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Delight, Devotion and the Music of the Monsoon at the Court of Emperor Shah ‘Alam

II

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[Figure 39. Blind Shah ‘Alam II, c. 1800–06.]

He is well versed in the Persic and Arabic languages, particularly the former, and is not ignorant of some of the dialects of India, in which he often amuses himself in composing verses and songs.

– Antoine Polier, on Shah ‘Alam II¹

The Mughal Emperor Shah ‘Alam II, who reigned 1759–1806, was an accomplished poet and lyricist.² In this chapter, we examine some of the emperor’s many compositions in Rag Gaund, a musical mode intrinsically linked with the monsoon, and used in the Mughal court to evoke a complex range of feelings and associations to do not only with melancholy, longing and desire, but also with spirituality. We reflect on this old monsoon *raga* to open up the feelings and sensibilities of members of elite Indian society on the eve of colonialism, and explore the political, social, devotional and aesthetic worlds they inhabited.

Shah ‘Alam II is one of the least-studied members of the Mughal dynasty. At its height the Mughals controlled almost the whole of the South Asian subcontinent, but by the late eighteenth century the empire was vastly diminished after a series of invasions, wars and the encroachment of the British East India Company. The story of the century has been one of declining imperial power and culture as the backdrop to the advent of a European-inspired ‘modernity’. If recent historians have offered correctives to this simplistic narrative by focussing on the flourishing of sub-imperial cultures in the various successor kingdoms, we

have still not taken seriously the possibility of enduring cultural creativity and innovation at the centre, in the court of the emperor.

Emotions are an appropriate lens through which to begin examination of this subject, not least because the tale of Shah 'Alam II's life and reign is an emotional one, full of intrigue, desperation and a certain resilience in the face of pathos-inspiring tragedy. When prince and heir-apparent to his father, Emperor 'Alamgir II, Shah 'Alam escaped confinement at Delhi after his father's murder in 1759 and led a campaign in the east to reassert imperial authority over the provinces of Bengal. He spent the years 1761–64 under the protection of the Nawab of Awadh, ruler of a state that, while in fact all but independent, still paid homage to the idea of Mughal rule. After battling the forces of the East India Company at Buxar in 1764, the emperor was forced to cede the right to administer the rich province of Bengal to the Company in 1765. It was not until 1772 that he returned to Delhi, escorted by the Maratha ruler of Gwalior Mahadji Scindia and restored by him to the throne. After a series of further uprisings and invasions of the capital, Shah 'Alam was blinded by the Rohilla leader Ghulam Qadir on 10 August 1788. It took only six days for news of this horrific violation to reach the ears of British residents in Lucknow. Mrs Sophia Plowden noted in her diary on 16 August that 'Golam Khader Shhawn had put out the King's eyes after deposing him...with an uncommon degree of cruelty having been scooped out by a dagger. It is usual in blinding people to touch the pupil of the eye with a searing iron.'³ While Qadir was subsequently killed by Scindia, Shah 'Alam was to spend the rest of his life effectively as a puppet of either the Marathas or, after their 1803 invasion of the Mughal capital, the East India Company.

Throughout all this, Shah 'Alam still found time to engage in courtly pastimes, including writing poetry and songs—as the quotation above from Swiss adventurer Colonel Antoine Polier suggests. The court still marked the ritual events of the Islamic calendar, performed pilgrimages to Sufi tombs, heard poetry recitations, and enjoyed dance and music performances.⁴ The *Khulasat ul- 'Aish i 'Alamshahi*, a treatise on the arts of music and dance from 1798, listed some three pages of famous musicians, dancers, pandits and other creative intellectuals who had been employed at the emperor's court.⁵ In short, Shah 'Alam and his courtiers continued to fulfil the role expected of them as members of the Mughal nobility. Such activities were—and are!—often dismissed as indulgent, extravagant and distractions from the real business of ruling; but they were not. As we discuss below, they were essential elements in the maintenance and performance of Mughal sovereignty.

In what follows, we look at a selection of Shah ‘Alam’s own poetry, all composed to be performed in one particular *raga*, or musical mode, associated with the monsoon—Rag Gaund. We then discuss what thinking of these poems as songs adds to our understanding of the emotions of the compositions and their performance. Finally, we look at one likely setting for the performance of these pieces, and for the celebration and enjoyment of the monsoon: the Mughal ‘place of pleasure’ in the royal pavilions and gardens around the *dargah* of the thirteenth-century Sufi Shaikh Qutb ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki at Mehrauli (see Pernau, also Asher, this volume).

Taking Pleasure: a Selection of Shah ‘Alam’s Verse

Sometime in 1797 a scribe at the Mughal court completed work on a collection of the emperor’s choicest examples of poetry and song—the *Nadirat-i Shahi*—compiled at Shah ‘Alam’s command.⁶ This manuscript contains over 700 examples of the emperor’s verse in Urdu, Brajhasha and Persian, in genres ranging from the ever-popular *ghazal* to *nayika-bheda* verses, celebrations of the new year, and songs of praise and supplication to Sufi *pirs* or saints. Importantly, over seventy-five per cent of the compositions have *raga* indications, demonstrating this to be a *song* collection, rather than a straightforward *diwan* or poetry collection. And of all the *ragas* listed, by far the most popular is Rag Gaund, with which some sixty-three verses, or nine per cent of the whole, are explicitly marked. As we will see below, Rag Gaund is now obsolete and unknown to contemporary musicians; but this is not to say it is unknowable.

Shah ‘Alam’s verses in Rag Gaund span the genres of *ghazal*, *kabitt*, *doha*, *tarana* and *hori*, in all three languages of the compilation. Various themes emerge strongly in these lyrics: most strongly of all, images and sentiments that evoke the time of the monsoon and the activities and pleasures associated with the rainy season. Perhaps these stand out most clearly in the verses on *nayika-bheda*—a genre devoted to the description of female beloveds (*nayikas*) and the travails and joys of love and longing. Here the *nayikas* are often invoked obliquely through codified and metaphorical references to birds.

For instance:

پیا کے ملن کی یاہورت آئی مائی
دادر مور پپیہا بولے کوئل کوک مجائی

पिया के मिलन की याहू रत आई माई
दादर मोर पपीहा बोले कोयल कूक मचाई

The season for meeting [my] dear has come, oh!

The frog, peafowl, and cuckoo are calling; the koyal is crying.

In this couplet, the plaintive calls of the birds and frogs, all of which mate during or just before the monsoon, are a metaphor for the longing of the beloved and the lover's impending return.⁷ The first half of the verse makes it quite clear: this is the time for meeting, the season of reunion, and a sure invocation of the joys to come. In another verse slightly later in the collection, Shah 'Alam again invokes the calls—and the implied 'promises'—of the birds calling to their mates:

कोयल मोर पपीहे की कोलों लगी दास
नैनन की बिन लाल के बरखा रहै छिमास

कोयल मोर पपीह की कौलों लगी उदास
नैनन की बिन लाल के बरखा रहै छिमास

The promises of the koyal, papiha and peafowl have distressed me;

Without the eyes of my beloved, the rainy season might as well last six months.

The rhetorical device here is a clever one: the specific joy of the rainy season, and the intensity of anticipating it, would be lost if either lasted for half the year; so too, would the joy of reunion be lessened if the lovers weren't so long apart; and so too would the season be meaningless if the promises of reunion—voiced by the birds—went unfulfilled. This is a kind of 'wet *viraha*' (see Williams, this volume)—a sense of joy deferred or delayed, with the time of separation painfully extended into the monsoon. When everyone else around you is enjoying their lover's return and reunion with them, yours has yet to appear: the sense of separation—that is, *viraha*—is especially intense when experienced in this way.

Rain is, of course, omnipresent in Shah ‘Alam’s compositions in Gaund. These are not the gentle rains of spring, but the drenching, all-encompassing and all-consuming deluge of the monsoon, as in this couplet:

برسیں سرسین گھنگھور گنا ترسین پی دیکھن کو اب نین ہمارے
چپلا چکلے حیرا رجبے سکھی کیسے پڑے سکھ چین تمہارے

बरसैं सरसैं घनघोर घटा तरसैं पी देखन को अब नैन हमारे
चपला चमकै लरजै जीयरा सखी कैसे परै सुख चैन तुम्हारे

The rains and the waters, the thunder roars and the clouds gather, now our eyes are
longing to drink

The lightning flashes and shakes my very life; my dear, how will you get your
satisfied rest?

This sense of intensity and drenching—of ominous but still joy- and life-bringing clouds—is emphasised elsewhere through strong alliterative and onomatopoeic effects (see Aitken, Williams, Orsini, this volume). In this next couplet, the explosive rhythmic effect of repeated aspirated *gh* sounds in the second half of the verse evokes the drumming of the rain on the earth, insistently marking the arrival of nature’s renewal and all the joys that brings:

بھوم ہری سب دیکھ کے مور کرے میں شور
چوں اور گھر گھر گھٹا گھوم رہی گھنگھور

भूम हरी सब देख के मोर करे हैं शोर
चहूं ओर घर घर घटा घूम रही घनघोर

bhūm harī sab dekh ke mor kare hain shor

chahūn or ghar ghar ghaṭā ghūm rahī ghanghor

Seeing the green earth, the peafowl make a noise

In every direction over every house the lowering clouds swirl and the thunder roars

One can easily imagine the performance of this particular song, danced by courtesans to *tintal*, their *ghunghrus* (ankle-bells) chiming with every syllable and dance step.⁸

But if anything underlines the importance of Rag Gaund to Shah ‘Alam, it is his direct invocation here of listening to its melody, and of the emotional resonance that it clearly had for him:

بہاں یا سمیں یوں جی چاہت سنیے مل گونڈ کی آہنگ
دل اپنے کی کوک سنا کیجے رس بتیاں پیاسنگ

बलमां या समैं यौं जी चाहत सुनिये मिल गौण्ड की आहंग
दिल अपने की कूक सुना कीजिये रस बतियां पिया संग

Now, lover, if you should so desire, listen to the melody of Gaund

Give voice to the plaintive cries of your heart; tell, dear, your emotions in company

Here, the emperor-poet once again directs our attention to his role as emperor-song-writer. The emotions of the monsoon—particularly here the ‘cries of your heart’—are best articulated through voice and melody; through, in other words, the performance of the emperor’s compositions in Rag Gaund.

Reconstructing the Sonic and Iconic forms of Rag Gaund

What, then, was Rag Gaund as a musical entity, and what did its melodic rendering add to the emotional impact of Shah ‘Alam’s poetry? How did Rag Gaund specifically ‘give voice to the plaintive cries of your heart’?

Although the sentiments expressed in Shah ‘Alam’s lyrics are evocatively rendered, we are concerned not to consider these just as poetry. These were songs, and their emotional power derives from the interlocking of lyric with the melodic formulae—the *ragas*—in which his songs were set. Worldwide, one of music’s primary functions is to move the emotions; according to the great Mughal music theorist Faqirullah, ‘to arouse tender sympathies in the heart is music’s entire essence, and its result.’⁹ But music is not a universal language. Musical patterns are abstract, capable of infinite interpretation beyond their immediate visceral impact. They gain their agreed meanings and specific emotional powers through a long-term accretion of unique cultural associations—with ideas, histories, images, stories, people, experiences, the supernatural, places, even smells and tastes. Yet even when the meanings of particular musical patterns have been established culturally, each musical

performance remains open to multiple interpretations. Music goes beyond language, expressing things that words alone cannot.¹⁰ When combined with other art forms—with the visual, with poetry—the range of music’s possible meanings narrows, becoming more tailored to the specific instance. But its melodic gestures can still be used to emphasise or suppress one meaning in the lyric over another, or even to upend the usual meaning of an image. When deployed together, music, word and image thus deliver an altogether more complex and potent aesthetic experience than words alone. This is why understanding the particular resonances of the *ragas* in which Shah ‘Alam set his poetry is so important, because they are key to a fuller understanding of his affective intentions.

In North India, the agreed meanings and affective powers of the melodic formulae used to set courtly and religious poetry have been codified elaborately in visual and verbal form since the fourteenth century. Each *raga* exists in both a sonic form, and an iconic form rendered visually in *ragamala* paintings and verbally in poetical verses and the lyrics of song compositions. In their sonic form, *ragas* are melodic formulae—ascending and descending note patterns with special additional rules—that act as blueprints for composition, and produce a unique character or *soundmark* for each *raga*.¹¹ The soundmark produced by specific melodic gestures in each *raga* is associated with a distinct emotional flavour—a *rasa* (distilled affective essence) or *bhava* (temporary emotion)—and with a particular time of day or season of the year (see also Leante, this volume). Sung correctly, every *raga* is supposed to have a specific effect on the listener’s physical or psychological wellbeing or on the wider natural world. The monsoon *raga* Megh, for example, has the power to bring the monsoon rains; the coming of the rains is furthermore associated with the joy of union with the beloved. Dhanashri, on the other hand, consumes the listener with longing as he or she waits for the return of the absent beloved. In the *ragas*’ iconic forms, these associations are assembled into painted icons and poetic imagery (see Aitken, Orsini, this volume). Since the fourteenth century, Indian poets have described the *ragas* as beautiful heroines, brave heroes, sages, *joginis* and gods, using poetic rather than melodic means to convey the *rasa* of the *raga*. And since the sixteenth century, the *ragas* have been painted in suites of six male *ragas*, each with five wives called *raginis* and known as a ‘garland of *ragas*’—the *ragamala*.¹²

In theory and in practice, one form of the *raga* is supposed to call the other to mind in the moment of appreciation. But there is no one-to-one correspondence of brushstroke and *meend* (glissando) or bird name and note cluster between iconic and sonic forms of the *raga*. Rather, the two use independent artistic techniques simultaneously to act cumulatively on

multiple sensorial fronts, in order to magnify and intensify the specific powers of a particular *raga* over the listener's physiology, emotions, intellect and spirit.

But if we want to understand better the emotional resonances of the songs Shah 'Alam wrote in what may well have been his favourite *raga*, we need to reconstruct its sonic and iconic forms. For Rag Gaund has been obsolete in North Indian classical music since the turn of the twentieth century, and we are unable to confirm from recordings what it sounded like. To add to the difficulty, from Mughal-era painters and music theorists to modern art collectors and art historians, the iconography of a proliferation of *raginis* with similar sounding names—*gaund*, *gonḍ*, *gaur*, *gaud*, *gaurā*, *gaurī*, *gunakrī*, *gonḍgirī*, *gunkalī*, *gaur malhar*, etc.—have been confused or conflated. As Ebeling noted, these disagreements 'not only confuse us now, but apparently...bothered the artists and patrons when these Ragamalas were created.'¹³

What follows, then, is our attempt to bring together visual and sonic clues about Gaund's affective identity from paintings, music treatises and song collections produced in Mughal India from the 1610s to the 1860s. Technical analysis of this kind helps identify Gaund as the quintessential monsoon *raga* of the late Mughal court, and suggests some of the particular emotional qualities it conveyed at the time Shah 'Alam was composing his songs.

Sonic Form

We already have a strong lead from Shah 'Alam's poetry settings in Gaund that it was a monsoon *raga*. The noisy peafowl, cuckoos, koyals, papihas and frogs would be enough to give this away. But Shah 'Alam drenches us with rainwater, low dark clouds, thunder and lightning, and earthy greenery, and draws out the exquisite monsoon tension of love stretched between longing and fulfilment. More particularly, as we shall see shortly, his is a very localised monsoon—the monsoon as it was experienced in the pleasure gardens built explicitly to enjoy the rainy season at the Mughal summer palace at Mehrauli, with its restful resident saint Qutb ud-Din contributing his personal temperament of quiet fulfilment to the atmosphere of this secluded time and space.

But if anything demonstrates the powerful association of Gaund with the monsoon—and the critical importance of his verses as *songs*—it is Gaund's placement in the order of *ragas* that provides the underlying organisational principle of the *Nadirat-i Shahi*. For, uniquely in our experience, Shah 'Alam ordered his collection according to melodic relationships between the *ragas* in which each composition should be sung.

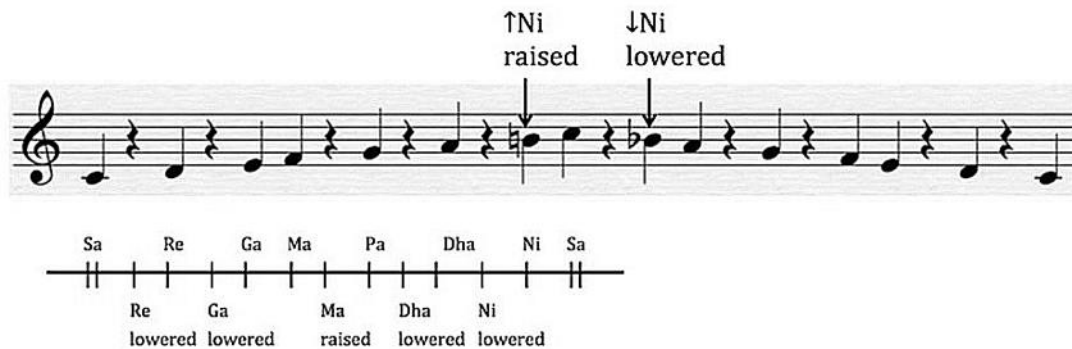
Within each genre section, the compositions are ordered not by final rhyme, as in a poetry collection, but by *raga*. Nor have they been ordered according to any of the classic *ragamala* systems, as we might expect.¹⁴ The truly revolutionary feature of Shah ‘Alam’s collection is that the compositions have been ordered according to the intrinsic and specifically *melodic* soundmarks by which Hindustani musicians today still group *ragas* into relationships. Harold Powers and Richard Widdess have noted that modern Hindustani musicians do not consider scale or basic pitch sets to be predominant, or sometimes even relevant, in determining *raga* relationships. Instead, ‘performers conceive the *rāgas* as falling into groups, connected by common motifs rather than by scale.’¹⁵ It is these motivic or soundmark relationships that order the *Nadirat*: each genre section starts with *ragas* from the Bilaval group, regarded by the 1790s as the base scale of Hindustani music,¹⁶ followed by: Todi (then in its Bilaskhani form); a Sarang group; a Shri group represented most prominently by Dhanashri; further down the list the Kalyan, Kanhra and Kedar families; and so forth. That the musical logic of these groupings strikes us as obvious from the point of view of modern, embodied and practised *raga* theory attests to the modernity of Shah ‘Alam’s musical vision. This was, to our knowledge, the first time a major song collection was organised according to soundmark relationships, and it testifies to the pioneering nature of the emperor’s ideas, or of those around him.

We find Gaund towards the end of the order in the *Nadirat*, where a ‘Desh group’ of *ragas*—Sorath, Desh, Gaund, Gaund Malhar, Bhatiyar and Jaijawanti—rub shoulders with a group of monsoon and rain-tinged *ragas* like Sur Malhar; and Gaund Malhar is patently both. There were good musical reasons for both of these partnerings for Gaund, made clear in descriptions of the *ragas*’ melodic formulae written in and around Delhi between the 1790s and the 1860s.

Here we do have to get a little technical, because, as always, the devil is in the detail. (Writing about music is, famously, ‘like dancing about architecture’—fundamentally an impossibility, and a ridiculous one at that. We recommend listening to Miyan ki Malhar and Gaund Malhar while hacking your way through the thicket of this section, attending with your ears to the characteristic soundmarks of the monsoon that resolve into the enchanting voice of the *nayak* or *nayika* who lies at the end of your quest.) In the rest of this section, we prove musicologically, through a detailed examination of music treatises from the period, that Gaund was unmistakably a monsoon *raga*, and a major one at that, closely associated with the Mughal court; it may even be the old name for the now revered Rag Miyan ki Malhar,

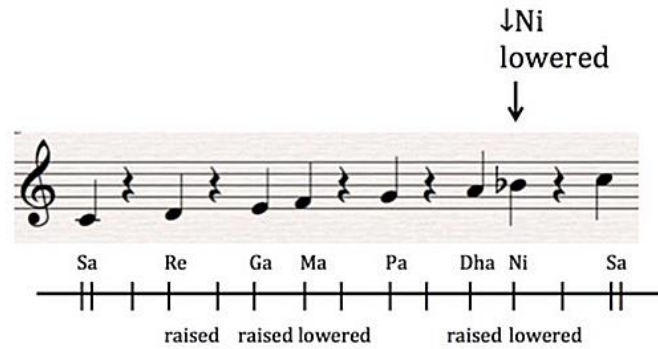
which Laura Leante describes in this volume as currently the most beloved of monsoon *ragas*.

The Desh grouping has to do with shared scalar material, and one particular feature specific to how these *ragas* ascend and descend. For a start, Desh, Gaund and Sorath were all regarded as possessing distinctive regional associations—Gaund with the tribal region of east-central India and the Deccan.¹⁷ Sorath and Gaund Malhar are still used in the Rajasthani musical connoisseurs’ game of *kakadi* to indicate the regional directions ‘south’ and ‘down towards the earth’ respectively.¹⁸ But what the Desh-group *ragas* in the *Nadirat* had, and still largely have, in common melodically are the use of both variants of the seventh degree of the scale, Ni—*shuddh* Ni (raised or natural Ni) when ascending the scale and *komal* Ni (lowered or flat Ni) when descending the scale:¹⁹



[Figure 40. The ‘Desh-group’ ascent and descent, and the seven-note scale of Hindustani music with all its twelve positions.]

Sadiq ‘Ali Khan, who wrote his ‘treasure-store of delight’ (*Sarmaya-i ‘Ishrat*) in Delhi in the years immediately following the 1857 Uprising, described in a series of diagrams how to fret the sitar to play different sets of *ragas*. Like the *Nadirat*, the *Sarmaya* groups Gaund together with Sorath, Bhatiyar and Jaijawanti, as well as Nat Mallar, Jhinjhoti, and yet another regional *raga*, Khamaj, in the scale that V.N. Bhatkhande later named Khamaj *thath* (scale or fret-setting)—all natural (*shuddh*) with lowered (*komal*) Ni:²⁰

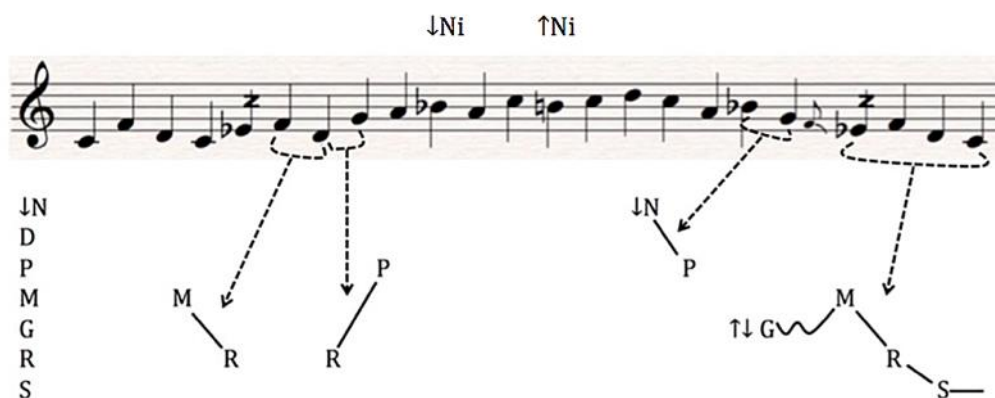


[Figure 41: The scale of Gaund in the *Sarmaya*, now called Khamaj *thath*.]

When the frets on the sitar are set up like this, it is possible to pull the melody string from lowered Ni to produce raised Ni (but not vice versa). Indeed, later in the volume Sadiq ‘Ali says explicitly that Jaijawanti and Khamaj use both versions of Ni, and that Jhinjhoti, Nat Malhar, Desh, Gaund and Gaund Malhar can be conceptualised both in Khamaj *thath* AND in a scale using raised Ni, here called Desh²¹ *thath*.²² Sadiq ‘Ali’s grouping reflects the classical traditions of Mughal Delhi as they were recollected after the Uprising. It is not surprising that the relationships he recorded resembled Shah ‘Alam’s grouping so closely.

But more importantly, Gaund is unequivocally associated sonically in Delhi treatises with the Malhar family of monsoon *ragas*. The use of both versions of Ni, in fact, had been understood in mid-seventeenth-century Delhi as especially characteristic of the major monsoon *raga* Megh, one of the six male *ragas* in the *ragamala* (see Orsini, this volume).²³ Gaund was certainly already conceptualised by the 1660s as it was in the 1860s: in Khamaj *thath*, with characteristic soundmarks focussed on the use of Ni and Ga.²⁴ But from the 1790s and beyond it was Rag Gaund’s use of a soundmark now customarily associated with a newer monsoon *raga*—Miyani ki Malhar—that was highlighted. In 1666 Faqirullah had classified both Gaund and Gaund Malhar separately as sons (*putras*) of Rag Megh, and he noted there was a specifically melodic reason for this classification of Gaund.²⁵ Gaund’s association with Megh still held true in the 1790s, with Gaund now becoming Megh’s second wife—but with a new and, on the surface, mysterious melodic connection to the Kanhra *ragas*.²⁶ Picking up on this idea in 1862, Mardan ‘Ali Khan suggested that the connection had to do with Gaund’s specifically Kanhra use of both lowered and raised forms of the third degree of the scale, Ga.²⁷ Sadiq ‘Ali then clarified that Rag Gaund used both versions of Ga in a unique entry—rather than saying ‘both’ (*dono*), as he usually did with *ragas* that used both versions of a note, he wrote ‘raised and lowered’.²⁸

What modern Miyan ki Malhar and the quintessential representative of the Kanhra family, Darbari Kanhra, have in common today is an extended motif used as a cadence, a resting and ending formula that is used to structure a performance. The shared soundmark Ga–Ma–Re–Sa makes use of a highly identifiable Ga that oscillates heavily and slowly between lowered and raised Ga.²⁹ Crucially, in the only modern example we have of Rag Gaund, a song composition that Walter Kaufmann wrote out in Western notation in the 1960s, Gaund also features this specific soundmark, along with the use of raised Ni in ascending passages and lowered Ni in descent, and three soundmarks considered quintessential to the Malhar family—the gliding movements M–R, R–P and N–P (Figure 42, and Leante this volume, especially Figure 49).³⁰ In fact, Kaufmann’s notated example of Gaund’s structure is so nearly identical to the structure of Miyan ki Malhar that it is tempting to speculate that modern Miyan ki Malhar *is* Rag Gaund, renamed (or merged, perhaps) after the Uprising.



[Figure 42: The identifiable soundmarks of Rag Gaund; Walter Kaufmann, 1968.]

For the other thing that Miyan ki Malhar and Darbari Kanhra have in common is a deeply nostalgic association with the Mughal court in its days of glory. Both Darbari Kanhra and Miyan ki Malhar were supposedly written by the legendary Hindustani musician Tansen for the greatest of the Mughal emperors, Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Yet Miyan ki Malhar is in fact a new *raga*; it emerges for the first time, and that only sketchily, in the 1869 *Sarmaya-i Ishrat*.³¹ Given Gaund’s popularity as the major representative of the monsoon *ragas* at the court of Shah ‘Alam and his immediate successors, we wonder whether, in the aftermath of the 1857 Uprising, the dual urge to nationalise Hindustani music and to recall the Mughal empire in its heyday when an Indian regime had once outshone the British, led musicians to

disguise Gaund's regionality and nominate it as the quintessential Mughal monsoon *raga* by reworking it as Miyan ki Malhar.

Iconic Form

Identifying Gaund as a major monsoon *raga* in its sonic form helps us to cut through some of the confusion over its iconography in the *ragamala* painting tradition. What, then, does Gaund's iconic form add to our understanding of this *raga*'s specific emotional valencies? Firstly, in the Rajasthani game of *kakadi* mentioned above, Megh, the *raga* of the monsoon clouds, is counterpoised against Gaund, the *raga* of the rain-drenched earth below. The earthiness is a reminder of Gaund's erstwhile regional roots, but by the seventeenth century her origins as a dark, tribal and potentially tantric figure dressed in a short skirt of peacock feathers (Figure 44)³² had largely been superseded by her new incarnation as a monsoon *nayika*, seated on a bed of lotus flowers and surrounded by birds, on the verge of reunion with her beloved. This beautiful early-seventeenth-century miniature painting, Figure 43, and the verses that accompany it and its later eighteenth-century copy, lead us to suggest that, emotionally, Rag Gaund represented the imminent moment of joyful union between the clouds and the earth, the lover and the beloved (see Dwyer, Rao, this volume)—the moment of the most intense anticipation when the lover knows that the promise of her beloved's return is definitely going to be fulfilled, but he has not quite yet come:

[Figure 43: Gaund from the Manley *Rāgamālā* Album, c. 1610.]

The worried one makes up a bed of sweet flowers. She directs her view by night, this dusky one known as Gauṇḍ-karī. Gauṇḍ Rāg. [Persian script: Gaund.]

Gauṇḍ is an impassioned, exquisite woman;
she holds the thought of her distant lover tenderly in her heart.
Sitting with the one source of her love before her
she reads aloud the words inscribed upon her heart.
Her friends beside her play to her;
with sweet notes they sing of the thrills of happiness.
When she hears word of her lover's approach
her body blooms and her bliss thunders.

She decks herself in a special, colourful dress,
and watches the roads in every direction.
Gaunḍ is an impassioned woman, beautiful in her desire,
completely devoted to her lord.
Her soul knows of the approach of her lover;
the flower of her body burns.³³

(these translations by Richard David Williams).

[Figure 44: Gaund-giri from the *Javāhir al-Mūsīqāt-i Muḥammadī*, c. 1570.]

The Place of Pleasure: Mehrauli and the Sufi *Dargah*

In June 1772, Shah ‘Alam re-entered Delhi for a second time—this time flush with military success. The date of his famous *bazgasht* (Return) after thirteen years of exile in Allahabad is usually reckoned by his first entry into the imperial capital around new year, which in 1772 coincided with the great Muslim feast of Eid al-Fitr.³⁴ Yet the first time he stayed only a few days. The emperor faced stiff armed opposition from the local Rohilla warlord who controlled the region, Zabita Khan, and with his Maratha backers Shah ‘Alam marched straight out to Saharanpur to bring his Afghan nemesis to heel. Having chased the defeated Zabita Khan eastwards into Awadh, the combined Mughal and Maratha armies then spent some months ‘reducing all Zabita Khan’s possessions’ north and east of the capital. But when the rainy season drew close, Shah ‘Alam left the Maratha army encamped at Bareilly and returned to Delhi, to celebrate and to rest.³⁵

The monsoon was customarily a season of respite for North India’s armies. Heavy rain made baggage trains sink to their axles in mud, swollen rivers swept soldiers away to watery graves, and warhorses and elephants struggled over roads rendered impassable by mudslides, fallen trees and floodwater. So the onset of the rains generally heralded a temporary cessation of military hostilities, and a spell in which warriors hunkered down and enjoyed the more pleasurable activities of courtly life—feasting, music and dancing, making love, and begetting heirs (see also Sharma, this volume).

The Mughals’ successors, the British, misunderstood the importance and serious purpose of these moments of pleasure in the life of the Mughal court. They painted Mughal pleasure as decadence and despotism, in part because the Mughals themselves saw an excess of devotion to pleasure as threatening the political order, but mostly because the British wanted to portray their own rule as a welcome relief to the Indian people. By and large, we

have continued to understand the pleasures of the Mughals, and especially the late Mughals, on colonial terms. But seen from a Mughal perspective, setting aside a sacrosanct time and place for the pursuit of pleasure was absolutely essential to maintaining the health and well-being of the individual imperial official and of the body politic, not just physically but also spiritually and supernaturally.

According to their understanding of the mind and the physical body, human beings were constantly involved in an internal struggle between the faculty of reason, and the fundamental emotions of anger and desire. This struggle came out into the open in the social and political worlds in a need to prioritise the domain of duty over the domains of manly sports and manly pleasures—chief among which was the connoisseurship of music, recited poetry, dance, youthful beauty, and other ephemeral things. The ideal was not, however, the annihilation of anger and desire, but the *public display of mastery* over them through the pursuit of a virtuous balance. This was demonstrated to the world through controlled participation in sports and aesthetic connoisseurship (see also Aitken, this volume). The Mughals understood music to be the sonic vehicle of all emotions stemming from the domain of desire, and particularly joy, love and longing. Thus the patronage and enjoyment of music in the intimate gathering of connoisseurs called the *majlis* or *mahfil* became a major arena in which Mughal men could prove their right to rule through their mastery of desire. More than that, though, the space and time set aside for music provided a necessary respite from the domain of duty. In Mughal philosophy, music gained its power over the emotions supernaturally, by acting as a direct channel of the astrological power of the stars over human affairs. Music could thus bring emotions and bodily humours unbalanced through exhaustion and illness back to the equilibrium required for a man's return to worldly duties, or to restore and maintain the political harmony of the court (see also Preckel, this volume). The space and time of pleasure was also deeply spiritual and sacrosanct. The *ahl-i zauq*—the 'man of pleasure and taste' or connoisseur—was not, as the British mistranslated it, a 'voluptuary', but a man of profound spiritual inclinations capable of tasting, often through the *ragas*, the spiritual delights of the world beyond.³⁶

The rains thus created a particularly important seasonal sheltered space for men and women to explore a range of culturally significant emotions through the aesthetic and more visceral stimulation of the bodily senses of hearing, sight, taste, touch and smell. The idea of a space of retreat, of delight and seclusion, is perfectly encapsulated in another of Shah 'Alam's verses in Gaund:

آیونیک و سبھ دن آج چار شنبے کو سکھ سوں سیر کیجے باغ کی
شاہ عالم بادشاہ عیش عشرت کرو تم سنوں باتیں راگ گوند کی

आयो नेक-ओ सुभ दिन आज चारशंवे को सुख सूं सैर कीजे बाग की
शाह आलम बादशाह ऐश इशरत करो तुम सुनूं बातें राग गौण्ड की

Come, on this beautiful, splendid day; today, Wednesday, take the air and delight in
the garden

Emperor Shah 'Alam, sate your thirst and take pleasure in the matters of Rag Gaund

The reference to 'Wednesday' is not incidental to our understanding of the milieu in which these songs in Gaund would have been sung. As Margrit Pernau shows in her chapter on the *Phulwalon ki sair*—a festival centred on the *dargah* of Qutb ud-Din at Mehrauli—from the time of Muhammad Shah Rangila (r. 1720–48) the Mughal emperors moved to Mehrauli every year at the onset of the monsoon. It is possible that Shah 'Alam's verse invokes the customary beginning of the movement out of Delhi to the verdant surrounds of the *dargah* of Qutb ud-Din, and the carefully tended gardens, waterfalls, and surrounding complex of music rooms and pavilions where the court reposed to enjoy the many pleasures offered by the beginning of the rains.³⁷

If as Pernau states 'the life of the royal visitors [to Mehrauli] revolved around the *jharna*', we have evidence for that in the poetry of Shah 'Alam also:

بھوم ہری ات نیکی سہاوی اور گھیرے چوں اور تیں باور
خواجہ قطب سے مانگ مرادیں کیجے زیارت میں یہ نادر
مور جھنگریں پہاڑ کے اوپر سور کریں سگرے مل دادر
نینن نیکو لگو جھرنا اور چھوٹیں بھلی سب ہی تیں چادر

भूम हरी अति नीकी सुहावे और घेरे चहूँ ओरतें बादर
ख्वाजा कुतुब से मांग मुरादे कीजे ज़ियारत हीं यह नादर
मोर झिंगारें पहाड़ के ऊपर सोर करें सगरे मिल दादर
नैनन नीको लगे झरना और छूटें भली सब ही तैं चादर

The great beauty of the green earth pleases, and the clouds circle all around
This pauper makes his pilgrimage to beg a boon of lord Qutb ud-Din
The peafowl murmur atop the hills while the frogs make noise as they gather
Turn your eyes to the beautiful waterfalls and spread the covering cloth fully

As the verse makes clear, pleasure in the gardens and delight in the sights and sounds of the season combined powerfully for the emperor with religious devotion. The verse refers to Khwaja Qutb ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, whose *dargah* or tomb shrine is at Mehrauli. Qutb ud-Din was the spiritual successor to Muin ud-Din Chishti, the Sufi saint who established the Chishti order in South Asia, and had settled at Delhi during the reign of Iltutmish in the early thirteenth century. So, while the earth is verdant and the birds and other animals whose mating we associate with the onset of the monsoon—and with the broader affective register of monsoon *ragas* and song—are there, it is *also* a time when the emperor and court move to Mehrauli, not simply to enjoy themselves, but to engage in *ziyarat* or pilgrimage, to spread the cloth over the tomb of the saint, and beg for his benevolence. The two sentiments—of pleasure and piety—are so closely entwined in this single verse, we might assume they were inextricable in this context. And the verse above is indicated, unsurprisingly at this stage, to be sung in Rag Gaund.

By sheer coincidence, the *'urs* or death anniversary of Qutb ud-Din fell on 15 June in 1772, right around the time we would expect the rains to arrive and when Shah 'Alam returned from his defeat of the Afghans, presumably quite satisfied, even if still dependent on his Maratha protectors. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the emperor's devotion to his spiritual intercessors might have been particularly intense and thankful at that moment. And his collection is liberally sprinkled with poems or verses dedicated to the saints of the Chishti lineage. Consider:

مانگت ہوں یہ خواجہ قطب تم جی کی مرادیں سہی بھرنا
دہاوں تمہیں تم ہی سوں پاوں لاگ رہوں تمہرے چرنا
مال ملک شاہ عالم کو دو اور خزانے تمہی بھرنا
سیر کریں امرای تے لکھ چھوٹ چادر اور بھرنا

मांगत हूं यह ख़्वाजा कुतुब तुम जी की मुरादें सभी भर करना
धाऊँ तुम्हें तुम ही सूँ पाऊँ लाग रहूँ तुम्हरे चरना
माल मुल्क शाहे आलम को दो और ख़ज़ाने तुम्ही भरना
सैर करें अमराई तले लख छूटत चादर और झरना

I beg this of you, lord Qutb ud-Din, fulfil all the desires of my life
I worship you, please hear me, constantly touching your feet
Give riches and a country to 'Shah 'Alam', and fill his treasure house
Strolling beneath the mango trees, gazing at the spread cloth and the waterfalls

This verse has no *raga* indication, and we can note immediately that it has no specific imagery to associate it directly with the monsoon. However, if this verse too refers in the last line to a sojourn at Mehrauli—waterfalls or waterways once more, and again the *chadar* or tomb-covering cloths—then we can see a somewhat more specific cast to Shah 'Alam's supplications to the saint. While strolling through the mango groves certainly provided him a sense of pleasure, release and relaxation (see Pernau citing Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg on a 'glimpse of Eden', this volume), it was simultaneously a venue for spiritual activity, with devotion to Qutb ud-Din and indeed the entire Chishti lineage an important part of the ritual conduct of the emperor and his court. Nowhere is this coming together of pleasure, piety, and polity better pictured than in the wonderful painting from the Prince of Wales Museum in Figure 45, wherein Shah 'Alam takes his ease in a secluded pavilion in Mehrauli, surrounded by his family, musicians, and attendants sporting in the pools, with roiling clouds overhead, and the Qutb Minar overlooking all in the background.³⁸ It was in this context, then, in this 'place of pleasure', that Shah 'Alam expressed literarily and musically his fervent hopes of being restored to his rightful place as ruler *in fact* of the Mughal Empire.

[Figure 45. Shah 'Alam enjoys the monsoon at Mehrauli. DETAILS/]

Conclusion

On 1 April 1806, William Fraser—then Deputy Resident of the East India Company at Delhi—wrote to his father at home in the highlands of Scotland:

On one of the late Mussulman festivals, I accompanied the King to the Mosque; and was much struck with the dignity and humility, with which the whole court offered their prayers to the Almighty. At this time, I was constantly at the side of the King; and could not but admire the extreme of nobility in his gait, aspect and mien. The loss of his eyes does not at all disfigure his countenance; but the history of their loss and of his misfortunes exalts to the highest our pity and our veneration. On his death, and not till then, we may say, that the Line of Timour is extinct as a Dynasty; beginning with the lame, and ending with the blind.³⁹

The equivalent date in the Islamic calendar was 13 Muharram 1221, so it is not inconceivable that Fraser was referring to having accompanied Shah ‘Alam to Ashura prayers three days previously (or, slightly further back, to the festival of Eid al-Adha that fell on 28 February). Either way, his letter was written just over seven months before Shah ‘Alam passed away. The death of the blind emperor—or ‘the King of Delhi’ as the British had taken to referring to him, disparagingly—did not herald the end of the ‘Line of Timour’, which was to continue to rule at least nominally until the overthrow of Shah ‘Alam’s grandson, Bahadur Shah II ‘Zafar’, in 1858, in vengeance for his role as figurehead of the 1857 Uprising. Nevertheless, Fraser’s pathos-filled recounting of the dignity—in dire straits—of the emperor is not unhelpful to us as we attempt to imagine, and to recover analytically, some of the emotional associations of poetry, music, melancholy, devotion and longing that coalesced around him in the season and courtly celebration of the monsoon.

[Figure 46. The Tomb of Shah ‘Alam at the Dargah of Qutb ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki at Mehrauli, nineteenth century.]

Shah ‘Alam II is buried at Mehrauli alongside the *dargah* of Shaikh Qutb ud-Din, as is his son and successor Akbar II and his early-eighteenth-century predecessor and great-grandfather Bahadur Shah, Shah ‘Alam I. Near them lies an empty dirt plot, meant to house the remains of Bahadur Shah Zafar (d. 1862). He lies instead where the British sent him into

incarcerated exile for the term of his natural life, in the capital of Burma, Yangon. Local South Asian Sufis have since raised a shrine over his grave, and the last Mughal emperor has become, himself, a saint, and his burial place a site of pilgrimage.

Notes:

¹ Antoine Louis Henri Polier, *Shah 'Alam II and His Court*, ed. Pratul C. Gupta (Calcutta: S.C. Sakar and Sons, 1947), 68.

² This research was generously funded by the European Research Council under the starting grant MUSTECIO, project ID 263643 (King's College London, 2011–15, Principal Investigator Katherine Butler Schofield). We are grateful to the other team members on this project for many conversations, particularly Richard David Williams who also supplied translations of *ragamala* inscriptions; Cathy and Malcolm Fraser, Laura Leante, Molly Aitken, Catherine Asher, William Dalrymple, and Alexander for putting up with his mother's mind being elsewhere for far too long.

³ Sophia Elizabeth Plowden, diary entry for 16 August 1788, MSS Eur F127/94, British Library.

⁴ The *Roznāmcha-i Shāh 'Ālam Sānī* gives extensive details of the emperor's daily activities for the last seventeen years of his life (1789–1806); I O Islamic 3921–2, British Library.

⁵ Nawab Mazhar Khan Bahadur, *Khulāsat ul- 'Aish-i 'Ālamshāhī*, Ouseley Add. 123, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, ff. 3v–5r.

⁶ A copy of the manuscript is preserved in the Raza Library, Rampur, which has published a facsimile and transcription. *Shah 'Alam II, Nādirāt-i Shāhī*, ed. Imtiyaz Ali Khan Arshi (Rampur: Raza Library, 2006 [1944]).

⁷ See Laura Leante's discussion in this volume of contemporary musicians' understandings of these birds, as well as Nicholas Magriel and Lalita du Perron, *The Songs of Khayal* (Delhi: Manohar, 2013).

⁸ *Tala*—the rhythmic cycle—was also indicated for many compositions in the *Nadirat-i Shahi*: for this song, '*titala*'. In the late Mughal period, elite courtesans sang and danced to even the most erudite of Persian, Urdu and Brajhasha verses; see e.g. Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1866 [1838]), 143–144.

⁹ '*...chīzī ast, ke qalb-rā ba-riqqat ārad, lazzat-i naghma o mā-hasal-i ān, hamīn ast*'; Saif Khan 'Faqirullah', *Tarjuma-i-Mānakutūhala & Risāla-i-Rāgadarpaṇa*, ed. and tr. Shahab

Sarmadee (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts & Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 152; Schofield translation.

¹⁰ Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, ‘Emotional Translations: Conceptual History Beyond Language’, *History & Theory* 55.1 (2016): 46–65.

¹¹ An excellent beginner’s guide to the *ragas* as melodic structures is Joep Bor, et al., *The Raga Guide* (Monmouth: Nimbus Records & Rotterdam Conservatory, 1999).

¹² Allyn Miner, ‘Ragas in the Early Sixteenth Century’, in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature, and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge: Open Book, 2015), 385–406.

¹³ Klaus Ebeling, *Ragamala Painting* (New York: Paragon, 1974), 86.

¹⁴ Ebeling, *Ragamala Painting*.

¹⁵ Richard Widdess, *The Ragas of Early Indian Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 35, expanding upon Harold Powers, ‘The Structure of Musical Meaning: A View from Banaras’, *Perspectives of New Music* 1.3 (1976): 308–334.

¹⁶ The outlier in this section is Kafi, which was earlier regarded as the base (*shuddh*) scale; this status transferred to Bilaval in the late eighteenth century. For a discussion of the seventeenth-century Sanskrit and Persian works on this matter, see Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], ‘Hindustani Music in the Time of Aurangzeb’, PhD dissertation (SOAS University of London, 2003), 204–208.

¹⁷ Mardan ‘Ali Khan’s *Ghuncha-i Rāg*, produced in the Delhi region in 1862–3, has ‘Gaund: the name of a community of tribals, like the Bhils, aboriginal to Hindustan’; (Lucknow: Naval Kishore, 1862–1863), 42.

¹⁸ Shalini Ayyagari, ‘Spaces Betwixt and Between: Musical Borderlands and Manganiyar Musicians of Rajasthan’, *Asian Music* 43.1 (2012): 3–33, pp. 3–5.

¹⁹ For the modern versions of these *ragas* see Bor, *Raga Guide*.

²⁰ Sadiq ‘Ali Khan, *Sarmāya-i Ishrat* (Delhi: Matba’-i Faiz-i ‘Alam, 1869), 190. For V.N. Bhatkhande’s modern *thath* system, see Bor, *Raga Guide*, 3–4.

²¹ Now Bhatkhande’s Bilaval *thath*; here ‘*Gaund kī thāth Desh*’; Sadiq Ali Khan, *Sarmāya*, 231. These *ragas* are not considered to be related to the Bilaval-group *ragas*.

²² In contemporary times, Rag Sorath has merged almost completely into Desh, Desh and Jaijawanti are considered particularly closely related, and so are Khamaj and Jhinjhoti; see Bor, *Raga Guide*.

²³ In the seventeenth century the *komal* Ni in Megh, and in Malhar *ragas* generally, was conceptualised as extra high or *tivra* Dha; ‘Iwaz Muhammad Kamilkhani, *Risāla dar ‘Amal-i Bīn* [1668], Ouseley 158, ff. 123r–132v, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

²⁴ Mirza Raushan ‘Zamir’, *Tarjuma-i Kitāb-i Pārijātak* [1666], RSPA 72, British Library, f. 34v.

²⁵ ‘Whenever a *rāginī* gets repeated, as here, after being mentioned earlier, under Śrī-rāga, it is to be attributed to difference in...the arrangement of *surs* [*swaras*, notes].’ Faqirullah, *Rāg Darpan*, 34–35.

²⁶ Ghulam Raza, *Usāl al-Naghmāt-i Āsafī* [1793], Persian Mus 2, Salar Jung Museum Library, Hyderabad, f. 89r.

²⁷ Mardan ‘Ali Khan, *Ghuncha*, 55.

²⁸ Sadiq ‘Ali Khan, *Sarmāya*, 196.

²⁹ See Leante in this volume for an extended discussion of this feature.

³⁰ Walter Kaufmann, *The Ragas of North India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 445–448. He noted that Gaund’s structure as he notated it ‘consists to a great extent of Kanada and Mallar phrases’.

³¹ Sadiq ‘Ali Khan, *Sarmāya*, basic scale on p. 195, one-line composition on p. 233.

³² See e.g. Ragini Gond-giri in Shaikh Abdul Karim, *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi* [paintings c. 1570], Or. 12,857, British Library, f. 110v.

<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_12857>

³³ Inscription on *ragamala* painting of Gaund from Jaipur, c. 1750; 1962.147.27, Art Institute of Chicago.

³⁴ The exact date on which Shah ‘Alam reentered Delhi for the first time is disputed; Antoine Polier, who was most likely to be correct being a contemporary, stated it was 23 December 1771; William Francklin Christmas Day; and others 6 January 1772, which coincided with Eid al-Fitr.

³⁵ Polier, *Shah ‘Alam II*, 24–26.

³⁶ These paragraphs on the place of pleasure in Mughal thought and society are expanded in Katherine Butler Schofield, ‘Musical Culture under Mughal Patronage’, in *The Oxford Handbook to the Mughal Empire*, ed. Richard Eaton and Ramya Sreenivasan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

³⁷ Though this predates the institution of the flower-sellers’ festival; see Pernau, this volume.

³⁸ We are grateful to William Dalrymple for drawing our attention to this stunning image, and to Catherine Asher for assistance in acquiring permission to reproduce it.

³⁹ William Fraser, letter, 1 April 1806, Fraser of Reelig Archives vol. 29, 'William Fraser: Correspondence'. With thanks to Malcolm and Cathy Fraser for access to this archive, and for their wonderful hospitality.