian philosophical literature represents an enormous library of commentary, contradictory interpretations, and changing emphasis over historical time. This canon of literature includes foundational Hindu philosophical texts such as the *Upanishads* (from circa eight century B.C.E.) and the *Bhāgavad-Gitā* (circa fourth century B.C.E.), along with commentaries on these texts by countless philosophers through the centuries.[15] Influential philosophers include Shankara (eight century C.E.),

[13] The term *darshana* is also used to describe 'seeing the Divine' in specific relation to the worship of idols or *murti* (Knott 2008 [1998], p.51). In India, when referring to philosophical texts in a general sense, the term 'philosophy' is generally preferred. For this reason I adopt the term in this work. For a detailed discussion contrasting Western philosophy with Indian philosophy, see King (1999, pp.24-41).

[14] The '*vedic* literature' represents a vast canon of texts dating from the *vedic* period and beyond. The *vedic* period lasted between the fourteenth and fourth centuries B.C.E., although interpretations of the exact dates diverge. During this time, the Aryan race migrated into North India and spread their language (Sanskrit) and customs through a gradual process of interaction and synthesis with indigenous peoples. 'The Four *Vedas*' (or 'Four *Samhitas*') are considered the foundational texts of Hinduism and orthodox Indian philosophy. They are the *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. These texts are among the oldest extant literature in the world, written between the fourteenth and tenth centuries B.C.E. in Sanskrit verse. They depict the beliefs, traditions, and rituals of the Aryan people, containing hymns, *mantras* and charms relating to foundation myths, ritual sacrifice, praises to deities and sacrificial formulas. The Four *Samhitas* lay the foundation for Hinduism and Indian spiritual thought. However, the texts are not commonly read by the Indian population, other than scholars. It is the interpretations of the *Samhitas* and later *vedic* literature that find their way into the milieu of Indian thought. These texts include the *Upanishads* and the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*. The original four *Vedas* are considered a pure expression of divine reality, as explained by Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan: 'The *Vedas* do not give us theories or theologies. The hymns contain reflection of a consciousness that is in communion with metaphysical reality' (Radhakrishnan 2006 [1979], p.11). See also Sharma (2006); Demariaux (1995); and pp.106-109 in this dissertation.

[15] The dates cited for the *Upanishads* and *Bhāgavad-Gitā* come from Muesse (2011).

Ramanuja (eleventh century C.E.) and Sri Ramakrishna (nineteenth century). Contemporary Indian philosophers cited in this work include Radhakrishnan (2000), Menon (2007), Easwaran (1987 and 2007), and Sharma (2006).

The body of literature known as the *Upanishads* (lit. 'sitting near devotedly' [Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.ix]) represents the seminal philosophical authority in *vedāntic* thought. Although the literature as a whole presents diverse streams of thought, the *Upanishads* can be summed up, to some extent, in the formula '*Tat Tvam Asi*' – 'You are That' (Demariaux 1995, p.9). This is interpreted to mean that the 'individual soul' (*ātman*) and 'God' (*brahman*) are ultimately one and the same unified supreme reality. The *Bhāgavad-Gitā* or 'Song of the Lord' is more accessible, and more popular, than the abstruse metaphysics of the *Upanishads*. This popular story recalls the deity Krishna instructing the archer Arjuna on the principles of *yoga* – paths to spiritual union or liberation; and *dharma* – religious and social duty (Easwaran 2007). The *Bhāgavad-Gitā* states two important and influential concepts. First, that there is not just one way, but many ways, to spiritual liberation; each person finds his own path, according to his *dharma*. Second, anyone can attain liberation. Ordinary acts can lead to liberation if conducted with the right form of attention, which can be summed up as detachment and worship. This message has made the *Bhāgavad-Gitā* and the deity Krishna popular among Indians. This inclusive and pluralistic approach to spirituality has become a hallmark of Hinduism and Indian spiritual thought, a hallmark that is imprinted throughout this dissertation.

Indian philosophical texts inform and contextualise this work. Both Hindustāni music and Indian philosophy are said to stem from the *Vedas*. Analogous to the practice of Hindustāni music, Indian philosophy is a living tradition, consistently reinvigorated each generation, as contemporary philosophers re-interpret ancient texts and make them more relevant to modern times. I personally consider many Hindustāni musicians as belonging to the wide family of Indian philosophical traditions. To me, this is evident in both their words about music, and in the music itself. Throughout this study I present Hindustāni musicians' eloquent and often spontaneous rhetoric about music, rich in philosophical allegory. I consider whether *rāga* improvisation can be viewed as a 'sonic philosophy'. I explore how the system of *rāga* improvisation not only reflects many of the tenets of Indian philosophy, but how –

according to the narratives of Hindustāni musicians – *rāga* improvisation can function to facilitate metaphysical experience, communion with the divine, and deep philosophical realisations about the nature of being.

Indian musicology

There is an extensive and ancient tradition of indigenous Indian musicology, containing some of the earliest examples of musical literature known to man.[16] Traditional Indian musicology generally focuses on taxonomy and theory rather than performance practice or anthropological concerns.

Indian musicological literature plays a peripheral role in my research because this study focuses on the experience and conceptualisation of Hindustāni musicians. Although Indian classical musicians are aware of the body of Indian musicology, and hold it in high esteem, they are generally not knowledgeable about it, and few musicians would ever read such works. There are two principal reasons for this: Hindustāni music is essentially an oral tradition and the literature is largely superfluous to both pedagogy and practice, and there is a separation between the theory expounded in the ancient texts and the practice of present day practitioners. Musicology and practice are effectively separate disciplines in the world of Indian classical music. Despite this separation of theory and practice, some musicological texts are important in my research, notably the *Natyasastra* and the writings of V.N. Bhatkhande, two bodies of work separated by approximately two millennia.

The *Natyasastra* ('dramaturgy'), written sometime between the third century B.C.E. and the fifth century C.E., is attributed to Bharata-Muni, the sage, who may, in fact, have been several scholars. This extensive treatise concerns music, dance and drama, and is sanctified in India as the foundational text of the Indian classical arts. Such is the authority of The *Natyasastra* that it is sometimes known as the 'Fifth *Veda*' (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.322; Rangacharya 2010, opening flap).[17] The work gives

[16] The extensive literature of the *Vedas* includes the *Rig Veda*, which contains 1028 hymns, some with musical notation, known as *samvedic chant*. For an overview of traditional Indian musicology see Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]); Danielou (1980).

[17] 'The very epithet of 'Veda' [was] assumed for an advantage, to confer upon the work the prestige of sole authority' (Rangacharya 2010, p.xx). Curiously, the great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are also 'sometimes referred to as a fifth *Veda*' (Knott 2008 [1998], p.15).

us an idea of the theoretical principles of Indian classical music at that time, although most of the contents of the book are now out-dated.

The second important musicological source I draw from is the work of Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860-1936), translated in various formats, including Bhatkhande (2004 [1984]) and Avtar (2006).[18] Bhatkhande sought to reconcile ancient theory and extant practice through extensive research into ancient Sanskrit treatises, interviews with musicians, and transcriptions of compositions from all over India. His enduring legacy is a system of taxonomy and *rāga* delineation that has become the standard authority for '*rāga* theory' in modern times.

Central Themes: Dichotomy, Unity, and the Beyond Experience

In this section I introduce three central themes in this study: dichotomy, unification, and the experience of transcendence. These themes resonate with the narratives of Hindustāni musicians, Indian philosophy, the culture of Hindustāni music, Indian classical music theory, and to my enculturation process. In order to contextualise these central themes within the broader context of India, and within my fieldwork, I begin with the story of my first direct experience of Indian culture.

My enculturation process: first encounters

It is perhaps a cliché among ethnographers and travel-writers alike to describe their very first encounter with another culture through immediate impressions expressed in diary reflections. My own documentation of my first encounter with India is a valuable resource for me, as it recalls, with undiluted immediacy, my very first step in a long, and gradual process of enculturation. My first taxi journey from Delhi airport into the city was such a profoundly arresting experience that my recollections today are still fresh and vivid, some fifteen years later:

> My very first time on an Indian road in October 1998, sitting in the back of a taxi from Delhi International Airport was unforgettable. The scene was a myriad of cows, colours, beeping horns, bicycles, smells, dust, and fascinating people. On either side of the road there was a wide footpath where tiny shacks and tents of sticks, plastic sheeting and corrugated iron were crammed. Many of the residents looked remarkably

[18] See also Jhairazbhoy (2011 [1971]) and Bakhle (2005).

> clean and dignified, surrounded by filth. Beside them pigs were waddling in mud and wild dogs scavenged for food. Behind the footpath were fancy hotels and grand, spacious parks. Bright vibrant colours were everywhere against the dirty, dusty backdrop. Our driver's accomplice on the front passenger seat – turned around to face us – was talking to us non-stop through blackened teeth in broken English trying to bring us somewhere we didn't want to go, and somehow succeeding. When we stopped in traffic, child beggars in rags would come to the car pretending to sob into our faces. Strange scenes waited around every corner. It was a case of sensory overload, an overwhelming feeling of an inability to take everything in. Chaos and paradox were everywhere. (O'Brien 1998, diary entry)

I can still remember the scene today. The air was dry and dusty, permeated by an unfamiliar smell. On the side of the road children with gleaming school uniforms stepped out of a shack made from sticks and plastic sheeting; behind them stood a four-star hotel. Eight people were crammed into a bicycle rickshaw. A man was walking bare foot pulling a cart with a ten-foot tall pile of sacks; I could see what was in the sacks but could not work out what the strange substance was. The traffic moved differently, weaving around in a frantic noisy rush to get ahead rather than sticking to straight lines. There was a constant beeping of horns with unfamiliar sounds, some shrill, some deep, and some simply comical; I could not work out why they kept beeping. There was a sense of frantic movement, perpetuated by bustling noisy traffic, and by the front seat passenger's incessant and incomprehensible rant throughout the journey. In contrast to this, I was at times perplexed by the sight of someone fast asleep in perfect stillness, sprawled out on the footpath right beside the busy motorway, or an occasional cow casually standing in the middle of the road, eating a pile of paper, apparently undisturbed by the hectic traffic surrounding him. Birds of prey hovered overhead. Everything looked, smelled, and sounded otherworldly.

I clearly remember the disorientating bewilderment of being confronted with what appeared to be the interaction and co-existence of contradictory phenomena and oppositional imagery, which I perceived as 'paradox'. These apparent dichotomies included: dirt and cleanliness; poverty and wealth; grayness and vivid colours; spaciousness and congestion; stillness and movement; and antiquity and modernity, all co-existing side by side. I remember experiencing an inability to take everything in at once, it felt like sensory overload and perceptual chaos, built partly from the frenetic nature of the scene, and partly from the fact that so much of what I perceived was alien to me.

That first taxi journey in Delhi was one of the most remarkable experiences of my life, when the initial impact of India was raw, immediate and direct. I have a strong memory of perceiving this experience as an assault on my cultural norms and sensibilities. The impact of my encounter with Indian street life has dissipated over the years as a result of my gradual enculturation process and through the normalisation of such experience into my perceptual reality. Somehow I am no longer as struck by the dichotomies in front of me. They have normalised in my world. Some of the 'paradoxes' were only 'apparent paradoxes' due to my preconditioned Western experience; through enculturation into India, I have resolved them in some sense. I still perceive India as a land of dichotomy and diversity, but also as a culture that is unified and coherent. Although there is immense diversity, even contradiction, there is also a quintessential and unifying 'Indian-ness' to my comprehension of the land, culture and music.

It is apparent to me that my process of enculturation into India has come largely through the gradual resolution of 'apparent' paradox or dichotomy, and the assimilation of diverse elements that initially appeared disjointed or chaotic. This same process of resolution and assimilation extends to my experience of learning Indian classical *sitār*, entering into the world of *rāga* improvisation, and understanding the theory and culture of Hindustāni music. The themes of resolving or mediating apparent dichotomy, and assimilating diversity and multiplicity into a coherent whole, also inform my research model. These themes do not only reflect my own experiences, but have surfaced throughout my research in a number of ways.

Dichotomy

The process of forming an understanding through mediating apparent dichotomy is central to this study.[19] Through highlighting dichotomy, or 'apparent dichotomy', the functional dynamics of this complex music culture are clearer and easier to perceive; ideological concerns and pragmatic realities are polarized and easier to decipher. In this study I explore the dynamic relationship between avocation and professionalism,

[19] The paradigm of uncovering meaning through viewing opposite relations is an age-old methodology shared between a number of theoretical models: *vedāntic* philosophy (Easwaran 2009), structuralism (Stone 2008), dialectics (ibid.), and Hegelian philosophy (where a 'thesis' is explored through locating an 'antithesis', and a mediating 'synthesis' is found) (Fieser and Dowden 2013).

cognition and meditative absorption, devotion and entertainment, ideology and pragmatism, and discipline and freedom.

A number of scholars have commented on a sense of dichotomy in the culture of Indian music, and have used this to frame their discussions. For example, Schippers (2007) explores the following dichotomies in relation to pedagogy: 'written-aural' (p.127); 'analytical-holistic' (p.128); 'tangible-intangible' (p.129); 'static tradition-constant flux' (p.131). Ruckert (2004) also frames elements of his writing through dichotomy: 'fixed composition and improvisation – preservation and creation' (p.7), and 'the old and the new in an ancient land' (p.11). Neuman suggests that a sense of 'ambivalence' can be found in Indian culture in general, and in the culture of Hindustāni music:

> The bipolar traditions of music as a way for and a way of life… continue a fundamental ambivalence in the meaning of musicianship which I would suggest mirrors all facets of Indian culture; an ambivalence, I should add, which is in itself not there interpreted as a contradiction or a paradox but rather as a natural reality of being. (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.221)

On his website, *sarod* player Amjad Ali Khan, alludes to a paradigm that is central to this study, reconfigured in different contexts throughout the dissertation: 'the meaning of Indian classical music is freedom within discipline' (Amjad Ali Khan 2013). The apparent dichotomy between discipline and freedom represents a functional pair, where 'freedom' is found through strict discipline.

According to Hindu philosophical thought, there is a mystical dimension in parallel with the mundane, or a hidden divine essence within all being. This is reflected in the conceptualisation and representation of Hindustāni music, where there is a constant interplay between the profane and the divine. In this work I consider the dynamics of this interplay. At times the divine is said to be revealed through the profane, and spiritual 'freedom' or 'liberation' is experienced through disciple and the confines of a complex musical system. Another perspective I explore is how the 'profane' may be elevated to 'spiritual' in status through idealised representation and emic conceptualisation.

The principle of unity

Unity is an important theme in my research, and a core principle in Hindu philosophy. [20] The primary concern in *vedāntic* philosophy (the dominant philosophical school in India) and *bhakti* (popular Hindu devotional practice) is the search for an ultimate state of unification: 'A state of mystical union in which every distinction, all duality between the subject and object, is abolished' (Demariaux 1995, p.29). The dominant schools of Indian philosophy today – *yoga* and *Advaita-Vedānta* – have at their heart, a principle of unification with the divine through an experiential realisation of the identification of the 'true self' and God as being one and the same:

> The self to be realised beyond the ego in Indian Yoga is the *Atman*. Find the *Atman*, which is pure consciousness, through Yogic practice, and you find that individual being and Cosmic being … are one. This realised union is called Yoga – the word comes from roots meaning 'union'. (Hewitt 1995, p.3)

According to the principles of *yoga*, unification can be experienced through any number of paths. *Nāda yoga*, the '*yoga* of sound' is one such path (Bryant 2009 [2003]; Easwaran 2007; Beck 2008 [1993]).

The ideal of unity is a recurring theme within the narratives of Hindustāni musicians. Unity is expressed as a spiritual ideal by a number of practitioners in relation to the function of Hindustāni music. Musicians speak about experiences of divine communion with *rāga*, with a deity, and between musicians and audiences, through the medium of *rāga* improvisation. The principle of unification can also be seen in aspects of music theory and practice. For example, '*sa*' is the fundamental tonic in Indian classical music. All *rāgas* begin and end on *sa*. *Sa* is the consistent reference point – intoned throughout a recital through drone – to which all other notes relate. '*Sa*' encapsulates the concept of unity in sound. Taking my lead from musicians such as Ali Akbar Khan (see Chapter 3), I use *sa* as a metaphor for the Indian philosophical ideal of pervading essence, divine communion, and the ultimate point of unified resolution.

[20] Knott (2008); Easwaran (2009).

***Kyabat!* 'There is no word!'**

Another thread that runs through this work is the idea that *rāga* improvisation can become a vehicle to transcendental experience, to an experience of the 'intangible' or 'unconditional', considered 'spiritual' to the Indian philosophical mind. There is a phrase often exclaimed spontaneously by an enthusiastic audience member or accompanist during key moments of subtle beauty in a performance of Indian classical music – '*kyabat!*' (often accompanied by a subtle gesture of a raised hand or a lateral nod of the head). '*Kyabat!*' can be translated as 'there is no word!' or 'this is so beautiful because it is indefinable, beyond words!'[21] The phrase exclaims that the experience is indefinable, and somehow beautiful because of this very indefinability. This phrase is an expression of the ideal that music can elevate you to an experience beyond reference and beyond analysis. Such an experience holds ontological priority in the Indian philosophical mind.

For example, in a popular verse in the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*, the 'true self' or 'soul' is depicted as an infinite, transcendental reality: 'Everlasting and infinite, standing on the motionless foundations of eternity. The Self is unmanifested, beyond all thought, beyond all change' (*Bhāgavad-Gitā* 2.24-25, translated in Easwaran 2007, p.91). Swami Bodhananda (Chairman and Spiritual Director of the Sambodh Foundation, India) is a respected Indian philosopher and *vedāntic* scholar. He posits a central dilemma in the world of human knowledge: 'consciousness is so close to human experience, but so far from human understanding' (Bodhananda in Menon 2007, p.xii). Perhaps in a similar fashion, intimate musical experience can never be fully understood beyond the experiential moment.

The exclamation '*kyabat!*' eloquently sums up a dilemma central to this study – the inherent difficulty of using language to describe ineffable experience. In Indian philosophy, 'truth' is often expressed either through paradoxical statements, or through negation, illustrating how 'absolute truth' or 'God' is beyond reference and beyond analysis:

> Soundless, formless, intangible, undying... without beginning, without end, eternal, immutable, beyond nature… the uncaused cause… the end of the journey, the supreme goal. (Katha Upanishad, translated in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.10)

[21] I am indebted to Sougata Roy Chowdhury for these translations (personal correspondence 2009).

I explore in this study how Indian classical music is emically conceptualised as a bridge to this supreme goal, built through ephemeral glimpses into a divine transcendental space.

Related Studies: Situating My Research Within the Field

This study is informed by, and contributes to, a body of scholarship in the areas of Indian classical music, ethnomusicology and philosophy. This section offers a brief overview of this scholarship, and locates my research in the broader field of related studies.

Seminal studies on Hindustāni music

A number of seminal studies stand out in the vast canon of scholarship relating to North Indian classical music, encompassing historical, musicological and anthropological concerns. Historical research includes Rowell (1992), Widdess (1995), Wade (1998), Bakhle (2005) and Mukherji (2006); notable musicological studies include Jairazbhoy (1980) and Bagchee (1998); influential anthropological investigations include Neuman (1980) and Kippen (1988); while Junius (1974), Slawek (1987) and Miner (1993) have successfully focused on individual instruments. Farrell (1997) and Lavezzoli (2007) considered the complex relationship between Indian music and the West, and successful collaborative studies between Western scholars and Indian musicians include Sorrell and Narayan (1980) with their elaboration on performance practice, and Khan and Ruckert (1998), providing a textbook on Hindustāni music based on repertoire of the *Maihar Gharana*, as taught by Ali Akbar Khan. General introductions to Indian classical music include Shankar (1969), Wade (1979) and Ruckert (2004). Related studies include Qureshi (1986) who has provided valuable research into Sufi music and Racy (2003) on Persian music.

Scholarship relating Hindustāni music to spirituality

A common paradigm within both Western ethnomusicological literature and Indian musicology is that the reader is left with a sense that the subjects of Indian classical music and ‘spirituality’ are closely linked, but little attempt is made to clarify this relationship. Spirituality is alluded to, but not explained. When the subject is investigated in greater depth, it can be explored through any one of a number of

perspectives including history, mythology, religion, philosophy, musicology, and experience. This profusion of different perspectives reflects the plurality of expression on the subject found in the narratives of Hindustāni musicians. The literature relating Hindustāni music to spirituality thus presents a wide and complex web of thought.

Historically oriented perspectives

Bonnie Wade's *Music in India: The Classical Traditions* (2004 [1979]) is an excellent, comprehensive introduction to the classical music traditions of both North and South India, aimed at the 'uninitiated Westerner' (p.xiii). Its broad scope covers the subjects of instrumentation, aesthetics, theory, and performance context. Wade takes a historical perspective to the subject of spirituality, writing about the special status music was given in ancient Indian culture. It was considered a creation of 'divine agency' and a path to 'self-realisation':

> Music was viewed as a creation of divine agency… the ultimate synthesis of intuition and expression, and it was given the status of *Adhyatma Vidya*, a pathway to self-realisation. (Wade 2004 [1979], p.13)

Placing the subject of spirituality in a historic context is typical of much of the literature (Danielou 1980; Rowell 1992; Widdess 1995; Wade 1998). My dissertation is not an historical study. Rather it seeks to investigate the conceptualisation and experience of Hindustāni musicians in relation to the subject of spirituality, with respect to practitioners in the current era. However contemporary exponents of the tradition often contextualise their views on spirituality in relation to the past. The roots of the tradition, spiritual heritage, religious influences, and nostalgia permeate their views on the subject. Therefore, historical context is relevant to my concerns.

In this respect, Rowell's account of historic concepts in early Indian music is a valuable resource (1992). His is a detailed study of music in India from *vedic* times to the thirteenth century C.E. Rather than being structured chronologically, it is divided into the following themes: thought, sound, chant, theatre, musical scholarship, pitch, time, form, song and style. Rowell positions Indian music within the broader philosophical, cosmological, and scientific culture of the time. Like many scholars of early Indian music, he includes material translated from the original Sanskrit literature, but unlike many such scholars he contextualises this material within the

music and culture through finding points of intersection between philosophy, theory and aesthetics.

Anthropological approaches

In line with trends in ethnography, many Western scholars in recent times have adopted an anthropological approach to their research on Indian music, including Kippen, Neuman, Slawek, Hamilton, and Clayton. Their methods include 'bi-musicality' (Hood 1960) and participant-observation. Learning music in a traditional context, through sustained and intimate contact with the culture, opens a window into emic conceptualisation and cultural process. This is an approach resonant with my research.

A successful study in this regard is *The Tabla of Lucknow* by James Kippen (1988). Kippen portrays a lucid picture of the living tradition of *tablā* playing in Lucknow, incorporating history, music culture, society, pedagogy, and repertoire. The book mediates between the technical and the humanistic, and between the historical and the cultural. Through direct experience of intensive *tablā* training, Kippen elucidates valuable insight into the nature of the traditional learning process and the relationship between *guru* and disciple.[22]

Daniel Neuman's *The Life of Music in North India* (1980) is also rooted in social anthropology. He gained intimate access inside a Muslim *gharana* in Delhi, through learning *sarangi*. Neuman wrote about spirituality in terms of mythology, and the supernatural powers attributed to *rāga* performance by so-called 'saintly musicians' of the past. He contends that these stories illustrate belief systems regarding the potential 'spiritual power' of Indian classical music. He notes how this 'spiritual power' is almost always spoken about in historical terms, pointing to how present day musicians represent their culture with a proud nostalgia for the past. Neuman portrays how practitioners represent the tradition in an idealised fashion, highlighting an apparent disparity between the way music is spoken about by musicians and what musicians actually do in their day-to-day lives. He points out how Indian classical

[22] We will see later in this present study how the *guru-disciple* relationship is seen as fundamental to the transmission of spiritual values associated with Hindustāni music.

musicians commonly express the idea that music is a form of devotion, while he sees no direct use of the music in that context:

> No musician with whom I have talked utilizes music regularly as a form of devotion…. Almost without exception, they put a premium on the devotional aspects of music. (Neuman 1980, p.61)

This apparent disparity may come from a lack of understanding on the part of author into the meaning of 'devotion' in the Indian context. What Neuman perhaps fails to ask is what 'music… as a form of devotion' actually means for a Hindustāni musician, a question I address in this study.

Stephen Slawek has made a valuable contribution to Indian music scholarship with an approach that is relevant to my concerns, incorporating native conceptualisation as central to his investigation. Slawek is a highly regarded *sitār* player and his engagement with the tradition through the learning process and through close proximity with exponents of the tradition has led to insightful research, and reflects my own journey. He is one of the few musicologists to attempt to come to an understanding of the experience of performance for a Hindustāni musician. He looked at the mechanics behind the ability to sustain flow and interest in an extended *rāga* presentation. He mentions one essential component in the performance of *rāga* as the ability to be free of inhibitions, enabling an effortless flow of creativity. These inhibitions can be various: in an ideal situation the performer has ample technique on his instrument in order to have expressive freedom; is not overly anxious regarding the audience he is playing in front of; his accompanist is sensitive and skilled; there is a good sound system in place; and the performance environment is appropriate. According to Slawek, performance under these ideal conditions can lead to a shift in consciousness:

> When the performer is free of all inhibitions, an ecstatic state of effortless creativity ensues. It is here that some common ground may be found underlying both improvisational performance and ritual, in that both processes can lead to altered states of consciousness. (Slawek 1998, p.338)

Slawek suggests that this effortlessness can be cathartic and spiritual in nature. He mentions Ravi Shankar's account of losing physical awareness of his *sitār* strings during peaks of improvisational creativity, and suggests that at moments such as this

'the act of creating music is more of a release of inner energy than an activity requiring conscious effort' (ibid., p.339). Slawek highlights elements of performance in this discussion and relates them to spirituality, focusing on virtuosic displays of extended *tans* and rapid accelerating tempo.[23]

Sacred music studies

Much of the scholarship concerning spirituality and Indian music focuses on musical genres that are more explicitly religious and devotional than Hindustāni music. A few scholars have posited links between these idioms and Indian classical music.

Stephen Slawek carried out an extensive study of *kirtan* in Benaras (1986).[24] His research attempts to understand the meaning of the music for the participants and how it relates to their belief systems. His methodology involves contextualising the musical event through its social organisation, musical style, and conceptual and cultural significance. He looks at musical phenomena through a functionalist lens and interprets cultural meaning from the data.

Meilu Ho (2006) also explores *kirtan*. She proposes that the classical *rāga* tradition was derived from Hindu temple music. She successfully outlines strong stylistic, structural, textual, temporal, and compositional comparisons between one tradition of *kirtan* (the *Pusti Marg* in Braj, North India) and North Indian classical vocal music. Ho maps out the spiritual theology of *kirtan* practice. Through repeated experience of ritualised emotive states (*bhava*), the apparent separation between the divine and the mundane become transcended and the practitioner attains divine bliss in this world:

> Over time, the divide becomes progressively permeable, to the point when one eventually and ultimately crosses over into the world of the divine – while remaining physically in this world. At this point, one is said to exist in a state of liberation within this world. (p.173)

Guy Beck's scholarly contributions (1993) and (2006) are excellent resources for the study of Hinduism and sacred sound. Drawing on ancient philosophical texts, with references to archaic practices, Beck relates Hindu *vedāntic* philosophy to various

[23] *Tans* are fast melodic passages, characteristic of the dominant *khyāl* style of Hindustāni music.
[24] *Kirtan* is a devotional song form prevalent throughout North India. *Kirtan* has Hindu origins and is generally practised at communal gatherings in Hindu temples.

genres of Indian music. He only touches on Indian classical music briefly, outlining the devotional texts recited in *dhrupad* and recounting the lives of some of the authors of these texts. Beck corroborates Ho's conclusions by remarking on the close relationship between devotional song in praise of Krishna and *dhrupad*.

Wolfgang Stefani (1993) explores the relationship between religio-philosophic worldview and sacred music style in a far-reaching study of sacred music. Stefani's research is both inter-disciplinary and intercultural, drawing on ethnomusicology, philosophy, sociology, theology, and religious studies. His primary focus is on Christian sacred music but Islamic, Hindu, and Central African sacred music are also explored in some detail. He locates a common polarity in religio-philosophical worldview, the co-existence of concepts of divine immanence and divine transcendence. His discussion centres on an exploration of how this polarity is manifested as a stylistic pluralism in sacred music. He views immanence/transcendence as a paradox, which is sustained through dynamic tension between the two poles. In the context of Indian classical music, Stefani considers aspects of *rāga* performance as a reflection of 'unity in diversity', an overarching principle in Hindu spiritual thought. He sees the use of the drone as a unifying factor: 'that primal or fundamental note that acts as a centre of unification in relation to which all other notes are projected' (p.128). While Stefani is clearly an authority on Christian theology, his discussions in relation to Indian music and philosophy are limited. However, his correlation between musical style and spiritual concepts of immanence/transcendence are particularly appropriate to the Indian context, and deserve further attention.

Other research

Other scholarship touching on the area of spirituality and Hindustāni music illustrates the wide breath of perspectives that can be applied to the subject. Martin Clayton (2000) suggests that there is a relationship between the cyclical nature of rhythm cycles in Indian classical music and the cyclical nature of time in Indian cosmology. Peter Lavezzoli (2007) asks whether Indian classical music is a vehicle for world peace. Widdess (1994, pp.92-95) provides valuable research into the ideology of *dhrupad*. Through interviewing prominent musicians of the idiom, he finds consensus in the idea that *dhrupad* is primarily presented for God and not for the entertainment

of an audience. The terms *sādhanā* and *upasana* are used by musicians to describe the objective of *dhrupad*. Widdess offers the translations 'worship' and 'praise' for these terms (p.93). It is curious to note that the musicians he interviewed were Muslim while these terms come from the Hindu tradition. Ruckert (2004) also includes anecdotes from musicians to ground his work in native conceptualisation. He relates Indian philosophy to Hindustāni music by outlining some of the main Hindu concepts relating to the sound and function of music. Corroborating Widdess's research into Muslim *dhrupad* musicians, he points out how these philosophical concepts are not disputed by musicians of other faiths.

Clarke and Kini (2011) explore the relationship between *dhrupad ālāp* and consciousness. Their valuable contribution marries narratives of Indian musicians, Hindu philosophy, and consciousness studies. They conclude that Indian classical music 'both emanates from and is able to instil deep states of consciousness, and that it is discursively grounded in ideas about consciousness consistent… with concepts from longstanding Indian philosophical traditions' (p.138).

Ravi Shankar was undoubtedly the best-known Indian classical musician on a global scale. He was both an innovator and an upholder of traditional values, with a far-reaching legacy. Value systems attached to Indian classical music are strikingly expressed through his writing, two autobiographies (1968) and (1997). His vivid accounts of a fascinating life paint an intimate portrait of being an Indian classical musician.[25] A scholar whose work is particularly resonant with my own is Peggy Holroyde. Holroyde (1972) posits connections between the theory and practice of Indian classical music and the tenets of Indian philosophy. Although valuable, her work can be critiqued on a number of fronts. She presents an ideological stance, with poetic romanticised writing, and a lack of objective distantiation. At times, it is clear that Holroyde was not a musician and her work could have benefited from a better grasp of the processes of *rāga* improvisation. However, I draw from her insightful work, and combine it with a deeper practical and theoretical understanding of Hindustāni music.

[25] It must be noted that Shankar's life was not typical in any way. He spent much of his youth in Paris as a dancer, and lived in California for the latter part of his life. It is perhaps his long engagement with the West that helped him communicate so effectively as a cultural ambassador of Hindustāni music. More than any other Indian musician he has cultivated widespread global interest in the tradition.

Relevance to Contemporary Research: Embracing Subjective Experience

This study also draws from, and compliments, contemporary research in the areas of ethnography and practice theory. I suggest that aspects of Indian philosophical thought, and the paradigms suggested by Hindustāni musicians, can be fruitfully applied to address some pertinent concerns of contemporary research. This study places the subjective experiences and rhetoric of Hindustāni musicians as central to the research. This invites an epistemological and ontological positioning that embraces a privileging of subjectivity over objective distantiation. From an experiential perspective, musical practice can have a unique and ineffable quality, a particular quality of being and knowing that transcends analysis. Communicating this meaning through the idiom of the academic form of expression in a challenge. This section looks at my negotiation between subjective experience and the objectivist agenda of the academic model.

Some ethnomusicology and arts practice research highlight apparent disparities between the kind of knowing experienced through artistic practice and the kind of knowing achieved through the medium of scholarship (Titon 1997; Quaye 2007; Chang 2008; Melrose 2011). The kind of knowing inherent to musical practice may be referred to as ‘lived experience’, or a particular ‘way of being’. For example, Titon suggests that ‘musical being is a special ontology’ (Titon 1997, p.94). If we follow the phenomenological model, musical knowing is a special epistemology, knowledge grounded in being and lived experience (Gallagher and Zahavi 2007).

The rigor of academic ‘objective’ scholarship can be privileged in the Academy. Although there is a growing desire in the humanities to honour subjective experience, and legitimise arts practice on a par with academia, Timothy Rice points out that there is a continual insistence ‘on objective methods to validate our understanding of subjective reality’ (Rice 1997, p.114). For an ethnographer, the act of analysis ultimately perpetuates a distance from subjective experience and the very ways of knowing and being that are studied. The process of representation extends this distance further. I have attempted to minimise these inevitable issues through privileging the voices of practitioners, and through representing and honouring their

conceptualisation and direct experience. Also, at times, I present my own subjective experience of the practice of Hindustāni music.

Indian philosophy

These concerns are mirrored in central themes of Indian philosophy, but framed in a different way. Indian philosophy recognises our constant interpretation of the world around us as central to the human condition, but views this perception as essentially illusionary (‘*maya*’ ‘illusion; appearance, as contrasted with Reality’ [Easwaran 2007, p.283]). According to this view, ‘true being’ is a state that can only be experienced to be understood, and ‘true knowing’ is beyond analytical reference. Some Western thinkers like Recoeur suggest that ‘absolute knowledge is impossible’ (quoted in Rice 1997, p.116). Indian philosophy claims that absolute knowledge is possible, but is experiential in nature; it is a transcendental reality, an experience of pure consciousness, absolute being and absolute knowing (Easwaran 2009; Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002).

Contemporary Indian philosophy centres on the nature of consciousness and the relationship between the individual and the cosmos (Sharma 2006; Menon 2007). According to some schools of Indian philosophy, the only knowable ‘truth’ is the experience ‘I am’, the fact of our conscious inner witness (or ‘Self’) (Maharaj 1973). Swami Bodhananda eloquently outlines the Indian philosophical position, advocating the primacy of consciousness and subjective experience:

> I come from a tradition where ‘consciousness’ is considered central to any form of study. The heart of that worldview is the subject-object dynamics. The objective world depends on subjective experiences of the self-conscious individual. According to this worldview no study can be complete without factoring the subject in the study. (Bodhananda in Menon 2007, p.xi)

Bodhananda states that subjective experience is a window to consciousness and needs to be recognised and validated in the field of science, rather than being disregarded as non-empirical: ‘A knowledge that subsumes the knower in a higher experience of ecstasy is dismissed as subjective and therefore irrelevant’ (ibid., p.xii).

In this work, I attempt to present the interpretive stances of Hindustāni musicians in relation to subjective musical experience. I contextualise their narratives within the theory, practice and culture of Hindustāni music, and within the wider milieu of Indian philosophical thought. Many of the subjects elaborated on by Hindustāni musicians overlap and interweave. A central challenge for me has been to structure the work in a way that is both appropriate to the experience of musicians, and clear for the reader.

Experiential writing

Recent trends in ethnography and arts practice research embrace subject experience and process as central to meaningful inquiry. New modes of expression have been generated to accommodate and represent this approach, including: new writing genres (Quaye 2007); autoethnography and personal narrative (Chang 2008; Bartleet 2009); and alternative writing registers (Herbst 1997). In a modest way, I follow this trend here. At times I utilize an alternative writing register to reflect and evoke the raw immediacy of my own direct experience. Some of this writing comes from diary reflections and field notes. Other writing arises directly out of practice, expressed in the form of self-reflexive dialogue. I present some of this writing in a different font in order to emphasize the fact that it is coming from a personal experiential narrative. Through this re‘present’ation, I aim to invoke the ‘present’ moment and ‘presence’ of my experience within the reader. However, this auto-ethnographic approach is only one minor strand of my research, as my primary sources – the narratives of Hindustāni musicians – are so rich both quantitatively and qualitatively.

CHAPTER 2

THE QUESTION OF RELIGION AND THE CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF SPIRITUAL IDEOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss Hindustāni music in terms of its relationship to religion, the construction of spiritual ideology and idealised representation. I first contextualise the tradition historically in terms of religious influence, pointing to how Hindustāni music emerged as a Hindu-Islamic cultural synthesis. I then consider the relationship between religion and Hindustāni music today. Despite an evident religiosity in the culture of Hindustani music today, musicians in the current era generally consider their practice to be 'spiritual', and not 'religious'. However, their conceptualisation of spirituality in music is expressed through a broadly 'Hindu' or *vedantic* philosophical worldview. I consider this conceptualisation in terms of an 'Indian worldview' (Hamilton 2001, p.10) or what James Hamilton describes as 'the Indian mode of perception' (Hamilton 1989, p.xxiii). I then present recent scholarship that suggests how the dominance of Hindu spiritual ideology in the culture of Hindustāni music today may have been constructed, and to some extent invented, during the nationalist movement and the twentieth century renaissance of Indian classical music. The negotiation of identity, authority and authenticity led to a resurgence (and some scholars suggest an 'invention') of a Hindu oriented perspective on Indian classical music as cultural heritage. This Hindu ideological position remains evident in the representation and discursive culture of Hindustāni music today. Finally I explore idealised representation within the culture of Hindustāni music. This representation comes in the form of artist's websites, Indian literature and Indian musicology.

The ideal function of Hindustāni music is often stated as spiritual by its practitioners. For example Hindustāni vocalist and author Sheila Dhar states that:

> Ideally, the Indian musician sets out to experience the infinite and to share his striving with the listener. The traditional goal of all spiritual seeking in India has been to identify with and merge into the vastness of the eternal being. (Dhar 1992, p.17)

Vocalist and scholar Professor Sunil Bose said 'the nearest approach to God is through music' (Bose 1990, p.19). Kishmori Amonkar suggests that one can reach God through voice, rhythm (*taal*), or melody. 'You can reach God through words, you can reach him through taal, You can reach Him through notes' (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.125). My intention in this chapter is to shed some light on the questions: Where do these ideas come from? How are they represented in the tradition?

The Question of Religion

A huge variety of different religions and cultures co-exist in the sub-continent of India. The region of North India – the home of Hindustāni music – is particularly rich in religious diversity. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, and others share this land. In this section, I view the relationship between religion and Hindustāni music. I first consider the influence religion has had on Hindustāni music in an historical sense, I then discuss the relationship between religion and Hindustāni music today. Many of the subjects I touch on here will be detailed in other chapters in specific relation to more pertinent concerns as they arise.[1]

Indian classical music has been under a recurring process of evolution throughout its long and colourful history. North Indian classical music today is the culmination of various waves of influence over a period of over two thousand years. These influences include different religious practices and beliefs. Hindustāni music in its present form evolved largely as a synthesis of indigenous folk and classical traditions, 'Hindu' devotional music, and Islamic music (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], pp.317-331).

The historical and religious context of ancient and early Indian music

Little is known about Indian music in the ancient period, except for what has been passed down through the *Vedas*. The liturgical chant of the *vedic* period (circa 1400-400 B.C.E.), known as *samvedic chant* was recited for devotional and ceremonial purposes in the ancient religious practices of the Aryans. Modern day Hinduism has roots in this period, and both Hindustāni musicians and scholars trace the origins of

[1] For a discussion on the origins of Hindustāni music see Chapter 5 'The Origins of *Rāga*'; see also Rowell (1992); Prajnanananda (1997 [1963]); Wade (1998).

Hindustāni music to *samvedic chant* (Shankar 2007 [1968]; Widdess 1981; Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], pp.319-320).[2]

The extensive canon of Indian musicology portrays a highly evolved system of Indian classical music after the *vedic* period.[3] Seminal works include the *Natyasastra* by Bharata (Third century B.C.E. - fifth century C.E.), the *Brihaddeshi* by Matanga (ninth century C.E.), and the *Sangitaratnakara* by Sarangadev (thirteenth century C.E.).[4] This early classical music functioned as devotional music in the temples and ashrams of ancient India. The *Natyasastra* also points to how music was used in the context of theatrical performances. The great epics, the *Mahābhārata* (composed circa 400 B.C.E. - 400 C.E), and the *Ramayana* (circa 200 B.C.E. - 200 C.E.), have been recited orally and staged as dramas alongside music from very early times (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998), p.320). Stories from these epics and the multiple deities they portray are still present in the texts of Indian classical vocal music today.

During the period 500 B.C.E. to 300 C.E., Buddhism and Jainism were the dominant religions in India. There is little evidence that these religions had any significant impact on the foundations of Hindustāni music. During the 'Hindu Period' or 'The Golden Age of Sanskrit' (300 - 1300 C.E.) (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.322), Indian music was thought to have had a predominantly 'Hindu' sacred dimension.[5] Referred to as '*gandharva* and *margi sangeeta*' (Deva 1992 [1973], p.81), this was 'a kind of sacred music, Lord Siva being the subject'. Despite the lasting legacy and imprint the ancient and early period has had on Hindustāni music, Indian music in the thirteenth century was very different from the classical forms we hear today.

[2] See pp.106-109 in this dissertation.
[3] A system of *jatis* (melodic modes) based on two principal heptatonic scales (*gramas*); the concept of *shrutis* (microtonal intervals); the classification of instruments; and theory based on different moods, all stem from early Indian music theory. See Jhairazbhoy (2011 [1971], p.16); Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], pp.321-323); Rowell (1992); Prajnanananda (1997 [1963]).
[4] See Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]) and Danielou (1980) for an account of ancient Indian musicological treatises.
[5] The term 'Hindu' is of recent origin. 'Hinduism is a label that was attached in the 19th century to a highly complex and multiple collection of systems of thought by…. Westerners who did not appreciate that complexity' (Hamilton 2001, p.8). However in time the term 'Hinduism' was adopted indigenously to refer to a wide range of beliefs and practices that principally stem from *vedic* times.

The wave of Islamic influence

A substantial influx of Islamic music and culture into India began in the eleventh century C.E. as waves of Afghan, Turki, Persian and Central Asian peoples invaded the North of the subcontinent. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a small, predominantly Muslim ruling class governed a mixed population of Hindus and Muslim converts. They established lavish courts and ruled over huge areas of North India. These courts placed great importance on music. Having a large number of court musicians was considered prestigious, and many Muslim rulers became great patrons of the arts, sometimes training in music themselves. Muhammad bin Tughluq, sultan of Delhi (1325-1351), is said to have kept 1,200 musicians in his service along with 1,000 slave musicians (Jairazbhoy 2011 [1971], p.17). It is thought that music flourished during this time. The court environment was conducive to the development of a highly evolved art form where Indian musicians and Persian musicians could be heard side-by-side. The final substantial wave of Muslims entering India was in the sixteenth century when the Mughals invaded and successfully united almost all of North India under a vast empire. North Indian classical music was now under the generous patronage of the new rulers. This was a period of relative peace and prosperity where musicians could concentrate on their music as a full time occupation.

Hindustāni music: a Hindu-Muslim synthesis

Hindustāni music as we know it today, emerged largely out of these Muslim courts, evolving out of a Hindu-Islamic cultural, artistic and political integration. Daniel Neuman (1985) examines the complex relationship between Hinduism, Islam and Indian classical music, and points out the intrinsically oppositional nature of these socio-religious worldviews:

> Some of the obvious differences, polytheism/monotheism; hierarchism/egalitarianism; iconic elaboration/prohibition; cremation/burial… merely adumbrate a catalogue of innumerable others…. The problematic generally stated is how such cultural integration was accomplished despite the multiplicity of oppositions, (and concomitant contradictions?). (Neuman 1985, p.98)

Despite these apparent oppositions, Hindustāni music is a testament to an effective cultural integration. The oldest extant style of Hindustāni music is *dhrupad* (literally ‘fixed word’), which is said to have evolved in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth

centuries. *Dhrupad* reached the height of its popularity in the sixteenth century, but remains a highly esteemed form of Hindustāni music today.[6]

The dominant vocal form of Hindustāni music today is *khyāl*. *Khyāl* became established in its current form by the eighteenth century and is widely considered to have evolved out of a blend of *dhrupad* and *qawwālī*.[7] This synthesis of *dhrupad* and *qawwālī* is significant. *Dhrupad* is considered to embody ancient Hindu devotional musical forms, whereas *qawwālī* is Sufi (Muslim) devotional music.[8] *Khyāl* remains the most dominant style in Hindustāni music today, and exemplifies the Hindu-Muslim artistic integration.

Many scholars suggest that the success of this integration was largely due to the fact that Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, resonated strongly with '*bhakti*', or popular Hindu devotionalism.[9] Both *bhakti* and Sufism are characterised by an approach to worship that fosters an attitude of ecstatic love, through a personal quest for unity with the divine. Sufism and bhakti both use music explicitly as a vehicle for mystical experience and spiritual advancement, placing great emphasis on the experience of divine presence.[10] This affinity between *bhakti* and Sufism opened the way for a more seamless religious and musical integration between Hindu and Islamic traditions.

Conversion from Hinduism to Islam

Another reason for the integration of Hindu and Islamic musical traditions lies in power, politics, and professional necessity. During the Mughal period (1526 to early eighteenth century), many musicians who were Hindu at birth converted to Islam for professional and political reasons (Neuman 1980 and 1985). They converted from Hinduism to Islam as the context for their art form shifted from devotional avocationalism in Hindu temples to professional entertainment in Muslim courts. An archetypical example of this conversion to Islam is Hindustāni music's most

[6] Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.292); Bagchee (1998, p.109); Sanyal and Widdess (2004); Wade (1987, p.159). See also Chapter 7.
[7] Wade (1987, p.169); Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.297); Bagchee (1998, pp.120-121).
[8] Sanyal and Widdess (2004); Qureshi (1995 [1986]). *Qawwālī* is said to have been invented in North India by Amir Khrusro (1254-1324 C.E.) (Deva 1992 [1973], p.83); (Jairazbhoy 2011 [1971], p.17).
[9] *Bhakti* is a Hindu term, which refers to 'approaching God through love and devotion' (Beck 2006, p.124).
[10] Gulen (2006); Beck (2006); Behl (2007).

celebrated musician, Miyan Tansen (circa 1506-1589), who – it is generally accepted – was born a Hindu but died a Muslim (Neuman 1985, p.101).

> The contemporary significance of Tansen is measured by the fact that most performing Hindustāni musicians today trace some discipulary, if not actual kinship descent, from Tansen. (Neuman 1985, p.102)

The effective consequence of this dual religious heritage, is that many Muslim musicians today have Hindu ancestry, and the culture of Hinduism still permeates their philosophical stance, and influences their culture of musical practice.[11] To some extent, this complex religious ancestry makes the idea of looking at religious belief systems in Hindustāni music an exercise in ambivalence. However, Neuman argues that the Islamisation and professionalisation of music changed its definition as a cultural phenomenon. He points to the lasting effects of an important distinction: 'Muslim musicians… did not write theoretical treatises… ultimate authority consequently lay not in quasi-sacred texts… but in quasi-sacred pedigrees' (Neuman 1985, p.103).

By the eighteenth century, the great canon of Indian musicology, largely written in the form of Sanskrit treatises, had lost its relevance to the music being performed.[12] Authority had shifted from texts to musical lineage. The idea that a musician may be considered a primary carrier of tradition by virtue of his ancestry is still prevalent today.

British rule and nationalism

With British rule dominating India from the early eighteenth century, the Muslim courts lost much of their wealth and power, and classical music thus lost much of its patronage. Muslim orthodox beliefs forbidding music also did not help in some quarters (see Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.326). The British were not patrons of the Indian classical arts. Many musicians moved to the expanding cities to earn a living from teaching and performing. By the nineteenth century, the practice of

[11] Religious plurality has been a hallmark of Indian culture for centuries. Although an individual may identify himself as belonging to a particular religion, in reality he may blend different religions through his belief systems and religious practices.

[12] I will discuss later in this chapter how the authoritative status of these works was revived from the nineteenth century on as part of a Hindu resurgence.

Hindustāni music was in sharp decline and the social and 'spiritual' status of musicians had fallen considerably.

However, by the late nineteenth century the nationalist movement had swept through India and Indian classical music became an important emblem in the search for a national cultural identity. Through the efforts of a number of scholars and musicians including Saurindra Tagore (1840-1914), V.N. Bhatkhande (1860-1936) and V.D. Paluskar (1872-1931), Hindustāni music made a strong recovery. During this revival, Hindustāni music was invested with Hindu authority, religiosity, and ideology. This Hindu orientation on the spiritual ideology of Hindustāni music persists to this day.

The Hindu revival and constructed ideology

A number of scholars in recent times have advanced convincing arguments suggesting that the present representation of Indian classical music as an emblem of Hindu spirituality and heritage is a construction that arose during the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lubach 2006; Neuman 2004; Bakhle 2005; Subramaniam 2008).

During this period, the tradition was re-imagined and re-invented in a number of ways. The advent of notation, institutionalisation, and standardisation reshaped and reinvigorated what had become a fragmented tradition in serious decline. Born out of a confrontation with modernity, and the need for a national cultural identity, Indian classical music was largely re-constituted and elevated in status from a dying service profession to a high art music of nationalist cultural significance:

> It became marked as a high art form initially responding to the changing sociology of modern urban performance but eventually to the imperatives of functioning as one of the key emblems of the nation's cultural inheritance…. The practice and consumption of the reinvented art form was relocated among the middle class, which decided to author its history restoring it to very ancient origins and framing it within a long textual lineage that answered early colonial critiques of native deficiency. (Subramaniam 2008, p.76)

On one hand, India's cultural renaissance was a reaction against colonialism, through a search for a new independent identity. On the other hand, elements of the nationalist movement adopted certain Western attributes as a legitimising authority. These included western dress, institutional education, and the ideal of scientific rigor. Kaye

Lubach points to two central themes in the new definition of Indian cultural identity, which are particularly relevant to the resurgence of Hindustāni music: science and spirituality.

> First, application of modes of presentation that corresponded particularly with notions of science, as a key to earning Western respectability; and second, assertion of an innate and ultimately exclusive Indian spirituality, impervious to Western intellectualism. Things Indian – particularly art and music – were imbued with a profound religiosity…. The new Orientalism suggested a reversal of the pervading Eurocentric hierarchy: if, in the realm of transcendental knowledge, East represented the abode of the enlightened; West, by comparison, represented the ultimate materiality. (Lubach 2006, p.21)

Indian classical music was embraced as a symbol of the nationalist agenda, which was Hindu in conception. By the mid-nineteenth century, Hindustāni music was primarily an activity of hereditary Muslim musicians of low socio-economic status, the legacy of the then largely defunct Muslim court profession. One hundred years later, the idiom was practiced by both Muslims and middle to upper-class Hindus. Hindus claimed it as their cultural inheritance, with the assertion that the roots of Indian classical music lie in *vedic* spirituality.

According to Janaki Bakhle (2005), V. D. Paluskar was particularly influential in infusing the tradition with Hindu religiosity, despite V. N. Bhatkhande's attempts to secularise the tradition. Paluskar set up a number of popular music schools throughout Northern India under the name *Gandharva Mahavidyalaya* (GMV). This institution is still running and Paluskar's legacy has endured. As Bakhle demonstrates, 'both he and his students were committed to cementing a culture of sacrality around the history of music and its devotees' (2005, p.140), a sacrality that was exclusively Hindu:

> There were no Christian or Muslim students in his schools…. Given the GMV's emphasis on Hindu *pujas* ['worship'], the suspension of classes on Hindu festival days, and Sanskrit prayers, which were sung on all occasions including informal gatherings, it is reasonable to postulate that Paluskar had founded not just any music school, but a Hindu music school. By placing religiosity at the forefront of his pedagogy, Paluskar institutionalized a Brahmanical Hinduism as the modal cultural form of Indian music. (Bakhle 2005, p.173)

Hindu religiosity persists as a dominant force in the culture of Hindustāni music today, legitimising and reinstating the positioning of the tradition as a custodian of ancient Hindu heritage. It is apparent in my research that the narratives of Hindustāni

musicians reflect both a philosophical and religious perspective rooted in Hinduism, influenced by both *vedāntic* philosophy and *bhakti*. In light of the historical context of the nationalist movement, aspects of these contemporary narratives can be viewed as the continuation of a culture of performative discourse serving to reinforce Hindu authority and authenticity in a tradition where ownership has been negotiated for centuries.[13]

Post Independence

Dard Neuman (2004) also considers the effect the nationalist agenda had in the twentieth century renaissance of Indian classical music. Post-independence India (post 1947) was a completely different environment for a professional musician. It was 'an age of radical social transformation – bringing new patronage (the nation-state), a changed economy (capitalism) and a new sovereign (Independent India)' (p.342). The era of musicians becoming national celebrities had begun. Neuman illustrates how 'the condemned *ustad* became ennobled in the public world of Indian nationalism' (2004, p.339). Classical musicians in post-independence India were not only seen as custodians of cultural heritage, but with the attribution of divine origins bestowed upon their art form, their social and 'spiritual' status was also elevated.[14]

When India became independent in 1947 it was divided into separate nation states: present day India, and the Islamic states of East and West Pakistan ('East Pakistan' became 'Bangladesh' in 1973). This religio-political divide caused a mass migration of people: Hindus and Sikhs flooded into India while Muslims moved to Pakistan and Bangladesh. To some extent these people took their respective musical traditions with them. In modern post-independence India, religiosity is still evident in the culture of Hindustāni music, but the tradition has also evolved into a professional and international secular art music.

[13] Hindustāni music is a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim traditions, thus, claims to heritage, lineage and ownership can be legitimately made from both sides.

[14] Some Western scholars can also be accused of serving the persuasive agenda of Hindu authority. For example, Holroyde (1972) presents a Hindu biased ideological stance. Although her work is both insightful and scholarly, her representation, at times, extends into orientalist exoticism.

It is evident throughout this dissertation how the complex history of India and Hindustāni music is reflected in the narratives of Indian classical musicians. Different musicians refer to different historical periods when they discuss the topic of music and spirituality. Some musicians refer to the *Vedas*, some refer to mythology, some refer to deities from the Hindu tradition, some Muslim musicians use Islamic references, and others speak about spirituality in more abstract philosophical terms. Echoes of religious heritage also remain in the representation, iconography, and performance ritual of Hindustāni music (see Chapter 7).

Transcending religious divides, and religious plurality

Over several centuries, many influential Indian writers, poets and philosophers have attempted to bridge the gap between different religions in India, advocating a position which states that spirituality and religion are complementary to each other, but that spirituality can exist beyond specific religious affiliation (Ramakrishna 2006; Khan 1996).

India's most famous poet, Kabir (1440-1518), sought to bridge the gap between Hindu and Muslim beliefs. He exemplifies religious plurality, transcending religious divides and expressing a message of a unified spirituality beyond religious dogma. 'Although he addressed his god as "*Rama*", he rejected image worship and strict theism, believing the Hindu *Rama* to be identical with the Muslim "*Allah*"' (Slawek 1986, p.63). The following extract of Kabir's poetry illustrates his stance:

> I am neither in temple nor in mosque: I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash: Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation. If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time. (Kabir, translated in Tagore and Underhill 2004 [1914], p.1)

Religious plurality is evident among many Hindustāni musicians. According to Ali Akbar Khan, his father, Allauddin Khan practiced various forms of worship. Coming from a family of converts from Hinduism to Islam, he observed his daily prayers, but he also offered *puja* (worship) to the Hindu goddess Sarasvatī on a daily basis (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.234). According to his son, his father's music was his religious devotion: 'My father was a devotee of every religion, and he gave to them in a very honest way, through music' (Ali Akbar Khan 2006, p.37).

Ali Akbar Khan clearly inherited his father's religious plurality. He married three times, first to a Muslim, then to a Hindu and finally to a Christian. His son Alam Khan describes how his home was full of icons from various religions:[15]

> My father had pictures of all the different deities, and worshipped both Hindu and Muslim things, and also there were pictures of Buddha, and Jesus. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Alam Khan's stance on this religious plurality and tolerance is that various objects of worship are all ultimately the same, symbolising a force greater than us that can be called on at times of need:

> I worship everything, its all the same at its core, its all meant to signify something greater than ourselves, and that we all need help and we can worship these kinds of things. (ibid.)

Religious assimilation and tolerance is evident in the practice of Hindustāni music. It is very common for a Hindu and a Muslim to share a stage in performance, or for a Hindu to have a Muslim *ustad* (for example the Hindu, Ravi Shankar was a disciple of the Muslim, Ustad Allauddin Khan). It is also common for a Muslim vocalist to sing a song text praising the Hindu deity, Lord Krishna, or for a Hindu vocalist to sing a text that relates to Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam.[16] In reality the two religions have become intertwined through the culture of Indian classical music.

Hindustāni music: 'spiritual' but 'not religious'

The idea that 'Indian classical music is spiritual' is ubiquitous among Hindustāni musicians I interviewed in India. Most Hindustāni musicians also hold the conviction that Indian classical music is not 'religious', and transcends religious creed. The late *sitār* player Nikhil Banerjee sums up this position:

[15] See also Khan and Ruckert 2009 (1998).

[16] Although Muslims sung Hindu texts, Neuman (1985, p.109) suggests that the 'Islamicization' of Indian music culture in the Moghul period gradually resulted in 'condensed compositions'. Through Muslim influence, vocal compositions got shorter due to a gradual 'de-emphasis of the meanings of the texts' (ibid.).

> Indian music is based on spiritualism, that is the first word, you must keep it in your mind. Many people misunderstand and think its got something to do with religion, no, absolutely no! Nothing to do with religion, but spiritualism – Indian music was practiced and learned to know the Supreme Truth. (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

The idea that Indian classical music is not based on religion is understandable, considering the fact that Hindustāni music is practiced by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and people of no particular religious persuasion. There are also a growing number of Europeans, Japanese and Americans taking up the practice. In this sense, Hindustāni music can be said to transcend specific religious affiliations.

Sitār player Maninal Nag expresses a similar sentiment to Banerjee. Nag sees the difference between religions as inconsequential in relation to the universal power of music:

> Music is the language of God. There are so many religions in the world-churches, temples, mosques – and everywhere is music for worshipping God. It's all the same! I don't understand the difference between all religions. Your blood is red, my blood is red; if you don't get air you can't live, if I don't get air I can't live; if I don't get water I can't live, I will die. Everyone is like this, everyone depends upon this universe, that means the power of the Supreme…. Music has power but we have to play with 'yoga' [union] in mind. (Maninal Nag 1994)

Ali Akbar Khan expresses a similar view:

> No, not a religion. Nothing to do with that. You don't have to believe in this or that like you do in religion. My father taught that all religions had the right way… but music is beyond that. At the same time, you show respect to music as Nada-Brahma – the language of God. (Ali Akbar Khan in Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.247)

The fascinating thing about all three musicians I have quoted, Banerjee, Nag and Khan is that they all dismiss the importance of religion in Hindustāni music. But at the same time they all express a spiritual ideological stance based broadly on a Hindu worldview. The concepts they refer to – 'Supreme Truth', '*yoga*' and '*Nada-Brahma*' – are all rooted in Hindu beliefs.

'The Indian mode of perception'

In this brief section I explore the idea that spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music is predicated on an 'Indian worldview' characterised by *vedāntic* (Hindu) thought.[17] A number of scholars have pointed to the idea of an 'Indian worldview' (Hamilton 2001, p.10) unifying the sub-continent. Holroyde refers to 'the fabric of India where everything is permeated by this timelessness and this intensity of serious thought' (1972, pp.44-45). In his anthropological study of *sitār* music in Calcutta (1989), James Hamilton suggests that there is an underlying unity in India, based on what he terms 'the Indian mode of perception' (p.xxiii). He suggests that this worldview is made up of two overarching principles, 'unity in diversity' and 'solidarity through hierarchy' (ibid.):

> An underlying unity which is not based on religion (in the popular accepted sense of the word), but rather on a particular worldview and mode of perception. The belief in Brahmanism, brought to the subcontinent by the 'Aryans' in approximately 1500BC, developed in conjunction with indigenous Dravidian and tribal perspectives, creating a world-view characterized by the notion of unity in diversity and solidarity through hierarchy. (Hamilton 1989, p.xxiii)

He offers another general description of this worldview as 'polytheistic' and 'inclusive' (ibid.).[18] What is interesting in Hamilton's outlook is that he views this 'mode of perception' as being beyond specific religious connections, a view consonant with Hindustāni musicians, who consider Indian classical music to be 'spiritual' but not 'religious'. Hamilton suggests that the emergence of new religions had little effect on this unifying and persistent worldview. He suggests that even though Buddhism and Jainism developed in India from approximately 500 B.C.E., they did not alter the 'Indian mode of perception'. He also argues that the wave of Islamic dominance over North India between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries left only a minor legacy on the essential fabric of Indian thought. 'Even the

[17] By 'worldview', I mean the fundamental beliefs and presuppositions that make up one's ideas about the world and reality. One's worldview is both conscious and unconscious and includes values, attitudes, spiritual beliefs and faith.

[18] Hamilton's view certainly resonates with my experience of India, where contradictions can appear to live side by side without conflict. Hamilton considers a typical Indian answer to a perplexing question to be 'why not?' (1989, p.xxiii). The concept of God or 'the spiritual' is that there is an omnipresent timeless spiritual world existing in parallel with the physical world as we perceive it. It is believed that there are many paths but only one destination – God. This 'Indian mode of perception' characterises Hinduism in its modern form as an inclusive, philosophical, socio-religious system with an underlying belief in unity through diversity.

introduction of Islamic monotheism and a mass conversion of a sector of the population to this faith did not radically alter the native perception' (ibid. p.xxiii). This point is mirrored by Peggy Holroyde:

> Not even Moghul invasions and Muslim supremacy for 700 years, nor the arrival of the British, Dutch, French and Portuguese with their own civilization and standards, penetrated into the impervious core of this steadfast faith. (1972, p.52)

The 'faith' Holroyde is referring to is Hindu belief. She is pointing to an apparent hegemony of Hindu thought in India. In fact, her thesis is not dissimilar to that of Hamilton, who relates the 'Indian mode of perception' to a social and philosophical heritage stemming from *vedic* times. *Vedāntic* thought, mixed with ancient indigenous practices and beliefs, are the foundational roots of Hinduism. On final analysis it is the definition of 'Hinduism' that is in question. An important point addressed by theologian Kim Knott is that Hinduism is not just a religion, it is 'a way of life' (2008 [1998], p.111). Unlike most religions, Hinduism has neither a defined governing hierarchy, nor a single set dogma or code of practice. It is pluralistic, inclusive, and open to personal interpretation. A *vedāntic* worldview is a Hindu worldview, whether one chooses to call it a religion or not.

The Representation of Spiritual Ideology in Literature and Musicology

In this section, I discuss idealised representation of Hindustāni music through websites, album covers, Indian literature, and Indian musicology. Both spiritual idealism and theoretical idealism are evident in these forums for emic representation. More performative displays of emic representation are explored as the dissertation unfolds. These include the use of honourific titles; displays of etiquette; stage presentation; the ritual of performance; religiosity and the use of iconography; and the narratives of Hindustāni musicians.

Album covers and websites

Emic representation in album covers, websites and concert tickets varies in relation to the depiction of Hindustāni music as 'spiritual'. On balance, although some explicit references to this ideal are made, the majority of these materials paint Hindustāni music as more secular and professional, rather than sacred and avocational.

Some published recordings of Hindustāni music depict the tradition as spiritual, with CD titles such as 'Food For the Soul' (Krishnamurti Sridhar [*sarod*] 2007), 'Total Absorption' (Nikhil Banerjee [*sitār*] 2000), and 'Divine' (Veena Shastrabuddhe [vocal] 1996). However it must be noted that the majority of albums do not display such explicit references to spiritual ideals and paint Hindustāni music more as high art music. Websites by prominent artists generally focus on painting a professional profile, but often allude in a subtle way to spiritual ideology. For example, the homepage in Kushal Das's website depicts a passageway in a temple with the word 'enter' in a doorway at the end of the passage (Das 2012). A number of artists have short statements displayed on their websites that highlight spiritual ideals. For example, *sarod* player Amjad Ali Khan's website states: 'every rāga has a soul and every musical note is the sound of God' (Khan 2013). However, the words: 'one of the 20th century's greatest masters of the sarod' is much more prominent, perhaps illustrating the primary function of websites as a way to promote professional status.

Idealised representation in Indian literature

Some Indian writing on classical music is replete with romantic representation, presenting Indian classical music as 'spiritual' through colourful, idealised language. For example, Ashok Roy (2004) interviewed a number of luminaries of Indian classical music and filled the pages in between the interviews with highly romanticised biographies of the artists, portraying them as noble, spiritual exemplars of a divine art form. His lyrical and poetic writing style paints an unequivocally exalted picture of Indian classical music. The introduction reads like an offering from the Indian tourist board:

> Indian classical music, whether Hindustani or Carnatic, is an intuitive, spontaneous and spiritual outpouring from an inner fountain of melody…. The individual musician, is the nucleus of this divine art form. It is he, who having mastered the art and craft through years of sadhana and sacrifice, and having earned the blessings of his guru, surrenders to the sweep of spontaneity, and soars above the realms of expectation, every time he sings. (Roy 2004, p.9)

Another Indian publication, published by Times Music, also displays a tendency for romantic representation. *Alaap: A Discovery of Indian Classical Music* (2002), was created by the *Sri Aurobindi Society,* a Hindu spiritual organisation based in Pondicherry. The book is an excellent technical introduction to Indian classical music

and is dotted throughout with an unquestioning proclamation of its spiritual qualities, in terms of both heritage and affect. Chapter titles include 'The Quest', 'The Call of the Swara', and 'The Alchemy of Music'.

> Indian music is intimately linked to the need to discover a certain kind of truth in itself, an unchanging eternal center within. In fact this music is so devised, its structure so formulated, that any serious involvement with it would bring us straight up against this search for truth. And like all truths that are glimpsed by man, if even once, it would leave us unsatisfied until we have made the truth our own. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.28)

A more historical example of philosophical idealism is found in the writing and public lectures of *veena* player Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927). His are enduring and influential examples of persuasive emic discourse on the spiritual qualities of music, principally intended for an American and European audience. A collection of his work titled 'The Mysticism of Sound and Music' (1996) is widely considered a spiritual classic today. Khan was a Sufi, a mystical branch of Islam, but his vision is universalist, embracing concepts from all religions into a unified whole:

> Abstract sound is called *sawt-e-sarmad* by the Sufis; all space is filled with it…. Moses heard this sound on Mount Sinai when in communion with God, and the same word was audible to Christ when absorbed in his heavenly Father in the wilderness. Shiva heard the same *anahad nada* [unstruck sound] during his *samadhi* [state of divine unity or absorption] in the cave of the Himalayas. The flute of Krishna is symbolic of the same sound. This sound is the source of all revelation to the Masters to whom it is revealed from within… they… teach one and the same truth. (Khan 1996, p.170)

Khan connects music to the 'harmony of the universe', and sees man as intimately connected to this harmony:

> Music is the miniature of the whole harmony of the universe, for the harmony of the universe is music itself, and man being the miniature of the universe, must show the same harmony. In his pulsation, in the beat of his heart, and in his vibration.[19] (Khan 1996, p.111)

Theoretical idealism in Indian musicology

Indian classical music has an ancient tradition of indigenous musicology dating back over two thousand years.[20] Ancient treatises expound theoretical principles that give

[19] See Lubach (2006, pp.5-10) for an insightful look at the influence Khan and other Indian writers had on the appropriation of Indian spiritual ideology into the USA.

[20] The *Natyasastra* – a major theoretical treatise on the dramatic arts including music, dance, and drama – is widely considered the most authoritative work in the canon of Indian musicology. It was

us insight into a remarkably scientific emic conceptualisation. Indian classical music theory is relentlessly taxonomic, portraying a quintessentially Indian appetite for fine detail, classification, and subdivision. Although scientific, theory often extends into ideological representation, and is often far removed from the reality of arts practice.

For example, a form of theoretical idealism is evident in the subdivision of pitch and time. Pitch is theoretically broken down into subtle microtones or '*shrutis*'. The *Natyasastra* lists twenty-two *shrutis* in an octave (some accounts suggest as many as sixty-six).[21] Ancient theory ascribes specific emotions to each *shruti*.[22] The theory of twenty-two *shrutis* in an octave persists as an ideal. The reality, in the current era at least, is that *shrutis* are not measurable for two reasons: first, they are not consistent among even the most respected practitioners; second, they are rarely stated as fixed pitches, but arise through the use of ornamentation and movement between pitches. There is an evident divergence between theory and practice, where theory exists as an expression of an ideal rather than a practised reality.[23]

The Ancient Hindu division of time is not only immeasurable, but ultimately inconceivable, and built on philosophical speculation rather than experience or empirical inquiry. In this system, one *mātrā* ('musical beat' or 'human heartbeat') is subdivided into 16,384 *kshaṇ* ('an instant'). This infinitesimal and inconceivable period of time is an example of the idealised subtly and nuance of Indian science, art and *yoga*, as pointed out by George Ruckert:

> A kshaṇ is sometimes fancifully described as the time it takes for a sharp needle to pass through one of a hundred lotus petals… while these extremely small ratios can be conceived of only in atomic standards, they indicate the subtlety of perceptions which

written between the third century B.C.E. and the fifth century C.E. See Danielou (1980), or Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], pp.333-335) for a succinct summary of major treatises from ancient times until the nineteenth century C.E.

[21] Danielou (1980, p.31); Jairazbhoy (2011 [1971], pp.224-226).

[22] Danielou (1980, pp.29-43).

[23] Kaufman's observations indicate that Indian classical musicians often produce different variations of *shrutis*, or even different versions of the same basic pitch (1968, pp.9-10). According to Kaufman, this inconsistency does not compromise the mood and purity of *rāga*. However it clearly places the theory of measurable *shrutis*, and the idea of unique emotional qualities being precisely ascribed to subtle microtonal intervals under scrutiny. Exacerbating this anomaly between theory and practice further is the fact that in the current era – due in part to the introduction of the *harmonium* into the tradition from the nineteenth century – an even-tempered scale dominates the sonic landscape of Hindustāni music. *Shrutis* are sadly almost obsolete, except in ornamentation. However, in my experience, the ideal that there are twenty-two distinct intervals in the octave is still commonly stated by Hindustāni musicians as fact.

> the ancients recognized as the ideal... and one to which the practicing musician continually aspires to further realize. (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], pp.222-223)

The Hindu cosmology of time extends out in the other direction into equally inconceivable periods. A '*Mahayuga*' is said to be 4,320,000 human years (Meusse 2011, p.16).

> One *Mahayuga* is a single day in the life of Brahma, the creator god according to many [Hindu] traditions. A period of 360 Brahma-days equals one Brahma-year, and Brahma lives one hundred such years… 155,520,000,000,000 human years![24] (ibid.)

Although inconceivable, time is measured out through a classification system that has the appearance of scientific rigor and scrutiny. One version of this Hindu taxonomy of time is illustrated thus:

> 8 *kshaṇ* = 1 *lāva* (*lāo*)
> 8 *lāva* = 1 *kashta*
> 8 *kashta* = 1 *nimish* ("blink of an eye")
> 8 *nimish* = 1 *kalā*
> 4 *kalā* = 1 *anudrut* (1 *mātrā*; heartbeat)
> 2 *anudrut* = 1 *drut*
> 2 *drut* = 1 *lāghu* (1 *vibhāg* in tintal)
> 2 *lāghu* = 1 *guru*
> 3 *lāghu* = 1 *pluta*
> 4 *lāghu* = 1 *kakapad* (1 cycle of tintal)
>
> (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.222)

This system essentially relates to the science of *yoga* but Ruckert illustrates a clear link to the theory of music, showing a theoretical connection between *yoga* and music. The terms *mātrā* (beat), *vibhāg* (a sub-section within a time cycle of Hindustāni music), and *tintal* (or '*teentaal*', a common rhythmic cycle of sixteen beats) are rudimentary for any Hindustāni musician. This delineation of time is obscure, coming from archaic ancient treatises, largely unknown to the majority of Indian classical musicians. However, it is noteworthy that the above quotation comes from a textbook on Hindustāni music written in 1998 by respected *sarod* players Ali Akbar Khan and George Ruckert, illustrating that despite being antiquated, such theory potentially still holds a weight of authority in the tradition.

[24] For more information on Hindu classification and conceptualisation of time, see Simms (1992) and Clayton (2000).

Another version of this taxonomy of time is outlined by Gobind Singh Mansukhani. It is curious to note how the two versions are conceptually alike, but contradict each other:

> Anudruta = 1 akshara = 1/4 matra
> Druta = 2 akshara = 1/2 matra
> Laghu = 4 akshara = 1 matra
> Guru = 8 akshara = 2 matra
> Pluta = 12 akshara = 3 matra
> Kakpad = 16 akshara = 4 matra
>
> (Mansukhani 1982, no page numbers)

In the first version, one *anudruta* is equated to one *mātrā*; in the second version, one *anudruta* is equal to a quarter of a *mātrā* and one '*akshara*', a term that does not appear in the first version. This kind of contradiction is extremely common in Indian classification systems, suggesting perhaps that such systems are a representation of an ideal, but are ultimately flawed and academic, despite their scientific appearance and attention to minute detail. The classification systems I have quoted above are representations of an ideal concept of fine subdivision of time, but have little practical utility.

Large tracts of the *Natyasastra* amount to classification and taxonomy in exacting detail. For example, the author describes forty-nine distinct *bhāvas* ('expressions', 'emotions'), divided into three categories. He elucidates on each *bhāva* individually in relation to their causes, and describes human involuntary reactions to their experience. Before we read this exhaustingly extensive discourse, the author cautions the reader on the limitless nature of the Indian classical arts, stating how it is impossible to have a complete knowledge of any single *bhāva*:

> It is impossible... to know all about nāṭya since there is no limit to bhāva-s (emotions) and no end to the arts involved. It is not possible to have a thorough knowledge of even one of them.[25] (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, translated by Rangacharya 2010, p.53)

Through this inexhaustibly refined taxonomy, the Indian classical arts are represented as highly cultivated, and yet so infinitely complex that they are unknowable in full by mankind.[26]

[25] Although this quote refers to the Indian classical performing arts in general, including music, the term *natya* generally refers more specifically to drama and dance.
[26] I present more examples of theoretical idealism in Chapter 4: 'The Concept of *Rāga*'.

CHAPTER 3

THE ENDLESS SEARCH FOR *SA*: HINDUSTĀNI MUSIC AS A PHILOSOPHY OF SOUND

Introduction

In this chapter, I present several central tenets of Indian philosophy and Hindu thought, along with abstract Indian philosophical ideas about the nature of sound and music. I posit co-relations between these concepts and Hindustāni music, considering to what extent Hindustāni music and Indian philosophy mirror each other. Viewing Hindustāni music as a reflection of an Indian philosophical worldview, I explore whether its practice may be an active manifestation or revelation of this very philosophy. I begin with a core concept of Hindu sacred sound, *nāda-brahma*, or 'sound is God'. The following section introduces the principle of unification, a core metaphysical dimension of Indian philosophy and Hindu belief. This principle leads into an exploration of a number of philosophical dichotomies, including the relationship between 'self' and 'God', and the idea that reality comes in two forms, the 'manifest' and the 'unmanifest'. These dichotomies are woven into a discussion about how *rāga* improvisation may act as a mediator between the mundane and the divine, as bridge to a state of unified consciousness, or as a kind of mystical quest, or spiritual search.

Despite the fact that Hindustāni music evolved as a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic culture, a philosophical orientation based on a *vedāntic* worldview is evident in the music culture today, although echoes of Sufism also persist. This Hindu oriented worldview is foundational to the spiritual ideology of Hindustāni music today. In this chapter, I highlight consistent correlations between Hindu philosophy and Hindustāni music that appear to add up to a body of 'evidence' in this regard. Indian philosophy contextualises and substantiates the ideological positioning and testimony of Hindustāni musicians. Indian philosophy also provides a fascinating window into emic perceptions of the mystical potency of sound and music. The philosophical concepts expounded in this chapter serve as essential context for the rest of the

dissertation, where I explore spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music with respect to the concept of *rāga*, and the processes of transmission, practice, and performance.

Sources and related scholarship

The primary sources in this chapter are Indian philosophical texts and the narratives of Hindustāni musicians. I consider how Hindustāni music may be an expression of a philosophical worldview centred on *vedāntic* thought, the foundations and core of Hindu philosophy. This stance is a direct result of my fieldwork. My *sitār* teachers have all been Hindu (except Jagdeep Singh Bedi who is a Sikh). The majority of my informants are also Hindu, and I have found that musicians of other religious affiliations generally conform to an ideological frame that resonates principally with Hindu philosophy over any other doctrine.[1]

The *Upanishads*, the principal philosophical texts of Hinduism; the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*, the popular story within the great Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*; and other sources, including the writings of contemporary Indian philosophers; provide an understanding of *vedāntic* thought. The narratives of Hindustāni musicians also fill these pages. Drawn from personal experience – and the cultural milieu of India and Hindustāni music – their philosophical insights guide and contextualise this work, grounding it within the music culture. The plurality of thought among Hindustāni musicians equates to the multiplexity of Indian philosophy. In this chapter I consider whether this polyphony of voices is theoretically unified through the doctrine(s) of Indian philosophy, and is itself a philosophy of sound.

Musicology and ethnomusicology provide other valuable sources for this chapter. Scholarship with a disposition towards philosophical perspectives on Hindustāni music includes: Holroyde (1972); Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]); Rowell (2002); Sri Aurobindi Society (2002); Ruckert (2004); Sanyal and Widdess (2004); and Clark and Kini (2011).

[1] See Chapter 2. It must be stated that Hindustāni music has absorbed other philosophical influences, including Sufism, but this is beyond the scope of this work. See Widdess (2004); Neuman (1990 [1980]) for an exploration of a more Islamic frame of reference.

Peggy Holroyde's *Indian Music: A Vast Ocean of Promise* (1972) could be criticised as subjective and romanticised, but it is full of remarkable insight into the connections between Indian classical music and Hindu philosophy. Her emphatic conviction that the origin of the Indian classical arts is intimately connected to the tenets of Hindu philosophy – and that this influence has endured to this day – resonates strongly with this present study:

> Hindu philosophy, which so encompasses all things Indian, influenced totally – quite totally – all the principles of aesthetics upon which the arts were founded, so long ago that one forgets the physical impact of such a long, unbroken thread of continuous tradition. (Holroyde 1972, p.48)

North Indian classical music today has been dramatically reconfigured through various epochs in its extended history. The 'thread of continuous tradition' stemming directly back to the foundation of the Indian classical arts may be 'unbroken', but is thin at best, and continues to unwind and evolve, woven into a changing tapestry. What Holroyde fails to articulate is the manner in which both Hindu philosophy and Hindustāni music have undergone a continuous process of evolution. The extent to which Hindustāni music has developed in response to influences outside of the philosophical realm must be considered. Such influences include professionalisation, globalisation, and technological advances (see Chapter 7).

I discovered Clark and Kini's 'North Indian Classical Music and its Links with Consciousness: the Case of Dhrupad' (2011), as I was mid-way through this chapter. It came as both a revelation, and a vindication of my own position. Despite its compact form as a single chapter in a book entitled *Music and Consciousness*, the pages are dense with detailed and well-considered research. Consciousness *per se* is not the principal subject of this dissertation, but it is highly relevant to my concerns.

The shadow of orientalism

It could be argued that this kind of speculation into the 'philosophy' of Indian music is an extension of the orientalist agenda, exoticising 'the other' through fanciful theories that are as much a reflection of a Western impression of India, as an expression of an emically held perspective. There is little doubt that the stereotype of India and its art traditions as 'spiritual', colours the discursive culture of Hindustāni

music with spiritual ideology, but this occurs both outside and within the Indian sub-continent. My primary sources are Indian philosophical literature and the narratives of Hindustāni musicians. If the conclusions drawn from this study are 'orientalist', it is an 'orientalism' that has been adopted by Indian philosophers and musicians alike.[2] This investigation serves to uncover and represent an insider perspective, while holding an awareness of the fact that this perspective often exhibits an ideological stance.

Nāda-Brahma: Sound as Primordial Essence

Indian philosophers and Indian classical musicians often point to the ancient Hindu concept *nāda-brahma* ('sound is God') when referring to the spiritual nature of music. The concept expresses the idea that sound and music have inherent spiritual potency. I introduce it here as a central paradigm, and then explore it further to illustrate its implications and relations with other core concepts.

Nāda (or *naad*) is a Sanskrit term meaning 'sound' in a universalist and primordial sense: sound imbued with mystical potency. Indian musicologist Sandeep Bagchee defines it thus: 'sound in its broadest sense usually conceived in metaphysical terms as vital power' (1998, p.331). Holroyde cites the following etymology: 'Na = prana = life breath; da = agni = fire' (1972, p.275).[3] S.N. Gulati expands this into the following description of *naad*: 'the manifestation of the fusion of the physical breath with the fire of the intellect' (Moorthy 2001, p.11). The deity Brahma is the creator in the Hindu tripartite model of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva. *Nāda-brahma,* then, means 'sound is God'.[4] *Nāda-brahma* refers to a central philosophical concept in Hinduism; sound is the foundational essence of the universe, and the universe is sound in essence. Bose writes: 'There is music and rhythm in the eternal throbbing of the universe, which the ancient sages realized as the *Naad Brahma*' (Bose 1990, p.21).

[2] See Said (1978) and Jairazbhoy (2011 [1971], pp.223-244) for excellent discussions of the issues concerning orientalism.
[3] See also Beck (2008 [1993], p.40). A similar definition is offered by Ashok Roy 'Naad: emanation of life principle or Prana' (Roy 2004, glossary). *Nāda* can also be defined as 'sounding, droning, roaring, howling, screaming' (Berendt 1991, p.15), and is associated with the words '*sonant*, *resonance* and *reverberation*' (Beck 2008 [1993], p.81).
[4] '*Nāda-brahma*' is the common term used by Hindustāni musicians; '*nāda-brahman*' can also be used (for example Beck 2008 [1993]). The meaning of '*brahman*' is more abstruse than '*brahma*', referring to the unmanifest 'supreme reality' or 'absolute' of the *Upanishads*.

The primacy afforded to sound is reflected in Hindu practice where sound assumes a primary function in religious ritual (Beck 1993, Paul 2004), and is perceived as having metaphysical agency.[5] Beyond this Hindu connection, scholars and Indian classical musicians alike often express universalist and inter-religious correlations in their reflections on *nāda-brahma*. The explanation offered by Sufi mystic and Hindustāni musician Hazrat Inayat Khan is typical in this regard; in a few sentences he connects Hinduism, Sufism and Christianity through a foundational theory of vibration:[6]

> The whole system of Hindu religion and philosophy is based on the science of vibration and is called *Nada Brahma*, Sound-God. The poet Shams-e-Tabriz, writing of the creation, says that the whole mystery of the universe lies in sound. This fact is expressed in the Qur'an as well as in the Bible. Fine vibrations through action become grosser in their degrees, which form the different planes of existence, ending in the physical manifestation. (Khan 1996, p.9)

Connections are posited between the structure and harmony of the universe (and nature) and the structure of music. For example, *sitār* player Ravi Shankar believes that music created by man mirrors this universal order: 'Musical sounds reflect the orderly, numerical patterns of the universe' (Shankar 2007 [1968], p.25).

Nāda-brahma and Hindustāni music

Hindustāni musicians often refer to *nāda-brahma* as an umbrella term for the spiritual aspect of Indian classical music, and as a seed concept describing the intrinsic relationship between music and the divine, where the experience of sound and music is perceived to be a direct experience of God. *Nāda-brahma* describes the idea that sound is divine in origin; therefore music is a means of communing with the divine. *Rāga* (and all music) is said to emanate from *nāda-brahma*, the source of all sound: 'Nad Brahma: a vibration that filled the uncreated void, featureless and

[5] Hindu theism has repeatedly highlighted the metaphysical power of sound over several millennia. *Vak* 'sacred word'; *mantra* 'sacred syllable'; *japa* 'the repetition of divine names'; *śabda-brahman* 'the "Sonic Absolute"' (Beck 2008 [1993], p.8); and other terms for the sacrality of sound hold a prominent place in Hindu theology. Sound is a dominant element in the practice of Hinduism: 'sacred sound, in whatever form or name, is almost always involved in the salvific process to attain final liberation, or release, known as *mokṣa*, or *mukti*–interpreted monistically as union with Brahman itself or theistically as communion with a chosen deity who is identified theologically with Brahman' (Beck 2008 [1993], p.9).

[6] This theory of vibration mirrors recent thinking in the science of physics. For an in-depth debate on the relationship between *vedāntic* philosophy and modern physics, see Dobson and Ballard (2004).

undifferentiated, from which music emerged, embodied as Raga' (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.27).

The connection to a divine source through sound, and the idea that Indian classical music emanates from this source is, as Ruckert suggests, 'a profound root of its affect' (2004, p.18). The spiritual benefits of Indian classical music are often described in terms of communion with divinity through sound, a communion that can lead to 'self-realisation':

> The rich heritage of the Indian Musical Tradition is based on the belief that sound is God and *Nada Brahma*.... Thus Indian Classical Music is viewed as a spiritual discipline that elevates one's Inner Self to the heights of Divinity and Self-Realisation. (S.N. Gulati in Moorthy 2001, p.11)

Concurring with this view, Ravi Shankar connects the experience of *rāga* to 'self-realisation' through the concept of *nāda-brahma*:

> To us, music can be a spiritual discipline on the path to self-realisation, for we follow the traditional teaching that sound is God – Nada Brahma: By this process individual consciousness can be elevated to a realm of awareness where the revelation of the true meaning of the universe – its eternal and unchanging essence – can be joyfully experienced. Our ragas are the vehicles by which this essence can be perceived. (Shankar 2008)

Shankar's statement lifts the ancient concept of *nāda-brahma* out of its usual associations with archaic philosophy and esoteric *yogic* practices, and relates it directly to the practice of Indian classical music and the experience of *rāga*, and to the contemporary experience of Indian classical musicians. In order to contextual the ideas he expounds, I will now consider relevant philosophic and *yogic* principles, before extending the discussion into other related areas of Hindu thought. The manner in which Shankar uses Hindu philosophical concepts to explain spirituality in Hindustāni music is typical of Indian classical musicians. This section also introduces terminology used in Hindustāni music that has both a technical and a philosophical meaning. This dual meaning reflects a core principle of dichotomy in Indian philosophical thought, where divine essence is considered to exist within and beyond the world of ordinary perception.

Ahata nāda and *anahata nāda*

The Hindu scriptures state that there are two types of sound: *ahata nāda*, meaning 'struck sound', the physically audible vibration of air; and *anahata nāda*, meaning 'unstruck sound', the omnipresent unchanging subtle vibratory sound of the universe.[7] According to *vedāntic* scholar, Swami Yogatmananda, *ahata nāda* is caused by two materials striking together, creating an audible vibration, while *anahata nāda* is the sound that exists beyond duality; it is 'unstruck' because it emanates from 'the one':

> In the one there is no vibration perceptible, but all vibrations emerge from it. At this level there are no two things, it is one, and thus there is no striking possible, but the sound is there. So that sound is called *anahata naad*. (Swami Yogatmananda in Desai 2009, disc one)

There are ancient practices within the *yogic* traditions that reflect the concept of *nāda-brahma* and offer the aspiring *yogi* a system of 'liberation' (or 'self-realisation') through sound. The esoteric practice of '*nāda yoga*' is described as a discipline through which a *yogi* hears the pervasive and mystical sound of the universe (*anahata nāda*) through a process of internal listening or mystical audition.[8] This practice is said to lead to a state of absorption into the absolute (*moksha* 'spiritual liberation' or *samadhi* 'absorption').

> Sound produced from ether is known as 'unstruck'. In this unstruck sound the Gods delight. The Yogis, the Great Spirits, projecting their minds by an effort of the mind into this unstruck sound, depart, attaining Liberation. (The *Sangita-Makaranda* (I, 4-6) in Danielou 1980, p.21)

---

[7] The *Sangita-Makaranda* by Narada (c. 1100 C.E.) is a seminal authoritative text on Indian classical music that refers to this distinction (see Lakshmi 1996).

[8] The practice of *nāda yoga* was codified in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (circa second century B.C.E to second century C.E.), but earlier references appear in the *Nādabindu Upanishad* (500-200 B.C.E.), attached to the *Rig Veda* (Paul 2004, p.119). Drawing from the *Siva Samhita* (circa 1500 C.E.), *yoga* scholar James Hewitt describes the practice of *nāda yoga* in the following extract: 'The Yogin sits in meditative posture and seals his right ear with his right thumb and his left ear with his left thumb, his eyes with his index fingers, his nostrils with his middle fingers, and his lips with the remaining four fingers. The *Siva Samhita* describes the variety of internal sounds that the Yogin should concentrate upon: "From practicing this gradually, the Yogi begins to hear the mystic sounds (*nadas)*. The first is like the hum of the honey-intoxicated bee, next that of a flute, then of a harp; after this, by the gradual practice of Yoga, the destroyer of the darkness of the world, he hears the sounds of ringing bells; then sounds like roaring thunder. When one fixes his full attention on this sound, being free from fear, he gets absorption" (*Samadhi*)' (Hewitt 1995 [1977], p.442-3). *Nāda yoga* is also related to *kundalini yoga* and the theory of *chakras* or spiraling energy centres in the body; and *nadis*, energy circuits. See Beck (2003 [2008]); Hewitt (1995 [1977]); Iyengar (1991, p.119); and Paul (2004) for a more in-depth overview of *nāda-brahma* and *yogic* practices relating to sacred sound.

The experience of *anahata nāda* is perceived as being a direct revelation of the supreme reality (*brahman*), which, according to the *Upanishads*, is identical to one's true self (*ātman*). The practice of listening to these mystical inner sounds is thus considered a path to self-realisation, through an experience of sound as God, *nāda-brahma*:

> Leaving all thoughts and devoid of actions, he should meditate upon *nāda* alone. This mind will then merge completely in the *nāda*… wherein is manifest the Brahman which is no other than the innermost *ātman* (self). (Beck 2008 [1993], pp.93-94)

Anahata nāda: The divine source of all sound

The concept of *nāda-brahma* suggests that all sound emanates from a divine source, making music inherently spiritual. *Anahata nāda*, as a quality of Brahma, the creator of the universe, is considered the root of all sound.[9] Manifest sound (*ahata nāda*) is said to stem from *anahata nāda*, which exists as the unheard silence behind all sound:

> Mystics of the ancient world perceived all individual sounds as taking place against a background of unheard silence behind the sounds. In Nada Yoga, this background is called *anahata* nada, meaning the 'unstruck sound.' (Paul 2004, p.123)

Sri Chinmoy was an Indian spiritualist, musician, and composer who was instrumental in popularising Indian spirituality in the West. He remarks on the nature of silence as the divine source of all sound and music:

> The soundless sound is something real, absolutely real…. Silence is the source of everything. It is the source of music and it is music itself. Silence is the deepest, most satisfying music of the Supreme…. Silence is the nest and music is the bird. The bird leaves the nest early in the morning and returns to the nest in the evening. Similarly, in the spiritual world, divine music comes from the inmost soul of silence. (Chinmoy 1995, p.12 and p.3)

The *Upanishads* identify *anahata nāda* with this mystical inaudible sound permeating all existence. *Anahata nāda* is also conceptualised as residing in the heart. The *Yogasikha Upanishad* states that when mixed with *prana* ('vital breath'), this subtle sound becomes audible and is given expression ('*svara*'):

[9] *Anahata nāda* is not exclusively 'the root of all sound'; in typical Hindu fashion it is one of many names (and theories) given to the idea that sound arises out of universal essence. The seed mantra *om* is also be considered the root of all sound (Beck 2008 [1993]; *Mandukya Upanishad* in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002); see also Khan (1996, p.10) for a more universalist perspective connecting Hinduism, Sufism, and ancient Greek Pythagorean philosophy.

> From that alone rises *nāda*, even as the sprout out of the subtle seed. That, by means of which the Yogis see the universe, they know it as *pasyanti* (also known as *anahata* [or "unstruck"])… when, in conjunction with the *prana* vital air, it goes by the name of *svara* (when it takes the form of articulate expression). (Yogasikha-Upanishad [3.2-5] in Beck 2008 [1993], p.96)

Svara: 'that which shines of itself'

Svara (or *swara*) is a term commonly used in Indian classical music to denote a 'musical note' in a scale. Like many terms in the lexicon of Hindustāni music, it has both a technical meaning and is also imbued with philosophical resonance.

Relating to the aforementioned principles about the divine origin of music, *svara* can be described as emanating out of the universal unstruck sound, when it is mixed with *prana* ('vital breath'). This idea is indicative of the primacy and potency afforded to vocal music in the Indian classical music traditions. The singer's voice, produced through his or her breath, is associated with *prana*, or 'vital life force'. Vocal music is thus considered to express a more intimate connection to the *ātman*, or 'true self', through being an outward expression of this essential inner vital principle. Interestingly, the word *ātman* is 'related to an Indo-European root denoting "breath"' (Demariaux 1995, p.28).

The etymology of the term '*svara*' also illustrates a meaning with more philosophical resonance than its technical translation as 'musical note' (or 'sound that generated an expression' [Danielou 1980, p.24]). This is described by the sage Matanga in his seminal ninth century treatise on music, *Brihaddeshi*: 'The word *svara* means "that which shines of itself – from *rajri* (to shine) with the prefix *sva* (self)" (Matanga, *Brihaddeshi*, I, 63)' (Danielou 1980, p.24). This can be interpreted in a number of ways: agency is given over to the musical sound, 'shining' as it were, 'of itself'; the 'self' can also be interpreted in light of the perception that there is an intimate connection between the musician's true self and the music. Through the process of surrendering to sound, an essential, transcendent self may be revealed: 'As the Swara enters our nature, our Self begins to shine through our music' (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.35).

Svara, 'something that is complete in itself, shining within' (Holroyde 1972, p.143), is thought to have its own ontology (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.145), its own agency

and mystical essence, beyond the mechanics of sound production. *Dhrupad* vocalist Uday Bhawalker describes this hidden mystical aspect of a musical note as its 'divine soul', a conception related to the idea of *rāga* as living entity (see Chapter 4).

> Every *swar*… has a divine form and it needs no clothing. When we dress it up, it becomes a *rāga*…. The *swar* has a divine soul (*divya ātma*) and when you sing it, it is not emerging superficially. It is coming from deep within. (Uday Bhawalker in Clarke and Kini 2011, p.145)

Taking this a step further, Bhawalkar contends that through the process of deep concentration on *svara*, the 'soul' of *svara* and the 'soul' of the musician merge into a state of unity. This unity can also transfer to the wider sonic landscape of *rāga*, as 'you become the *rāga*':

> You become one with the *swar*: *ātma* and *swar* become one... if this oneness can happen with the *swar*, then why not with the *rāga*?… the concentration is so intense that you become the *rāga*. (Uday Bhawalkar in Clarke and Kini 2011, p.145)

In a similar account of being absorbed into a state of union with musical sound, vocalist Ashwini Bhide considers this experience to be spiritual:

> Ultimately everything merges into the *svara*, the whole of my being and my surrounding merges into the *svara*, the *svara* only is being upheld. So what is spirituality? Spirituality is just this. (Ashwini Bhide in Desai 2009, disc 1)

A student of Uday Bhawalkar refers to the idea that there is a '*naad*' (a mystical quality of sound) 'beyond the note', that should be the centre of the musician's focus and aspiration:

> When you sing the notes there is a *nād* (sound), a *bhāva* (emotion or feeling), that is just beyond the note…. You think beyond the notes–Guruji says do not think about the note at all–go beyond that. (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.144)

Svara is therefore considered to contain both an immanent essence and a transcendental mystical quality. Musical sound is perceived as being made up of both *ahata nāda* (manifest sound) and *anahata nāda* (an unheard silent essence). This can be conceptualised as the 'two faces' of 'musical sound':

> There are two faces to a musical sound: an inner face and an outer face. The outer face is what we are accustomed to calling a note. The Swara is born when the inner face comes into being and shines through the outer note. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.36)

Tarab strings and *anahata nāda*

The inclusion of *tarab* (or 'sympathetic') strings on many Indian classical instruments appears to reflect this concept of *ahata nāda* and *anahata nāda* as two simultaneous aspects of sound.[10] The *sarod*, *sitār*, *sarangi*, slide guitar, and *esraj* all have two bridges, and two sets of strings: an upper set, which is struck; and a lower set, which is not struck. The lower set of strings (*tarab* strings) resonate of their own accord when a corresponding note is played on an upper string. It seems self-evident to identify the struck strings with *ahata nāda* ('struck sound'), and the *tarab* strings with *anahata nāda* ('unstruck sound').

The aesthetic effect of the unstruck *tarab* strings reflects the philosophical meaning of *anahata nāda*, symbolising an ethereal divine subtle essence. The *tarab* strings add a subtle shimmering timbre to the sound of the instrument, often heard just after the note on the main string is struck (or approached via *meend* [bending pitch]), creating an after-glow of sound. Two parallel sounds are heard simulateously, one defined and struck, the other subtle and unstruck. I suggest that the inclusion of *tarab* strings, may both signify and facilitate a bridging process from the profane to the divine. Interestingly, this affect of the *tarab* strings reflects one of the meanings the term '*tarab*' embodies in the world of Arab music. In Arab culture, '*tarab*' can refer to the feelings generated through music; '*tarab*' can be translated as 'a musically induced state of ecstasy' or 'transformative state' (Racy 2003, p.6).

Shruti: 'that which is revealed'[11]

As a technical term in Indian classical music, *shruti* denotes a microtonal interval. Theoretically there are twenty-two *shrutis* in an octave, as codified in the *Natyasastra.* There is also a more philosophical meaning attributed to the term *shruti*: 'the manifestation of the divine in the world' (Knott 2008 [1998], p.14). This definition of the term principally applies to the belief that the *Vedas* were revealed to man through a process of mystical audition. The *Vedas* are said to have been 'breathed out by the absolute (*brahman*) and revealed by audition "shruti" to a number of eminent sages' (Demariaux 1995, p.7). The ancient texts of Hinduism are categorised as either '*shruti*', meaning 'divinely revealed' (Knott 2008 [1998], p.5); or '*smriti*'

[10] '*Tarab*' can also be spelt and pronounced '*taraf*'.
[11] This translation of '*shruti*' comes from Kim Knott (2008 [1998], p.14).

('remembered') (ibid., p.14), meaning that which is composed by man. '*Śruti* as a concept features both the auditory character of Vedic truth and its transcendent, revealed nature. Being that which is seen and heard by those in closest touch with Supreme Reality' (Beck 2008 [1993], p.24).[12] This meaning states that *shruti* arises from a divine space and is revealed to those trained to hear it. It must be noted that this definition of *shruti* is somewhat archaic, and relates more to Hindu belief than Hindustāni music. However the dual technical and philosophical meaning is suggestive again of an enduring principle that sound emanates from a divine source, with its own agency; and that the practice of music can result in divine revelation.

The Principle of Unity

The metaphysical idea at the heart of Indian philosophy is that we are all fragmented parts of a whole, ultimately united as one.[13] In *Advaita Vedanta* – the dominant school of Indian philosophy – *brahman*, or the 'supreme reality', is viewed as a form of monism, the 'unifying absolute' (Beck 2008 [1993], p.9). Relativity, duality and separation are considered illusionary (*maya*), to be transcended into an experience of the unified nature of absolute being, which is seen as identical to our true self (*ātman*).

This unification principle, and the search for unity, is central to India philosophy, Hindu religion, Indian politics, and, I suggest, the practice, theory and ideology of Hindustāni music. Amid an immense diversity of cultures, languages, religions, and geographical landscapes, unity in diversity is a cornerstone of Indian national politics.

> [Unity in diversity is] a quality of thought that impregnates the whole of Indian philosophy. It is the foundation-stone of the modern Indian secular state and it was the most passionate of Pandit Nehru's private themes. (Holroyde 1972, p.26)

Hindu religious practice and iconography incorporates countless deities, but they are all considered different facets of one supreme unity.[14]

---

[12] See also pp.106-109 in this dissertation.
[13] I borrow this phrasing, in part, from Holroyde (1972, p.26).
[14] Hindu tradition tells us that there are 3,306 deities in the Hindu pantheon, or 330 million according to another source (Meusse 2011, pp.131-132). A famous story in the *Upanishads* expresses the idea that all these deities are ultimately one (ibid., p.131).

> A Hindu does not see his pantheon of deities as separate entities–categories of divinity even–but rather as symbols of the multifaceted aspects of an overwhelming unitary truth. (ibid., p.49)

This pantheon of deities, along with everything else in the universe is seen as a manifestation of *brahman*, and ultimately at one with this divine essence:

> All other essences and presences are derived from and sustained by this one cosmic entity… in India the various forms and forces perceived as Gods and Goddesses (are) seen as emanations of one Supreme Being: Brahman, derived from the root word *brh*, meaning 'to swell'. (Paul 2004, p.39)

In Hindu philosophy, the concept of unity can be expressed through endless diversity; this is conceptualised like a hologram, where each part contains the whole. A popular story about Krishna illustrates this idea of the essential unity within diversity:

> On the night of the full moon there assembled sixteen hundred *gopis*, and the miracle of Krishna was performed when he appeared as a separate Krishna to each *gopi*, and all of them danced with their beloved Lord at one and the same time. (Hazrat Inayat Khan 1991, p.153)

This story represents the belief that the same fundamental divine essence is omnipresent and all-pervasive. Although it appears as an impossibility, the story is a perfect metaphor for the core Hindu belief in unity in diversity. Indian philosopher, Eknath Easwaran resolves the apparent dilemma:

> In the end, unity in diversity is not a paradox at all. Unity is the center–in Upanishadic terms, 'in the cave of the heart'–of conscious beings, while diversity flourishes on the surface of life. (Easwaran 2007 [1987], p.328)

Yoga

The spiritual sciences of *yoga* also centre on the principle of unification. The term *yoga* means 'union': 'The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj meaning to bind, join, attach and yoke…. It also means union or communion' (Iyengar 1991, p.19). *Yoga*, in its many forms, is a practical spiritual science that aims to bring about a state of unified consciousness through discipline and self-control:

> The methods of yoga… are designed to quieten the compulsive activity of the mind and its habit of limited identification with transient aspects of reality; to change our consciousness from one of apartness and separateness to one of identification and union. (Devereux 1994, p.3)

Authoritative texts include the *Yoga Sutras* (circa second-fourth centuries C.E.) attributed to Patanjali, and the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*. These texts name many forms of *yoga*, including: *hatha yoga* (physical postures), *karma yoga* (the *yoga* of action), *jnana yoga* (the path of knowledge), *bhakti yoga* (the way of loving devotion) and *nāda yoga* (the *yoga* of sound). *Yoga* is thus 'a variety of practices that share the common goal of uniting with (yoking to) the divine' (Viswanathan and Allen 2004, p.18).

It is thought that there are many paths, but only one ultimate destination. Music is considered one such path: 'Nāda Yoga as a term for music embodies the idea that the experience of musical sound is a direct means of becoming united with the divine' (ibid.). Many Hindustāni musicians consider their practice as a form of *yoga*. Ali Akbar Khan remarks on the similarity between *yoga* and the various exercises a musician needs to learn: 'You have to learn at least three-hundred-sixty different kind of exercises for voice, just like yoga' (Khan 2006, p.35). *Bansuri* player Hariprasad Chaurasia states 'when you are playing the flute, you are making music and at the same time you are doing yoga' (Hariprasad Chaurasia in Roy 2004, p.82). Vocalist and Indian musicologist Paṇḍit Amarnath considers Hindustāni music to embody numerous forms of *yoga*, incorporating the paths of knowledge, action and devotion:

> The Hindustani music tradition, unfolding this great art as *karma* yoga, *gyana* yoga as well as *bhakti* yoga. In other words *gyana* (or knowledge), which is meaningless without *karma* (or doing), *karma* which is blind without *gyana*, and both being complete only with *bhakti* (or devotion and faith). (Amarnath 1994, p.vii)

Brahman and *ātman*

We have already briefly introduced the Hindu philosophical belief in a supreme reality, an absolute being, or a great cosmic soul known as *brahman*, which can be translated as the 'God' of Indian philosophy. This central philosophical concept requires further discussion in order to contextualise additional important themes. The omnipresent universal absolute, beyond time and space, beyond duality and relativity, *brahman* is transpersonal, trans-conceptual, and formless.[15] *Ātman* is our 'true self' or 'soul'. *Ātman* can also be equated to our inner witness or consciousness, the aspect of the self that remains constant throughout all outer changes in our lives. Indian

[15] The concept of *brahman* is enigmatic and not easily defined, partly because it has undergone schematic development through innumerable references in philosophical discourse over several millennia. See Beck (2008 [1993]); Easwaran (2009 [1987]) for a more detailed discussion on the meaning(s) of *brahman*.

Philosopher Hari Prasad Shastri advances a compelling argument illustrating the independent nature of *ātman*:

> The changeless can never be identical with the changing; the Witness can never be the same as what is witnessed. The self is therefore essentially different from the body and the mind. (Shastri 1957 [1976], p.25)

The central thrust of the *Upanishads* is encapsulated in the formulae *Tat Tvam Asi*, 'That Art Thou' (*Chandogya Upanishad* in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.79).[16] This concept sits at the heart of *Advaita Vedanta*; *ātman*, the 'true self' or 'soul' is identical to *brahman* – they are ultimately one and the same supreme reality. The *Katha Upanishad* (circa fifth century B.C.E.) describes this absolute reality:

> The uncaused cause… this Brahman, this Self, deep-hidden in all beings… Soundless, formless, intangible, undying… without beginning, without end, eternal, immutable, beyond nature, is the Self. (*Katha Upanishad*, translated in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.10)

The relationship between *ātman* and *brahman* is expounded in a famous story in the *Upanishads*. The story recounts a conversation between father and son, or *guru* and disciple:

> 'These rivers my dear Svetaketu, run, the eastern towards the east, the western towards the west. They go from the ocean and return to the ocean. They become the ocean itself. But once they have become the ocean they are incapable of remembering having been this river or that. In the same manner, my dear son, all these creatures, when they have emerged from Being, do not know that they have emerged from Being. Whatever these creatures are, whether a lion or a wolf or a boar or a worm or a midge or a gnat or a mosquito, they are all identical with that Being which is subtle essence. The whole universe is identical with that subtle essence, which is none other that the self. And you are That, Svetaketu.'
> 'Father, teach me more', he asked his father.
> 'Be it so,' his father replied…
>
> 'Place this salt in water, and them come to me in the morning'. Svetaketu did as he was asked, and the next morning his father said to him: 'Bring me the salt which you placed in the water last night.' The son looked for it, but could not find it because it had dissolved completely. 'Sip the water from the surface,' said the father. How is it?' 'It is salt.' Sip it from the middle,' said the father. 'How is it?' 'It is salt'. 'Sip it from the bottom,' said the father. 'How is it?' 'It is salt.' His father explained. 'In the same manner, my dear son, you do not see Being. But it is there. It is this subtle essence. The whole universe is identified with it, and it is none other than the self. And you are That, Svetaketu.' (Chandogya Upanishad, 6, 10 and 13 in Demariaux 1995, p.31)

[16] *Tat tvam asi* is also commonly translated as 'You Are That' (for example Demariaux 1995).

These two parts of the story convey different perspectives on the nature of existence and the relationship between *ātman* and *brahman*. First, our experience of this world is one of differentiated objects, which are ultimately one and the same. *Advaita Vedānta* claims that the experience of being a separate individual is an illusion (*māya*). We are not all just part of the vast ocean, we are the ocean, and there is nothing but ocean. The second part of the story expresses how the same essence permeates all life; the salt and the water are inseparable, our being (*ātman*) and the supreme-being (*brahman*) are one and the same. We cannot perceive this essence because of its subtle and invisible nature, even though it is all-pervasive.

Hindustāni music and the principle of unity

The principle of unity is evident in the ideology expressed by exponents of Indian classical music. It is a recurring theme in the narratives of Hindustāni musicians regarding subjects such as the origins of Indian classical music (see Chapter 4), and the ethos and affect of performance (Chapter 7). Hindustāni musicians point to the idea that *rāga* improvisation can lead to intense metaphysical experience, often conceptualised as a window into the absolute nature of reality, a reality wherein duality and separation are transcended into a unitary state, a unity that is ideally shared between musicians and audience. This window gives access to a direct view of the nature of reality (*brahman*), and also a revelation of the true nature of self (*ātman*). This revelatory experience of divine unity is one explanation of how Hindustāni music functions as a spiritual practice. Another explanation lies in the origins of sound and *rāga*. As sound is conceptualised as emanating from a divine essence (*nāda-brahma*), similar explanations are offered to explain the origins of *rāga* (see Chapter 4). The implication is that through the experience of *rāga* 'that essence can be perceived' (Shankar 2008).

All is *sa*

'*Sa*' (shortened from the Sanskrit '*sadja*') is essentially a technical term denoting the fundamental tonic, or root note of Indian classical music. The importance of *sa* to Hindustāni music can hardly be overstated. *Sa* is the only note common to all *rāgas*. Indian music theory asserts that the meaning of all notes derives from its interval (*shruti*) from *sa*. In all recitals of Hindustāni music this fundamental tonic is consistently heard through the use of drone, reminding us of this fundamental

precept.[17] Besides the use of the *tānpurā* (and/or other instruments) to create the drone, many stringed instruments have a drone string tuned to *sa* that resounds through large parts of a *rāga* recital. *Rāga* emanates from *sa* and returns to *sa*. Throughout a *rāga* exposition, codified in the improvisational methodology, *sa* is stated repeatedly as a point of resolution, or used to signify the end of an episode in the extended development of the opening section, *ālāp*.

According to Amarnath (1994, p.101) the word *sadja* comes from '*shata* (six)' and '*ja* (born of)', 'that is, born of six organs: nose, throat, chest, palate, tip of the tongue, and teeth.' He further implies that 'born of six' suggests that the other six notes are derived from *sadja*.[18] This etymology supports the manner in which *sa* functions in *rāga*, and resonates with the symbolic and philosophical weight some musicians ascribe to *sa*, identifying it with an idealised state of unity or with *nāda-brahma*, the divine source of all sound. As a metaphor, this could hardly be more apt. The everlasting, changeless *sa*, is both the beginning and the final point of resolution, and is the fundamental and continuous backdrop to any *rāga*. *Sa* is like the timeless centre, the only constant, underlying the diverse, shifting sonic landscape of Indian classical music.

A few musicians offered me reflections on '*sa*' as a philosophical concept. *Sarod* player Sougata Roy Choudhury points to the essential and fundamental importance of *sa* in *rāga*, offering the analogy of a tree's root.

> *Sa* is the base, *sa* is the root, see this tree with all its branches with its own shape, its leaves, flowers, fruit. If there was no root, then where is the *raag*? (Sougata Roy Choudhury November 2010)

[17] This explains one theoretical function of the drone, which is to establish a constant *sa* so that the distinct quality of different *shrutis* can be defined: 'Heard always in relation to the tonic note, each note in the scale yields a colour and emotional charge' (Dhar 1992, p.19). 'Notes are always manifested through the "interval they form with the tonic", their *shruti*, "just as a pitcher in the dark is made manifest by a lamp." (Matanga, *Brihaddeshi*, I, 36)' (Danielou 1980, p.25).

[18] Another meaning ascribed to the term '*sadja*' is 'the call of the peacock' (Sangitratnakara of Sarngadeva in Kaufmann 1968, p.4).

Ali Akbar Khan's son, Alam Khan, influenced by his late father's reflections, ascribes spiritual meaning to being 'in tune' with *sa*:

> My father said that if you can sing *sa* in tune once in your life, you'll be a pretty lucky person. He said 'I've been in tune a couple of times in my life'. What does that mean? I think it means being in tune with your self as well, in tune with the music, and in a way that's how it does connect you with something greater. It can be related to meditation or things like that, as a spiritual practice. (Alam Khan June 2013)

After making this statement, Khan spoke about the concept of *sa* on a more existential level. His thoughts offer a glimpse into the experience of *sa* for a musician. I can relate to his sentiments through my own experiences. The effect of the continuous drone, the pull towards resolution to *sa*, and the feeling of this resolution when it lands, define *sa*, experientially, as a space of harmonious perfection:

> *Sa* is like a state of harmony within one's self. It is peace, its just being. Its being here, its now. *Sa* is like creation, it just is, you know, you're just being, in the moment, when you're playing *sa*. (ibid.)

He also identifies this all-encompassing concept of *sa* with *nāda-brahma*, the source of all sound; *sa*, as the source, contains all the *rāgas* within it:

> In *sa* you can see all of the *rāgas*. Everything has to start from a point, you take it even further, they say *nāda-brahma*, sound is God, right; so *sa* is the beginning, it's the start and it encompasses everything within it. All of it is just an extension of *sa*. (ibid.)

The *tānpurā* and the ubiquitous *sa*

The *tānpurā* (or *tāmburā*) is the principal drone instrument in Hindustāni music today.[19] The design and construction of this instrument exhibits some idiosyncratic features that appear to be functionally related to the spiritual ideology I have been discussing. A *tānpurā* resembles a *sitār* with no frets, and various sizes exist. A typical *tānpurā* has four open strings, with three tuned to *sa* and one tuned to *pa*.[20] The strings are played in sequence and the sequence is repeated continuously throughout a recital.

[19] Although the acoustic *tānpurā* is the dominant drone instrument, other instruments are also used, often in conjunction with it. Examples include bellowed reed instruments such as the *surpeti* (or *shruti box*), *harmonium*, and wind instruments. Electronic *tānpurās* are commonly used today, either in conjunction with an acoustic *tānpurā*, or on their own when an extra musician or acoustic *tānpurā* is unavailable.

[20] The number of strings on a *tānpurā* can range from three to five. Other tuning configurations are used. For example, if a *rāga* has no *pa* in it, or if *ma* is the dominant note (*vādi*) in a *rāga*, *ma* may be tuned instead of *pa*. An extra note may also be added such as *ga* or *nee*.

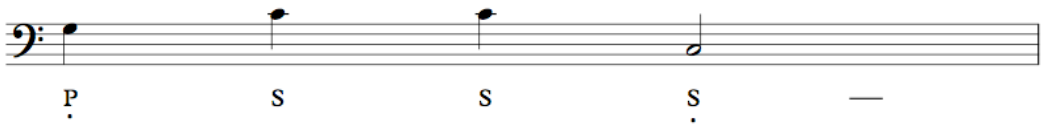


Figure 3.1: Typical *tānpurā* sequence[21]

The *tānpurā's* construction and playing technique produces overtones, and complex timbral relations between the different strings. The *tānpurā* has a wide curved bridge, similar to that of a *sitār*, with a long region of contact between the bridge and the strings. This creates a distinctive 'buzzing' timbre (*javari*).[22] This effect is exaggerated in the *tānpurā* with the use of thread placed between the string and the bridge. This raises the string a fraction above the bridge and thus increases or 'opens' the *javari*, leading to an exaggerated 'buzzing' timbre and a wide array of overtones. The strings on the *tānpurā* are played half-way along their length with the flesh of the fingers, and are 'stroked' rather than 'plucked'. This playing technique increases overtones and produces a textured sound. Plucking the strings, or playing them close to the bridge, would place too much attack on the notes and make the rhythm created by the sequence of individual notes too apparent. The *tānpurā* does produce a rhythmic pattern, although this is heavily masked by its dense sound texture. The rhythmic pattern relates in no way to the pulse of the *rāga* and *tāla*. An Indian musician once remarked to me that the *tānpurā* exists in its own 'celestial space', therefore the rhythm produced by it does not come down to the 'earthly plane'.[23]

Although *sa* is heard throughout, it is not produced as a clear prolonged pitch. *Sa* is obscured, emanating and flowing from within the complex sound-texture. Vocalist Vijay Kichlu suggests that the distinctive sound of the *tānpurā* is 'divine', and that it connects to us on a deep spiritual level. He also points to a connection between the *tānpurā's* recurrent cyclical sound and a sense of timelessness:

[21] This transcription is a little deceptive as there is no prescribed rhythm to the *tānpurā* sequence, it is certainly not a cycle of five beats as the transcription suggests.
[22] This buzzing tonality has striking parallels with many instruments around the world used for shamanistic or mystical purposes where 'rattle' textures are used as aids in journeying rituals. The unstable nature of the tonality evokes an in-between space, and facilitates a liminal, otherworldly experience. This particular idea is not emically conceptualised in the culture of Hindustāni music in my experience.
[23] The comment was made by an Indian musician one evening in Sougata Roy Choudhury's apartment in Kolkata in January 2009.

> This sound of *tānpurā* is not only for our ears, not even for our intellect, but it goes down deep to the soul…. The very sound of *tānpurā* is divine, just four strings are played, but as far as the sound produced is concerned, there is no beginning of the sound, there is no end of the sound. (Vijay Kichlu in Desai 2009, disc 2)

Even though a *tānpurā* is generally only tuned to two notes (*sa* and *pa*), some artists, such as vocalist Vinay Bhide, remark that the instrument produces many more notes than this: 'The *tānpurā* is a wonderful instrument, if it is tuned properly, it gives you all the twelve notes' (Vinay Bhide 2012). Kichlu extends this idea, claiming that the *tānpurā* produces all the microtones: 'It is just one roll, and the roll consists of not just four notes… the sound will give you all the microtones that make the sound divine for us' (Vijay Kichlu in Desai 2009, disc 2).

Although these accounts may be exaggerated – particularly the idea that a full chromatic scale of twelve notes is created – the *tānpurā* does produce more tones than just the fundamental pitches of the open strings. Partials and overtones are produced as part of the complex tapestry of sound. As a result of the extended contact between the bridge and the strings, the fundamental pitches of the open strings are also not completely stable, but swell and contract very slightly as the notes open and close.[24]

There is perhaps a correlation between the philosophical ideal that 'all is *sa*' – that all sound emanates from divine essence (*nāda-brahma*) – and the fact that the *tānpurā* produces an extensive tapestry of extra frequencies, built from the foundational *sa*. I suggest that the unusually complex and shifting texture of the *tānpurā's* sonority elicits an imaginative response, suggesting pitches, and even melodies, that are not there.

Related to this experience, and reflecting the principle of *nāda-brahma*, some musicians ascribe independent agency to the *tānpurā*. According to vocalist Vijay Kichlu, many musicians listen to the *tānpurā* carefully before performing, and through this attentive listening, 'they discover what *raag* the *tānpurā* is suggesting at that time' (Vijay Kichlu in Desai 2009, disc 2). Vocalist Ashwini Bhide puts it slightly differently, stating that 'the *tānpurā* will emanate the *rāga* that is there in my

[24] For a scientific exploration of the complex sound texture of the *tānpurā*, see 'The Effect of Drones' in Jairazbhoy (1980).

mind' (Ashwini Bhide in Desai 2009, disc 2). Bhide also suggests that the *tānpurā* responds sympathetically to the musician. Expressing a philosophical ideal, he states that through this process the vocalist can 'become one with it':

> Take the *sa*, the *tānpurā* is near your ear like that, its like a sphere of sound. When you hit the right note, *tānpurā* responds to you, and you become one with it. It's kind of, you know, meeting what you are looking for, your objective, call it a God, call it anything you want. And so it's becoming one with it. That's what we try to do. (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

The ideal of unity recurs again. Clarke and Kini eloquently sum up these thoughts on the *tānpurā*. They equate the process of an individual musician 'merging' with the *tānpurā*, with the spiritual aspiration of absorption into unity with the divine absolute:

> The soloist represents the embodied consciousness of the individual (*jīva*); the ceaseless tānpurā drone–on the one hand integral to the performance, on the other hand unaffected by it, as if uncaused and free from causation–creates the image of the universal, unchanging consciousness (*puruṣu* or *brahman*). The performer seeking to merge his *swar* with the ethereal tānpurā enacts the quest for union between self (*ātman*) and being that represents consciousness in its most elevated sense. (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.150-151)

'The one': more than the *sum* of the parts

It is tempting to suggest a similar philosophical identification with respect to '*sum*' or 'beat one' in the cycles of Indian rhythm. The theory of *taal* centres on repeated cycles of rhythm (*tālas*). Complex subdivisions, polyrhythms and cadences are created within these cycles. Fundamental to the theory and the aesthetic experience of *taal*, is repeated resolution to '*sum*', or 'the one'. As Saxena puts it, the 'cyclical quality of our rhythm at once favours the suggestion of wholeness' (1979, p.3). Some writers have suggested a connection between the cyclical nature of Indian rhythms and the cyclical concept of Hindu cosmology. For example, relations between Indian spiritual thought and *taal* are suggested in a section called 'The Beat of the Timeless' created by the Sri Aurobindi Society (2002, p.80): 'The presence of a pervading cyclical quality in all created things is a perception that goes to the roots of all Indian spiritual thought.'[25]

[25] See also Clayton (2000, pp.15-26).

The 'Manifest' and the 'Unmanifest'

Ahata nāda and *anahata nāda* can be defined as 'manifest' sound and 'unmanifest' sound. This binary distinction mirrors other concepts in Hindu philosophy. The idea that there is both a manifest reality, and a more subtle and essential unmanifest reality, is echoed in a number of related paradigms stemming from different schools of Indian philosophy. Throughout these different paradigms, there is an overarching principle that the unmanifest is the essential divine reality, that this unmanifest reality is the source of the manifest reality, and is thus revealed through the manifest. The unmanifest divine essence is thought to exist within and beyond the manifest world, simultaneously immanent and transcendent. I now introduce these principles, and this dynamic, before considering how this basic principle of the manifest and the unmanifest is relevant to Indian classical music.

Nirguna-brahman and *saguna-brahman*

The concept of *brahman* can be thought of as both 'manifest' and 'unmanifest', or 'conditional' and 'unconditional'. *Nirguna-brahman* means 'reality without attributes' and is the transpersonal aspect of the divine in its absolute state of formlessness. *Nirguna-brahman* is beyond our normal perception, transcending all duality, relativity and even mental conception. 'It transcends attributes altogether, far beyond the normal range of our spiritual perception and the capabilities of our mental conception' (Paul 2004, p.40).

Divinity is said to manifest in the world as form moving through time. This is known as *saguna*, or 'with attributes'. Deities in the Hindu pantheon are considered '*saguna-brahman*'. For example, the deity Sarasvatī (the Hindu goddess of learning, music and the arts) is seen as representative of a quality of the supreme being or divine absolute, personified in the form of a goddess. She is an accessible form of *brahman*, with individual qualities and functions.[26]

[26] This distinction between '*saguna-brahman*', 'with attributes'; and '*nirguna-brahman*', 'without attributes', can be said to represent two philosophical schools. The first is based on monotheism, the existence of one God; the second is based on monism, the existence of one reality. The first is characterised by a personal god, and the second by an impersonal reality. A personal god makes the practice of spirituality more accessible, through the act of worship to a chosen deity. On a theoretical level, according to *Advaita Vedānta*, the impersonal perspective is the ultimate, elusive truth, distinguished only by its total absence of attributes: 'The absolutistic spirituality of *nirguna brahman* stakes the claim that the ultimate reality is without any differentiating attributes (*nir*: without; *guna*:

Śabda-brahman and *aśabda-brahman*

Resonating strongly with the concept of *nāda-brahma*, the potency of sound as a manifestation and agent of the divine is expounded in various schools of Indian philosophy. The *Mimamsa* school of Indian philosophy explains the power of *mantra* ('sacred word', 'syllable', 'chant formula'; Beck 2008 [1993], pp.30-31) through the concept of '*sabda*' or 'eternal word' (Coward and Goa 2004, p.35):

> Every sabda or word has an eternal meaning. Each sabda is the sound-representative of some aspect of the eternal cosmic order. The mantras of the Vedas, therefore, are not words coined by humans. They are the sounds or vibrations of the eternal principles of the cosmic order itself. (Coward and Goa 2004, p.35)

According to this school of philosophy, these divine sounds exist in seed form, irrespective of human influence. The *Maitri-Upanishad* denotes two forms of *brahman*, *śabda-brahman* 'sound-brahman', and *aśabda-brahman* 'non-sound-brahman':

> There are two Brahmans to be meditated upon; sound (*śabda*) and non-sound (*aśabda*). Now, non-sound is revealed only by sound. Now, in this case the Sound-Brahman is Om. Ascending by it, one comes to an end in the non-sound…. This is immortality. (The *Maitri-Upanishad* in Beck 2008 [1993], p.45)

The *Maitri-Upanishad* suggests that divine silence (*aśabda-brahman*), is reached through sound, in this case the primal seed *mantra*, *om*.[27]

Consciousness and *om*: from sound to silence – 'the un-uttered *sa*'

The over-arching principle expounded by the concepts *ahata nāda* / *anahata nāda*; *nirguna-brahman* / *saguna-brahman*; and *śabda-brahman* / *aśabda-brahman* is that there is a formless silent mystical reality, within and beyond all form. Through form, this inner formlessness can be revealed; through sound, silence can be experienced. This idea is reflected in the spiritual ideology of Hindustāni music:

> [Rāga improvisation] can become a passageway leading us to a still and luminous center. This seems to have been the constant search of Indian music throughout the ages. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.29)

---

differentiation) and it is this fact about it which in fact differentiates it from everything else!' (Sharma 2006, pp.16-17).

[27] See Rowell (1992, p.38); Clarke and Kini (2011), for more detail on *śabda-brahman* and *aśabda-brahman*.

The idea that sound can lead to silence is stated by a number of Indian classical musicians. Vocalist Kishmori Amonkar states that *ahata nāda* or audible music should lead to *anahata nāda* or silent essence:

> Actually, musicality should lead to silence! A stage comes when sur [being in tune] begins to move and speak within one's mind. That's the realm of silence. After the pronounced 'sa' we must reach the un-uttered 'sa'. After 'aahat' [*ahata*], our yearning should be to feel the 'anaahat' [*anahata*]. I must also see what is beyond. This is not idle philosophy, mind you, this is the domain of practical reality. Practise, and you will achieve. (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.125)

The idea that practice should lead one to a 'beyond' experience is typical of the spiritual yearning musicians often allude to. Striving for the achievement of 'silence' or 'the un-uttered *sa*' points to an ideal state of pure being that can be contextualised through the Indian philosophical theory of different levels of consciousness. This theory is expounded in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, explained through its relation to the seed *mantra om*.

Om is both a sound and a symbol that is sacred to all major religions of Indian origin: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The origins of this sound and its associated symbol are lost in history. Hindus relate it to *nāda-brahma*, believing that *om* was the first sound of the universe, and that the universe began with *om*; therefore all sound, and all being, is contained within it:

> The syllable OM, which is the imperishable Brahman, is the universe. Whatsoever has existed, whatsoever exists, whatsoever shall exist hereafter, is OM. (*Mandukya Upanishad*, translated in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.51)

According to Sanskrit grammar, *om*, or *A-U-M*, contains three distinct sounds: 'A' from the throat; 'U' or 'O' (effectively a cross between these sounds) from the mouth; and 'M' from the lips. *Om* (or *A-U-M*) thus encapsulates the totality of vocal sound, and the totality of all sound. However, the true potency of this sound is said to lie in the experience of it fading into silence, and in the silence following its utterance.

Indian philosophy recognises three basic states of human consciousness: the waking state, the dreaming state and dreamless sleep. Contrary perhaps to Western perspectives, in Indian philosophy dreamless sleep is considered to be closest to an experience of our true selves; in dreamless sleep we temporarily experience the

infinite blissful silence of being, as all desire and attachments vanish. The *Mandukya Upanishad* states that the three sounds within *A-U-M* correspond to these three states of consciousness: 'A' represents the waking state, 'U', the dreaming state, and 'M' signifies dreamless sleep. Here *om* embodies the totality of our experience. But *om* also points to a fourth state of consciousness, known as '*turiya*' ('the fourth'). In this state of ineffable, transcendental consciousness, individual consciousness merges with the divine.[28] This fourth state of consciousness is symbolised and realised by the silence following the utterance of the sacred sound *om*.

> Beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression, is The Fourth. It is pure unitary consciousness, wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the supreme good. It is One without second. It is the Self.[29] (*Mandukya Upanishad*, translated in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.51)

Rāga Improvisation as a Mediator Between the Profane and the Divine

It is clear from the concepts already discussed that a central tenet of Hindu philosophy is the idea that there is a subtle divine essence as the root and essential quality of all reality. Different models exist to explain this core concept. Some models – such as the classification of levels of consciousness – are based on a continuum, ranging from gross, to subtle essence, and ultimately to an ineffable 'unmanifest' supreme reality.[30] Other models, discussed earlier in this chapter, view reality as a dichotomy, with two aspects, one manifest and conditional, the other unmanifest and unconditional. These different models are ultimately seen as different ways of explaining a trans-conceptual absolute reality and the one supreme truth of unification. I now further consider the relevance of these concepts to the practice of Hindustāni music, with particular attention to the experience and system of *raga* improvisation, and to the texts of Hindustāni vocal music.

---

[28] This state of consciousness is named 'the fourth' because of its ineffability.

[29] For additional commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, see Sharma (2006, pp.115-118); Easwaran (2009 [1987], pp.197-201); see also Beck (1993); Clark and Kini (2011, p.146).

[30] Such continuums can also be seen in classificatory models in Indian classical musicology. See Chapter 2 for examples. Many other such models exist in the Indian philosophical lexicon. With regard to sound, *vedāntic* scholar, Swami Yogatmananda outlines a *vedāntic* view on different stratum in the continuum of sound. They range from audible sound '*vaikhari*'; through two stages, '*madhyama*' and '*pushyanti*'; to the purest, most-subtle, and least audible '*pura*' (Yogatmananda in Desai 2009, disc 1). Structures within Indian society, such as the caste system, also point to this pervasive tendency for hierarchical classification systems in the Indian cultural consciousness. Hamilton (1989) considers 'solidity through hierarchy' as a fundamental element of the 'Indian mode of perception'.

‘Law and liberty’: the ‘rules’ and the beyond experience

An apparent paradox, often alluded to by Indian classical musicians, is the juxtaposition of strict, precise and systematic ‘rules’ for *rāga* improvisation on one hand, and a ‘freedom’ that is experienced through the process of improvisation on the other. Vocalist Shubha Mudgal labels this paradox ‘law and liberty together’ (Shubha Mudgal in Desai 2009, disc 2). Another Hindustāni vocalist, Sheila Dhar explains it thus:

> One of the most remarkable things about the traditional Hindustāni music is the co-existence in its practice of the most rigorous discipline and a degree of freedom that is truly astonishing. The manifold disciplines are rigid and uncompromising; the rules of the raga, the time of the day, the intention of the composition, the confining frame of the tala, the prescribed form of presentation, faithfulness to the gharana or style of utterance. These and many other considerations bind the musician, but at the same time the tradition offers him extraordinary freedom to express his being. He is free to explore the areas between the rigid ‘notes’ of the keyboard, and free from objective time. (Dhar 1992, p.21)

Rāga is a systematic, controlled and modally restrictive template for the creation of music. At the same time, the experience of *rāga* is conceptualised as a path into an other-worldly, metaphysical experience. Musicians and scholars offer some compelling views on how this dichotomy can be understood and how the dilemma may be resolved. Holroyde, for example, suggests a mediation of this apparent paradox. The very act of precise focus on *rāga*, with its prescribed form and grammar, leads to liberation of the mind:

> Within a very strict discipline, i.e. the framework of a raag... the Indian musician will use the specific tools of his trade, the grammar in fact of gamaka or grace note, portamentos and talas or rhythm cycles, to release the mind in this very concentration upon these concrete exactitudes. (Holroyde 1972, p.35)

Holroyde appears to be presenting a further paradox, suggesting that concentration leads to the ‘release’ of the mind. However, on consideration of the practice of meditation, where the act of extreme singular focus is used as a vehicle for transcendence, this idea seems more tenable. From this perspective, the ‘freedom’ and ‘release’ Dhar and Holroyde allude to is not in conflict with the constraints of Indian classical music, or what Dhar calls the ‘binds’ a musician finds himself in. ‘Spiritual freedom’ comes from the discipline of concentration and strict adherence to the system and language of *rāga* improvisation. An association between dhrupad and meditation is suggested by Clarke and Kini (2011), which further qualifies this point:

> The greater the constraints within which the mind is encouraged to create, the greater the demand on the creative thinking process. Hence it is the extremes of concentration demanded by dhrupad's improvisatory exploration of *swar* [*svara*] that foster enhanced levels of consciousness and that connect with meditation. (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.144)

It is interesting to note that *dhrupad* (translated as 'fixed'), has a more fixed form than *khyāl* (meaning 'imagination'). *Dhrupad* requires greater adherence to 'the rules' of structural form and the language of *rāga*. It is these very restrictive controls that demand a quality of focus that may be identified as a form of meditation, which is said to lead to a 'release' of the mind. Through discipline, 'freedom' is found; through form, 'formlessness' is revealed.[31]

Learning in order to forget: becoming and transcending

Another view of the apparent paradox between the 'rules' of *rāga* and the 'freedom' of improvisation relates to a musician's evolving experience. A Hindustāni musician typically goes through a rigorous learning process, copying his *guru* (or *ustad*) carefully, practising technique in precise detail, and learning an extensive body of repertoire. Gradually, as he embodies the tradition, his style develops, and the process of improvisation becomes less mechanical and more fluid (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Through the processes of embodiment and musical maturity the challenges of technique, *taal* (rhythm), and *rāga* purity, dissolve, and some musicians state that a deeper experience of the music evolves. This deeper experience can be equated to a form of transcendence, a communion with *rāga*, or a deeply emotional journey. *Khyāl* vocalist Shabha Mudgal speaks about this as a dual process of first learning and then unlearning:

> You spend a lifetime learning the rules, then you spend another lifetime unlearning the rules, so you can say something more than just craft…. You need to learn the rules, but you don't need to let yourself get imprisoned by the rules. (Shubha Mudgal in Desai 2009, disc 2)

[31] In the discursive culture of Hindustāni music, *dhrupad* is revered as more 'spiritual' and 'devotional' than *khyāl* (Widdess 1994). This perception relates to the antiquity of the style, to notions of 'purity' and 'authenticity', to its stronger connection to *vedic* chant, and to dhrupad's fixed, structural system of *rāga* improvisation – a system itself seen as an embodiment of cosmic order.

Sitār player Nikhil Banerjee presents a similar analogy with respect to technique. Technique is essential, but in order to reach levels of transcendence through music, focus on technique must itself be transcended:

> Technical virtuosity is everything but you know music is such a thing you must first practice technique, then you must forget it. Then only can you break the fence around you and go beyond. Until and unless you can really go beyond this fence and go towards Space, everything is useless! (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

Banerjee's conviction is that transcendence is the ultimate purpose of music. However, in the context of Indian classical music, 'unlearning the rules' or 'forgetting technique' equates in no way to 'free improvisation'; *rāga* is never abandoned in the process of improvisation. The language and form of *rāga* and *taal* are strictly adhered to, acting, ideally, as a vehicle for an experience of transcendental consciousness. Technique, the language of *rāga* and 'the rules' must be so engrained in the body and mind that they can become unconscious; only then can the body and mind be transcended. It appears that Banerjee's conception of transportation to a 'beyond' experience is facilitated by the capacity to go 'beyond' physical and mental restrictions. In other words, one must learn in order to forget, and therefore discipline leads to freedom. On a more abstract level, it may be suggested that through form, 'formlessness' is revealed; or through the tangible, the 'intangible' is experienced.

From the one comes the many – from the many comes the one

Divinity or divine presence is perceived as taking many forms in Hinduism: it manifests in sound, in nature, in the natural elements, in an individual's 'soul', and in the hundreds of deities worshipped throughout the subcontinent. The countless manifestations of the divine are ultimately thought of as different faces of one 'godhead' or unified absolute (Knott 2006, pp.50-58). Explaining this central tenet of Hinduism, theologian, Kim Knott states 'the many are an expression of the One... [for] Hinduism is both polytheistic and monotheistic' (p.58).[32]

[32] Knott cites the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in a famous verse proclaiming how there are both many gods and one God at the same time (Knott 2006, pp.57-58). The many deities are each personified with a character, a sex, and other attributes; some are feared, some are worshipped in order to grant favours. *Darshana* is the practice of 'seeing' or 'being seen' by the divine through a consecrated idol (*murti*) where divine presence resides (ibid., p.51). Different deities are ultimately thought of as different aspects of the one supreme reality, and as accessible windows into this intangible absolute.

This metaphysical idea that 'the many' all come from 'the one' is mirrored in core concepts and musical processes in Hindustāni music.[33] For example, *rāga* compositions and improvisation involve potentially endless variations on a single (yet complex) melodic theme. Thousands of compositions can exist for any one *rāga*, and due to its improvised nature, every 'version' is different and new. When presented live, a *rāga* is generally developed through a structural form, built up through a series of episodes. However, the modal identity of *rāga* and its melodic theme remain constant throughout these changes. A *rāga* is conceived as singular and unified, yet presented through a limitless multiplicity of rhythmic modulation, melodic nuance, and variation.[34]

Improvisational methodology also mirrors this philosophical relationship between 'the one' and 'the many'. This includes processes of expansion and reduction, rhythmic sub-division, and the examination of pitch in minutiae. Through a variety of methods and concepts, *rāga* improvisation acts as a model that reflects core concepts in *vedāntic* philosophy. *Rāga* improvisation may both symbolically refer to these concepts on some level and may also manifest as a living embodiment and practice of this very philosophy.

The following example illustrates how a single melodic phrase can be used as a springboard for improvisation through processes of repetition along the scale and rhythmic 'reduction'.

[33] We have already discussed this in relation to the ever-present drone.
[34] See Chapter 4, 'The Concept of *Rāga*'.
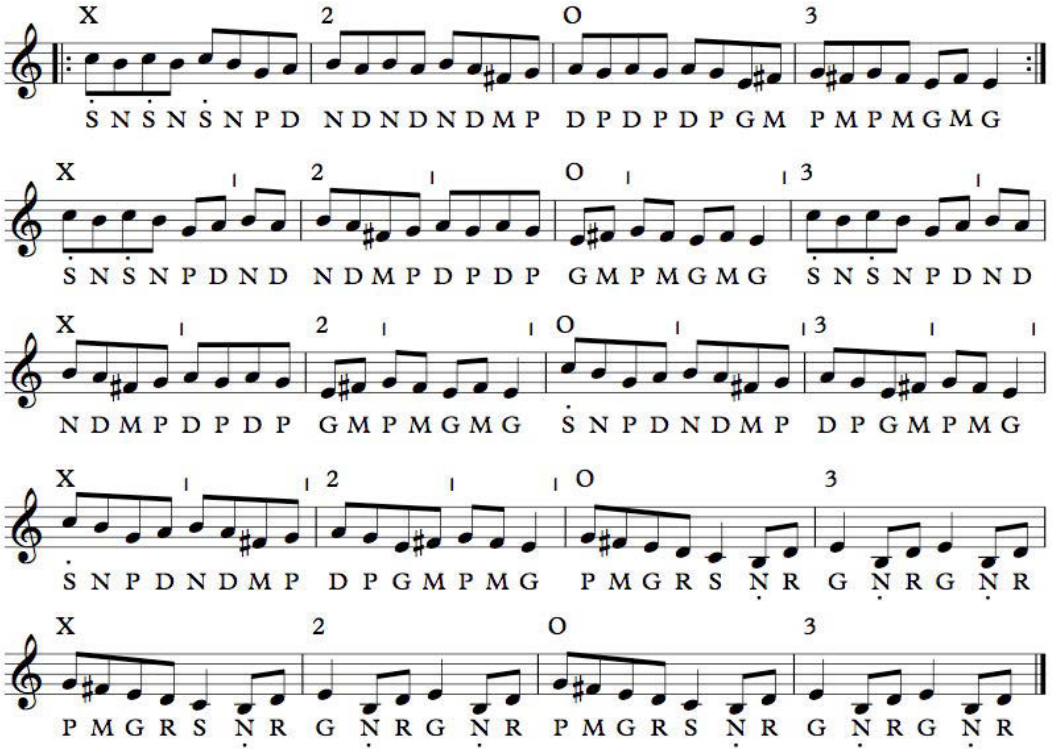


Figure 3.2: An example of repetition and reduction

I offer the following analysis: the musical sequence is essentially based on the manipulation of a single phrase 'ṠNPD'. The phrase first takes the space of four beats, with the first two notes repeated: 'ṠNṠNṠNDP'. In the next line the phrase takes the space of three beats: 'ṠNṠNDP'. The next time the phrase is played, it lasts for two beats: 'ṠNDP'. Each time the phrase is played, it is reduced in length, hence the use of the term 'reduction'. In tandem with this, the melodic motif is repeated sequentially down the scale, played four times at each rhythmic length. Each group of four phrases is played twice. The melodic progression is concluded with a *tihāi*, or a cadence, where a phrase is played three times. This musical sequence was shown to me by Kushal Das during my lessons with him in February 2007. It enacts not as repertoire to be repeated in a performance, but as an example of compositional devices used in *rāga* improvisation.[35] It illustrates how complex musical sequences can be created from very sparse material, how endless variations can potentially arise from a single phrase, how 'the many' can come from 'the one'.

[35] The sequence is based in Rāga Yaman but there is an implication that it can be adapted to other *rāgas* by following and copying the compositional logic. See Chapter 6 for examples of other musical material taught to me by Kushal Das.

The processes of rhythmic subdivision are many-fold. Time-cycles or '*tālas*' are foundational to rhythm in Hindustāni music. A time cycle is enacted as a recurring pattern of a particular number of beats. For example, the common cycle of *teentaal* is sixteen beats long and is conceptualised as a round, repeated over and over. Through the practice of rhythmic subdivision, the sixteen beats may be divided up in numerous ways. Common divisions include 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4, or 4 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 2, but variations are endless. Again 'the one' becomes 'the many'; and 'the many' are expressions of 'the one'. Similar processes can occur in slow sections of *rāga* improvisation (*vilambit*). Through the process of *layakārī* ('playing with time') single beats are divided up into smaller divisions of three, four, five, six or seven pulses.[36]

Most melody instruments used in Hindustāni music have the ability to bend pitch (*meend*) with a high degree of control through an extended melodic range.[37] This facilitates the quintessential Indian aesthetic sense that beauty lies in the movement between pitches and not so much in the execution of fixed pitch. Movement between pitch is highly refined in the practice of Hindustāni music and is performed in exacting detail. This refinement is evidenced in technical terminology: '*meend*' refers to movement between notes; '*shrutis*' denote microtonal pitches outside 'fixed' intervals; in instrumental music '*gamak*' is an ornament where rapid pitch bending is performed; '*āndolan*' refers to the slow oscillation of pitch. I suggest that movement between pitches, along with the exploration of microtones, has the affect of evoking an 'in-betweeness', and facilitates a shift in consciousness beyond the fixed nature of everyday perception.

In relation to the bending of pitch, it may also be said that through an exploration of the many, the 'one' is revealed. We have already considered how a musical note ('*svara*') is said to have a 'divine soul' (Uday Bhawalker in Clarke and Kini 2011, p.145), and how this 'soul' may be 'revealed' through *rāga* improvisation. The improvisational methodology, especially in *ālāp*, the opening non-metered section of a *rāga*, includes the exploration of pitch in minutiae. The nuance of pitch is examined in infinitesimal detail through the use of *shrutis* (microtones) and through the weight

[36] The translation 'playing with time' was offered to me by Sougata Roy Chowdhury (personal correspondence February 2009). See pp.45-47 in this dissertation for a view into the Indian theory of time division.
[37] This does not exclude the human voice, which is seen as the 'purest' instrument in Hindustāni music.

of *meend* (pitch bending). This kind of nuanced investigation of pitch builds up a sense of tension and anticipation. Then, when a *svara* is stated clearly, it shines out on the point of resolution. Its true 'colour' is pronounced, revealed through the exploration of its myriad shades. The affective meaning of the interval is defined through its development. Through 'the many', 'the one' is revealed.

In *ālāp*, individual notes are developed one at a time through a gradual sequential fashion. In the *gat* section, when a rhythm cycle is introduced, a similar pitch development can be effected. In my lessons with Kushal Das, he instructed me to 'stand on a note' during the *gat* section of *rāga*. 'Standing on a note' means that a particular note becomes the locus of attention for an extended time through a play with anticipation and resolution. The note is repeatedly landed on after a series of increasingly complex phrases and thus becomes the consistent point of resolution. It is again as if the 'essence of the note' (*svara*) is 'revealed' through exploring it from every conceivable angle, and in every conceivable way.

Māya ('illusion') and *ahamkara* ('ego')

Like *svara*, a *rāga* is also thought to have an inner essence. Holroyde views the process of Indian classical improvisation as a search for the 'inner feel' of *rāga*: 'in their intensive exploration of abstract sound. The certain and particular notes of each raag are examined in every conceivable way to get at the secrets of the "inner feel" of the structure of each raag' (Holroyde 1972, p.35).

At a philosophical level, the revelation of the inner essence of *rāga* can be thought of as a glimpse into divine reality. Holroyde contextualises this through the Hindu principle of *māya*, the illusionary nature of our perception:

> Maya is the concept of illusion, false reality. The immediately recognizable material world is questioned on the validity of its realness. Humanity takes it for real, not realizing the opaqueness our ignorance gives to the outer form. 'Real' reality is within the essence of a thing rather than in its outer shell. (Holroyde 1972, p.34)

Māya can be described as a cloud of illusion, which obscures our perception of the 'supreme reality'. It is *māya* that is said to give us the experience of relativity, duality, linear time, and ego. Philosopher Hari Prasad Shastri offers a compelling analogy to describe *māya*:

> If a man tries to fix his eyes on the center of the bright sun, he is dazzled and cannot see it. It is the extreme brilliance of the sun which covers it and prevents it from being seen. Similarly, it is the extreme luminosity of the supreme Consciousness which repels the intellect and does not allow it to identify itself with the Self. This is what is called Maya. (Shastri 1957 [1976], p.28)

According to Hindu thought, we are all caught up in the game of *māyalila*, the play of illusion. Through spiritual practice, *māya* (the veil of illusion) becomes very thin, and a spiritual practitioner can peer through it and get a glimpse into a more essential reality.

Ahamkara or 'ego' is a concept related to *māya*. The ego is said to be the result of our false identification with the mind, body and false reality. In order to release this identification, we must surrender our ego and experience the real self beyond the egoic self. Dissolving the ego, we merge with the supreme reality (Shastri 1957 [1976], p.33).[38] We will see later in this dissertation how the spiritual ideology of Hindustāni music advocates the dissolution of the ego in a number of ways. These include humility to one's *guru* and to *rāga*, and a form of 'surrender' to the process of improvisation. This process of 'surrender' is said to bring about an experience of divine reality, or divine presence. This experience can be thought of in terms of glimpsing through the veil of *māya*, 'the unreal', and perceiving the essential 'real' nature of the universe.

The endless search for *sa*

Ideologically, *rāga* improvisation may embody a kind of mystical quest, or spiritual search. The spiritual goal of this search is often described as unattainable, infinite and endlessly subtle. Indian classical music is conceptualised as a vehicle to the divine, but in two directions at once. It is seen as a link back to a primordial essence (*nāda-brahma*), and to the spiritual heritage of ancient India, celebrated in the *Vedas*. *Rāga* is thus perceived as immanently spiritual. At the same time, the process of *rāga*

[38] See also Holroyde (1972, p.45).

improvisation may be described as a transcendental 'beyond experience'.[39] Indian musicians speak of their practice as a search for divine unity, both in terms of an inner journey towards an unattainable essence, and in terms of transcendence.

Learning Hindustāni music, *riāz* (practice), and *rāga* improvisation are all pursuits that embody this endless search. There are hundreds of *rāgas* played in Hindustāni music today, and few exponents have an in-depth knowledge of more than one hundred or so. There are always new *rāgas* and new compositions to learn, and it is always possible to go deeper into *rāgas* that are already 'known'. *Riāz*, too, is endless. The refinement of technique in terms of clarity and speed is potentially limitless. New exercises, and new approaches to improvisation are always possible. The practice of *riāz* is a lifetime's pursuit. In fact a popular traditional anecdote states that it takes seven lifetimes to learn *sitār*. Another popular phrase – used by musicians as a humble reply to a compliment – is, 'I am only a drop in a vast ocean of promise'. Musicians commonly proclaim that they are always learning, even master musicians, such as *tablā* maestro Zakir Hussain: 'I am always just a student' (Zakir Hussain in Desai [2009], disc 1). In relation to *riāz*, Daniel Neuman suggests:

> The concept of *riāz* encompasses more than its translation as 'practice' would suggest. It is not only a preparation for performance, but also a preparation for an unattainable perfection. It is a learning experience for which there is never an end, only successive stages. (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.34)

Alam Khan identifies a constant striving for 'unity', 'truth', or 'God' as 'the search for *sa*'. As we have already seen, '*sa*' can be painted in a philosophical light as a state of perfection, unity and ultimate resolution. Khan speaks of every musician's individual search for 'their own *sa*', painting a picture of a personal pursuit: 'We are always searching for *sa*. *Sa* can be found everywhere. Everybody's *sa* can be different…. Everybody has to find their own *sa*' (Alam Khan June 2013). In a similar vein, Nikhil Banerjee suggests that in the past, the practice of music was a pursuit of 'truth'. He believes that this ethos should be retained in the minds of present practitioners: 'It was practiced in search of truth. This is the background of Indian classical music; you must keep it in your mind always' (Nikhil Banerjee 1985).

[39] The dichotomy of immanence / transcendence is proposed by Wolfgang Stefani (1993) as a principal stylistic determinate in sacred music.

The *Upanishads* expound on the search for the true self, hidden deep within, on the very subtlest level of being: 'subtler than the subtlest is this Self' (*Katha Upanishad*, translated in Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.7). Holroyde suggests that the Indian traditional arts are not a search for something new, but rather an illumination of 'what is' (1972, p.38). In the Indian philosophical mind, 'truth' is a constant, a pervasive subtle essence, that can be expressed in myriad ways. However, the essence remains ineffable and elusive, as the intangible supreme reality.

> Truth is seen in opposites and multireflections… "it is not this – it is not that" – neti, neti, declare the *Upanishads* on the nature of reality…. Truth is like the mercury globule. Incapable of being pinned down, it wriggles free. (Holroyde 1972, p.39 and p.61)

The search appears endless, and 'truth' can only be experienced in rare glimpses. Musicologist Lewis Rowell uses the analogy of zeno's paradox to illustrate the nature of the endless search for truth. Like zeno's racehorse, who gets closer and closer to the end, but never reaches it, so it is with Indian classical music. The search for a unitary 'truth', although reportedly experienced in rare glimpses, is ultimately out of reach:

> The search is open-ended, since truth can never be known in full. It is open-ended, with a method whose goal, like zeno's racecourse, is unattainable. (Rowell 1992, p.24)

A similar sentiment is beautifully expressed by India's most famous poet, Kabir (c. 1440-1518):

> It is like the lotus, which lives in the water and blooms in the water: yet the water cannot touch its petals, they open beyond its reach. (Kabir in Tagore and Underhill 2004 [1914], p.20)

This idea of reaching for something that is always beyond is reflected in the thoughts of Ali Akbar Khan, relayed to me by Sougata Roy Chowdhury:

> Ali Akbar Khansahib, when he is playing he has a very gentle smile on his face…. If you see him, if you ask him, he always said that 'I am this much far away from *sa*'. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury November 2010)

I end this section with a metaphor for complete resolution and finality. Once again Roy Chowdhury is quoting his idol, Ali Akbar Khan, stating that if he ever 'purely' touches *sa*, that would be the end of his life's work:

> Ali Akbar Khan said 'I'm still far from *sa*. When I can purely touch the *sa*, my work is done, and that's the end of me'. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury July 2013)

Metaphor and sentiment in North Indian classical vocal music:

I finish the chapter with an exploration of the metaphorical meaning in the texts of Hindustāni vocal music, and a brief introduction to the theory of *rasa* ('mood', 'taste', or 'aesthetic flavour'). The philosophical principles of duality, separation, and the striving for unification are commonly expressed in the texts of Hindustāni vocal compositions (*bandish*). These concepts are expounded through metaphorical poetics. A common theme in many of these texts is the longing for divine love, or for unity with the divine.[40] The theme is commonly personified through the story of the milkmaid (*gopi*) Radha and the deity Krishna. Radha sings of her longing for the love of Krishna and for unification with her beloved, unification that almost never comes. The sentiment is romantic and sad, often with erotic overtones. This unrequited love is a metaphor for the human search for union with the divine. Radha represents the individual human; Krishna, represents the transpersonal divine.[41]

This theme is intimately related to the *bhakti* tradition,[42] and many texts used in Indian classical music come from this tradition. *Bhakti*, or popular Hindu devotionalism, also centres on the themes of separation and unity. The *Bhāgavad-Gitā* is a seminal Hindu sacred text in which Krishna outlines various practical paths to enlightenment, and union with the divine ('*yoga*'). *Bhakti* is expounded as the easiest, most direct, and most accessible spiritual path, hence its enduring popularity. *Bhakti* centres on an experience of divine presence and an emotional search for union with a personalised God.[43]

[40] Texts can also include descriptions of deities, honours to rulers and the beauty of nature.
[41] According to Indian philosophical thought, to reach God is to transcend duality. In the Radha-Krishna stories, this duality is portrayed as the female-male pair and the humanity-divinity dialectic.
[42] Also known as the '*bhakti* movement'.
[43] See also Chapter 6 in this study.

This theme is particularly evident in the texts of the popular Hindustāni vocal styles of *khyāl* and *ṭhumri*.[44] The following is an example of a popular *khyāl* text:

Eri aaj bhailava sukhva,
Ah friend, there is such expectation of happiness today,
Mere mana ko suna jiya ki baaten
Tell me tales about my beloved

Aavana kahe begi bulaave,
When will you come? I am calling,
Sadaa rahoge anand bhailav
You will be eternally joyous and content

(Bagchee 2006, p.198 [translation Yameema Mitha])

Like so many of these texts, this can be interpreted in two ways: as a human love story, in which a girl is yearning to meet with her lover and hoping for eternal joy with him; and also as a prayer for unification with the divine, where 'my beloved' is the deity Krishna, an *avatar* (manifestation) of God. Human romantic love is used as a metaphor for spiritual love. It is common in these vocal texts for the emphasis to be on a sense of separation and a deep yearning for re-unification, as in the following example:

Piya more anat des gailava
My lover has gone to another country
Na jaanu kaba ghar aavenge
I do not know when he will return

Unake daras dekhve ko ankhiya tarasa rahin
My eyes are longing to get a glimpse of him
Una bina mohe kachhu na bhaave
Without him, I cannot feel (experience) anything

(Bagchee 2006, p.191)

Hindustāni vocalist Vinay Bhide explains the 'double meaning' in these texts in relation to the wider field of Indian poetry:

> Indian poetry is always double meaning, one meaning goes in spiritual way; other one is everyday life. So, describing the nature, lightning is going on, thunder is going here and there, and I'm alone waiting for my beloved, and he's not there. This can be a regular meaning of real life, or the beloved is the God. (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

[44] *Ṭhumri* is a light classical romantic vocal style related in sentiment to the *bhakti* movement.

We are once again presented with a dichotomy between the manifest earthly world and an unreachable divinity, or between the mundane and the spiritual. In this way, the texts of Hindustāni vocal music mediate between the world of everyday life and the world of the divine. They relate directly to human emotions and desires, but are metaphorically elevated into stories of divine worship. The dual meaning is not just intellectually metaphorical, but the stories are allegorical in intent.

Bhide suggests that while a double meaning is generally present in the texts of Indian vocal music, the presence of the spiritual aspect of the meaning depends on the artist's interpretation. To illustrate the point, he relates the story of a *ṭhumri* text. In the song a girl is about to climb into her nuptial bed, but she is scared, because she is wearing an ankle bracelet; the bells are going to make noise and she is embarrassed that everyone will hear her:

> This can be a scene of any newly wed bride, ok? The philosophical meaning is that: now is the time going from this world to the next world, and all that I did in my life, which is bad, now making noise! See, so same thing, but it is symbolically philosophical now. It is philosophical, it is spiritual, but provided that you think that way, you interpret that way, otherwise its a love song! (ibid.)

Bhide qualifies this further by suggesting that the meaning of such a song depends on the manner in which the artist is thinking about it as he or she performs. In our discussion, he also extended this idea into instrumental music, stating that although there are no words, instrumental music should reflect vocal music, and an instrumentalist can still think of the meaning of a *bandish* (vocal composition with text). He summed up these thoughts stating that musical meaning is defined through the subjective quality of thought:

> Your thoughts are supposed to reflect in your improvisation. The language helps us. If you are not a singer, you have no words but those means are still there for you. Music is philosophical, music is mundane, I won't say music is anything! The meaning is in your head! That reflects into that and then it becomes philosophical, it becomes spiritual or, none of that. (ibid.)

For Bhide, the ideal quality of mind first involves a form of worship of sound. Then as the singer becomes absorbed into the meaning of the song, he or she 'become(s) that':

> It's a *bhakti* [devotion]. We all us musicians, we actually worship sound, so being one with it first of all is what we do, and then, you have to say, what you singing? What are you thinking about that song? And you become that. (ibid.)

One way in which 'you become that' is through absorption into the emotion of the story, or the '*rasa*' (mood) of the *rāga*.[45]

Rasa and the sentiment of separation

The ancient and extensive theory of *rasa* outlines a model for sentiment, mood and aesthetic affect in the Indian arts.[46] In Indian classical music, *rasa* is the inner feel or 'taste' of a *rāga*. Therefore, *rasa* may be said to connect the artist to the *rāga*, and human emotion may become a vehicle to divine communion. According to Hindustāni vocalist Rajeswar Bhattacharya, the prominent theme of separation in Hindustāni music instils a feeling of pathos and longing. He equates this longing to 'devotion':

> Any classical song based on the devotional way of singing…. You cannot make any joy with the notes, with the *rāga*, you understand? You cannot sing like a pop, like enjoyment, not superficial, its pure devotional. Sad, you know sad, sadness, every *rāga* is sad. No joy is there, only sadness. Every *rāga* is sad because of the longing…. The story is of separation from my lover, the feeling is longing, separation. It's all about separation. (Rajeswar Bhattacharya June 2008)

Reflecting this view, vocalist Kishori Amonkar also considers *karuna* (pathos) to be the principal *rasa* in vocal music.[47]

---

[45] Sougata Roy Chowdhury describes the essence of the Krishna-Radha stories as 'anticipation, love and sacrifice' (November 2010). The anticipation comes from Radha's ceaseless expectation of intimacy with Krishna. For example, she may be expecting to meet Krishna and waits for him until sunrise, but he does not show up. A famous *bandish* set to Rāga Yaman illustrates this, a translation of its principal refrain is: 'Oh where is my beloved, I spend my time counting the stars' (I am indebted to Rajeswar Bhattacharya for this translation). In musical terms, a sense of anticipation is a key component in the aesthetic feel of both *rāga* and *tāla*. Playing with melodic and rhythmic tension, and the expectation of resolution to *sa* and *sum* ('beat one') is central to the methodology and form of *rāga* improvisation.

[46] The theory of *rasa* relates to the Indian classical performing arts as a whole, incorporating music, dance, and drama. The *Natyasastra* outlines eight *rasas*, *shānti* (peace) was added to the classification system in the tenth century to complete the '*navaras*' ('nine rasas') (Ruckert 2004, p.28), and is said to encompass all the other *rasas*. The nine *rasas* are: '*shringara* (romantic/erotic), *hasya* (comic), *karuna* (pathetic), *raudra* (wrathful), *vira* (heroic), *bhayanka* (terrifying), *bibhasta* (odious) and *adbhuta* (wonderous)… [and] *shanta* (peace)' (Bagchee 1998, p.83). Not all of the *rasas* are considered relevant to Hindustāni music; *shṛingār*, *karuna*, and *shānti* are most commonly referred to. For further discussion of *rasa* see Wade (1998); B.C. Deva (1992); Ruckert (2004, p.28); and Bagchee (1998, p.83). See also p.97 and Chapter 7 in this dissertation.

[47] Although Amonkar and Bhattacharya both emphasis the importance of pathos, embodied as *karuna rasa*. The Radha-Krishna stories are generally described in terms of *shṛingār rasa*, a romantic mood, spiced with eroticism and sensuality.

> In singing, the ultimate rasa is Karun rasa. It contains pain, pathos and many other shades. When its notes are extended sensitively, the real colours of the mind come to the fore. And when universalised with inspired singing, it can lead to 'ananda', the sublime joy... the state of bliss. (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, pp.124-125)

Amonkar suggests that through a 'sensitive' and 'inspired' portrayal of this emotional and aesthetic flavour – when pathos becomes 'universalised' – a sense of bliss (*ananda*) can arise. Somehow, through a deep exploration and shared feeling of pathos, human emotion leads to an experience of transpersonal divine bliss. We are left with a curious paradox, through focus on the pain of separation, a state of blissful unity is realised. This resonates with the theory of *navarasa* (the nine sentiments). According to this doctrine of emotional effect, the ninth *rasa*, *shānti* (peace) encompasses and transcends all other *rasas* as a state of blissful resolution. 'It is felt that a judicious use of the first eight moods would leave the audience with a feeling of the ninth, peace' (Ruckert 2004, p.28).

CHAPTER 4

THE CONCEPT OF *RĀGA*

Introduction

> Every raga is like an ocean... one lifetime is not enough to fully explore a raga. (Amjad Ali Khan in Roy 2004, p.23)

Rāga is the melodic principle of Indian classical music. To be 'classical' is to play *rāga*.[1] *Rāga* sits at the heart of Indian classical music, but eludes simple description. Like many terms in the Indian classical lexicon, it is enigmatic and its meaning can be perceived in a number of ways simultaneously. *Rāga* is a complex and multi-faceted concept, mediating between philosophical, aesthetic and technical concerns, and assimilating these disparate elements under one broad conceptual umbrella. An explication of the concept of *rāga* in all its dimensions is an important key to unlocking the conceptual and aesthetic principles of Hindustāni music.

In this chapter, I first describe *rāga* in musicological terms, outlined through Indian classical music theory, which largely amounts to a complex system of classification and taxonomy. The classification model helps describe *rāgas*, and distinguish one *rāga* from another, but most Hindustāni musicians do not consider this framework to fully 'define' any *rāga*. This formulaic model amounts to an analytical interpretation of *rāga*, but does not reflect the experience of *rāga*. The various classificatory categories are windows into an understanding of *rāga*, but the sum of all these descriptive parameters does not create a full picture of the concept of *rāga*.[2]

I illustrate the less formulaic side of the concept of *rāga* in the following part of this chapter, focusing on mythological and extra-musical associations. I centre this

[1] An exception to this is in the tradition of Indian classical percussion. Here the focus is *taal*, the rhythmic principle of Indian classical music. However, in a performance centred on percussion in Hindustāni music, it is very rare for there not to be some form of melodic accompaniment. A melody instrument such as harmonium or *sarangi* generally plays *laharā*, a cyclical melodic composition that defines and sustains the timecycle (*tāla*). This is centred in one *rāga* but the *rāga* is not developed melodically.

[2] *Rāga* improvisation is emically conceived and experienced as a deeper process than the mere execution of rules and formulas. I illustrate later in this work how traditional learning processes, along with attitudes to practice and *rāga* presentation, convey a less formulaic and tangible experience of *rāga* than is implied by the technical and descriptive model I outline here.

discussion upon the multiple versions of the origins of *rāga*, a subject that invites a host of numinous associations and spiritual ideology. My research incorporates ancient mythology, contemporary music theory, and the beliefs of present day practitioners. Some ideas I present appear to relate to ancient times, but much of this ancient mythology has been reinvented and reconfigured through time and finds new relevance in the current era. The manner in which mythology is presented in the current era says as much about belief systems inherent in the culture of Hindustāni music today as it does about times past. For this reason, this section does not follow a clear chronology but often jumps through historic time, reflecting the manner in which my interviewees often referred to both ancient concepts and modern reality side by side.

The origins of *rāga* and Indian classical music are considered to come from a divine source. The name given to this source is manifold – Brahma, Shiva, *anahata nāda*, *om*, nature – but these are all expressions of the same basic principle: that Hindustāni music emanates from divine essence. The implication is that this essence can be revealed and experienced through *rāga*.

Throughout this chapter, I focus on one *rāga* as an illustration of the multiple distinguishing features and associations a single *rāga* can encompass. This serves to demonstrate the pluralistic and often contradictory nature of *rāga* conceptualisation, or the multiple 'definitions' of *rāga*. I have chosen Rāga Bhairav for this task because of its antiquity and prominent position among the hundreds of *rāgas* extant today. Rāga Bhairav is richer in numinous associations than the majority of *rāgas*, especially those that have evolved in more recent times.

Defining and Describing *Rāga*

It is typical for scholars and practitioners alike to pre-empt any attempt to define *rāga* with the proviso that the concept is extremely difficult to explain. This is due, for the most part, to its multi-dimensionality, encompassing: mythology, religion, superstition, nature, subjective experience, music theory, and traditional repertoire. The etymology of the word suggests that *rāga* is an active principle related to a pleasing or 'colouring' effect on the mind. This has been pointed out by several scholars:

> The word *raga* is said to have derived from the Sanskrit root word 'ranja' meaning 'to please' or 'to colour' (in the sense of colouring a mood) and indicating delight or appreciation. (Holroyde 1972, p.76)

Alain Danielou offers a slightly different explanation:

> The word 'rāga,' is obtained by adding the suffix 'ghan' (which indicates 'doing') to the root 'ranj,' 'to please' (Sangita-darpana, comm. on 2-1). (Danielou 1980, p.91)

One of the most commonly cited definitions of the term '*rāga*' comes from an old Sanskrit phrase related to these etymological roots: '*ranjayati iti rāga*' – 'that which colours the mind is *rāga*'.[3] This expression suggests that *rāga* has an effect on the mind and emotions of the listener, 'in other words, the *rāga* must create a forceful effect on the listener' (Shankar 1968 [2007], p.28). Paṇḍit Amarnath offers a similar interpretation, '*ranjayatee itee raagaha* means "*raag* is that which pleases" (aesthetically)' (Amarnath 1994, p.100). A slightly more technical definition of *rāga* comes from Matanga's *Brihaddeshi* (circa ninth century C.E.), which contains the earliest known literary reference to the term: 'A *rāga* is the product of permutation and combination of tones which creates sweet and soothing impressions (samskara) in the mind' (translated in Prajnanananda 1997, p.33).

Some other definitions of *rāga* are less tangible and less specific: 'the word rāga, translated roughly, means love' (Amarnath 1994, p.100). On a visit to Ireland in 2006 the virtuoso slide guitarist from Kolkata, Debashish Bhattacharya, held his audience in complete silence when he spoke in philosophical terms about his musical tradition.

[3] See Shankar (1968 [2007] p.28 and p.33); Ruckert (2004, p.55).

He finished his spoken introduction to the concert with the statement '*rāga* is life!'[4] This all-encompassing definition illustrates how Indian classical musicians conceptualise *rāga* as something far beyond the sum of its technical characteristics and aesthetic effect. Sougata Roy Chowdhury offered another enigmatic definition of *rāga* at a workshop/concert he gave at University College Dublin in 2011. Pointing to the assembly of gathered students, he exclaimed '*rāga* is you and you and you!' He did not qualify this assertion but quickly went on to explain *rāga* in technical and musicological terms. Asking him about this statement afterwards, he explained to me how a *rāga* is like a person, with a unique character, just like each person in the room.

Musicological and technical descriptions of *rāga*

I will now introduce *rāga* in more concrete and musicological terms. The purpose of this is not so much to provide a textbook-style outline of Hindustāni music theory and *rāga*, but rather to present one side of a dichotomy inherent in the concept of *rāga* – between analytical technical classification and numinous associations. I only provide a cursory introduction here, as there is a substantial body of literature outlining *rāga* in technical detail.[5] Some technical nuances of *rāga* will be explored in more detail later in this study.

Rāga is the melodic framework of Indian classical music. A *rāga* is a unique modal construct that serves as a template for improvisation and composition. Theoretically, any *rāga* can be played on any instrument, as long as it has all the necessary pitches.[6] There are several hundred *rāgas* in use today, each with a distinctive melodic identity and, according to tradition, a unique mood. A *rāga's* melodic identity can be described in terms of scale, melodic movement, signature phrases, pitch hierarchy, characteristic ornamentation, and 'mood' or 'aesthetic affect'. These categories are codified through a complex classification system where *rāgas* are outlined through various parameters, amounting to a model of music theory based largely on

[4] He issued these words at a concert in St. Audoen's Church in Dublin, 2006.

[5] I recommended the following sources for a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the technicalities of *rāga*: Shankar (1968); Kaufmann (1968); Wade (1979); Khan and Ruckert (1986); Bagshee (1998); Scott (1997, p.145-150); Ruckert (2004); and Neuman (2004).

[6] The most common instruments are voice, *sitār* and *sarod*. Many other instruments are also used in Hindustāni music including *bansuri*, *santoor*, *surbahar*, *rudra veena*, *esraj*, and *sarangi*. Besides these more traditional instruments, new instruments, including the violin and the slide guitar, have been introduced into the Indian classical tradition.

taxonomy.[7] This model serves to differentiate between *rāgas* as much as it helps to describe or 'define' any one *rāga*. Differentiation is a pragmatic concern in the complex world of *rāgas*, where many *rāgas* share the same basic scale, but have very different melodic contours, or where a small detail may distinguish one from another. V. N. Bhatkhande (1860-1936) standardised *rāga* theory by creating an authoritative and largely accepted (although controversial) version of *rāga* classification for the majority of the *rāgas* in common use. I will now introduce this standard model, using Rāga Bhairav as an example.[8]

Scale

A *rāga* consists of a scale, or a series of notes, that does not change throughout its rendition. In other words, a *rāga* does not modulate but stays fixed in one mode.[9] The scale for Rāga Bhairav includes all natural notes with the second and sixth degrees of the scale flattened (*komal re* and *komal dha*).[10] The scale of Rāga Bhairav is one of the ten '*thats*' or parent scales that Bhatkhande used in his extensive *rāga* classification system, where each *rāga* is designated into a scale group. Thus, there are a number of *rāgas* belonging to the '*Bhairav That*' scale family.

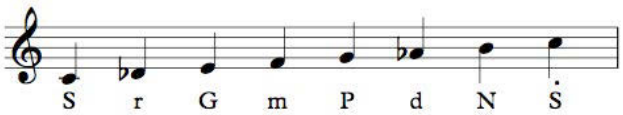


Figure 4.1: *Bhairav Thāt*

[7] The meaning of the term 'theory' in this context is not easily comparable to its use in Western art music. Stephen Slawek points out how the transmission of Indian art traditions involves complex descriptive vocabularies, where the term 'theory' applies essentially to 'a body of indigenous discourse that serves to explain existent musical practices' (Slawek 1998, pp.339-340). This point is well made but I also suggest that the formulated methodology of *rāga* improvisation equates to a theoretical model that stretches beyond explanatory vocabulary. This 'theory' is embodied through the learning process in a largely naturalistic process over a long period of time, and is not necessarily explained verbally.

[8] My sources for the examples I present come from lessons with *sitār* players Amrendra Jha in 1999 and Jagdeep Singh Bedi in 2000, and from musicological literature. For more detail on Rāga Bhairav see Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], pp.32-46); Bagchee (1998, pp.310-311); Danielou (1980, pp.125-127); and Kaufmann (1968, pp.233-237).

[9] There are some exceptions to this. Some *rāgas*, and some light styles of rendition, allow space for other notes to enter the sound scape, but the fundamental scale remains consistent throughout its rendition. In *rāga mala* ('a garland of *rāgas*'), a number of *rāgas* are mixed together, and the scale can modulate as new *rāgas* are suggested, but *rāga mala* is not commonly played.

[10] By 'natural notes' I mean the notes of the Western 'major scale', which is also considered the natural ('*suddh*') scale in Hindustāni music.

Melodic movement

A *rāga* is more specific than a scale, and exhibits particular patterns of movement within a scale. Three principal terms used in pedagogy and theory books help illustrate a *rāga's* melodic movement: *aroha-avaroha*, a concise description of a *rāga's* ascending-descending scale; *sārgāms*, exercises set to a time cycle that exemplify a *rāga's* melodic movement; and *chalan*, a short illustration of a *rāga's* melodic movement and principal melodic themes. Examples of *aroha-avaroha*, *sārgām*, and *chalan* in Rāga Bhairav are illustrated below.
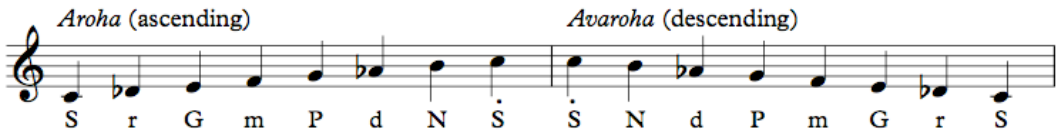


Figure 4.2: *Aroha-Avaroha*, Rāga Bhairav[11]
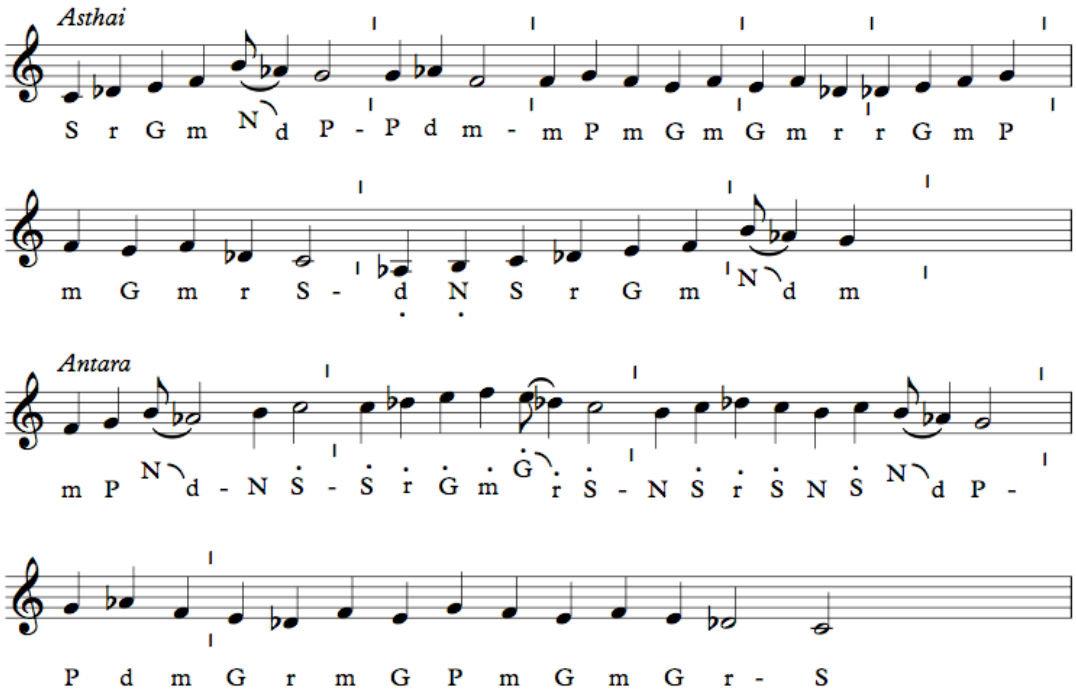


Figure 4.3: *Chalan*, Rāga Bhairav[12]

[11] See Shankar (2007 [1968], p.109); and Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.32) for 'more complete' versions of Rāga Bhairav's *aroha* and *avaroha*.

[12] This is an amended version, taken from Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.32). The original transcription is longer, and indicates some passages of *meend*. I have shortened and simplified the example in order to illustrate the melodic movement of Rāga Bhairav in a more digestible form.
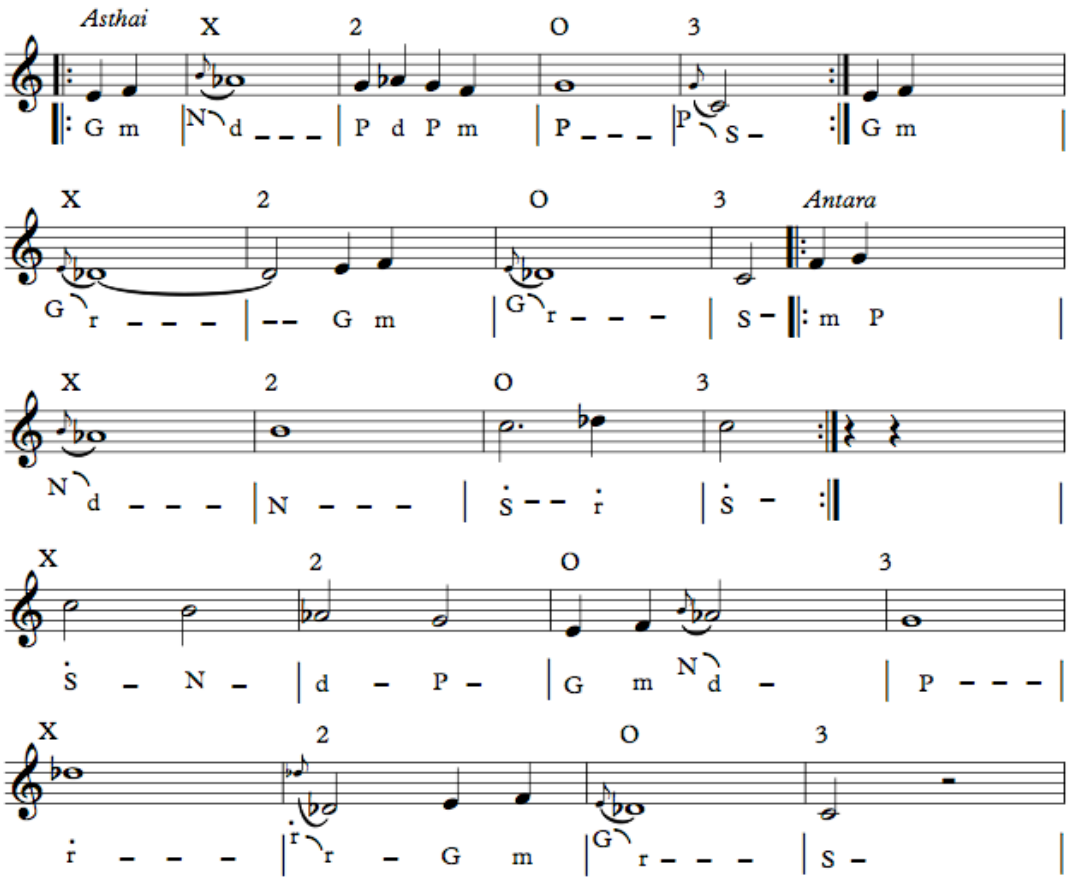


Figure 4.4: *Sārgām*, Rāga Bhairav[13]

Rāga Bhairav is known as *sampurna* (‘even’ or ‘balanced’) because both the *aroha* and the *avoroha* contain seven notes. This classification is known as *jati* (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.257). Many *rāgas* have five or six notes ascending and seven notes descending, or a different version of the same note may be used in ascending and descending (e.g. *shuddh* nee ascending and *komal* nee descending). Some *rāgas* are classified as *vakra* (‘jagged’), because their ascending-descending pattern does not move in a straight line. A *rāga’s* melodic movement is generally not as simple as ascending and descending patterns. For example, some *rāgas* have notes that can be said to be ‘attached’ to each other.[14] The various categories in the classificational theory of *rāga* are different ways of viewing and explaining characteristic motifs and

[13] Amended version, taken from Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.33). See Shankar (2007 [1968], p.155) for an alternative *sārgām* in Rāga Bhairav.

[14] In Rāga Vrindavani Sarang, *shuddh nee* ‘natural seventh’ can be said to be ‘attached’ to *sa*, and *komal nee* ‘flat seventh’ can be said to be attached to *pa*. Melodic movement such as ‘nPNṠ’ is therefore characteristic of this *rāga*. Another way to describe this characteristic is to say that Rāga Vrindavani Sarang uses *shuddh nee* in ascent and *komal nee* in descent.

melodic movement. A *rāga's* melodic movement can rarely be fully demonstrated through *aroha-avaroha*, *chalan* and *sārgāms*. These parameters act as generalisations, but do not tell the full picture.

Characteristic ornamentation

Movement between pitches is as important to the aesthetic of Indian music as fixed pitch. This movement is generated through bending between pitches (*meend*) and through various types of ornamentation. There are two characteristic ornaments in Rāga Bhairav: *komal re* is typically played with '*āndolan*', a slow vibrato; and the notes *komal re* and *komal dha* are approached from the note above with a slow *meend* (pitch bend).[15]

Pitch hierarchy

Pitch hierarchy is an important feature in the concept of *rāga*, where some pitches are afforded more significance than others. *Sa* is the most important pitch in any *rāga*. Heard throughout a recital through the use of drone, *sa* is the fundamental tonic and is treated like a 'home place'. *Rāgas* begin and end with *sa*, and *sa* is a consistently restated reference pitch used to ground the melodic development of *rāga* at key points in a recital. After *sa*, in a *rāga's* pitch hierarchy, there is a *vādi* ('king note', or 'primary note'), *samvādi* ('prime minister' or 'secondary note'), *anuvādi* ('assistant notes') and *vivādi* ('enemy note', or a note that is outside of the *rāga*). This pitch hierarchy is established in a *rāga* in a number of ways: characteristic phrases commonly rest and resolve on dominant notes, whereas weak notes are used in the middle of phrases; significant notes land on prominent beats in a rhythmic cycle; and strong notes are heard for a longer duration than weak notes. The *vādi* and *samvādi* in Rāga Bhairav are *komal dha* and *komal re*, respectively. Other strong notes are *sa*, *pa* and *ga*; *ma* and *nee* are a little weaker in this *rāga* than the other notes.[16]

[15] Jagdeep Singh Bedi described this characteristic ornamentation of Rāga Bhairav (approaching *komal re* and *komal dha* from the note above them in a descending *meend*). He said: 'these notes are shrinking in this *rāga*' (Bedi 2000). This is typical of the kind of impromptu, metaphorical rhetoric used in the tradition.

[16] This pitch hierarchy is very precise. For example if *ma* is emphasised too much in Rāga Bhairav, the feeling of Rāga Jogiya may come into effect (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.31); if *ga* is over emphasized, the character of Rāga Kalingda may emerge instead of Rāga Bhairav (Bagchee 1998, p.310).

***Pakaṛ* ('to catch')**

A *rāga* is 'defined' in large part through signature phrases, or catch phrases ('*pakaṛ*' or '*pakad*'). It could be justifiably suggested that a *rāga* is a collection of phrases, fashioned through traditional models of linear form, rhythmic structure, and style. A *rāga's pakaṛ* ('to catch') is a small collection of phrases that describe its melodic essence in minutiae. *Pakaṛ* may be as simple as a single phrase, or may be described as a few phrases. The following examples illustrate *pakaṛ* in Rāga Bhairav in two different ways, from two different teachers. The first example consists of a single phrase, and the second is made up of two phrases:[17]
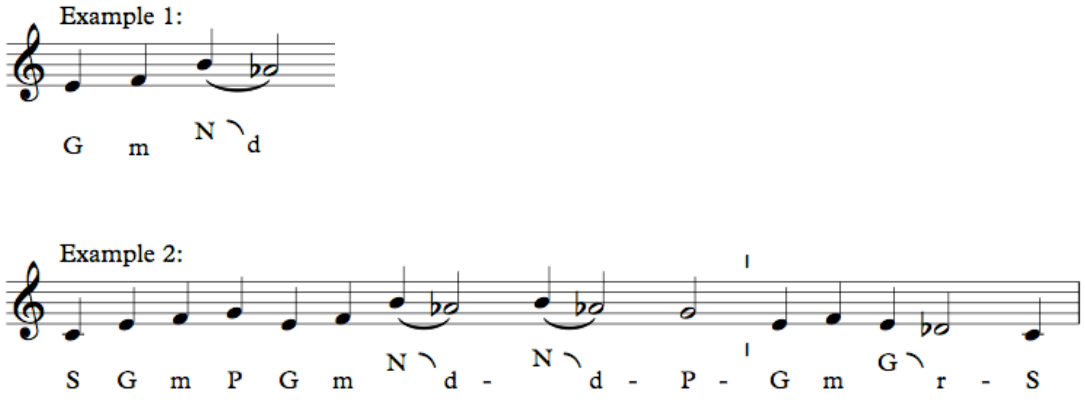


Figure 4.5: *Pakaṛ*, Rāga Bhairav

The two examples above illustrate how *pakaṛ* 'catches' the essence of the *rāga* in just a phrase or two. The melodic movement is evident. The pitch hierarchy is pronounced; *vādi* (*komal dha*) and *samvādi* (*komal re*) are emphasised through being played for a longer duration. The characteristic ornamentation is also marked with a descending meend to *re* and *dha*, and *āndolan* on *re*. The characteristic phrase '$Gm^{N}d$' is common to both examples. *Pakaṛ* is the melodic signature of a *rāga*. A connoisseur of Hindustāni music is able to easily identify a popular *rāga* on hearing only a couple of key phrases, properly rendered by an expert musician.

[17] The first example comes from Ali Akbar Khan and George Ruckert (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.32); the second example comes from a lesson I had with Jagdeep Singh Bedi in New Delhi in 2000. The manner in which *pakaṛ* is illustrated depends partly on the whim of the teacher in the moment and is not fixed. In reality, *pakaṛ* is often not explicitly demonstrated or offered by a teacher; *pakaṛ* is principally outlined in books as a way of describing *rāga* and differentiating between *rāgas*.

Rasa and *bhāva*

The classification model of Indian music theory extends beyond technical characteristics of pitch and melody and enters into the realm of sentiment and emotional affect. The theory of *rasa* ('taste', 'flavour' or 'juice') amounts to an ancient science of aesthetic flavour. This culinary metaphor is evocative of finely seasoned food; if one ingredient changes, the overall 'taste' changes, such is the cultivated delicacy of the Indian classical arts. *Rasa* indicates the manner in which *rāga*, and the Indian classical arts in general, are savoured and relished as a visceral experience. Although there are nine *rasas* in the '*navaras*' system, some are more relevant to drama than music. The following are most relevant to Hindustāni music: *shṛingār*: joy, romance and love (erotic and/or divine love); *karuna*: pathos, compassion, sentiment; *vira*: heroism, valor; and *shānti*: peace. *Bhakti* (devotion) is also mentioned in the same context as *rasa*, even though it does not fit into the formal classification system. Some sources suggest that a single *rāga* embodies one principal *rasa*, but other sources, including the voices of Indian musicians, describe how one *rāga* can combine many *rasas*. One *rāga* may also move through different moods through the various stages of its rendition, and thereby explore different *rasas* as it develops. The principal *rasa* of Rāga Bhairav is *bhakti*, with *shānti* also commonly indicated.[18] This means that the *rāga* should be played with *bhakti* and *shānti* in mind, displaying a devotional and peaceful mood.

In some respects *rasa* theory is more of a reminder of a principle of aesthetics than it is useful for a musician on a practical level. So many *rāgas* are said to be *shṛingār* and *karuna* that the classification system can become unhelpful and academic. The generalised designation of the nine *rasas* does not do justice to the particularity and specificity of mood that individual *rāgas* portray. Many musicians suggest that every *rāga* has its own specific and unique mood. The term '*bhāva*' refers to the 'emotional quality' of the experience of *rāga* and is related to *rasa*. *Rasa-bhāva* relates to the heart of *rāga*, its emotional disposition, marrying the subjective and the objective by portraying an intimate sensorial human engagement with *rāga* through a science of aesthetic affect.

[18] This assessment of the principal *rasa* of Rāga Bhairav is a generalisation I have garnered from textbooks and lessons. See Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.32); Bagchee (1998, p.311).

Temporal associations

The general principle inherent in the theory of *rasa*, that a *rāga* portrays a particular mood, is related to a *rāga's* temporal association. The mood of a *rāga* is said to be associated with the mood or natural quality of a particular time of day or season. The majority of Hindustāni *rāgas* are associated with a particular time of day, and Hindustāni musicians generally present *rāgas* within their designated time-period. *Rāgas* are classified into different time periods based on the solar cycle, with sunrise, noon, sunset and midnight as pivotal points. More precisely, *rāgas* are often categorised according to a traditional Indian system where day and night are divided into different three-hour time-periods or '*prahars*' ('watches' or 'quarters').[19] Rāga Bhairav is associated with early morning and sunrise. According to archaic theory, Rāga Bhairav is also associated with either Autumn or Winter.[20]

Repertoire and 'fixed' musical material

Memorizing fixed repertoire is an essential part of the learning process in Hindustāni music, even though the majority of a *rāga* presentation is improvised and little of the repertoire is performed in its original format. The most important fixed materials are compositions set to *taal*, known as *gat* in instrumental music and *bandish* (or *chiz*) in vocal music. An accomplished musician would typically have learnt hundreds of compositions, and several compositions for any one *rāga*. Sougata Roy Chowdhury described different compositions as many faces of the great personality of a *rāga*.[21] Different compositions show different aspects and possibilities of a *rāga*, and embody its melodic movement and mood. Although a musician may learn several compositions in any one *rāga*, when it comes to performance typically only one or two are actually presented.

Fixed compositions are central to the oral pedagogical tradition, and are the principle way *rāgas* get passed on through generations of musicians. Some of the compositions a teacher teaches a student may be very old. There is a substantial wealth of such material for old and popular *rāgas* such as Rāga Bhairav. Newer or more obscure *rāgas* may have less traditional repertoire. New compositions, or rearrangements of

[19] Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]); Bagchee (1988).
[20] Kaufmann (1968, p.233); Bose (1990, p.20). Both of these references are quoted later in this chapter.
[21] Personal correspondence June 2011.

traditional material, are also created anew each generation, sometimes spontaneously during a lesson. Fragments of old compositions are commonly rearranged to create new compositions, using traditional structural rhythmic patterns and characteristic phrases. *Rāga* is both formulaic and traditional, and spontaneous and new. There is little emphasis placed on the composer of compositions, and the line between old and new is fluid and largely undefined. The *rāga* itself is given epistemic priority, and the *guru* holds the authority to transmit it in the manner he sees fit at the time.[22]

The following examples are two compositions in Rāga Bhairav. I learnt the first (figure 4.6) from Amrendra Jha in Varanasi in March 1999. The second (figure 4.7) was shown to me by Jagdeep Singh Bedi in Delhi in January 2000. '*Vilambit*' and '*drut*' can be translated as 'slow' and 'fast'. Both of these compositions are set to the common time-cycle of sixteen beats, known as *teentaal*.
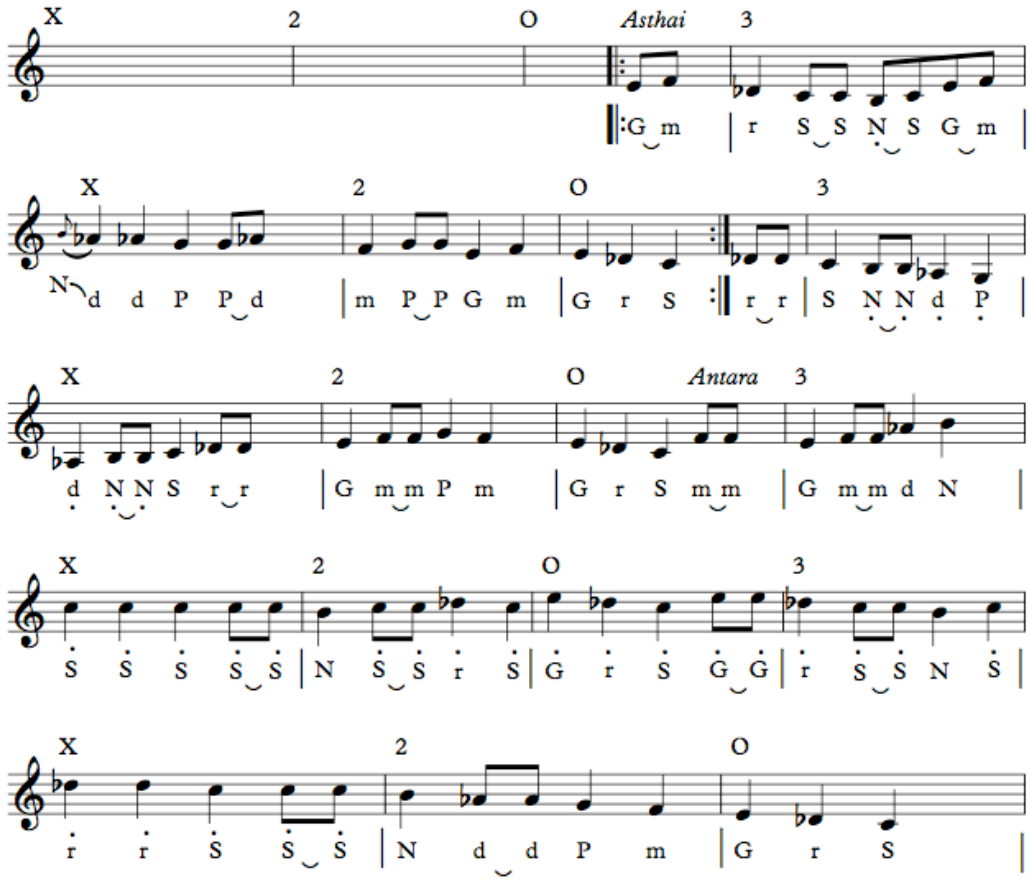


Figure 4.6: *Vilambit Teentaal Gat*, Rāga Bhairav (approximately 40-60 b.p.m.)

[22] See Chapter 5 for an explication of the pedagogical tradition of Hindustāni music.
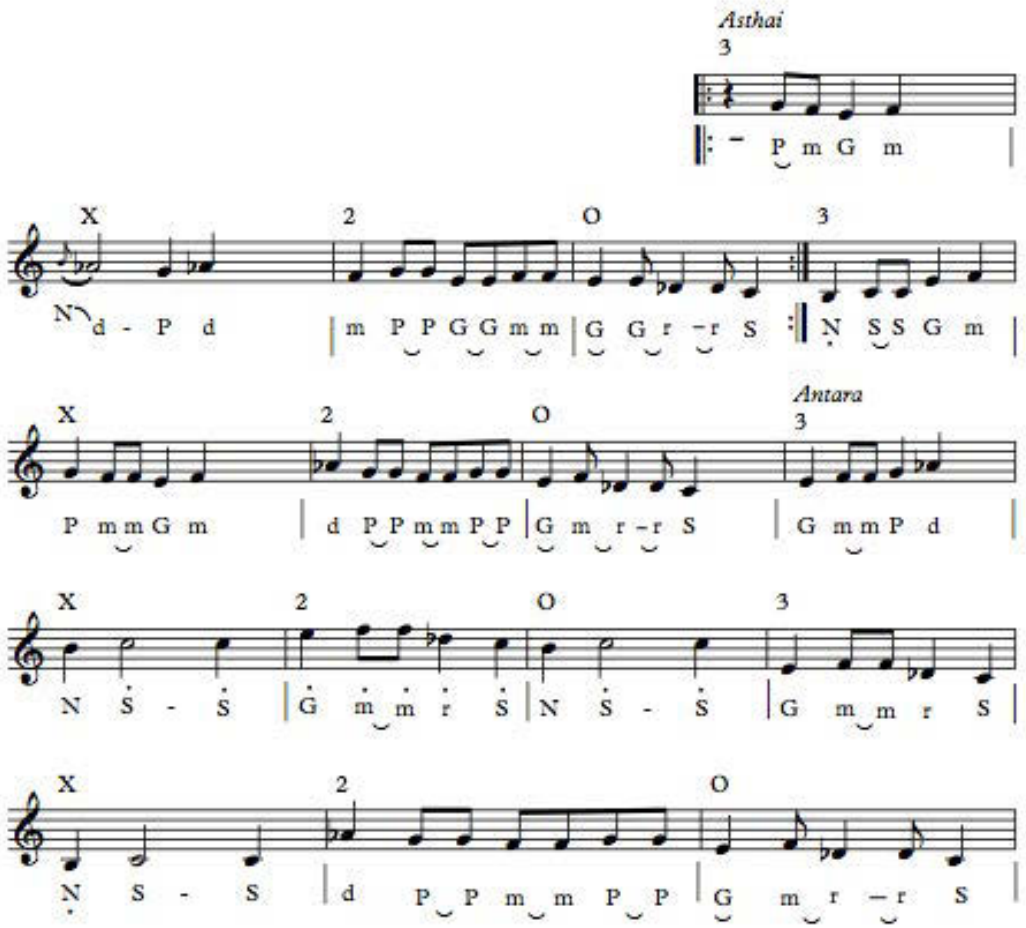


Figure 4.7: *Drut Teentaal Gat*, Rāga Bhairav (approximately 180-220 b.p.m.)

The characteristics of Rāga Bhairav are clearly evident in both of these compositions. Most saliently, the *vādi* (*komal dha*) lands on beat one (*sum*) of the time cycle in both compositions, giving the note special significance. The phrase 'Gmd' also features prominently in both compositions; this is the phrase common to both examples of '*pakaṛ*' illustrated in figure 4.5.

Along with compositions, other fixed musical material is created and transmitted as part of the learning process. It is difficult to describe and categorise this material, as different meanings are often attributed to terminology in the tradition, and much of the fixed material does not fit neatly into a definable category. The level of 'fixity' and spontaneous improvisation exhibited in the learning process is also ambiguous and fluid. However the following kinds of fixed material – illustrating different parts of a *rāga* presentation – are evident: *tans*, fast melodic lines that weave in and out of a

fixed composition; *toras*, *rāga* variations that exhibit rhythmic patterns (‘*bols*’); *vistar*, a more expansive approach to *rāga* exposition; and *tihāis*, rhythmic cadences where a single phrase is played three times.

Improvisation

When it comes to a *rāga* recital, a musician will typically only present one or two compositions and will recite very little fixed musical material. Improvisation is at the heart of Indian classical music. A *rāga* recital is typically ninety per cent improvised or more. Improvisation in Hindustāni music is bound by style, form, *rāga*, and *taal*, and bears little relation to the improvisational freedom found in idioms such as jazz or rock. The grammar of *rāga* improvisation follows traditional stylistic parameters, determined in part by a musician's pedagogical heritage and chosen instrument. *Rāga* improvisation is kept within the melodic frame of a specific *rāga*. Characteristic melodic movement patterns, pitch relations, and signature phrases are established and repeatedly refashioned throughout a *rāga* recital. In this way the melodic identity of a *rāga* remains consistent throughout a presentation but is continuously reconfigured through a process of episodic development. A masterful rendition of *rāga* displays a huge amount of variation and subtle nuance, while staying within the frame of the chosen *rāga*, presenting its identity in a clear manner, yet spontaneously giving it a fresh face every time. The ingenuity and skill involved in creating endless variation from within the tight frame of *rāga* is highly esteemed in the tradition, and is an integral part of the aesthetic of Hindustāni music.

Form

The form of *rāga* presentation includes a gradual progression from non-metric to metric, from slow tempo to fast tempo, from less musical density to more musical density, from low pitch to high pitch, and from quiet to loud. A *rāga’s* melodic characteristics remain essentially the same throughout a rendition but the rhythmic frame changes through a process of episodic development.

The opening section, *ālāp*, is non-metered and is conducted without rhythmic accompaniment. Here the principle pitch relations are established, and the nuance of ornamentation and *meend* are highlighted. *Ālāp* is developed episodically with a

gradual expansion of its pitch range, a gradual introduction of pulse, and a measured build-up of intensity.

The remainder of a *rāga* recital is set to *taal*, with *tablā* accompaniment (or *pakāwaj* in the case of dhrupad). In a full-length *rāga* exposition a slow composition is typically presented first, with variations and improvisation. This is usually followed by a fast composition. Throughout these sections improvisation takes many forms and a musician consistently refers back to the fixed compositions in between elaborations. In instrumental music, a final section is often added called *jhālā*. In *jhālā* the tempo increases significantly and the *rāga* builds up to a climatic finish.

This short description does not do justice to the complexity of *rāga* form and the sophistication of Indian classical improvisation.[23] Improvisation in Hindustāni music involves a measured and detailed exposition of *rāga*, where musical density and intensity is built up in a controlled fashion through a number of sections. The numerous possibilities of a single *rāga* are explored and recontextualised throughout, yet its fundamental melodic character remains constant.

Styles of *rāga* presentation

There are a number of different stylistic parameters in which *rāga* is performed today. *Dhrupad* ('fixed') is the oldest extant form of *rāga* presentation in Hindustāni music, dating from the sixteenth century C.E. but rooted in more ancient forms.[24] As its translation suggests, *dhrupad* has a fixed structure and a set system of improvisation. *Dhrupad* portrays an austere, devotional mood and is highly esteemed in the tradition for its integrity, antiquity and for maintaining the purity of *rāga*. *Khyāl* (from a Persian term meaning 'imagination') is the dominant style of Hindustāni music today, established in its current form from the eighteenth century.[25] *Khyāl* exhibits more ornamentation, virtuosity, and improvisational freedom than *dhrupad*, yet it is still highly structured. Light classical styles also exist. Here there is still more freedom from set classical structure and the tight melodic frame of *rāga*. Light classical styles generally use six or eight beat rhythm cycles, can mix *rāgas* (*mishra*), are usually

[23] For more detailed descriptions see Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]) and Bagchee (1998).
[24] See Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.292); Bagchee (1998, p.109); Sanyal and Widdess (2004); Wade (2004 [1979], p.159). See also Chapter 7 in this dissertation.
[25] Wade (2004 [1979], p.169); Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.297); Bagchee (1998, pp.120-121).

shorter, and are often played at the end of a recital. *Thumri* is a light, romantic rendition of *rāga*, with a lyrical quality. *Dhuns* are based on folk melodies played in a light classical romantic style. Within these forms of Hindustāni music, different instruments, different lineages or schools of style (*gharana*), and individual artists, have their own particular style ('*baj*') of *rāga* exposition.

Having shown the technical aspects of *rāga*, I now illustrate how the emic conception of *rāga* extends far beyond the scope of technical musicology to embody various numinous associations.[26] It is curious how these associations are often expressed through a classification format, and despite their apparent intangibility and abstraction, are often described through a remarkably scientific framework.

The Origins of *Rāga*: Mythology, Evolutionary Models, and Numinous Associations

This section centres on an exploration of emic conceptions of the origins of *rāga*, based largely on the narratives of Hindustāni musicians and Indian musicological sources. I have chosen to view *rāga* through this lens in order to explicate the various numinous associations the concept of *rāga* invites. Indian classical music has absorbed a wealth of cultural and religious heritage throughout its long and colourful history. The discursive culture among Hindustāni musicians and enthusiasts today is rich in mythology, religiosity, and legend. It is my contention that this lore, in all its plurality, adds up to different ways of explaining and sustaining what amounts to a core set of philosophical positions and attitudes that permeate the culture and practice of Hindustāni music. Various ideas regarding the origins of Indian classical music and *rāga* were revealed to me during interviews. *Rāga* is generally considered to have divine origins, but the manner in which these origins are explained differ. Claims to the antiquity and divine provenance of *rāga* are proudly made by Hindustāni musicians and Indian musicologists, supporting the status of *rāga* as a sonic embodiment of ancient Indian spiritual heritage. Foundation myths, lore and belief

[26] It should be noted that there are other theoretical parameters are used to describe *rāgas*, beyond the scope of this work. For example, a *rāga's* '*ang*' is classified in accordance to which tetra-chord the *vādi* is in and thus which tetra-chord is most dominant in the *rāga's* development, either *purvang* (lower tetra-chord) or *uttarang* (upper tetra-chord). Rāga Bhairav is thus classified as *uttarang*. Other classification terms such as *varna* ('colour') and *thāt* (the parent scale to which a *rāga* belongs) are also used (Khan and Ruckert 2007 [1998]).

systems in the culture of Hindustāni music present multiple origins of *rāga* simultaneously. Rather than being contradictive, I suggest that they are different representations of the same fundamental precept, that the origins of *rāga* are divine. Thus the experience of *rāga* is imbued with spiritual potency.

Scholarship and historical context

The earliest record of the term *rāga* is by the scholar Matanga, whose writings may date as late as the ninth century C.E.[27] In his day, *rāga* was a small classification within the wider class of *jati-s* with little resemblance to the present concept of *rāga* (Bagchee 1998, p.77); today the term denotes the melodic principle of Indian classical music as a whole, taking on a broader meaning than its original classification. The nature of change in the terminology relating to Indian classical music reflects the tradition's constant evolution and re-invention through over two millennia. Although the term '*rāga*' may not have been in use before the ninth century C.E., the roots of '*rāga*' as we know it today stretch back much further in time.

A wide body of scholarship has been dedicated to the pursuit of locating the origins of Indian classical music and *rāga*. It is commonly stated by musicians and scholars alike that the earliest origins of Indian classical music lie in the *vedic* period (c.1400-400 B.C.E.), but this is a contentious issue.[28] Indian classical music may also have origins which pre-date the Aryan invaders, just as the Hindu religious tradition does not draw its origins exclusively from the Aryan people as is often believed.[29]

Meilu Ho (2006) suggests that *kirtan* temple practice (a form of Hindu devotional song) in the early medieval period is the prototype out of which today's North Indian classical music developed in the later medieval courts. Her argument is well presented, based on a comparison study between *rāgas* used in liturgical practice and

[27] Matanga's *Brihadeshi* has been variously dated between the fifth century and ninth century C.E.
[28] See for example Widdess (1981); Ruckert (2004); and the following section in this chapter.
[29] 'The cult of the phallus (*sisna*), the mythology of the snake gods (*nagas*) and the genies (*yakshas*), along with the great God Shiva of classical Hinduism, have pre-Aryan origins, which in all probability are Dravidian. Furthermore, there may well be some affinity between the 'mother goddess' of Mohenjo-Daro and the figure of the goddess (Devi) known in Hinduism under very different forms, notably those of Durga or Kali, and also of the many "village deities" (*gramadevatas*)' (Demariaux 1995, p.7). This ancient history may not appear relevant until you consider the fact that these deities – such as Kali, or various forms of Shiva – are central to popular Hindu culture today. This popularity spills over into the culture of classical music, witnessed through the presence of iconographic imagery in musicians' practice rooms, in music shops or even on stage during a performance.

rāgas used in *dhrupad*. However, despite any claims to radically undermine the popular perception that the roots of Hindustāni music originate in *vedic* times, her evidence in fact supports the accepted historical line drawn for the evolution of Indian classical music in relation to performance context: from ritual *vedic chant*, to Hindu devotional temple practice, to the Muslim court tradition and finally onto the stage and theatre. Bonnie Wade notes how the names of certain *rāgas* point to their origins:

> Malava, Sindhu, Karnataka, Jaunpuri, and Bangala, for example, are place-names; whether the rāgas of these names were developed from regional melodies or simply evolved in those places, however, is difficult to ascertain. The names of the rāgas Saka, Ahiri, Saveri (Asavari), and Gujari indicate possible origins in tribal music; those of the rāgas Hejaj, Zila, Imam, and Shahana are associated with Islamic culture. Some rāgas bear the names of the artists who 'composed' them. For example, Miyan ki Todi (for Miyan Tansen) and Vilas Khani Todi (for Miyan's son Vilas Khan) are two varieties of Rāga Todi. Bhairavi, Kedar, Sarasvatī, and Shri are rāgas named for Hindu deities. (Wade 2004 [1979], p.74)

It is well documented that North Indian classical music has also been profoundly influenced by Persian and Afgan music, especially between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries C.E., when successful waves of invasions resulted in Islamic political dominance over North India. Music flourished during this era as a wealth of new instruments, melodies and forms spread into North India mixing with existing musical forms to profoundly shape the tradition into a new idiom (Wade 2004 [1979]; Jairazbhoy 2011 [1971]).

In contrast to these suggestions, through an extensive comparison between nineteenth century practice and ancient texts, the Indian musicologist V. N. Bhatkhande 'heaped scorn on most assertions that contemporary music could be traced back in a straight line to the Vedas' (Bakhle 2005, p.105), concluding rather dramatically that 'music as it was then performed had a history going back only two hundred years, not two thousand' (ibid.). Hindustāni music has also been transformed in more recent times due to globalisation, technology, and changes in pedagogy (Neuman 1990 [1980]).

Tracing the origins of a tradition as ancient and malleable as Indian classical music is like trying to locate a fixed point in a complex, moving continuum. Hindustāni music is a living and ever-evolving music culture, the sum of a wide and eclectic range of influences over a long span of historical time, possibly stretching back to pre-history.

On foot of this reality, Hindustāni music today can be said to have multiple origins. This multiplicity is reflected in the narratives of Hindustāni musicians who express divergent beliefs in relation to the origins of *rāga*. For the purpose of this study, historical fact is less important than these belief systems; my primary focus here is to present the manner in which the practice of Hindustāni music is conceptualised and represented. This representation often involves the re-creation of histories, and the re-imagining of tradition and spiritual heritage, where history, myth, and ideology merge.

Ideological perspectives on the *vedic* roots of Indian classical music

One of the most established answers to the origins of Indian classical music is that it originated in the *vedic* period, an idea commonly and proudly stated by many of its present practitioners (especially those of Hindu ancestry).[30] This claim carries considerable weight in relation to issues of authenticity, cultural status, and spiritual authority. For example, the late Ravi Shankar stated that Indian classical music is

> devotional in origin and spiritual in performance…. The system of Indian music known as Rāga Sangeet can be traced back nearly two thousand years to its origin in the Vedic hymns of the Hindu temples, the fundamental source of all Indian music. (Shankar 2008, no page numbers)

The idea that Indian classical music and *rāga* is rooted in the *Vedas* gives the tradition an implicit cultural and religio-spiritual status. The Aryan race and the *vedic* period are celebrated as a refined people and an enlightened time. The *Vedas* are considered the foundational roots of Hinduism and Indian philosophy (or '*vedāntic*' ['from the *Vedas*'] philosophy). Knowledge stemming from this time is considered pure and sacred to many Hindus, passed down through the chain of orality from *guru* to disciple. Hindustāni musicians see themselves connected to this master-disciple chain, and thus to the *Vedas* themselves.

[30] Richard Widdess (1981) outlines the relationship between *vedic chant* and Indian classical music by looking at melodic elements and form in *ālāp*, the opening non-metered section of *rāga*. He concludes that only a small, yet distinctive element of what is performed today can be said to derive from *vedic chant*. In particular, Indian classical music is widely considered to have evolved out of *samvedic chant*, a liturgical devotional form represented in the earliest of the 'Four *Vedas*', the *Rig Veda* (c. fifteenth - eleventh centuries B.C.E.). *Samvedic chant* was originally practiced by the Aryan people who migrated into North India from the fifteenth century B.C.E. Very little is known about these people before they moved into present day India, but the extensive literature of the *Vedas* paints a detailed portrait of their beliefs and traditions. The majority of the hymns in *samvedic chant* are either descriptions of foundation myths or praises addressed to deities (Demariaux 1995, p.8).

The sacred nature of this knowledge is often conceptualised as divine revelation. The term '*veda*' is etymologically derived from the Sanskrit root '*vid*', 'to know' (Demariaux 1992, p.7). In Indian philosophical and religious thought, supreme truth exists and has always existed: 'It was first revealed to the ancient sages through their sense of hearing, and it is thus known as *śruti*, "that which has been heard"' (Rowell 1992, p.24). The *Vedas* are considered '*shruti*', a manifestation of sacred knowledge of divine origin; it is believed that this knowledge was revealed to man through sound:

> It is in fact said that this divine science was breathed out by the absolute (*Brahman*) and revealed by audition 'sruti' to a number of eminent sages (*rishis*) who, having received it directly by audition, then transmitted it from generation to generation through a long chain of masters and disciples. The Veda is still *the* eternal word (*vach*), the quintessence of the world as sound. (Demariaux 1995, p.7)

A belief in the potent metaphysical power of sound, and vocal sound in particular, permeates Hinduism in both theory and practice and is also an important aspect in the spiritual ideology of Indian classical music, stemming in large part from the *vedic* inheritance.[31] In Indian religious practice, as in Hindustāni music, orality is privileged over the written word. The Four *Vedas* – sacred hymns and rituals of the Aryans – have been passed down orally for approximately three thousand years. The very sound of the *Vedas*, irrespective of whether the meaning is understood, is sanctified. In ancient India 'the very act of hearing them was considered auspicious; understanding their profound philosophical implications was not immediately foremost' (Ruckert 2004, p.19). This point is exemplified in the fact that *samvedic chant* is still practiced today, despite the fact that the meaning of much of its archaic Sanskrit has been lost in time.

> Meaning was secondary to the correct production of sound, for the power of the word was contained in its physical sound, not in the intended meaning. It may be because of this that portions of the Vedas are no longer fully intelligible to those who continue to recite them. The belief that particular configurations of sound are cause for specific effects continues in many contemporary religious traditions and practices of India… and is especially apparent in various aspects of the theory of raga. (Slawek 1986, pp.39-40)

[31] See Chapter 3 for a discussion on *nāda-brahma* and the spiritual potency of sound.

The recitation of sacred sound in many forms is the very substance of Hindu ritual and worship. Sacred syllables, '*mantras*', are perceived to contain inherent transformative power. The etymology of the term suggests liberation of the mind: '*manas*' means 'mind' and '*tram*' means 'to free' (Paul 2004, p.47). The names of deities are intoned to evoke different manifestations of the divine. Beck suggests:

> The Hindu experience of the Divine is shown to be fundamentally sonic, or oral/aural, the theological position of sacred sound constitutes a kind of *mysterium magnum* (great mystery) of Hinduism. (Beck 2008 [1993], p.3)

Hindustāni vocalists uses a variety of sounds, including both abstract sound and text, and some sound that lies in-between these categories. Abstract sound plays a key role in Hindustāni vocal music, mirroring the concept of the inherent potency of pure sound. The most common sound a vocalist employs is simply the open voiced 'ahh' ('*aakaar*').[32] Other sounds include the names of the notes of the scale ('*sa re ga ma pa dha nee ṡa*' or '*sārgām*'). *Dhrupad* is the oldest extant style of North Indian classical music. Vocalists in this genre utilise sound to a remarkable degree of refinement. Large portions of *dhrupad ālāp* centre on the improvised arrangement of syllables. In *nom tom ālāp*, a variety of syllables are used including 'ta', 'na', 'ri', 're', 'ra', 'na', 'nom', and 'tom' (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.290). Clarke and Kini point to how these syllables are abstractions of sacred *mantras*: 'It is commonly held that these syllables are derived from mantras such as "om ananta naryana hari" (an invocation to the immortality of Visnu)' (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.146). Ruckert (2004, p.21) comments on the use of 'vikriti patterns' in *vedic chant*, where syllables are so rearranged that their original meaning becomes obscured as abstract sound. He suggests a link between this process and the processes of permutation found in both *dhrupad* and Hindustāni instrumental music. He thus identifies the ancient practice of *vedic chant* as foundational to improvisational methodology in Indian classical music.

The idea that *dhrupad* is derived from *vedic* principles and utilizes Hindu sacred sound is most saliently demonstrated when *dhrupad* vocalists begin a *rāga* with the sacred sound *om*, sung to the note *sa*. *Om* is recited at the beginning of *mantras* or at the start of a rendering of the *vedas*. Its incantation signifies and evokes the primordial essence out of which all sound and being emerges. *Om* is said to be a sonic

[32] This open sound can be thought to enable the *prana* or 'vital life force' to flow.

manifestation of the entire universe, its resonance being the totality of all existence as cosmic vibration (Paul 2004; Coward and Goa 2004).[33]

Creation myths and associations with the Hindu pantheon

Other ideas regarding the origins of *rāga* relate to associations between the Indian classical arts and Hindu deities. There are many ways in which *rāga* pertains to such associations: through myth, legend, and name; and in the texts of countless *bandishes* or vocal compositions where deities are described, praised or alluded to.

There are a number of Hindu creation myths relating to Indian classical music and *rāga*, all pointing to the idiom's divine provenance. One story relates to a famous tale about Krishna, who took on multiple forms in order to please all the milkmaids who sought his love, dancing simultaneously and individually with each one:

> For the sake of the 16,108 milkmaids, the Dark Lord, Krishna, took the same number of shapes. Each of the milkmaids for each of the Krishna-s sang a different *rāga* in a different rhythm, thus giving birth to 16,108 modes. These *rāgas* and *rāginī-s* later became famous on earth.[34] (Danielou 1980, p.92)

Hindu mythology states that Brahma created music (along with the *Vedas*). This knowledge was then imparted onto Lord Shiva and Goddess Sarasvatī. Shiva is associated with rhythm and Sarasvatī is associated with melody:

> This music as per all Indian custom is like spiritual thing. The thing is that, this type of music is being handled by the Goddess Sarasvatī and Lord Shiva. And he used to play the rhythm; and music and song and the *sitār* and the *veena* used to play by, you know, Sarasvatī. (Nimai Das February 2009)

In turn, music was passed to mankind: 'the sage Bharata Rishi, taught music to the heavenly deities, while Narada Rishi, singing and playing on the 'Veena', taught music to man' (Bose 1990, p.19).

[33] See Chapter 3.

[34] This version of the story comes from Rāga Kalpa-druma by Krishnananda Vyasa (nineteenth century). I have already presented a different version of the same story in Chapter 3 where I considered its meaning as a philosophical metaphor for unity in diversity and the omnipresence of the divine. It is interesting to see how the version I have just quoted incorporates a *rāga* creation myth that was not in the other version. This illustrates the flexibility and interpretive capacity of Hindu mythology.

Other stories attribute Lord Shiva to the creation of the threefold art form known as *sangeet*: music, dance and drama. Shiva created rhythm as he performed the cosmic dance (*Tandava Nrittya*), holding a percussion instrument in his hand (the *damaru)*, in order to rid the universe of evil.[35] 'Mythology tells us that five ragas came out of Lord Shiva's mouth, while the sixth one from that of Parvati – his consort' (Bose 1990, p.19). Another version of this myth suggests that Shiva had five mouths pointing in five directions and one *rāga* came out of each. Other interpretations appear to have been tailored over time in line with particular religious affiliations:

> The worshippers of Lord Shiva hold that music came out of from the mouths of both Siva and Shakti, whereas the followers of Vishnu ascribe its origin to Laksmi and Narayana. (Prajnanananda 1997, p.14)

The *rāgas* generally associated with this story are Bhairav, Hindol, Megh, Deepak, Shri, and Kaushik (created by Shiva's consort Parvati). It must be noted that this is not just archaic mythology, but such ideas relating to the origins of music and *rāga* are commonly held by Indian classical musicians, and still resonate with philosophical meaning. For example, the late *sarod* maestro Ali Akbar Khan broadly concurred with the traditional story, while adding another thirty-six *rāgas* to it! (or '*rāginīs*' as they were known in an ancient classification system, where male '*rāgas*', female '*rāginīs*', sons ['*putras*'], and daughters-in-law ['*bharyas*'] were grouped into *rāga* families):

> Sound is created by God. We may say music is created by a person, but no. Real music, these six ragas and thirty-six raginis and these twelve notes, He created from the heavens. (Ali Akbar Khan in Lavezzoli 2007, p.75)

Jagdeep Singh Bedi is a distinguished professional *sitār* player and music teacher at a University in New Delhi. The following is his response to my question about the origins of Rāga Bhairav:

> These *rāgas* are come from the God. Directly come from the God. Whenever on the earth when the God was the earth he produced four or five *rāgas* and one of them, this *rāga*.[36] (Jagdeep Singh Bedi January 2000)

[35] The *damaru* is still used in India by some folk musicians and dancers and many *dhrupad* compositions praise Shiva and mention the *damaru* in their descriptions of him.

[36] Directly after this statement, Bedi added the following caveat 'I tell you very frankly I cannot say that we are playing the same thing near about one thousand or two thousand years back… no it is difficult. The season has changed, there was no recording system, nothing else' (ibid.). For Bedi, the idea that the origins of Rāga Bhairav are directly connected to God and to an ancient mythical time, is unchanged despite an awareness that today's musicians play a version that has changed and evolved over the centuries. There is no apparent conflict between ongoing human influence and the perceived

This statement again corroborates the traditional foundation myth, and Rāga Bhairav is clearly considered to be of divine origin. In fact, 'Bhairav' is not only a *rāga*, it is also the name of a particular deity from the Hindu pantheon of gods. In this sense Rāga Bhairav may be seen as a sonic representation of the divine in a particular aspect. Bhairav is described as an incarnation of Shiva: a fierce giant smeared in the ashes of the dead, with a garland of skulls around his neck, guarding Mount Kailash, the resting place of the gods.

> Three eyed, wrapped in the skin of an elephant and adorned with snakes, his scarf white, his garland of human skulls, armed with a burning trident – so triumphs Bhairava, the first of rāga-s. (*Sangīta-darpana* 2, 46) (Danielou 1980, p.125)[37]

Paṇḍit Amarnath offers another related definition of the word 'Bhairav', pointing to yet another version of the origins of the *rāga*:

> From the word *bhee*, meaning fear, and *raee*, meaning sound. *Bhairav* were men and *Bhairavee* the women devotees of Lord Shiva, and they lived mostly in and around cremation ghaats. It is said that they exorcised the spirits of the dead, The rāgas *Bhairav* and *Bhairavee* derive their names from here. (Amarnath 1994, p.18)

Listening to the *rāga,* one is initially challenged to find a correlation between these grim and terrifying images of Bhairav and the aesthetic quality of Rāga Bhairav, which may be described as peaceful, sonorous, and full of pathos. However, Rāga Bhairav is not a light or romantic *rāga*; its character is solemn, dignified and serious and is generally rendered in an austere and slow style without the romantic ornamental affectations afforded to lighter *rāgas*. Jagdeep Singh Bedi described Rāga Bhairav as a 'totally devotional *rāga,* heavy *rāga*' (January 2000). The prominence of *komal dha* and *komal re* provide a restless dissonance, added to by the characteristic *āndolan* and *meend,* producing a serious, quasi-mystical mood. In this sense, the aesthetic sensibilities of Rāga Bhairav do somewhat reflect its mythological and religious associations.

---

providence of the *rāga* as a divine creation. Later in the interview he alluded to the oral master-disciple tradition, *guru-sishya paramparā*: 'so this is the strong tradition of our Indian music. So we can say that this Bhairav *rāga* is… this origin is same thing.' Here Bedi concludes that the origin of Rāga Bhairav can also be said to lie in the oral transmission process. Clearly he views multiple origins of *rāga* simultaneously.

[37] See Gaston (1982) and Kaufmann (1968, p.233) for further iconographic description and imagery of Bhairav.

A number of other *rāgas* are named after Hindu deities, these include: Bhairavi, Durga, Kedar, Sarasvatī, Shankara, Shri, and Ramkali. This association is not only a window into the perception of *rāga* as divine entity, it also illustrates how individual *rāgas* (like individual deities) are endowed with unique personalities. The nature of this personification can be witnessed in part through *rāga* iconography. Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, a number of paintings were created and coupled with iconic verses to depict individual *rāgas*. These visual-poetic sets are known as *rāgamālā*. This colourful description of Rāga Hindola is an example, finishing in yet another *rāga* creation myth:[38]

> *Hindola* is a lovely youth, surrounded by young ladies. He looks like an embodiment of love. The spring blossoms around him with all its beauty and lustre. He swings amongst maidens playing the *veenas* and beating the drums. Lord Brahma created him out of his navel-lotus. (Deva 1992, p.75)

A similar story of divine creation is depicted in the *rāgamālā* description of Rāga Bhairav, attributed to Shiva:

> Bhairava is born from the mouth of Shiva, and carries the poison on his neck, and his eyes are red. He carries the trident, the skull, and the lotus, and wears jeweled pendants on his two ears and matted locks. This [melody] is sung by the gods in the morning in Autumn.[39] (Kaufmann 1968, p.233)

Another example of *rāgas* being personified, and directly related to divine entities, comes from a popular old story where the legendary musician and sage, Narada, witnessed the *rāgas* in their divine manifestation as gods.[40] They were tormented with broken limbs, claiming that Narada's arrogance and miss rendering of *rāga* had damaged them. The message in this story is that man has to be humble in the face of the divine character of *rāga* in order to evoke the presence of its true character in a pure manner; arrogance (or ego) is seen as a block to realising the true nature of *rāga*. This story depicts *rāgas* as divine entities with distinct and unique individual personalities, a depiction that mirrors the perception of *rāga* among practitioners. *Rāgas* are also perceived as having unique 'aesthetic personalities', relating to their particular mood (*rasa*), emotional affect (*bhāva*) and melodic identity. Mediating

[38] For more information on *rāgamālā*, and to see the depiction of Hindola, see Wade (1998).
[39] This description is attributed to a *rāgamālā* painting of Rāga Bhairav by Mesakarna. See Kaufmann (1968, p.234) to view the painting.
[40] See Shankar (1969, p.12) and Deva (1992 p.78) for accounts of this story.

between divine and aesthetic perceptions of *rāga*, Indian musicologist B.C. Deva, suggests another view of the personification of *rāga*:

> A *rāga* or *tāla* is the externalisation of an inner consciousness.... Every *rāga* is a man, a woman or a god in a particular state of mind. In effect it is a personality–a *dhyanamoorty*–a form to be meditated upon and the *dhyanamoorty* helps and intensifies the inward tendency of the artiste. (Deva 1992, p.78)

This contention presents a pragmatic assertion that concentration and inner contemplation is an easier conscious state to sustain if there is an image to be contemplated upon, just as sustained attention on a singular focus is a core technique in meditation, aiding the realisation of higher states of consciousness. In a more specific sense, Deva is also suggesting that the perception of a *rāga* as a deity or divine personality can be intimately related to its sonic realisation. The characterisation of a *rāga* as a distinct personality is used as a medium for its actualisation through sound.[41] The particularity of an iconic image of *rāga* assists in the exactitude of rendering its unique aesthetic identity. This perspective is supported by Hazrat Inayat Khan who argues for a considered view of Hindu pantheistic religiosity:

> The ancient gods and goddesses were simply images of the different aspects of life…. The same idea has been worked out in the images of Ragas. (Hazrat Inayat Khan 1996, p.162)

On one hand, this assertion portrays *rāga* as a subtle science, with sacred and universalist overtones; on the other hand this view is as much to do with the classification of *rāga* – an ancient and on-going pursuit of Indian musicology – as it has to do with the personification of *rāga*. Here classification and personification are inter-related. For example, the thirteenth century Indian musicologist Sarngadeva designated a patron deity for each *rāga*, codifying *rāga's* characterisation as semi-divine beings into a system of taxonomy.

Creation myths relating to the divine provenance of *rāga*, and associations between particular *rāgas* and deities are expressions of an underlying philosophical attitude that *rāgas* are sacred in origin and divine in nature. Learning *rāga* is therefore

[41] The use of iconography – physical or imagined – as vehicles to divine experience is discussed in Chapter 6.

perceived as a spiritual discipline and the experience of *rāga* is perceived as spiritual experience. *Rāgas* are represented as semi-divine entities existing in a subtle realm. *Rāga* is considered to possess extra-human agency, and thus the process of *rāga* improvisation can be a form of evocation and devotion to a higher power.

Rāga **comes from** ***om***

Like many Indian musicians I have interviewed, Sougata Roy Chowdhury perceives multiple understandings of the origins of *rāga* simultaneously, with no apparent contradiction. During one interview, he suggested that *rāga* begun in *vedic* times, but he then proposed an evolutionary model different from that presented by most historians and scholars. He considers *rāga*, and Indian classical music, to have evolved in a clear and systemic manner. The evolutionary model he proposes states that Indian classical music started with *om*; then there were three notes; then *rāgas* gradually evolved to five notes; then six note *rāgas* emerged; and finally seven note *rāgas* followed.[42] Reflecting this logic, Roy Chowdhury named a rarely played three-note *rāga* called Malashri as 'the first *rāga*'. He attributed this particular assertion to something Ali Akbar Khan had once said. It is most likely that Rāga Malashri was thus labelled as it is the only *rāga* known to contain only three notes, therefore according to this evolutionary model it must be the 'first *rāga*'.[43]

In reality, the very idea of there being a 'first *rāga*' is historically untenable (although when an authority like Ustad Ali Akbar Khan states such an idea, it assumes considerable weight); *rāga* is the organic product of a gradual process of musical and cultural evolution. The interesting point about this model is that it expresses a clear systematic development stemming directly out of the sacred sound *om*. For a Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, or Sikh, *om* is the ultimate in sacred sound thought to be a sonic manifestation of primordial and universal essence. The universe is said to have begun

[42] Another version of this account is offered by musicologist P. P. Narayanaswami (2013, part I): 'The mystic sound "Om" is regarded as the adhaara svaram (fundamental note) for Indian music. Originally, vedic hymns employed only a single note (arcika recitation). Later, to avoid monotony, two more notes were added, one above and one below the pitch of the single note, and these notes became the ri, ni, and sa of later times. In due course, two more notes were added and a scale of five notes evolved. The concept of seven notes was carved out later by adding two more notes, one above and one below, to these five.'

[43] It is interesting to note that some *vedic chant* only consists of three fundamental notes (*ne*, *sa*, and *re*). These are different pitches to Rāga Malashri. Malashri traditionally only contains the notes *sa*, *ga* and *pa*, although sometimes a weak *nee* and possibly a weak *ma* are added. The origins of Rāga Malashri are obscure and difficult to trace.

with *om*, and *om* is the embodiment of all totality in sound.[44] Through Roy Chowdhury's evolutionary model, *rāga* is again presented as sacred in origin, and of divine rather than human agency. Here *rāga* stems from the very origins of the universe, with a pre-human provenance, as ancient as life itself. This contention is then supported by a hypothetical, if scientifically constructed, model where human influence is taken into account. However, this human influence is still displayed in a passive light; the portrait Roy Chowdhury paints of the expansion into five, six and seven note *rāgas* is of the gradual evolution of *rāgas*, where humans are custodians rather than active creators. This account, although set to a linear historical scale, also suggests the immanent presence of *om* in *rāga* today.

Connections between *rāga* and nature

The theory and lore of Hindustāni music presents an intimate relationship between Indian classical music and the natural world. There are a wide number of perceived connections between *rāga* and nature including temporal associations, seasonal associations, and links between *rāgas* and natural forces.[45] Some of these associations exist as lore and legend, passed down through oral culture; others are found in archaic musical treatises, and some relate to extant music theory, convention and customary practice.

The most famous and striking examples of the perceived relationship between *rāga* and natural forces come from the legends of the medieval period. These stories recall supernatural phenomena arising from particular *rāgas* when recited by 'saintly' musicians of the past. The effects of these *rāgas* include the melting of rocks, the bringing of rain and even the raising of the dead.[46] The feats of the legendary vocalist Tansen (c.1506-89) are the most celebrated. One story recounts a time when he sung a night *rāga* at mid-day; it is said that darkness spread as far as his voice could reach. Another famous story tells of a dangerous trick played on him by fellow court musicians who were jealous of his fame and eminence. They suggested to Emperor

[44] See Chapter 3. This idea reflects the Hindu belief in *nāda-brahma* ('sound is God'), an idea that all existence is essentially a form of vibration, or sound (Beck 1993; Berendt 1983).
[45] It is worth noting that early Aryans were largely animistic, worshiping 'the sun, the air, fire, water and ether (energy)' (Holroyde 1972, p.63). *Samvedic chant* was largely devoted to the harnessing of natural forces. However, whether there is a direct connection between this early religious culture and present associations between *rāga* and nature is historically unclear.
[46] See Shankar (1968) and Neuman (1980) for accounts of these stories.

Akbar that he command Tansen to sing Rāga Deepak. Akbar made the command unaware that the *rāga* was associated with light and fire, and could burn up his most-prized musician:

> The royal command could not be disobeyed; and so Tansen began to sing the *rāga*. One by one the lamps in the palace courtyard, where he was performing, began to light up by themselves. As the music proceeded, the heat started to consume his body. The stupefied king did not know of a way of stopping this slow but sure death. Then someone thought of Tansen's lady who was herself a great musician. She was immediately informed of the tragic situation. On hearing of the danger of her lover, she began to sing *rāga Malhar* (a monsoon *rāga*) and surely the rains came, drenching Tansen and saving his life. (Deva 1992, pp.74-75)

Such wondrous accounts of legendary musicians of the past continue to have resonance today. The stories are retold within the oral culture and give us insight into the depth and power that *rāga* is considered to potentially possess. Many of today's musicians accept these stories as historical fact. For example, *sitār* and *surbarhar* player Imrat Khan expresses a belief in the reality of these supernatural tales. He feels that this quality of *rāga* is now lost because the knowledge of the musical patterns has been forgotten. He regrets that there was no way of recording or notating the music of the time to preserve it:

> Here we are completely lost, because although Mia Tansen lived not very long ago–it was only in the sixteenth century–it's very hard for us to find how he brought rain and how he melted stones, because all of these miracles are associated with his performance and with his music. We musicians very strongly believe. We don't think it is a myth. Modern science is also trying to find these musical powers… scientifically we are discovering that music has much more to offer; perhaps in those days they went deep enough into it. I wish we had a recording system or a writing system like the ones in Western music, so we would be able to know at least what were the patterns. (Imrat Khan in Rahn and Khan 1992, p.129)

Ali Akbar Khan presents a similar conviction in the potential power of *rāga* to harness natural forces. He suggests a pragmatic utility to this quality of *rāga* in ancient times, where desert people used to sing the monsoon *rāga*, Megh, in order to evoke rain. He points to a lack of belief in this quality of *rāga* in modern times:

> In old times, whenever they really needed water somewhere, like Rajasthan desert, no rain for a long time, then they sing all these melodies. They tune the vibration, microtones and the melody, in such a way that it is like a telephone number to dial to somewhere in India, or anywhere you see, person-to-person, then you can say hello. Like in the same way this old system by this note you can dial for the king of the rain. We call that *Megh Rag. Megh* means the king of the rainy season. But we don't believe nowadays because now in modern times, nobody wants to believe. (Ali Akbar Khan

2006, p.34)

Kushal Das also expresses an inherent belief in the legends of the past and the supernatural potential of *rāga*. He suggests that this kind of phenomena does not happen today because of the reality of modern life. He spoke to me about how the distractions of noise, busyness, and professionalism are not conducive to this depth of musical expression. Interestingly, he also said that such phenomenon may still be happening today, but we wouldn't know about it because such individuals would be cut off from society. The sentiment expressed is that the environment must be correct, within and without. The inner state of the musician must be serene, coupled with an outer environment of peace and relative silence. Unfortunately this is at odds with the chaotic and noisy nature of today's urban India where modern professional musicians generally live and work. This kind of sentiment, comparing an idealised past to a less-than-ideal present is a common theme in Indian philosophical and ideological discourse. It is interesting to note that all three practitioners express a belief in the supernatural potential of *rāga*. They offer three different reasons for why it is not witnessed in the current era: the knowledge is lost; there is a lack of belief; and modern life does not support this power.

A number of Indian musicologists and practitioners of Hindustāni music point to the idea that Indian classical music has its origins in nature, often referring to music theory and mythology for support. They offer accounts of an ancient and refined spiritual science where the subtle relationship between sound and nature was realised through music. According to ancient music theory, the basic scale of seven notes is said to have evolved out of the sounds of animals, and out of the colours of the rainbow:

> The evolution of the seven *swaras* (musical notes) is believed to be derived from the sweet sounds of some of the birds and animals viz., *Sa* (peacock), *Re* (bullock), *Ga* (goat), *Ma* (Jackal), *Pa* (Cuckoo), *Dha* (horse) and *Ni* (elephant). It is also said that these seven notes in the gamut were constituted in view of the seven colours of the rainbow–if a scientific research is made in this regard, the shades or nuances in between the colours of the rainbow may perhaps prove to be akin to those of the shades or nuances of the *swaras*. (Bose 1990, pp.20-21)

Bose's contention – similar to that of Imrat Khan above – that scientific research may potentially prove these connections illustrates an implicit conviction held within the

tradition that such associations are more than arbitrary and fanciful musings of an archaic ideology. In general, connections between *rāga* and nature are accepted by present practitioners and considered a legacy of a subtle science belonging to an enlightened age of ancient India.

Bose presents an association between nature and the six 'primary' *rāgas* said to be of divine origin. They were once considered to correspond to, and, according to Bose, to arise out of, different seasons: 'music is the outcome of nature…. *Natnarayan* (summer), *Megh* (rain), *Pancham* (autumn), *Sri* (dew), *Bhairav* (winter) and *Hindol* (spring)' (Bose 1990, p.20).[47] This belief that Indian classical music comes from nature is reflected in the narratives of contemporary professional musicians. Hindustāni musicians I interviewed further suggested that this connection to nature relates to the devotional and spiritual quality of the music.

> Actually the Indian classical music, you can see, [is] mostly devotional, because it came from the nature. Nature and, nature, I mean, totally it came from nature and created from nature, daylight-wise, season-wise. (Kushal Das February 2007)

Das is referring specifically to the fact that particular *rāgas* are conventionally associated with particular times of the day or seasons. From this convention, he draws the conclusion that Indian classical music was 'created from nature'. This belief is reiterated by Amir Kumar Kas, a *santoor* player from Kolkata, who gave the following explanation in response to an open question regarding the relationship between spirituality and Hindustāni music:

> See, our North Indian classical music based on nature, you know. *Rāga* is all from nature, you can find the relationship with the timing, our *rāga* have different timings. So morning *rāga* has different sentiments so automatically if you listen to that you get the feeling of morning…. If you play it in the night, it doesn't look nice, you won't get the feeling. From your heart, from your mind, you won't get that feeling if you don't play it in the morning. (Amir Kumar Kas February 2009)

There is a belief among Indian musicians and many Indian musicologists that the temporal associations attributed to *rāga* are a reflection of an innate relationship between mood and time of day, or season in the year. Specific *rāgas* are considered to embody the quality of a particular time of day or a particular season.[48] For example,

[47] For a slightly different version of the same designation, see Bagchee (1998, p.85).
[48] According to Sougata Roy Chowdhury, it is not the actual time of day, but rather the cycle of natural

in order to fully grasp Rāga Megh, a monsoon *rāga*, one would have to experience the monsoon season. This *rāga* is generally only played at that time of year. Rāga Megh is partly defined as an expression of the experience of rain, just as an evening *rāga* is an expression of the mood of the evening. 'Theoretically, for a *rāga* that describes the feeling of early evening to have its full effect, it should be played in the early evening' (Shankar 1968 [2007], p.33).

Hindustāni musicians largely adhere to *rāgas'* temporal associations, only performing particular *rāgas* at their assigned times.[49] Rāga Bhairav is traditionally played during or after sunrise (it may even be said that the *rāga* evokes the rising sun). For this reason, logistics dictate that the *rāga* is rarely heard live in a public performance, despite its status as a 'primary' *rāga*.[50] The convention regarding seasons is not as strictly maintained except for a few examples such as monsoon *rāgas* belonging to the Malhar family or the spring *rāga* Hindol.

The rules and exactitudes of this convention are well-worn subjects in Indian musicological discourse. The most authoritative voice on the subject, V.N. Bhatkhande, attempted to devise a coherent and comprehensive theoretical model through which *rāga*-time relationships could be explained and codified by searching for general determining factors. For example, he stated that *rāgas* to be played at sunrise or sunset generally include the note *komal re* ('flat second') (such as Rāga Bhairav), and that *rāgas* whose *vādi* ('primary note') is in the lower tetra-chord (*purvang)* are characteristic of the evening or early night.[51]

---

light that is the determining factor corresponding to a *rāga's* mood.

[49] Sougata Roy Chowdhury brings this a step further by only teaching particular *rāgas* during the time associated with them. For example, if I went to his apartment for a lesson around noon, we would work on something from the Sarang family of *rāgas*, which are associated with that time of day.

[50] Bhairav is a 'primary *rāga*' in many respects. It is one of the six ancient *rāgas* cited in early mythology. It is also the name of one of the ten *thāts*, or primary scale groups as outlined by V.N. Bhatkhande. Knowledge of Bhairav is essential to a Hindustāni musician's training because many other *rāgas* are derived from it. However, in a live setting, it is more common to hear a variation such as Ahir Bhairav, often at the end of an all-night concert, because this *rāga* is presented a little earlier than Bhairav (at approximately five am).

[51] B.C. Deva considers *rāga*-time association a 'psychological aspect' (1992, p.75) and presents an analysis of the relationship between pitch and time, based largely on Bhatkhande's assertion that *rāga*-time association results from the science of psycho-physiological affect. For more information on *rāga* temporal associations see Bagchee (2008); Lath in Mutatkar (1987); and Deva (1992).

The problem is that there are so many exceptions to these 'rules' that the entire theory is debatable, and a comprehensive explanatory model appears untenable. Temporal conventions are riddled with inconsistencies: an early morning and late night *rāga* being fused as one (such as Rāga Bhairav Bahar) leaves the whole concept confused; Rāga Bhairavi has somehow being freed from its early morning slot, to be played at any time as long as it is the last *rāga* in a concert; a medieval rule dictated that the time restraints of a *rāga* could be broken if a King so ordered it; a number of varying interpretations and contradictions persist among scholars and practitioners; and inconsistencies and change have occurring over time.

Despite such empirical realities, temporal conventions and the ideology surrounding them are resilient in Hindustāni music.[52] Contradictions and varying interpretations are often considered to be built of human flaws and miss-guided renderings of the universal truth that *rāga* intimately reflects nature. Although attempts have been made to find a coherent generalised model to explain the relationship between melody and time, no such model exists without a myriad of exceptions. In order to explain this, it has been claimed that pitch relationships alone are too simplistic an analysis of this complex reality, and therefore a comprehensive and coherent theoretical explanation of *rāga*-time relationships cannot be formulated on this basis alone (Lath in Mutatkar 1987, p.118). The implication is that *rāga*-time associations are implicitly 'correct', but we are as yet unable to formulate a thorough theoretical explanation.

The idea that temporal associations developed in ancient times through a subtle perception of the natural world is also debatable. The origins of temporal associations are not historically clear, although they have certainly existed for centuries. Some scholars contend that the convention may have originated in ancient Indian drama, where particular melodies were used to indicate times of day, seasons, particular moods and even characters (Wade 2004, p.76). By extension, it is easy to imagine how such a practice may have transferred into classical convention. Other compelling evidence points to temple liturgical practice as the source of *rāga*-time associations.[53]

[52] The practice of temporal association has all but died out in the Karnatic tradition of South Indian classical music.

[53] Mukund Lath (Mutatkar 1987, pp.113-119) outlines a convincing argument in this regard. He claims that the earliest literary mention of *rāga's* temporal associations is in the tenth or eleventh centuries C.E., with a vast body of authoritative literature not mentioning such associations at all. He also points

In light of this scholarly evidence, *rāga*-time association may not stem from an ancient science where the mood and qualities of a particular time (or season) were matched with particular melodies and pitches, as is generally believed today. It appears highly plausible that the idea of an affiliation between mood and time came later, evolving as a way of explaining and justifying convention.

Irrespective of the gap between ideology and evidence, the association between *rāga* and nature once more reveals a philosophical sentiment, presenting *rāga* as a refined, subtle science with mystical potency. *Rāga*-time association is emically perceived as an ancient sonic science of natural mood, where aesthetic affect is intimately related to the cycles of nature. *Rāga* is thus invested with is a cosmic, spiritual and devotional component. There is an assumption among many Indian musicians and scholars alike that the temporal aspect of *rāgas* is a natural and objective phenomenon. Just as there are many different seasons and many different shades of light in the solar cycle; so there are many *rāgas*.

The contention that Indian music reflects natural order is at times elevated to a higher ideology encompassing astrology, the order of the entire universe, and the nature of universal truth.[54] Hazrat Inayat Khan considers music to be behind the working of the entire universe:

> Every note of Indian music corresponds with a certain planet; every note has a certain colour; every note denotes a certain pitch of nature, a certain pitch of the animal world…. Music is behind the working of the whole universe. Music is not only life's greatest object, but music is life itself. (Hazrat Inayat Khan 1996, p.61 and p.11)

Khan further suggests that if music reflects the harmony of the universe, the universe can then be revealed through the experience of music: 'From the miniature music which we understand, they expanded themselves to the whole universe of music'

---

out how this convention was originally ascribed 'not because of aesthetic but religious reasons… meant only for added religious merit [and] added auspiciousness' (p.117). Through customary practice and literary authority, this religious practice became established convention, and the explanation for the convention changed through time. He further points to the many inconsistencies and changes in the details of these conventions over time, highlighting the apparently arbitrary nature of *rāga*-time associations. Ho (2006) makes a similar suggestion, pointing to the ritual of early medieval liturgical practice as the source for *rāga*-temporal associations. Devotees in Hindu temple traditions performed daily and seasonal liturgical acts, accompanied by particular melodies, which were, according to Ho, embryonic forms of today's *rāgas*.

[54] See also Khan (1996, pp.16-17) for a related concept on how the world was created through sound.

(Hazrat Inayat Khan 1996, p.13). This idea reflects the Hindu philosophical concept *nāda-brahma* ('sound is God'): that the universe originated with sound. Thus primordial essence is manifested and experienced through sound (see Chapter 3).

The innate pre-existence of *rāgas*

The concepts of sound as a manifestation of primordial essence, and *rāga* as a reflection of nature, point to another explanation of the origin of *rāga*: that *rāgas* pre-exist, to be 'discovered', or 'awoken' by musicians; and not 'created' by them.

> It could never be said that a musician 'invents' a raga. Rather, a raga is discovered as a biologist might 'discover' a new species or an explorer a new continent. The number of possible ragas is nearly infinite. (Shankar 1968 (2007), p.28)

Rāgas are perceived as dormant entities, awaiting human intervention in order to awaken: 'A Raga can only be discovered. It is said that Ragas sleep in the subconscious of the human race and surface at various periods of history' (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.70). This notion of *rāgas* as independent, elemental entities beyond human origination, can be explained through a curious argument based on the idea that an almost infinite number of *rāgas* potentially exist. According to this doctrine, there are already so many *rāgas* that man cannot 'create' new ones:

> New ragas are virtually impossible to create. Everything already exists. There's no space for even a needle tip. It is out of ignorance that some people feel they have 'created' something new. Our shastras refer to 5584 different ragas, does it leave any scope for anything else? (Zia Fariduddin Dagar in Roy 2004, p.328)

This huge number of *rāgas* suggested by the *dhrupad* artist is nothing compared to other accounts. In the following description, Ali Akbar Khan begins with the Hindu origin myth of six original *rāgas*; he continues with details of the ancient *rāga* classification system, whereby *rāgas* were divided into family groups; and finally, he extends this system to reach a vast number of 75,000 *rāgas*, all family descendants of the original six:

> Six ragas means male melody, which were created by Brahma, and he taught Lord Shiva. And Lord Shiva made six females for each raga, [which] becomes thirty-six. And when it becomes thirty-six, then their family. Each raga is like that for rainy season. So from six ladies they have daughters, granddaughters, sons, and this and that. Came out total, from six ragas, seventy-five thousand [*rāgas*]. (Ali Akbar Khan 2006, p.38)

The magnitude of this assertion mirrors that of the seventeenth century musicologist Ahobala who speculated on all the possible modal permutations that can be derived from the different scales, each potentially equating to a different *rāga*: 'Ahobala speaks of 18,678 modes of seven notes, 31,050 modes of six notes and 17,505 modes of five notes in the *Ma grama* alone' (Danielou 1980, p.92).[55] Another account lists even more possible *rāgas*, but concludes that the true number is limited only by the human ability to perceive subtle difference:

> We are often asked how many Ragas are there in our music. There is no true answer to this question.... From a single scale it is possible to have 4,840 Ragas. With the 72 scales we can mathematically have 348,480 Rāgas. To this if we add Vakras, Meends, different Shrutis, Vadis and Samvadis we can have several million Ragas. This is of course absurd.... Ragas are finally a kind of experience and their number is limited only by our own capacity to experience different perceptions. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, pp.67-68)

Accounts of such vast numbers of modes and *rāgas* are clearly theoretical and speculative, supporting an ideological stance, rather than reflecting reality.[56] The total number of *rāgas* played today number in the hundreds, not thousands, although many have been lost (and altered) through time. It is typical of professional musicians today to have a working repertoire of approximately fifty *rāgas*, with a more theoretical grasp of a wider number. Stories of vast numbers of *rāgas* represent the tradition as immense and immeasurable, giving it weight and authority. Such insurmountable quantities of *rāgas* also adds to the air of mystique surrounding the concept, and makes it inconceivable that human kind could ever fully know the world of *rāga*.

The idea that man cannot 'create' *rāgas* is also contradicted by many accounts and is disputable in light of simple historical fact. Although the origins of many *rāgas* are lost in prehistory; a number of popular *rāgas* today have been 'created', 'composed', or should we say, 'discovered' relatively recently by musicians. They are acknowledged as new additions to the tradition. For example, Rāga Jog is commonly performed in current times. Its creation is attributed to Daras Piya, a well-known twentieth century vocalist and composer (Broadbank 1999, p.31). In more recent

[55] 'The *Ma grama* alone' means that this is only one subset in a wider scheme of scale classification. Danielou made his own mathematical calculation based on the number of possible modes in each seven note scale, multiplying this by the seventy two possible seven note scales, he derived a possible 34,848 distinct modes (ibid., p.92).
[56] See Chapter 2 for a discussion on theoretical idealism in Indian musicology.

times, instrumentalists such as Ali Akbar Khan, Amjad Ali Khan and Ravi Shankar have also 'composed' new *rāgas* and mixed older *rāgas* to create new hybrids. Some of these *rāgas* have become part of the common repertoire of Hindustāni music. Shankar's immodest account of his own creative achievements clearly contradicts his earlier statement that a musician can never 'invent' a *rāga*:[57]

> As many as thirty different ragas are my own creations, including Nat Bhairav (which I developed way back in 1945), Bairagi, Ahir Lalit, Tilak Shyam, Manamanjari, Pancham Se Gara,… and Rajya Kalyan (... which I composed for the occasion of my leaving the Rajya Sabha in 1992) and many others. (Shankar 1999, p.294)

North Indian classical music is recognised as being in a state of constant evolution. Ideology legitimises change through sustaining the image of antiquity, and the ideal of a divine source. Various accounts of the origins of *rāga* amount to different ways of explaining this divine source. The idea of *rāga's* existential independence fosters a characteristic humility in the face of *rāga*. Ideologically, *rāga* is not something created by musicians but is a divine entity, living in a subtle realm, to be evoked or revealed in the moment through a pure rendition. Ideally, the experience of *rāga* can result in a revelation of its divine essence, and thus *rāga* is a vehicle to spiritual realisation.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts: *Rāga* as a Unifying Principle

Rāga is a unifying umbrella term that encompasses a range of different perspectives simultaneously, seamlessly bridging the worlds of myth, lore, music theory, aesthetics and music practice. The concept of *rāga* cannot be fully understood without considering its different components separately, and then trying to comprehend the totality of the parts. In this chapter I have outlined multiple perspectives on a single *rāga*, Rāga Bhairav. I first outlined *rāga* in technical terms, through the sophisticated classification system of Indian musicology. I then discussed multiple perspectives on the origins of *rāga*; this discussion introduced many of the numinous and mystical associations that the concept of *rāga* embodies. In this concluding section, I consider the concept of *rāga* as a whole. I outline how the apparent dichotomy between the technical and the numinous may be understood, mediated, and reconciled. In this way, I further explore the spiritual ideology that the concept of *rāga* embodies, and

[57] Amjad Ali Khan (2013) lists twenty-four *rāgas* on his website as his own compositions.

simultaneously relate this ideology to the practical realities of *rāga* as a musical system. The discussion includes the following themes: defining *rāga*, theory and practice, *rāga* as divine communion, my own experience of *rāga,* and the principle of unity.

Defining *rāga*

Rāga is a complex and compelling concept encompassing technical and theoretical descriptions alongside numinous, mystical associations. Through its breath and conceptual malleability, *rāga* accommodates a host of divergent aesthetic principles and philosophical perspectives. Through the ideas I have presented – sound as a manifestation of primordial essence; *rāga* arising out of nature; and various interpretations of the divine and mythological origins of *rāga* – it is clear that there is a belief in *rāga's* existential independence and extra-human provenance. There is an implication that *rāga* can be experienced, but not fully defined.

This perception fosters an attitude of humility on behalf of the musician towards the sanctity of *rāga*. The enigmatic quality of *rāga* invites numinous and ideological associations. Humility and an ethos of surrender also relate pertinently to central tenets of Indian philosophy (see Chapter 3). Later in this dissertation I consider how surrender to *rāga* and to the immediacy and flow of the improvised moment is conceptualised as 'devotional', and paramount to an 'authentic' and 'pure' rendition of *rāga* (Chapter 7).

The classification model of *rāga* 'theory' suggests a completely different concept of *rāga*. This model presents *rāga* as formulaic, as if *rāga* can be 'defined' through a man-made musicological system. The implication is that if you follow the model, you will play the *rāga*. Philosophically, this is untenable, as *rāga* is perceived to be a living entity, beyond human agency:

> One of the reasons why a Raga cannot be created by merely keeping its rules and constraints is because the Raga is the child of the moment. Like life itself it is momentarily revealed. It cannot be framed and mounted without losing its life. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.71)

Practically however, *rāga* classification plays an essential part in sustaining the tradition, and the 'life' of *rāga*, through documentation and pedagogy. *Rāga* theory describes *rāga* but does not fully define *rāga*.

Theory and practice

A separation of theory and practice is evident in Hindustāni music. The taxonomical theoretical model of *rāga* conveys a precise and highly refined modal construct. The very exactitude of *rāga*, and the apparently analytical basis of its construction belie many accounts of the experience of performing *rāga*. Bonnie Wade suggests that: 'although the analysis and the performance each derive from the same material, they are two different types of experience' (2004 [1979], pp.55-56).

One way to reconcile this separation between theory and practice is to understand *rāga* as the sum of the processes of learning, enculturation, and experience. From that perspective, the analytical and classificatory theory is a description of an embodied art form. The reality is that much of the terminology outlined in the first part of this chapter, such as *pakaṛ* and *chalan*, is not necessarily part of the traditional learning process. These terms are academic and theoretical, and representative of *rāga*, but are not the *rāga* itself. Even when these classification devices are used in the learning process they can be fluid and pluralistic. Different versions are suggested by different teachers, or even by the same teacher at different times. In this way *rāga* is alive, continually recreated anew, and not fossilised as a formulaic set of 'rules'.

The two sides of *rāga*

On one hand *rāga* can be described through technical, cognitive, and theoretical terms; on the other hand the concept is infused with numinous associations and mystical potency. The concept of *rāga* therefore mediates between the profane and the divine, the analytical and the visceral, the tangible and the intangible, and the defined and the indefinable, through assimilating both sides of an apparent dichotomy under a broad conceptual umbrella.

Indian musicologists offer philosophical perspectives on how this dichotomy may be understood or mediated. M.R. Gautam suggests a parallel between the discipline of

yoga – leading to spiritual union or liberation – and the discipline of *rāga*, capable of infinite expansion:

> *Rāga*... could be defined as a mode having a rigid and apparently circumscribed form... nevertheless, it is capable of infinite improvisation. It is like yogic discipline. Just as the yogi disciplines his body and mind in order to experience that unity-consciousness, be in communion with the Infinite and obtain total release from the thralldom of flesh and matter, so also the *rāga* of Indian music, while appearing to be very rigid in form, is capable of limitless variety and expansion. (Gautam in Mutatkar 1987, p.13)

The dual aspect of *rāga* is also articulated by Paṇḍit Somanatha in the Sanskrit treatise, the *Rāgavibodha* (1608 C.E.). He asserts that there are two-forms of every *rāga*: '*nādamaya-rupa* (sound-body) and *devatamaya-rupa* (body of the divine deity)' (Prajnanananda 1993, p.19 and p.70).[58] Swami Prajnanananda presents a similar view: 'A *rāga* or *rāgini* is something more than its physical form, its symphonic structure, its "body". It has a "soul" which comes to dwell and inhabit in the "body"' (Swami Prajnanananda 1993, p.71). This 'soul' can be known as a '*dhyana*' (a 'meditation') (Bryant 2009 [2003], p.584):

> It is said that each Raga has a Dhyana, a meditative presence, associated with it. The realisation of this Dhyana is a vital element of the experience of the Raga. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.70)

Rāga is said to be the incarnation of this 'body of the divine deity', 'soul', or 'meditative presence' as sound. Prajnanananda quotes another Indian musicologist, O.C. Gangoly:

> Mr. Gangoly emphatically says: 'According to the doctrine, it is believed that the presiding deity, the spirit, or ethos of a raga or ragini can be induced to come down and incarnate (*avatirna-lit.* 'made to descend') in its physical sound-form.' (Prajnanananda 1993, p.70)

It is thought that this divine form of *rāga* may be evoked through a proper and sensitive rendition, and experienced by receptive listeners. *Rāga* is considered to embody the divine, and playing or listening to *rāga* therefore acts as a direct

[58] This dual concept relates to an idea that is more widely cited by Hindustāni musicians today. Accordingly, there are two types of sound, *ahata nāda* ('struck sound', physically audible) and *anahata nāda* ('unstruck sound', inaudible to the human ear, the subtle divine sound permeating the universe). The *Maitra Upanishad* states that 'non-sound is revealed only by sound', experienced as 'the supreme… unqualified, indistinguishable, like the various juices which have reached the condition of honey' (*Maitra Upanishad* 6.22 in Beck 1993, p.45). This is an allusion to divine communion or unitary consciousness. See chapter 3 for an explication of this concept.

connection to an experience of divinity, or a form of divine communion:

> The *rāgas* of Indian music are recognised as the living embodiments of the Divinity, because they part as the mediums to direct apprehension of the Absolute. The divine forms of the *rāgas* are contemplated, and the artists of the art of music concentrate and meditate upon them so as to commune their individual soul with the universal sound of the divine ideal of the *rāgas*. (Prajnanananda 1998 (1973), p.61)

However the dynamic may be conceptualised, be it an evocation of divine presence, communion with nature, or a transcendental 'beyond' experience, *rāga* is seen as a vehicle to the divine.

Rāga as lived embodied experience

Through reflection on my experience learning and playing *rāga*, I am aware of my on-going subjective encounter with much of the ideology I have presented. In my experience, one develops a relationship with a *rāga* that deepens the more one gets to know it, and this deepening process is never ending. I have a unique relationship with each *rāga* I 'know', yet I feel that I don't fully 'know' any *rāga*, there is always more to be 'revealed'. I have been learning and experiencing Rāga Bhairav for fifteen years. Unlike some light *rāgas*, which invite invention and decorative ornamentation, this *rāga* commands great respect and careful attention. The 'devotional' aspect of Rāga Bhairav feels very strong for me. I cannot say whether this is due to its aesthetic flavour, or as a result of my understanding and absorption of the *rāga's* mythological heritage and standing in the tradition. All I can say is that it is real, if a reality bound by intimate subjective experience, and an ideological lean. I wrote the following words through the process of experiential writing, coming directly and immediately out of the experience of practice:

> After tuning, I begin with some thought into the nature of the *rāga*. As I play the first few notes, I carefully try to enter into the feel of Rāga Bhairav, opening up, allowing it to fill the space and consume me. As I do this, I feel it entering my being and I pay homage to its presence through trying to stay faithful to its unique austere character. In this way I try to keep its presence alive. Bhairav is strong and commanding, yet tender and delicate; its embrace is to be feared and loved…. When I surrender to the moment, the moment swells. Time expands, and a deep experience of sound takes over from mechanical process. When I surrender to *rāga*, its personality shines. It comes as a revelation, revealing itself to me and filling the space with its presence. I feel most alive

> when I take myself out of the equation. *Rāga* fills the potency of inner silence. (Fieldnotes, February 2012)[59]

Perhaps, ultimately, *rāga* can only be experienced to be understood, and is only 'known' during this experience. Theory and language may describe the characteristics of *rāga*, and philosophical attitudes to *rāga*, but they do not equate to the experience of its 'presence' in time and space, and within the mind, body, and emotions of the artists and listeners. The nature of direct experience also suggests another interpretation of *rāga's* origins and existentialism. *Rāga* ('that which colours the mind') arises anew in the consciousness of the perceiving mind during performance. Through this lived process, vast stretches of historical time converge in the present moment, and *rāga* re-emerges '*in time*' (Clayton 2000, p.14) as a vital and visceral aesthetic experience:

> *Rag* is a dynamic, temporal, generative principle which can have no satisfactory representation in static or synchronic form. The *rag* can only be apprehended in performance, *in time*. Performance is therefore conceived as a process of making audible, of evoking, of manifesting. (ibid.)

This on-going 'process of making audible' in the tradition of Hindustāni music, consistently resounds philosophical attitudes rooted in ancient times, and re-contextualises them in the present.

The malleability of *rāga*

Many Hindustāni musicians view multiple origins of *rāga* and music simultaneously. In my experience, this sophisticated capacity to view many possibilities simultaneously is a hallmark of the Indian mind. At times, different accounts can appear contradictory, even arising from the same source. For example, a number of apparent contradictions can be found through surveying the writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan:

[59] During my experiments with this writing register, I set the task of not playing a *rāga*, but engaging in a more open form of improvisation. I found that 'free improvisation' is a very different qualitative experience to *rāga*; in my experiential writing I describe free improvisation as 'looser and lighter' (2012) than *rāga*. For me, practicing a *rāga* that I am familiar with is 'an immediate in', an immediate experience of something familiar, grounded, yet otherworldly, 'like a journey home' (ibid.).

> The Science of Indian music has come from three sources: astrology, psychology and mathematics…. The Ragas are derived from five different sources: the mathematical law of variety, the inspiration of the mystics, the imagination of the musicians, the natural lays peculiar to the people residing in different parts of the land, and the idealization of the poets. (Hazrat Inayat Khan 1996, p.60 and p.161)

The concept of *rāga* is malleable enough to accommodate numerous representations simultaneously. Many of the accounts of the origins of *rāga* and Indian classical music serve to fulfill, consciously or unconsciously, an agenda whereby the idiom of Indian classical music is projected as ancient, deeply rooted in spirituality, and arising from a time that is idealised as an enlightened period of human history. Many interpretations of the concept of *rāga* persist and are reinvented through time. Whether a *rāga* is considered a deity, a divine personality, a unique aesthetic principle, a particular state of consciousness, or simply 'life', one thing is clear: that *rāga* is shrouded in a sacred halo. Hindu religiosity permeates the concept of *rāga* and endows it with mystical potency. *Rāga* is depicted as an evocation of natural forces, or a divine being summoned and channeled through the careful and skilled attention of learned musicians – the bestowers of ancient tradition stemming from *vedic* times. Despite the vast array of technical, theoretical and historical analysis of *rāga*, *rāga* refuses to be fully defined but remains elusive, clouded by a mystique that helps project and sustain its spiritual identity. Like a generous host, its enigmatic quality invites an open forum, expansive enough to entertain a wide range of ideological interpretation.

Rāga and the principle of unity

Various technical perspectives, multiple numinous associations, and an entire tradition of composition and improvisation are all encapsulated in the single term, *rāga*. In the theory and culture of Hindustāni Music, the concept of *rāga* is presented as a unified whole, yet it incorporates a remarkable multiplexity of ideas and associations. In musical terms, a single *rāga* is the sum of countless compositions, melodic fragments, a pitch hierarchy and other elements, to be potentially rendered in a variety of styles; yet it can be described (or 'caught') perfectly in just a couple of phrases (*pakaṛ* 'to catch'). *Rāga* is unified, yet endlessly variable.[60]

[60] Musicologist Nicholas Cook suggests that aesthetic experience implies a perception of a unified whole. 'The idea that to perceive something aesthetically is to perceive it as an integrated whole is axiomatic to the entire enterprise of aesthetics' (1990, p.5).

The *rāga* I have focused on illustrates this. Rāga Bhairav has been endowed with multiple origins: a creation of Shiva; sacred knowledge revealed to ancient seers; a legacy of a religious tradition of exorcism; or a product of generations of *guru-shishya paramparā* (master-disciple tradition). It is interesting to note that there are no obvious connections between the various associations Rāga Bhairav embodies: winter, sunrise, or Bhairav as a terrifying incarnation of Shiva; nor do these associations necessarily relate to its aesthetic sensibilities, although theories could be suggested. Despite this seemingly disconnected multiplicity of associations and descriptions, Rāga Bhairav is distinct and conceptually unified. The melodic theme of Rāga Bhairav can be expressed in simple terms, even in just a single phrase, but the *rāga* becomes infinitely expansive through the improvised exposition of a skilled and experienced practitioner. *Rāga* improvisation involves potentially endless variation on a theme, built through successive steps of increasing density and intensity. The melodic character of a *rāga* remains consistent but is extemporised through constant episodic development. The concept of 'improvisation' in Indian classical music therefore differs from the way the term is commonly thought of and applied in Western music. Hindustāni musicians are not trying to create something new, nor expand the horizons of aesthetic experience; rather they are restating the known, building endless variations upon a unified source.

Rāga is a sonic archetype, specific and yet unlimited, self-referential and yet intimately connected to the human condition and emotional experience. *Rāga* is a systematic, controlled, and modally predetermined template for the creation of music. *Rāga* improvisation is conceptualised as a path into an otherworldly and metaphysical experience and as an evocation of divine presence. A masterful rendition of *rāga* is both a re-enactment of a systematic prescribed formula and a spontaneous flow of consciousness.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSMISSION

Introduction

An exploration of transmission processes in Hindustāni music is pertinent to this study for many reasons. Pedagogical methodology encapsulates and perpetuates values intrinsic to the culture. It is during the formative period of a musician's life that he becomes enculturated into the tradition and becomes part of it. Belief systems, customs, and the ethos a musician upholds towards the creation of music are often inherited from a teacher and fashioned during the learning process. The very concept of what a musician is doing when he is playing music is largely formed during this time. The intentionality behind making music and the aspirations of a musician are largely culturally constructed. An exploration of this pedagogical culture is therefore central to an investigation of ideological concerns in the world of Hindustāni music.

I begin with a discussion on the traditional mode of transmission in Hindustāni music, *guru-shishya paramparā*, which can be loosely translated as 'master-disciple succession'.[1] Hindustāni musicians express a nostalgic veneration for the institution of *guru-shishya paramparā*, revered as the ideal pedagogical system and a direct link to an ancient oral heritage stemming from *vedic* times. This nostalgia is perhaps all the more poignant in the modern era of rapid social and cultural transformation. Much of the spiritual ideology in today's culture of Hindustāni music can be located in impressions and representations of the past (a past which may be partly re-invented and romanticised). This is particularly true in relation to pedagogy where the tradition of *guru-shishya paramparā* is considered to epitomise and sustain a spiritual ethos in Hindustāni music. It is pertinent to explore it for this reason, even though it is rarely practised in its original form today.[2]

[1] Various translations of *guru-shishya paramparā* are offered by different musicians and scholars: 'The continuity of tradition through master to disciple' (Shankar 1968 [2007] p.22); 'The Master-Disciple Tradition' (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.43); 'preceptor disciple tradition' (Slawek 1987, p.2).
[2] *Guru-shishya paramparā* may still be found within hereditary musical families.

The ideology presented through accounts of *guru-shishya paramparā* follows: This system advocates for a close connection between teacher and student, where musical and extra-musical elements are absorbed through naturalistic processes of embodiment, enculturation, and 'osmosis' (Neuman 2004, p.102). Music becomes a way of being in the world, integrated into one's lifestyle rather than peripheral to it. This system transmits values, etiquette, philosophy, spiritual ideology and music in an holistic fashion, fostering an ethos of surrender and humility, a strong discipline towards practice, a reverential attitude towards the act of music making and a deep respect for tradition.

In the second part of this chapter, I consider how the culture of Hindustāni music has been modified in recent times through tracking changes in the learning process. Many Indian musicians believe that there has been a significant erosion of spiritual values in the Hindustāni music tradition in recent times. Changes in pedagogy are commonly cited as one of the main reasons for this decline. The study of this change is therefore adopted as an approach to understanding what these values are and how they are sustained. Pedagogical changes most commonly referred to by Hindustāni musicians are the watering down of *guru-shishya paramparā*, institutional education, and formulaic learning processes.

Throughout this dissertation I uncover what appears to be a world of dichotomy and plurality, which coalesces into a complex musical and cultural system. The learning process bridges the realms of intellect and visceral experience, formula and spontaneous expression, tradition and individuality, and the sacred and the profane. On one hand, Hindustāni music is intuited and *rāga* is embodied through an organic process of absorption. On the other hand, Hindustāni music is intellectualised and *rāga* is formulaic, technical, and systematic. The reality of the music culture in the current era is that it assimilates both sides of this wide dichotomy into a complex whole. Later in the dissertation, I consider how these apparent paradoxes may be negotiated, in order to gain an understanding into the dynamic between pragmatism and ideology.

The Traditional Learning Process

Guru-shishya paramparā

A principal compound term used by Hindustāni musicians in reference to the transmission of their tradition is *guru-shishya paramparā*, meaning master-disciple succession. This term is not exclusive to Indian classical music; the institution of *guru-shishya paramparā* has been a mode of transmission of knowledge in India for millennia. In *vedic* times the term *guru* principally applied to a religious teacher who passed on knowledge of the *vedic* tradition to his disciples.[3]

Guru is a Sanskrit term derived from *gu* 'ignorance' and *roo* 'destroy'; literally translated, *guru* means 'one who destroys ignorance' (Amarnath 1984, p.47). A *guru* is seen as much more than a teacher, he is revered as a spiritual guide with deep embodied knowledge and wisdom. A *guru* is afforded high status in Indian culture and can transcend the stratified hierarchies of Indian society. Ustad Allauddin Khan was once *guru* to a king. On one famous occasion he reportedly threw a *tablā* hammer at the king in anger.[4] This subversion of social hierarchy is an example of how a *guru* can transcend typical social stratification. The manner in which some people in the West have trivialised the term '*guru*' is not inconsistent with the way it is sometimes used in India today. Calling a fashion consultant a 'style *guru'* is as likely to happen in New Delhi as it is in New York. However, in the context of Indian classical music, the term *guru* still carries a strong status relating to its original meaning as 'spiritual guide'.

The meaning of the term '*shishya*' is a combination of 'student' and 'disciple'. *Shishya* is derived from the root *shish*, which means 'to hurt'; *shishya* means he 'who is hurt to be disciplined', or he 'who exerts for discipline' (Amarnath 1984, p.117). Amarnath also offers another translation: 'to leave behind as a reminder' (ibid.). This suggests that a part of the *guru* is left behind in the *shishya* as the *shishya* absorbs attributes of the *guru* into his own being.

[3] This traditional model of *guru* is still very much alive in India today. However the meaning of the word *guru* is much broader than this. The term also refers to teachers of the traditional arts of dance, drama and music along with other traditions including painting, literature, *yoga*, *ayurvedic* medicine, astronomy and philosophy.

[4] See Banerjee (1985) for an account of this story.

The term *paramparā* derives from *paraha* or 'chain' (Amarnath 1984, p.48) and can be translated as 'tradition' or 'succession'. The relationship between *guru* and *shishya* is seen as a link in a long chain of orality that stretches back to ancient times. The *guru* is the disciple's link to these roots, and their relationship is considered essential for sustaining the continuum of Indian traditional practices and values.

Ustad-shagird is the Urdu, Muslim term analogous with the Sanskrit, Hindu *guru-shishya*. These terms are virtually synonymous in practice and conception.[5] It is not uncommon for a Muslim student to have a Hindu *guru* or for a Hindu student to learn from an *ustad*. The terms *guru* and *ustad* are used to convey esteem, respect and status. A *guru* or *ustad* is revered as an expert carrier of tradition, and the terms also suggest a high spiritual status. In the culture of Hindustāni music the institution of *guru-shishya paramparā* (or *ustad-shagird*) remains engrained as an ideological archetype. This model of music transmission represents tradition and authenticity, and resonates with the spiritual values of humility and reverence.

Honourific titles

Besides *guru* and *ustad*, additional honourific titles are also used. *Khansahib* is a compound title commonly bestowed on a celebrated Muslim musician as a label of veneration. The title *khan* (meaning 'leader') originally came from Central Asia and has spread throughout India. It is used as an honourific title, and is also a common surname or hereditary family name in the Muslim world. *Sahib* (or *saheb)* is a term of

[5] However, the social histories of these terms differ: *ustad-shagird* means 'master-apprentice' while *guru-shisyha* means 'spiritual guide-disciple' (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.44). Neuman points to another Muslim term, *shaikh-murid*, which he suggests is a more literal translation of *guru-shisyha*. *Shaikh-murid* comes from the Sufi tradition and refers to a Sufi master and his disciple, carrying strong overtones relating to the transmission of spiritual practice and esoteric knowledge. Neuman suggests that this term was not adopted by Muslim musicians due to professionalisation of North Indian classical music under Muslim influence from approximately the twelfth century C.E. (p.44). Muslim control of North India took classical music out of Hindu temples and into the courts of the new rulers. The perceived function of Hindustāni music thus changed from one of devotion to one of entertainment. Musicians became professionals working in the courts under the patronage of the rulers. They were considered more as master craftsmen than 'spiritual preceptors'. There is a difference in the manner in which the terms *guru* and *ustad* are used. An Indian classical musician's principal teacher is known as *guru* for Hindus, or *ustad* for Muslims. The term *ustad* is prefixed to a Muslim master musician's name, such as *Ustad* Allauddin Khan. This honorific title is then used in a general sense: on sleeve notes, program notes and as a term of respect when referring to such a musician. The term *guru* is very rarely prefixed to a musician's name in this manner. The term *paṇḍit* is often used for this purpose. This is a Sanskrit term that originally applied only to learned members of the Hindu priestly caste, or *brahmins*. It thus carries strong religious overtones. In a more general sense, the term denotes a learned man (Slawek 2000, p.460).

Arabic origin, literally translated as ‘owner’ or ‘proprietor’. Sougata Roy Chowdhury always refers to Ali Akbar Khan as *Khansahib*. Other famous Muslim musicians such as *sitār* players Vilayat Khan or Imrat Khan are also commonly referred to in the same way. Sometimes, in the midst of conversation, it can be difficult to discern which particular ‘*Khansahib*’ is being discussed. In the Hindu sphere ‘*paṇḍit*’ meaning ‘man of learning’ (Slawek 2000, p.460) may be used as a prefix to a respected musicians name. Honourific titles do not stop there. *Ji* is used as an affix to someone’s name, as a term of respect and familiarity. *Shri* is more formal, prefixed to someone’s name as a term of respect. These terms can be loosely translated as ‘sir’. It is common for a student to call his teacher *guruji* or *ustadji,* or to label a respected Hindu musician whom they know as *paṇḍitji*.[6]

The use of honourific titles such as *guru*, *ustad*, *paṇḍit*, and *khansahib* in Hindustāni music encapsulates the fact that expert musicians are seen as much more than great artists. A Hindustāni ‘master’ musician is venerated as a bestower and preceptor of a spiritual practice. He or she is considered to be a living embodiment of a tradition and a corpus of knowledge rooted in spirituality; Stephen Slawek suggests an implicit link between musical knowledge and spiritual status:

> Philosophers and aestheticians alike within the Hindu tradition have attributed mystical powers to music; thus those who are capable of performing music are likewise invested with spiritual powers. (Slawek 2000, p.459)

The very fact that a musician has attained a high level of musicianship and knowledge of the Hindustāni classical tradition means that he or she is perceived as embodying spiritual attributes. However, the reality, in the modern era at least, is that honourific titles are as much an indication of professional status as ‘spiritual’ status. Being a *guru* or *ustad* to many disciples is highly esteemed in the culture of Hindustāni music. Generally, musicians only ‘become a *guru*’ in the middle to later stages of their career. The position implies that they have undergone the rigorous stages of learning and practicing and have embodied the tradition through experience, and now have the maturity to pass it on with insight and depth.

[6] A number of Indian classical musicians with whom I have developed a friendship regularly call me *Daraji*. This is not to say that they consider me a great musician, rather it is a term of affection, respect and friendship. In a similar way I am often called ‘*dada’*, meaning ‘older brother’; ‘*didi*’ is the equivalent term of respect for a woman meaning ‘older sister’. These particular terms permeate Indian society far beyond the culture of Hindustāni music.

Identity, authenticity, and lineage

The provenance of one's *guru* is a principal component in a Hindustāni musician's musical and professional identity. A musician's standing in the tradition is partly defined by how distinguished his or her *guru* is. To some degree, a musician is considered an extension of his or her *guru*. The value of inherited knowledge is perceived to be dependent on the authenticity and age of its lineage. Musical lineage is defined through one's *guru*, through one's '*gharana*', and in the case of hereditary musicians, through a direct bloodline.[7] *Guru* and *gharana* are a Hindustāni musician's link to heritage. Indian classical musicians place great emphasis on this connection, in part because their particular identification with the tradition is central to their professional status. The perception of authenticity of musical knowledge, style and lineage is also linked to impressions of spiritual status.

The significance afforded to a Hindustāni musician's pedigree and relationship to 'authenticity' can lend itself to expressions of exaggerated pride in his or her musical lineage. In my experience interviewing Hindustāni musicians, the answer to a question such as 'can you tell me a little about your musical background?' can be disproportionately long compared to answers to other questions. Considerable time may be spent explaining the details of how they come from a musical family, or of the lineage to which they belong; this is important to their sense of belonging to tradition and to their representation of their place within it. It is not uncommon for a musician to cite the legendary Tansen as the founder of his *gharana*, or even better, to state that there is a direct bloodline between Tansen and his *guru*, or even himself. Such an association gives him an implicit status within the tradition, and at times appears to carry immanent spiritual standing.[8] Many professional classical musicians in India come from a musical family. These hereditary (*khandani*) musicians usually have

[7] A *gharana* ('of the house') (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.272) is a distinctive school of style, or family of tradition. A *gharana* amounts to an extended socio-musical family defined by lineage, heritage, a large corpus of repertoire, and a distinctive style. Through learning from a particular *guru*, a musician becomes part of his *gharana*, and represents this *gharana* in time. There is tremendous value placed on the ideal of representing a *gharana* in a stylistically pure manner. Even though many artists have practical knowledge of different styles, most artists identify with one *gharana* and perform in that style. Knowledge of other *gharanas* is considered academic.

[8] A Hindustāni musician's portrayal of tradition and heritage has to be considered in terms of a possible idealised representation. This can be said of his depiction of the tradition as a whole and his representation of his own particular identity within it.

their father, or perhaps uncle, as their *guru* or *ustad*.[9] Traditionally, a musician has only one principal *guru* and the relationship is for life. Illustrating the immense importance of the relationship, Ravi Shankar suggests that 'the choice of the guru, to us, is even more important than choosing a husband or wife' (2007 [1968], p.20). He quotes an old Indian saying:

> 'Pani piya chhanke guru banaye janke'–which means that one should drink water only when it has been filtered, and one should take a guru only after one feels sure of the decision. (ibid.)

Ganda bandhan

The traditional ceremony of *ganda bandhan* ('thread tying') is still widely practiced among Indian classical musicians. This ceremony involves the *guru* tying a yellow and red thread around the student's wrist. It implies a life-long connection and surrender to the *guru* or *ustad,* and formally initiates the *guru-shishya* relationship. Slawek (2000, p.459) points to an obvious connection between *ganda bandhan* and an ancient Indian initiation ceremony called *upanayana*, used to formally join students to *gurus* for religious study. *Upanayana* involved tying a girdle around a disciple, representing an umbilical cord connecting him to the *guru*. This parent-child symbolism aptly represents the perceived relationship between *guru* and *shishya*. After the *upanayana* ceremony, the *shishya* lived with his *guru* and offered him gifts and services for his knowledge, but not money. In return the *guru* had a sacred duty to pass on his knowledge. The similarity between the rituals of *ganda bandhan* and *upanayana* illustrates the sacred nature of the *guru-shisyha* relationship in Hindustāni music culture and the manner in which the culture is related to the wider family of Indian spiritual disciplines.

It is common to have a test period during which a prospective disciple has to prove himself before he is accepted as a *shisyha*. The musicologist James Kippen underwent such a test period when he was studying *tablā* in Lucknow in the 1980s. The lessons he received during this period were pre-arranged private lessons for a fee. The *ustad* waited until he felt that Kippen was ready, trust worthy and respectful of the

[9] Many of my interviewees fit this model. Nilandri Kumar is the fifth generation in a line of *sitār* players, he started his training at the age of four with his father and *guru*, Paṇḍit Kartick Kumar. Sabir Khan belongs to the ninth generation in a lineage of hereditary *sarangi* players. He started his training with his grandfather and continued with his father, Ustad Sultan Khan as his *guru* until his death in 2011. He told me how he felt blessed to be born into this family and to be able to carry on the tradition.

knowledge and tradition. For Kippen, this took six and a half months. He was then initiated into an *ustad-shagird* relationship through *ganda bandhan*.[10] Kippen noted a profound change in his teacher's relationship to him after this ceremony:

> Following the ganda bandhan ceremony, a distinct and palpable change of attitude towards the new disciple is evident. He is admitted to the ustad's family circle…. Fellow disciples, known as guru-bha'is, or 'brother's under one guru' behave fraternally toward the initiate…. The ustad… begins to act much more like a father than a teacher. Lessons change, perhaps more often but less fixed, maybe a few minutes, maybe a few hours. More time is spent in the household surrounded by guru's musical atmosphere. (Kippen 1988, p.114)

The musical information taught to Kippen may have been similar before and after this formal shift took place, although it is very likely that certain material would not have been shown to him previous to the initiation. However, the manner in which the information and knowledge was transmitted completely changed. The formal lessons were replaced with a more naturalistic and spontaneous approach. Kippen was now not only learning musical material; he was becoming enculturated into the tradition through spending more time with the *ustad*.

The traditional system: a lived and integrated experience

Guru-shisyha paramparā (or *ustad-sagird*) in its traditional form is a compelling pedagogical system. A disciple lives with his or her *guru* for several years and receives *talim* ('training') on a continual basis. He or she may be subject to a strict practice routine with little time for anything other than music. There may be several disciples in one *gurukul* ('household of the *guru*') and they would commonly refer to each other as *guru-bhai* or '*guru*-brother'. This term is still commonly used by students who share the same *guru*, even if they have never met. Studying with a good *guru* is traditionally seen as the only way to learn Indian classical music properly. Hindustāni music is essentially an oral-aural tradition where technique, repertoire, improvisational methodology, and musical style are all transmitted through the *guru* by a system of rote learning. Much of this knowledge exists only in the memory of the *guru*. Through *guru-shisyha paramparā* students not only receive regular – possibly daily – tuition, they also absorb a wealth of knowledge in an informal manner by being in the environment of music on a consistent basis. Along with musical

[10] This ceremony is essentially a Hindu concept but is also performed by many Muslims. It is sometimes known as *shagirdi* (discipleship) in the Muslim sphere.

knowledge, the *shisyha* is enculturated into a traditional way of life, and a way of being in the world.

Hindustāni musicians often speak about *guru-shisyha paramparā* in nostalgic and idealistic terms. Sougata Roy Chowdhury spoke to me about the holistic nature of this traditional system, where a disciple learns a spiritual practice alongside music:

> *Shishya* used to live at *guru's* residence and learn from him. It is not only because of the music. It's many ways, like, what is your practice of daily life? You learn from your *guru* your spiritual practice. When the *guru* speaks about something, it's a great philosophy behind it, if he is a good, great *guru*. He learned from his *guru*, and his *guru* learned from his *guru*. The same way, the *shishya* should learn from his *guru*. That was the process. That was the system. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury February 2007)

Age-old knowledge, attitudes, and belief systems are transmitted from generation to generation through this process. Living with the *guru* means that a *shishya* may be exposed to an inner circle of older and more experienced musicians. Through this close contact, a wealth of traditional lore, stories of past masters, and spiritual ideology are absorbed by the students. This exposure fosters respect and reverence for the tradition along with a desire to uphold it with sensitivity. Musicians who have learnt through the traditional system, such as Hindustāni vocalist Paṇḍit Amarnath, place considerable value on the process of learning through contact with older musicians:

> As young *shishyas* we not only lived at the feet of our gurus but, what has really become rarer today, we had the opportunity to listen to the great masters in conversation with each other, informally talking for hours about musicians and music. It was in this manner that we imbibed ideas about the attitudes as well as techniques of the masters as we saw them living through entire musical processes. (Amarnath 1994 (1989), p.16)

Through this pedagogical system students become part of the music culture through living it. The music and its cultural milieu become engrained through an organic, holistic process, integrated into a way of life.[11] Thus traditional value systems and spiritual ideology encapsulated within them are transmitted and sustained through this process.

[11] To highlight this, Kippen (1988) describes his *guru's* four-year-old son being so surrounded by music that he would recite *tablā bols* while playing with toys, like nursery rhymes. *Tablā bols* are vocalised mnemonic sounds used to teach, notate, memorise, and recite the language of *tablā* and the rhythmic complexities of Hindustāni music.

The 'real *guru*'

The relationship between *guru* and *shishya* is a popular theme in the narratives of Hindustāni musicians. It is often painted in nostalgic, ideological terms, with a recognition that the ideal presented is rarely realised today. The relationship is often described as being similar to that between a parent and child, but with a devotional component, and thus a *guru* often commands even more respect than a parent:[12]

> A *guru* is like a parent of his child, who is a *shishya*… and from the other side, for a *shishya*, a *guru* is like more than a parent, even more than a God sometimes. Just next to God it is considered, *guru*–the real *guru.* (Sougata Roy Chowdhury February 2007)

The 'real *guru*' is an iconic archetype in the psyche of Hindustāni musicians. Perceived as the living embodiment of an ancient aesthetic and spiritual science rooted in the *Vedas*, he is almost a divine being. The 'real *guru*' loves his disciple like his own son and guides him carefully and diligently. He passes on the tradition in a pure manner while also facilitating his student to find his own voice. Ideally, the tradition that is transmitted includes a philosophical dimension, a spiritual ethos, and a way of life. This is all encapsulated in the purity of the *guru's* music. The 'real *guru*' also instils discipline in his student through setting up a strict practice regime and leading by example. He can see inside the student, always knows best, and needs to be followed without question.

Through the guidance of a *guru*, and after an initial period of technical work and rote learning, a musician undergoes a process of individuation, developing his own unique style and expression. The 'real *guru*' acts as a mentor, guiding the student to find his own voice, through the tradition. Sougata Roy Chowdhury expands the parent-child analogy to illustrate this point:

> A child tries to copy his parents, the way the parents do. The same way the *shishya* also do. But after a certain extent, the *shishya* has to find himself–through the teaching of the *guru*, through the knowledge he got from his *guru*, and his personal life experience. I think that's the best thing. Every real *guru* will teach the student not to copy him, but to follow the ideals, the principles. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury February 2007)

[12] See Neuman (1990 [1980]); Neuman (1985); Shankar (2007 [1968]) for discussions on the relationship between *guru* and *shishya*.

Humility and the ethos of surrender

> The shishya has to surrender himself, and the guru has to adopt him. (Hariprasad Chaurasia in Roy 2004, p.82)

Humility (*vinaya*) and an ethos of surrender are central to the ideology of Indian classical music (Shankar 2007 [1968], p.20). 'The ethos of surrender' is a recurrent theme throughout this dissertation, resonating with the learning process, the concept of *rāga* (Chapter 4), the process of *rāga* improvisation (Chapter 7), and the philosophical ideology of Hindustāni music (Chapter 3). The term 'surrender' is not quite elegant enough to describe this aspect of Hindustāni music culture comprehensively. Other terms such as 'absorption', 'humility', 'devotion', and 'release' need to be added to better elucidate this ethos. The Hindi word '*samarpan*' describes this wider concept more eloquently, meaning 'giving yourself completely', or 'to surrender'. It implies dedication, submission, a process of release and 'devotion to the feet of God'.[13] The concept of 'surrender' relates to *bhakti* and *vedāntic* philosophy, implying a release of the 'ego' (*alamkara*), opening a space for the '*ātman*' or 'true self' to be realised.[14]

In Hindustāni music, an ethos of surrender is fostered during the learning process and extends into the process of *rāga* improvisation. Symbolised by the *ganda bandhan* ceremony, a *shishya* surrenders himself completely to his *guru* on initiation. Traditionally, the code of conduct between a *shishya* and his *guru* is one of utmost respect and subordination. Ideally, a *shishya* should be devoted to his *guru* and follow his guidance without question or hesitation. Slawek (2000, pp.457-458) lists a few verses from a work called *Gurupancasika* ('Fifty Verses of Guru-Devotion'). The verses were written in the first century B.C.E. by an Indian poet named Asvaghosa. They offer a glimpse into the incontrovertible standing a *guru* had in ancient India. One verse follows:

---

[13] I came across this term through the Hindustāni Vocalist Kishori Amonkar. Her 2003 CD release is named '*Samarpan - The Joy of Surrender*', with the first track named '*Samarpan - Offering of the Self (Rāga Yaman)*'. The other tracks on the album are *bhajans*, light classical Hindu devotional songs. The names of these tracks also suggest a spiritual ethos: '*Pag Ghungroo Bandh Meera Nachi Re - Dancing With The Divine*' and '*Saheliya Sajan Ghar Aye - Lost In The Expanse Of Divine Love*'.

[14] I discuss this philosophical perspective in more depth in Chapters 3 and 7. 'Surrender' can be equated with 'absorption' and 'release' – 'absorption' into a higher conscious space, and a symbiotic 'release' of the conditioned (and philosophically illusionary) egoic frame of reference.

> 'It has been taught that for a *Guru* to whom you have pledged your word of honour (to visualize as one with your meditational deity), you should willingly sacrifice your wife, children and even your life.' (Asvaghosa in Slawek 2000, p.458)

The exalted position of *guru* still persists in Indian society today. Slawek observes how this is especially true of the classical music and dance traditions. The etiquette between *guru* and *shishya* remains highly codified in the Hindustāni music tradition. Neuman's observations in 1980 are still relevant today: he notes how a *shishya* must not speak ill of his *guru*, must not show his feet to him and must not speak more than him. He also states how it is common for Muslims to touch their right ear with their right hand as a mark of respect when mentioning their *guru's* name (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.47); this particular practice is less observed today. However, one custom that is still widely observed is the offering of *pranam*, 'touching the feet' (Holroyde 2007, p.336).

When a *shishya* sees his *guru*, at the beginning of a lesson, or at any other time, it is customary for him to perform the gesture of *pranam*. He touches his *guru's* feet, places his palms together, and touches them off his forehead. Other versions of *pranam* are also practised. *Pranam* may be more casually executed with a single hand, or may be more exaggerated; on one occasion, I witnessed people prostrating on the ground, touching the *guru's* feet with their foreheads. It is common for the *guru* to reciprocate by touching the *shishya's* head with his hand, as a form of blessing. *Pranam* is a ritual of obeisance, symbolising humility, and surrender, 'indicating the awareness of one's own smallness in the presence of a superior' (Shankar 1997, p.320). This humble, subservient gesture is not just a mark of respect and surrender to one's *guru* as an individual; it is also a mark of respect to the tradition and heritage of Hindustāni music as a whole, of which one's *guru* is considered a living embodiment.

Pranam is not only offered by a *shishya* to his *guru*, it is commonly performed throughout Indian society as a mark of respect to parents, elders, or anyone of significance or 'higher status'. Indian culture abounds with etiquette and hierarchical structures, codified through the now officially defunct *caste* system. One's *caste* (*jati*) dictates one's inherited place and duty (*dharma*) in the social order.[15]

[15] The *caste* system was officially abolished in the 1950s, but still exists as an effective reality for many Indians. The genesis of the *caste* system can be traced to early Indian social and philosophical theory.

Allauddin Khan: passion, discipline, and legacy

To add a more human dimension to the discussion, I conclude this section on the traditional learning process of Hindustāni music, with some words from Nikhil Banerjee and Ali Akbar Khan concerning their relationship to their *guru* (or *ustad*), Baba Allauddin Khan. These words offer insight into the traditional *guru-shishya paramparā* system, depicting an extraordinary lifestyle of discipline and subservience to the *guru*.

Ustad Baba Allauddin Khan (c. 1862-1972) is the fountainhead of the *Maihar Gharana*, sometimes known as the 'Baba Allauddin Gharana' (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.235). He completely reshaped this lesser known *gharana* into one of the most important and influential stylistic traditions in Hindustāni instrumental music, while he was court musician at Maihar, Madhya Pradesh, North India (from 1918).[16] He is revered for his musical genius and for his untiring, life-long dedication to music. Although celebrated as a brilliant performing *sarod* player, and composer, his lasting legacy is the way he reshaped Hindustāni instrumental music.[17] His students include influential luminaries such as his son Ali Akbar Khan, his daughter Annapurna Devi, and *sitār* players Nikhil Banerjee and Ravi Shankar.[18]

The '*Laws of Manu*' in the *Dharma Shastras* (second century B.C.E.) divides Indian society into four classes (*varna*), which are inherited through generations. These divisions represent a hierarchy from purity to impurity, and dictate social and religious duties, restrictions and privileges. The description of these delineations in the *Rig Veda* is a good introduction to the symbolism of the human body in the culture of Hindu India. The four classes were identified with body parts. These classes are, in hierarchical order from top to bottom: *Brahmin* (priestly class)-mouth; *Ksatriya* (warrior)-arms; *Vaisya* (merchant and cultivator)-thighs; and *Sudra* (servant)-feet (Tyler 1986 [1973], p.77; Knott 2008 [1998], pp.19). The feet are perceived as the dirtiest part of the body in India, a symbolic significance that pervades Hindu cultural etiquette. To touch someone's feet is thus a gesture of humility and subordination; similarly to bare the soles of your feet to someone is an insult. For more details on *varna* (class), *jati* (caste), and *dharma* ('duty', 'order') see Tyler (1986 [1973], pp.76-97) and Knott (2008 [1998], pp.19-21).

[16] This is the school of style I personally identify with, because my principal teachers Kushal Das and Sougata Roy Chowdhury are exponents of the *Maihar Gharana*. Although Sougata Roy Chowdhury's present *guru*, Paṇḍit Santosh Banerjee is an exponent of the *Rampur Senai Gharana*, Sougata still identifies principally with the *Maihar Gharana*; his initial *talim* (training) was from Ali Akbar Khan's son, the late Dhyanesh Khan.

[17] For biographical information on Allauddin Khan's fascinating life, see Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]); Shankar (2007 [1968]). For more detailed information, including a musicological account of Allauddin Khan's innovations, see Trasoff (1999, pp.163-198).

[18] The legacy of these four musicians alone is monumental. Shankar and Khan were instrumental in bringing Hindustāni music to the international stage and college. Banerjee had a prestigious performing career, the testament of which can be heard in hundreds of recordings. Although Devi lives a reclusive life, her students include famous artists such as Shiv Kumar Sharma and Hariprasad Chaurasia. Allauddin Khan deliberately moulded Ravi Shankar and Nikhil Banerjee to play in completely different styles. It can be said that Shankar's style is more rhythmic and Banerjee's style is more lyrical. These approaches now persist as the two distinctive and idiomatic styles of *sitār* playing within the *Maihar*

The accounts these musicians give of learning from Allauddin Khan offer us personal insights into the traditional pedagogical system, although it must be cautioned that these stories are not to be over-generalised. Allauddin Khan is infamous for being an extremely strict *guru*, demanding from his students the same absolute dedication to music that he himself practiced. Failing this, a student would endure the fury of his legendary temper:

> He will not repeat anything twice or thrice! The first time he sang, you had to pick it up! If you said, 'sorry, I have missed that', he will just immediately kick you! He was an extremely strict man! But besides all these things, can you tell me in the history of Indian classical music any great musician who has created so many good students? No other than Allauddin Khansahib. (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

Allauddin Khan's son, Ali Akbar Khan was reportedly tied to a tree, beaten and refused food after not being able to play a particular exercise (Shankar 2007 [1968], p.83). He also claims to have been forced to practice up to eighteen hours a day by his father (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998] p.240). His accounts of his father show an attitude of respect, obedience, reverence, and fear:

> I [had] never seen my father's eyes. Always my eyes are down. He's so powerful that you can't take it. It's always like that, "Yes". There is no "No". Whatever you can do, you have to say yes, and you have to do it. If you can't do it, then he will help you to do it. (Ali Akbar Khan 2006, p.40)

Despite this strict regime, Allauddin Khan is remembered by his students with kindness, love, and sincere gratitude.

> He was a teacher incarnate with the purest vibration. Any student, if really deserving, had from him the shower of his blessings and by the sheer touch of his genius felt quite transformed. (Banerjee 1970, no page numbers; also in Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.235)

These words come from an essay Nikhil Banerjee wrote to dispel the image of his *guru* as nothing more than a strict, old-style disciplinarian. The essay entitled 'My Maestro As I Saw Him' (1970) illustrates the manner in which *guru-shisyha paramparā* is perceived by Hindustāni musicians. Banerjee colours his description of his learning experience with a vocabulary appropriated from traditional Hindu spiritual practices. He portrays his *guru* as a spiritually enlightened man passing on

---

Gharana. Kushal Das is said to be very close in style to Nikhil Banerjee and is a forerunner in the modern expression of that branch of the *gharana*.

his ‘realizations’ and the ‘truth’ through music. He speaks of his lifestyle while studying with Allauddin Khan, comparing it to the simple and austere discipline of living in a traditional Hindu centre of spiritual practice, known as an *ashram*.

> While staying at Maihar Baba gave as a life-style very much like that of an Ashram or hermitage. As a person he was simple, unassuming and completely devoid of egoism…. He was a great Naad Yogi. (Banerjee 1970, no page numbers)

A *naad yogi* can be translated as ‘one who is on a disciplined spiritual path through sound’. *Naad* means ‘sound’ (imbued with mystical potency); a *yogi* describes a person who leads a disciplined and austere life, focused on a spiritual path. Allauddin Khan was affectionately known as ‘*Baba*’. This term is usually reserved for ‘holy men’ who have renounced material possessions and worldly attachments for a spiritual life; it can also mean ‘father’. Banerjee characterises Allauddin Khan as a man who taught by example. His untiring devotion to music, and to his students, inspired his disciples to follow his example and give total devotion to their practice under his instruction:

> Till the day he was unable to move, he would go to the market to buy daily necessities and not let the students go there and waste their valuable moments of practice. He was great in practicing austerity in his own life and had therefore the right to impose it on us. He was a disciplinarian and would never allow the slightest deviation from his ideals of simple living, strict observance of Bramhacharya during our stay at Maihar, a total withdrawal of the mind from all kinds of superficialities, directing all the energy to practice of music and concentration.[19] In going to enforce all this he had to keep up a certain hardness which was, in reality, a show…. But this image of himself he deliberately projected in order not to allow any liberty to the disciple. (Banerjee 1970, no page numbers)

Despite his legendary temper, Allauddin Khan exemplifies the ideal *guru*, in the old style of *guru-shishya paramparā*. With an unwavering lifelong devotion to music and to his students, the pedagogical system he represents demands total surrender and dedication on behalf of the *shishya*, living with the *guru* for several years, and learning through a strict daily regime.

[19] *Brahmacharya* is the first of four stages in the ideal Indian life as set out in the Laws of Manu (200 B.C.E – 200 C.E.). *Brahmacharya* refers to ‘a period of study under the authority of a master’ (Demariaux 1995, p.viii), the term implies sensual and material abstinence, and complete unquestioning devotion to the teacher, on the road to self-realisation (Muesse 2011, pp. 83-86); (Demariaux 1995).

Pedagogy in the Current Era

Many practitioners believe that Indian classical music has lost much of its devotional quality and spiritual ethos in recent times. They often cite the demise of *guru-shishya paramparā* as one of the main reasons for this change, accepting with resignation the pragmatic necessities of modernity. These necessities include a more professional relationship between *guru* and *shishya*, and the rise of institutional education. Getting a Ph.D. in order to secure a good teaching job can be more important today than 'getting closer to the divine'. Perhaps, the most profound difference between the old and new approaches is that the transmission of a myriad of extra-musical value systems are altered, diminished, or lost without *guru-shisha paramparā*. These include elements of religiosity, etiquette, lore, and philosophical attitudes relating to musical meaning and conceptualisation.

Guru-shishya in the modern world

Due to modern socio-economic conditions, *guru-shisyha paramparā* in its original form has become rare, although some hereditary families still maintain the tradition. With the loss of patronage in the twentieth century, many musicians were forced to move to urban centres and earn a living through concerts and teaching. Naturally, students followed, but they could no longer live with their *gurus*. They had to fend for themselves and earn money through working, and possibly through teaching music to relative beginners. The traditional model of *guru-shishya paramparā* became economically and socially untenable.[20] The majority of music students now learn in one of two ways: either through a modern form of *guru-shisyha paramparā* or through a music school or university. There is often a mixture of the two systems, where a student attends an institution and has a principal teacher, whom he calls his *guru* (or '*ustad*').

Many students of Hindustāni music now pay their *guru* for regular lessons and remain largely removed from them outside of their allocated lesson times. The difference between this arrangement and the traditional practice where a student lives with his *guru* for an extended period is striking. The learning experience is no longer an

[20] For a more detailed account of this socio-economic shift, see Neuman (1990 [1980]).

organic immersive process, where musical material and associated cultural and spiritual values are absorbed in a naturalistic manner. Students are more removed from the cultural milieu of the older generation and no longer emulate the *guru's* way of life to the same extent as before. For a *guru*, less time spent with a *shishya* necessitates a more efficient and formulaic mode of musical transmission. The effective reality of these changes is that much of the subtle, unspoken nuance – relating to both the music itself and to the cultural milieu surrounding it – is no longer transmitted along the chain of orality. The traditional role of the *guru* as the 'preceptor of a spiritual practice' has altered somewhat into a 'profession teacher', who passes on technique, repertoire, 'theory', and performance practice to his students.

Despite all these changes, many traditional elements in the relationship between *guru* and *shishya* remain today, and many modern *gurus* strive to maintain a traditional ethos in their pedagogical approach. Many of today's *gurus* and university teachers learnt through the traditional system of *guru-shishya paramparā* and continue to carry elements of it into their pedagogical approach. For example, there is very often additional contact outside of allotted lesson times. It is common to see disciples on stage during a musical presentation by their *guru*. Sometimes they accompany on *tānpurā*, or sit behind their *guru* throughout his or her recital. This traditional practice is said to be good preparation for performance, and it is also thought that a disciple can absorb the ambiance of his *guru* through this close presence. Kushal Das generally performs with his son (who is also his student) playing *tānpurā* and with a number of his senior disciples behind him on stage (see figure 7.2 in Chapter 7). I saw the *sitār* player Nayan Ghosh play three times in Kolkata in 2007, his young son and *shishya* (who was only about ten years old at the time) sat on stage beside him silently and in stillness for each recital.

Most Hindustāni musicians still consider the idea of learning from a *guru* as paramount. The continued importance placed on *guru* is understandable as Indian classical music is still essentially an orally transmitted tradition. Although notation systems are now commonly used and understood, it is universally agreed that the finer points of Indian classical music cannot be written down. Technique, nuance, knowledge of *rāga* and improvisational methodology still predominantly come

directly from the *guru*. According to Jagdeep Singh Bedi, there is a profound distinction between learning from a book and learning from a devoted *guru*.

> *Guru-shishya paramparā*, it's a very great, it's a very great. *Guru-shishya paramparā* mean student-teacher tradition. If it will be not there our music or any music will be mechanical. Just go read the book and just play, no that's not good! Only the tradition is going when the teacher teach the students with devotion… if the student will be not devoting to the teacher, he cannot take anything. (Jagdeep Singh Bedi January 2000)

A modern decline in humility and the ethos of surrender

Bedi clearly considers 'devotion' to one's teacher an essential component in the learning process. The term 'devotion' implies attentive obedience to the teacher's instructions, along with dedication to practice, and a reverential attitude towards the *guru* and the tradition he represents. Older musicians testify to a dramatic change in the relationship between student and teacher in recent times; the 'devotion' of old was apparently of a different quality, requiring a student to follow his *guru's* guidance unequivocally:

> I'm telling you from my own experience, which we experienced in my generation and we know that it was the same in the older generation. You have to commit yourself, you have to dedicate yourself and you have to surrender yourself to your teacher… and whatever teacher says, that's what we did, in our time it was very different…. We couldn't ask any questions to our teacher, whatever he used to say we have to follow it. But nowadays its different, the younger generation pays no attention to that, they do whatever they want to do… in order to reach a certain level you have to have faith on your teacher, because your teacher is much much higher level than you, you know, so he can see through what you need. (Swapan Choudhury February 2009)

Although this kind of unquestioning 'faith' in your teacher may be in question in the modern era, interviews I have conducted reveal that attitudes relating to the institution of *guru* remain humble and reverential. The *guru-shisyha* relationship may not be as formal as it used to be, but still remains highly codified, invested with traditional protocol and etiquette. As Ravi Shankar points out, the gesture of *pranam* is still commonly performed today, but in the past it was generally much more exaggerated. Shankar welcomes aspects of this modern change, suggesting that while humility is still important to the tradition, the modern relationship between *guru* and *shishya* is more pragmatic and balanced than in the past:

> (In the past) when a teacher entered a room, everybody would stand until the teacher would tell them to sit down, and they always held their hands together saying 'Guruji, Guruji'. We still need to keep the respectful relationship with the guru, but we shouldn't overdo it. If we touch the feet as I have described, for the first time in the day, it is like a 'Good Morning'. But if you meet five times a day and each time you touch the feet, then it is too much. (Shankar 2007 (1968), p.170)[21]

Money, politics, and the abuse of power

The spiritual ideology related to the ethos of humility and surrender must be balanced with the reality of pragmatic, sociological, and political concerns. The power relation between teacher and student is unambiguous. Knowledge and authority clearly abides within the teacher. Humility and surrender can be interpreted as facets of the hierarchical power relations endemic to the culture and politics of Hindustāni music. The exalted and incontrovertible status of '*guru*' or '*ustad*', along with the culture of subservience (idealised as 'surrender'), can lead, in some cases, to abuses of power. The perpetuation of aspects of spiritual ideology can thus be viewed as a controlling mechanism to sustain lob-sided power-relations.

In tandem with ideological representations of *guru* – and generally in private conversations among musicians – frustrations about the realities of the relationship between *guru* and *shishya* in the current era can be vexed. These frustrations centre on the politics of money, control, and power-relations. A few professional musicians relayed a number of issues to me in confidence. Some *gurus* were accused of charging an unreasonable fee, sometimes received as a monthly wage, irrespective of the amount of time the *guru* gives his student. They may be in a position to charge a high fee because of their high status within the tradition. For the student, there is considerable professional prestige associated with being a student of a high standing musician, so they are willing to pay. In parallel to this, an esteemed *guru* may have a multitude of students, and a busy performing career. Therefore, he has little time to teach, and the learning environment is often a large group session where students receive very little individual attention. The irony is that a student often ends up paying considerably more, for considerably less teaching time, for the honour and professional credibility of a high-status *guru*.

[21] This comment was written in 2007 as part of a chapter added to a new edition of his book.

Other frustrations include being asked to run too many errands for one's *guru*.[22] Some *gurus* get involved in the politics of professionalism, and can demand restraints on the *shishya's* teaching and performance career, sometimes for their own monetary gain.[23] One musician told me how he plays very little in India due to this kind of 'corruption' (anonymous 2009). Such disquiet exists in parallel to the idealised concept of *guru*, and political tensions and power struggles are not uncommon in the competitive professional world of Hindustāni music today.

Institutional music education

The proliferation of institutional music education from the late nineteenth century marked a profound shift in pedagogical approach and in the relationship between student and teacher in Indian classical music.[24]

Two pivotal figures had an enduring influence in the shaping of Hindustāni music pedagogy during its period of transformation into institutional education, Paṇḍit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860-1936) and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931). Bhatkhande sought to reconcile theory and practice through establishing universal classifications of specific *rāgas*.[25] The success of his efforts can be seen in

[22] I recall being with a musician when he received a call on his mobile phone. He had to instantly drop everything to assist his *guru*. The task was not an emergency but he felt obliged to assist without question or delay. The same musician told me that it was difficult enough to be at his *guru's* beckon call to run errands, but this was confounded when his *guru's* daughter starting ringing him up asking him to fulfill tasks for her!

[23] One musician told me details about the difficult predicament he was in. Besides the heavy cost of tuition demanded by his *guru* – for very little teaching time – his *guru* forbade him from teaching students, which could have helped him financially. This was, in part, because the *guru* wanted these students to become his students, for monetary gain. The idea of disobeying his *guru*, or changing to a different *guru* was simply out of the question as a cultural transgression, so this *tablā* player was caught in a difficult and economically challenging bind ('changing *guru*' can and does happen, but only with the permission of one's *guru*). He also complained about the politics involved when trying to get work accompanying established artists. His *guru* sometimes got involved in the arrangements and made it difficult for him to secure this kind of performance work, from which he would have gained status and significant monetary reward. He is an incredibly gifted and dedicated *tablā* player and a better musician than some of the *tablā* players who manage to get work accompanying such artists. During a later conversation, the reasons for these political transgressions became clearer. This particular *guru* commonly asks for commission from his students when they play a well-paid concert. If a student does not give him commission, he may stop him from playing in the future and arrange for another student to play a concert, thus being assured of his cut. His senior status within the culture of Hindustāni music provides him with the necessary political capital to effect these changes. The same *guru* also asks for commission from a student on returning from a foreign tour.

[24] Learning Hindustāni music in an institutional setting began in India as early as 1871 with the Bengal Music School set up by Sourindro Mohun Tagore (Slawek 2000). See also pp.34-37 in this dissertation.

[25] The theory and elaborate taxonomy contained in ancient treatises on music bore little relevance to what musicians were playing in his day. Dard Neuman (2004) points to the schism between Indian musicologists and Indian musicians around this time. Indian musicologists advocated 'formality, rigid

the fact that his definitions and classification of *rāgas* have become standard among Hindustāni musicians. His work persists as an authority and is used widely in institutional education today. Unlike Bhatkhande, who attempted to mould classical music into an academic and secular art form, Paluskar fostered 'a culture of sacrality' (Bakhle 2005, p.140) into the institutional learning environment and performance context. His school, the *Gandharva Mahavidyalayas*, adopted an ethos of *bhakti* devotionalism where daily communal prayer, *puja*, and Hindu devotional song were practiced alongside classical pedagogy.[26] This form of Hindu religiosity has persisted in some schools of Indian music and has infiltrated the culture of Hindustāni music, partly through his efforts.

Classical music educational institutions are widespread throughout India today. Although this new pedagogical context appears to redefine the traditional '*guru*' into a 'university teacher', the reality is more complex. There is no fixed model on how a music school operates and there are many variations. Some have attempted to adapt the tradition model of *guru-shishya paramparā* into an institutional environment. For example, I visited the Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata in 2009 and was struck by how similar it was to *gurukul*.[27] The students are residential and have practice rooms along with basic accommodation. Many of the teachers live on campus. The students do not live in the 'household of the *guru*', but they do have close and continuous contact with their teachers, some of whom are among today's top artists, including celebrated vocalist Ajoy Chakraborty. However, this is only one example. A large number of music schools in India today are based on class instruction, set curricula, textbooks, and examinations, where students visit the building as day pupils only. The extra-musical transmission process is diminished in this context and the

systematicity and theoretical uniformity' (p.102), while Indian musicians learnt 'through aural osmosis' (p.102) resulting in referential ambiguity and inconsistencies. Neuman illustrates the divide between practice and musicology by highlighting the fact that many *ustads* used to teach *rāga* without disclosing the name of the *rāga*, an indispensable, fundamental, and foundational building block of Indian musicology. Neuman suggests that 'the musicologist and music-critic often misunderstood this and other signs of absent-classificatory and referential knowledge as dubious trickery [and] arrogant elusiveness', however, 'not only did they withhold names; it appeared that they did not, in fact, know the names' (Neuman 2004, p.103).

[26] Paluskar also invented a notation system, which changed the face of the tradition forever. Notation made music education available outside of the elitist and secretive oral tradition of the time. It also had a standardising effect on the music. Over time local variation has greatly diminished; partly due to notation, but also as a result of seminal recordings fossilizing *rāga* conceptualisation and being absorbed into the learning process, and used as models for performance (Neuman 1990 [1980]).

[27] *Gurukul* means 'household of the *guru*'. The term is virtually synonymous with *guru-shishya paramparā*, except the emphasis is on the fact that *guru* and *shishya* live together.

syllabus and textbooks largely replace the *guru* as the authority, guardian, and bestower of tradition.

This marks a significant shift in the system of musical transmission. Slawek considers the difference between learning in the traditional manner through a *gharana* and learning through a music college. For him it is 'interesting not because of what is given but for the ways it is given' (1988, p.114). In a music college *rāgas* are typically learnt through formulas and rules, the process is largely analytical, theoretical, and detached. This contrasts the traditional model where *rāga* (and *rāga* improvisation) is absorbed through a more organic process. Thus, the very concept of *rāga* changes.[28] Moreover, value systems, philosophical attitudes and spiritual ideology are not naturally integrated as part of the learning process. A student in a music school is likely to be much more detached from this perspective on music, and in my experience can relate to the topic of music and spirituality more as an historical, academic subject rather than a lived experience.

The 'tangible' and the 'intangible'

Ethnomusicologist Huib Schippers (2007) contrasts *guru-shishya paramparā* and institutional education. He suggests that *guru-shishya paramparā* leaves room for 'intangible' aspects of music, whereas institutional education emphasises 'tangible' aspects:

> Every musical tradition has a balance between tangible aspects of music making, such as repertoire, instrumentation, and technique, and less tangible aspects, such as improvisation, expression, aesthetics, and social or spiritual values underlying the music. In institutional environments, the emphasis often shifts to tangible, measurable, analytical aspects of teaching, while in the much more personal *guru-shishya-paramparā* there is room for intangible elements. (Schippers 2007, p.129)

According to Schippers, *guru-shishya paramparā* highlights 'insight into musical meaning' over analysis of 'musical structure'; 'fixed compositions and improvisation' over 'freedom in improvisation'; 'playing complex structures' over 'understanding complex structures'; 'oral perception' over 'analysis'; 'doing' rather than

[28] Many musicians have remarked how musical style has changed dramatically in recent times due, in part, to this pedagogical shift. The general consensus is that *rāga* improvisation has become more formulaic and less naturalistic and flowing. See Chapter 7.

‘understanding’; ‘humility’ over ‘confidence’; and ‘anecdotes about great musicians’ rather than knowledge of ‘historical background’ (Schippers 2007, p.129).

I strongly concur with his view, and suggest that ‘intangible elements’ nurtured in the traditional learning process of Hindustāni music are intrinsic to the very fabric of the culture’s spiritual ideology, an ideology largely based on conceptions of the intangible and transcendent. I explore these themes throughout this dissertation: in Chapter 3, I consider how *vedāntic* philosophy advocates the ‘intangible’ or the ‘beyond experience’ as a gateway to an experience of the divine; ‘intangible’ transcendent experience is also considered in Chapter 6 (practice) and in Chapter 7 (performance).

In Schippers’s study, based on a singular pedagogical event, he found the learning process to fall between the tangible and the intangible, including aspects of both. In my experience, this can be expanded into a generality. The reality is that the learning process in the current era of Hindustāni music commonly involves a multifaceted approach combining traditional pedagogy with more modern, analytical, and standardised systems of transmission. Spiritual ideology persists, blended with a new efficiency and pragmatism.[29] Traditional values may have become eroded in modern times due to changes in pedagogy. However, the archetype of the ‘*guru*’ still persists, recontextualised in the current era.

[29] In my experience, this point can be further expanded into a generality about contemporary Indian culture as a whole, where the sacred and profane; and the ancient and modern, are layered on top of each other like a living archaeology.

CHAPTER 6

PRACTICE: WHERE PRAGMATISM AND IDEOLOGY CONVERGE

Introduction

Indian classical music is a highly sophisticated and virtuosic idiom. Prolonged periods of practice are necessary in order to reach a professional standard.[1] A substantial portion of a Hindustāni musician's life – especially in his formative years – is spent alone, practising music. Practice is highly valued in the tradition, not only as a means of gaining technical skill and internalising musical knowledge, but also as a spiritually transformative discipline.

Practice is a persistent theme in the narratives of Hindustāni musicians and in the popular lore of the tradition, and is often spoken about in an idealised fashion. The subject is typically framed in one of two ways. The first way Hindustāni musicians speak about practice is in pragmatic terms: how many hours are spent practicing, and the science of practice. Practice methodology can be highly evolved in Hindustāni music and a student may (or may not) receive detailed instructions in this regard from his *guru*. This was certainly the case when I studied with Kushal Das, and I draw on this experience in the discussion that follows. The second way Hindustāni musicians talk about practice is in philosophical and ideological terms, relating to the experience and value of musical practice. Their views encapsulate principles intrinsic to the concept of Hindustāni music as a spiritual discipline. The subjects of religiosity, 'presence', devotion, worship, humility, and quality of focus, all converge within discussions on musical practice and are explicated here. Although my primary focus is on spiritual and ideological concerns, I also consider the practical realities – the conditions, routines, and musical content – of practice in Hindustāni music.

The voices of Hindustāni musicians are the primary sources in this discussion. I also draw from Indian philosophical sources, Indian musicology, and from the work of a number of scholars, including Sorrell and Narayan, Ruckert, and Neuman. Sorrell and Narayan (1980) consider the relationship between practice and performance in

[1] In this chapter the term 'practice' refers to time a musician spends honing his art, as opposed to the more general and all-encompassing use of the term meaning one's 'artistic practice'.

relation to musical content. Ruckert examines the manner in which rigorous practice is compared to a 'spiritual quest' (2004, p.27). Neuman (1990 [1980]) outlines ideological discourse and views this in relation to the realities of a musician's practice. Ravi Shankar (2009 [1968]) also adds a valuable voice to the subject, as an insider, expressing values about practice while also offering a textbook guide.[2]

I begin this chapter with an outline of terminology used in the tradition in relation to practice. This terminology frames the discussion, introducing core conceptual principles. I then discuss practice in terms of lore from the tradition. In the discursive culture of Hindustāni music, in general, there is an implicit conviction that the act of musical practice is spiritually rewarding and transformative. I present some suggestions regarding the dynamics of this connection: some musicians speak of acquiring 'devotional power'; other musicians mention the effect of extreme concentration; and some allude to the experience of being immersed in the presence of *raga*. The relationship between practice and spirituality largely hinges on ideas about quality of focus. These ideas are multifarious: practice can be considered a form of 'meditation', 'devotion', or 'worship', and may involve elements of ritual and religiosity. From the perspective of artistic integrity, many musicians speak about quality of focus in terms of what the correct attitude should be towards practice. Accordingly, a musician should practise without the idea of impressing an audience in mind; 'love', 'honesty', and 'surrender' are considered more honourable. Much of this rhetoric converges on the idea that an ethos of surrender and devotion to practice results in a spiritually rewarding and cathartic experience, which in turn, translates to music that carries a tangible spiritual quality or 'presence' that an audience will recognise and connect with.

In the second half of the chapter, I consider practice in terms of both technical advancement and personal experience through detailing the rigorous exercise regime prescribed to me by Kushal Das. I consider how pragmatism and ideology may be functionally related, proposing that musical practice can be at once both a science and a spiritually transformative experience.

[2] For other guides to practice in Hindustāni music, see Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]); Junius (2006 [1974]).

Terminology: *Riāz, Sādhanā,* and *Chilla*

Practising music is referred to within the Hindustāni tradition through three principal terms: *riāz, sādhanā* and *chilla*. These terms are not exclusive to Hindustāni music but also relate to wider spheres of Indian artistic and spiritual disciplines. The use of these terms within the discursive culture of Hindustāni music thus points to the legacy of cultural and religious heritage inherent in the tradition, and situates the practice of Hindustāni music within the broader frame of Indian spiritual and artistic endeavours.

Along with other terminology used within the discursive culture of Hindustāni music, there are a host of divergent translations of these terms, and some of the proposed meanings imply a philosophical orientation. These terms encompass much more than just the notion of technical training, but also symbolise ideological perceptions about the nature of musical practice.

Riāz

Riāz (or *riyāz*) is the word most commonly used by Hindustāni musicians when talking about a musician's practice.[3] The term is of Persian and Muslim origin, but is commonly used by Hindustāni musicians irrespective of their religion. Most Indian musicians translate '*riāz*' as simply 'practice', or more accurately 'routine practice'. Paṇḍit Amarnath presents a more 'spiritual' interpretation based on the term's etymology; he claims '*riāz*' derives from '*riyaazat*, meaning "prayerful meditation"' (Amarnath 1984, p.106). Although the term is generally used in specific reference to a musician's practice on his instrument, *riāz* can refer to more than that. *Tablā* player Debojyoti Sanyal includes practising one's instrument and listening to music under the umbrella term *riāz*:

> Every musician needs a lot of *riāz*, a lot of work. *Riāz* not only practice own instrument, listening practice also *riāz*. Three things: good lesson, you need good teacher; then good practice, and good listening. (Debojyoti Sanyal February 2009)

[3] I predominantly use the term *riāz* in this dissertation in order to reflect this popularity, and my fieldwork experience, where the term was used most frequently by musicians I had contact with.

Sādhanā

Some musicians prefer to use the Hindu, Sanskrit term '*sādhanā*', rather than the Muslim, Persian '*riāz*'.[4] In a general sense, beyond and including the sphere of music, *sādhanā* is used in reference to *yogic* practices and belongs to the lexicon of Hindu spirituality. It refers to the practice of *yoga*, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines on the road to '*samadhi*' ('self-realisation' or 'absorption') (Hewitt 1995 [1977], p.542). Thus, in relation to Hindustāni music, the term carries more explicate spiritual overtones than *riāz* and is associated more specifically to the devotional aspect of practice.

'*Sādhanā*' is derived from the root '*saadh*', meaning 'to achieve', and '*naa*' refers to 'effort' (Amarnath p.109). Amarnath suggests that the 'achievement' is *mokhsa* or 'liberation' from '*samsara*', the cycle of birth and death (ibid.). Ravi Shankar describes *sādhanā* as disciplined practice for the purpose of 'self-realisation':

> Sadhana, the traditional Indian practice of sacrificing all materialistic things and working in a disciplined manner under a guru's direction towards achieving self-realisation, through spirituality, music or another route. (Shankar 1999, p.114)

'*Sādhanā*' indicates that the motive for practice, and the outcome of practice, is spiritual transformation. Some Hindustāni musicians compare disciplined musical practice to stereotypical images of Hindu asceticism. For example, *tablā* player Nimai Das compares a musician's focused and prolonged musical practice to an ascetic meditating in cave. He considers both practices as forms of meditation, and the implication is that musical *sādhanā* has similar spiritually transformative qualities for the dedicated musician:

> And you know the people who are staying in the big big mountain, inside the cave and they are worshiping the God, years after years, long long years they are doing, they are worshipping the God and, you know the *sādhanā*, we are calling the meditation, they are doing. And out of that they become a big big saint and sages, in due course. And becoming the *gurus*, giving the light, enlightening the people. So they are getting this type of light in their minds, and realisation. This is also meditation we are practicing fourteen hours, sixteen hours at a stretch we are putting all our concentration to this. (Nimai Das February 2009)

[4] Musicians of all religious persuasions including Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian, can use both or either term. This is another illustration of how the culture of Hindustāni music can transcend religious diversity.

The term *sādhanā* also signifies depth in the experience of disciplined practice. The implication is that *sādhanā* is a deeper form of practice than *riāz*; while beginners conduct *riāz*, *sādhanā* is only experienced when one's practice has reached a particular level of maturity. It is therefore thought that *riāz* can turn into *sādhanā* over time.

> Years and years of *riāz* add up to *sãdhanã*, which is "spiritual practice," and the word carries the additional senses of realization and fulfillment which are worthy of great respect. (Ruckert 2004, p.27)

Debojyoti Sanyal explains *sādhanā* as a combination of practice and worship: '*sādhanā* means *riāz* and at the same time you will do worship of God' (Debojyoti Sanyal February 2009).

Chilla

A '*chilla*' is an extreme example of extended and dedicated focus, signifying a period of intense practice, traditionally lasting forty days. Like '*sādhanā*', the term '*chilla*' is used within and beyond the sphere of music; it can refer to any activity, but generally relates to artistic, religious or spiritual endeavour. In Sufism, a *chilla* denotes a period of meditation by the tomb of a saint, or 'secluded worship' (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.41 and p.262). In the sphere of Hindustāni music, a *chilla* is often undertaken to work on technique or to find a deeper and more personal connection to one's music. There are different interpretations regarding the pre-requisites of a *chilla*, but it is generally agreed that it requires consistency in terms of what is practised, the time it is practised for, a consecutive daily routine for a period of forty days, and abstinence from activity outside of focused practice. Some musicians apparently extend this time by undertaking consecutive *chillas* (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.42). Although such an intense period of dedicated practice may not be an effective reality for most Hindustāni musicians, the ideal it represents is lived out to some degree by most. In the course of their training, Hindustāni musicians generally spend long amounts of time practising alone, and maintain a regular routine for extended periods. Some accounts present *chilla* as a form of extreme asceticism, pragmatically difficult to realise in the modern era.

> The Chilla is an all out effort made in total isolation from the rest of the world…. The Shishya… totally cuts himself off from all human contacts…. He allows himself the barest time for his most essential physical needs. Nothing is permitted, even momentarily, to break the intensity of his concentration. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.49)

This quote comes from a publication by Times Music (created by the Sri Aurobindi Society). This book deals with the subject of *chilla* more extensively than most literature on Indian classical music and I choose to quote it extensively here. It is of particular relevance because it paints an ideological picture of *chilla*, expressed through spiritual superlatives. This picture can be translated into an ideology of practice in general.

The purpose and benefits of *chilla* are described in terms of both musical and spiritual advancement. A period of such intense and prolonged practice has obvious benefits to a player's technique. In tandem to this, *chilla* is represented as spiritually revelatory and transformative:

> Apart from its immediate gain, the Chilla can lead one to a higher mental and spiritual plane. Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan once said that if we do a Chilla long enough–we cannot get free of its psychological state. We remain in it all our life even after we have emerged from the formal Chilla. This is a spiritual state, the "Mehfil ki tanhayee", loneliness in a crowd, spoken of by the poets.[5] (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.49)

It is suggested that the spiritual effect can be so strong that a musician may even give up music, along with all other forms of 'desire', and begin the life of an ascetic (*sanyasi*):

> In this solitude he comes face to face with himself…. In some rare cases its effect can be so far-reaching that the student abandons all desire, even for music, and becomes a mendicant withdrawing from life and turning into a wandering Sanyasi. Many illusions about life and its meaning drop away from people who do the Chilla. (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.49)

The apparent intensity of a *chilla* can be imagined through the following words from Hindustāni vocalist Abdul Karim Khan (1872-1937) describing the experience:

> The Chilla is like 'lighting a fire under your life. If you do not cook you will burn. It is better to get cooked so that everyone can enjoy your flavour. Otherwise you will be a mass of cinders, a heap of ash.' (Sri Aurobindi Society 2002, p.50)

[5] Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan (1888-1972) was a famous *sarod* player from a hereditary family of musicians. His son, Amjad Ali Khan continues the family lineage.

This poetic anecdote presents *chilla* as an immense challenge and ordeal. The result of meeting this challenge is that the musician matures, finds his inner voice, and learns to express it. *Chilla* represents extreme dedication, discipline and devotion to the art of music, and is considered permanently transformative in terms of both technique and spirituality. The idea that discipline and extended concentration lead to spiritual experience is central to the perceived relationship between Hindustāni music and spirituality, as suggested by *tablā* maestro Swapan Chaudhuri:

> Spiritual thing always comes when you discipline yourself. The main thing is your dedication and concentration. Discipline, focus, your dedication, your honesty, and your learning process. (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009)

Practice Routines and Lore

Daniel Neuman suggests that for *riāz* to be effective in terms of both quantity and quality, both the inner and outer environments need to be correct (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.40). The inner condition should be one of intense focus facilitated by willpower and discipline. The outer environment should be void of distractions. Most musicians state that they prefer to practice in solitude, with nobody listening. For this reason it is common for musicians to practice late at night, and sometimes throughout the night. At times, a vocalist or instrumentalist may practice with a *tablā* player, or visa-versa, but to advance in technique, practice alone is considered preferable.

The initial period of a musician's training (*talim*) generally involves a strict practice regime, which is often devised, and possibly overseen by the musician's *guru*. It is generally agreed that in order to reach a professional standard it is necessary to go through an intense period of *riāz*, sustaining a disciplined routine of extensive daily practice for a number of years, preferable at a young age. Stories told by Hindustāni musicians about *riāz* are striking and inspiring, and, at times, exaggerated and unbelievable.[6]

Many professional musicians maintain a practice routine throughout their lives, but practice regimens generally become less intensive as a musician matures. Kushal Das

[6] For example, musicians commonly speak about periods in their lives when they practiced for up to sixteen hours a day, or even eighteen hours a day, according to Ali Akbar Khan (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.240), although this claim was curiously revoked in an interview in 2006 when Khan said that he practiced 'eight hours a day, sometimes more' (Khan 2006, p.3) and not eighteen.

told me that he maintains a healthy practice routine, developing his style and technique on a continual basis, practising three hours each morning. A few professional musicians admitted to me that they almost never practice, except when they have an important concert on the horizon, or after a visit to their *guru*: apart from these times they often only play when they are teaching or performing. It is extremely common for musicians to say that they do not practice as much as they would like to, often remarking with regret they do not have enough time, or enough discipline. Such comments are related to the projected ideal of a Hindustāni musician, practising on a continual basis, with endless devotion and dedication – an archetypal image that is almost impossible to live up to as a busy professional musician in the present era.[7]

Riāz can encompass a wide range of musical content, including technical exercises, repertoire, improvisation, and *ālāp*. The quantity of material that can be practiced is potentially endless, a point addressed here by Ali Akbar Khan.

> To learn, there are so many things. Because first thing, there are three hundred fifty exercises, and seventy five thousand melodies. Six seasons. And [for] each melody, at least you have to learn five hundred fixed compositions…. By memory, you have to learn. Then after that you can write it down for the future. But whenever you want to practice, you don't touch your book. (Ali Akbar Khan 2006, p.22)

The impossibility of the task Khan suggests is obvious, and it must be viewed as an ideological representation of the vastness of the traditional repertoire, and the endless potential of *rāga*.

In general, the content of a Hindustāni musician's *riāz* changes over the years in line with his training and musical maturity. In the beginning a student copies his *guru* exactly, following his instructions in a very mechanical and precise fashion in order to build up a good technical foundation. Under his first teacher, Dhyanesh Khan,[8] s*arod* player Sougata Roy Chowdhury spent the first two years of his training learning and practicing only technical exercises before he was introduced to playing *rāga*:

> When I started with him [Dhyanesh Khan] he made me do only the exercises for two years. Only exercises, he didn't give me any *talim* (training) of any *rāgas* or anything. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury February 2007)

[7] See Neuman 1980 for an excellent explication of the ideology verses the realities of *riāz*.
[8] The late son of Ali Akbar Khan.

When he eventually started learning *rāga*, he began learning and memorising only fixed repertoire, made up mainly of compositions (*gats*) and melodic lines (*tans*). In time, he was gradually allowed to create his own *tans* and variations, following the traditional patterns he had learnt through repertoire and technical exercises. This is typical of the methodological, precise, and disciplined manner in which a Hindustāni musician traditionally learns the language and system of *rāga* improvisation. *Riāz* often develops and changes in line with this general progression from fixity to creative input. At first everything is fixed and outlined by one's *guru*, but gradually a musician can improvise more during his practice, as his personal style develops.

Swapan Chaudhuri spoke to me about his deepening experience of practice over the years. It first became an embodied need, and later fostered emotive experiences of profound ineffable beauty. When he was younger he simply obeyed his *guru* completely and practised exactly what he was instructed to. He admits that he did not know the deeper side of practice, which evolved later in his life:

> I was young, I didn't understand the depth of practice, I disciplined myself and did what I was told… and then it became my routine. When you come out of that system, what happens? It sets in your body. And then it feels like if I don't practice today I did nothing… you can feel that your *tablā* is calling you, 'come on man, you didn't touch me today!' Its such a great experience, the feeling, its like my baby. And once you go into that level, sometimes when you are playing, notes are just talking to you, it's a very different experience I can tell you that, but I cannot explain to you in details what happens, its just a feeling. It makes you laugh, it makes you cry, it happened to me many times, many times… and there are certain notes that hit you in a certain way, that you cannot hold your emotion, its beautiful! (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009)

The lore of practice: tales and legends

Stories regarding extraordinary dedication to practice and extreme discipline abound in the discursive culture of Hindustāni music. Some of this lore relates to legendary characters from the history of Indian classical music; other stories are about more recent exponents of the tradition. In my interviews, many musicians talked about their own practice regimes, a popular and enduring subject among musicians.

'Practice' and 'performance' are not separated in the lore regarding ancient times. Music is said to have been played as devotional practice in temples and ashrams. Some musicians of ancient times have been given mythical status, as '*rishis*' ('seers') or even '*gandhavars*' ('celestial beings') (Shankar 2009 [1968], p.24; Rowell 1992).

Legendary characters such as the musician-sage Narada and the musical scholar Bharata are revered as 'saintly musicians' (Massey 1993). Some musicians from the medieval period are also placed on a spiritual pedestal. Haridas Swami (sixteenth century C.E.) is an iconic figure who represents the ideal that music was practised purely as a form of devotion and a medium for self-realisation.

> Indian music was practiced and learned to know the Supreme Truth. Mirabai, Tyagaraja from the South, Haridas Swami, Baiju-all these great composers and musicians were wandering saints; they never came into society nor performed in society. (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

The statement, 'they never came into society', alludes to the idea that music was practised as a form of devotion and worship, in temples and *ashrams*, and not performed for the purpose of entertainment.

However, from the thirteenth century, the dominant context of music production changed from the *ashrams* and temples of ancient India to the courts of Mughal India where many classical musicians lived as professional entertainers to the Muslim ruling classes. This environment was famously conducive to a life fully dedicated to the arts, and accounts suggest a fervour for prolonged practice. Neuman notes the romantic and partly imagined impressions which modern musicians invariably attach to the past in relation to musical practice:

> The remembered past which contemporary musicians evoke is not the immediate past but a world that to the modern sensibility seems like something from the Arabian Nights…. This was a world where musicians practiced unceasingly until practice itself became a form of worship and its own objective. (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.21)

Despite this over the top impression, Neuman concedes that there is good evidence that it is not complete fantasy:

> If it all seems a trifle romanticized, it… is probably truer as an affective reality than our contemporary skeptical sensibilities would allow us to believe. (ibid.)

Stories from more recent times give a human face, and a greater air of credibility, to this representation of a culture of untiring practice and dedication. One famous story recalls how Ustad Allauddin Khan (1862-1972) used to tie his hair to the ceiling to stop himself falling asleep during long periods of practice (Khan and Ruckert 2009

[1998], p.234).[9] His supreme dedication to music transferred on to his expectations of his disciples, for whom he set up strict practice regimes. His son, Ali Akbar Khan spoke about being forced to practice eighteen hours a day for a period of his life on a television interview with the BBC in 1984 (see also Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.240).[10] Another disciple of Allauddin Khan, Nikhil Banerjee, gave the following description of the practice regime he was under:

> You have to just practice, forget the whole world! That training period is very, very rigorous and very strict. You have got no time for anything! Just practice, just practice 14 hours a day minimum, just practice! Practice starts from four o'clock in the morning and it ends at eleven o'clock at night. There is a little break for breakfast, a little break for lunch, a little for dinner, a little for washing and other things, but we actually played from four o'clock in the morning till eleven o'clock at night. So hardly any energy was left. (Banerjee 1985)

Hindustāni musicians commonly state that there was a period in their life when they practised between ten and sixteen hours a day. Some musicians recall how practice became an intrinsic need:

> I used to practice a lot, without stopping, maybe twelve hours, sixteen hours and out of what? I was getting interest, I was getting pleasure, I was getting happiness. In case if I have no option to sit once with the *tablā* for practicing, I felt much eh, what shall I say, much lonely. And I felt, its no use staying in this world, I have no other job, I have to do this job, and this way, this is a type of, a pattern of the meditation. (Nimai Das February 2009)

The idea of practising sixteen hours 'without stopping' appears physically impossible. In my experience, when you dig deeper into these stories, they start to unravel into partial truths. For example, a period of sixteen hour's practice may include several breaks. Such long practice sessions may have been carried out periodically, but are presented as a daily routine.[11] This unimaginable idea of practicing sixteen hours a day on a consistent basis can also be partially explained by the fact that some

[9] For similar stories of extreme practice habits of other famous musicians, see Neuman (1990 [1980], pp.31-43). For more accounts of *riāz* see Shankar 2007 [1968]; Banerjee 1985.

[10] Ali Akbar Khan was famously tied to a tree for not practising enough, such was the strict regime he was put under (Shankar 2007 [1968], p.83).

[11] I must confess that I have occasionally found myself exaggerating my own dedication to practice. This has happened quite unconsciously, and I only realise the overstatement when I stop to think about how my account may be interpreted. For example, there were several days when I practiced ten hours or more during my stays in India. When people ask me about this time, I find myself saying that I used to practice ten hours a day. This is not completely untrue, but there is an implication in the statement that this was a daily routine, which it was not. This ideal practice regime of ten hours a day was always interrupted by the more pertinent need to conduct fieldwork, receive lessons and attend concerts.

musicians describe *riāz* as not only physical practice on their instrument, but also listening practice. Neuman suggests that exaggerated stories concerning *riāz* are often told with the function of inspiring musicians to practice more. The truth of such stories then becomes secondary to this 'moral' function (1990 [1980], p.31). Ideology and pragmatism are linked here, 'the ideal is "no limit"' (ibid., p.35). Another consideration is that such stories may help raise the status of musicians. Indian classical musicians are esteemed for their dedication to practice as much as their musical achievements on stage. Neuman suggests that a musician not only becomes 'great' due to his dedication to practice, but that the very dedication to practice itself is also part of his 'greatness':

> The concept of riāz symbolizes a certain accomplishment of one's inner development. Seen in this way, sixteen hours of riāz a day are symbolically equivalent to the high quality of music that would inevitably result. (Neuman 1980, p.34)

This connection between dedication to practice and status fosters a culture of exaggeration regarding practice habits and routines. Despite these qualifications, there is considerable truth to these accounts, and the virtuosity and musical sophistication of thousands of Hindustāni musicians is testament to this fact. I have had personal experience witnessing this kind of extreme dedication and discipline. For example, I was once staying with a professional Indian *tablā* player in France for a week. During this time, we played music from the late afternoon until after midnight everyday with some breaks in between. Following this, my companion then stayed up all night, every night, practicing until 8 am. In this way, he dedicated approximately fourteen hours a day to actual practice. He could maintain this schedule because he was in a conducive environment away from home, with no commitments or distractions.

Religiosity, Presence, and Devotion: *Riāz* and Quality of Focus

The quality of a musician's practice is considered as important as quantity. The next two sections consider the qualitative nature of practice, assessed first in philosophical terms and then in pragmatic terms. In this section I consider 'quality' from a philosophical perspective. This includes the nature of the experience of practice, and the perceived spiritual benefits derived from this experience. My sources come largely from Hindustāni musicians themselves. The interpretations they offer in relation to

their experiences touch on a number of inter-related subjects including: practice as worship, divine presence, integrity, and the effect of singular concentration.

The section following this explores pragmatic concerns, centring on the effective and efficient use of time, strategies for attaining technical virtuosity, learning repertoire, and embodying the language of *rāga* improvisation. These two sections focus particular attention on my principal teacher Paṇḍit Kushal Das. I illustrate how Das's guidance in relation to practice presents a distinct polarity, ranging from philosophical inspiration to an extreme systematic pragmatism. This polarity reflects a more general relationship between ideology and pragmatism that I tease out as the rest of the chapter unfolds.

Religiosity and divine presence

A degree of religiosity is a common component in a Hindustāni musician's practice ritual, especially, but not exclusively, for those of Hindu persuasion. Many musicians have a dedicated space at home for practice, which they may also use for teaching. Practice rooms are often simple spaces: a carpet on which to sit; perhaps an electronic *tānpurā*, *tablā* machine, or *laharā* player;[12] a framed picture of the musician's *guru* may be on a wall; other pictures may include legendary performers whom the musician admires; and, finally, some religious iconography is often found in the space. Figure 6.1 shows a display of pictures on the wall of a musical instrument shop, 'Hemen & Co.', Rashbehari Avenue, Kolkata (2006). The images include the deity Krishna, goddess Kali, and the famous musician Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. Pictures like this may be found in a Hindustāni musician's practice room.

[12] Electronic *tānpurā*, *tablā* and *laharā* machines are small electronic devices used as practice aids by many musicians. They serve to act as accompaniment in the form of drone, rhythm and *laharā* respectively. *Laharā* is a repeated melodic pattern used by *tablā* players to maintain the time cycle. Electronic *tānpurās* are also commonly used on stage.



Figure 6.1: Pictures in 'Hemen & Co.' musical instrument shop, Kolkata, 2006

It is common to see a small shrine in a musician's practice area. While this is more common among Hindu musicians, it is also evident among non-Hindus. Such a shrine may include an image of a Hindu deity (or several deities), and perhaps a picture of the musician's *guru*, although such a picture is more typically displayed on a wall. The deity may relate to music in some way, or may be a personal favourite of the musician. Sarasvatī, Ganesh, and Krishna are popular among musicians because they have a connection to music; according to Hindu mythology Sarasvatī plays the *veena*, Ganesh plays the drum and Krishna plays the flute.[13] Some musicians light incense at the foot of their shrine at the beginning of a practice session. Other musicians offer *pranam* to their shrine or to their instrument prior to practice. Kushal Das has a small marble statue of Sarasvatī on a shelf in a corner of his music room. He lights an incense stick beside the statue prior to practising and teaching.[14]

This kind of religiosity relates to the Hindu practice of *puja* ('worship', 'offering'), where devotees offer up something (food, flowers, incense), pray, or chant in front of

[13] See Slawek (1987, p.iv).
[14] There is a danger of reading too much into the presence of this religious imagery. It must be noted that small shrines and similar iconographic imagery are also commonly found in shops and homes throughout India. Simple rituals such as lighting incense at a shrine or offering *pranam* are also widespread and do not necessarily symbolise the idea that a particular activity is inherently 'spiritual' or 'religious' in nature.

a small shrine or *murti* (an iconographic depiction of a deity, usually in the form of a small statue).[15] This act is also related to *bhakti* ('devotion'), or popular Hindu devotionalism. *Bhakti* involves active worship of a personal god, emphasising the presence of divinity and the act of loving devotion.[16]

Like many Hindustāni musicians, Debojyoti Sanyal practises in front of a small shrine in his music room. His shrine is dedicated to the Hindu deities Ganesh and MaaKali.[17] Sanyal often lights incense at the foot of his shrine as he practises. When I asked him about this, he spoke about the feeling of divine presence as a spiritual experience, facilitated through the act of concentration on music:

> I always practice in my home, just in front of Goddess…. When I play this rhythm, in myself I feel this Goddessji and also Lord Shiva, I just feel in my inside, when I play so, concentrate on my music, that time I feel spirituality. (Debojyoti Sanyal February 2009)

I have adopted, in a largely unconscious fashion, many aspects of religiosity into my own *riāz*. For example, I have created a small shrine in my music room with an image of Sarasvatī and an incense holder. This is presumably a result of a gradual process of enculturation, perhaps coupled with a natural tendency towards superstition and ritual.

---

[15] Most Hindu temples contain *murtis*, or small icons representing different deities, either in anthropomorphic form as a statue, or in more abstracted form, such as a *shiva lingum*. Temple *murtis* are usually consecrated through an elaborate ritual where the deity is said to reside within the icon. They are regularly washed, dressed, and given offerings. A consecrated *murti* is considered to be a manifestation of the divine, and not just a representational idol. Shrines containing similar, yet smaller, statues (generally without the associated elaborate ritual) can be found throughout India: on the dashboards of taxis, on the walls of shops, or in this case in a musician's practice area. See Knott 1998; Muesse 2011; Demariaux 1995; for a more detailed introduction to Hindu devotional practices.

[16] *Bhakti*, 'the doctrine of intense emotional devotionalism' (Slawek 1986, p.37), has its roots in the popular text, the *Bhāgavad-Gitā* (circa fifth century B.C.E.), and in the poets of the '*Bhakti* Movement' (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries). The modern popularity of this doctrine is due to its inclusivity; according to the tenets of *bhakti* anyone can worship God through personal devotion to a chosen deity (or deities). The rise of the *bhakti* movement thus questioned brahmanical authority by empowering everyone (including *dalits* or 'untouchables') to find a direct and personal connection to the divine (Knott 1998; Schelling 2011; Slawek 1986). The influential and reformist Indian philosopher Ramanuja (1017-1137 C.E.) and his followers 'taught that the Lord manifests in five forms: (i) in the supreme transcendental form, (ii) in its emanations (avartara); (iii) in the heart or self of each individual; (iv) as the inner controller of the universe; and (v) as the divine presence within the consecrated icon (*murti*). The Lord is transcendental and supreme, but also immanent and accessible' (Knott 1998, p.52). *Dharsana* is thought to be the act of seeing the divine and being seen by the divine (Muesse 2011, p.140; Knott 2008 [1998], p.41).

[17] Sanyal lives in Kolkata where the goddess Kali is particularly popular. His MaaKhali depicts Kali alongside a picture of his mother; '*maa*' means 'mother'. *Bhakti* is generally, but not exclusively, associated with the worship of Krishna – whereas the worship of the feminine or mother aspect is known as *Shaktism* (Muesse 2011, p.156). In *Shaktism*, there are multiple manifestations of the goddess including Sarasvatī, Kali, and Durga.

On a couple of occasions when I left India, Sanyal gave me a gift of incense, saying 'this is for your practice'. Due in part to his influence, I often light incense in front of the statue of Sarasvatī before I sit to practice or play. For me, this signifies an intention, helps facilitate a particular form of focus, and aids my concentration. The small ritualistic act seals an affirmation that my attention, and the practice session, will be of a particular quality in terms of focus, experience, integrity, and value.

Offering and receiving

Although my perspective on this ritual may resonate with many Hindustāni musicians, exponents I spoke to offered explanations that relate more to traditional concepts of *bhakti*. For many musicians the gesture of lighting incense (or 'offering' incense) to a divine icon before practice signifies that the music is an offering, and through this offering, is a way of asking for some sort of blessing. Sanyal is extremely dedicated to practice and maintains a very strong practice routine, but despite all the hard work he continues to put in, he stated a number of times with an emphatic conviction that his music is all a divine blessing: 'I feel that all my music is just the blessing of God, I strongly believe that this is all just blessings of God' (Debojyoti Sanyal 2009).

Nimai Das also perceives a relationship between musical practice and divine blessings (or 'grace'). He considers musical practice (which he labels 'meditation' or '*sādhanā*') to have numerous benefits. These include the development of willpower and the cathartic cleansing of one's soul; but most of all Das repeatedly stressed how the blessings and grace of 'the goddess' is received by musicians as a result of the act of musical practice:

> When we are playing this continuously and we were getting certain strength in the mind, and the power in the mind and the goddess power. If I wish to make friends with anyone or if I wish to get anything, I am getting this. Various kinds of incidents have occurred in my life, and it is a miracle, it is unbelievable, how it was getting solved? This is a matter of the will-force and wherefrom the will-force gained? This is from the meditation, this is from the practice, this is from the *sādhanā*. Wherefrom this type of power has gained, this is only from the spirituality. The goddess grace is being showered on us who are musicians, and who are making the music. And not only that, we are rectifying our soul. (Nimai Das February 2009)

Das went on to describe the invisible omnipresence of the divine through using the analogy of electricity. Sitting in my room in Kolkata, he pointed to the light bulb hanging from the ceiling and joked about what it would feel like to take the light bulb out and put your finger inside:

> Like electricity… the bigger power cannot be seen but it can be felt. In that way we the musicians, we can feel the power of the god, we cannot see it but we can feel it. Just to feel it the music is the best way of touching the goddess feet. To get the grace of the god. This only the way, there is no other way. Not a single way is there. (He then quotes the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*) 'I am only staying there, where the worshipper is singing!' (ibid.)

Das sees music as a form of worship, and through worship, as an evocation of divine presence, power, and grace. Annapurna Devi frames a similar relation slightly differently, where 'honest practice' reaps 'rewards'.

> My aunt Annapurna Devi told me one time that if you do honest practice, then, she said God, or the music, will reward you with gifts. It will give you something. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Swapan Chaudhuri offers a somewhat similar account, without the religious perspective. His view is that if *riāz* is performed with the correct ethos – one of love and surrender – 'something comes up': 'The main thing about practice is that, give your love! Give your self! And surrender your self, something comes up' (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009).

This statement was left open-ended, but it can be inferred that, for Chaudhuri, a particular quality of focus can lead to a deeper and more rewarding experience of *riāz*. This idea bares strong commonalities to the statements by Sanyal and Das. A similar ethos of humility and surrender is portrayed in the various perspectives: 'touching the goddess feet', 'music as worship', and 'giving yourself'. These musicians advocate a particular quality of focus characterised by both concentration and passivity. I argue – in part on reflection upon my own experience – that ritual and religiosity can help facilitate such a form of focus. In turn, this quality of *riāz* is conceptualised as leading to 'the grace of God', to an experience of 'divine presence'; or as Chaudhuri remarks, 'something comes up'.

Whether conceptualised through the lens of religious belief or not, a functional relationship is posited between the quality of attention and the experience of *riāz* in terms of profundity, depth and reward. The next section extends this idea further, exploring the relationship between attentive passivity and 'presence' through an intriguing practice method relayed to me by Kushal Das.

'Devotion' and 'presence': Kushal Das describes a special practice method

One day in January 2009, after a lesson in his apartment in Kolkata, Kushal Das outlined a practice method that his *guru* Professor Santosh Banerjee had told him about. In this practice a musician instils an attitude of attentive passivity, whereby space is opened for *rāga* to come of its own accord. The key terms Das used in reference to this method were 'presence' and 'devotion'. There is so much value in his detailed description of this practice that I cite it in its entirety. I also quote the entire narrative to illustrate the manner in which it was told to me, which evoked an essential aspect of the message: the need for time, patience, and passivity. Das's description was communicated in a characteristically soft and unhurried voice, with appropriate long pauses to emphasise the idea of 'waiting'. I offer a running commentary in the form of footnotes to help elucidate and contextualise the narrative. I also underline some key phrases in order to highlight them. I recommend to the reader that you first read the entire narrative, and then follow this by reading only the underlined parts as a brief summary.

> You have to get preparation, so it has some system. A quiet, silent place you need first, and it should be there very dark room, only one candle and the incense stick is needed.[18] And you enter the room and open your *sitār*, but don't play [pause].
>
> Mainly I feel this is talking about the presence actually. That presence should be on the stage also.[19] Don't [be] in a hurry. Anything, not something is going out. So you enter the room, take your *sitār*, don't play, just take one *tānpurā* or something, tuning the *sa*.[20]

[18] Das has set the scene for an uninterrupted, simple setting. In India, the use of a candle and incense stick is a typical way of creating a meditative, devotional space.

[19] 'The presence' can be perceived in many ways, and it is not exactly clear what Das means by the term. However 'presence' can be inferred to relate to a tangible feeling of something that is unseen; this may be conceptualised as the presence of *rāga*, the presence of divinity, or the presence of a devotional or emotionally charged atmosphere.

[20] *Sa* is the tonic note, the only note that is in all *rāgas*. Theoretically, the meaning of all notes is perceived through their relation to *sa*. *Sa* is therefore the fundamental reference point out of which *rāga* arises from and returns to.

After *sa* tuned, then you will, some note will come, next note after *sa*. Until it comes, you have to wait, only playing *sa*. So *sa* is there. After tune all *sa* notes, then either, you have to wait [pause], I don't know which will come. You don't know, nobody knows. So when it comes, either *pa*, *ma* or something, any note, so tune there.[21] After that, playing those, suppose *sa* and *pa*, so play this *sa* and *pa* and wait. Maybe after that which note is coming? Till you understand *pa* oh, *pa* no? Which *rāga* wants to come? And according that *rāga* you tune.[22]

After that you tune. After complete you tune, very, very, needs very good tuning. That is why you need silent place. After tuning, you just play your instrument, I mean, right hand, no left hand. So you can see that, you know that finally this is this *rāga*.[23] So tuned already. But how to start? So you have to wait, you have to wait. Then you will feel that some phrase is coming.[24]

First one phrase will come, but don't play [pause], not until another phrase come, till you see that another phrase came. So you have two phrases. Automatically it will be selected that which one is better. When you have selected this, this you like most, or this environment is demanding this, this is better phrase, then play.[25]

Play that phrase, again you have to keep silence, just play right hand things, just basic notes, and wait for the next, another two phrases. So like this way, after and after two phrases is comes, it will go for maybe one year, six months, eight months, nobody know.[26]

Two phrases working. After that, three phrases will come instead of two. In this way, gradually day-by-day if you keep practice this system, you can see next, seven, eight, nine, ten phrases. And more fast it will come and work. So within eight, nine phrases, automatically it will be selected the best one. And best one related with before phrase.[27]

So this is also very very devotional practice. I mean, I asked my *guru* is that when I listen Nikhil Banerjee or Ravi Shankarji or Vilayat Khansahib. I feel that they are playing one phrase, next phrase, then another phrase. So every phrases is beautiful and is very stirring. So I said, how it is possible? And I said, all this memorised or what? They were playing all memorised phrases? Otherwise you cannot possible, and so structural, so beautiful, so *rāga*-wise and smoothly music, how it is possible? Then I

[21] The *tarab* or sympathetic strings are to be tuned gradually to these notes as they reveal themselves. In the case of certain notes the frets on the *sitār* are to be moved into the correct position.

[22] This passage highlights the idea that the agency is completely surrendered to *rāga*, which is here presented as a kind of living entity with a will of its own, choosing whether or not it 'wants to come'.

[23] By playing with the right hand only, no distinct melody is formed. It is the left hand that is used to fret the strings in order to produce melody. The right hand on its own can only play open unfretted strings, these can include notes from the sympathetic strings, individual notes *sa*, *ma* and *pa* or the *chikārī* strings, also tuned to fundamental pitches *sa* and *pa* (or *ma* in the case of certain *rāgas* where *pa* is not present).

[24] Again the 'phrase' appears to come of its own accord, facilitated through the act of getting out of the way and waiting for it to come, with an attitude of total passivity and openness.

[25] Here the agency appears to be somewhat mixed, on one hand the 'better' phrase is selected 'automatically'; on the other hand it is selected by the musician as a matter of preference.

[26] The sense of endless practice towards an unreachable perfection is ever-present in the rhetoric of Indian classical musicians.

[27] Here Das is suggesting two ideas: First, the more this 'system' is practiced, the faster the phrases start coming. The implication is that this carries over to stage performance, where 'perfect' phrases come automatically and effortlessly through the re-enactment of the same quality of focus. The second idea is that the phrases are naturally related to each other – the thread of musical development is automatically appealing with a strong quality of compositional structure and musical flow.

> got this answer that this is the system. So when they were looking six, seven, eight, ten phrases next, selecting the best one, so how do you get bad phrases from them? Is simple! (Kushal Das January 2009)

Simple perhaps, but nevertheless this 'system' suggests the daunting prospect of endless practice, patience and time. Whether such a system is or was ever enacted may be cast into some doubt, especially in the slow, deliberate and pre-conceived manner that Das's description implies. However, the sentiment is clear, and like so many anecdotes passed on in the lore of the tradition, it is inspiring as a projection of a philosophical ethos.

This practice method emphasises the idea that *rāga* has its own agency, and outlines a pragmatic step-by-step system through which *rāga* can be given space to reveal itself. Facilitated by a silent atmospheric space and a patient attentive attitude, the *rāga* appears to come of its own accord through the musician. First a particular *rāga* manifests, then phrases come. In the next step, there is an interesting dialectic between the personal agency of the musician and the agency of the *rāga* (or the 'environment'), as it is 'automatically' chosen which phrase is 'better'. The very notion of judgment seems at odds with the projected ethos, but Das portrays a process that is at once intuitive and systematic; and both esoteric and pragmatic.

However there is an ontological question implied in the narrative that is beyond the pragmatic and schematic. The nature of the 'creator' in the 'creative process' is in question. On a philosophical level the exercise is an enactment of the idea that it is not the musician who is creating the music. The musician is evoking 'the presence' – a force greater than himself – embodied in *rāga*. *Rāga* is presented as having an agency independent of the musician.

Das appears to be describing a creative process involving the deconstruction of habitual patterns through a heuristic, intuitive process. Such a method may have the capacity to train a musician to let the music breath, and to wait for inspiration to come, rather than simply re-enact set patterns.

His assertion that this is 'very very devotional practice' can be interpreted in a number of ways. The process resonates with Hindu spiritual practices and Indian philosophy

in many respects. First there is silence; the practice may be considered a form of meditation. Philosophically, the method can be said to be about the dissolution of the ego, where the musician's ego is surrendered to *rāga*. He becomes an open channel through which *rāga* is given space to enter. This could be interpreted as devotion to *rāga*, a quasi-divine presence invoked through a systematic ritualistic process. However, elicited from other conversations I have had with Kushal Das, his concept of 'devotion' relates strongly to a process of entering into the 'unknown'.

This method trains the musician to be simultaneously passive and attentive, developing within him the facility to allow music to flow through him through harnessing a particular quality of focus. Improvisation becomes a journey into the unknown, an idea that suggests a mystical dimension where a threshold into alternative states of consciousness may be opened and passed through.

In this practice method the juncture between the pragmatic and the spiritual is found. The practice is at once systematic and quasi-mystical. Das illuminates the esoteric through a clear and measured methodology. The apparent dichotomy of system and the metaphysical is mediated, and the intangible is explained through a tangible pragmatism. In my experience, this is typical of Das's teaching. He manages to create a perfect marriage of science and intuition, with a methodological approach to an intuitive process.

It must be noted that Das paints the intention and function of this practice in relation to the production of music, and not so much in relation to the experience of the practice itself. He offers a clear rationale: it is preparation for performance, facilitating the musician to create perfect phrases with a seamless compositional flow, while also helping the musician to evoke 'presence', that 'should be on the stage also'. He sees this practice as training for producing music that is 'beautiful', 'very stirring', 'structural', and '*rāga*-wise'. In some respects this is counter to an ideology often projected by Hindustāni musicians regarding the integrity of *riāz* – that it should be practiced for its own sake, where process is more important than product. However Das's thoughts are consonant with a related idea: that the quality of one's practice translates onto stage performance, a forum where a musician's integrity becomes transparent. These ideas are explored in the following section, and in Chapter 7.

Integrity and intention: the relationship between the practice room and the stage

A central tenet in the philosophical ideology of practice in Hindustāni music is that it should be conducted without the intention of impressing an audience. *Riāz* is often portrayed as an immersive experience, complete within itself. Ideally a musician is so steeped in the process of practice that concerns regarding music as product completely vanish. This is related to the contention that Indian classical music is ideally a spiritual practice, rather than a form of entertainment. Nikhil Banerjee, for example, suggests that Indian classical music should not be solely for entertainment, but rather for spiritual realisation, as a kind of meditation:

> It's a kind of meditation, in Indian music it was practiced to know the supreme truth, it is not only for the entertainment of the people. (Nikhil Banerjee 2005)

Annapurna Devi – daughter of Allauddin Khan and sister of Ali Akbar Khan – is regarded as one of the greatest *surbahar* players of all time, but she neither plays in public nor records, and lives a reclusive life in Mumbai. I asked her nephew Alam Khan about her, and why she doesn't record or perform.

> She just doesn't care for it. For her music is truly a spiritual practice for herself, and it's not for entertainment, it's not for concertising. She didn't care to do any of that. It's really just for herself and for her students to teach them. For her it really is one's own practice. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Swapan Chaudhuri states that a musician should not practice in order to impress people, but rather as an act of love and dedication to the art:

> You know practising is not to show yourself to the people, practice is basically your love, your dedication to your subject. Practice should not be like that 'I have a concert so I have to practice, otherwise people will not accept me' no, that means you are using music, you are using your practice. So what you get out of that is different than if you give your one hundred percent personal love. (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009)

In our conversation Chaudhuri expressed the idea that the way you practice affects the way you perform. If you practice with a particular feeling, that feeling will come out in your playing on stage. This idea is mirrored by the views of a number of musicians I spoke to. It is generally thought that a musician who practises in order to impress an audience will come across as gimmicky and overtly flashy to the detriment of the 'soul' of the music. The resulting music could be considered to lack spiritual depth. Such a musician may lean towards the entertainment side of a perceived

entertainment-devotion dichotomy.[28] The general contention is that musical integrity is transparent, and a musician's ethos in relation to *riāz* translates from the practice room to the stage. This is obvious on a technical level: the music a musician creates on stage is largely drawn from the reservoir of vocabulary garnered during *riāz,* and – consciously or unconsciously – the musical habits formed during practice. Alam Khan considers *rāga* central to musical depth, and suggests that musicians who practise too much technique, and not enough *rāga*, lack profundity in performance. 'Some people spend too much time practising without any *rāga*, there's no depth' (Alam Khan June 2013).

On a less tangible level, the conscious space a musician enters into during practice is considered to project outwards through his music in performance, and an audience can feel an intimate connection to music that is fostered through a process of deep *riāz* or *sādhanā*. For the connoisseur of Hindustāni music, a strong 'presence', and the aesthetic subtleties of *rāga* and *taal* exposition are more valued than displays of virtuosity. Swapan Chaudhuri spoke of how some musicians can play just a few notes in such a way that everybody in the audience is profoundly affected:

> Things come out from your practice, from your playing that will be very touching. Sometimes when we play, we are not playing anything just maybe two or three notes and people say wow! Why? Because those notes, the way it hits will change everything. So that's the way it should be. (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009)

This idea is mirrored by Nimai Das, but framed in more religious terms. He considers the act of extensive and continuous practice, or *sādhanā*, to result in the acquirement of 'devotional power'. This 'power', in turn, communicates directly to the audience's 'soul' in a performance context:

> The devotional aspect can be gained by worshipping the God, practice, *sādhanā*. It's a long *sādhanā*. If you continue practising the *sādhanā*, the long *sādhanā*, it's a definite that you will gain the devotional power, and whenever you produce the thing, people would be mesmorised, will be amazed, because this music is directly hitting to their soul, to their minds, to their feelings, to their desire. Nothing is left uncovered. Then they will praise for you. Oh what I have heard! It is the grace of the God is going through your music and into their soul. (Nimai Das February 2009)

[28] See Chapter 7 for an exploration of this apparent dichotomy. Comments I received regarding musicians who appear to be primarily focused on impressing an audience are largely anecdotal. Such comments were commonly offered in judgment after a concert, and were rarely expressed in the context of a formal interview.

A noticeable commonality between Chaudhuri and Das is that they both speak of how an audience would be immensely impressed ('wowed', 'mesmorised', 'amazed') by the experience of such music. Although they stated that the intentionality of practice should be directed towards 'love' or 'worship' (as opposed to audience impact), ideas regarding the resultant music are still connected to the idea of its affective impression upon an audience.

Despite this qualification, the overarching paradigm is that when the inner motivation, ethos, and intention of musical practice is virtuous, and not centred on making an impression upon an audience, the resultant music is intrinsically more powerful. When practice is conducted with the right conscious attitude – one of 'love', 'worship', 'devotion', or 'surrender' – it may be considered a 'spiritual' discipline, resulting in music of a 'spiritual' quality. The 'spiritual' quality of the music fosters an intimacy and deep resonance between the music and the audience. As Das suggests 'the grace of the God is going through your music and into their soul'.

This ideal artistic integrity is influenced and sustained by the lore of the tradition. For example, the iconic story of Tansen and Emperor Akbar visiting Tansen's *guru* Haridas Swami persists as an archetypical illustration of this ideology. Tansen explains to Akbar why his music can never eclipse that of his *guru*:

> I cannot surpass my guru; because I sing whenever my emperor commands, but he sings only when his inner voice demands. I sing to please you; but he sings to please God. (Aiyar 1980, p.198)

The message in this age-old story persists as an ever-present ideal for Hindustani musicians to emulate: that music as 'devotion to God' is intrinsically more powerful than music as 'entertainment'. Furthermore, in this story there is no disconnect between 'practice' and 'performance'. Haridas Swami sings out of an inner urge, irrespective of outer context.[29]

[29] I explore the meaning behind this famous story again in Chapter 7 when I discuss the dichotomy of music as 'entertainment' versus music as 'devotion'.

The act of singular concentration

Another dimension to the ideal quality of focus in *riāz* is the nature of singular concentration. *Riāz* often involves intense concentration over prolonged periods of time. Hindustāni musicians remark that sometimes when they are playing or practising music, the nature of their focus is so single-pointed that their minds become empty of everything else. This experience is often expressed as both cathartic and spiritual:

> When somebody is going to church, somebody's going to temple, maybe going to mosque, even they cannot give up all their desires from their mind. They cannot give up all their feelings, all their battle of things, all their tension, all their liabilities, they cannot give up everything from their mind. When they are going in a holy mind they cannot worship the God…. But the way only is in the music, when we are involved in the music, nothing is kept in our mind. Our mind become free, and alone from all worldly affairs. We are fully involved in the music, and we are doing the music and we are keeping our mind blank, completely from the outer affairs, from the outer hazards. We are keeping our mind free, calm and quiet, and very clean. Then we are putting our full concentration on the music. It means we are really worshipping the God. (Nimai Das February 2009)

It is interested to note how Das elevates a pragmatic concern ('concentration') to a spiritual status ('worship') through his position. In a similar fashion, by comparing musical practice to going to a church, temple or mosque, he is clearly making a statement about the nature of all of these activities as being on a similar pedestal of spiritual endeavour. Das's contention is that 'full concentration' on music is a superior form of 'worship' than going to a church, temple, or mosque, because the nature of musical focus is such that the mind is cleansed of all other thoughts.

According to Swapan Chaudhuri, this single-pointed musical focus – where the mind is absorbed by music and nothing else – can be profoundly transformative:

> It makes you very young inside, because you don't think about other stuff at that time, because always something is going on. Its like something is changing inside you… it actually changes yourself, means it transforms you into a different person because everything you see very differently. (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009)

It is traditional for *dhrupad* vocalists to begin their *riāz* with the repeated intonation of *sa*. On a functional level, this practice develops clear, accurate, and sustained pitch, and enables breath control. Clarke and Kini suggest another more spiritual function to this practice:

> The reduction of sensory awareness to a single object–in this case a sonic one–resembles standard meditative techniques oriented towards the attainment of *samadhi* states. (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.149)

The term '*samadhi*' comes from Hindu philosophy and refers to 'supra-mental spiritual experience' (Shastri (1957 [1976]), p.101).

Perspectives from the matrix of Indian philosophy

Many of the ideas I have explored have strong resonances with Indian philosophical thought. The act of singular concentration is clearly resonant with the traditional Indian spiritual practice of meditation. There are countless ways in which meditation is related to spirituality in the Indian philosophical tradition: a connection to an immanent divine source, a transcendental experience of elevated consciousness, a way of seeing through the illusionary nature of our everyday perception (*maya*), or a realisation of the essence of one's being. Eknath Easwaran describes how meditation results in the dissolution of the ego and the discovery of the true self (*ātman*):

> In profound meditation, when consciousness is so acutely focused that it is utterly withdrawn from the body and mind, it enters a kind of singularity in which the sense of a separate ego disappears. In this state, the supreme climax of meditation, the seers discovered a core of consciousness beyond time and change. They called it simply Atman, the Self. (Easwaran 2007, p.26)

The central thrust of the *Upanishads* is encapsulated in the formula *Tat Tvam Asi*, 'That Art Thou' (*Chandogya Upanishad* translated by Prabhavananda and Manchester 2002, p.79).[30] This concept sits at the heart of *vedāntic* philosophy – that *ātman*, the self or pure consciousness is ultimately the same as *brahman*, the absolute, formless, supreme reality. Meditation is considered to potentially lead to an experience and concomitant realisation of this unity, where ephemeral glimpses into the supreme reality gradually lead to a permanent state of divine unification:

> The unitive state has to be entered over and over until a person is established in it. But once established, even in the midst of ordinary life, one sees the One underlying the many, the Eternal beneath the ephemeral. (Easwaran 2007, p.27)

Many of the ideas explored earlier – including the ethos of surrender, and the ideal artistic integrity where music is practised without an audience in mind – can be contextualised in relation to the central tenets of popular Hindu devotionalism, or

[30] *Tat Tvam Asi* is also commonly translated as 'You Are That' (for example, Demariaux 1995).

bhakti. The *bhakti* movement has its genesis in the popular and highly influential text, the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*. The *Bhāgavad-Gitā* describes many paths to enlightenment. Its central message is that *bhakti yoga*, the path of loving devotion, is the easiest, fastest, and most assessable of all paths. Spiritual rewards are bestowed on those who act with an attitude of surrender and devotion:

> They for whom I am the supreme goal, who do all work renouncing self for me and meditate on me with single-hearted devotion, these I will swiftly rescue from the fragment's cycle of birth and death, for their consciousness has entered into me…. Better indeed is knowledge than mechanical practice. Better than knowledge is meditation. But better still is surrender of attachment to results, because there follows immediate peace. (*Bhāgavad-Gitā* 12.7 and 12.12, translated in Easwaran 2007, p.208)

In the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*, Krishna states that the agitated mind caused by desire is the root of all suffering. In order to relinquish desire, one must discipline the mind and engage in activity without thinking of results. *Karma yoga* is action without attachment to the rewards of the action. It is the selfless fulfilment of one's duty, offered as worship to the supreme being.[31] Krishna teaches the archer Arjuna the merits of focusing on action itself, and not its outcome:

> You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work. You should never engage in action for the sake of reward, nor should you long for inaction. Perform work in this world, Arjuna, as a man established within himself–without selfish attachments, and alike in success and defeat. For yoga is perfect evenness of mind. Seek refuge in the attitude of detachment and you will amass the wealth of spiritual awareness. (Bhāgavad-Gitā 2.47-2.49, translated in Easwaran 2007, p.94)

Krishna's teaching brings this discussion back to the idea of an ideal quality of focus. The quality of focus advocated here is an 'attitude of detachment'. This is considered spiritually beneficial, in part, because one realizes an experience of one's true self (*ātman*), 'as a man established within himself', while not seeking gratification for the ego (*alamkara*), 'without selfish attachments'. Easwaran further qualifies this as a process of purification: 'selfless work purifies consciousness because when there is no trace of ego involvement, new karma is not produced' (2007, p.59).

[31] On one hand the 'supreme being' is Krishna, as a manifestation of God; on the other hand, as Easwaran states 'Krishna is the Self' (p.58). This 'Self' is the 'true self' or '*ātman*', which is beyond the ego, and, according to some schools of *vedāntic* philosophy, ultimately identical to '*brahman*', or 'God'.

The Science of Practice: A Paradigm of Efficiency and Methodological Progression

In this section I focus on the development of technical proficiency in Hindustāni music through the practice of technical exercises. In particular, I highlight the refinement of Indian classical practice methodology, and the precise and exacting nature of technique. I make specific reference to the strategies Kushal Das employs in order to make *riāz* qualitatively efficient and effective through outlining his instructions to me regarding my own *riāz*. Finally, I postulate a functional relationship between the system of *riāz*, the challenge of prolonged and intense concentration, and the experience of transcendence, an experience many Hindustāni musicians speak about in relation to the subject of music and spirituality.

The musical content of *riāz* can include technical exercises, repertoire and *rāga* improvisation.[32] A central component in *riāz*, especially during a musician's formative years, is the repetitive and systematic execution of technical exercises. These are practised in order to build up technical proficiency and embody the language and system of *rāga* improvisation. Many Hindustāni musicians continue to practise such exercises throughout their life, although the intensity of this aspect of *riāz* tends to diminish as time goes on. Although these exercises are essentially technical, a musician may often practise them within a specific *rāga*; in other words, altering the exercises to comply with a particular *rāga's* scale and melodic movement.

Technical exercises are codified into various categories, each with a name and a precise function. These categories relate to specific techniques and to different sections in the episodic development of *rāga*. Categories can include *sapat* (scale exercises), *bols* (right-hand rhythmic patterns), *gamak* (a distinctive ornament involving rapid movement between pitches), *sparce* and *krintan* (hammer-ons and pull-offs), *ghasit* (sliding between notes horizontally along the string), *meend* (bending between pitches vertically on the frets), and *jhālā* (on a *sitār*: interplay

[32] Sometimes it can be hard to draw clear lines between these components. For example, a small section of repertoire may be treated as a technical exercise, or a musician may be practising *rāga* improvisation while at the same time focusing on a specific technique. Some exercises, such as '*sārgāms*', exist outside of categories such as 'technique' and 'repertoire'. *Sārgāms* are composed fragments of music, practised in order to internalise the melodic movement of specific *rāgas*. For examples of *sārgāms* see Shankar (2007 [1968]).

between the *chikārī* [rhythmic drone] strings and the main melody string). Although these kinds of exercises are common within Hindustāni music pedagogy in general, countless variations exist depending on one's instrument (including voice), *gharana*, and teacher.[33]

The primary reference for this discussion is a body of technical exercises taught to me by Kushal Das during my first period of instruction with him, from December 2006 to February 2007. The instruction I received from Das mirrors lessons I have had with other teachers, and variations of the exercises I outline are commonly practised in the tradition as a whole.

Kushal Das: strategies for effective and efficient *Riāz*

During our conversations, Das emphasised how a musician must not only practise daily but must also learn how to practise correctly and efficiently.[34] Throughout the course of our lessons – and especially during the initial period – he invested considerable time teaching me practice methodology. His instruction amounts to a precise and systematic science of practice formulated to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. I can testify to the fact that the system he advocates produces rapid progress in technique; I can also testify to the fact that the execution of the system requires remarkable discipline and is highly challenging both mentally and physically.

The practice chart

The transmission process employed by Kushal Das was completely oral-aural, although he allowed me to record everything in order to refer to it later, and transcribe it. Das either played something, sang something, or explained something to me, and I immediately copied or responded accordingly on the *sitār*. The only exception to oral-aural transmission, and the only thing he ever wrote down for me was a practice chart. This instructional chart comes in two parts, written on opposite sides of a single piece of paper: Part I (figure 6.2) contains five different categories of technical exercises,

[33] For detail on traditional exercises, see: Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998]); Farrell (1990); Shankar (2007 [1968]); Sorrell and Narayan (1980).

[34] This view is commonly held by musicians and scholars alike. For example, Neuman suggests that 'knowing how to practice is what must be learned' (1990 [1980], p.36). He quotes *sarangi* maestro Ram Narayan: 'now I only practice about two hours a day, because I have learnt how to do correct *riāz*' (p.36); and *tablā* player Latif Ahmed Khan: 'you can't practice without practice' (p.37). See also Sorrell and Narayan (1980).

which are further subdivided into series of exercises. Part II (figure 6.3) contains two categories of technical exercises and some instruction regarding work on Rāga Yaman. In Part I, Das indicates the precise order in which to practise the prescribed exercises, and for how long to practise each one. Part I outlines a three-hour intensive *sitār* workout. I was instructed that the entire three-hour version should be executed without a break, preferably every morning. Das also included a thirty minute amended version that would suffice if there was not enough time for the full version on any given day. Part II is designed for evening practice. The duration of the practice session is not so precisely prescribed, but the order of the different elements is clearly defined.

I will now outline the exercises in this practice chart in order to illustrate the precise nature of Kushal Das's instruction, and the rationale behind it. All the exercises were taught with precise details regarding their execution, including time and tempo instructions, exact fingering, and *mizrab* technique.[35] Only a small portion of this detailed information is on the practice chart itself, most of it was taught orally, and transcribed by me. The original practice chart is faded, a little tattered and has oil spilt on it. I attach a restored version, where I have written over Kushal Das's original writing. I have also deleted some notes I made on the sheets. See pp.viii-x for an explanation of the system of notation and for a key to musical transcriptions.

[35] A *mizrab* is the wire 'plectrum' worn by *sitār* players on their right index finger.

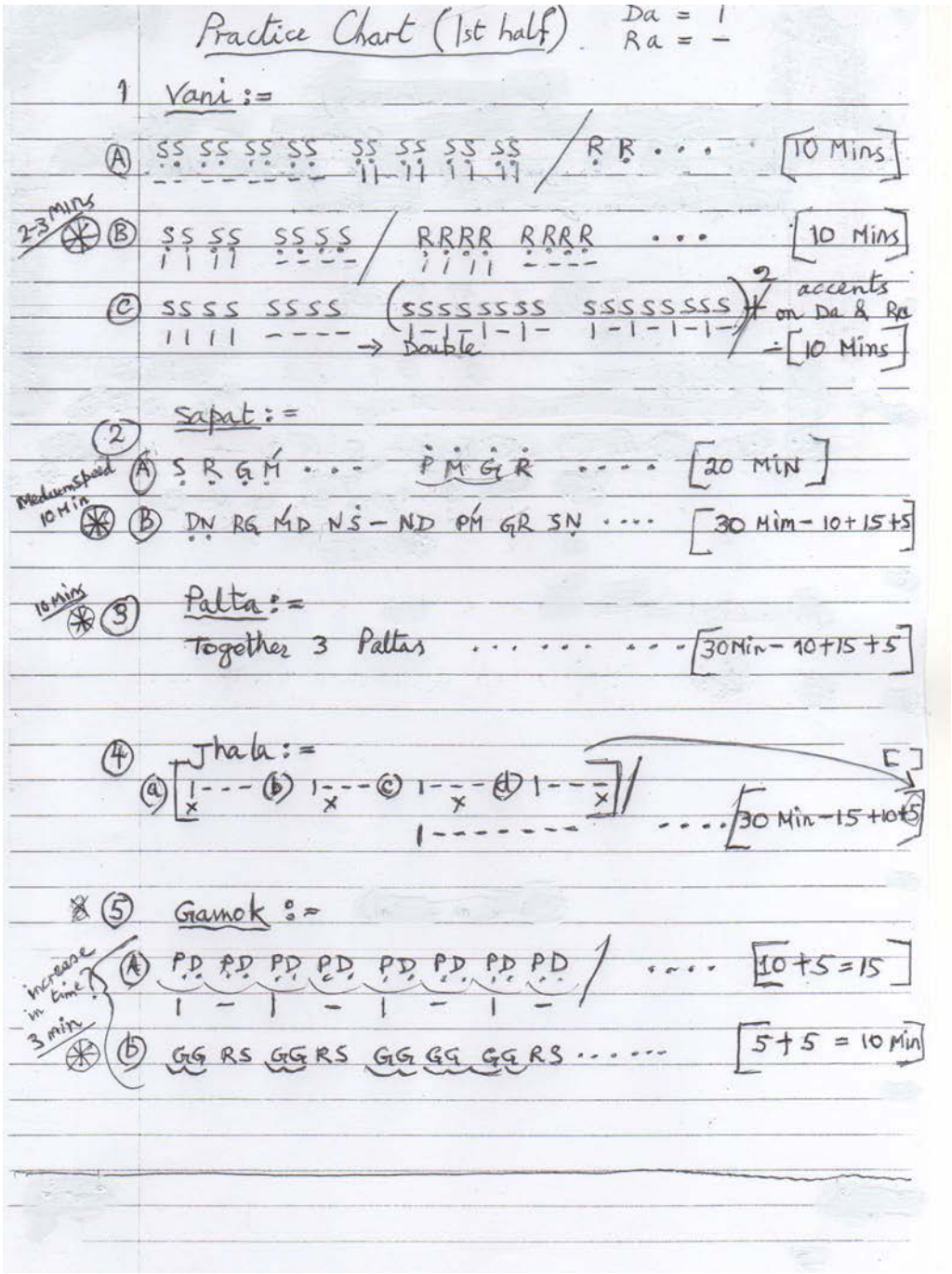


Figure 6.2: Practice Chart, Part I ('1st half')

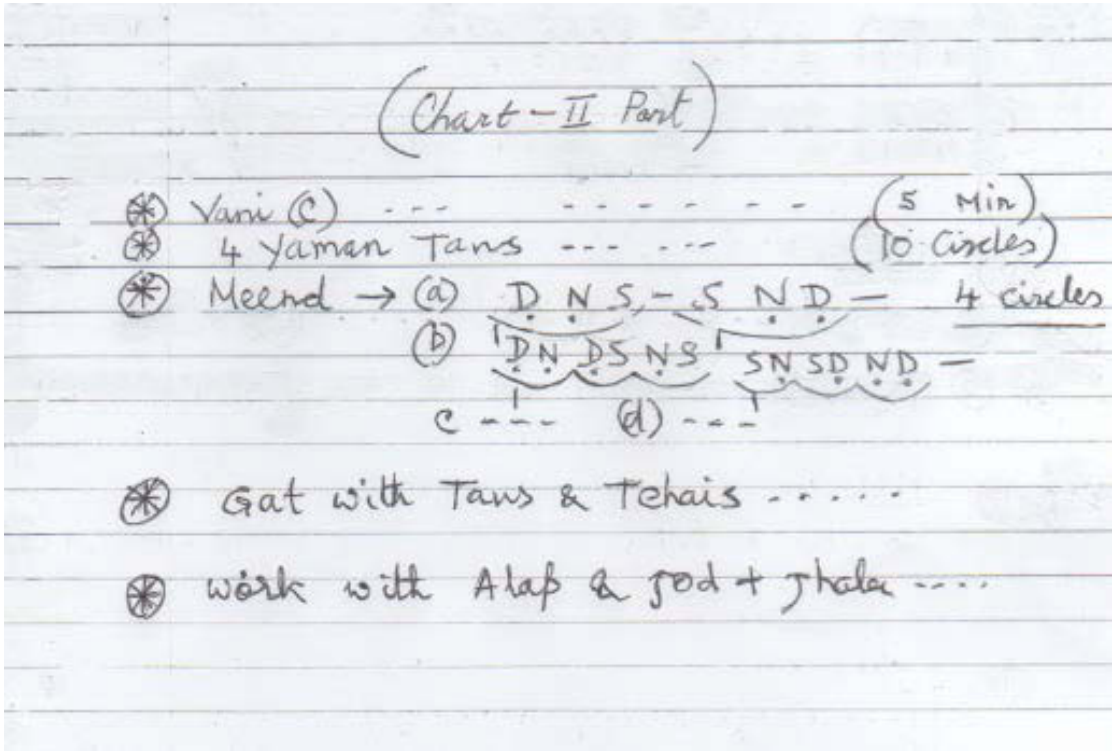


Figure 6.3: Practice Chart, Part II ('II Part')

In this section, I outline the exercises in the Practice Chart, Part I. I illustrate the exercises in the same way Kushal Das wrote them on the practice chart: a numbered category, and each category subdivided into a series of exercises denoted by letters. *Mizrab* strokes are shown underneath with the time instruction on the right hand side. In addition to what Das wrote out, I add the extra detail that was orally transmitted. I include staff notation in order to make the material more accessible to readers. Where appropriate I add symbols to signify accents, ornaments, and the rhythmic frame of *teentaal* (the common rhythmic cycle of sixteen beats).
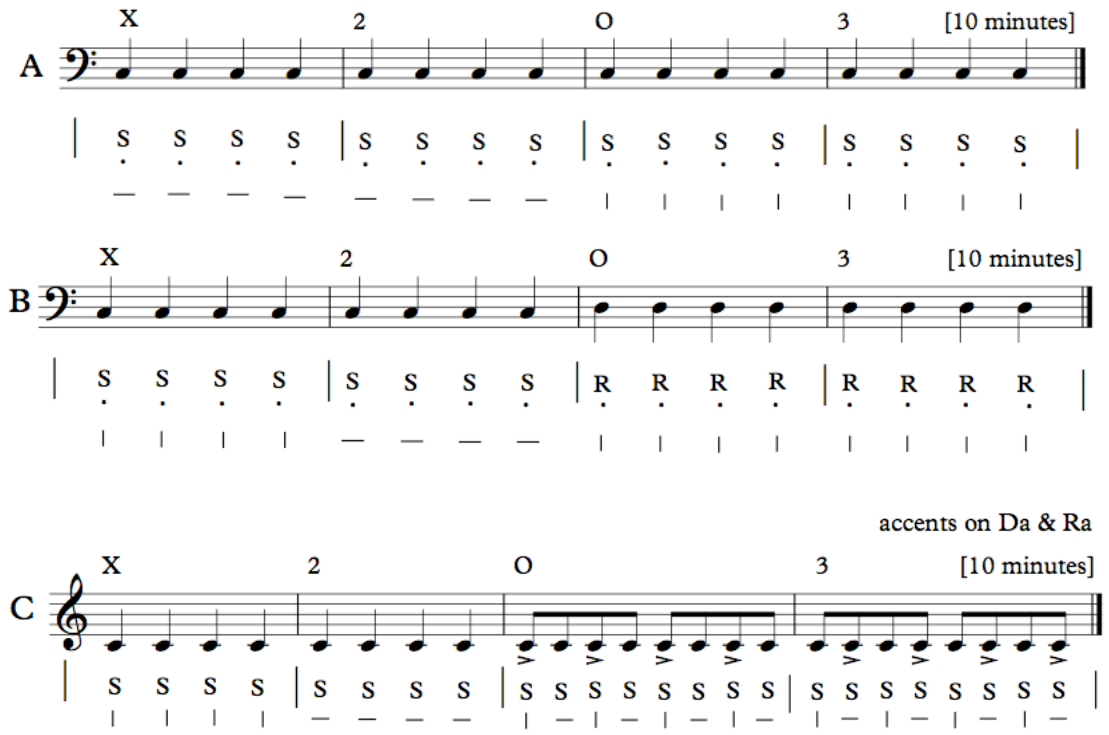
The majority of these exercises are set to *teentaal*, and Das recommended playing them with an electronic *tablā* machine with an electric *tānpurā* in the background. Everything in the chart is set to the scale of Rāga Yaman, and most of the material complies with the melodic movement of Rāga Yaman.[36] These exercises thus function to internalise the melodic movement of the *rāga* in tandem with technical development.

[36] The scale of Rāga Yaman is equivalent to the Lydian mode of Western music theory, containing all natural notes except for the forth degree of the scale, which is augmented. In Rāga Yaman the first degree of the scale is not played while ascending the scale and the fifth degree of the scale is also commonly left out in ascent. This principle is adhered to in the majority of the exercises.

Practice chart, Part I: morning practice

1: *Vani* – right hand exercises

Das begins Part I and Part II with an exercise called '*vani*', for the right hand. He explained to me that any practice session should start with *vani* in order to establish proper technique in the right hand before the attention goes to the left hand, playing melody. He gave me a series of three *vani* exercises. He explained how this work 'evens out the stroke', balancing the sound produced by the upward and downward strokes of the *mizrab* in terms of both volume and tone. The exercises also help develop accurate pulse and rhythm.



Example 6.4: *Vani* exercises

All three exercises are to be played for ten minutes at a medium speed, gradually moving up and down the scale of Rāga Yaman. Through these exercises, the stroke of the *mizrab* is 'balanced' through a process of isolating and alternating the upward and downward strokes. Exercise C starts 'single speed' with one note per beat for eight beats, before doubling up to two notes per beat. It is to be played as a continuous cycle alternating between slow and fast. In the first four beats of the fast passage, accents are placed on upward strokes (*Da*), on the beat; in the second four beats of the fast passage the accents are on the downward strokes (*Ra*), off the beat.

During our lessons, Das outlined further benefits from *vani* exercises in addition to 'evening out the stroke'. First, he described how a very small movement in the *mizrab* is used in modern technique, in order to play faster. Second, he stated that when playing 'very fast *tans*', the *mizrab* stroke is reversed from *Da Ra* (up-down) to *Ra Da* (down-up). He stated how *vani* exercises help to develop these techniques, especially when they are practised on the second string, without touching the first string. This requires a very small and exact movement of the *mizrab*, thus helping to develop the technique for very fast speeds. In line with the idea that the nature of practice changes as a musician progresses, Das said that the time used for *vani* should gradually decrease.

2: *Sapat* – scale exercises

The second set of exercises in Part I focuses on the left hand and are based on playing a series of notes up and down the scale. '*Sapat*' denotes scale exercises. In Das's chart the movement of the notes is set to Rāga Yaman, complying with, and exemplifying its melodic movement. In Rāga Yaman the notes *sa* and *pa* are not played as part of the ascending scale, whereas all notes are played in the descending scale. Das prescribed two *sapat* exercises: the first covers two and a half octaves (from low *sa* to high *pa*), almost the entire range of the *sitār*; the second covers just over one octave.

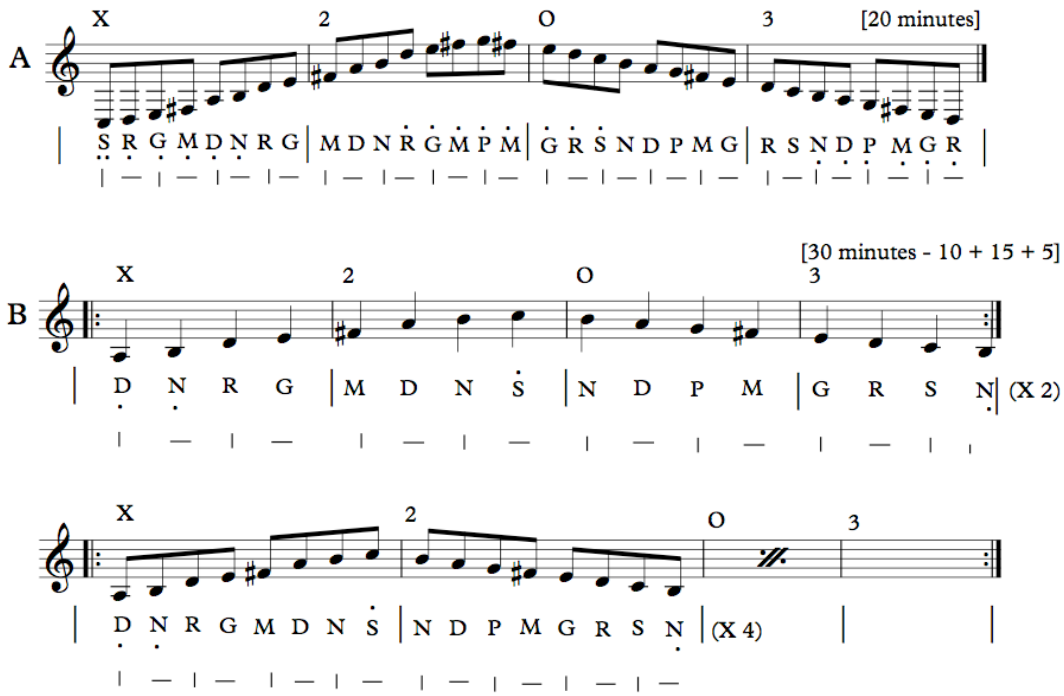


Figure 6.5: *Sapat*

Das gave clear instructions regarding how these exercises are to be played. The first exercise (A) is played at a medium-fast (or 'comfortable') tempo for twenty minutes non-stop. The speed for the second exercise (B) is much more complex: A series of notes is played twice at a slow speed, and then four more times at exactly double this speed. This sequence is then repeated in a cyclical fashion. The slow and fast speeds each take up two cycles of *teentaal*, and the entire exercise takes four cycles of *teentaal* to complete. The entire exercise is then practised at three different tempos. It is traditional in Indian classical music to practise certain exercises at three speeds. Theoretically, the first speed is very slow, the second speed is exactly double this tempo, and the third speed doubles the tempo again.[37] In order to carry out this method, you need to judge how slow the first speed should be by determining whether you can play the same thing four times as fast. This results in an extremely slow tempo, which requires remarkable patience and focus to sustain. Das presented a modified version of the traditional three-speed model. The first speed is very slow: 'your full concentration needs to be on every note, your technique needs to be perfect, the sound needs to be perfect, and your body should be completely relaxed' (Das 2009, personal correspondence during lesson). The second speed is the fastest you can play the exercise 'without mistakes… comfortable speed'. The third speed is faster than you can play, 'with mistakes… uncomfortable speed'. The second *sapat* exercise was set for thirty minutes in total: ten minutes at the very slow speed; fifteen minutes at the second speed; and five minutes at the extremely fast speed.

Das claimed that this method produces rapid progress in technique. I can certainly corroborate this contention through my own experience. After practising an exercise very slowly and attentively for a sustained period, the same exercise can be played much cleaner and more precisely at a fast speed than would have been the case otherwise. After practising an exercise at a speed beyond my capacity, I feel as though I have been stretched a little in terms of ability, reaching forward to higher speeds,

[37] I am referring to descriptions on how to practise that I received from some teachers including Jagdeep Singh Bedi. I say 'theoretically', because I have not actually witnessed musicians playing exercises in three speeds like this. This kind of instruction exemplifies the ideal of very slow practice; the extent to which such practice is carried out in reality is open to scrutiny. However, in my experience, practising exercises at two speeds is very common, where an exercise is first played at a slow speed and then played twice as fast. The idea of practising in three speeds also reflects the three speeds of *laya* (tempo): *vilambit* (slow), *madyalaya* (medium), *drut* (fast).

and eventually attaining them. However, this practice method requires a concerted effort in terms of concentration and discipline. The second speed, playing as fast as possible without making mistakes, is relatively easy to perform, but requires stamina and perseverance to sustain for fifteen minutes non-stop. Playing at the very fast speed for five minutes continuously is extremely physically demanding and can result in tension, cramps, and pain. Perhaps ironically, what I personally find even more challenging is playing a single exercise extremely slowly for ten minutes non-stop. This requires remarkable discipline, patience, and focus to perform.[38]

3: *Palṭā* – 'variations', 'turns'

Palṭās are short melodic motives or patterns of notes, which are practised up and down the scale of an instrument (or voice). A huge variety of *palṭās* can be found in Indian classical music textbooks. My different *sitār* teachers each showed me a number of *palṭās* that ranged from very simple to a little complex. None were as complex as the long *palṭā* exercise Das outlined. His *palṭā* consists of three separate *palṭās* that are to be practised individually at first and then combined as one long *palṭā* when the individual parts are adequately memorised.

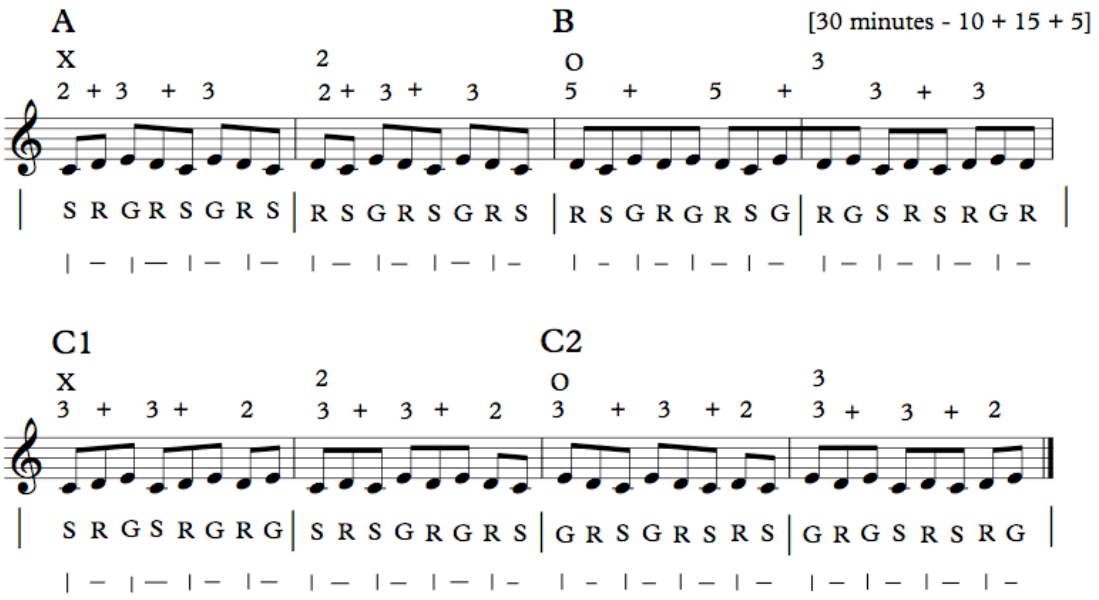


Figure 6.6: *palṭā*

[38] The time-honoured wisdom appears to be that in order to play very fast you need to practise very slowly. My own contention is that the slower you practise the more engrained the information becomes in your 'muscle memory', leading to a more embodied and cleaner technique.

The *palṭās* A, B and C (C = C1 + C2) are all played with two notes per beat. The long *palṭā* is performed by playing A, B, C1 and C2 in succession. The entire pattern then becomes thirty-two beats long, taking two cycles of *teentaal* to complete. The numbers above the notation show the internal rhythmic subdivisions that these *palṭās* embody. The value of each number is half a beat, so that '2' takes up the space of one beat and '3' takes up the space of one and a half beats. The rhythmic patterns add up to various combinations of four beats, except for *palṭā* B, which is a more syncopated eight-beat pattern.

Following the standard procedure for *palṭā* exercises, this exercise is to be moved up the scale one degree at a time until the highest fretted note on the *sitār* is reached (for my *sitār* this note is high *ma*). The exercise is then played in a similar way descending down the scale, one degree at a time, until low *ga* is reached (played on the second string). At this point you again ascend the scale until you reach *sa* in the middle octave where you begun. It can take several minutes to complete one cycle, depending on the tempo. As a general rule, when descending down the scale, *palṭās* may be 'inverted' (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.209). For example, one popular *palṭā* is 'SGRMGRS- RMGPMGR-' etc… in ascending order, and 'ṠDNPDNṠ- NPDMPDN-' etc… in descending order.[39] Das specified a variation of this principle of 'inversion' for his *palṭā*: when ascending the scale the *palṭā* is played in the following order A, B, C1, C2; when descending, this order is reversed (C2, C1, B, A) but the internal form of the variations remain the same.

[39] This example was taught to me by *sitār* player Amrendra Jha. It can also be seen in Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.209).

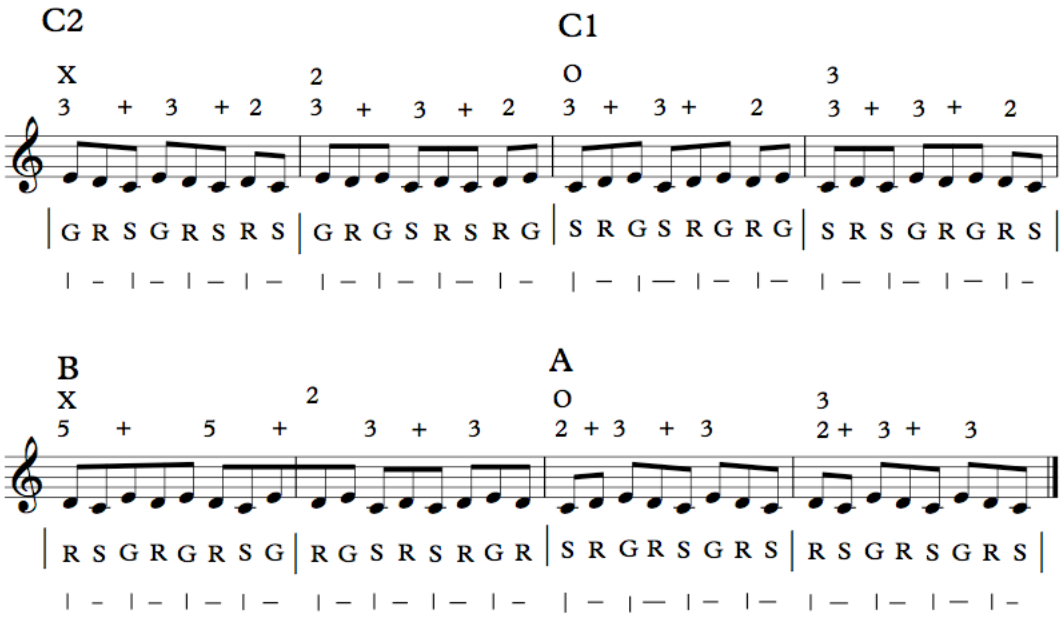


Figure 6.7: *palṭā*, descending pattern

Das set the time for this exercise as thirty minutes, to be performed in the same three-speed formula as the previous exercise: ten minutes at the very slow tempo, fifteen minutes at the second tempo, and five minutes at the very fast tempo. He instructed me to play every note with equal loud strokes, exclaiming 'we need power'.

This *palṭā* consists of various permutations of only three notes. Das stated that all the possible combinations of three notes are contained within it. He also declared that 'this is the only *palṭā* you need to practise because all *palṭās* are contained in this *palṭā'* (2007, personal correspondence during lesson).[40] Practising *palṭās* is essential in the learning process of Indian classical music, providing both technical fluency and material for improvisation. *Palṭā* practice produces the capacity to create seemingly endless permutations and combinations of notes from a very small amount of material.

[40] It could be argued that not all *palṭās* are contained in this single exercise. For example the simple rhythmic formulas 4+4, or 4+2+2, are not contained in this *palṭā*. Melodic movement such as 'SGRM' is also not evident. However, I understood Das's statement as an assertion regarding the comprehensive nature of his practice system, which cannot be denied.

4: *Jhālā*
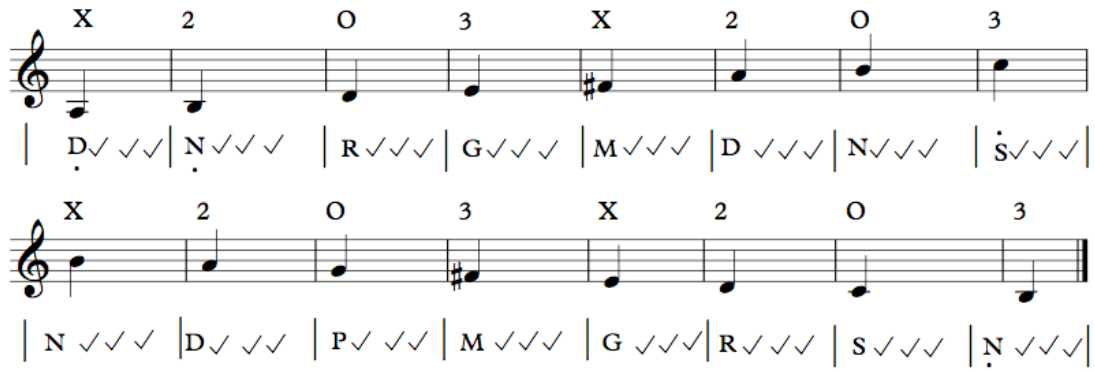
This exercise again employs the three-speed method. This time the slow speed is set for fifteen minutes, the medium speed for ten minutes, and the very fast speed for five minutes. Basic *jhālā* technique on *sitār* involves interplay between the main melody string and the *chikārī* strings (rhythmic drone strings). This exercise involves playing eight notes ascending and descending, in line with the melodic movement of Rāga Yaman (the notes are identical to the *sapat* exercise, 2B, figure 6.5).

The first four cycles of *teentaal* is played four times, 'A, B, C and D': For each round, an accent is placed on a specific beat, changing sequentially: For A, an accent is placed on the first beat of each *vibhag* (four beat section); for B, the accent moves to the second beat of each *vibhag*; for C, the accent is on the third beat; and for D, the accent is on last beat of each *vibhag*.

For the longer cycle, E, all notes are played with an equally strong emphasis. The five cycles A, B, C, D and E, are played in succession as one long cycle, taking twenty-four circles of *teentaal* to complete. This long cycle is repeated in the three-speed method, as outlined above. There is a clear function and rationale to this exercise. Similar in some respects to the first exercise (*vani*), this *jhālā* exercise is designed to 'even out the stroke' (Das January 2007, personal correspondence during lesson) and give strength and consistency to the *chikārī* stroke.

(Play four times) A, B, C and D – accents move each round:

[30 minutes - 15 + 10 + 5]



E – all beats strong (play once):
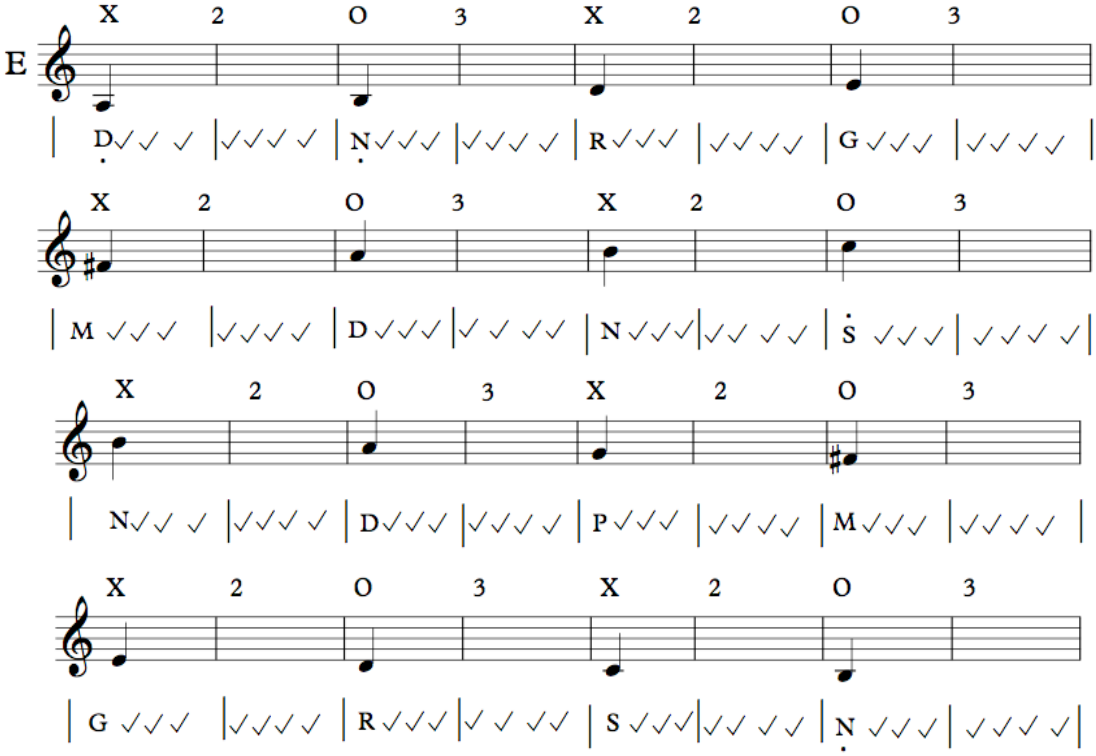


Figure 6.8: *Jhālā*

5: *Gamak*

The term *gamak* (or '*gamok*' as Das wrote it) can refer to ornaments in general (especially in reference to vocal music), or to a specific ornament (especially in relation to stringed instruments). In this case the latter definition is implied, where '*gamak*' refers to the rapid and repetitive movement from one pitch to another.

Kushal Das instructed me to practice two *gamak* exercises. One is purely technical, and the other amounts to 'repertoire' set to Rāga Yaman. The technical exercise (figure 6.9) involves playing each note several times, approached from the note below. This exercise is then treated in a similar way to *vani* and *palṭā*, ascending the scale successively, one degree at a time – before descending in a similar fashion, covering the entire range of the main melody string. The practice time is set for ten minutes at a medium-fast tempo and five minutes at a very fast tempo. Exercise B (figure 6.10) is a more composed sequence of music, amounting to a small section of 'repertoire' in Rāga Yaman stretching over four cycles of *teentaal*. I was instructed to practise it at a medium-fast tempo for five minutes and then a very fast tempo for five minutes. The *gamak* exercises are the most physically challenging of the entire practice chart. Exercise A is particularly demanding; playing it for fifteen minutes non-stop involves pain and considerable determination to execute.

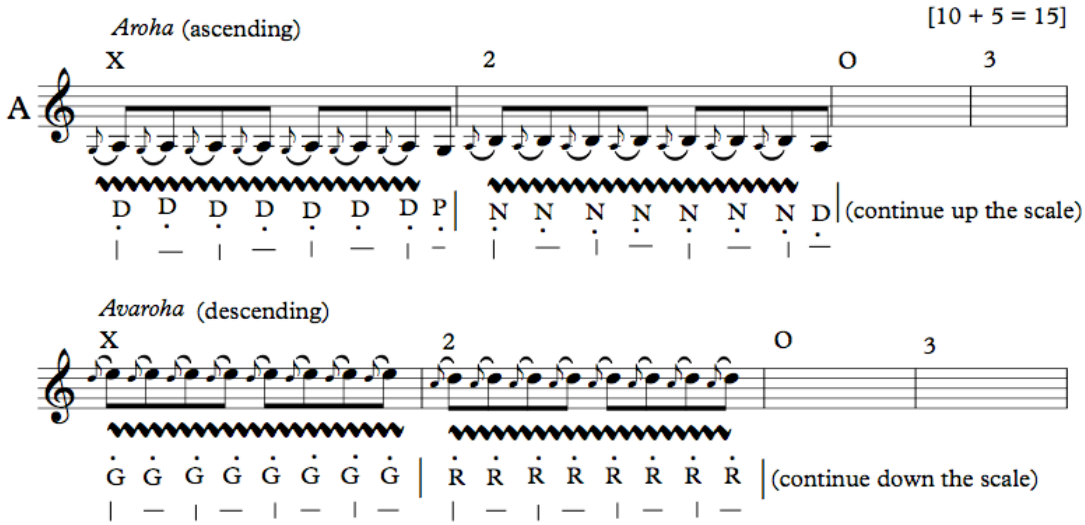


Figure 6.9: *Gamak* A - technical exercise

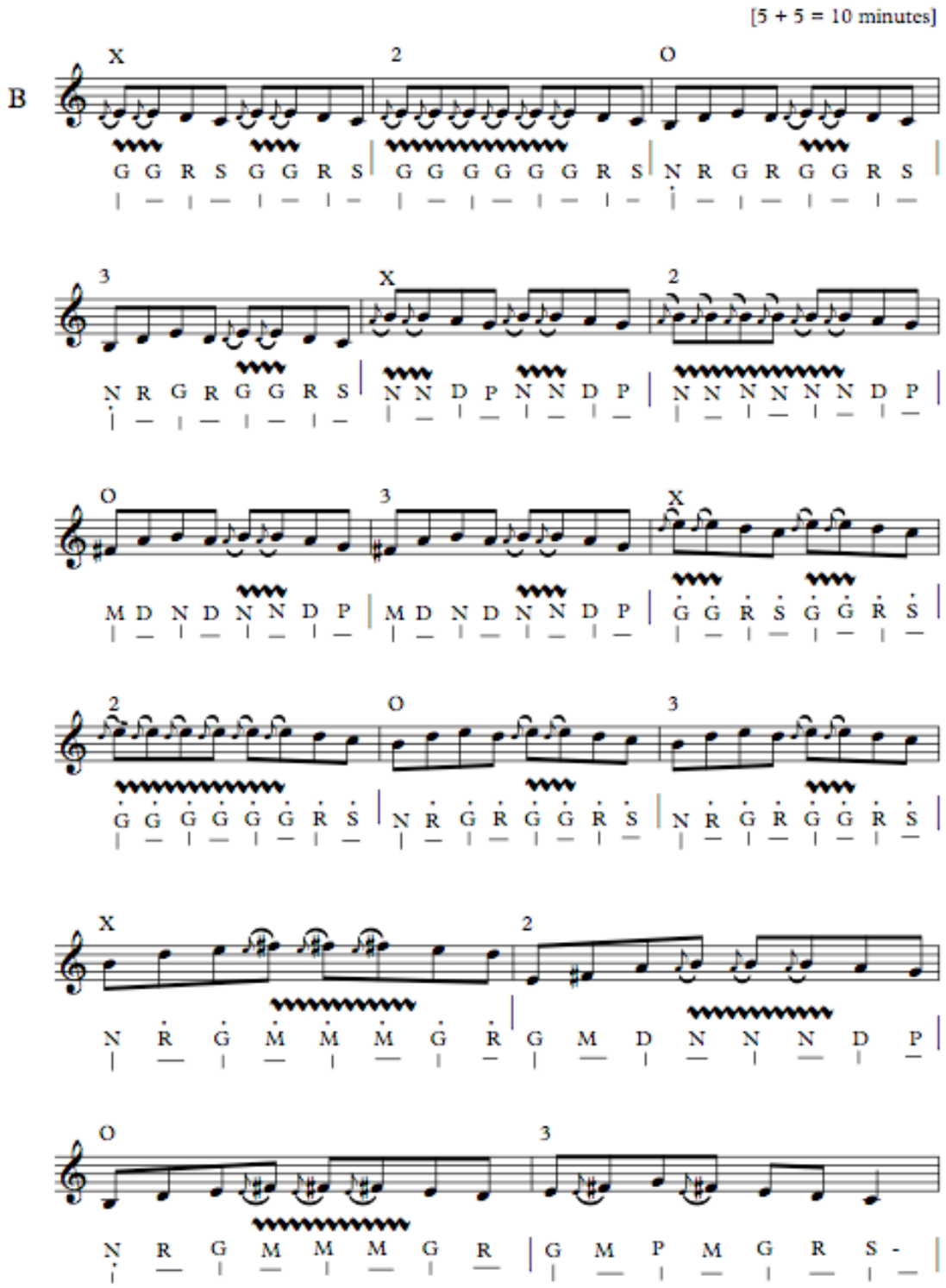


Figure 6.10: *Gamak* B - repertoire

Das was very precise about the left hand technique for these exercises. In exercise A, all notes are played with the first finger, but when ascending the scale (*aroha*), the second finger is used to support the first finger ('with support from the second finger' [personal correspondence January 2007]); this means that the second finger rests on

the first finger to lend extra strength. He indicated that all the movement should come only from the fingers and wrist, while the arm and shoulder should remain relaxed and still. He stated that this efficiency of movement – which he called 'very casual' – helps in the development of very fast *gamak*. Das also suggested using alternate stroking patterns for *gamak*. Traditionally, all *Da* strokes (upstrokes) are used, but Das said that using alternate strokes (*Da Ra*) means you can eventually play faster. This is a modern approach to efficiency.

Furthermore, Das illustrated how *gamak* can be performed in two ways. In the first method, the note is approached from the note below in the scale; for example *ga* is reached by playing *re* and bending up to *ga*. The second approach is for fast *gamak*. Das explained how this is played with only a very slight *meend* approaching the note, so the note is reached from a microtone below it, as opposed to a whole note in the scale. He pointed out that in very fast tempos you don't have time to play the whole bend from the note below, and that when you only play a microtonal bend instead 'the audience hears the whole note as if it is played' (personal correspondence February 2007). He presented this as a clever and preconceived trick, where the effect of the music for the audience, along with the efficiency of technique are prioritised. *Gamak* is the last category of exercise prescribed for the morning practice.

The logic and pragmatism of the practice system

Besides the points I have illustrated regarding the function and effectiveness of individual exercises, there is additional internal and overarching logic to Kushal Das's practice chart. First, there is a clear rationale behind the ordering of the exercises. Das explained this to me in part, and I suggest some further explanation: *vani* 'balances' the right hand before the attention shifts to the left hand; *sapat* warms up the left hand; *palṭā* is a more intense workout for the left hand; then the right hand works hard as we enter *jhālā* and the left hand gets a bit of a rest. After this rest, the left hand is worked hard once again for the final exercises. This final category of exercise, *gamak*, is the most intense exercise for the left hand. For this reason – as stated by Das – it is at the end, to be performed when the fingers are fully warmed up. After *gamak*, the fingers can rest, and the practice session is complete.

Second, the practice chart illustrates an important principle that Das explained to me, the effectiveness of sustained repetition. The premise is that practising a single technique for a long period of time is much more rewarding in terms of developing technique, than practising many different techniques in the same amount of time. Part I of the practice chart is three hours long, yet it only includes five categories of technique and nine actual exercises, three of which are to be played for thirty minutes non-stop (in the three speed method of very slow, fast and very fast).[41] Through isolating and focusing on specific techniques in a repetitive fashion, for sustained time periods, they become fully embodied. Das emphasised the importance of continuity through daily practice. He set out an alternative thirty-minute version of Part I, for mornings when three-hour's practice is not possible. Rather than decreasing the times of all the exercises, he reduced the number of exercises from nine to four, thus maintaining the sustained repetition of individual exercises.

Finally, it is clear that each exercise in Part 1 has its own function and internal logic. *Vani* balances the right hand through a method of isolating the upward and downward strokes of the *mizrab* through a number of different sequences. *Sapat* trains the left hand to use the entire neck of the *sitār*, while simultaneously the basic ascending/descending movement of Rāga Yaman is internalised. *Palṭā* provides a wide vocabulary of possible permutations of only three notes; this can be applied to improvisation, and in particular to the production of *tans* (fast melodic lines). *Jhālā* again evens out the stroke, incorporates Rāga Yaman, and trains the student for the final virtuosic section of a *rāga* presentation. *Gamak* is an essential technique for an advanced *sitār* player.

Practice chart, part II: evening practice

Part II of the practice chart (figure 6.3) is for evening practice. I outline it briefly here, and only illustrate one category of exercise in depth. Part II starts in the same way as Part I with *vani* (right hand technique), but here it is set for only five minutes, as opposed to thirty minutes. The second exercise is an extremely long *tan* in Rāga Yaman. With two notes per beat, the *tan* takes nine cycles of *teentaal* to complete. It took me weeks to memorise it before I could play it in full. It is to be played ten times

[41] This only covers a small portion of the range of techniques involved in a comprehensive study of the *sitār*.

without stopping. This is a fantastic exercise for internalising the melodic movement of Rāga Yaman and for practising melodic material for *tans*.

Meend (bending pitch) exercises follow this. Das prescribed six *meend* exercises. Each exercise has two parts, the first part ascends from the starting note; the second part mirrors the first, inverting the melodic movement, and descending back to the starting note. The exercises get progressively more complex, developing in a systematic and sequential fashion as more permutations and more notes are added. The sequence begins with the simplest *meend* exercise conceivable, a simple bend from one pitch to the next pitch in the scale, and back again, using just two notes. The following three exercises use three notes and the pattern between them becomes progressively more complex. The final two exercises use four notes (the final exercise is not transcribed).

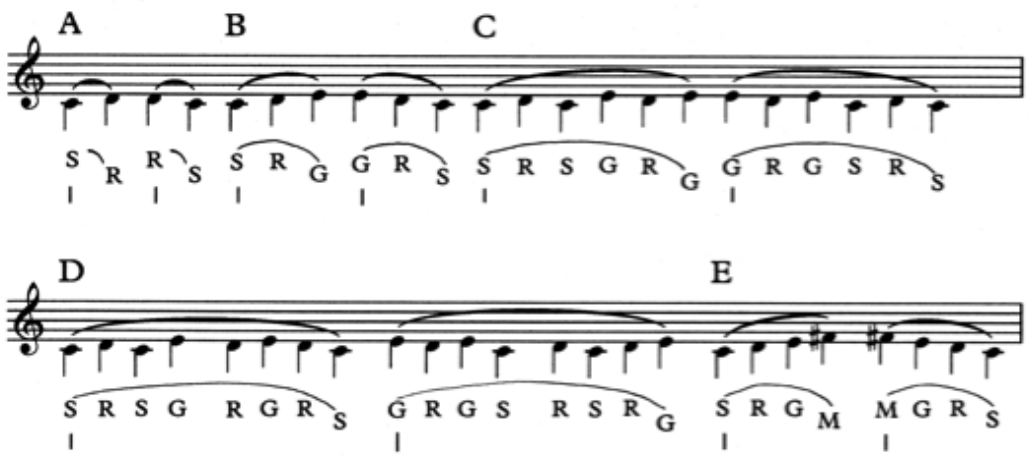


Figure 6.11: *Meend* exercises

Das prescribed exact details on how these *meend* exercises should be practised. Only '*Da*' (upward) strokes are used, with one stroke for each phrase. The *mizrab* plays the first string, and then touches (or 'rests') on the second string. The logic of this technique – as explained by Das – is that a larger part of the *mizrab* is in contact with the melody string resulting in both a fuller tone and more sustain. This is in direct contrast to the technique used for fast *tans*, where only the very tip of the *mizrab* touches the string.[42] Each exercise is played four times on each degree of the scale,

[42] Das explained to me how the tip of the *mizrab* can also be used for *meend*, when a particular 'effect' is required. This technique produces a thinner tone. The nuance of tonal variation is highly developed

gradually moving up and down the melodic range of the *sitār*. They are to be played one at a time for four full cycles of the main melody string (spanning almost two octaves), starting with a slow speed, gradually getting faster, and finishing with a fast speed. A *tablā* machine is not used.

The fourth category of practice is '*gat* with *tans* and *tehais*' (usually spelt '*tihais*'). This involves the practice of a wide body of set repertoire in Rāga Yaman, along with some improvisation. The repertoire Das taught me includes *gats* (fixed compositions set to time cycles); *tans* (melodic lines that weave in and out of a *gat*, or long passages of fixed melodic material); and *tihāis* (a phrase repeated three times, effectively amounting to a rhythmic cadence). The improvisation is based on Rāga Yaman, in part reflecting the set repertoire, and in part based on a number of other exercises and instructions.

The final category of practice is 'work with *alap, jod* and *jhala*'. This represents work on a body of lessons he gave me in this area, all in Rāga Yaman. Much of this work involves improvisation, based on the principles Das outlined, and reflecting the oral transmission experience of my lessons with him. The total time suggested for Part II of the practice chart is three hours, but this is not broken down in the prescribed manner of Part I.

The logic of the sequence of Part II is similar to Part I. Starting with 'balancing' the right hand; the focus then goes to the left hand with the big *tan*. *Meend* is next; Das stated that *meend* needs to be the last technical exercise practised because the left hand gets very tired after it. Finally, after all the technical practice is complete (the morning practice and the first half of the evening practice), focus then shifts to repertoire and improvisation, when technique is applied towards the exploration of *rāga*.

A note on pedagogical disparity: Kushal Das and Sougata Roy Chowdhury

The exercises given to me by Kushal Das are representative of the pedagogical tradition of Hindustāni music in general, in relation to technical training. However it

---

in Hindustāni music, yet in my experience few musicians explain it in such a considered manner as Kushal Das.

must be noted that Kushal Das is exceptional in the level of detail and in the scientific approach he advocates and expounds. Although other teachers taught me similar exercises, they did not prescribe them with the same degree of detail.

Sougata Roy Chowdhury's approach was very different. His teaching was based entirely on the language and development of *rāga*. The only exercises he prescribed were short scalar exercises based on the ascending/descending movement of particular *rāgas*. He presented very little fixed musical material, a few *gats*, or short 'fixed compositions' set to a time cycle, and perhaps some short additional material. These often changed as a lesson progressed, with illustrations of possible variations and elaborations. The vast majority of our lessons consisted of *ālāp*, and some *gat* improvisation, all conducted in a loose call and response manner.[43] There was almost nothing precise, tangible, or concrete that could be practised during *riāz* arising out of his lessons. This fostered a looser approach to *riāz*, one where I would focus almost entirely on *rāga* improvisation and on the internalisation and experience of specific *rāgas*, through following his guidance. Despite his fluid pedagogical approach, Sougata Roy Chowdhury was always very precise about the language of *rāga*. He imparted some of his considerable knowledge of *rāga* onto me through a naturalistic, intuitive, and interactive teaching method.

Kushal Das is proud of the efficiency of his teaching method, and he stated how such a method is necessary in the modern era because people have less time to practise than they used to have. He spoke about how people used to practise for long periods of time, but the way they practised was not as 'scientific' as it is now (personal correspondence during lessons 2007). He claimed that three hours practise using this new method is equivalent to eight hour's practice in the past.[44] The detail of his

[43] One reason for Sougata Roy Chowdhury to teach me in this manner is that he is a *sarod* player, so *sitār* technique was outside the scope of our lessons. Another reason is the fact that I had already attained basic technical proficiency by the time we first sat together. In general, however, the difference between Roy Chowdhury and Das adds up to a striking methodological disparity.

[44] Although this claim may be true as far as the development of technique is concerned, Hindustāni musicians express nostalgia for the older, slower, pedagogical system. During my conversations with Hindustāni musicians, anecdotal comments were sometimes made amounting to concerns about how the modern focus on technique produces a different quality of music to the traditional, unhurried pedagogical approach of the past. Reservations were made regarding the loss of a devotional quality for the sake of entertaining the audience (see Chapter 7). However, with respect to Kushal Das's music, I have never heard such a remark made. Rather he is respected for both his *rāga* 'purity', and his astonishing virtuosity.

practice methodology has been refined to a remarkable degree, amounting to a formulaic and systematic training for the development of technique, founded on a rationale of efficiency, effectiveness, and pragmatism.

The practice chart: my experience

Drawing insight from my experience of using the practice chart, I locate a curious connection between the prescribed, repetitive nature of the exercises on one hand, and the transcendental nature of the experience of practising them on the other. I used the practice chart daily from January 2007 in both India and Ireland for a period of about six months. It was not always possible to complete both three-hour sessions as prescribed, and sometimes I had to settle for one (or both) of the shorter versions he suggested. The experience was both immensely challenging and highly rewarding. At first I found the exercises impossible to complete as set out in the chart. Some of the exercises – such as '*palṭā*' (figure 6.6) and '4 Yaman *Tans*' (Part II, exercise 2) – required a gradual process of memorisation before they could be performed in the prescribed manner. Also, when I began the act of repetitive prolonged practice of a single exercise at fast speeds my hands went into cramp, or the tip of my left hand index finger simply hurt too much to continue, due to constant pressure against the thin steel string. It took considerable time and persistence before I could perform the entire chart as prescribed.

The morning practice (Part I) amounts to a test of sustained focus and physicality. The most difficult aspect is the repetition of a single exercise for thirty minutes non-stop. The act of doing just one thing for so long is a test of perseverance, patience, and motivation. This is especially true when practising the exercises at a very slow speed. At first, this prolonged repetitive act made me feel like a machine, not a musician, as if I was training in a sport as opposed to an art form. However, as I persevered and began to see the benefits of extended practice in the three-speed method, it became more satisfying. The experience of this daily routine gradually deepened for me. At times, it felt like an intimate process of personal growth and musical evolution. In addition to this, the act of sustained repetitive practice in slow and fast speeds became a kind of meditation. The details of the exercises were so prescribed that conscious cognitive processes were bypassed within a short time; yet at the same time, an incredibly focused form of concentration was required.

My experience is that long periods of singular focus transports me into a sustained state of heightened attention. This experience is intrinsically meaningful. For me, daily *riāz* conducted in this way quickly became a kind of 'spiritual discipline', which had little to do with music, *rāga*, aesthetics, or improvisation; the spiritual aspect of the experience came from the nature of the singular focus and the enlivening, 'transcendental', physicality of the experience. It is perhaps ironic that the most systematic and aesthetically mundane form of *riāz*, the practice of pure technique, engendered the most transcendent experiences for me. Repetitive sustained focus is not only extremely effective from the perspective of developing technique; it also has a profound effect on consciousness.[45] Here pragmatism and spirituality appear to converge in an extraordinary way.[46]

Part II begins in a similar vein with three categories of technical exercises. But these practice sessions are principally concerned with repertoire and improvisation in Rāga Yaman. For me, this form of practice engenders a different quality of experience to the regimental repetition of pure technique. There is a greater emphasis on cognitive processes: learning repertoire, analysing structural elements in *rāga* and *taal*, and applying these structures, along with new techniques, to *rāga* improvisation. The experience of this practice also includes the flow of improvisation and the feeling of being 'inside' a *rāga*.

Completing Kushal Das's practice chart was a strict part of my daily routine throughout February 2007 in my rented room in Lake Market, Kolkata. I began writing brief accounts of my experience of *riāz*, directly after the morning sessions. The following piece of writing comes from that body of experiential writing. I have pieced fragments of this writing together, and edited them in order to create this succinct testament of my experience of *riāz*.

[45] This idea is further explored in Chapter 7 in relation to *rāga* improvisation, where I consider how the act of concentration coupled with 'being lost in *rāga*' may function as a release of the analytical frame of reference, into a transcendental 'beyond' experience.

[46] On a more pragmatic level, I feel that the challenge of performing prolonged technical exercises necessitates and fosters a particular quality of focus that benefits a musician in his capacity to sustain a full-length *rāga* presentation, which may last over one hour.

Before breakfast but after a glass of water, I light an incense stick, turn on the *tānpurā*, tune up, get settled into position, and begin. My gaze is directed sequentially to a number of locations, first my right arm, hand, and fingers, checking their position. Then the left hand thumb at the back of the neck, always placed directly behind the index finger. I start the first exercise.

Time takes on an elastic quality during *riāz*. Shortly after beginning the first exercise I look at my clock, the prospect of ten minutes non-stop seems daunting; time appears to move extremely slowly, stretched out laboriously. As I resolve myself to the task and focus, I quickly loose track of time. My gaze is redirected to the angle of the right hand fingers, I listen to the tone, I relax the movement, then the left hand takes my attention, I relax this also, focusing on the sound. As I concentrate I look straight ahead, staring at nothing in particular, periodically closing my eyes to internalise the experience, and find the motivation to continue. Suddenly the ten minutes has passed. With relief and satisfaction, I move on to the next exercise.

Throughout the practice, my conscious experience takes on many forms. At times my internal mental dialogue takes over from the experience, I regain focus through breathing, I open my eyes wide and blink to centre myself back into the practice. I am reminded of what Kushal Das once said to me, that you should sweat to get the full benefit from practice. I imagine his years of practice. His discipline inspires me to continue. Seeing his writing in front of me is also a curious motivational tool, like a quasi-presence of the *guru*. At times my hands begin to tense up. I find myself breathing into my hands to relax the muscles. Determination takes over and I persevere.

Sometimes I feel as if I pass through a threshold into a heightened conscious space. This can happen when the exercise becomes completely mechanical, no thought is present, as no conscious cognitive process is required. The mind becomes a void, a vacuum, sucking in pure experience. The physical action becomes automatic. At these points I find myself as a witness to the practice, watching, listening. There can be a profound physical effect to this experience. The *sitār* suddenly feels very small, or I see just a portion of the neck through a kind of tunnel vision, where the rest of the room disappears from view, and my entire body dissipates, becoming just one hand. If I start thinking about this, I immediately loose this heightened experience, get distracted, and inevitably make a mistake in the exercise. The heightened state becomes more normalised through continuous daily practice. It becomes an important and seductive daily food. Technical practice has an addictive quality – the tangible feeling of progress, the enlivening physicality, the tickling sensation it leaves on the fingertips, the state of being it induces – it quickly becomes a daily need.

Where Pragmatism and Ideology Converge

In this concluding section I further extend the discussion on the relationship between pragmatism and spiritual ideology with respect to practising Hindustāni music. I have already viewed practice from both ideological and pragmatic perspectives; at times we have seen how these two perspectives converge or oppose. The terminology used to indicate musical practice is invested with spiritual connotations. The pragmatic realities of *riāz* are often elevated to spiritual in significance through an ideology that is intrinsic to the discursive culture of Hindustāni music. Some musicians consider the act of musical practice a form of worship, or an evocation of divine presence or grace. Neuman suggests that the lore of the tradition serves a 'moral' function (1990 [1980], p.31), to motivate and inspire musicians to practise more.

I presented two very different approaches to practice as outlined by Kushal Das. The 'special practice method' he described comes across as an esoteric, intimate encounter with sound and the 'presence' of *rāga*. This method appears to act as training for the enactment of an ideological model stating that in the context of *rāga* presentation, the music is not created by the artist as such, but rather flows through him. This is a very different approach to the instruction he outlined in the practice chart, which is prescribed and fixed to a remarkable degree, founded on a premise of efficiency and pragmatism. These two methods suggest two very different experiential modes of being and qualities of focus. However, in my own routine practice of Das's regimental *riāz* system, I found the experience transcendental, due to the very nature of prolonged intense focus. Extreme dedication (or 'devotion') to practice, not only produces astonishing musicianship, but also may induce states of heightened awareness. Such experience is commonly defined as 'spiritual' through the Indian frame of reference.

These extreme examples serve to highlight the co-existence of visceral intuition and scientific refinement in the practice of Hindustāni music. I remember many instances during my lessons with Kushal Das where this co-existence was starkly evident. For example, he often gave a clear methodological explanation of a musical strategy or idea, followed by a brief demonstration of the idea on the *sitār*. Sometimes, as he demonstrated, he would cast his eyes up as if searching for inspiration. His musical

examples often exhibited a touch of ineffable beauty, far beyond his referential analytic explanations.

Riāz and improvisation: assimilating and transcending

The strategies Das employs through the exercises he teaches, along with the 'system' he taught me in relation to *rāga* form and structural development, remove much of the mystique from the process of *rāga* improvisation.[47] For example, some sequences of exercises he taught me appear to be formulated to facilitate the capacity for endless variation, designed to develop technique to a level where the maximum number of variations are embodied and are thus available for improvisation. An example of this is the sequence of *meend* exercises outlined in the evening practice (Part II, exercise 3, figure 6.10). Stemming from a single technique, the exercises get progressively more complex as the sequence unfolds. The exercises could conceivably be developed ad infinitum, with more notes and permutations added. A musician's capacity to improvise for sustained periods, consistently coming up with new ideas without repetition, is built partly from the practice of such exercises.

The taxonomy of exercises in Hindustāni music is extensive, and many musicians create their own exercises to develop specific techniques and musical ideas. Technique can always be refined, leading to faster speeds, greater clarity, subtler nuance of expression, and more variations for improvisation and ornamentation. Through the rigorous practice of many exercises, a musician embodies a large repository of musical possibilities to draw from in the moment of improvisation. What may appear to the musician or the audience as 'spontaneous creation' – an impression that invites all manner of ideological interpretation – may be the result of a resounding of musical fragments that have been practiced innumerable times. Fragments are re-ordered and re-composed in relation to the movement and form of *rāga*, and the frame of *taal*. In this way, 'creativity' in Hindustāni music is intimately connected to the extensive musical memory embodied during *riāz*. Ali Akbar Khan goes as far as saying that Hindustāni music is 'not improvisation', because it is made up of the sum of all the exercises:

[47] I am referring specifically to what Das called 'the system' (personal correspondence during lessons 2006-2009), a step-by-step approach to *rāga* improvisation through the form of *rāga* from beginning to end. An outline of these detailed lessons is beyond the scope of this work.

> Well, it's not improvisation, actually. There are three-hundred-sixty different kinds of exercises. Just like you have all kind of things, materials; you can make a house, you can make a car, you can make many things with those materials… Once you learn, then you'll get the idea. (Ali Akbar Khan 2006, p.6)

Upon learning what I have learnt, I do have an idea of what Ali Akbar Khan is saying. In my own experience of *rāga* 'improvisation', there is an ever-present dialectic between the material that is practised, and the feeling of 'spontaneous creation'. The repertoire of phrases and techniques developed through *riāz* are to a large extent re-ordered in improvisation. In my experience, when something is practised so much that it is engrained in the body, it can then appear to arise in a 'spontaneous' fashion. Sometimes, the music seems to come of its own accord, but this experience only comes after extensive practice. For me, 'the flow of creation' then feels 'authentic' and 'of the moment', in part because conscious cognitive and physical processes are transcended – I am not thinking about what I am doing, I am just doing it; I am not inhibited by physical or technical limitations, in fact I am only barely aware of the physical challenge, and the music can flow freely. In my experience, systematic physical practice can lead to experiences that appear to transcend mind and body. The transcendental experience of *rāga* improvisation, referred to consistently by Hindustāni musicians in relation to music and spirituality, is facilitated by the system of *riāz*. 'Spiritual freedom' is found through rigorous discipline.

Once again, a relational dynamic between pragmatism and spiritual ideology is brought to the surface. *Sitār* player and scholar, Stephen Slawek draws a comparison between a disciplined Hindustāni musician and a *yogi*. Both are dedicated to a pragmatic system that leads to spiritually elevated states.

> They can be prepared to the exercises of an adept at yoga, who goes about his pursuit of spiritual enlightenment by following a pragmatic path of rigorous adherence to a regimen of physical and mental exercises. In the same way, a musician is trained rigorously, practicing a musical yoga of exercises and performed music that is pragmatically expected to lead both the musician and listeners to a higher spiritual plane. (Slawek 1998, p.339)

Vocalist Vinay Bhide suggests a similar correlation between *riāz* and *yoga*. '*Pranayama*' refers to the *yogic* practice of breathing exercises. Bhide suggests that the *riāz* he used to do in his youth was *pranayama*, or *yoga*. However, it was not given that label. For him, *riāz* as '*yoga*' is a retrospective definition.

> Duration, volume, accuracy. We didn't do pranayama daily as yoga; that was our pranayama without telling, it is yoga. A lot of things we did, today people call it yoga, but it was not told to us as yoga. It was kind of ritualistic, to do that you do this, and you do it without explanation. (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

The efficacy of religiosity

As we have already seen, religious iconography is commonly found in a Hindustāni musician's practice room. My own subjective experience points to practical applications of using an icon of Sarasvatī during *riāz*. For me, the use of such iconography facilitates a particular form of focus. It helps set an intention before practice, induces concentration, and triggers a philosophical ethos towards the experience and purpose of *riāz*.

The potential practical application of religiosity is explored in the following account. Vinay Bhide told me an amusing story illustrating how a small icon of a deity (*murti*), can be used as a means to an end. First he notes how it is common for singers to become physically animated during performance. He considers this a fault, suggesting that it is a distraction from their state of presence:

> While singing you have to be present there, a lot of singers do all sort of hand movement, a lot of faces and all that, that's not a quality, that's a defect... but you take the habit. (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

According to Bhide, some *gurus* used to get their students to sing while holding a *murti* on one hand, and playing a *tānpurā* with the other hand. The task is to stay still while singing so that the statue does not fall:

> Their gurus used to do: one hand you have *tānpurā*, other hand he used to put a Ganesh *murti* here, he says 'now that should not fall down!' Now see it becomes a god so you are afraid that it falls down, so you won't move. Was it necessary to do that? No, but its a means. (ibid.)

This practical system to stop excess hand movement may be comical, and the use of *murti* is somewhat trivialised in this story. However the example serves to illustrate the crux of Bhide's point perfectly, that religiosity can have a practical application. Bhide sees the use of religious iconography in a musician's practice as an aid that some people need and others do not. Ultimately he considers religiosity to be 'in your

head', but at the same time he fully accepts it as useful for some musicians, and therefore, valid.

> God presence as a physical thing, some people need it, some people don't. Its not outside, all that is in your head. Some people need that support, we'll take it! (ibid.)

Riāz: some considered insider perspectives

Regardless of ideological outlook, *riāz* is largely conducted for practical reasons. These include technical development, the memorisation of 'repertoire', the establishment of a comprehensive reservoir of vocabulary for improvisation, the internalisation of *rāga*, acquiring the skills and language of *rāga* improvisation, and the development of style. *Riāz* is hard work. For many musicians, practice is increased when a concert is on the horizon, conducted as a professional imperative, rather than an a-vocational 'spiritual' calling.

To end this chapter, I present some opinions offered to me by Hindustāni musicians that act as a counterbalance to the ideological stance that I have presented throughout. Not all Hindustāni musicians subscribe to spiritual ideology. A small minority of musicians I interviewed distanced themselves from the subject of spirituality and expressed alternative perspectives on musical practice. Some Hindustāni musicians express a stark pragmatism in relation to their own experiences. For example, *sitār* player Nikhil Joshi presents a more sobering view. He considers all the elements involved in *riāz* and emphatically states that it is 'not a spiritual experience', rather he paints it as hard work, requiring diligence, patience and perseverance:

> You need to focus on technicalities of performance/practice and think of practical and technical possibilities of applying them in your particular instrument or vocal. Then the process of modification, alteration, addition, deletion etc… repeats until it is complete properly. Most of the times you fail here. It requires lots of patience and certainly this is not a spiritual experience. (Nikhil Joshi August 2013)

For Joshi, a special form of focus is needed for *riāz*, but he relates this to the need for a strategic plan, rather than some special conscious space a musician may enter into:

> Special form of focus means plan your sessions what you are going to practise, i.e. *ālāp, gats, tans, layakārīs,* exercises. Just going blindly won't work. (ibid.)

In my experience, many Hindustāni musicians elevate pragmatic concerns, giving them spiritual significance, and single out music as especially spiritually potent. Joshi does just the opposite, translating 'surrender', '*bhakti*' ('devotion'), and 'worship' as 'involvement', 'dedication', and 'hard work'. He does not single out music as a unique discipline but suggests parallels with 'all other professions':

> I feel these 'surrender, bhakti, worship etc…' are nothing but involvement, dedication, creativity, hard work and enthusiasm. They apply to all other professions in the world. (Nikhil Joshi August 2013)

Rather than glorifying practice through seductive language, he appears to recognise the representation of Hindustāni music as spiritual, as an idealisation. However, Joshi is still young and only beginning to enter into the professional sphere. His thoughts are not incongruent with the expressions we explored earlier by older musicians on how the experience of practice matures and deepens over time.

Angshubha Banerjee is a more senior professional *tablā* player from Kolkata. Although he says that '*tablā* or music' is his 'God', he is cautiously reluctant to use the word 'spirituality' in reference to his experience of musical practice. For Banerjee, the term 'spirituality' belongs to another realm, 'bigger' than the scope of his musical experience:

> This is my God, *tablā* or music. When I practise I don't find anything that is spiritual, this are some big things for me. I just practise. Is it spiritual or not? I don't know. These are big things, you need to go to some *gurus* for this…. I am a very practical man. Somebody says 'yes its very spiritual, when I practise, I forget all these things, I go to another world.' For me, I can't say all those things. (Angshubha Banerjee May 2012)

He offers an alternative explanation of the experience of musical practice, citing its benefits. There is a beautiful depth in his sentiment, expressed in parallel to his down-to-earth synopsis.

> Its very deep. It means richness of your mental growth. Number two, it's a kind of therapy. It helps to protect yourself from many things from society. For me I really feel very happy when I practise, my mind is good, good condition, good harmony, and when I practise then my mood is very good. (After three hours of practice) I feel, I feel the touch. (ibid.)

He also displays a keen personal integrity towards his practice and towards the music: ‘when I don’t practise I feel like I am not doing justice to me. Not to me, not to the music’ (ibid.). Banerjee’s honest and measured account incorporates both pragmatism and sentiment. Alongside the personal benefits of feeling ‘good’, he also feels ‘the touch’, implying an experience of emotional depth, or perhaps a sense of ‘presence’.

Indian musicologist, M.S. Ramaswami Aiyar suggests a similar, considered view on the benefits of musical practice in relation to personal development. He discusses the simple fact that learning music fosters discipline, concentration, and self-reflective criticism. He states that playing music can bring people instantly closer, and that listening to music ‘develops the power of receptiveness and adaptiveness and creates the habit of being silent, attentive, and appreciative in the presence of beauty’ (1980, p.229).

CHAPTER 7

PERFORMANCE: THE PRESENTATION OF *RĀGA* AND THE DICHOTOMY OF MUSIC AS 'DEVOTION' AND MUSIC AS 'ENTERTAINMENT'

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the presentation of *rāga*, and is framed around an apparent dichotomy between music as 'devotion' and music as 'entertainment'.[1] This dichotomy has recurred as a persistent theme among the musicians I have interviewed and serves to polarise and amplify ideological concerns regarding the presentation ethos of Hindustāni music and the dynamic relationship between musicians and audience.

I first look at historical perspectives on the debate between music as devotion and music as entertainment. Following this, I view the performance ritual of Hindustāni music along with ideological and philosophical perspectives on the presentation of Indian classical music. The ideology I present suggests that the musician evokes the presence of *rāga*, opening himself up as a channel through which *rāga* flows. Technical skill, embodied knowledge, attentiveness, and a passive attitude of surrender facilitate the presence of *rāga*, or a higher power. The musician channels 'divine presence' and touches the audience with it, connecting them to the spiritual source of his inspiration. Agency is assigned over to *rāga*, or God, as a form of grace passing through the musician and into the audience; musical inspiration comes from a divine power during this spiritual communion.

In the final section, I survey the contexts and conditions in which *rāga* is played in the culture of Hindustāni music today. Through a comparative study of these contexts, the practical realities of *rāga* presentation are brought to light, highlighting the relationship between ideological concerns and pragmatic realities. I suggest that the

[1] It is interesting to note that Hindustāni musicians rarely use the word 'performance'. An Indian classical musician rarely says they are going to 'perform' a *rāga*, but rather 'present' a *rāga*. This reflects an ethos of humility to the tradition and to *rāga*.

context and conditions of *rāga* presentation significantly alter musical style and the perceived function and meaning of a musical event. *Rāga* proves to be malleable, adapting to different contexts.

Within the tradition of Indian musicology a distinction between 'music as devotion' and 'music as entertainment' has been recognised for over a thousand years (Clarke and Kini 2011). The debate is still a contemporary concern in India, especially within the discursive culture of Hindustāni musicians. A number of Western scholars have also focused on, and highlighted, similar debates: tradition and modernity (Neuman 1980); music for spiritual benefit or music for earthly pleasure (Clark and Kini 2011, p.139); and Sanyal and Widdess (2004) formulate a similar debate focusing on the sphere of *dhrupad*. This chapter therefore interweaves with, and draws from a number of relevant sources.

Central to my concern is a particular form of artistic integrity that presents itself as the ideal within the culture of Hindustāni music, related to both the intentionality of the musician and to the quality of his or her focus during the presentation of *rāga*. Indian classical music can ideally induce a shared state of 'unity' or 'transcendence'. Hindustāni musicians conceptualise these experiences as 'spiritual' and often describe them through the lens of Indian philosophy or Hindu religiosity.[2] In Hindu philosophy, '*brahman*' or 'God' is the supreme reality, transcending all duality and relativity.[3] Hindustāni musicians point to the ideal that the experience of *rāga* can connect people to this unified transpersonal absolute. Many musicians accept that these deep experiences only come in rare glimpses, but almost all musicians I interviewed subscribe to the idea that spirituality is central to the purpose and experience of the music. There is a search for something more profound than entertainment. However, in the modern era of Hindustāni music there is a tension between idealised impressions of the tradition and the realities of professionalism. An eminent musician may be painted as a mystic, but in reality he is also a professional entertainer.

[2] It must be considered that the experience of music may be similar for musicians who come from other cultures and play other genres, such as jazz musicians for example. Due to the religio-philosophical milieu of India, Indian musicians may label certain experiences as 'spiritual', while people from a different culture may conceptualise them differently. What is 'cool' to a jazz musician may be perceived as 'transcendental' to an Indian music.

[3] Easwaran 2009.

An Age Old Debate, Sustained and Reconfigured Through Time

The question of music as 'entertainment' versus music as 'devotion' is an age-old recurrent debate in the culture of Indian classical music. In this section I illustrate how this debate has been sustained and reconfigured for over a thousand years. The debate seems as pertinent today as it appears to have been 450 years ago at the time of the legendary vocalist Tansen (circa 1506-1589). Throughout all this time, there appears to be one particular point of continuity in the discussion: contemporary changes in Indian classical music inevitably fall into the 'music as entertainment' category, while older forms and practices are defined as more 'devotional' and 'spiritual'.

This points to two important, related considerations: first, there is a prevalence in the discursive culture of Indian classical music (and in the wider sphere of Indian thought) to sustain a nostalgic, idealised impression of a romanticised past; second, concepts of authenticity are intrinsically related to the past, and are reconfigured and illuminated in the light of contemporary changes. In relation to our present discussion, the question of whether a particular style or genre is considered 'spiritual' or 'for entertainment', at any time, depends on its comparison to other extant styles and genres, or to a remembered or imagined past. Definitions of music as 'devotional', 'spiritual' or 'for entertainment' are relative to the musical tensions at any given time, and to contemporary perceptions of authenticity. Daniel Neuman points to an ever-present nostalgia for an idealised past in the culture of Hindustāni music. The perception of how things used to be acts as a perpetual model for the present:

> There is... not only a past which molds and personifies the 'tradition' but also a tradition of representing a past which, however unreachable, is always available as a model for the present. So commonly is one assaulted, sometimes assuaged, with the perpetual sighs of what always was but never is–a collective remembrance of things past. Whether it is the sixteen hours of *riāz* shaping a living legend or the musical battles of a thousand years past, these all exist for the musicians and their disciples as the tradition which lies at the root of the present. (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.231)

The perception of what constitutes music as 'entertainment' or music as 'devotion' has shifted over historical time, with a tendency for older styles to fall into the latter category. In this section I view the historical evaluation of 'devotion' and 'entertainment' through three perspectives: the shifting status of musical styles; fixity and the perception of spiritual potency; and historical changes in performance context

and the function of music. Rather than writing this section with an overarching time-line, I have chosen to present these three perspectives separately, each following their own internal chronology.

The shifting status of musical styles

Over one thousand years ago, a defining distinction was recognised between '*deshi*' music and '*marga*'. *Deshi* means 'country', or 'land', and is still used in reference to the numerous regional styles of 'folk' music found throughout the Indian sub-continent. *Marga* can be translated as 'road', 'path', or 'the sought', and refers to classical music as a spiritual 'path to salvation'. The term is rarely used today.[4]

> *Marga* (lit. 'path'), a disposition towards spiritual well-being or salvation, and *desi*, regional styles of music and dance aimed at more worldly aesthetic enjoyment. (Clarke and Kini 2011, p.139)

In the seventeenth-century treatise *Rāga Darpana*, Persian writer *Faqirullah* points to the origins of *dhrupad* as rooted in both *marga* and *deshi* forms:

> *Dhruvapada* absorbed the characteristics of both *margi* and *deshi* styles…. Raja Man Singh had assembled together the most renowned musicians… had pooled together their vast and rich musical talents to develop the novel musical form of *dhruvapada* in which they assimilated the best features of *margi* and *deshi sangeet*. The language of this new form incorporated the language of both styles.[5] (Mutatkar 1987, p.78)

This account of the origins of *dhrupad* as a localised and pre-conceived creation, emerging in Gwalior from the court of Raja Man Singh Tomar (1496-1525) is substantiated by other writers.[6] The contention that *dhrupad* was a deliberately constructed and 'novel' musical form, with a strong influence from *deshi* (folk music), seems at odds with its current exalted status. In the current era, *dhrupad* is perceived as the most authentic extant genre of Hindustāni music, rooted in classical antiquity and ancient *vedic* heritage.[7]

---

[4] The definitions cited for these terms come from the glossaries in Holroyde (1972) and Ruckert (2004), and from Widdess (1994, p.94). See also Sanyal and Widdess (2004, p.47).

[5] *Dhrupad* appears to have evolved from an extinct classical form known as *prabandha*, as well as from folk (*deshi*) music. Other accounts suggest different origins: Widdess (1981) illustrates *dhrupad's* connection to *samvedic chant*; Ho (2006) explores it origins in relation to *kirtan* devotional chant.

[6] Khan and Ruckert (2009 [1998], p.292); Bagchee (1998, p.109); Sanyal and Widdess (2004); Wade (1987, p.159).

[7] Widdess (1981) successfully illustrates a correlation between *dhrupad ālāp* and *samvedic chant*. Ruckert (2004) points to how the methodology of *dhrupad* improvisation may be derived from *vedic chant*.

This contemporary perception of *dhrupad's* antiquity and classical purity carries implicit weight. *Dhrupad* is perceived as the most 'devotional' and 'spiritual' style of Hindustāni music today. However, in the sixteenth century when *dhrupad* was at the height of its popularity, it functioned as a form of secular entertainment. Sanyal and Widdess advance an argument about the shifting status of the form:

> [*Dhrupad* was] a form of refined but essentially secular musical entertainment. It is only as the newer genres of *khyāl* and *ṭhumri* have taken the stage as secular art forms, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that *dhrupad* has become, in effect, the current… *marga*, and has therefore taken on a higher, esoteric, salvific function. (Sanyal and Widdess 2004, p.40)[8]

This persistent tendency for musical styles that were once considered 'entertainment' to become perceived as 'spiritual' or 'devotional' over the course of time can also be seen in *khyāl*, the dominant form of Hindustāni vocal music today.[9] *Khyāl* developed in the Mughal courts and was established as a distinct style by the eighteenth century. Although *khyāl* was considered a secular art form when it first emerged, it has taken on an air of sacrality in the current era, as evidenced by numerous anecdotes presented throughout this dissertation.

The nature of consistent change in Hindustāni music, and the emergence of new styles and forms, has sustained and fuelled the devotion-entertainment debate for centuries, reconfiguring the polarities of the dichotomy as new forms redefine and legitimise older forms.

Fixity and the perception of spiritual potency

Sanyal and Widdess (2004) point to an important and related concern that also marks the distinction between music as 'entertainment' and music as 'devotion'. Music deemed to have spiritual virtue is created in strict accordance with an ancient and defined musical system, whereas music for 'entertainment' does not adhere to such rules as strictly. Charting the history of Indian classical music from ancient times to the present day, one can trace a gradual movement from formal fixed modalities to forms that allow for more improvisational freedom.

[8] Quoted also in Clarke and Kini (2011, p.139).
[9] The term '*khyāl*' applies to vocal music and not instrumental music. The instrumental style prevalent today combines elements of *dhrupad* (especially in *ālāp*) and elements of *khyāl* (especially in *gat*).

The spiritual potency of *samvedic chant* (dating from circa 1400 B.C.E.) is perceived to be in direct relation to the exactitude of its rendition. Proper pronunciation of its text is considered paramount to its affect.[10] The 'meaning' of its words does not lie in a translation of the archaic Sanskrit, for this aspect of the language is now largely lost and obscure; the 'meaning' of *samvedic chant* lies in the sound itself, considered a manifestation of a divinely revealed truth ('*shruti*'). This liturgical musical form has been preserved by *brahmin* priests through generations of oral transmission, and is thought to be still recited close to its original format.[11]

By 1000 C.E., a formal distinction between 'spiritual' music and music for 'entertainment' had been classified, based on the premise that 'spiritual' music is formulated according to ancient rules, and music for 'entertainment' is not:

> It was classically formulated c. 1000 A.D. by the philosopher Abhinavagupta, who distinguished two categories of music: *gandharva*, ritual music performed according to the precepts of the *Natyasastra*, and *gana*, entertainment music not controlled by theoretical principles. The former, he believed, led to esoteric, spiritual benefit (*adrsta-phala*, "unseen fruit"), the latter to tangible benefit (*drsta-phala* [fruit that is seen]) in the form of aesthetic enjoyment (*rasa*).[12] (Widdess 1994, p.94)

Dhrupad emerged in the sixteenth century and is the oldest extant form of 'classical' music in North India. The etymology of the word '*dhrupad'* illustrates that there is an emphasis on fixed form: '*dhruva* means "fixed" or "true"… *pada* means "verse", so a *druva-pada* is a song in which the verse is set' (Khan and Ruckert 2009 [1998], p.292). *Dhrupad* is improvised, but set within a tight framework, following a fixed formal system through a process of gradual episodic development. *Dhrupad* is presented with strict adherence to the grammar of *rāga*, with minimal ornamentation. The non-metered *ālāp* is particularly detailed and extensive in this genre.

Khyāl came to prominence during the eighteenth century and is the dominant classical form in Hindustāni music today. Etymology proves insightful again; the word '*khyāl*'

[10] In Hindu sonic theology 'sound itself implies a divine presence, Sanskrit syllables also carry sacred etymological implications' (Ruckert 2004, p.22).
[11] *Samvedic chant* is also written down in the *Rig Veda*, constituting 1028 hymns, some with musical notation. The majority of the hymns are either descriptions of foundation myths or praises addressed to deities (Demariaux 1995, p.8). The idea that Indian classical music originated from the *vedic* period is commonly and proudly stated by many of its present practitioners.
[12] The analogous and contemporaneous distinction between *marga* and *deshi* suggests a similar rationale: 'the spiritual qualities of *marga* derive from its adherence to rules, rather than its dependence on taste' (Widdess 1994, p.94).

derives from a Persian term meaning '"fantasy," "imagination," and "idea"' (ibid., p.298). As these translations suggest, the genre allows the musician more improvisatory freedom than *dhrupad*. Although a structural system is still adhered to, *khyāl* is less fixed. There is more space for spontaneous improvisation and the artist has more freedom for embellishment.

Other more modern forms such as *ṭhumri* or *dhun* are considered 'light classical' and extend the musician's improvisatory license even further. Strict adherence to the language of *rāga* is not as important in these styles, and elaborate ornamentation is a characteristic feature.[13]

Surveying the historical emergence of genres of Indian music through a broad chronology – *samvedic chant, dhrupad, khyāl, ṭhumri, dhun* – it is apparent that the history charts a gradual progression from fixity to improvisational freedom. As the genres become less fixed, and thus less 'classical', the perception of their spiritual potency diminishes.[14] This perception of spiritual potency also stems from the legitimising authority of antiquity.

The gradual historical movement away from the formal and the fixed continues today through stylistic changes within the dominant forms of *khyāl* and instrumental music. Young musicians today appear to be challenging and compromising formal stylistic boundaries. According to *sarod* player Alam Khan, these changes are characterised by a careless approach to the traditional structure of the music:

> Some people spend one moment on *sa*, and God knows what they do after that, they are just jumping around the place. It's also a matter of respect for how much there is in the music. How many different sections there are in the music, has the person spent the time, do they care about showing these sections? Exploring them, revealing them, or do they just care about getting to the punch line? A lot of people just play each line as a punch line. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Khan's statement mirrors a consensus among my interviewees that current changes are characterised by a pandering to populism, driven by the pressures of

[13] There are some anomalies in this contention. For example, in *ṭhumri* vocal music, correct pronunciation of the text is considered important (in order to project the meaning of the song), whereas in *khyāl* this aspect of performance practice is often not adhered to as strictly.
[14] It should be noted that *samvedic chant* is generally not considered a 'classical' form, but rather a purely liturgical practice.

professionalism.[15] Many musicians express a fond nostalgia for a bygone era, when music apparently had a stronger devotional component. It is frequently expressed that the younger generation of musicians and audiences do not care as much about this 'devotional aspect'. For example, *khyāl* vocalist, Kishori Amonkar, speaks about how eminent musicians she heard in her youth focused on 'the real art', as opposed to current trends where commercialism has taken over:

> All these artistes had the great desire to seek and pursue at any cost the real musical bliss! They were much closer to the real art; we in comparison seem to have drifted away, giving priority to making money, cutting records and planning foreign tours. (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.122)

Historical changes in performance context and the function of music

A third way to view the distinction between music as 'entertainment' and music as 'devotion' through an historic frame relates to changes in performance context and function. In the ancient period, Indian 'classical' music had a religious function. It was recited in temples and *ashrams*, and was explicitly 'devotional'.[16] The sixteenth century marks an important epoch in the history of Hindustāni music. By this time, Hindustāni music had largely moved from the temple to the court, under the patronage of new Muslim rulers. The function of Hindustāni music changed in this new context from temple devotional music to court music for the entertainment of the ruling classes. This is expressed well in a popular story about the legendary vocalist Tansen, his patron the Mughal emperor Akbar, and his *guru* Haridas Swami. The story is told here by Indian musicologist M.S. Ramaswami Aiyar:

> One day, Akbar asked his celebrated Tansen: 'Can anyone in the world sing like you?' Tansen replied: 'Yes; my guru Haridas Swami of Brindavan, will even surpass me'. The emperor exclaimed: 'What! Can you not surpass him?' Tansen bowed his head and humbly observed: 'No: I cannot surpass my guru; because, I sing whenever my emperor commands, but he sings only when his inner voice demands. I sing to please you; but he sings to please God.[17] (Aiyar 1980, p.198)

The legendary Haridas Swami is an example of a so-called 'saintly musician', or one who sings purely as a form of devotion to God. His student, Tansen was exemplary of a new breed of professional court musician, playing art music to entertain an informed

[15] See Neuman (1980) for an exploration of the effects of professionalism on the tradition. Changes in pedagogy are also offered as an explanation for current stylistic trends, see Chapter 5 in this dissertation.

[16] Prajnanananda (1997 [1963]); Rowell (1992).

[17] For another version of this popular story see Sri Aurobindi Society (2002, pp.2-3).

audience, supported by courtly patronage. The perceived functional shift from devotion to entertainment was also a result of a shift in religious context and affiliation, from Hinduism to Islam. As Wade points out, 'in Islamic monotheistic thought, music is not believed to be of divine origin' (1987, p.19). In the Muslim courts classical music therefore adopted the role of entertainment, and lost much of its explicit religious functionality (see Chapter 2).

The British political dominance of India from the eighteenth century until 1947 saw the demise of the Mughal Empire. The patronage the arts had been enjoying all but vanished and the practice of classical music diminished in terms of both status and activity. Classical musicians flocked to urban centres in order to make a living, and the era of public concerts began. The most common performance context for Hindustāni music today is a theatre environment. Here it appears to function as secular art music. However, as I illustrate in the next section, the presentation of Hindustāni music is still imbued with ideals of devotion and spirituality.

Ideological and Philosophical Perspectives on the Presentation of Hindustāni Music

In this section I shift the focus away from history and onto the contemporary presentation of Hindustāni music in concert. I begin by outlining ritualistic elements that may be included in a Hindustāni music concert, set in a typical performance context, such as a theatre, concert hall, or formal house concert ('*mehfil*'). I then discuss spiritual ideology related to Hindustāni music as a live event. Along with my own fieldwork observations, I privilege first hand accounts from Hindustāni musicians recalling their experiences of performance. I illustrate multiple ways spiritual experience is conceptualised in the context of live performance. A number of themes emerge out of the investigation including: divine agency; transcendence; musician as mediator between man and divinity; and the ideal of spiritual communion.

The performance ritual

Travelling throughout the Indian subcontinent one bears witness to many aspects of Indian culture where antiquity and modernity, and the sacred and profane co-exist side by side, interwoven into the fabric of life. I can think of many such examples from my own experiences: orange robed Buddhist monks with iPhones; the ancient Hindu epic '*The Mahabharata*' transformed into a popular television drama series; and miniature plastic shrines to Hindu deities on the dash-boards of the countless rickshaw taxis humming throughout urban India.

Despite waves of sociological, religious, and technological change, many customs and practices in India have persisted through long stretches of time, spanning several centuries or even millennia. Instead of disappearing in the face of modernity, many older aspects of Indian culture have been retained with little change, co-existing alongside modernity; other ancient practices have adapted to change, becoming reconfigured and appropriated into a modern context. The streets of urban India today are like a living archaeological site, with layers of antiquity and modernity intertwined into a complex whole. The typical performance ritual in a concert of Hindustāni music mirrors this, and is rich with layers of historical, cultural, and religious heritage, reconfigured in a contemporary context, and intermixed with modern technology and other aspects of contemporary culture.[18]

In the following section I discuss performance rituals in Hindustāni music. The section is divided into two parts: first, I briefly explore the private rituals that some musicians perform, often kept discretely away from public gaze; second, I view ritual elements conducted for public display, often choreographed with a distinctly Hindu religiosity.[19]

[18] See Ruckert's discussion of 'The Old and the New in an Ancient Land' (2004, pp.11-17) for an account of the effect of modernity on Hindustāni music. See also Neuman: 'The Ecology of Hindustāni Music' (1990 [1980], pp.202-229).

[19] Some scholars have suggested that such displays of religiosity, and other aspects of the performance ritual, function to create and project an image of Indian classical music that serves the agenda of a Hindu-centric Indian nationalist identity (Lubach 2006; Neuman 2004; Bakhle 2005; Subramaniam 2008), see Chapter 2.

A musician's private ritual

Some musicians have their own personal preparation routine or 'ritual', which they perform prior to performing. The nature of such a ritual is individualistic and not explicitly codified in the tradition. I know of some musicians who recite a particular *mantra* to themselves just prior to performing, and others who bring an image on stage with them (such as a small picture of their *guru* or of a Hindu deity). Many musicians told me that they have no particular ritual, other than settling into position, tuning up, and checking their sound.

Kolkata based *tablā* player Debojyoti Sanyal prepares himself before every concert through prayer and meditation:

> Before fifteen minutes or ten minutes just mediation inside, and pray to my gods, my MaaKhali, every concert, this is my own things, very personal… just go outside, not in front of people. (Debojyoti Sanyal February 2009)

When Sanyal sets up on stage he places a picture of MaaKhali between himself and his *tablā*, away from the public eye. This image consists of a picture of his mother alongside a depiction of the mother goddess Khali, a popular deity in Kolkata. He has been using the exact same image for over ten years, which he keeps in his wallet at all times. He simply opens his wallet out and places it in front of him with the image facing up.

Sougata Roy Chowdhury uses a collection of images in a similar way, placing them discreetly in front of him before he begins a public performance. The collection consists of small paper images of inspirational icons, all placed inside a small plastic see-through wallet. He keeps this wallet in his instrument case and takes it out for performances. The collection of images includes musicians, philosophers and Hindu deities, with an image of Sarasvatī on top.

As a visual representation of the divine, such iconography is used as a moral aspiration of intent, or as a way of evoking divine presence or asking for divine blessings. Iconography facilitates an attitude of devotion by creating an object of devotion. Roy Chowdhury describes why he uses his images:

> I always keep the image of Ma Sarasvatī [‘Ma’ means ‘mother’]. I feel she is present with me, and to get her blessing. It gives me confidence on stage. I can easily loose concentration, so that helps me. I try not to look at the audience, but focus on the music. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury July 2013)

The use of such imagery aids concentration, and may help a musician access the quality of focus that he has fostered during years of *riāz*. In a musician’s practice room, similar iconography is often present. This may be in the form of a small shrine to Sarasvatī or another deity, and it is not uncommon to see framed pictures on the walls with photographs of a musician’s *guru*, or other notable musicians of his *gharana* and tradition. Many musicians described to me how the devotional aspect of playing music is much stronger during solitary practice without the distractions of stage, audience, and sound system. Transferring that quality of focus from the private practice space to the public stage is a challenge that may be helped through the use of iconography. Iconography becomes a consistent locus of attention in both environments.

Imagery is not restricted to the form of a physical picture, but may also be imagined. Some musicians visualize their *guru* before they start a recital so that he may guide them. According to Nikhil Banerjee, if you do this your guru ‘will come inside you and he will push you, and create good music’ (Banerjee 1985). When Sougata Roy Chowdhury feels his concentration or inspiration lapsing, he sometimes visualises the feet of Sarasvatī before him, suggesting that inspiration may be seen as coming from a divine source, accessed through a humble attitude of devotion and servitude. He also considers tuning his instrument an important element in the preparation for performance, and adds a higher value to the process of tuning, above its obvious pragmatic utility:

> Tuning also helps. When you are tuning, by that time *rāga* is already inside you. You [are] tuning in the *raag* and not the *that* [scale]. When you are tuning you are already singing inside. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury July 2013)

On another occasion he said, ‘when I am tuning my instrument, I am also tuning myself’ (Sougata Roy Chowdhury January 2009).

The presentation of Hindustāni music

I begin this section with a description of a concert I attended at Talkatora Indoor Stadium, New Delhi, in January 2000, presented as an example of the kind of ritualistic elements that can be witnessed in a formal presentation of Hindustāni music. The account comes from field-notes written during, and directly after, the concert. The formality and ritual elements in this concert were particularly exaggerated but are not uncommon in Indian classical music concerts. The principal artist was the legendary vocalist Paṇḍit Jasraj.

> The venue was a large stadium with the biggest audience I have ever seen for an Indian classical concert numbering approximately five thousand. The line-up was *santoor* player Rahul Sharma (the son of Paṇḍit Shiv Kumar Sharma) followed by the legendary Hindustāni vocalist, Paṇḍit Jasraj. The respect given to Paṇḍit Jasraj was amazing. There was an hour-long opening ceremony before any music was played. This included several speeches, flowers being presented to the artists several times, the communal lighting of a lamp and several rounds of standing applause. At one point Paṇḍit Jasraj stood and held his arms outstretched to the audience to rapturous applause. After this prolonged introduction, he was guided along a red carpet to a special large seat in the centre of the front row. It was like a throne. The rest of the front row consisted of a line of couches reserved for VIPs; a few rows back, TV cameras were rolling. Paṇḍit Jasraj only sat for a few minutes before retiring backstage, then the music finally began with Rahul Sharma. As Jasraj approached for his part of the performance he offered *pranam* to the stage, touching his hand off the stage and on to his forehead several times in an obvious and exaggerated fashion. The juxtaposition between this gesture of humility and the red carpet treatment was particularly striking to me at the time. Paṇḍit Jasraj was dressed in orange robes. The stage was also decorated with beaded orange flowers. The spatial arrangement of the musicians on the stage is indicative of their function and status. Paṇḍit Jasraj is centre stage at the front facing the audience. Beside him is a *tablā* player, facing him. His role is essentially one of accompaniment but he also gets to play the occasional solo. To the other side of Jasraj is a harmonium player, again facing the famous vocalist. His function is to shadow and echo the vocal line throughout the performance and give the occasional flurry of notes to fill short empty spaces during the recital. In an arc behind these musicians are two *tānpurā* players and two backing vocalists. Behind them, a giant banner stands as a backdrop to the stage, advertising the sponsors of the event…. Jasraj sings with his eyes closed, his arms moving in an exaggerated fashion, following the flow of his vocal exploration.



Figure 7.1: Paṇḍit Jasraj in concert (New Delhi, January 2000)

The theatricality and extravagance of the ritualistic aspects of this event were extreme, and not all of the elements are common to public performances of Hindustāni music. The red carpet is particularly unusual (figure 7.1). However, other aspects are more typical; Indian classical music concerts are orderly and dignified, choreographed with a sense of tradition, respect, and ceremony. Speeches are common before any music begins, and can become more prolonged in proportion to the status and seniority of the artists, and the importance of the event. Some concerts and festivals are conducted with an air of sanctity, while others are less formal.

At Jasraj's concert, proceedings began with a short *aarti* ceremony. A small metal lamp – with a wick soaked in camphor or purified butter – was lit by a Hindu priest (*brahmin*), who then waved the flame in a circular motion in front of the stage. This ritual stems from early *vedic* times, when Agni, the god of fire, was ritually worshipped and appeased in this way. The ceremony is a common element in *puja* today, and is typically conceptualised as an offering of fire to please the gods, as an evocation of divine presence, and as a symbol of humility.[20] It is more common at a Hindustāni music concert for an *aarti* lamp to sit on a pedestal on the side of the stage. The flame is lit in situ before the concert, and it remains lit and in place for the duration of the event. The *aarti* flame effectively acts as a symbol of worship and divine presence. In my experience, the majority of Hindustāni music concerts do not include *aarti*.

[20] Meusse (2011, pp.140-142).

As a Hindustāni musician first enters the stage area he will invariably perform the gesture of *pranam*, touching his hand off the stage, perhaps off his instrument and to his forehead; where his *guru* is present, he may touch his feet. This gesture signifies reverence, humility, and surrender, and is commonly performed throughout Indian society in various contexts. *Pranam* may be conducted with discretion, away from public gaze, or in an exaggerated fashion such as Paṇḍit Jasraj's overt display at the concert I attended.

The visual staging of a Hindustāni music concert follows some common procedures. Images from the corporate world often co-exist on stage with iconographic elements, symbolic of spirituality or religion. It is common to see a large banner behind the stage, possibly advertising the promoters of the event. The banner at Jasraj's concert read 'Pandit Chatur Lal Memorial Society presents Legends', with logos from three corporate sponsors also clearly visible. Stages are typically decorated with orange or yellow flowers. *Sitār* player Jagdeep Singh Bedi told me that orange flowers are used for classical concerts because orange represents spirituality, whereas red flowers are used at weddings because the colour red symbolises romance.[21] At some concerts, an image of a religious icon is present around the stage area. If the performing musician's *guru* is deceased, a framed photograph of him is sometimes placed on stage, but this is not common. Musicians sit on a white cloth stretched out over a raised platform ('*rias*', meaning 'raised') on the centre of the stage.

The musicians are spatially positioned according to the status and function of their role within the proceedings: the principal artist is in the centre, flanked by one or more accompanists to the sides, with one or two *tānpurā* players, and possibly backing vocalist and disciples, behind them at the back. Instrumental recitals generally have fewer musicians on stage than vocal recitals; often only three musicians are present – for example: a *sitār* player (centre), a *tablā* player (to the side) and a *tānpurā* player (behind).[22] The dress code is formal and traditional; male musicians wear traditional long shirts, known as *kirtans*, and female performers dress in a *sari*. In general, the principal artist is dressed more elaborately than his

[21] Bedi January 2000, personal correspondence.
[22] It is not uncommon for an electronic *tānpurā* to replace the third musician in the current era. See Wade (1987, pp.21-23 and pp.206-211) for a detailed account of the functional and dynamic relationship between the different musicians on stage at an Indian classical music concert.

accompanists, signifying his prominence in the proceedings. If disciples are present on stage they are dressed in simple clothes. For example, when Kushal Das's senior disciples are on stage with him, they dress in white (see figure 7.3, p.255). A hierarchy is clearly projected, with the lead melody musician most prominent, followed by the accompanists, then the *tānpurā* players, and finally, any disciples present. The lead melody musician faces the audience, embraced within a semi-circle of musicians, all of whom face him. His or her prominent position indicates the primacy of *rāga* as the central focus, supported by *taal* (rhythm) and drone. The mannerisms of the artists are also central to the construction of meaning. As Neuman suggests, 'the public personality of an artist… contributes to an interpretive context creating meaning in the music through extramusical messages' (1990 [1980], p.221).

The lead artist singing or playing *rāga* is generally more animated than the other musicians; a *tablā* player's mannerisms often amount to signals of praise and support for the lead artist. Vocalists are particularly animated. During the concert I described above, Paṇḍit Jasraj moved his arms and hands continuously in a gestural manner that mirrored the contours of his vocal expression. With eyes closed, he appeared in a state of deep, trance-like, introspection. His mannerisms – typical of Hindustāni vocalists in general – invite an ideological interpretation. For example, Indian author Ashok Roy describes Paṇḍit Jasraj in performance with the following poetic words:

> If you can imagine an unbridled emotional odyssey of the human voice through the ever-expanding galaxy of music, you may be able to conjure the charismatic image of Paṇḍit Jasraj in concert… his alaap ripples all around your being, as if you are yourself the source of these pristine *swaras*… the maestro soon invades your very breath! You suddenly realize that you are breathing *only* when he is sending his voice dancing into the ether!… Enthralled beyond dreams… you feel one with the dynamics of the universe. (Roy 2004, p.86)

The evocative images Roy paints introduce spiritual ideals in the relationship between musician and audience. Ideally, there is a transpersonal intimacy to the musical experience, where the audience becomes 'one' with the music through the musician, and is elevated to a state of deep spiritual communion. I consider this ideology later in the chapter.

Neuman (1990 [1980], pp.221-223) suggests that there are two models for performance in Hindustāni music – 'courtly (*darbar*)' and 'devotional (*bhakti*)'. The courtly model is dignified and majestic, a legacy of the Muslim court tradition. This format is characteristic of instrumentalists and Muslim hereditary musicians who's ancestors come from the court tradition. The *bhakti* model suggests humility and devotion. According to Neuman, the artist in the courtly model addresses the audience, with pride, whereas the *bhakti* musician addresses God, with humility and devotion:

> The *bhakti* presentation simulates above all the idea of authentic performance of pure devotion. The listeners are not so much attending to as they are corporate witnesses of the performance: what in India would be called a *darshan* ['seeing the divine']. The performer, here more typically a vocalist, addresses himself to God, raising his hands in supplication as he sings his devotion. (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.222)

Neuman's hypothesis regarding these two principal performance models amplifies the dichotomy central to this chapter: music as 'entertainment' versus music as 'devotion'. My observations suggest that the two models he presents exist side by side in the majority of Hindustāni music performances today.[23] The co-existence of a number of polarities is present, held in dynamic tension, and negotiated through the live event. Many of these polarities were present in Paṇḍit Jasraj's concert: the sacred and the secular; displays of humility coupled with adoration and fame; and the manner in which Jasraj controlled everything, and yet appeared to be consumed by something greater than himself.

Fame, status, and the humble servant of sound

During Paṇḍit Jasraj's concert, I was struck by the co-existence of his repeatedly performed gesture signifying humility (*pranam*), and the manner in which he was treated like a superstar. The juxtaposition between this gesture of humility and the red carpet treatment was particularly striking. In some respects Jasraj was treated like an idol. He is a living icon of Hindustāni music with a career that also extends into popular devotional song (*bhajan*), but the red carpet and large throne-like seat were

[23] Neuman also suggested a third model for performance, that combined aspects of the two already mentioned. 'The *salon* model… [with] aspects of both the courtly and devotional' (1980, p.222). It must be noted that the majority of Neuman's fieldwork was carried out in the 1970s, when the custom of Hindustāni music concerts was a much newer phenomenon. The legacy of the court tradition, and the divergence between Hindu and Muslim stage presentations may have been more pronounced at this time.

strikingly symbolic. His positioning in the front of the stage suggested authority. He led the entire musical proceedings, and directed the other musicians as they followed and supported him in accompaniment. After the concert he stood up with arms stretched out as if offering a blessing to the huge audience. A large crowd of people gathered in front of the stage and tried to touch him, and many got him to autograph their tickets. For famous artists such as Paṇḍit Jasraj it is not uncommon to find a large group of admirers backstage after a concert, queuing to touch the master's feet, hoping to receive a blessing in return. Such a 'blessing' is generally signified by the 'master' touching the individual's head.

The esteem bestowed upon some of the top exponents of the tradition can be exaggerated. Awards and honours are often conferred upon them from cultural organisations or universities. Figure 7.2 shows a billboard in Kolkata advertising a Ravi Shankar concert in February 2009. The billboard reads 'A Tribute to the Living Legend RAVI SHANKAR'.

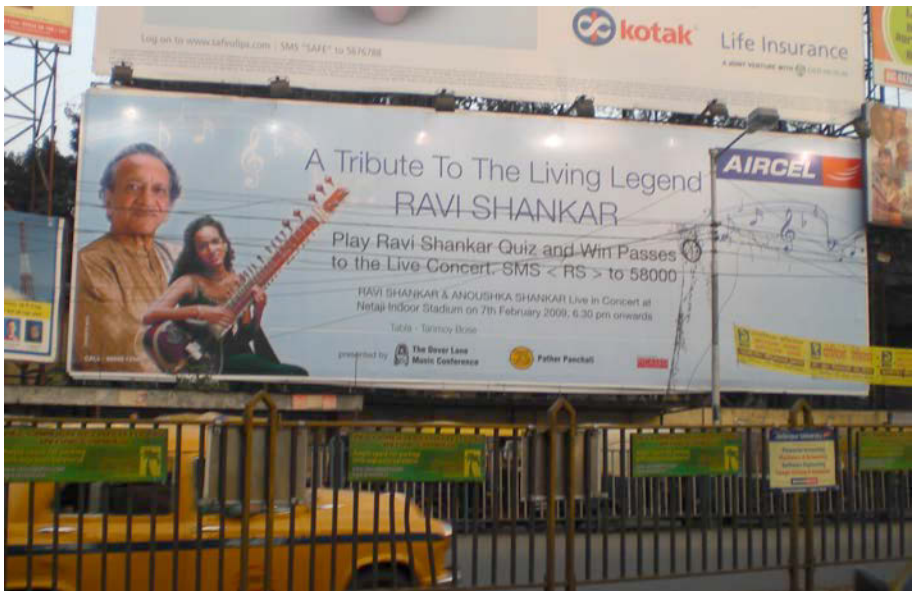


Figure 7.2: 'A Tribute to the Living Legend Ravi Shankar' (Kolkata, February 2009)

Such fame and adoration appears contradictory in a tradition that advocates humility and egoless devotion. The question is, does negotiating the polarity between fame and humility represent an identity and image crises for some musicians and for the tradition as a whole? Ashok Roy suggests that for Paṇḍit Jasraj, at least, there is no

conflict. He proposes that despite all his success and fame, Jasraj has remained a searching and creative artist:

> While national and international accolades, honours, titles and trophies were being showered upon him, Pandit-ji was engrossed in ascending the heights of spirituality by exploring the depths of his music. Riding the waves of success and adulation, he, the true artist, never paused in his evolution as a creative explorer and innovator. (Roy 2004, p.90)

A well-worn saying among Indian classical musicians – commonly recited after receiving a compliment – is 'I have only touched a drop in a vast ocean of promise!'[24] Through this phrase, the artist is modestly expressing a humble view of his own achievements; at the same time he is stressing the endless depth and potential inherent in Indian classical music. Hindustāni vocalist Vinay Bhide considers maintaining a humble and searching attitude an imperative:

> You remain a student all your life, then you are ok. If you say 'I have reached' that means you have stopped. End of it! There's no end of it! (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

Bhide's statement is typical of the prevailing ethos in the tradition, where ego and arrogance are seen as blocks to creativity, purity, and true musicianship. Nilandri Kumar, a highly successful young *sitār* virtuoso who adopts a modern approach to his music, concurs with Bhide.[25] Kumar is sceptical about the widespread use of titles such as *paṇḍit* in the modern era. He considers it pretentious and arrogant for every artist to use such titles of veneration, especially those who label themselves with such titles:

> Playing xyz festival does not mean you become a *paṇḍit*… the word *paṇḍit* is very significant, you could say very holy to an extent, its got some kind of piousness to it. In the last few decades, it has been diluted, where people have been acknowledging themselves as *paṇḍit*. But the word *paṇḍit* means 'you are full of knowledge'… so if someone wakes up one day and says 'I am full of knowledge', you can imagine how shallow his knowledge is. (Nilandri Kumar June 2010)

Kumar never adds the prefix *paṇḍit* to his own name. Even as a child, he was uncomfortable with it. He went as far as to hide the title *paṇḍit* on awards and

[24] I have heard versions of this anecdote on a number of occasions from classical musicians. Sougata Roy Chowdhury is particularly humble in his depiction of his own musical achievements, commonly making statements such as 'I am nothing' in response to a compliment (personal correspondence).

[25] Kumar's modern approach includes the use of computer programming in recordings, the occasional use of an electric *sitār*, and the incorporation of new *sitār* techniques (including the use of a metal slide to reach notes above the normal range of the instrument).

trophies he had received by covering over the word with tape:

> As a kid, I got many awards and shields and mementos with my name as Paṇḍit Nilandri Kumar, I used to hide it, I used to put tape on that *paṇḍit* because I didn't feel good about it, I didn't feel right about it. Because my name is Nilandri Kumar, I don't want any prefixes, I don't want any suffixes, I want my name. I think every true musician, who wants to do music, has this [ethos]. (ibid.)

Like many Hindustāni musicians I interviewed, Kumar speaks in idealistic terms about what it is to be a true musician, and in somewhat cynical terms regarding the current state of affairs in the culture of professional Hindustāni music. There is a tension in the modern era between the devotional ideology of the culture and the realities of professionalism. Fame and esteem are tempered with modesty, as a tightrope is walked between celebrity and humility.

> I know of many artists who insist on the organizers that I should be put *paṇḍit* so I get respect. No, just writing *paṇḍit* is not respect. Respect: you might meet someone whose name you don't know, but if his music touches you, he's earned your respect, you should call him *paṇḍitji*. He may even be surprised you are calling him this and may not even know what it means. (ibid.)

In reality, honourific titles may say more about professional status than 'spiritual status'. In recent times, titles such as '*paṇḍit*' or '*ustad*' have become labels that relate to the professional success of an artist. Today, a musician typically becomes a '*guru*' by virtue of the fact that they have had a career as a performer, and now teach students. This appears at odds with these titles' spiritual connotations. On the surface, the reality behind how such titles can come into being seems superficial in comparison to the depth of cultural resonance and meaning attributed to them.

However, what may appear as pretention can also be viewed in a different light, suggesting a juncture of the pragmatic and the spiritual. A musician may become a '*paṇḍit*' because he is playing at a prestigious event alongside performers of considerable repute. His status is elevated, reflected in a new professional and cultural identity as *paṇḍit*. There is an implicit understanding that his musical skills are worthy of the event. In turn, these musical skills afford him a spiritual status, worthy of the honourific title. There is an understanding that he has undertaken a rigorous training process – a process that is seen as a spiritually transformative discipline in itself.

The international 'star' is a relatively new phenomenon in Hindustāni music (Neuman 1990 [1980]). With world tours, television appearances, billboard advertising, websites, and all the paraphernalia of modern stardom, the ego is surely at risk of inflation. This is reinforced by the kind of adoration luminaries like Jasraj experience, and the absolute 'power' inherent in being a '*guru*' to a number of dutiful 'disciples'. This appears to be compounded even further when we view the special position such esteemed artists are perceived to hold as mediators between man and the divine. With an apparent direct communion with the divine, the star performer appears as both divine agent, and at times, divine being. As Indian musicologist M.S. Ramaswami Aiyer puts it: 'we shall shine in our resplendent colour either as gods or musicians or, more often, as both; for both are the same' (Aiyar 1980, p.233).[26]

The musician as a mediator between man and the divine

This section explores the perception that a Hindustāni musician can act as a mediator between man and the divine. Continuing his praise of Jasraj, Roy points to the idea that musicians can enter deep inner states, withdrawing from this world and connecting to a divine space. From this space inspiration can come from a higher power. Roy suggests that this higher power is not only the ultimate creative guide, but also the 'supreme' audience.

> Creating a vibrant musical trance…. Paṇḍit Jasraj can suddenly be lost in himself within the very epicentre of that spiritual storm. Insiders have come to know it as a moment from a higher realm. A moment when, like the fading echo of many of his standing ovations, the everyday world recedes into oblivion, leaving him alone with his music… and his Maker. When that audience of one, the Supreme One, inspires him to even further musical ascendance… whispering to his soul what to sing next. (Roy 2004, p.91)

[26] The belief that a human being, through ritual or art, can transcend his mortal frame and become a 'god' can be seen in a number of examples throughout the Indian subcontinent. For example, anthropologist and travel writer William Dalrymple (2009, pp.29-55) reports on a tradition of dancing in Kannur, Kerala, where an apparent transformation takes place. In Dalrymple's account the transfiguration is all the more extreme because the performers are untouchables (*dalits*), the lowest caste in Hindu society. As part of an ancient tradition, performed at special holy sites, performers dress up in elaborate costumes, and take on the form of specific deities. They enter a trance-like state, and are then perceived to not only become possessed by the deity, but to become the deity itself. During the performance, they transcend all caste distinctions, and are perceived as being transformed from mortals to divine entities. During their trance-like dance, *brahmins* (the priestly *caste*, or highest class in Hindu society) bow down to them and touch their feet. This is completely oppositional to traditional social norms where a *brahmin* may not even drink water from the same source as a *dalit*, let alone touch him.

This idea that the 'Supreme One' or 'God' becomes the audience is reiterated by Jasraj himself as he recounts a recurrent dream he used to have:

> There was a strange dream, which used to blow my mind every time I saw it. It was the 'darbaar' of Lord Krishna, where, on his left sat kings and emperors, and on his right, were poets and musicians. I was in the middle, and Lord Krishna was telling me, 'Jasraj, prayers and rituals are meant for others. Whereas what you sing reaches me directly! Sing on…[27] (Paṇḍit Jasraj in Roy 2004, p.97)

Jasraj's dream is an apt metaphor for the perception that musicians can become mediators between the world of man and the divine, where sound and music are considered to facilitate a direct and intimate communion with a higher realm.

The dynamics of this mediation process are described in a number of ways by musicians. Life-long friend and colleague of Jasraj, *bansuri* player Hariprasad Chaurasia thinks of his music as a prayer to God and perceives God as listening to the musical prayer. It can be inferred that through offering music to God, his 'audience' or 'presence' is evoked. Instead of Chaurasia thinking of himself as a mediator between man and the divine, he thinks of God as present between himself and his audience:

> When I am on stage, I do not think of it as a performance. I think of it as a prayer! My offering to God. Who is present there between my audience and me… listening to my music. (Hariprasad Chaurasia in Roy 2004, pp.80-81)

Legendary *sitārist* Nikhil Banerjee is revered for the devotional quality of his music.[28] Interviews with Banerjee reveal a deep, philosophical attitude to his art:

> My approach to music is very deep. I do not compromise with anybody or anything else in the world. I do not care, I don't care if anybody appreciates it or not; I don't care. When I start I always like to play better, nice, good, heavenly music. I want to really go beyond this materialistic world towards space-there, no compromise…. A musician must lift up the souls of the listeners, and take them towards space. (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

[27] A '*darbaar*' is a Persian term meaning a court or formal audience chamber. The term can also denote a formal gathering of dignitaries at such a space. In general '*darbaar'* refers to Muslim courts of medieval India; applied here to the Hindu deity Krishna.

[28] I spoke to a number of musicians in Kolkata about Nikhil Banerjee, some of whom had known him personally. They all reiterated the same sentiment regarding the devotional quality of his music. Kushal Das is widely considered to play close to his style. He told me how it had been arranged that Nikhil Banerjee was going to be his *guru* just before his early death in 1986, when he was aged only 54.

On one hand this statement shows a lack of interest in whether or not the audience 'appreciates' the music. On the other hand Banerjee states that 'a musician must' facilitate an experience for the audience of a transcendental nature. The intention is clearly not to entertain the audience, but rather to bring them on an elevated journey.

The ideal of spiritual communion between musicians and audience

Indian musicians place a high value on audience feedback during a performance as a source of inspiration and encouragement. Ideally, the audience become participants in a shared experience. Hindustāni musicians comment on how interaction between musicians and audience helps in the generation of a sense of unity between everyone present:

> Its a quite intimate situation, we need that, that feeds back, and then you go with them and you come together, so everything is like the getting together with the sound, getting together with your accompanist, because you are not separate, you are complimentary. So that togetherness, getting one. Always become one, that's the thing. (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

This idealised state of unity between the musicians, and between the musicians and the audience, is often portrayed as a form spiritual communion. Vocalist Kishori Amonkar speaks about the audience in terms of a 'collective soul', that the performer 'strives to touch': 'The audience is the soul of the mehfil! A performer strives to touch that collective soul'[29] (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.122).

Sarod player Amjad Ali Khan considers this state of unity to arise out of a two-way process. If he can communicate to his audience, he then receives inspiration back from them, through which he 'creates' the unifying atmosphere:

> When I am able to get across to my audience, when I can get them involved, I find that my listeners always give me the inspiration to create that special atmosphere, the ambience where music, the musician and the audience become One. (Amjad Ali Khan 2013)

This aspiration towards unity is reflected in Indian philosophical thought. The metaphysical vision at the core of Indian philosophy is the idea that we are all

[29] A '*mehfil*' or 'house concert' is a traditional context for *rāga* presentation. This intimate environment is thought to be particularly conducive to a strong rapport between audience and musicians.

fragmented parts of a whole, and that all existence is ultimately united as one essence.[30] Indian philosopher Arvind Sharma relays a popular metaphor that describes how the world appears to be made up of separate, differentiated objects, which are ultimately all part of one unified spiritual reality:

> One can visualize a number of jars in a room. Let us imagine five such jars and label them jar A, B, C, D, and E. The space contained within each jar could then be labeled as space A, B, C, D, and E. Now let the jars be smashed. What happens to space A, B, C, D, and E? These spaces disappear into space, from which they were never different to begin with. Space A, B, C, D, and E had been artificially delimited by imagining the space contained in jar A as limited to A, whereas space is really unlimited. (Sharma 2006, p.70)

Agency

Just as Indian musicians often perceive musical agency as coming from a source outside of themselves during *riāz* (see Chapter 6), so, too, many Hindustāni musicians express the same idea in relation to their experience of performance. *Tablā* maestro Swapan Chaudhuri describes the experience of being an open channel, or 'medium', with music flowing through him:

> I am not creating music, somebody else is creating music through me… that's my experience, certain things at that point come which I have never thought about, so I feel that I am the medium… its coming out through me. (Swapan Chaudhuri February 2009)

The mysterious source of musical inspiration is often conceptualised as divine. *Tablā* player Nimai Das suggests that when the musician reaches out to God through 'full concentration', a communion or 'link' takes place between God and the musician. Through this 'link', the musician becomes led by 'the power of God':

> You are putting your full concentration on this tune. What is going directly to the Goddess power, is reaching to it, and there is link. The tune is going to the God and there is a link between the God and the musician. Something, some power is leading you, go in this way, play in this way. After completing your playing, if I ask you the question what have you played? You say me that I don't know what I played, it was the power of the God. (Nimai Das February 2009)

[30] Easwaran 2007 and 2009, see also Chapter 3.

Sarod player, Amjad Ali Khan, shares a similar conceptualisation. He perceives himself as a medium, receiving music from a 'cosmic' source:

> When I'm performing, in search of perfection and excellence with eyes closed, I feel connected to a cosmic power from where I receive the messages which my audience experience. (Amjad Ali Khan 2013)

Humility, surrender, and devotion

The idea that musical inspiration comes from a divine or cosmic source is combined with the belief that an attitude of humility and surrender is essential in order to connect to this source, and receive inspiration. For example, Nikhil Banerjee believes that any arrogance or egotism on the part of the musician is a block to creation:

> You cannot create this music – something comes from maybe within or from outside. That creates it! If you say, 'now I am creating!' then do it now, each time can you do it? No! You cannot do it each time. That is the purpose, and it's so vast, so much in the outer space. Most unpredictable things! (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

Alam Khan describes an active process of 'humbling yourself before the music'. 'The music' is again portrayed as an external entity that can be connected to, or channeled:

> You try to connect and humble yourself before the music, ask it to help you, whether that's *riāz* or performance, when you ask it to let you channel it, or connect with it, then the devotion is always there. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Paraphrasing his father (Ali Akbar Khan), Alam Khan again uses the term 'devotion' in reference to this act of humility:

> My father always said about the *rāga*, if you go into the *rāga* trying to play it as pure as possible and as correct as possible, then it will help you and show its face to you, and assist you. If you have respect for it like that, and a devotional attitude, then it will show its soul to you. (ibid.)

Here the agency is given over to *rāga*, painted as a living entity. *Rāga* responds benevolently to a sincere, respectful and humble musician, by revealing its essence to him or her. According to Sougata Roy Chowdhury, playing a *rāga* 'correctly', in terms of its technical melodic characteristics, may not be enough to evoke its presence, and receive its 'blessings'. He proposes that a process of surrender to the *rāga* is also required:

> Sometime *rāga* takes time to come. You are playing all the notes, correct ascending and descending, but still *rāga* is not coming. It happens. You need to surrender yourself to the *rāga*, and maybe *rāga* will come to you. Same way, *rāgas* are like God, when you surrender yourself fully and wholeheartedly, you will get the blessings of the *rāgas*.[31] (Sougata Roy Chowdhury July 2013)

Emotional affect

Playing a *rāga* can be an emotional journey. The affect of emotional states is not only theoretically codified in the tradition through the classificatory system of *rasa* ('juice', 'flavour', 'mood'), emotional states are also conceptualised as intimately connected to divine states.[32] Sougata Roy Chowdhury considers emotion essential in Hindustāni music.

> Emotion is the most important thing in Indian classical music, emotion touches your heart directly, emotion gives you some sort of mood; it gives effect to you and to the audience. I was playing at a concert in Marseille recently; one guy just fell from his chair and fainted. We had to stop and someone had to bring him to the hospital. Then we started playing again and an old lady started crying. She said later, 'this music took me somewhere, and I was remembering my past'. Emotion can touch others' emotion; we don't know why it happens! (Sougata Roy Chowdhury July 2013)

This account illustrates the potential power of Hindustāni music to move people in a profound way. Kishori Amonkar attempts to provide a cathartic experience for her audience, by bringing them on a journey of elation:

> When I sing for my audience, I try to sing in such a way that they are able to forget themselves, their pain, their problems…. I always try to take them along with me and gift them that feeling of exaltation. (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.124)

Nimai Das's passionate narrative on musical experience equates 'deep feelings' with 'devotion'. Das appears to be pointing to feelings that are deeper than everyday emotions.

> This devotional thing is coming one after another, the feelings, its generating the feelings of your soul and music is coming from your soul, and the heart's corner, the full feelings, deeper feelings. (Nimai Das February 2009)

[31] I am reminded of an evening spent with Sougata Roy Chowdhury and a number of musicians in a private house in Italy in May 2012. Sougata began to play Rāga Darbari Kanāda. After about ten minutes, he stopped, simply stating 'the *rāga* did not come'. He then re-tuned and played a different *rāga*.

[32] Two terms are commonly used in the Indian classical lexicon to refer to emotion. *Rasa* is the theory of aesthetic affect and mood, and *bhava* refers to 'feeling' and 'expression'. See Chapters 3 and 4 for detail, and other perspectives on the theory of *rasa*.

In his website, Ravi Shankar wrote about the 'ecstasy' induced through musical performance, and equates this experience with being 'near God'. He recalls a range of emotional experience including peace, sadness, and joy:

> For me, it is performing that generates a deep ecstasy, physically, mentally and spiritually. Through years of sadhana, I have developed this built-in 'stimulator' or 'inspirator' which, once I have tuned my instrument and closed my eyes, immediately starts working–shutting out the world, gradually giving me a sensation of great peace and power, together with either sadness or extreme joy. I have a real feeling of being high, sometimes 'higher', or even 'highest'!… I feel so near God when deeply involved in music. (Shankar 2012)

Ali Akbar Khan remarks on the unique experience of peace he feels through *rāga*. He equates this deep peace with 'a pathway to God', as opposed to 'entertainment':

> This music is not just to entertain, it is really a pathway to God. And once you really get the right sound in your soul and mind, it is such a peaceful and pleasant feeling. That peace you cannot get anywhere. (Ali Akbar Khan in Ruckert 2004, p.88)

In my conversation with Ali Akbar Khan's son Alam Khan, he spoke to me about the refined nature of emotional experience in Hindustāni music, and remarked that although an array of emotions are felt, somehow the experience is always 'grounded':

> It is highly emotional, but it [*rāga*] keeps you grounded within the field of all these emotions. It gives a platform to experience the range of all these things but yet stays centred at the beginning and the end, or throughout…. Maybe there's a different mood that encompasses all of them–seeing the world through a centred state. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Although he didn't refer to it directly, his thoughts reflect the theory of *rasa*. '*Shānti*' ('peace') is the final *rasa* in the classification system of nine moods ('*navaras*'). *Shānti* is said to incorporate and transcend all the other *rasas*. This view of *shānti* may identify with the all encompassing 'centred state' Khan suggests. Khan's thoughts also suggest that the artist sustains a kind of witnessing meditative state of mind throughout the exploration of *raga*, despite the range of feelings experienced. Reflecting this idea, Indian musicologist B.C. Deva asserts that *rasa* is both an emotional journey and an awareness of the nature of emotion:

> Rasa is a contemplative state of mind…. Though *rasa* itself is identified with emotion… it is both emotional behavior and more; *it is an awareness of the totality of the emotional situation*. It is a detached observance of such a condition of mind and body [emphasis, Devi]. (Devi 1992, p.73)

Devi's view of *rasa* as the witnessing of the emotional condition does not indicate that *rasa* is subjective. Rather he describes *rasa* as an objective absolute: 'The experience of *rasa* is absolute and is known only by empathy… that is to say, by entering into, feeling the permanent motif' (ibid.). This seductive notion of 'the permanent motif' mirrors a central tenet of Indian philosophy, the belief in the existence of a universal truth, or supreme absolute. Devi's thoughts on *rasa* point to a visceral experience of that collective spiritual condition.

Transcendence: **being lost and being present**

Some Hindustāni musicians describe *rāga* improvisation as a vehicle to transcendent states. Vocalist Kishori Amonkar is well known for singing with her eyes closed, as if she is in her own world, completely oblivious to her surroundings. She is even known as 'the blind artiste' (Roy 2004, p.124). In a searching interview with Ashok Roy she describes how she often gets lost in a trance during *rāga* presentation:

> I am presenting the *rāga* to a large audience. Yet, sometimes I am so lost to outer world that I can just about manage to hold on to my *swarmandal* out of sheer habit! In fact, I sometimes wish that I pass away to the other world... my stilled hands clutching on to the loyal *swarmandal*.[33] (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.127)

The idea of becoming lost in music, and transported to another space is reiterated by other musicians. Kushal Das speaks of rare occasions when a profoundly emotional atmosphere transports everyone present on a metaphysical journey. The potency of the music can be like a spell, cast through devotion and surrender:

> It happens on the stage very rarely, but when it happens then everybody can feel that, spellbound! The whole audience is spellbound. That means something happening. You can't even move, because of the disturbance, you cannot talk, you cannot move, even maybe you will cry. So that is the thing, I mean, musicians can create that atmosphere, where, nobody is there; I mean, everybody is there, but mentally everybody was somewhere out of the world, like this. So that means that is the surrender and that is the music, the main thing is the devotional side, I feel, in Indian classical music. But it happens very rare. Not every day. (Kushal Das February 2007)

[33] A *swarmandal* is a stringed harp consisting of 21-36 strings tuned to the scale of the *rāga*. Hindustāni vocalists use it for pitch support and to add musical texture at key moments during a recital.

Some musicians use more cosmic metaphors to describe the experience of transcendence: 'Many times when I play my flute, I feel this special power surging in me. I forget myself. I get transported to a different planet' (Hariprasad Chaurasia in Roy 2004, p.82). Nikhil Banerjee uses a similar analogy, describing a sense of transportation beyond the material world, stating that this kind of transcendence is the 'purpose of the art'. He also directly compares the feeling of being lifted up 'towards space' with being taken 'up towards God', thus conceptualising transcendent experience as spiritual.

> For a few moments, good music… lifts you up and you forget your whole body and surroundings. That is the purpose of the art! That it will take us up towards God, you could say, or towards space, beyond all these things. (Nikhil Banerjee 1985)

The devotional attitude espoused by many Hindustāni musicians can be described in terms of the quality of focus engendered and experienced by them. In his autobiography, the *santoor* player Shiv Kumar Sharma relates spirituality in Hindustāni music to an inward journey:

> To me the most important process in music is to go inward. Playing the santoor is not just entertainment for me; it takes me inward. This is the spiritual quality of the music. (Sharma 2002, p.58)

Sharma writes about ideal musical experience in terms of a state of blissful consciousness. This state is induced through intense concentration, where mundane perception dissolves. Sharma describes this experience through the lens of Hindu philosophy:

> Moments when you concentrate so intensely on music, lose yourself so completely, that the physical world disappears and you reach a sublime level of consciousness–to me this is Nirvana. (ibid., p.161)

'*Nirvana*' is a Hindu term denoting an ideal state of blissful liberation from the world of suffering (*samsara*); it can also be described as union with God.[34] Sharma qualifies his remarks by stating that the experience of 'spiritual communion' only comes in ephemeral glimpses, and only in moments when he is so completely immersed in the music that he loses awareness of everything else:

[34] Knott (2008); King (1999).

> My art is my prayer to the almighty–I continually seek communion with God through the mantra of my music. The spiritual communion can happen only momentarily, when I have lost myself totally in my music and forgotten the audience, my surroundings, my ego, everything.[35] (Sharma 2002, p.162)

Sharma's remarks, coupled with the narratives of the other musicians I have quoted, point to a pertinent paradigm. The relationship between an active intensity of focus, and the simultaneous experience of loosing oneself, is revealing. The act of concentration appears to become a vehicle for transportation to states of consciousness beyond the physical world and the world of habitual perception. There is an emphasis on the importance of surrender, humility, and a 'devotional' attitude. Concentration and surrender are presented as two sides of a coin, functionally related. Combined, they suggest a particular quality of focus that is both singular and open, and able to induce profound transcendental experiences, which are conceptualised as spiritual.

It should be noted that not all musicians speak of their musical experiences in terms of transcendence. For example, Alam Khan says that he does not reach such a 'high place' through his music.[36] However, he still equates being 'lost in the moment' with being 'present in the moment', mirroring the paradigm I have suggested above.

> I don't say that I go any kind of high place, or a place of realisation or anything like that. The closest thing I feel is being very connected to the music or at peace, or maybe just lost in the moment, you know, or present in the moment. Being present means that you're totally one with the notes, so you forget what you are doing for a second, but you are playing and the music is coming out. That's that moment, you can feel a very deep connection there. (Alam Khan June 2013)

[35] Shiv Kumar Sharma is a 'superstar' of Hindustāni music, regularly headlining major festivals and playing in front of very large audiences. It must be difficult to forget one's surroundings and ego in front of two thousand people, many of whom have come to be entertained. While some artists such as Jasraj and Sharma may have managed to sustain a 'devotional' ethos, a number of my interviewees observed that younger musicians today appear to be more focused on displays of virtuosity and effect, seeking to impress an audience rather than cultivate a 'devotional atmosphere'.

[36] He modestly expresses how he sometimes connects to a deep space through listening to the power of his father's music (Ali Akbar Khan).

The Many Faces of *Rāga*: Performance Context(s) and the Musician-Audience Relationship

In this section I focus on performance context. My intention is to view much of the spiritual ideology I have already presented within the pragmatic realities of performance environments. I consider how *rāga* improvisation alters in significance and meaning depending on the performance setting and conditions. Musical style, the perceived function of *rāga*, and the experience of the participants are found to be largely contextually determined. Through this discussion I shed further light on value systems attached to *rāga* presentation, and highlight ideational distinctions between 'devotion' and 'entertainment' in the context of Hindustāni music performance.

This section is divided into two parts. The first part is centred around a number of events that took place during the festival of Sarasvatī Puja in various locations in North India. I include a comparison of three distinct musical events which occurred in one place, just hours apart, in Kushal Das's apartment, Kolkata, 23rd January 2007. I suggest that these three events represent a continuum from 'devotion' to 'entertainment'. Analyzing these events highlights central concerns in the entertainment-devotion debate. The second part surveys typical *rāga* performance contexts, including house concerts, theatre and concert hall environments, private gatherings, and recording studios.

Part 1: Kushal Das Live and Sarasvatī Puja

Kushal Das live

The first time I saw Kushal Das perform was in Kolkata, in January 2007. The concert was a formal, but modest event, staged in a medium sized theatre with built-in tiered seating. The theatre was less than half full.[37] In customary fashion, the musicians sat on a raised platform ('*rias*') covered in a white cloth, which stood on a large stage. The stage was decorated with flowers, and there was a large banner on the back wall that read '*Kajalrekha Musical Foundation*', the organiser and sponsor of the event. Figure 7.3 shows Kushal Das playing a concert two years later, when the stage was

[37] It is a sad reality that small classical music events are often poorly attended throughout India today, despite the facts that they are often free, and the standard of musicianship is extremely high.

set up in a similar fashion. His son and student, Kalyanjit Das, is to the right of the picture playing *tānpurā*. Three other students are sitting behind and Subhankar Banerjee is playing *tablā*.



Figure 7.3: Kushal Das live, Kala Mandir, Kolkata (Kolkata, January 2009).

At the concert in 2007, Das played a single *rāga* lasting one hour and twenty minutes. This is a little longer than one expects at a concert today. A more common format is one *rāga* of approximately forty minutes to one hour, followed by a shorter, light composition. The fact that Das played one long *rāga* did not surprise me because I was aware of his reputation as 'a very devotional musician'.[38] The label 'a devotional musician' can have multiple meanings in the context of Indian classical music. I infer from my conversations with Hindustāni musicians that such a label is attached to a musician who has a strong work ethic with regard to practice, and who, perhaps ironically, does not deliberately 'show off' in front of an audience. Das's *rāga* presentation was mature, and while it was clearly virtuosic, it was not exuberant for the sake of exuberance.[39]

[38] In the course of conversations with Indian musicians I am consistently asked who my teacher is. My answer 'Kushal Das' is generally followed by a positive response and some commentary about him. It is from these comments that I extracted the label 'a very devotional musician' for him. Playing a single *rāga* as an entire recital is considered a traditional and purist approach.

[39] This may be refuted were you to witness his incredibly fast *tans* (fast melodic passages of improvisation). However, this virtuosity came towards the end of the recital, after an hour of playing. There was a clear build up to this point and the rapid *tans* flowed naturally out of the *rāga*. They did not come across as forced or introduced for the sake of exhibition. Rather, they were integral to the

I attended the concert with Sougata Roy Chowdhury. He was unusually quiet after the event and only had three words to say, 'that was *puja*!'[40] We talked a little later. He said 'he went deep inside, many other *sitār* players play just so they can say "look I can do this!"' I spoke to Roy Chowdhury about the concert again a few days later; he added that he could barely talk directly afterwards because he had been so moved. The performance was refreshing for him in light of modern stylistic change. He spoke about a growing trend in concerts where performers show off their virtuosity and use clever tricks and 'gimmicks' to please the audience. He finished his remarks with a punch line that appears straight out of the famous Tansen story recited in the first section of this chapter: 'in the old days people played for God, nowadays they play for the audience.' This anecdote has been repeated to me a number of times by other Hindustāni musicians as a way of summing up the perceived nature of recent change in the tradition. When I pressed Roy Chowdhury about the remark, he revealed that he was referring to an apparent change that has occurred only in the last generation or two.[41]

I was in Kushal Das's apartment two weeks after his concert, helping him prepare for a special event. The next day was Sarasvatī Puja, an annual festival in honour of Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning, music, and the arts.

Sarasvatī Puja

In this section I give an account of various musical events during the festival of Sarasvatī Puja from my own experiences. I suggest that the choreography of these musical events highlights pertinent concerns in the entertainment-devotion debate. I was fortunate to witness the festival in Varanasi in 2000, in Kolkata in 2007, and in the Himalayas along the India-Nepal border region in 2009. I begin the discussion with an account of the festival on the streets of Kolkata (2007) and Varanasi (2000). Then I shift the focus to the experience of Sarasvatī Puja at Kushal Das's apartment in 2007.

---

overall aesthetic form of the musical presentation.

[40] '*Puja*' means 'worship' (Knott 2008 [1998]). The term generally refers to a Hindu or Buddhist devotional practice involving a form of prayer, sacrifice or offering to a deity.

[41] This kind of nostalgia for the past may be an ongoing historical attitude in the culture of Indian classical music, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter.

Sarasvatī Puja is celebrated in North India on a day known as '*Vasant Panchami*', marking the beginning of spring in the Hindu lunar calendar. Countless clay idols of Sarasvatī are on sale throughout India during the week running up to the festival (figure 7.4).[42] People buy an idol in order to create their own shrine for the festival.



Figure 7.4: Clay statues of goddess Sarasvatī on sale in Lake Market (Kolkata, January 2007)

Large public shrines are also created for the duration of the festival.[43] In 2007, one of these shrines was placed in the street where I was living in Kolkata. Throughout the day various musicians passed by the shrine and played music in front of it for several minutes, before carrying on in procession to the next shrine.

[42] Sarasvatī is usually depicted with four arms. With two arms she plays a *veena*, an ancient India stringed instrument; another arm holds a scroll, signifying knowledge; and her fourth arm holds a string of pearls depicting purity and grace. This aspect of grace is also represented through her *avatar*, a swan (or sometimes a peacock). Small swans are found on some Indian stringed instruments such as *sitārs*, representing Sarasvatī, the divine embodiment of melody. Sarasvatī is also a river goddess (Muesse 2011, p.48).

[43] The festival of Sarasvatī Puja lasts for three days in Varanasi and one day in Kolkata.



Figure 7.5: Sarasvatī shrine, Late Market (Kolkata, 23rd January 2007)

One of the first musicians to come to the shrine was a solo drummer, carrying a large drum strapped around his shoulder (figure 7.5). A Hindu priest was also present at the shrine. I was struck at the time by the similarity between the actions of the two men. Both men faced the image of Sarasvatī. The repetitive nature of the drumming style was similar to the repetitive actions of the priest, who was waving a flame in front of the large Sarasvatī idol in a circular motion.[44] To me, both the music and the fire (‘*aarti*’) appeared as offerings to Sarasvatī, and both men were performing an explicit act of ‘devotion’, or *puja* (‘offering’, ‘worship’).

Some time later, an ensemble of six musicians came to the shrine: four drummers, one trumpet player, and one person playing a pair of shakers. They performed in a lively style, creating a celebratory mood. Their music was more exuberant and animated than that of the solo drummer. The musicians had a more casual air about them. They were looking around, and were facing each other and the people around them, just as much as they were facing Sarasvatī. The musical style and posturing of the solo

[44] The use of fire (‘*aarti*’) in Hindu ritual is a living legacy of early *vedic* times when the fire god Agni was central to religious ritual.

drummer appeared to define his performance as ‘devotional’, while the performance of the ensemble of musicians appeared to be both ‘devotion’ and ‘entertainment’.

Seven years previously, in February 2000, I was in Varanasi for Sarasvatī Puja. I witnessed a wide range of music and dance throughout the three-day festival in Varanasi’s public spaces. An inclusive ethos was evident, with community participation playing a key role throughout the festival. Many events took place at public Sarasvatī shrines that had been erected throughout the city. Celebration, devotion, and entertainment merged within the festive atmosphere, and it was often difficult to define a clear distinction between ‘entertainment’ and ‘devotion’ at any particular event.

Figure 7.6 shows one of the public shrines, set up on the *gats*, along the banks of the River Ganga. At this shrine (just out of the picture) a stereo-system was blasting out loud Bollywood pop music. It may be difficult to reconcile this musical style with the concept of religious devotion. However, the context and the intention of the music appeared to make it ‘devotional’. Played before Sarasvatī, it appeared as an offering to the goddess. In this case, context, rather than style appeared the defining factor in the entertainment/devotion debate.



Figure 7.6: Sarasvatī shrine (Varanasi, February 2000)

A dance competition was taking place at another shrine in Varanasi. The music was also Bollywood pop. The dancers were young girls and boys, and the style of their movement reflected the music; it was Indian style disco dancing, with pronounced arm, hip, and hand gestures. This was performed on a small stage in front of a seated audience with a statue of Sarasvatī looking on. The dancing was clearly directed towards the audience, who watched attentively and clapped intermittently. Many had their backs to the idol of Sarasvatī, which appeared as a backdrop to the event, rather than the central focus (figure 7.7). 'Entertainment' and 'participation' seemed to be central to this event, with 'devotion' perhaps taking a back seat.



Figure 7.7: Sarasvatī watching over a dance competition (Varanasi, February 2000)

On the last day of Sarasvatī Puja in Varanasi, the clay idols are ceremonially cast into the sacred Ganga River. Figure 7.8 shows a group of children carrying a Sarasvatī idol down to the river. There was a fanfare of repetitive chanting performed by other children present as they descended the *gats* (steps leading down to the river). They placed the idol into a boat, rowed out to the middle of the river, and cast Sarasvatī in.



Figure 7.8: Sarasvatī being carried to the River Ganga (Varanasi, February 2000)

The diversity of events at Sarasvatī Puja demonstrates two important aspects of Hinduism: individual interpretation and adaptability. The manner of one's participation in Hinduism is largely open to personal taste and interpretation. Through this openness to interpretation, ancient practices are continuously reconfigured and re-contexualised through a seamless assimilation with modernity.

I witnessed further examples of this open, inclusive ethos, and the assimilation of tradition with modernity, during Sarasvatī Puja in 2009 along the India-Nepal border region in the Himalayas. Although most locals in the border area identify themselves as Buddhist, Hindu practices are also evident among them and a blend of Buddhism and Hinduism prevails. Statues of Sarasvatī were displayed in the villages I passed through during the festival. On one occasion I followed the sound of loud pop music, and ended up visiting a village school to discover a children's disco taking place in front of a shrine to Sarasvatī. The event was put on in the school to mark the Sarasvatī

festival. The children were dancing to pop music in celebratory mood. As in the Varanasi examples, 'devotion', 'entertainment', and 'community participation' appeared to blend as one.

Sarasvatī Puja in Kushal Das's home

In this segment, I give an account of Sarasvatī Puja at Kushal Das's apartment, 23rd January 2007. Kushal Das lives with his wife and son in an affluent suburb of Kolkata. He invited family, neighbours, friends and students to Sarasvatī Puja at his apartment during the morning of the festival. The gathering consisted of about twenty people, seven of whom were music students of his.[45] A shrine had been created against one wall in the living room. The centrepiece of the shrine was a clay idol of Sarasvatī, surrounded by flowers, offerings of food, musical instruments and – illustrating again the theme of assimilating modernity in Hindu practice – a modern stereo system (figure 7.9).



Figure 7.9: Sarasvatī shrine in Kushal Das's family apartment (Kolkata, 23rd January 2007)

[45] These students came from India, France, England, Japan, the United States of America, and Ireland.

Three distinct musical events took place over the course of just three hours in Das's apartment. These three events represent a musical spectrum from 'devotion' to 'entertainment'. The first musical event was ritualistic and overtly devotional. Everybody present sat facing the shrine to Sarasvatī while a Hindu *brahmin* conducted a ceremony involving an offering of flowers and fire ('*aarti*') to Sarasvatī.[46] This was a traditional *puja* ceremony. The sonic components in the ritual included prayers and *mantras* recited by the *brahmin*, a set of bells rung by Kushal Das, and a large conch blown by Das's wife. A *tablā* player also accompanied proceedings, playing a simple repetitive rhythm. It was clear that the music was not orchestrated with any conscious effort to connect rhythmically, harmonically, or melodically. The musical style was functional, ritualistic, and evocative. The musical form involved a gradual build in intensity, ending with the conch. Although there is no doubt that the music added to our enjoyment of the ceremony, the context, intention and style define it as a ritualistic act of 'devotion'. The sound itself was an offering to Sarasvatī and the music functioned to draw everyone's attention into the ceremony and towards the shrine. It seems to me that if the music had been more musically sophisticated, or if virtuosic displays of musicianship were presented, it may have distracted the listeners from the ceremony and onto the musicians. The sound was all directed towards Sarasvatī, everybody present faced the goddess as equal participants in the offering.

Following this, Das played a *rāga* on the *sitar*, accompanied by the *tablā* player. The *rāga* was also an offering to Sarasvatī.[47] In a similar fashion to the *puja* ceremony, the two musicians sat facing the shrine with all the guests sitting behind them, also facing the image. The *rāga* was about forty-five minutes long, and was rendered in a much simpler and more modest style than Kushal Das's typically virtuosic theatre performances. The presentation displayed humility with no overt displays of musicianship. The musicians were not the focus of attention. Everybody's attention was firmly on the shrine, sharing a devotional experience through the rendition of *rāga* as *puja*. During the event I was reminded of Sougata Roy Chowdhury's apt

[46] A *brahmin* is a birth-right member of what is often called the 'priestly caste' in Hindu culture. Only such an individual is endowed with the right to conduct certain Hindu ceremonies.
[47] I had assisted Kushal Das in the creation of the shrine the day before. During this time he explained to me that he was going to play a *rāga* 'as an offering to *Sarasvatī*'.

statement two weeks previously after Das's public concert in Kolkata when he exclaimed, 'that was *puja*!'

When the *rāga* was finished, the formal ceremony was over. The food – which had been placed as an offering to Sarasvatī – was now shared out between everybody present. The mood completely shifted from one of formal ritual and devotion, to one of informal celebration. People talked, mingled and moved around the room. In time, more musical instruments were produced for another musical presentation. The musicians set themselves up in a different place in the room, and in a similar orientation to a typical stage performance. Their backs were to the wall, and the guests became their audience facing them, some sat and some stood around casually. The *brahmin* priest who had conducted the initial *puja* ceremony now played *pakāwaj*, while Kushal Das maintained a time cycle on *harmonium*.[48] The performance style reflected the shift in mood. The people listening most actively were Das's foreign students, staring attentively at the musicians. We witnessed an incredible display of virtuosity and showmanship. The percussionist periodically stopped and explained what he was going to play next. This included 'eleven-over-nine', 'seven-over-nine', and 'sixteen-over-nine' internal polymetrics with complex variations.[49] His exuberant display of virtuosity and mathematical ingenuity was totally opposite to the humble offering presented by Kushal Das just an hour earlier. The *pakāwaj* player was entertaining a group of eager music students, and appeared to be relishing the opportunity to perform the most difficult aspects of his instrument, to our great satisfaction.

Conclusion: context, function, and style

Illustrating these three contrasting musical events, in the same place, just hours apart, serves to highlight defining factors in the devotion/entertainment debate. These

[48] The *pakāwaj* is a double-sided barrel drum traditionally used to accompany *dhrupad*. *Dhrupad* exhibits an austere form of stylistic presentation, and virtuosic displays of *pakāwaj* playing are rarely seen on stage. By 'maintained a time cycle', Das played a simple melody around in circles ('*laharā*'), set to a particular number of beats. For the majority of the recital he sustained a nine-beat cycle known as *matta taal*. This simple melody was the reference, sustaining the frame of *taal* (rhythmic cycle) underneath the *pakāwaj* player's extemporisations.

[49] 'Eleven-over-nine' means that the basic pulse is a nine-beat cycle, here maintained by the *harmonium*. The percussionist plays an eleven-pulse feel over this, fitting into one nine-beat cycle. The aesthetic appeal is in the complex rhythmic tension created between the nine-pulse feel, contrasted with the eleven-pulse feel; and the feeling of resolution on beat one of the time cycle (*sum*).

factors include the context and perceived function of an event, the physical orientation and relationship between performers and audience, and musical style. The first two musical happenings were explicitly 'devotional'. The context and function of the music was clear, they were '*puja*', devotional offerings to goddess Sarasvatī. This function dictated the manner of presentation. The physical orientation was choreographed such that Sarasvatī was the 'audience'; the music was directed at Sarasvatī, turning the attention to the divine as opposed to the musicians. For Kushal Das, playing *sitār* with his back to us, and facing Sarasvatī, the *rāga* was *puja* and we were all witnesses to, and participants in, a humble devotional offering. This facilitated a shared experience, with little separation between the music makers and the rest of us. Stylistically, the *rāga* was understated, creating a sublime and contemplative atmosphere, in sharp contrast to his renowned concert presentations full of ingenious musicality and astounding virtuosity. This modest style served the function perfectly, sustaining a devotional mood, and not distracting attention from Sarasvatī. The goddess was both the audience and the locus of attention. For the final musical event, we were the audience and the focus was clearly directed towards the percussionist. The *pakāwaj* player set himself up to entertain us and we were thoroughly enjoying his virtuosity and musical sophistication. His wonderful display finished with a feat perhaps more fit for the circus than the stage. He performed seven different rhythms with seven different parts of his body simultaneously, including his eyebrows, hands, feet and mouth!

The distinction between devotion and entertainment seems clear in the case of the music in Kushal Das's apartment. The contextual functionality and performative parameters stand out in sharp relief because of the overtly defined intention of these music events.[50] However, when it comes to more typical presentations of Hindustāni music, such as Kushal Das's theatre concert, the distinctions once again become blurred. The question then is not so much whether an event is 'devotion' or 'entertainment', but how ideas about 'devotion' and 'entertainment' combine and conflict.

[50] It must be conceded that analysis on singular events can lead to over-generalisations. Had the *pakāwaj* player performed facing Sarasvatī, and had Kushal Das played facing us, would I now be considering their respective musical presentations in a different light? I am certainly not suggesting that whether someone is playing for 'devotion' or playing for 'entertainment' is simply a matter of physical positioning and degree of virtuosic display.

Part 2: A Comparative Survey of Performance Contexts in Hindustāni Music

The typical context for a recital of Indian classical music has changed throughout its long history. In very general terms, its context has shifted from the (Hindu) temple in the ancient period, to the Muslim court in the medieval period, and to the secular concert hall or theatre in the modern era.[51] This generality belies the fact that there are a number of different contexts for *rāga* presentation today. Hindustāni music is now largely based in urban centres. This demographic has evolved during the past one hundred and fifty years, largely out of economic and professional necessity (Neuman 1990 [1980]). The most common setting for a recital today is a theatre or auditorium, especially in large cities such as Kolkata or Delhi. A more traditional and intimate format is a house concert ('*mehfil*', or '*baithak*' ['small gathering'] Bagchee 2006, p.12). Recording studios and radio stations present a more modern context for Hindustāni music. Outside of public events, musicians often play *rāga* alone as an extension of *riāz*, or together in informal settings where listeners (such as students, family, and friends) may be present. I survey these various performance contexts here, highlighting the salient features of each, especially as they relate to the general discussion on the spiritual ideology of Hindustāni music and the apparent dichotomy between 'devotion' and 'entertainment'. I do this, in large part, in order to consider spiritual ideology in relation to the realities of performance contexts.

Rāga at a house concert: audience feedback and participation

Although some Hindustāni musicians have said to me that they particularly relish the experience of playing in front of a large audience of many thousands, the consensus among musicians I have spoken to is that a more intimate gathering, such as a house concert or '*mehfil*', is their preferred place to perform. A *mehfil* is generally held in a private house with a small invited audience.

The audience members at these events are often knowledgeable about classical music, and the intimate setting means that a rapport can be generated between musicians and audience. The dynamic between the musicians and the audience can be animated. Some audience members follow the *taal* (rhythm cycle) with their hands or fingers. Discerning listeners often give spontaneous gestural and verbal feedback to the

[51] Neuman (1990 [1990], p.221-229); Wade (2004 [1979]).

musicians at key moments, energising and inspiring the performance. These gestures may include a wave of the hand or a lateral nod of the head. Vocal responses generally take the form of superlatives such as '*kyabat*!' ('What a thing is this!'), '*javab nahi*!' ('No answer!'), or '*bahh*!' ('Superb!').[52] In terms of proximity, the *tablā* player is the soloist's closest listener, and it is he who often provides consistent encouragement to the performer. This is especially evident during *ālāp*, when he is not busy playing *tablā*. A soloist may look at his *tablā* player (or the audience), as if to elicit a response, especially when there is a pause between melodic phrases. In a similar fashion to the audience response, a *tablā* player's encouragement comes in the form of hand and head gestures, and short verbal exclamations. A musician may also have a group of disciples (students) on the stage behind him, 'providing', as Neuman contends, 'an immediately responsive circle' (Neuman 1990 [1980], p.72), see figure 7.3, p.243.

Active response and participation from such an audience of music connoisseurs is highly valued by performing artists. Feedback is seen as essential food for a sustained and inspired recital of *rāga*, and good audience rapport is a key factor in accessing the success of a presentation. Vocalist, Vinay Bhide considers the communicative exchange between musicians and listeners as paramount to the very definition of 'singing' and 'music'. Without such an exchange, he suggests, the music is merely mechanical:

> We can sing for three hours from our hard-drive, hard-drive, nothing thinking, just whatever is practise, practise, practise, just pump it out. We can do that for two-three hours but that's not singing. Singing is 'my thought should be presented and communicated.' The exchange has to be there, then it is music. That's why this music was never a concert music, small intimate get together, where people could actually speak out if they like. It is not an interruption for us, because we got the feedback.[53] (Vinay Bhide July 2012)

[52] These superlatives are difficult to define, in part because they express the idea that the beauty of the moment comes from its very indefinability. They also express an element of surprise or an acknowledgement of the unexpected.

[53] The value of performer-audience rapport is recognised by scholars within and outside of the realm of Indian music. For example, Richard Schechner equates this feedback to the 'home team advantage' experienced in the world of competitive sport (2005, p.16). Ali Jihad Racy proposes an 'ecstatic feedback model' to explain the generation of ecstasy through audience participation in *tarab* performance (Racy in Nettl and Russell 1998); as a distant cousin, this musical tradition resonates strongly with Hindustāni music.

As we have already discussed, ideologically, musician-audience rapport can extend into a shared experience of spiritual communion. The *mehfil* is widely considered the ideal environment for such a charged and intimate atmosphere.

Theatres, concert halls and outdoor venues: microphones and mass audiences

Since the relatively recent advent of microphones and amplification systems, large performance contexts have become possible. It is common today to see Indian classical music in theatres, concert halls, large marquees, and large outdoor spaces. It has been over thirty years since Neuman (1980) eloquently illustrated how Hindustāni music has adapted to these new environments and to the pressures of professionalism, without a fundamental change to the underlying tradition. To a large extent his thesis still holds true. However, many musicians today identify sweeping changes over the last generation, fueled in part by mass consumerism. The effect of the physical detachment between musicians and audience; the pressure to entertain and impress large uninformed audiences; and environmental distractions (such as sound issues), are all factors cited by musicians as instrumental to this change. Large performance contexts significantly impact on the experience for both the musicians and the listeners.

Figure 7.10 illustrates the physical disconnect between the musicians and the audience in large auditoriums. Alam Khan (*sarod*) and Arup Chatterjee (*tablā*) are playing at the prestigious 'Dover Lane Music Conference', 2009, in the Nazrul Mancha auditorium, Kolkata, with a seating capacity of 3,500. An array of microphones, monitors and speakers stand between the musicians and the audience. The closest audience members are over fifteen meters away from the musicians, and most are much further back. See also figure 7.1, p.225.



Figure 7.10: Alam Khan, The Dover Lane Music Conference, Nazrul Mancha (Kolkata, January 2009)

Vinay Bhide told me about how Indian classical musicians playing in theatres in the West sometimes ask for the house lights to be turned on a little so that they can see the audience, in order to receive something of the feedback that is so valued in more intimate settings. When classical music in theatres was first introduced, the very idea of the audience sitting on chairs instead of on the ground, and the idea of the audience sitting higher than the musicians, caused some controversy. Ashok Roy relays a story from 1953 that gives us insight into this controversy. The story is not set in a theatre, but in a rich businessman's palace in Bombay. Apparently the 'elite' audience were sitting on 'cushioned chairs and velvet sofas' (Roy 2004, p.100), awaiting a musical presentation by Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (*sarod*) and Kishan Maharaj (*tablā*). The story goes that Kishan Maharaj refused to sit lower than the audience. The concert did not begin until the sofas were removed and the gathered assembly were placed on the floor. 'It would be an insult to Indian classical music, he had said, if [the musicians] had to sit at a level where the audience would rest its feet!' (Roy 2004, p.100).[54]

This particular controversy is firmly in the past, and spaces with tiered, raised seating are common settings for concerts today. It seems to me that the dignified setting of the theatre is appropriate to Hindustāni music's current status as classical art music.

[54] Feet are powerfully symbolic in Indian culture. To 'sit at someone's feet' implies submission and humility.

However, musicians state that the conditions must be right, and in large environments there can be many distractions. Distractions come in many forms, including sound systems and disruptive audiences. Sound issues can distract from a musician's concentration and disturb the sense of naturalistic flow. It is not uncommon for artists to stop playing during a recital and gesture for alterations to be made in their monitors, although the problem of poor amplification in Indian concerts has improved immensely in recent times.

Irrespective of an artist's integrity and ideological orientation, performing in front of a large audience brings its own demands. There is great pressure to please the audience and live up to their expectations. Many people in the audience may have come to be 'entertained', or may simply want to see a famous artist. In a large setting, only a minority of the audience are well informed about classical music. In these environments, those who are attentively listening to the music will inevitably be disturbed by people clambering in during the delicate *ālāp* section at the beginning of a concert. It is common in recent times to witness a sea of white dots hovering above the crowd as people record sections of the concert on their mobile phones and cameras. It is also not uncommon for some people to talk over the music, paying almost no attention whatsoever to the recital, much to the annoyance of avid listeners. Their motivation for attending must be questioned. On the expectations of these new mass audiences, Ruckert writes:

> They wish to be entertained, but not over-burdened with recondite technical or musical displays. They want to hear a polished and virtuosic performance, but not too introspective an exploration–they cannot perceive the minute differences between the hundreds of *rāga* and *tāla* types to which former elite audiences may have been more attuned. (Ruckert 2004, p.16)

In February 2009, at a large concert in Kolkata featuring two famous musicians, Zakir Hussain on *tablā* and Aashish Khan on *sarod*, I noticed how a large number of people arrived late and an equal number left early. I asked my companion, *tablā* player Debojyoti Sanyal about this. His opinion was that many people attending had no real interest in the music; he stated that, 'they just want to take a photo and be able to say they saw the musicians'. Author and Hindustāni vocalist Sheila Dhar notes, with some indignation:

> Not everyone who makes the effort to attend is necessarily interested in the music…. Many of the young people come because they are in search of their lost cultural identity. Jaded politicians come to prop up their image. Socialites come to be seen and because it is a pleasant and possibly rewarding way to pass the time. Snobbery, curiosity, boredom, networking and entertainment are some other reasons which draw audiences and can sometimes account for nearly half their number. (Dhar 2005, p.293)

In discussions among Indian classical musicians, a sense of disillusionment with modern audiences is often related to the effects of mass consumerism on the music. Musicians are criticised for catering to uninformed audiences, trying to impress and please them with gimmicks, displays of virtuosity, and light classical renditions, resulting in a lack of *rāga* purity and a general watering-down of tradition. For example, Alam Khan suggests that some *rāgas* are not suited to high speeds, and points to how these *rāgas* are compromised by musicians who play them too fast:

> A lot of the time people play *rāga* at speeds that don't suit the *rāga* at all. My father [Ali Akbar Khan] and my aunt [Annapurna Devi] both said this a lot… that this *rāga* doesn't call for that kind of speed. You can't see the *rāga* at all, it's not appropriate. But nowadays people just do that, that's kind of unfortunate, because it just waters it down, it takes the value out of the *rāga*. (Alam Khan June 2013)

Sheila Dhar suggests that the integrity of Hindustāni music is often compromised as a result of modern consumerism:

> Music can be made at many levels, and as in many spheres of activity the functional product has the greatest demand and therefore the greatest abundance. Contrived music, leaning heavily on sentiment, pathos, melodrama or gaiety is steadily manufactured with dedication, and consumed avidly by those who need soporifics, stimulants, opiates or psychic support.... What makes it unacceptable to the connoisseur is not its elementary character–for the greatest music can be extremely simple–but the fact that the musician is not seriously involved with his vision, and is making a conscious effort at producing beauty. One is tempted to add that in our music beauty is a bye-product, and like happiness, eludes those who make a business of seeking it. (Dhar 2003, p.122)

The philosophical orientation of Dhar's concluding statements points towards a particular form of artistic integrity: focusing on process is more important than the self-conscious consideration of the musical product; an artist should stay true to his practice, and not compromise it for the sake of pleasing others. This is mirrored by *druphad* vocalist Zia Fariduddin Dagar, who adds that there is a transparency between a musician's ethos and the depth of his or her music:

> If you have faith in your God and guru, it will manifest in your soul, your music. The listener too will get a feel of what kind of a man you are, what are your values.... The mantra today is to try and please the masses! But you see, people have different tastes, different attitudes. How many can you really please? The best thing is to truly immerse within yourself and please your own soul. The rest will all fall in line! In fact, you need not even look at the audience. Close your eyes and sing. (Zia Fariduddin Dagar in Roy 2004, pp.328-329)

Hindustāni Vocalist Kishori Amonkar expresses a similar view to Dhar and Dagar, with a different orientation. Instead of singing for self (*ātman*), she sings for God, or the universal self (*paramatma*).[55]

> Suppose four thousand people are sitting in front of you. How many souls can you communicate with? How many atmaas [individual souls] can you please? It used to worry me... until I found the solution. Sing for God. If Paramatma [universal soul] is happy, ordinary souls will also feel that happiness! That's why I usually sing with my eyes closed. I am even referred to as the 'blind artiste'! (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.124)

Ali Jihad Racy points to a dichotomy in relation to *tarab* music that resonates with this discussion. On one hand, 'music is seen as a participatory phenomenon that involves direct emotional exchange between performers and listeners. *Tarab* artistry is intimately intertwined with the ecstasy-based and interactive dynamics of the performance event' (Racy in Nettl and Russell 1998, p.110). On the other hand, '*tarab* musicians stress that playing for oneself can be a profoundly ecstatic and creative experience, and can lead to a state of *saltanah* (an ecstatic state)' (ibid.). In a similar way, Hindustāni musicians speak about profound musical experiences when they are alone, especially during *riāz*, and we have seen how some musicians endeavour to 'play for themselves' on stage, as if bringing the quality of their *riāz* to the space, even in front of a large audience. At the same time, as we saw in the context of the house concert, many Hindustāni musicians assert the need for audience participation in the process of creation. Racy offers the following explanation in relation to *tarab*:

> When the *tarab* artist creates alone, his ecstatic state can be self-induced and the feedback process can be internalized as he becomes both a *tarab* initiator and a *sammi* (sensitive listener). (ibid.)

[55] In Hindu thought, God is found within, and *atma* and *paramatma* are ultimately unified as one.

This theory holds some currency in relation to my own experience. Some of my deepest experiences playing music have involved a conscious awareness of being a detached witness to the act of musical creation. This can feel like being a vessel, with the music flowing through. In such moments, the agency of the creative process can feel as if it comes from outside, and 'I' becomes an audience to the music, as a detached listener. This kind of experience is more common when I play alone, and more difficult to induce on stage, with all the pressures and distractions the environment brings. However, in the rare glimpse of such a feeling in the presence of attentive listeners, the sense of elation can rise to an even higher state, intensified through audience feedback. At these moments, there is a sense of a deep, shared experience between myself and the audience. My personal reflections, drawn from direct experience, are below:

> Through losing a sense of self, something new is revealed. Through the focus comes a void, filled with sound. The flow of sound, immediate, and tactile through the physicality of pulling on the string – engulfs me so completely that I loose myself to the moment, and a new Self emerges. (Fieldnotes, August 2012)

The recording studio: *rāga* as product

Recording studios present a relatively modern context for *rāga* performance. The earliest recording of Indian music was in 1902 on wax (Neuman 1990 [1980]). Neuman argues that widespread commercial recording has resulted in accustomisation to the perfection of recorded music and has created greater pressure for flawless performance, resulting in less spontaneity (ibid.).

The function of recording can include the production of a CD or tape, or possibly a live broadcast through All India Radio. Although desirable for professional reasons, the recording studio is the least favourite context in which to perform for many musicians I asked. They are not so enamoured with the clinical studio environment, stating that there is no atmosphere, no rapport with an audience, and a pressure for perfection.

> I am utterly uncomfortable with the clinical and clock-bound atmosphere of the recording studio. That's why I do not readily submit to album projects, unless it's of some exceptional worth. In fact, I even charge a lot of money just to discourage producers. Live concerts are much closer to my heart. (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.126)

I have even heard anecdotally of musicians who refuse to be recorded on an ideological basis, believing that Indian classical music should not be divorced from the moment of creation and the presence of *rāga* (although this stance is rare). The idea that a morning *rāga*, for example, belongs to the very morning and moment of its evocation is certainly philosophically appealing. It is an undeniable fact that until very recently, music was always live, in the moment, of the moment, created by musicians playing acoustically in close proximity to any listeners present. In a tradition as old as Indian classical music, the context of a recording studio challenges age-old value systems and profoundly alters the human experience of music.

The recording studio is challenging due to time constraints, and the expectation for perfection. One musician said to me, 'it is as if the microphone sucks in all the energy in the room'.[56] This can result in profound stylistic change. Previous Indian ambassador to Ireland, Debashish Chakravarti is a keen enthusiast of Hindustāni music. At his residence in 2012, he told me stories about the two famous *sitār* players Vilayat Khan and Ravi Shankar in recording studios. One story recalls Vilayat Khan playing the same *rāga* in two different takes. Apparently, the two versions, each about twenty minutes long, were almost exactly identical note for note. For 'improvised' music, this seems remarkable. The other story is about Ravi Shankar. He reportedly recorded a number of versions of the same *rāga*; each version included various sections (*ālāp*, *joṛ*, *gat*, and *jhālā*). He then listened back to all the versions with a small group of people who were present. He asked everyone to tell him which sections of the different versions they preferred. He then chose particular sections from the different versions and recorded one final version using a combination of these different sections. The story goes that the final version was like a mix of all the most effective material from the original versions, again almost note for note.

It is impossible to substantiate these stories without copies of all the original recordings, but they do illustrate the manner in which performance context can profoundly alter the creative process of music. Here *rāga* has become a recital of pre-composed music, a product. This seems at odds with the concept of *rāga* as process, as an improvised and spontaneous evocation of presence. A *rāga* recital does have a

[56] This statement was made anecdotally by an unknown Hindusatni musician in Kolkata 2009.

pre-conceived structure, developed through various sections in an established form, but the details within the structure generally change considerably from one rendition to the next. In the recording context, the pressure to produce 'perfection' is particularly strong and a musician is understandably tempted to do considerable preparation, and fix as much musical material as possible. In a studio there is usually limited time to produce a rendition that will remain an immortal testament to your artistry. There is also often a time restraint on how long the rendition needs to be, adding to this sense of restrictive control.[57]

'*Sitting*' with *rāga* in the home environment: *rāga* as process

Casual gatherings of Hindustāni musicians – such as playing music at a musician's home – induce a completely different musical response to stage presentations and recording sessions. In this context, musicians have license to take risks and to explore *rāga* extemporaneously with few restraints or inhibitions. Instead of *rāga* as product, these environments foster an exploration of *rāga* as process. These kinds of musical events are neither 'performances' nor 'presentations'. There is neither a defined stage – usually a carpet on the ground – nor a formal audience.[58]

[57] These issues are evident in my own experience. I was once asked to do a pre-recorded *rāga* recital for television with a *tablā* player. The performance had to be three minutes and fifteen seconds long. I wanted to create a balanced rendition within this very specific time. The result was a fixed and rehearsed *rāga*, which may have had compositional balance, but possibly lacked the searching depth and nuance that I consider essential to an ideal rendition of *rāga*. Neither of us had ever played a 'fixed *rāga*' before, and the recording process profoundly affected our musical style. Our focus was on creating a 'quality product', with no sense of process (other than the processes of composition, arrangement, and rehearsal that preceded the event). With strict time constraints and two large television cameras pointing into our faces, the conditions were not conducive to an experience of significant musical meaning. This was a time for pragmatism, not ideology; 'getting lost in the music' or 'entering an intuitive space of communion with the *rāga*' was out of the question. Another factor needed to be negotiated. The recording took place at 4pm, but the *rāga* was aired at 11pm that night. Like most exponents of this tradition I usually stick to the temporal conventions, presenting *rāgas* at their associated time. Now I had to choose whether to play an afternoon *rāga* reflecting the actual time of the recording, or a late evening *rāga* in anticipation of the time when the virtual audience would hear the recital. I decided to stay true to my own authentic experience and picked the late afternoon *rāga*, Rāga Madhuvanti (this *rāga* may also be considered an early evening melody). This example illustrates how context can distort musical meaning, effect style and even question aspects of *rāga* conceptualisation. Certain conditions are coercive to profound changes in a musician's habitual patterns of music making, and conceptualisation of musical meaning, forcing decisions uncharacteristic of his typical musical sensibilities.

[58] Close associates such as family, friends, and fellow musicians may be present. It must be noted that events like this can turn into non-formal 'house concerts', where musicians take turns to play. In the situation where a student is asked to play by his teacher, inhibitions and nerves may come to the fore. The 'data' I have for this subject comes from my own experiences at such events in India, Ireland, Italy, and France, and does not come from a wide representative survey.

Sometimes these musical events are an extension of *riāz*, with musicians 'practising' together. However, in my experience, Hindustāni musicians rarely say 'let us practise!' rather they say, 'let us sit!' The words 'practice' and '*riāz*' generally refer to a musician's solitary practice. 'Sitting' with *rāga* implies a more open forum. The spatial organisation is not choreographed in any particular way; participants tend to sit facing each other in a loose and close circle. Figure 7.11 shows Sougata Roy Chowdhury (*sarod*) and myself (*sitār*) at my home in Dublin, Ireland, in May 2007. Australian *sarod* player Rob Perry, and Indian *tablā* player Debojyoti Sanyal are off shot. A couple of non-musician friends were also present.[59]



Figure 7.11: 'Sitting' with *rāga* in the home environment (Dublin, May 2007)

Despite the seemingly casual nature of events like this, a certain protocol generally persists: the music is firmly rooted in *rāga*, and an unspoken hierarchy based on status is usually adhered to – more senior musicians are likely to lead proceedings and a student may need to be invited to play by his *guru* if they are both present.

For a student like myself, these occasions are an intrinsic part of the learning process, yet are rarely defined as 'lessons'. I have spent countless hours in these environments, especially with fellow students, or with Sougata Roy Chowdhury and his

[59] The casual nature of this environment is clear from the picture. Roy Chowdhury is not wearing a traditional *kirtan* as he would on stage, but an Ali Akbar Khan tee shirt instead.

acquaintances.[60] Many of these musical happenings take place late at night, and into the early hours of the morning, perhaps until 2 or 3 am. Such occasions often involve equal measures of talking about music, playing music, and listening to others play music. Witnessing master musicians playing in these environments can be startlingly inspirational. The following extract is from my journal in Kolkata. I wrote it following a memorable late evening at the home of Sougata Roy Chowdhury (affectionately known to friends as 'Babui'), where he was playing with *tablā* player Subhojit Brahmachari:

> It is such a joy to see these great musicians loosen up. Their capacity is breathtaking, the variations ceaseless. Out of thin air, a simple idea is introduced and then built on, expanding and escalating. It may start with a single phrase, out of which springs an infinity of invention, with flourish and finesse. Babui can explore a single note until its full story is told, every nuance, every angle – and then he explodes in a vigorous rapture of virtuosic release. (O'Brien January 2009, diary entry)

In such naturalistic and unguarded environments the conditions are ripe for thorough and elaborate exploration of *rāga,* techniques, and modes of improvisation. Musicians have the freedom to 'play outside of themselves'. This contrasts the restrictive tendency to 'play it safe' in the self-conscious and career-conscious setting of public presentation. It is here that musicians try things they would not attempt on stage. They take risks, attempt new mathematical permutations, and they often play obscure *rāgas* and *tālas* that they would rarely present in public. At times, they let go of inhibitions and enter into unpredictable and previously unchartered territory, allowing themselves to make mistakes. In my experience, glimpses of sheer brilliance and rare beauty can arise out of such moments. New approaches to *rāga* exposition and improvisation can evolve in these environments.

Once more, the context and conditions alter the style and function of the music. The intention for a musician in this kind of context may be multiple: to enjoy the experience of playing music; to forge links and develop rapport between musicians; to extend one's musical skills and ideas; or to 'rehearse' for an upcoming concert –

[60] It is common for Hindustāni musicians to stay at people's homes when they are on tour, and a small entourage often follows. I have spent time with Roy Chowdhury (and his small and constantly changing entourage of *tablā* players, students, and friends) in Kolkata, Shantiniketan, France, Italy, and Ireland. Invariably – at various locations – a dedicated music space is defined (once it was in someone's kitchen). A carpet is spread, and for a few days that space is filled with music: lessons, *riāz*, and informal sessions where the musicians 'sit' with *rāga*.

although this is often more about developing rapport than preplanning musical material. Such sessions are intrinsic to the never-ending learning process, and are part of the life-blood of *rāga*, giving it space to breath and expand.

The many faces of *rāga*: the effects of context on style, function, and significance

In Chapter 4, I introduced *rāga* as a multifaceted concept embodying technical, theoretical, and philosophical concerns. Through an explication of *rāga* in different contexts, the concept again expands and proves to be extraordinarily malleable. Just as we dress and act differently for different occasions, so it is with *rāga*. Although the melodic character of any *rāga* essentially remains the same, its outer form, or the style of its exposition changes depending on a number of factors: the formality of the event; the perceived function of the occasion; and the relationship between musicians and audience. The depiction of *rāga* changes depending on the skill, training, and sensibilities of the artist. The different formal stylistic categories of Hindustāni music also portray different pictures of *rāga*: *dhrupad*, *khyāl*, and *ṭhumri* each have their own stylistic and structural parameters.

The relationship between the musicians and audience is particularly influential in determining the nature of *rāga* presentation. The most significant factors are audience response and participation; expectation and pressure for perfection; pressure to please and entertain an audience; and the perceived function of an event. These considerations determine the degree of *rāga* fixity, and the nature of *rāga* as process or product. The significance, function, and style of *rāga* are found to be contextually determined. The following chart represents a summary of this section in visual form. Although over-generalised, the chart represents a survey of different performance contexts in relation to a number of factors, illustrating the profound effect of context on the rendition of *rāga* and on musical experience.

Performance Context	Casual Gathering	House Concert	Theatre or Concert Hall	Recording Studio
Environment	Intimate Homely	Intimate Formal	Formal	Clinical
Audience Proximity	Very close	Close	Detached	No live audience other than accompanists and technicians
Audience Size	Very small	Small	Medium to Large	No live audience, other than accompanists and technicians
Audience Demographic	Friends family Teacher Fellow musicians Community	Informed audience Connoisseurs Musicians	Large mixed audience Less informed	Virtual future audience Mixed
Audience Interaction	Responsive	Attentive Responsive	Detached Distracted	No live audience, other than accompanists and technicians
Expectation	Mixed expectations	Inspiring recital Purity Impressive display	Entertainment Impressive display	Perfection Impressive display
Musical Content	Mixed content Obscure *rāgas* / *tālas*	Mixed content Obscure *rāgas*	Popular *rāgas*	Mixed content Popular *rāgas*
Style	Risk taking Less fixed Creative exploration of *rāga* and *taal*	Full-length *rāga* Long *ālāp* In-depth exposition Purity	Less emphasis on purity Virtuosic display Shorter *ālāp* Fixed ending	More fixed and rehearsed
Function	Sharing Learning 'Rehearsing' Developing rapport Social event Community	Heritage Money	Entertainment Heritage Money	Legacy Professional Prestige Money
Musician's Attire	Casual	Formal Traditional	Formal Traditional	Casual
The Experience for the Musician	Pleasurable Emotional Mixed	Satisfying Deep Emotional	Mixed accounts: Frustrating Elating	Work

Figure 7.12: The influence of performance context

Although I present a generalised analysis, I suggest that the various performance contexts – casual gatherings, intimate house concerts, large theatres and recording studios – present a continuum from the casual to the formal, from the improvised to the fixed, and from *rāga* as process to *rāga* as product. On the surface, a casual gathering may appear to be the most ideal setting for *rāga*, a naturalistic environment where musicians can focus on *rāga* as process, without the pressure of audience expectation, and without the self-conscious distractions of a more formal presentation. Here, perhaps, the musician's experience may get close to elements of spiritual ideology expressed by exponents of the tradition. However, under these less formal conditions, *rāga* is rarely played in full, rarely developed completely or 'presented' through the various sections. Although there are multiple flashes of inspiration, a musician may abruptly begin or finish in a manner that would never happen in front of a formal audience. Without the convention of a formal presentation in front of a defined audience (or even a microphone), *rāga* changes. In my experience, under these more casual conditions *rāga* generally lacks the considered balance and gradual exposition of a masterful presentation, where, a captivating suspense (or 'presence') is held in the air and sustained for an entire *rāga* recital. In my experience, the magic and delicacy of such a gradual unfolding of *rāga* under formal conditions, with a charged atmosphere generated by a responsive audience, is where *rāga* can be witnessed to its fullest potential. Here the 'presence' of *rāga* is best 'evoked' and sustained. This brings us back to the house concert, which most musicians cite as their preferred environment. It is perhaps here that we find the ideal balance between process and product; intimacy and formality; and avocationalism and professionalism. Here, perhaps, we find the conditions that best satisfy the spiritual ideology of *rāga* presentation.

Returning to the entertainment/devotion dichotomy, *rāga* as product appears to best identify the entertainment side of the dichotomy, and on the surface, *rāga* as process broadly satisfies many concepts of music as devotion expounded by Hindustāni musicians. However, in reality the many faces of *rāga* each contain aspects of both 'entertainment' and 'devotion', and the distinction between the two remains subjective and interpretive.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated ideological perspectives on the presentation of Hindustāni music, highlighted through an apparent dichotomy of 'devotion' versus 'entertainment'. In many respects this dichotomy is a construction, used here to polarise ideological concerns. However, it is a construction that is representative of the narratives of Hindustāni musicians and Indian scholars alike. The disillusionment some writers like Sheila Dhar express regarding recent change in the culture and practice of Hindustāni music, may be viewed as the perpetuation of a debate that has been on-going for hundreds of years.

The spiritual ideology of *rāga* presentation can be summarised through a number of themes: the resounding of ancient spiritual heritage; the musician as a mediator between man and the divine; the ideal of communion between musicians and audience through a shared elevated experience; divine presence; and the humility of musicians in the face of the divine agency of *rāga*. Many Hindustāni musicians express an ideological stance in relation to the process of *rāga* improvisation. This can be described in terms of 'surrender' and 'devotion'. I suggest that these terms equate to an ideal quality of focus. This ideal focus involves a humble openness to the agency of *rāga*, along with a form of intense concentration. Musicians comment on metaphysical experiences of 'presence' and being 'lost' in the sound, resulting from this quality of focus. The ethos of surrender and devotion, coupled with concentration, appears to be functionally linked to an experience of 'the divine'.

Viewing the various contexts and conditions effecting the presentation of *rāga* offers insight into the relationship between ideology and reality. The function, significance, and experience of music making are largely contextually determined. In many respects, the realities of performance context appear to compromise ideological concerns. It is particularly apparent that the modern contexts of large performance spaces and recording studios have influenced the ethos of the tradition, and the style of presentation, in the direction of 'product' and outward exhibition, rather than 'process' and expressions of deep internalised states. Musicians point to the ideology that an audience will resonate with music that comes from deep within, but the

realities of stylistic change in the tradition suggest that such a noble conviction is increasingly hard to realise in the professional world of Hindustāni music today.

To end this chapter, I present a seductively simple paradigm that appears to resolve the entertainment/devotion dichotomy. It was conveyed to me by *sitār* player Nilandri Kumar. The equation is brilliantly simple: a particular focus is required to stay in tune and in time, this focus is 'consciousness', and 'consciousness' is 'spiritual':

> If you have to pitch correctly, if you have to come perfectly in time, you have to be one with the note and the beat and that happens only when you are one with your consciousness, and what is consciousness? Consciousness is spiritual, it is what is within you, the power within you.... I am entertaining the crowd, I want to feel good with my *sur* [pitch or tuning], I want to feel good with my music, I want to feel good with my time, my tempo. Automatically I will convey, that is my picture, that is my consciousness, that is my spirituality, at that moment that is my God, that is my prayer. (Nilandri Kumar June 2010)

According to this line of thought, 'entertainment', 'spirituality', and 'prayer' are all identified with the inner focus required to keep correct pitch and time. Kumar considers the pragmatic concern of entertainment, and elevates it to spiritual in status. According to his thesis, there is no contradiction between entertainment and spirituality. 'Spirituality' is defined through the inner state of the musician. Being 'one with the note' is equated to being 'one with your consciousness', which is considered inherently 'spiritual'.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND CENTRAL THEMES

Introduction

This dissertation is an explication of spiritual ideology in the culture and practice of Hindustāni music today. One of my principal aims has been to honour the rich and nuanced voices of Hindustāni musicians in relation to their experience and conceptualisation of North Indian classical music. The subject of Hindustāni music and spirituality invites an enormously divergent and pluralistic range of expression. Taking the narratives of Hindustāni musicians as central to the study has therefore led the research in multiple directions. One of my challenges has been to represent the complex multiplicity of ideology expressed by Indian musicians in a digestible and appropriate fashion.

My approach to achieving this goal has been to first contextualise the subject in terms of related scholarship (Chapter 1), history and religion (Chapter 2), and Indian philosophy (Chapter 3). The concept of *rāga* (Chapter 4) sits at the centre of this dissertation and at the heart of Indian classical music. The following three chapters ground the subject of spiritual ideology within the life journey of Hindustāni musicians: the dynamics of the learning process (Chapter 5) encapsulate values intrinsic to the ethos of Hindustāni music culture; the experience and science of practice (Chapter 6) reveals core ideological concerns connecting spirituality to musical experience; and performance (Chapter 7) relates these concerns to the realities of staged presentation. In this final part of the dissertation, I briefly recapitulate and consolidate some central themes of the study through a generalised overview.

Central Themes

One of the most salient features in my conversations with Hindustāni musicians was the astonishing diversity of concepts, opinions and experiences articulated by them in relation to the subject of spirituality and music. Although it is incongruous to be dogmatic about any comprehensive 'conclusion' amid this diversity, there is a sense of a number of overarching themes permeating the spiritual ideology of Hindustāni music.[1] Themes that have punctuated my research include: the mystical potency of sound, the 'tangible' and the 'intangible', the ethos of surrender, divine presence, the search for unity, the experience of transcendence, the juncture of the pragmatic and the spiritual, *rāga* as a vehicle from the profane to the divine, an ideal quality of focus, and religiosity. In this concluding summary, I briefly focus on the last four themes just listed. Before I sum up these themes, I point to a central perspective I adopted in the representation of my research, dichotomy.

Dichotomy

Throughout this dissertation, I have identified a number of apparent dichotomies in the culture and practice of Hindustāni music. Drawing attention to dichotomy serves to highlight and polarise ideological concerns, and contextualise them in relation to pragmatic realities. The concept of *rāga* is at once formulaic and intuited. Practice can be highly scientific, leading to the virtuosity necessary in the competitive profession of Hindustāni music, yet *riāz* can also be considered a transcendental experience of 'divine presence', or a form of 'worship'. Performance also appears to embody binary opposites: on one hand a Hindustāni musician is performing a virtuosic art music in order to earn a living and entertain his audience; on the other hand, the ideology points to an ethos of humility, surrender, and devotion. *Rāga* improvisation requires precise technique, an in-depth knowledge of a complex musical system, and a wide repertoire of set material. *Rāga* presentation is bound in form, *tāla*, and a strictly confined melodic vocabulary. Yet the experience of *rāga* improvisation is idealised as

[1] The subjective nature of the topic along with the vast plurality of expression has meant that tangible lines of argument leading to concrete 'conclusions' have often been untenable in this study. At times, such an approach would have been contrived for the sake of an academic agenda and would not necessarily have honoured and accurately reflected the voices of the tradition.

a journey to an intangible reality, where *rāga* leads to communion with an ineffable divine presence.

Mediating dichotomy: the juncture of the pragmatic and the spiritual

The relationship between pragmatism and ideology is a persistent theme in this dissertation. There is often tension between ideological concerns in the culture of Hindustāni music, and the practical realities of everyday life as a professional musician. Ideological aspirations are often compromised due to circumstance. The *guru-shishya* relationship may be revered as 'sacred', but the relationship between *guru* and *shishya* can be fraught with power struggles and tensions. *Riāz* is often conceptualised as a form of devotion, but in reality it is a constant disciplinary challenge to maintain a strong practice routine; the busyness of modern life gets in the way of many musicians' lofty aspirations for extended practice time. Elements within performance contexts, such as sound systems, noisy uninformed audiences, and the pressures of professionalism generally mean that the inner and outer environments fall short of the ideal platform for spiritual experience.

Considering spiritual ideology in relation to the realities of everyday life, I have located a persistent paradigm where pragmatic realities are elevated to spiritual in status. A teacher becomes a '*guru*', practice becomes 'devotion' or 'worship', and performance becomes a form of 'divine communion'. *Sitār* player Nilandri Kumar's simple equation exemplifies this conceptual shift from the pragmatic to the spiritual. He suggests that the focus required to play in tune and in time, in order to entertain an audience, is 'consciousness', and 'consciousness is spiritual… that is my God' (Nilandri Kumar 2010).

***Rāga* as a mediator from the profane to the divine**

A 'shift' from the profane to the divine is a continuous thread in this dissertation, presented as a recurrent central paradigm, re-configured through a variety of contexts. The concept of *rāga* is at once formulaic and invested with numinous qualities and mystical potency. *Rāga* is considered to embody a divine core, and the experience of *rāga* is idealised as communion with this divinity. This paradigm mirrors a central Hindu belief that there is a parallel spiritual dimension within or beyond our perception of reality. Two realities are conceptualised in Indian philosophical thought:

the ‘manifest’ and ‘unmanifest’; the ‘conditional’ and ‘unconditional’; or in relation to sound: ‘struck sound’ and ‘unstruck sound’. The ‘manifest’ is thought to be a product of the ‘unmanifest’, and can thus be revealed through the manifest.

In this study, a further paradigm is considered: ‘spiritual freedom’ is found within the discipline of *riāz* and within constraints of *rāga* improvisation. The singular focus necessitated in *riāz* can be conceptualised as a meditative liberation of the mind. A musician practises in a precise fashion, in order to open the facility to go beyond the rigidity of pure technique and repertoire. He or she memorises and embodies the language of *rāga* and improvisational methodology to such an extent that he or she can perform without conscious reference to set musical materials. Through an ethos of surrender to the process of improvisation and a focus on the exactitudes of sound, a kind of ‘spiritual liberation’ is said to be experienced. On a philosophical level, ‘sound’ is said to lead to ‘silence’, ‘the un-uttered sa’ (Kishori Amonkar in Roy 2004, p.125).

An ideal quality of focus

My research uncovers a particular quality of focus – or state of being – that is advocated as an ideal within the tradition. According to Hindustāni musicians, somewhere in the nexus of the act of concentration, the surrender of the ego, and the emotional affect of the music, ephemeral states of elevated consciousness can arise. The ideal quality of focus can be described as a combination of ‘concentration’ and ‘devotion’, leading – according to *bansuri* player Hariprasad Chaurasia – to a visceral experience of divine presence:

> When you acquire the two most crucial qualities for music, which are concentration and devotion, you begin to literally feel the presence of the divine. (Hariprasad Chaurasia in Roy 2004, p.80)

Other Hindustāni musicians equate this quality of focus with a journey into the unknown, where music is perceived to arise from a divine source. Metaphysical experiences such as absorption into something greater than oneself, a feeling of unity, or transcendent states, are also described. This ideal quality of focus can be related to the ideology and practice of Hindustāni music in many ways. An ethos of humility and surrender is fostered during the learning process; *rāga* is perceived to have divine

agency, and needs to be ‘evoked’ rather than ‘performed’; the act of *riāz* instills the discipline of singular concentration; and the process of *rāga* improvisation cultivates a form of acute attentiveness, sensitivity and spontaneous openness.

Religiosity: Hindustāni music as a quasi-religion?

Despite the conviction among practising musicians that Indian classical music is ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious’, it is undeniable that spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music is influenced by religious heritage. Spiritual ideology is often represented through religious concepts, and through the lens of religious belief. North Indian classical music today is enshrouded in a strong culture of religiosity. Without being formally affiliated to any one religion, the salient elements of this religiosity take on a distinctly Hindu appearance.

I tentatively suggest that Hindustāni music is a kind of quasi-religion, with its own iconography, ritual practice, and philosophical doctrine. There is a hierarchy of revered icons: at the top of the list for many musicians is Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning, music, and the arts. Other icons of the tradition include the ‘saintly’ musicians of the distant past such as Narada. Legendary musicians of later eras such as Haridas Swami and Tansen occupy a hallowed space in the traditional lore. The *guru* is high on the list of icons, sanctified as the preceptor of a sacred art. *Rāga* is conceptualised as a quasi-divine entity, its ‘presence’ ‘evoked’ through a pure rendition and a devotional attitude. The hypothetical quasi-religion also has its ‘sacred texts’ in the form of song texts and ancient Sanskrit musicological treatises, most notably the revered *Natyasastra* (the ‘Fifth *Veda*’). The performance ritual exhibits a certain ceremony and protocol, not dissimilar to religious ritual. Finally, the tradition has a strong (but pluralistic) philosophical ideology that amounts to a kind of doctrine of faith.

The Endless Search for *Sa*: Final Thoughts

Spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music is encapsulated by the themes of unity and transcendence. In Indian philosophical thought, these are both ultimately one and the same. Divine unity is the transcendental absolute: the revelation of an immanent divinity through a transcendental 'beyond' experience.

In this study I present *sa* as a sonic metaphor, representing an ideal state of unity and resolution. *Sa* is philosophically synonymous with *om*, the embodiment of all totally in sound. Spiritual ideology in Hindustāni music points to a search for unity, a unity, Alam Khan suggests, that may be sonically enacted through the resolution to *sa*. '[*Rāga* improvisation is] a refined emotional journey, resolving to *sa* – a state of ultimate unification' (Alam Khan June 2013).

Realising that a statement of ultimate resolution is untenable in the case of the subject I have endeavoured to investigate, I take solace from the words of my teacher and mentor, Sougata Roy Chowdhury. His words conclude this dissertation, adding a salutary note on the ceaseless nature of searching. Although the goal may be unattainable, the process of searching itself is cathartic and life sustaining:

> We are actually very crazy people. Always searching for something which is infinite. I don't know why? Also we don't need to know why. But still we are searching... knowing that, we are never fulfilled with it. At least we are enjoying the moment and the movement of our searching. As long as our search will go on the music will keep us feeling beautiful. (Sougata Roy Chowdhury June 2007, personal email correspondence with the author)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Literature

Aiyar, M.S. Ramaswami (1980) 'The Scope of Music' in Kuppuswamy G. and Hariharan H. (eds.) *Indian Music: A Perspective*, New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.

Amarnath, Paṇḍit (1994) *Living Idioms of Hindustani Music: a Dictionary of Terms and Terminology*, New Delhi: Indus.

Avtar, Ram (2006) *Theory of Indian Ragas*, New Delhi: Pankaj Publications.

Bacci, Ingrid (2000) *The Art of Effortless Living*, London: Bantam Books.

Bagchee, Sandeep (1998) *Nad: Understanding Raga Music*, Mumbai: Eeshwar.

Bagchee, Sandeep (2006) *Shruti: a Listener's Guide to Hindustani Music*, New Delhi: Rupo and Co.

Baily, Derek (1993) *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, Boston: Da Capo Press.

Baily, John (1988) *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Musicians in the City of Herat*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bakan, Michael B. (2007) *World Music: Traditions and Transformations*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bakhle, Janaki (2005) *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Banes, S. and Lepecki, A. (2006) *The Sense In Performance (Worlds of Performance)*, London: Routledge.

Banerjee, Mita (2002) *The Chutneyfication of History: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee and the postcolonial debate*, Heidelberg: C. Winter.

Banerjee, Nikhil (1970) *My Maestro as I Saw Him*, [online], available: http://www.rāga.com/cds/211/211text.html [accessed 10 December 2009].

Bartleet, B. (2009) 'Behind the Baton: Exploring Autoethnographic Writing in a Musical Context', in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 38, No. 6, [online], available: http://jce.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/38/6/713 [accessed 18 November 2009].

Beck, Guy L. (2008 [1993]) *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Beck, Guy L. (ed.) (2006) *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions*, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Behl, Aditya (2007) 'Presence and Absence in Bhakti: An Afterword', in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 319-324.

Berliner, Paul (1978) *The Soul of the Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Berliner, Paul (1994) *Thinking in Jazz: the Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Bhatkhande, Vishna Narayan (2004 [1984]) *A Comparative Study of Some the Leading Music Systems of the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries*, New Delhi: Low Price Publications.

Blacking, John (1977) *The Anthropology of the Body*, Washington: University of Washington Press.

Body, Thera (2008) *India Grammarians and the Philosophy of Sound*, [online], available: http://www.mahavidya.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/body-thera-sanskrit-grammar-and-theology-of-sound.pdf [accessed October 2012].

Bose, Sunil (1990) *Indian Classical Music*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

Broadbank, Robert (1999) *The Raga Guide*, UK: Nimbus Records.

Brown, Katherine (2000) 'Reading Indian Music: The Interpretation of Seventeenth-Century European Travel-Writing in the (Re)construction of Indian Music History', in *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp.1-34, British Forum for Ethnomusicology.

Bryant, Edwin F. (2009) [2003] *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, New York: North Point Press.

Chang, H. (2008) *Autoethnography as Method*, Walnut Creek, CA.: Left Coast Press.

Clarke, David and Kini, Tara (2011) 'North Indian classical music and its links with consciousness: the case of dhrupad' in Clarke, David and Clarke, Eric (eds.) *Music and Consciousness: Philosophical, Psychological, and Cultural Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clayton, Martin (2000) *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clayton, Martin (2001) 'Introduction: Towards a Theory of Musical Meaning (In India and Elsewhere)' in *British Journal of Ethnomusicology, Vol. 10, No. 1, Music and Meaning*, pp.1-17, British Forum for Ethnomusicology.

Clifford, James (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Cook, Nicholas (1990) *Music, Imagination, and Culture*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dalrymple, William (2009) *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, London: Bloomsbury.

Danielou, Alain (1980) *The Rāgas of Northern Indian Music*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharial.

Day Captain R. (1893) 'Notes on Indian Music', *Proceedings of the Musical Association, 20th Sess. (1893 - 1894),* [online], available: http://www.jstor.org/stable/765195 [accessed: 6 Nov 2008].

Demariaux, Jean-Christophe (1995) *How to Understand Hinduism* (trans. Bowden, John), London: SCM Press Ltd.

Deutsch, Eliot (1973) *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Deva, B. Chaitanya (1992 [1973]) *An Introduction to Indian Music*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India.

Devereux, Godfrey (1994) *The Elements of Yoga*, UK: Element Books.

Devereux, Godfrey (1998) *Dynamic Yoga*, London: Thorsons.

Dhar, Sheila (1992) Sleeve notes in *Voyage Interieur (Inward Journey)*, CD C560017/18, Paris: Ocara.

Dhar, Sheila (2003) 'Aspirations of the Ideal Musician', in Kumar, Raj (ed.) *Essays on Indian Music*, Discovery Publishing House.

Dhar, Sheila (2005) *Rāga 'n Josh: Stories From a Musical Life*, New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Dobson, John and Ballard, Ruth (2004) *Beyond Space and Time*, USA: Temple Universal Publishing.

Easwaran, Eknath (2009 [1987]) *The Upanishads*, California: Nilgiri Press.

Easwaran, Eknath (2007) *The Bhagavad-Gita*, California: Nilgiri Press.

Ellingson, Ter. (1992) "Transcription" and "Notation" in Myers, Helen (ed.) *Ethnomusicology An Introduction*, pp.110-164, New York: W. W. Norton.

Farrell, Gerry (1990) *Indian Music In Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Farrell, Gerry (1997) *Indian Music and the West*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fieser, James and Dowden, Bradley (eds.) (2013) *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, [online], available: http://www.iep.utm.edu/eds/ [assessed: 20 March 2013].

Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (trans. Smith, A. M. Sheridan), New York: Pantheon.

Gallagher, Shaun and Zahavi, Dan (2007) *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, New York: Routledge.

Gaston, Anne-Marie (1982) *Shiva, in Dance, Myth and Iconicity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.

Gulen, M. Fethullah (2006) *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, New Jersey: The Light.

Hamel, Peter Michael (1978) *Through Music to the Self*, Dorset, UK: Element Books Limited.

Hamilton, James Sadler (1989) *Sitar Music in Calcutta: An Ethnomusicological Study*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press.

Hamilton, Sue (2001) *Indian Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Herbst (1997) *Voices in Bali: Energies and Perceptions in Vocal Music and Dance Theater*, Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press.

Hewitt, James (1995 [1977]) *The Complete Yoga Book*, UK: Random House.

Ho, Meilu (2006) *The Liturgical Music of the Pusti Marg of India: An Embryonic Form of the Classical Tradition*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), Los Angeles: University of California.

Holroyde, Peggy (1972) *Indian Music: A Vast Ocean of Promise*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Holroyde, Peggy (2007) *The ABC of Indian Culture: A Personal Padayatra of Half a Century into India*, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing.

Hood, Mantle (1960) 'The Challenge of Bi-musicality', in *The Ethnomusicology* 4, pp.55-59.

Hood, Mantle (1971) *The Ethnomusicologist*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Howard, Wayne (1977) *Samavedic Chant*, London: Yale University Press.

Iyengar, BKS. (1991) *Light on Yoga*, London: Harper Collins.

Jairazbhoy, Nazir (2011 [1971]) *The Rags of North Indian Music: Their Structure and Evolution*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashen PVT.

Jairazbhoy, Nazir (1993) 'India', in Myers, Helen (ed.) *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*. USA: Macmillan Press.

Jairazbhoy, Nazir (2008) 'What Happened to Indian Music Theory? Indo-Occidentalism?', in Cooley, Timothy J. (ed.) *Journal For the Society for Ethnomusicology,* Vol. 52, No. 3, pp.349-377, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Junius, Manfred (2006 [1974]) *The Sitar: The Instrument and its Techniques*, Varanasi: Indica Books.

Kaufman, Walter (1968) *The Ragas of North India*, Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press.

Khan, Ali Akbar and Ruckert, George (2009 [1998]) *The Classical Music of North India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Khan, Hazrat Inayat (1996) *The Mysticism of Sound and Music*, Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Khan, Ustad Vilayat (2006) *Komal Gandhar*, Kolkata: Sahityam.

King, Richard (1999) *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Kippen, James (1988) *The Tabla of Lucknow*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Knott, Kim (2008 [1998]) *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kuppuswamy, G., Hariharan, M. (1980) *Indian Music: A Perspective*, New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.

Krishnamurti, J. (1983) *The Flame of Attention*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India.

Lakshmi, Dr M. Vijay (1996) *A Critical Study Of Sangita Makaranda Of Narada*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

Lausevic, Mirjana (2007) *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lavezzoli, Peter (2007) *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West*, New York: Continuum.

Lubach, Kaye Leora (2006) *Tradition, Ideology and the History of Hindustani Music in the United States in the 20th Century*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Los Angeles: University of California.

Maharaj, Sri Nisargadatta (1973) *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, Bombay: Chetana.

Mansukhani, Gobind Singh (1982) *Indian Classical Music And Sikh Kirtan*, [online], available: www.michaelwheelerstudios.com/uploads/7/1/4/6/7146403/indian_classical_music_sikh_kirtan.pdf [accessed 13th May 2012].

Marcus, George (1991) 'Requirements for Ethnographies of Late-Twentieth-Century Modernity Worldwide', in *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*.

Massey, Reginald and Jamila (1993) *The Music Of India*, London: Kahn and Averill.

Melrose, Susan (2011) 'A Cautionary Note of Two, Amid the Pleasures and Pains of Participation in Performance making as research', Keynote Address presented at the *Participation, Research and Learning in the Performing Arts Symposium*, Centre for Creative Collaboration, London. [online], available: www.sfmelrose.org.uk/pleasure-pain, [accessed 20 June 2013].

Menon, Sangeetha (2007) *The Beyond Experience: Consciousness in Bhāgavad-Gitā*, New Delhi: Bluejay Books.

Merriam, Alan (1964) *The Anthropology of Music*, Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press.

Moorthy, Vijaya (2001) *Romance of the Raga*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.

Muesse, Mark W. (2011) *The Hindu Traditions: A Concise Introduction*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Mukherji, Kumar Prasad (2006) *The Lost World of Hindustāni Music*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Mutatkar, Sumati (ed.) (1987) *Aspects of Indian Music: A collection of Essays*, New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Miner, Allyn (1993) *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Berlin: Wilhelmshaven.

Narayanaswami, Dr. P. P. (2013) *Musicological Literature of India* [online], available: http://www.carnatica.net/special/muslit-ppn1.htm [accessed 16 March 2013].

Nettl, Bruno (1983) *The Study of Ethnomusicology, Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Nettl, Bruno with Russell, Melinda (eds.) (1998) *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Neuman, Daniel (1990 [1980]) *The Life of Music in North India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Neuman, Daniel (1985) 'Indian Music as a Cultural System', in *Asian Music*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp.98-113. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Neuman, Dard A. (2004) *A House of Music: The Hindustāni Musician and the Crafting of Traditions*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), New York: Columbia University.

New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2001), 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O'Brien, Dara (2000) *Between Two Worlds: A Story of Enculturation into North Indian Classical Sitār*, unpublished thesis (M.A.), Irish Academy of World Music and Dance, Limerick: University of Limerick.

O'Flaherty, Wendy D. (trans.) (1981) *The Rig Veda*, UK: Penguin Books.

Paul, Russill (2004) *The Yoga of Sound: Tapping the Hidden Power of Music and Chant*, California: New World Library.

Popley, H.A., (1996 [1921]) *The Music of India*, New Delhi: D.K. Publishers.

Potter, Karl H. (ed.) (1981) *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies VIII*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Powers, Harold S. (1965) 'Indian Music and the English Language: A Review Essay', in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.1-12.

Prabhavananda, Swami and Manchester, Frederick (2002) *The Upanishads: Breath of Eternal Life*, New York: Penguin, New American Library.

Prajnanananda, Swami (1997 [1963]) *A History of Indian Music*, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math.

Prajnanananda, Swami (1998 [1972]) *Music of the Nations*, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math.

Premalatha, Dr. V. (1985) *Music Through the Ages*, New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.

Quaye, J. (2007) 'Voice of the Researcher: Extending the Limits of What Counts as Research' *Journal of Research Practice*, Vol.3, Issue 1, [online], available: http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/60/129 [accessed 9 October 2009].

Qureshi, Regula (1995) [1986]) *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and meaning in Qawwali*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Qureshi, Regula (2000) 'How Does Music Mean? Embodied Memories and the Politics of Affect in the Indian "sarangi"', in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 805-838. Blackwell Publishing.

Racy, Jihad (2003) *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli and Moore, Charles (eds.) (1973) *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli (2000) *Indian Philosophy*, London: Allen and Unwin.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli (2006) *Indian Religious Thought*, New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks.

Ramakrishna, Sri and Nikhilananda, Swami (2006 [1942]) *Selections From the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House.

Rangacharya, Adya (2010) *The Nāṭyaśāstra: English Translation with Critical Notes*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Rice, Timothy (1987) 'Towards a Remodelling of Ethnomusicology', in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp.469-488.

Rice, Timothy (1994) *May it Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rice, Timothy (1997) 'Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology', in Barz, Gregory F. and Cooley, Timothy J. (eds.) *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Rice, Timothy (2003) 'Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography', in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp.151-179.

Rowell, Lewis (1992) *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Roy, Ashok (2004) *Music Makers: Living Legends of Indian Classical Music*, New Delhi: Rupa.

Ruckert, George and Widdess, Richard (2000) 'Hindustāni Music' in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 5: South Asia*, New York: Garland Publishers.

Ruckert, George E. (2004) *Music in North India: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rushdie, Salman (1981) *Midnight's Children*, London: Penguin Books.

Said, Edward (1978) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Books.

Sanyal, R. and Widdess Dr R. (2004) *Dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Schatzki, T., Knorr Cetina, K. and Savigny E. V. (eds.) (2001) *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Research*, London: Routledge.

Schechner, Richard (2002) *Performance Studies, an Introduction*, New York: Routledge.

Schechner, Richard (2007) 'Rasaethetics' in Banes, Sally and Lepecki, Andre (eds.), *The Senses in Performance*, New York: Routledge.

Schippers, Huib (2007) 'The Guru Recontextualized? Perspectives on Learning North Indian Classical Music in Shifting Environments for Professional Training', in *Asian Music*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp.1-16.

Scott, Stanley Arnold (1997) *Power and Delight: Vocal Training in North Indian Classical Music*, Ph.D. Thesis, Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University.

Seeger, Charles (1977) *Studies in Musicology* 1935-75, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Seeger, Anthony (1987) 'Do We Need To Remodel?' in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp.491-495.

Shankar, Ravi (2007 [1968]) *My Music, My Life*, San Rafael: Mandala Publishing.

Shankar, Ravi (1997) *Raga Mala: An Autobiography*, Dorset: Element Books Limited.

Shankar, Ravi (2008) *On Appreciation of Indian Classical Music*, [online], available: http://www.ravishankar.org/-music.html [accessed 28 March 2008].

Sharma, Arvind (2006) *A Guide to Hindu Spirituality*, New Delhi: Vision Books.

Sharma, Shiv Kumar (2002) *Journey with a Hundred Strings: My Life in Music*, New Delhi: Viking.

Shastri, Hari Prasad (1957 [1976]) *Yoga*, London: W. & G. Foyle Ltd.

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2007), 6th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simms, Robert (1992), 'Aspects Of Cosmological Symbolism In Hindustani Musical Forms', in *Asian Music*, Vol.24, No.1, pp.67-89.

Simon, Robert Leopold (1985) *Spiritual Aspects of Indian Music*, South Asia Books.

Slawek, Stephen (1986) *Kirtan: A Study of the Sonic Manifestations of the Divine in the Popular Hindu Culture of Benaras*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois.

Slawek, Stephen (1987) *Sitār Technique in Nibaddh Forms*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Slawek, Stephen (1998) 'Keeping It Going: Terms, Practices and Processes of Improvisation in Hindustāni Instrumental Music', in (ed. Nettl, Bruno with Russell, Melinda) *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Slawek, Stephen (2000) 'The Classical Master-Disciple Tradition', in (ed. Arnold, Alison) *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music (Vol. 5) South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent*, New York: Garland Publishing Inc.

Sorrell, Neil and Narayan, Ram (1980) *Indian Music in Performance: A Practical Introduction*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Sri Aurobindi Society (2002) *Alaap: A Discovery of Indian Classical Music*, Mumbai: Times Music.

Stefani, Wolfgang Hans Martin (1993) *The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style: An Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), Andrews University.

Stone, Ruth M. (2008) *Theory For Ethnomusicology*, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Strangways, A. H. Fox (1914) *The Music of Hindostan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Subramaniam, Lakshmi (2008) 'Culture and Consumption: Classical Music in Contemporary India and the Diaspora' in *Transforming Cultures eJournal Vol.3 No.1, February 2008*, [online], available: http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC [accessed 17 June 2013].

Sullivan, Lawrence E. (1997) *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.

Tagore, Rabindranath and Underhill, Evelyn (2004 [1914]), *Songs of Kabir*, New York: Dover Publications.

Titon, Jeff Todd (1997) 'Knowing Fieldwork', in Barz, Gregory F. and Cooley, Timothy J. (eds.) *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Trasoff, David (1999) *Sarod Performance Practice in the Twentieth Century: Tradition and Transformation in North Indian Classical Instrumental Music*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), Santa Barbara: University of California.

Turner, Victor (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Turner, Victor (1974) *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Tyler, Stephen A. (1986) [1973] *India: An Anthropological Perspective*, Long Grove, Ill.: Illinois Waveland Press.

Van Der Meer, Wim (1980) *Hindustāni Music in the 20th Century*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

Viswanathan, T. and Allen, Matthew Harp (2004) *Music in South India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wach, Joachim (1958) *The Comparative Study of Religions*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Wade, Bonnie (2004 [1979]) *Music in India: The Classical Traditions*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Wade, Bonnie (1980) "Some Principles of Indian Classical Music" in *Music of Many Cultures – An Introduction*, Oakland, CA.: University of California Press.

Wade, Bonnie (1984) *Khyāl: Creativity Within North India's Classical Music Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wade, Bonnie (1998) *Imaging Sound: An Ethnomusicological Study of Music, Art, and Culture in Mughal India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Westbrook, Anthony Peter (2001) *The Divine Vina and the World Monochord: Musical Cosmology from the Rg Veda to Robert Fludd*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), Baltimore: University of Maryland.

Widdess, Richard (1981) 'Aspects of Form in North Indian Alap and Dhrupad', in *Essays on Asian and Other Musics Presented to Laurence Picken*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Widdess, Richard (1994) 'Festivals of Dhrupad in Northern India: New Contexts for an Ancient Art', in *British Journal of Ethnomusicology, Vol. 3* pp.89-109. British Forum for Ethnomusicology.

Widdess, Richard (1995) *The Rāgas of Early Indian Music: Modes, Melodies, and Musical Notations from the Gupta Period to c.1250*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Witzleben, Lawrence (1997)"Whose Ethnomusicology? Western Musicology and the Study of Asian Music," in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 41, No.2, pp.220-242.

Yesudian, Selvarajan (1976) *Yoga Week by Week*, UK: George Allen & Unwin.

Other Reference Materials

Desai, Gita (2009) *Raga Unveiled: India's Voice, the History and Essence of Indian Classical Music*, 2 DVD set, Place Unknown: Gita Desai.

Websites Cited

Das, Kushal (2012) *Kushal Das: Sitar and Surbahar*, Official Website, [online], available: http://www.kushaldas.com [accessed 22 June 2013].

Khan, Amjad Ali (2013) *Amjad Ali Khan: Sarod Virtuoso and Composer*, Official Website, [online], available: www.sarod.com [accessed 30 June 2013].

Interviews by the Author

Amonkar, Premanand Shanu; Amonkar, Sadanand; and Fatarpekar, Subhash (May 2012) Dublin: Avalon House Hostel.

Banerjee, Angshubha (May 2012) Ravenna, Italy: a mutual friend's house during Banerjee's European tour.

Bhattacharya, Rajeswar (June 2008) Dublin: Oscailt Integrative Health and Therapy Centre.

Bedi, Jagdeep Singh (January 2000) New Delhi: Bedi family home.

Bhide, Vinay (July 2012) Dublin: Indian Ambassador's Residence.

Brahmachari, Rana Subhojit (January 2009) Kolkata: my apartment.

Chaudhuri, Swapan (February 2009) Kolkata: Chaudhuri family home.

Das, Kushal (February 2007) Kolkata: Das's music room in his family home.

Das, Kushal (January 2009) Kolkata: Das's music room in his family home.

Das, Nimai (February 2009) Kolkata: my apartment.

Jha, Amrendra (February 2000) Varanasi: Jha's bedsit.

Joshi, Nikhil (August 2013) India – Ireland: interview typed in stages by interviewee via facebook messaging.

Khan, Alam (June 2013) USA – Ireland: skype interview.

Khan, Sabir (June 2009) Dublin: Backstage at the National Concert Hall.

Kumar, Nilandri (June 2010) Cork, Ireland: Green Room in the Pavilion Theatre.

Randhawa, Sam (February 2012) Cork, Ireland: The Firkin Crane.

Roy Chowdhury, Subroto (November 1999) Dublin: Dublin Transcendental Meditation Centre.

Roy Chowdhury, Sougata (January 2009) Kolkata: Sougata's apartment.

Roy Chowdhury, Sougata (May 2006) Dublin: my home.

Roy Chowdhury, Sougata (August 2009) Toulouse.

Roy Chowdhury, Sougata (February 2007) India: on board a train travelling from Shantiniketan to Kolkata.

Roy Chowdhury, Sougata (November 2010) Cork, Ireland: by the River Lee.

Roy Chowdhury, Sougata (July 2013) France – Ireland: skype interview.

Sanyal, Debojyoti (February 2009) Kolkata: my apartment.

Sanyal, Joyeeta (August 2013) Co. Cork, Ireland: in my van, in transit to a concert.

Other Interviews

Banerjee, Nikhil (1985) Interview by Ira Landgarten, [online], available: http://www.raga.com/interviews/207int3.html [accessed June 2012].

Das Gupta, Buddhadev (1985) Interview by Ira Landgarten, [online], available: http://www.raga.com/interviews/210int1.html [accessed April 2013].

Dagar, Wasifuddin (2000) Interview by Ira Landgarten, [online], available: http://www.raga.com/interviews/wasifuddininterview.html [accessed April 2013].

Khan, Ali Akbar (2006) *Emperor of Melody: The North Indian Classical Music Tradition*, Interview by Caroline Cooley Crawford, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2010, [online], available: http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/khan_ali_akbar.pdf [accessed June 2013].

Khan, Bismillah (2007) *Musicians Now Seek 'Instant Success'*, article and interview, [online], available: http://mio.to/#/, [accessed November 2007].

Khan, Ustad Imrat and Rahn, John (1992) ‘An Interview with Ustad Imrat Khan’ in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp.126-145.

Nag, Maninal (1994) Interview by Ira Landgarten, [online], available: http://www.rāga.com/interviews/interview215.html [accessed April 2013].