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SIKH PATRONAGE OF HINDUSTANI
MUSIC AND *ŚABAD KĪRTAN* IN
COLONIAL PUNJAB,
1857-1947

Kirit James Singh

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

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Department of Music
SOAS University of London

ABSTRACT

Despite cohabiting overlapping social spheres, north India's music traditions are too often studied in isolation from one another, negating their inherent interrelatedness. Adopting a more inclusive approach with regard to two major traditions of north India, in this study I explore how both Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan*, the sacred music of the Sikhs, enjoyed patronage under the prolific network of Sikh patrons that comprised an important aspect of colonial Punjab's sociocultural landscape. The distinct influence of aspects of Punjabi society and culture, the unique circumstances surrounding the rise of Sikh patronage, combined with the prominent place of *rāg* music in Sikh religious tradition, gave rise to an unparalleled environment of music patronage that challenges many modern assumptions about the nature of Hindustani music and its social context during the colonial period. Attending to the Sikh courtly sphere, my study highlights how the developments of Hindustani music in colonial Punjab relate to the broader geopolitics surrounding the 1857 rebellion, harbouring critical insights in relation to the emergence of modern Punjābiyat. Exploring the circulation of Gurmukhi manuscripts on musicology in the Sikh religious sphere up until the late nineteenth century, I highlight a localised tradition of Hindustani musicology, its multivalent character, and links to local music practice. In response to the radical political and discursive shifts wrought by colonialism, I show how in the early twentieth century, through the novel medium of print, the musicological literary output of the Sikhs was co-opted under the new label of *gurmat saṅgīt*, functioning as a form of symbolic capital in process of Sikh identity formation. Finally, drawing on ethnographic as well as archival research on both sides of the Indo-Pak border, I highlight the multidimensional role of the *rabābīs* within Sikh religious tradition historically, thus challenging modern musicology-centric understandings of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition in the process. Attempting to transcend postcolonial discourse and boundaries, this thesis offers a lens through which we might better understand the significant intersection between music traditions in a region like Punjab whilst also offering an alternative perspective on prevailing conceptions of Punjābiyat.

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NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

All translations provided in this thesis are my own unless specifically otherwise stated. Given the multilingual (Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Braj Bhasha, Persian, English) and multiscript (Gurmukhi, Nastaliq, Devanagari, Roman) character of written sources circulating in colonial Punjab, the interchangeability and interoperability between scripts and languages, and the inconsistencies that often arise from various language-script combinations, a degree of compromise is required in adopting a system for transliteration. The ISO 15919 (“Transliteration of Devanagari and related Indic scripts into Latin characters”) system, in particular, with its cross-compatibility across various Indic scripts, is a particularly useful system for transliteration and thus constitutes the foundation to the system of character mappings and diacritics employed for transliteration in this thesis.¹

Reflecting the Gurmukhi script’s lack of conjunct consonants, in some instances the ‘*a*’ vowel, normally implicit to each consonant, is not enunciated in practice. In such instances, I have omitted the ‘*a*’ in the transliteration also, so *gurmukhi* is transliterated as *gurmukhī* rather than *guramukhī*, and *klrqn* as *kīrtan* rather than *kīratan*. *Except where important to the meter* – for example, when transliterating Sanskrit words, verses of poetry, or song texts – I have omitted the implicit ‘*a*’ vowel at the end of words in my transliterations, in order to reflect spoken practice of modern Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. One will thus encounter the transliterations *rāg* and *tāl* rather than *rāga* and *tāla*, for example.

Another consideration with respect to end vowels is in the specific case of transliterating passages from the Guru Granth Sahib. Where attached to a consonant at the end of a word, the Gurmukhi diacritics ‘*i*’ and ‘*u*’ (representing the short vowels ‘*i*’ and ‘*u*’ respectively) are generally understood to bear grammatical significance and are thus generally ignored with respect to

¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_15919 for details regarding the ISO 15919 system of transliteration.

pronunciation.² In accordance with this and to reflect common pronunciation, I thus transliterate these simply as ‘a’, their metrical value still being of import.

Within the chosen scheme, the transliteration of nasal diacritics – ‘N’ and ‘M’ in Gurmukhi – adapts with respect to the class of the subsequent consonant (guttural, palatal, retroflex, dental, or labial). So, sMglq is transliterated as *saṅgīt*, pMj as *pañj*, kMT as *kaṅṭh*, cWd as *cānd*, and gMBlr as *gambhīr* respectively. In the case where either 1) a long, nasalised vowel appears at the end of a word and thus without a succeeding consonant, or 2) a nasalised vowel appears before any of the semivowel or spirant consonants, specifically ‘s’ (‘s’), ‘ś’ or ‘ṣ’ (‘S’), ‘h’ (‘h’), and ‘v’ (‘v’), the nasalisation is transliterated with an ‘m’, such that swfIAW is transliterated as *sāḍīām*, nUM as *nūm*, sWvl as *sāmval*, and hMs as *hams*.

Outside of the context of transliterated passages, that is, when referencing Indic vocabulary in my discussion, I adopt the anglicised form of pluralisation, so *śabads* is the plural form of *śabad*. Similarly, outside of the context of transliterated passages, names of people and places will be referenced via the prevailing English spelling, for example Patiala rather than *Paṭiālā*, and Bhai Prem Singh rather than *Bhāi Prēm Singh*. On the other hand, when referencing the names of written works, whose language is Indic or Persian, I do treat them as transliterations.

Lastly, with referencing vocabulary of Persio-Arabic origin in my discussion, I employ a transliteration that reflects the Nastaliq-specific consonants, for example *maḥfil* rather than *mahfil*, and *ṭavāif* rather than *tavāif*. In an attempt to maintain as much consistency across the various scripts as possible and to convey the pronunciation as simply as possible, I transliterate the Nastaliq ending ‘و’ as ‘ā’ such that نغمه in Nastaliq and its Gurmukhi equivalent nZmw might both be transliterated as *naḡmā*.

² See Shackle (1983) for more on the grammatical significance of Gurmukhi diacritics in the Guru Granth Sahib.

PREFACE

It was as a teenager growing up in north London, through the outreach work of the Raj Academy at my local gurdwara, that I first became aware of a style of *śabad kīrtan* markedly different to and supposedly much older than the otherwise ubiquitous style, involving the harmonium and *tablā*, that I had been previously exposed to in the gurdwara setting. I recall well the moment when a family friend came to our house one day with a *dilrubā* – an enchanting sight and sound for my fifteen-year-old self – and news that a new *kīrtan* class had started at our local gurdwara. It was by embarking on the process of learning the *sāraṅgī* at my local gurdwara that I initially came to develop an interest in *śabad kīrtan* and Hindustani music more broadly. Little could I have imagined that the journey I had embarked upon would, many years later, lead me to writing this PhD thesis, driven in large part by an unappeased curiosity to understand and contextualise the intimate relationship between Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan* and the trajectories of these music traditions in the modern era.

It is important to acknowledge that my own diffuse journey of studying *śabad kīrtan* and Hindustani music, in the years since, has been just as formative of this project as the targeted research conducted over the past several years. Bringing my shared interest and training in both *śabad kīrtan* and Hindustani music together and guided by the inherent connection between these two traditions, my decision to study one in relation to the other emerged organically. With limited historiography on either *śabad kīrtan* or Hindustani music in the Punjab region and with the Partition of 1947 comprising an obvious historical point of rupture, the immediately preceding period of colonial rule emerged as window of time with which I might frame my study, particularly given the abundance of research materials available and the apparent transformative significance of this time.

Through the process of researching, reading, contemplating, and writing, I have learnt so much more than I could have initially envisaged, the final shape of my thesis evolving along the way in response to the competing threads of significance to emerge from my findings. If anything, at times I was overwhelmed by the abundance of different directions in which I might let my discussions wander, both the wealth of research material available and the scope

of the subject being such that I consider this thesis but an initial steppingstone to the future work that it might lead to.

This thesis also emerges as the central component of what has become a larger research project, named The Mardana Project, centred around the *śabad kīrtan* tradition and Hindustani music in Punjab. As a partially crowdfunded project, my intention from the beginning has been to encourage community engagement with this project and its subject matter. Alongside and inspired by the findings of my research, I have built a profile for the project on publicly facing social media channels (Instagram, YouTube) such that aspects of the research might be disseminated in a more accessible and user-friendly format.³ My hope is that the project outputs through these channels might serve as an inspiration for those who wish to learn more about the rich and intertwined history of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition and Hindustani music within Punjab.

With the unique opportunity of conducting fieldwork in both India and Pakistan, I was keen to document the research process and also produce some kind of film on the subject of *śabad kīrtan*. Thanks to enthusiastic input from some of the project's leading funders, I was fortunate to be joined on my travels by a small team including Nathan Drillot, an eminent filmmaker from Vancouver, Canada, who has been most gracious in lending his time and expertise to the project. Based on the interviews and footage captured, therefore, another of the project's forthcoming outputs will be a short film and other video materials pertaining to the history of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition. Through a widely accessible digital presence that utilises film and video media, my hope is that this project serves not only the interests of the academic community but also those of the communities in the real world to whom the subject matter is particularly relevant.

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/themardanaproject> for an archive of the video outputs of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project, like any, has come to fruition with the inspiration, guidance, support, and cooperation of so many. I hope to acknowledge here all of those who have assisted and contributed in some way and sincerely apologise for any omissions in doing so. Firstly, I am most grateful for the support and guidance of my two supervisors, Richard Williams and Richard Widdess, whose expertise, experience, and advice have helped shape this research project into what it is. I remain indebted to them for their patience, time and energy throughout, and for challenging me to produce a work that I could have neither envisaged nor achieved without their invaluable involvement. Secondly, I must acknowledge the wise words of Suhab Kaur who planted the seed of this PhD many years ago by way of her suggestion and encouragement. That seed was watered and nurtured at every step of the way by the support and energy of my loving parents Shiv Charan Singh and Satya Kaur and by my dear friend, constant confidant, fellow musician, and researcher Jasdeep Singh. I would also like to express my gratitude toward my guru in music Pt Uday Bhawalkar for his generosity, teachings, and blessings, because of which music has taken on a greater significance in my life. My teachers of *śabad kīrtan*, Prof. Surinder Singh Matharu, Ustad Gurdev Singh Namdhari, and Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari, also played a significant role in shaping my musical journey and inspiring my interest in this field at an early age.

This PhD has only been made possible through the generous financial support of several organisations and individuals, most notably including the Yogi Tea Foundation, Manbir Singh (Australia), Inderpreet Singh (Australia), Satbir Singh (UK), Satya Kaur and Shiv Charan Singh (Portugal), Ravinderpal Singh (UK), Peter and Robbie Chapman (Australia), Gurvinder Pal Singh (USA), Daljinder Singh (UK), Gurpreet Singh and Jit Kaur (UK), Mokham Singh and family (Malaysia), and many others who wish not to be named. I thank you all sincerely for your faith in this project and pray that the outcome may come close to your expectations.

Throughout my research, a huge inspiration and priceless source of knowledge has been Sardar Balbir Singh Kanwal, whose depth of expertise and many

publications on the subject matter are without equal. His decades of accumulated research and steadfast passion has been a guiding light and the cause for many a stimulating conversation along the way. Ever ready to share sources and provide me with useful contacts, his indirect contribution to this project has been immense.

My fieldwork specifically was facilitated and aided by countless acts of kindness. In Amritsar, I was greatly assisted by my dear friends Sardar Tarandeep Singh Ghuman and Jatinder Singh of Khalsa College, as well as by the warm reception of the wonderful musician Ustad Murli Manohar, and *rāgī* Bhai Narinder Singh Sant. In Patiala, I am grateful to Sardar Jagroop Singh and Satpal Singh for facilitating my visit to the Punjab State Archives. I am also very grateful to Dr Gurnam Singh, chair of the Gurmat Sangeet Bhavan at Punjabi University Patiala at the time, and to Ranbir Singh Tiwana for allowing and facilitating my use of the department's resources.

In Chandigarh, I was helped tremendously by Navleen Kaur and her family who so generously hosted me and made my stay in the city a real joy. I am grateful to the staff at the Punjab Digital Library offices for facilitating access to their resources and to the staff at the Chandigarh branch of the Punjab State Archives likewise. I must also thank the entire Namdhari community for hosting me and my research team on our visit to Bhaini Sahib. I would like to thank Ustad Kulwinder Singh for hosting me at his academy in Bhunga and to my *gurū bhāī* Jai Singh and Satinder Singh for making our stay so memorable and for providing useful contacts in my research process. In Delhi, I am grateful to Bhai Baldeep Singh for the many interview hours he afforded me and for kindly sharing contacts that proved invaluable to my research. I am grateful to Shailaja Khanna and the late Rajkumari Lalita Khanna for their time and for sharing the history of the Kapurthala *gharānā*. My visits to the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology, at the American Institute for Indian Studies, Gurgaon, were kindly assisted by Sangeeta Dutt.

My visit to Pakistan was only possible by the kind invitation of Dr Kamran Asdar Ali, Dean of the School of Humanities at LUMS, with much assistance and the mediation of Kabir Altaf and his father Mir Anjum Altaf. Not only did they

facilitate my procurement of the visa requirements, but they also generously hosted me at their home in Lahore during my stay. I am thankful to my friend Afzal Hussain for his joyful presence and his efforts to make me feel at home away from home. I am also very grateful to the *tablā* player Riaz Hans, who accompanied me around Lahore to meet various musicians. Two of Pakistan's most eminent music scholars Ustad Badaruzzaman and Ustad Parvez Paras both generously lent their time and shared their vast and unparalleled knowledge on Punjab's Hindustani music traditions. Staff at the Punjab University library, Punjab Public Library, and Dyal Singh Trust Library were all very gracious in facilitating my research access.

An exhaustive list of all the people I interviewed is not possible, but I would like to mention some of the most memorable and formative interviews in relation to this study. The residents of Chowk Passian, Amritsar, and in particular the deceptively sprightly Pt Tilak Raj (b.1923), had much insight to share with regard to the history of the locality and the *rabābīs*' connection to it. I was very fortunate to interview the senior *ex-rāgī* of the Darbar Sahib, the late Bhai Gurdeep Singh (1951-2019) of Tarn Taran, who grew up listening to the great *rabābīs* of Amritsar prior to Partition and later performed there with his elder brother, the late *rāgī* Bhai Bakhshish Singh (d.1990).

Last but certainly not least, I am indebted to the *rabābī* families of Lahore in whose honour I dedicate this thesis. Above all, it is the memory of the *rabābī* tradition and what it represented that has been the chief inspiration behind this project. I hope that I have been able to provide a platform for some of the memories of this tradition to reach and inspire others. Unwittingly, it is through the *rabābīs* that I have come to learn the most about what *śabad kīrtan* is. The unexpected encounters and insights of many a warm afternoon spent in the courtyard of Katri Bawa, Lahore, the neighbourhood of the *rabābīs*, will always remain with me. In particular, the interviews with Pola Mehar, Muhammad Mehmood (b.1951), son of the percussionist Saifuddin aka Bhai Sain, Babar Ali Bela (b.1962) and his sisters Abida Bibi and Sayeda Bibi, children of the famous Sufi *rabābī* vocalist Hamid Ali Bela (d.2001), and Gulzar (b.~1960), son of the legendary *rabābī pakhāvajī* Bhai Nasira, stand out in memory.

Elsewhere in Lahore, I am grateful for the enlightening interviews with Kaleem Hussain (b.1962), son of the Hindustani vocalist Ustad Ghulam Hussain Khan and grandson of the famous Hindustani vocalist Bhai Rura; Akram Farooqi (b.1947), son of the *rabābī sarōdīyā* Bhai Mehar and grandson of Bhai Sain Ditta; Ustad Abdul Sattar Khan aka Tari Khan (b.1953), world-renown *tablā* maestro whose maternal grandfather was Bhai Chanan, younger brother of Bhai Sundar and cousin of Bhai Chand ; Ustad Bhai Tahir Iqbal (b.1956) and his family, son and grandson of Master Feroz Din and grandson of Bhai Chiragh, who was the elder brother to Bhai Lal Muhammad; Bhai Moeen Ahmad (b.1972), son of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand and grandson of Bhai Sundar; Ustad Qadir Shaggan and Ustad Mazhar Shaggan, sons of the renowned Hindustani vocalist Ustad Ghulam Hassan Shaggan and grandsons of Bhai Lal Muhammad; and Bhai Naeem Tahir Lal, son of Bhai Ashiq Ali Lal (1929-2012).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE IDENTITY POLITICS OF HINDUSTANI MUSIC AND *ŚĀBĀD KĪRTAN*

Amritsar mēm Darbār Śāhib kī vajah sē jō Sikhōm kā ēk nahāyat muqaddas aur mutabarrīk maqām hai, rāg kā baṛā carcā hai. Mandir mēm śubah sē śām tak barābar khudā kī hamd-ō-sanā mēm bhajan gāyē jātē haiṁ.

In Amritsar, because of the Darbar Sahib, an extremely holy and blessed place of the Sikhs, there is much discussion of *rāg* [music]. In the temple, from morning until evening, devotional songs in praise of God are sung.

(Ram 1930: 71)

This quote from *Mūsīqī-i-Hind (The Music of India)*, a book authored in the first half of the twentieth century by one K. L. Ralia Ram (1930), foregrounds the fundamental relationship between Sikh musical tradition and Hindustani music historically, a relationship at the heart of this study. The author Ralia Ram, a headmaster of the Lahore Missionary College, was an amateur musician who had studied from the renowned musician Ustad Jhande Khan.⁴ His book serves as a survey of the musical landscape of north India in the early twentieth century, in which Punjab is represented through a description of its two most important urban centres of music in the region at the time, namely Amritsar and Jalandhar. Ralia Ram portrays Amritsar as an important hub for Hindustani music, primarily on account of the daily music activity at the Darbar Sahib (also known as the Harimandar Sahib or, more popularly, the Golden Temple), the Sikh shrine at the heart of the city.⁵ He thus positions Sikh musical tradition as an important influence in the realm of Hindustani music in the region.

⁴ Ustad Jhande Khan was a musician from Sialkot, Punjab, who worked for thirty-five years teaching at Aitchison College (earlier known as Chief's College), Lahore, but also became a renowned composer working in the early theatre and film music industries, first for the Johal Theatrical Company and then the New Ilford Company in Bombay (Ali 2007: 11).

⁵ Though often omitted from histories of Hindustani music, Amritsar has been acknowledged as an important centre for Hindustani music by scholars focussing on the region of Punjab (Lybarger 2003: 24).

The Sikh religion as we know it today represents an evolution of the legacy of the ten Sikh gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and ending with Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). Central to this legacy is the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), a scriptural embodiment of the teachings collated and revealed by the Sikh gurus, representing, in aggregate, an eternal Guru principle often referred to as *gurbāṇī* (the speech of the Guru) or *śabad gurū* (the Guru as word). The GGS was compiled by Guru Arjan, the fifth guru, in 1604, but subsequently added to by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, around the turn of the eighteenth century. It contains almost six thousand sacred revelatory songs, individually known as *śabads*, not only of the Sikh gurus but also of numerous other saints associated with the *bhakti* and Sufi traditions, including the likes of Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, and Farid to name a few. Each *śabad* is assigned to a particular *rāg*, a melodic entity central to Hindustani music, of which the GGS contains thirty-one. Moreover, *rāg* (rather than author or textual theme) constitutes the primary organising principle of the GGS, giving rise to thirty-one chapter-like sections therein and demonstrating the interwovenness of Hindustani music in Sikh religious tradition, as the intrinsic vessel of transmission for *śabad gurū* or *gurbāṇī*.

Despite this, however, it is surprising that Sikh music tradition has not been the subject of more scholarly work until recently. The tradition of singing *śabads* of the GGS is known variously as *śabad kīrtan*, *gurbāṇī kīrtan*, or often, when the context is clear, just *kīrtan*. For consistency's sake, I adopt the former of these terms to refer to the Sikh devotional music tradition throughout this study. It is really in the last decade or so that a growing body of scholarship relating to *śabad kīrtan* has emerged, a summary of which I provide below in order to understand the context out of which the present study emerges.

Much of this recent scholarship has engaged with the rise of the so-called *gurmat saṅgīt* movement in the period following the troubled events of 1984, amid a climate of heightened Sikh identity politics and renewed Sikh-Hindu tensions. Kalra (2014: 76) suggests that amid the destruction of tangible Sikh heritage in the form of buildings, artefacts, books etc., the community also became more conscious about preserving the intangible. *Gurmat saṅgīt* (music of the Guru's tenets) became a renewed focus for the community, the term evoking the idea of

an ‘authentic’, ‘original’ or ‘traditional’ Sikh music, in relation to instrumentation, *rāg* forms, style and repertoire. However, whilst seeking to assert *gurmat saṅgīt* as a distinct tradition from Hindustani music, Cassio (2015) and Khalsa (2012; 2014) have shown how proponents of the *gurmat saṅgīt* movement have, somewhat paradoxically, relied upon modern Hindustani music theory, musical styles, *rāg* forms, and compositions, thus invoking the idea of ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). A significant marker of the progress of this movement was the establishment of a dedicated *gurmat saṅgīt* department at the Punjabi University Patiala in 2003 (Khalsa 2012).

Whilst we might thus describe the modern *gurmat saṅgīt* movement as neo-traditionalist in character, there has been a parallel movement spurred by the same motives around the preservation of a Sikh heritage. The *gurbāṇī saṅgīt* movement, as it is known, chiefly represented by the activist, musician and scholar Bhai Baldeep Singh, might be described as traditionalist or revivalist in character, and is focussed on oral tradition, pedagogy, and responsible custodianship as a means for revival. This puts it at odds with the *gurmat saṅgīt* movement’s theory-centric approach toward standardising and reforming the *śabad kīrtan* tradition in accordance with modern Hindustani music theory and styles. Surprisingly, there has been relatively little scholarship that seeks to penetrate further into history, beyond the dominant discourse around *śabad kīrtan* that is so clearly intertwined with modern Sikh identity politics. This thesis in many respects seeks to attend to this significant gap in the scholarship.

One of the scholars who has sought an approach rooted more in historiography is van der Linden (2015b; 2012) whose contributions offer some historical contextualisation to the field. With reference to colonial-era identity politics and socioreligious reforms, van der Linden suggests that it was only in the early twentieth century that “Sikhs self-consciously began to define and canonize Sikh sacred music as a distinct musical form” (2015b: 135). Citing the influence of Western Orientalist writers on Indian music, he goes on to argue that “*kīrtan* experienced an intellectual trajectory of classicization that was relatively similar to what Indian national music reformers propagated within the Hindustani and south Indian Carnatic classical music traditions” (2015b: 135). Maintaining a broad perspective, van der Linden thus draws useful parallels between the

emergence of a canonised *śabad kīrtan* tradition early in the twentieth century, and the emergence of codified forms of Hindustani music (Bakhle 2005), Carnatic music (Allen 2008), and regional traditions such as *Rabindra saṅgīt* (Linden 2015b) during the same period. Whilst this contextual approach offers important insight with regard to colonial patterns, it also risks omitting the more nuanced distinctions between the trajectories of these various music traditions under colonialism. For example, the idea that Hindustani music was ‘classicised’ in the early twentieth century, as argued by Bakhle (2005), is itself contested, the work of Schofield (2010) demonstrating the inherently ‘classical’ elements of Hindustani music during the earlier Mughal period. This thesis, therefore, seeks to delve deeper into the nature of *śabad kīrtan*’s transformation during the late colonial period, closely analysing the extent and manner in which the tradition was canonised and codified (see Chapter Four).

Echoing the marginalisation of hereditary performer communities such as the Muslim *mīrāsīs*, the *ṭavāīfs* of north India, and the *dēvadāsīs* of south India, scholars of *śabad kīrtan* have consistently acknowledged the marginalisation of the *rabābī* performers in the late colonial period (Khalsa 2014; Kalra 2014; Purewal 2011; Linden 2012b). The *rabābīs* were a community of hereditary musicians who occupied a place within Sikh tradition as specialist performers of *śabad kīrtan* since the time of the Gurus, whilst simultaneously identifying as Muslims. In the case of the Muslim *mīrāsīs* who performed Hindustani music, it has been noted that religion was invoked in polemics against them amid the rise of Hindu nationalism, influenced in particular by the work of Paluskar (Bakhle 2005: 137). At the same time, the increasingly Anglicist rather than Orientalist policies of the colonial government from the mid-nineteenth century onward (Walker 2016: 11–12) resulted in new discursive attacks on hereditary performers, for the most part rooted in Victorian Protestant attitudes and moral languages (Linden 2008); with the help of colonial ethnographies, *mīrāsīs* and the courtesans they associated with were thus degraded to the status of pimps and prostitutes respectively (Sampath 2010: 109; Morcom 2013: 16).⁶

⁶ See Walker (2016) for a discussion of the relationship between Anglicist and Orientalist policies of the colonial government and reforms within the *kathak* dance tradition.

If identity politics of the nation embroiled performers of Hindustani music, then the identity politics of religion and the construction of a normative and bounded Sikh identity (Oberoi 1994) is what is cited as the leading factor in the downfall of the *rabābīs*, a community caught in a no man's land between what was Muslim and what was Sikh. In many ways, the *rabābīs* represented the fluid religious boundaries, syncretism, and “shared piety” cited so often by scholars of the region, albeit in different terms (Mir 2010; Malhotra 2012b; Murphy 2012a; Linden 2008). Citing Arvind Mandair's work, Murphy (2012: 95) notes that the category of religion itself operates within a regime of translation that denies both the complexity and relationality of pre-modern South Asian cultures.

The exclusion of the *rabābīs* on account of their non-normative religious identity was cemented by the partitioning of Punjab along religious lines, at which point the *rabābīs* migrated to Pakistan and became physically separated from the Sikhs. With more than seventy years of separation and inhibited interaction due to the ongoing political tensions between India and Pakistan, the *rabābīs* have become a distant memory for much of the Sikh community, so much so that they fail to even earn a place in Fenech and McLeod's *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (2014). In their absence, the discourse on *śabad kīrtan* has come to be dominated by Sikh *rāgīs*, often aligned with either the *gurmat saṅgīt* or *gurbāṇī saṅgīt* movements. However, recent notable contributions of Kalra (2014), Purewal (2011) and Balbir Singh Kanwal (2010), based upon ethnographic fieldwork with the *rabābīs* in Pakistan, have been instrumental in reviving a space for the *rabābīs* both in the scholarship and also in the collective Sikh psyche.⁷ In this thesis I aim to build upon this work by incorporating greater representation for the *rabābīs* in the historiography of Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan*. In particular, Chapters Four and Five scrutinise the downfall of the *rabābī* tradition more closely in order to situate the role of identity politics and other discursive influences therein.

The discursive hegemony of the *gurmat saṅgīt* and *gurbāṇī saṅgīt* movements in the field of *śabad kīrtan* today might justly be seen as a postcolonial remnant of

⁷ Kalra (2014) and Purewal (2011) worked extensively with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand (1927-2015), one of the last *rabābīs* to have been raised in the pre-Partition era and who survived into the twenty-first century.

the identity politics associated with the late colonial period. Adopting the traditionalist *gurbāṇī saṅgīt* rhetoric, scholars such as Cassio (2015: 51) have focussed on the idiosyncratic musicological features of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition, arguing that it ought to be considered an “independent tradition” and not simply a “regional version” of genres such as *dhrupad* and *khayāl*. On the other hand, highlighting shared performance practices (e.g. *dhrupad*), instruments (e.g. *rabāb*), and music theory (e.g. *rāgmālā*), van der Linden (2015a) has argued that pre-twentieth-century Sikh music shared more in common with the music of the Mughal courts than other scholars would admit. Of course, there is validity to both sides of the argument, and in many ways this debate itself is likely symptomatic of the wider struggle of scholars to understand the rich and diverse musical landscape referred to by Qureshi (2006: 8) as the “Indic music area”, challenged along the way by the intertwined colonial and postcolonial identity politics of participant communities and their respective claims.

Attempting to cater for north Indian’s multifarious regional and religious traditions by expanding upon the binary classical-folk paradigm of the West, Peter Manuel (2015) proposes an “intermediate sphere”, which he envisages subsuming traditions such as *śabad kīrtan* whilst Hindustani music is situated within the ‘classical’. This approach, however, in relying so heavily upon Western epistemological apparatus is less than ideal. It is often the case that Western scholarship falls prey to the traps of its own analytical apparatus, which may prove unsuited, insufficient, or incapable of fully describing the object of study. In fact, this inapplicability of Western taxonomies is perhaps attested to by Manuel’s need to further subdivide the “intermediate sphere” into five subcategories in an attempt to cater for the diversity therein. As aptly highlighted by Dirks (1993: 405), “Ethnohistory must risk subversion by its own objects of study”. With this in mind, I have sought to remain particularly attentive to my use of language and taxonomies throughout, preferring indigenous terms where possible to allow for the possibility of such subversion. I thus refrain from relying upon terms such as ‘classical’ or ‘folk’ when attempting to describe Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan*, given the limited use of the equivalent terms, ‘*śāstrīya*’ and ‘*lōk*’ respectively, in north India prior to the colonial period. This thesis, instead, seeks to build upon the existing scholarship by delving deeper into the

entangled trajectories of *śabad kīrtan* and Hindustani music in relation to the colonial period and its identity politics, and thus enhance our understanding of these two interconnected traditions.

1.2 PUNJAB AND PARTITION – SILENT VOICES AND LOUD ECHOES

The lack of historiography in the field of *śabad kīrtan* echoes what van der Linden (2015a: 155) highlights as a neglect of the Sikh courts in prevailing histories of Hindustani music. More broadly speaking, however, I would suggest that Hindustani music's historiography has until recently neglected the region of Punjab as a whole. Whilst modern Punjabi music, especially popular genres such as *bhaṅgrā*, has received considerable scholarly attention (Roy 2017; Leante 2004; Schreffler 2013), the historical proliferation of *rāg*-based music in the region has been largely neglected. This oversight has only recently begun to be addressed by the work of Radha Kapuria (2018, 2015) in particular.

It is hard to reconcile the relative neglect of Punjab in Hindustani music historiography given the abundance of evidence pointing to the region's historical importance in this regard. For a start, scholars (Kippen 2010; Stewart 1974) have highlighted how the Punjab occupies an important place in the historical development of the modern *tablā*, an instrument which later came to be popularised on the world stage by representatives of the Punjab *gharānā*, namely Ustad Allah Rakha and Ustad Zakir Hussain. Punjab is also somewhat unique in that it has the syncopated sixteen-beat rhythm, the Punjabi *ṭhēkā*, named after it. In Hindustani vocal music, one of the four major *dhrupad* traditions, the Talwandi *gharānā*, emerges from Punjab (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 28–30). Two noted *khayāl gharānās*, Sham Chaurasi and Patiala, are also situated in Punjab (Wade 1984). Indeed, Punjabi happens to be one of the few regional vernaculars to feature significantly in the development of the *khayāl* vocal genre and in the modern *khayāl* repertoire, with *ṭappā* being another *rāg*-based vocal genre, associated with the Punjab and sung primarily in Punjabi (Brown 2010: 179–80).⁸

⁸ See Paintal and Paintal's work for a survey of the extensive Punjabi *khayāl* repertoire (2004).

As highlighted by Kapuria (2015), the oldest public Hindustani music festival, the Harivallabh festival of Jalandhar, also belongs to Punjab, alluding to the rich and multireligious history of Hindustani music in the region. The oldest public school for Hindustani music, the *Gāndharva Saṅgīt Mahāvidyālaya*, was also established in Lahore, Punjab, in 1901 by the noted musician-reformist V. D. Paluskar. Despite these numerous contributions, reflecting the significance of the region in the Hindustani music domain historically, however, Punjab remains conspicuously underrepresented in the prevailing historiography. Noted *gurbānī saṅgīt* activist, musician and conservator Bhai Baldeep Singh has publicly bemoaned the underrepresentation of Punjab, noting: “The musical history of the Delhi Mughal court, the Rampur court and the Gwalior court has become the history of India! What are they talking about?!”.⁹

With regard to Hindustani music’s evolution during the colonial period, it has been widely noted that the modern *gharānā* system emerged after the fall of the Mughal court, following the failed rebellion of 1857, as eminent Mughal court musicians migrated to provincial courts, such as Rampur and Jaipur, in search of renewed patronage. In an essay summarising the modern history of Hindustani music, however, renowned scholars Joep Bor and Allyn Miner (2010) fail to even give Punjab a passing mention, never mind acknowledge the considerable migration of musicians in to the region at this time. The circumscribed power of the princely states under colonial rule and parallel rise of a new urban elite in the large bustling colonial cities eventually led to the shift of Hindustani music culture from provincial courts to cities like Calcutta and Bombay (Barlow and Subramanian 2007: 1785). Yet again, however, within this narrative, the large urban centres of Punjab, namely Lahore, Amritsar, and Jalandhar, are largely forgotten.¹⁰

The question thus arises as to why Punjab has been ignored in the historiography despite the abundance of markers alluding to Punjab’s contribution to Hindustani music historically. Several factors are noteworthy in this regard. Most important of these is the dramatic transformation of the sociopolitical landscape of the

⁹ Quote from a live performance by Bhai Baldeep Singh in Central Gurdwara Khalsa Jatha, London, attended by the author on 4 February 2018.

¹⁰ Recent scholarship by Kapuria (2015) has highlighted the musical import of Jalandhar.

region in the twentieth century as a result of the partition of 1947, resulting in a marked decline in the patronage and practice of Hindustani music in the region subsequently. This decline is reflected in the current underrepresentation of Punjabi musicians on the Hindustani music circuit of today. The adage “Out of sight, out of mind” seems applicable here, given how the scholarship today largely mirrors the representation of musicians in the modern Hindustani music circuit. The partition of Punjab constituted a sudden and violent tear in the social fabric that had allowed music to previously flourish in the region. Saeed (2008) notes how the ensuing mass displacement of communities resulted in the ironic separation of musician from patron with the westward migration of hereditary Muslim musicians and the eastward migration of Hindu and Sikh patrons. The extent of musicians arriving in Lahore, the largest city of Pakistani Punjab, is highlighted by Malik (2006: 23):

Included among the refugees were a large number of Muslim musicians from Ferozepur, Jalandhar and Ambala Divisions of East Punjab, a vast majority of which settled in Lahore.

Included among them were luminaries like Ustad Sardar Khan Delhiwaley, Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan, Ustad Akhtar Hussain Khan and his sons; the *Kheyal*-singers from Patiala; Ustad Bundoo Khan, the *sarangi* maestro from Delhi; Ustad Fateh Ali Khan (sitar player from Kapurthala); Ustad Habib Ali Khan Beenkar; Shaukat Hussain Khan and Talib Hussain Khan, *tabla*-players from Jalandhar; clarinettist Alamgir Khan from Amritsar; folk singer Tufail Niazi from Kapurthala; Nazakat Ali Khan and Salamat Ali Khan, the budding vocalists from Sham Chaurasi village in Jalandhar Division; *Ghazal*-singer Mukhtar Begum and her sister Farida Khanum from Amritsar; *thumri-dadra-ghazal*-singer Iqbal Bano from Rohtak; and the queen of classical music, Raushan Ara Begum from Bombay.

Notably, the majority of these musicians were Punjabi and the places from which they had migrated allude to the numerous erstwhile music centres of eastern Punjab, namely Patiala, Kapurthala, Amritsar and Jalandhar, all places which find little representation in the literature. With the majority of Punjab’s musicians

having migrated to Pakistan, they were subject to the nation's emergent cultural policy and discourse toward music, which in due course came to represent a significant divergence from that adopted by India. A particularly consequential driver of this divergence was the emergence of a more orthodox Islamic regime in Pakistan, especially under President Zia-ul-Haq between 1976 and 1988. Saeed (2008, 242) notes how "Zia ul-Haq's military regime in the late 1970s curbed the performance of music and other art forms, forcing most liberal and cultural activities to either go underground or shut down". As a consequence of this, he goes on to note, "Several instruments such as the *veena*, *pakhawaj*, *sarod* and *sarangi* have almost disappeared from Pakistan since the creation of the border" (Saeed 2008: 242).¹¹ Another notable example of the challenges faced by Pakistan's musicians is that of the musicians of the famed Talwandi *gharānā*, documented in the ethnographic study of Basra (1996). Not only did they lose their Sikh patron family at the time of Partition but as singers of *dhrupad* they were relegated within the new sociomusical hierarchy of Pakistan, which prioritised genres with more overt Persio-Arabic and Islamic links, such as *qavvālī* and *khayāl*, and neglected forms like *dhrupad* that were regarded as Hindu in origin.¹²

On the Indian side of the border, an important discursive shift, with regards to culture in the region, revolved around the construction of a regional identity for Punjab, characterised, in particular, by its rural and folk elements. Addressing the postcolonial neglect of Hindustani music in Punjab, Radha Kapuria has recently cited the emergence of this 'Punjabi' stereotype, in the post-Partition era, as detracting from the region's broader cultural history:

...the Punjab is seen as an arena, culturally, of what is qualitatively rustic, loud and brash, and by implication, "low". While this is undoubtedly a layperson's conception of culture in the Punjab— one which corresponds to the image of the loud and boisterous Sikh/Jat peasant as the representative Punjabi subject—there is a long tradition of historiography and

¹¹ Saeed's documentary film *Khayal Darpan* (2007) sheds further light on the Islamisation of Hindustani music in Pakistan.

¹² Sikh landowner Sardar Harcharan Singh of Lyallpur was the chief patron of the family of Mehr Ali Khan of the Talwandi *gharānā* prior to Partition (Basra 1996: 102).

scholarly writing in general which has rigorously and consistently couched “the Punjabi” in the image of the peasant.

(Kapuria 2015: 78)

In addition to the issues above, continued political tensions between India and Pakistan, marked by several wars and a largely impenetrable border for the average citizen on either side, has restricted the ability for constructive interaction and inhibited scholars’ ability to study the Punjab as a whole. The 2001 World Trade Center attacks and the media’s subsequent portrayal of Pakistan as a breeding ground for terrorists further discouraged international travel to and from Pakistan and the 2019 revocation of certain autonomous rights to Kashmir by the Indian government has reignited hostilities between the two nations. Whilst these difficulties show little sign of abating, technology and the internet specifically have facilitated a mediated form of interaction between musicians, scholars and listeners from either side of the border. YouTube *qavvālī*, and the interaction facilitated by comments in particular, has been noted as participatory source of affective solidarity in India-Pakistan relations (Graves 2021).¹³ Successful YouTube-based projects like Coke Studio (Williams and Mahmood 2019) and The Dream Journey have also proven popular platforms through which Pakistan’s musicians reach a transnational audience, softening the boundaries of nation and disrupting nationalist narratives in the process.¹⁴

Given these obstacles, we can begin to comprehend the relative lack of scholarship on Hindustani music in Punjab – how the bustling music centres of Jalandhar, Amritsar, Patiala and Kapurthala especially are largely forgotten. The Punjab *gharānā* of *tablā*, as documented by Lybarger (2003), and the Patiala *gharānā* of *khayāl*, documented by Wade (1984: 227–41), are notable exceptions in this regard, both distinguished on account of the enduring representation they retained in India, even after Partition, through the likes of Ustad Alla Rakha and Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan respectively. The latter was, in fact, noted for

¹³ Thomas Grave’s paper was presented at the online Punjab Sounds colloquium in August of 2021, organised by Radha Kapuria and Vibhuti Duggal.

¹⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/thedreamjourney> for a growing video archive showcasing musicians specialising in Hindustani music and Sufi genres and <https://www.youtube.com/cokestudio> for a popular project that blends traditional and regional music forms with modern and Western instrumentation and musical styles under the corporate sponsorship of the beverage giant.

famously reversing his decision to settle in Pakistan after witnessing the plight of musicians there. In her discussion of Patiala, Wade quotes and paraphrases the *gharānā*'s musicians who themselves allude to the influence of Punjabi "folk" music on Hindustani music in the region. She also notes the continued sense of Punjabi musical identity held by these musicians despite their no longer living in Punjab. The idea of a 'Punjabi' influence on Hindustani music in the region is a theme which I explore in greater depth throughout this thesis.

In her pioneering social history of music in colonial Punjab, Kapuria's (2018) recent contributions also critically engage with the scholarship on Punjabinat (Punjabi-ness), contesting for a more nuanced understanding of the geographical boundaries of the region, whose musical traditions blend into those of neighbouring Sindh, Haryana and Jammu.¹⁵ She highlights the radical gender shifts resulting from the colonial encounter and, in particular, the distinct popularity of the anti-nautch campaign in the region. Through her study of the region's *mīrāsī* communities, she highlights their pluralistic religious and musical identities, thus challenging colonial and postcolonial tendencies toward categorisation along the lines of religion or the folk-classical binary.

Another scholar who has addressed the complex identity politics of the *mīrāsīs* and the various hereditary performer subgroups invoked by this term within Punjab, is Lowell Lybarger (2003; 2011). Focussed upon *tablā* players in Pakistan, his work attempts to describe the somewhat disconcerting milieu of hereditary performer groups in the region, noting pertinently how the "neofeudal" system of Pakistan has "retained and transformed some of the erstwhile performance spaces and rituals that have now disappeared in India" (Lybarger 2003: 362). The lack of standardisation and canonisation observed among the *tablā* players of Pakistan, is representative, he suggests, of a greater degree of continuity with the Hindustani music tradition of the past. This, of course, is in relation to India where the early-twentieth-century musical reforms of Bhatkhande and Paluskar (Bakhle 2005) have retained greater currency and more enduring support. The unique and insightful findings of the few scholars who

¹⁵ The term Punjabinat is sometimes used to refer specifically to the Punjabi language revitalisation movement. I use the term, however, in a more general sense to refer to the quintessence of what it is to be Punjabi, and by extension the specific cultural associations linked to Punjabi identity.

have studied Hindustani music in Pakistan and the Punjab as a whole, highlight the great need for further study of the neglected but rich stream of Hindustani music in the region.

The critical insights borne by the existing scholarship on Hindustani music in the Punjab region comprises another of the key motivations underpinning my study. Max Katz's (2017) study of the underrepresented Lucknow *gharānā*, a tradition he describes as an "unlit recess" in the "mansion" of Hindustani music (Katz 2017: 163), exemplifies the type of insight that lies hidden in neglected counternarratives of history. To extend the metaphor, we might thus consider Punjab not an unlit recess but a forgotten wing within this same mansion. Just as the unrivalled fame of personalities such as Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan and Vilayat Khan in the late twentieth century propelled their *gharānās* (Maihar and Etawah) into the spotlight whilst eclipsing the historically prominent Lucknow *gharānā*, so too Punjab has been discursively marginalised by the modern hegemony of the urban centres of Calcutta and Mumbai. This thesis thus seeks to explore further potential counternarratives of Hindustani music by focussing on the Punjab, bringing greater representation of the region to the existing historiography of Hindustani music.

At the same time, the extent to which Hindustani music was a domain in which Punjabiya was formed, performed, and contested also comprises an important theme of this study. Building upon the scholarship of Mir (2010) and Murphy (2019), who have shown how the Punjabi literary sphere was an affective multireligious domain that was both formative of a sense of regional identity and resistant to colonial influence, I explore how Hindustani music also comprised an important space for the expression of Punjabiya, in ways less dependent upon Punjabi literature and language. The link between performative traditions and regionality and even regionalism has already been shown in relation to other regions, Dennen's (2010) work on the music of Odisha being a notable example. In postcolonial and globalised context, of course, notions of Punjabiya have come to be deeply intertwined with the emergent *bhaᅅgrā* tradition, which, with the aid of technology, is seen to be significantly formative of a transnational Punjabi identity (Roy 2013). Given the evidence of Hindustani music's historical significance in the region and the marginal place of *bhaᅅgrā* in Punjab

historically (Schreffler 2013), however, this thesis (Chapter Two in particular) investigates the character of an older Punjabiyat in relation to what was the shared musical inheritance of north India.

1.3 SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT – THE SPHERE OF THE SIKHS

Prior to the transformative impact of Partition in the region, the colonial period emerges as an obvious window of time in which to frame the present study. As of the early nineteenth century the Sikhs were at their height of power in the region with Maharaja Ranjit Singh (r.1801-1839) having established a kingdom that spread from the borders of Afghanistan in the west, Sindh in the south, including Gilgit, Baltistan, Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh in the north, and extending to the river Sutlej in the south-east. Across the Sutlej, lay the Malwa region, ruled over by the separate Sikh kingdoms of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot and Kaithal, all of which emerge from the single Phulkian family dynasty and are thus known as the Phulkian states (see Figure 1).¹⁶ The gradual decline of the Mughal empire in the late eighteenth century and parallel expansion of the East India Company (EIC) elsewhere on the subcontinent, occurred in tandem with the rise of the Sikhs from a class of peasant warriors, most often *jatts*, to that of a ruling class, as highlighted by Dhavan (2011). The chiefs of the various Sikh clans, known as *misls*, utilised kinship ties and their warrior values to successfully establish their dominance among the ruling classes in the region during this period. As Dhavan demonstrates, they combined these traits with aspects of the existing ruling practices of the Rajputs and Mughals, thus formulating their own composite ruling culture, upon which Khalsa-inspired egalitarian values also bore an influence.

¹⁶ See Griffin (1909) for the kinship ties and ancestry of the ruling families of Punjab.



FIGURE 1 THE NATIVE STATES OF PUNJAB IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY. FROM THE BOOK, THE PANJAB, NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE, AND KASHMIR (DOUIE 1916).

After a seemingly inevitable encounter with the expanding British power, the Punjab was annexed to the territories of the EIC in 1849, after two bitterly fought wars that resulted in defeat for the Lahore Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's successors.¹⁷ Whilst frequently referred to as the 'Anglo-Sikh' wars, the reality of these conflicts was in fact not so black and white. Fearing the expanding power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Lahore Darbar on their borders, the Sikh kingdoms of Kapurthala and the Phulkian families had earlier in the nineteenth century signed their own treaties with the British, effectively pledging their military support to and accepting suzerainty under the British in exchange for support against their rival.¹⁸ As a result, these Sikh rulers fought *with* the EIC *against* the army of the Lahore Darbar, whose army itself was in any case comprised of regiments of Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. The conflict was thus more nuanced, the outcome not simply a defeat for the Sikhs seeing as the Sikh

¹⁷ The two 'Anglo-Sikh' wars were fought in 1845-46 and 1848-49 respectively.

¹⁸ The Phulkian states had signed a treaty accepting British suzerainty in 1809 (Ramusack 2004: 39) and Kapurthala had effectively acquiesced to British suzerainty after a falling out with the Lahore Darbar in 1825 and seeking the support of the British (Grewal 1981: 5; Rao 1980).

kingdoms of Kapurthala, Patiala, Nabha and Jind were, in fact, situated on the winning side.

Less than a decade later, in the 1857-58 rebellion against the British, the Sikh princes of Kapurthala and the Phulkian states, having by now accrued a degree of trust and loyalty in the eyes of the British, once again reaffirmed their allegiances by offering military support to help quash the rebellion (Ramusack 2004: 85). They were handsomely rewarded both financially and symbolically with new ruling titles, land grants, and ceremonial gun salutes, indicative of their enhanced status and social standing within the new hierarchies of colonial society. Far from heralding a period of decline and depression, therefore, the transition to colonial rule in the Punjab marked a shift in which several Sikh states, through political astuteness, were able to capitalise on their circumstances and rise to even greater status, power, and resources. Similar to the manner in which they initially rose to power, the Sikh princes nevertheless had to continue to balance their own interests, which sometimes appeared as a betrayal of their fellow Sikhs, with the collective interests of the wider Sikh community to which they belonged (Dhavan 2011).

As noted earlier, 1857 is widely cited as a crucial moment in the history of Hindustani music whereby the collapse of the rebellious states, most notably Delhi and Lucknow, led to the migration of musicians to those states who had sided with the British during this time, thus leading to the development of the *gharānā* system (Barlow and Subramanian 2007). Like the important provincial centres of Jaipur and Rampur, the Sikh states of Patiala and Kapurthala emerged as noted patrons of music under the British Raj, as highlighted by Kapuria (2018). Hindustani music at the courts of the Sikh princes presents a particularly compelling subject of study not only because of their relative underrepresentation in the historiography but because the Sikh princes were notably distinct from other native princes in two important regards. Firstly, they belonged to a minority religious community in which music, in the form of *śabad kīrtan*, was so central to religious practice. Secondly, due to the lack of antiquity and noble descent associated with their dynasties (Ramusack 2004), the emergent ruling culture and practices of the Sikhs was particularly concerned with seeking legitimacy among their counterparties (Dhavan 2011). Within the frame of colonial Punjab,

therefore, the Sikh courts present a unique but significant environment in which Hindustani music flourished, one which I take up in Chapter Two.

It is important to note that elite social status in colonial Punjab was not restricted exclusively to that section of the Sikh aristocracy who had a proven track record of loyalty to the British. Prominent Sikh families with former ties to the Lahore Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh – the Bedi and Majithia families for example – also went on to earn considerable status under British rule by subsequently aligning themselves to British causes. Serving in the British army, advocating for British social reforms, and engagement in internal politics were all ways in which native elites have been shown to have advanced their own status in colonial Punjab (Tan 2005). In addition to the princes of Kapurthala and Patiala, therefore, figures such as Baba Khem Singh Bedi, whose ancestors were linked to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Oberoi 1994: 114–15), also feature as significant patrons of music during the colonial period, as highlighted in my discussion of music within the Sikh religious sphere (see Chapter Three).

Expanding considerably from the late eighteenth century onwards under the abundant patronage of the Sikh princes and landed aristocracy (Grewal 1981: 34), the Sikh religious sphere of the nineteenth century was comprised of vast networks of Sikh religious institutions, personalities and orders, among which were found the class of “traditional intellectuals” as described by Oberoi (1994: 123) in his work on nineteenth-century Sikh tradition. Within this sphere, the distinct role of Hindustani music and its patronage, including but not limited to *śabad kīrtan*, is intimated by fleeting references in the existing scholarship.¹⁹ Studies focussing on specific sub-contexts within the Sikh religious sphere, allude to the prominent role of Hindustani music therein.²⁰ Given the significant body of scholarship to highlight the intersection of Hindustani music with other religious spheres, most notably the Sufi (Qureshi 2006; Schofield 2015b; Brown 2010) and *vaiṣṇav* spheres (Ho 2013; Gaston 1997; Thielemann 2001; Beck 2012), in

¹⁹ Sanyal and Widdess (2004, 33) allude to the role of the Talwandi *gharānā* of *dhrupad* singers within the Sikh religious sphere.

²⁰ Malhotra (2017; 2009) foregrounds the integral role of courtesans and Hindustani music performance, more broadly, among the *gulābdāsīs*, a sect associated with the Sikh religious sphere.

Chapter Three I explore how the domain of Hindustani music intersected with the Sikh religious sphere.

In doing so, I attempt to remain cognisant of the fact that, whilst conceptually useful and delimiting with regard to the scope of the present study, the Sikh religious sphere of the nineteenth century was itself characterised by fluid and porous boundaries. As the work of numerous scholars highlights, shared religious practice (Oberoi 1994), literature and language (Murphy 2019; Mir 2010, 2012), and beliefs and values (Malhotra 2012b) all served as significant points of intersection between the Sikh, Hindu and Sufi religious spheres in precolonial and early colonial Punjab.²¹ By focussing on the primarily performative tradition of Hindustani music, however, this study offers an alternative perspective through which socioreligious cohesion in the region might be understood.

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Max Katz (2017: 15), in his historiographic and ethnographic study of the Lucknow *gharānā*, highlights how:

...the story of the Lucknow *gharānā* reveals that the contest over how to interpret music history is not simply a matter of whose sources are more accurate or reliable. Instead, it is a matter of the historian's own political and ethical decisions and dispositions.

The recent scholarship on *śabad kīrtan* (Cassio 2015; Khalsa 2014; Linden 2012b, 2015b) has had a relatively narrow focus, particularly around the lineage of the *rāgī* Bhai Jawala Singh (1872-1952). This is likely reflective of the representation this lineage of musicians has retained in the post-Partition era, first through his sons Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh and their published books of *śabad kīrtan* (Singh and Singh 1979a, 1979b), and then subsequently through his grandson Bhai Kultar Singh and his great grandnephew Bhai Baldeep Singh, the latter of whom is a particularly vocal revivalist and prominent

²¹ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, religious reforms and the influence of Western Secularism led to the emergence of more normative and mutually exclusive conceptions of religion, as discussed extensively in the existing literature (Oberoi 1994; Linden 2008; Mandair 2009; Dressler and Mandair 2011).

advocate of *gurbānī saṅgīt*. This bias has been highlighted by the likes of van der Linden (2012b) and Pashaura Singh (2019: 297–98), the latter of whom emphasises the fact that Bhai Baldeep Singh “represents one stream out of the prevailing musical traditions within the Sikh Panth”. This is not to undermine the huge contribution of Bhai Baldeep Singh, who is a noted conservator, revivalist, and has devotedly spent much of his energy over the last three decades collating oral histories and knowledge on the *śabad kīrtan* tradition from various other streams and representatives, as documented in his recent autoethnography (Bhai Baldeep Singh 2019a). However, as Katz notes, history depends upon the decisions and dispositions of historians, and so in acknowledgement of the issues around representation, I have actively sought out other voices in an attempt to bring wider representation to the historiography. This thesis, and Chapter Five in particular, creates a vital space for the voice of the *rabābīs* in the musical history of the Sikhs and Punjab more broadly.

In the field of ethnomusicology, ethnographic-based research has been a popular methodology, reflecting scholars’ well-intentioned attempts to understand music traditions from the perspective of musicians themselves. This methodological preference has perhaps been even more pronounced in the study of South Asian music traditions in which the absence of written notation systems and comparison with Western music has led to a privileging of orality.²² Whilst such perceptions, in relation to the essential orality of South Asian music traditions, are of course rooted in reality, they ignore the extensive history of writing on music in South Asia, highlighted by the likes of Schofield (2010, 2015a, 2018b), Nijenhuis and Delvoye (2010), Williams (2019), and Miner (2015) among others. Whilst not incorrect, therefore, such perceptions are perhaps incomplete. The approach of scholars such as Katz (2017), Kippen (1988; 2006), Williams (2014) and Walker (2016), in particular, highlights how written and oral histories can indeed be effectively interwoven and brought into conversation with one another.

In addition to the discursive-ideological divide between proponents of *gurmat saṅgīt* and *gurbānī saṅgīt*, the field of *śabad kīrtan* research has been equally divided along methodological lines, with certain scholars pushing against the

²² See studies of Weidman (2006) and Qureshi (2009), focussing on the oral aspect of Hindustani music and Carnatic music respectively.

tendency toward ethnography by vocalising the need to supplement such research with study of textual sources (Pashaura Singh 2019: 298–99) in order to achieve a “wider historical perspective” (Linden 2015a: 155). The at times passionate debate has been portrayed as one of history versus discourse/tradition, that is, written versus oral history, establishing what has otherwise been characterised as a rather unhelpful and unproductive binary (Weidman 2006: 9).²³ The fact that scholars have struggled to reconcile these contrasting sources, if anything, emphasises the need to combine both approaches such that a richer historiography might emerge. After all, what is remembered about a particular time is not necessarily what was being written about at that time, with memory often selective in nature, evolving with time to serve the changing needs of the individual or the community (Bartlett 1967: 309). Similarly, those who engage in the pursuit of writing are often a minority who cannot be considered to represent society as a whole; inevitably writing with specific motives that must be considered in context. As Dirks (1993: 405) notes, “the constituted object must never be permitted to speak (or to appear to speak) only for itself; it speaks with ‘interests’ and in situations that must be identified and decoded”.

In light of this, I have sought to combine written and oral histories, in the process, considering the “interests” and context out of which different voices emerge. Seeking an inclusive perspective on the intertwined histories of Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan* in Punjab, inclusive of India and Pakistan, *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*, written and oral, my thesis has evolved out of two periods of fieldwork, comprising of five months in India (late 2018 to early 2019) and one-and-a-half months in Pakistan (September to October 2019), during which I visited local archives and conducted formal and informal interviews.²⁴

Whilst written sources, primary and secondary, have proven invaluable in my research, the aspect of oral history is also not to be underestimated, especially in

²³ For examples of the history vs tradition – oral vs textual – debate see the academic threads between Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011) and van der Linden (2012b), and Bhai Baldeep Singh (2019) and Pashaura Singh (2019).

²⁴ Archives visited include the British Library (London), Punjab State Archives (Patiala & Chandigarh), Punjab Public Library (Lahore), Bhai Gurdas Library (GNDU, Amritsar), Khalsa College Sikh History Department (Amritsar), Punjab University (Lahore), Punjabi University (Patiala), Dyal Singh Trust Library (Lahore), Radio Pakistan Classical Music Research Cell (Lahore), Sangeet Natak Academy Library (New Delhi), AIIS Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (New Delhi), and the Sikh Reference Library (Amritsar).

the context of South Asian musicians and their lineages. As Katz notes, among musicians, memory presents a crucial medium for “the generation-to-generation transmission of dispositions, postures, self-understandings, and historical consciousness: an embodied epistemology of music and meaning” (Katz 2017: 11). Qureshi (2009: 166) similarly describes oral tradition in Hindustani music as a “fundamental process of musical enculturation and socialization”. The manner in which the marginalised *dēvadāsī* tradition endures today, kept alive in some way through the unbroken threads of memory and practice (Soneji 2012), suggests that the memory and practice of *rāgī* and *rabābī* families might also constitute a particularly rich source of history, vital to understanding *śabad kīrtan* in its historical context. Feriyal Aslam’s (1999) ethnographic survey of the *rabābī* community of Lahore served as a particularly useful starting point for initiating my fieldwork with the *rabābīs*.²⁵ In India, I conducted interviews with an array of Sikh *rāgīs* who trace their lineages to the pre-Partition era, whilst also interviewing the descendants of the Sikh royal family of Kapurthala, the latter, in particular, offering an alternative oral history from the perspective of music patrons.²⁶

1.5 CHAPTER OUTLINE

I begin, in Chapter Two, by focussing on Hindustani music at the Sikh courts of Punjab, the most important two of which were Kapurthala and Patiala. With the briefest history as rulers, when compared to their Mughal, Rajput and Nawab counterparts, and a not-so-distant past as peasant warriors, I explore how music patronage comprised an important domain for legitimising status and playing politics. I show how elite status came to be embodied by the eminent musicians of the erstwhile Mughal court and through powerful symbols such as the *bīn*. I explore the extent to which the sociomusical norms of Mughal *mahfil* culture were absorbed by the Sikh courts and how unique circumstances of the Sikh rulers came to be reflected in the patterns of social mobility among their musicians. I also demonstrate how the broader geopolitics associated with the 1857-58 rebellion manifested in the founding of the Patiala *gharānā*, thus

²⁵ I am particularly grateful to Saqib Razaq, a scholar of Hindustani music and in particular the *tablā* traditions of Pakistan, for making me aware of Feriyal Aslam’s work on the *rabābīs*.

²⁶ I am grateful to Bhai Baldeep Singh for connecting me with the royal family of Kapurthala.

situating music and the rebellion as important considerations with regard to our ideas of Punjabiya.

Shifting my attention to the Sikh religious sphere, in Chapter Three I explore how Sikh religious intellectuals comprised an important patron of both Hindustani musicians and musicological texts. I demonstrate how in this overlapping but distinct sphere, the boundaries between Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan* were highly nuanced. Drawing upon a rich body of nineteenth-century Gurmukhi manuscripts on Hindustani musicology, I show how Hindustani music, in its theory, aesthetics and practice, was a vital aspect of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition historically, comprising an important branch of knowledge and aesthetics to Sikh religious intellectuals historically. I explore the multivalent and multimodal character of these musicological texts, demonstrating their performative as well as scholastic dimensions, and illustrate how Hindustani music, like the Punjabi language, constituted a vital shared cultural domain in which communal differences were reconciled.

In a closer study of the early-twentieth-century musical literature of the Sikhs, Chapter Four highlights how the idea of *gurmat saṅgīt* – a music of the Sikhs – emerged from an environment increasingly defined by socioreligious reform and religious communalism, and in parallel to the idea of a national and ‘classical’ music, that is, *śāstriya saṅgīt*. Quite distinct from the post-1984 *gurmat saṅgīt* revival movement and its associated reforms, the initial *gurmat saṅgīt* project was deeply intertwined with the early-twentieth-century religious reforms of the Singh Sabha movement, revolving around the establishment of religious and textual norms and the consequent elimination of non-normative elements. I show how the *rabābī* performers came to be marginalised by Sikh *rāgīs* and how the singing of song-texts not linked to the Gurus was prohibited. Crucially, whilst such reforms may be familiar in colonial context, I also demonstrate the enduring relevance of precolonial and indigenous ideas and practices, thus limiting the often-assumed hegemony of the Western episteme and Anglicist and Orientalist policies in such instances.

Lastly, bringing the neglected voice of the *rabābīs* to the fore and drawing upon my ethnographic fieldwork with their community in Lahore, in Chapter Five I

highlight multiple, often neglected, facets of the *rabābī* tradition prior to Partition. Alongside being eminent musicians in the realm of Hindustani music, I show how their community historically comprised a significant aspect of the Sikh religious establishment as specialist performers of *śabad kīrtan*, an art both musical and exegetical in nature. Whilst the ‘disenchantment’ associated with the colonial period increasingly portrayed performers of *śabad kīrtan* – the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* – simply as musicians, I show how both memory and the archives allude to the distinct and auspicious ritual role of the *rabābīs* within Sikh tradition historically, whereby they were perceived as custodians and bestowers of the Gurus’ blessings. This past, whilst largely forgotten by the Sikhs and seemingly irrelevant if not potentially problematic to the *rabābīs* in the context of modern Pakistan, continues to be remembered by their community, comprising a formative aspect of their identity today, seventy years after Partition and their separation from the Sikh community. Exploring the memory of the *rabābīs* and their tradition, therefore, I reorient the history of *śabad kīrtan* in a way that duly locates their community at its centre, shedding light on a neglected aspect of Sikh history in the process.

2 POLITICS AND PUNJABIYAT: HINDUSTANI MUSIC AT THE SIKH COURTS OF PUNJAB

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted in Chapter One, the Sikh princes of Punjab were distinguished from their Mughal, Rajput and Nawab counterparts on account of their being rulers by conquest rather than by antiquity or succession. Ramusack (2004: 140) highlights how the practice of *rāj dharmā* – an indigenous system of ideal ruling practices, typically entailing protection of one’s subjects, adjudication of local disputes, and the extension of patronage to local artists, artisans and religious institutions – was crucial to securing legitimacy as a ruler. Given the prejudice the Sikh *sardārs* faced from outside states and powers, on account of their newfound ruling status, Dhavan (2011: 146) notes how patronage practices comprised one of the key means by which the Sikhs sought to combat this and assert their legitimacy as rulers.

Despite the fact that the Mughal empire had been reduced, in practical terms, to little more than a regional kingdom by the mid-eighteenth century, it has been noted that “the Mughals were still regarded as the ultimate legitimizing authority” (Asher and Talbot 2006: 248). Specifically with respect to the courtly patronage of music, it has been similarly argued that, within the Mughal courts, “the hegemonic cultural standards of musical patronage were established for aspirants to élite status throughout the empire” (Brown 2003: 119). Music has certainly been shown to have been politically significant to some of the early Sikh rulers such as Maharaja Ranjit Singh, whose court was decorated with some 150 musicians and courtesans (Nevile 2011), including the legendary Behram Khan (Sanyal and Widdess 2004; Khan 1959; *Dhrupad* 1983). Kapuria (2020) has shown how his impressive troupe of dancing girls, known as the ‘amazons’, featured as a prominent tool in his statesmanship with the British in particular.

The fall of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s empire (r.1801-1839) and subsequent annexation of Punjab to the British Indian territories in 1849 effectively marked the start of colonial rule in the region. As discussed in Chapter One, for the Sikh

princes of Kapurthala and Patiala this transition was one of political consolidation whereby their own fate was tied to that of their main political ally, the British. The subsequent military aid provided by these states to the British in the 1857-58 rebellion (Ramusack 2004: 85) meant that they were rewarded handsomely, both politically and financially, being endowed with subsidies, land, official ruling titles, and ceremonial gun salutes, all of which enhanced their position within the new social hierarchy under the colonial government.¹

Building upon the findings of Kapuria (2018), who has specifically highlighted some of the important musical contributions of Kapurthala and Patiala during the colonial period, in this chapter, I also focus on the patronage of music at these two well-positioned courts. Of course, this is not to suggest that the other states were not patronising music in Punjab during this period. Raja Raghubir Singh of Jind (r.1864-1887), for example, was clearly a lover of music, so much so that he had many villages within his territory named after Hindustani *rāgs* (*Punjab States Gazetteers: Phulkian States. Patiala, Jind and Nabha with Maps* 1904: 224).² The Nabha state has also been identified as an important site of music patronage in the early twentieth century (Khan 1959: 44). However, the significance and size of these states did not equal that of Kapurthala and Patiala; significantly, these were the only two states to establish their own notable *gharānās* during this period. Whilst Punjab's musical landscape also featured important non-Sikh centres of music patronage – the courts of Jammu, Malerkotla and Bahawalpur, all of which are equally underrepresented in the historiography of Hindustani music – these lie beyond the scope of my study.

Wade (1984: 9) highlights how, when based upon loyalty, the relationship between the native princes and the British government allowed for the continued patronage of traditional arts and culture in addition to the adoption of certain European pursuits and interests by native rulers:

¹ Within the Punjab States Agency division, the states of Patiala (17), Nabha (13) and Jind (13), and Kapurthala (13), featured among the top five states in terms of the gun salutes that they were awarded.

² Numerous village names in the Jind district, to this day, correspond to Hindustani *rāgs* including: Pillu Khera, Jaijaiwanti, Kalavati, Malar, Siri Rag, Bhairon Khera, Ramkali Khera, Sindhi Khera, Malsri, Desh Khera, Kamach Khera, Gunkali, Malvi.

British alliances with states crucial to the support of their Raj and, in particular, loyal, or perceived to be loyal to the British during the uprisings in 1857, were rewarded with subsidies and arms agreements. The subsidies and stipends enabled those rulers who wished to do so to entertain lavishly and otherwise spend their monies in whatever fashion they desired. Many adopted the interests of their overlords, acquiring a taste for horseracing, polo, and other European pastimes, while a few continued the great tradition of patronage of the arts that had been the Indic heritage.

Reflecting the colonial administrative influence, patronage of music within the court of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (r.1900-1938) of Patiala is said to have undergone the processes of ‘modernisation’ and ‘bureaucratisation’ (Kapuria 2018: 247), as also observed within other princely states during this period, perhaps most notably the court of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad (r.1875-1939) of Baroda (Bakhle 2005: 34–35). Reflecting a diminishing concern for the traditional Indic arts and growing interest in the pursuits of the colonial rulers among some native princes, Maharaja Jagatjit Singh (r.1877-1947) of Kapurthala is portrayed as having had an “obsession” with Europe and the West (Kapuria 2018: 268–70).

As Kapuria highlights, however, both Patiala and Kapurthala comprised important centres of patronage for musicians of the erstwhile Delhi court following the 1857-58 rebellion, much as has been documented with regard to other provincial courts of rulers who were loyal to the British, such as Jaipur and Rampur (Neuman 1990; Bor and Miner 2010; Barlow and Subramanian 2007). She notes how eminent musicians that had served in the Mughal court of Bahadur Shah Zafar, such as *khayāl* vocalist Tanras Khan and *bīnkār* Mir Nasir Ahmad, played an important role in the establishment of the Patiala and Kapurthala *gharānās* respectively (Kapuria 2018: 263–64). Building on the important work of Kapuria, in this chapter I focus on the Patiala *gharānā* of *khayāl* vocalists and the Kapurthala *gharānā* of instrumentalists, demonstrating how the discourses associated with these *gharānās* related to the politics of musicians, princely patrons, and indeed the Punjab as a region during the colonial period.

The manner in which *gharānās* served as symbols of status and prestige, for patron and musician alike, is well documented in what has been described as the “politics of pedigree” (Neuman 1990; Meer 1980). Broader political concerns are also noted to have impacted patronage of music at the courts of native princes. For example, under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, Patiala became increasingly inclined towards patronising Sikh musicians and Sikh music in the early twentieth century, reflecting the growing influence of Sikh identity politics and the Singh Sabha religious reform movement during this period (Kapuria 2018: 273). Tracing the trajectory of the Mughal *bīnkār* Mir Nasir Ahmad and his disciples, in this chapter I demonstrate how the symbolic discourse of the *bīn* and *bīnkār*, originating in the Mughal courts, travelled to Punjab and from Kapurthala to Patiala in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, allowing for shifts in the social hierarchies between musicians and princely patrons in the process. Despite the rise in popularity of the *sitār* and *sarōd* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often discussed with respect to the parallel decline of the *bīn* (Miner 1993: 161–62), I highlight the continued relevance and patronage of the *bīn* and *bīnkār* in the courts of the Sikh princes, reflecting their heightened need to utilise these musical symbols of elite status, associated with the music culture of the erstwhile Mughal court.

Given that the Patiala *gharānā* is noted to have emerged as the “singular focal and representative centre of Punjab’s classical music” from the 1930s onwards (Kapuria 2018: 274), I also explore in this chapter how and why this came to pass, linking the discourse of the Patiala musicians to the broader geopolitics and notions of Punjabinat during the colonial period. As scholars have noted, postcolonial ideas of Punjabinat tend to revolve around the image of Punjab as a rustic, rural and agrarian culture, central to which is the Punjabi language (Ayres 2012) and also the land-owning *jatt* community (Kapuria 2015: 78). This tendency within Punjabi cultural discourse is exemplified through publications in which the region’s ‘folk’ traditions constitute the central concern.³ Punjabinat thus tends to be associated with performative traditions such as *bhaṅgrā* and the music of ‘folk’ singers such as Surinder Kaur and Kuldip Manak (Roy 2017:

³ See, for example, *Folk Music & Musical Instruments of Punjab* (Pande 1999) and *Pañjābī Lōk Gīt* (National Council of Music Pakistan 1965).

132). As Schreffler (2013) has shown, however, whilst *bhangrā* is popular today, it is in fact somewhat of an ‘invented tradition’, occupying a more marginal place in the pre-Partition culture of Punjab, highlighting the degree to which ideas of Punjabiya have been transformed in the twentieth century.

Whilst Punjabi language and literature (Mir 2010; Shackle 2012) tend to inform our ideas of Punjabiya in the precolonial and colonial periods, recent scholarship also highlights the fact that the Punjabi language historically occupied a non-institutional space, thus emphasising the need to explore its performative and affective aspects (Murphy 2019). In this chapter, by analysing the origins of the Patiala *gharānā* and its associated vocal style – a performative tradition to emerge in colonial Punjab – I constructively engage with the existing scholarship on Punjabiya through the lens of this performative tradition and its associated discourse. In doing so, I highlight the importance of the political events of the mid-nineteenth century in the formation of modern notions of Punjabi identity whilst also foregrounding Hindustani music as a cultural domain that allowed for the expression of Punjabiya and Punjabi identity politics during the colonial period.

2.2 THE DISCOURSE OF THE *BĪN*

2.2.1 THE MUGHAL *BĪNKĀRS* OF KAPURTHALA

As of 1857, Kapurthala was under the rule of Raja Randhir Singh (r.1852-1870). The matter of his accession, however, had not been so straightforward. The death of his father Raja Nihal Singh in 1852 presented a problem for the British in so much as the recently deceased ruler had wanted his younger son Kunwar Bikram Singh (1835-1887) to succeed him instead of the elder Randhir Singh, posing a potential contravention of the succession rules in the eyes of the British. A protracted court case, lasting sixteen years, ensued in which the brothers’ respective entitlements were contested and negotiated under the mediation of the colonial government and its justice system. Complicating matters was the fact that both Bikram Singh and Randhir Singh had rushed to the aid of the British in 1857-58, offering their military services to help quash the sepoy uprisings in

Punjab and beyond, thus currying favour with the government and enhancing their respective claims.⁴

As part of the resolution, the younger Bikram Singh was granted an estate in Jalandhar in around 1860 (Dada 2019), still known to this day as Bikrampura, where he established Bikram Hall as his own residence. Randhir Singh, meanwhile, retained official ruling status over the Kapurthala state. This effectively created two important centres of patronage: one in the town of Kapurthala itself, under the watch of Randhir Singh, and the other at Jalandhar, under the watch of his younger brother. With two major patrons, the Kapurthala state came to earn a reputation as a major centre for music, attracting many eminent musicians in the post-1857 era (Paintal 1988). In particular, Bikram Singh and his descendants developed a close relationship as patrons and students of an elite family of *bīnkārs* from the erstwhile Mughal court.

Mir Nasir Ahmad had been the chief *bīnkār* under Bahadur Shah Zafar, in the period just prior to the collapse of the Mughal court, and perhaps the most renowned *bīnkār* of the mid-nineteenth century. He finds mention in numerous nineteenth-century texts on music, providing an estimation of his preeminent status. Born around 1800 (Khan 1959), he is described as the greatest master of the *khaṇḍār bānī* school of *dhrupad* and *bīn* (i.e. *rudra vīṇā*) in the *Sarmāyā-i-‘Israt* (Khan 1884). Rahim Beg, author of the *Naḡmā-i-Sitār* (1876), describes him as an *ustād-i-kāmil* – a perfect master – alongside several other prominent musicians of similar stature (e.g. Amrit Sen and Rahim Sen). Initially written in 1847, during Mir Nasir Ahmad’s lifetime, Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Āṣār-uṣ-Ṣanādīd* (1895: 124) details how Mir Nasir Ahmad was connected to the elite Delhi *kalāvānt* lineage, a lineage of musicians that had served at the Mughal court since the seventeenth century at least.⁵ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

⁴ Randhir Singh sent his forces to support the British in the disturbances at Jalandhar and also helped restore order at Hoshiarpur, for which he was conferred with a *khill’at* of Rs 15,000, an 11-gun salute, and the title ‘*Farzand-i-Dilband Rasikh ul-Itiqād Daulat-i-Inglisīā*’, (*Kapurthala State: Its Past and Present* 1928). His younger brother, Bikram Singh, personally led a troop of forces to Oudh in order to help the British deal with the sizeable uprising there. In reward for his service, he was awarded the title ‘*Sardār Bahādur*’, along with a large revenue-free land grant, or *jāgīr*, worth Rs 100,000 annually, in addition to a ceremonial *khill’at*.

⁵ See Schofield’s article (2015a) on the Delhi *kalāvānt birādarī*. The biographical details contained in the *Āṣār-uṣ-Ṣanādīd* have also been published separately under the name of *Taḏkirā-i-Ahl-i-Dihlī* (Malik 1983: 508).

centuries, Miyan Himmat Khan had been the *khalīfā*, or head, of this lineage and chief *bīnkār* of the Mughal court.⁶ Having no sons, however, it was Miyan Himmat Khan's daughter's son, Mir Nasir Ahmad, who became his leading disciple and successor (Schofield 2015a, 2018a). Following Miyan Himmat Khan's death in the late 1830s or early 1840s, therefore, Mir Nasir Ahmad succeeded his maternal grandfather as chief *bīnkār* of Bahadur Shah Zafar.

Mir Nasir Ahmad's father was in fact a Mughal nobleman, a *sayyid*, who had married Miyan Himmat Khan's daughter (Khan 1895: 124). It is for this reason that his name was prefixed with the honorific 'Mir'. His elite status was thus not defined simply by his affiliation with the eminent *kalāvānt* lineage of musicians but also by his noble birth, affording him the rare privilege of wearing a large turban (*dastār*) in the courtly setting. During the events of 1857-58, it is understood that Mir Nasir Ahmad was captured by the British on account of being perceived as a noble and thus a conspirator in the attempted rebellion. Destined for imprisonment along with the emperor and the other courtiers, it was at this time that Kunwar Bikram Singh came to learn of the fate of the great musician, negotiating with the British government to have him brought to Kapurthala.⁷ Thus it was that Mir Nasir Ahmad, perhaps the most important musician of the erstwhile Mughal court and thus north India, became attached to the Kapurthala state where he remained until his death sometime in the 1860s (Schofield 2018a).

Due to the lack of scholarly attention afforded to Punjab within the historiography of Hindustani music, such significant developments within the region have remained largely overlooked by historians of Hindustani music. Seemingly influenced by accounts such as that of Vilayat Hussain Khan (1959), until recently, scholars have assumed that Mir Nasir Ahmad moved to Lucknow after

⁶ Schofield's (2018a) podcast *Guardian of the Flame* contains details surrounding the life of Miyan Himmat Khan.

⁷ In an interview on 14 March 2019, Lalita Khanna, descendant of Kunwar Bikram Singh, suggested to me that Mir Nasir Ahmad and the Kapurthala prince were already well acquainted prior to the events of 1857 and that Mir Nasir Ahmad had sent news of his predicament to the prince requesting aid. Citing Anita Singh, also a descendant of the Kapurthala royal family, an article from *The Tribune* (Tandon 2003) provides more details concerning Mir Nasir Ahmad being confused for a noble at this time. The *Sarmāyā-i-ʿIsrat*, written in 1869, shortly after the failed rebellion, by Sadiq Ali Khan (1884), who knew Mir Nasir Ahmad personally, also cites Kunwar Bikram Singh as Mir Nasir Ahmad's rescuer.

1857 (Miner 1993: 130; Schofield 2015a). It is only recently, in her podcast on the life of Miyan Himmat Khan, that Schofield (2018) has highlighted Mir Nasir Ahmad's time at Kapurthala, an enduring testimony of which, today, is his impressive *mazār* (shrine) which still survives at a graveyard on the edges of the town (see Figure 2). As noted by Tandon (2003), the disrepair of the *mazār* today poignantly echoes the trajectory of decline in the Kapurthala tradition in the post-Partition era.



FIGURE 2 MIR NASIR AHMAD'S TOMB, KAPURTHALA. PHOTO BY AUTHOR, 2018.

Kunwar Bikram Singh's descendants, his great granddaughter Lalita Khanna and her daughter Shailaja Khanna, recounted to me some of the oral history of their family in which it is remembered that Mir Nasir Ahmad resided at Bikram Hall, Jalandhar. Most likely having spent the first few years at Kapurthala itself, Mir Nasir Ahmad and his two sons, Mir Abdul Rahman (also known as Mir Kallan) and Mir Rahmat Ali, settled at the home of Bikram Singh once the estate of Bikrampur had been granted and the Bikram Hall residence constructed there in the early 1860s. As was typical of patron-musician relationships in north India and in continuation of the culture of Mughal elites in which patrons could simultaneously be practitioners (Brown 2003: 130), Bikram Singh studied the art of the *bīn* under Mir Nasir Ahmad.⁸ According to the family's oral history, it was

⁸ Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh (1835-1881), ruler of Jaipur, for example, had studied the *bīn* under his chief *bīnkār*, Rajab Ali Khan (Bruguière 2010: 422).

in fact Bikram Singh, as patron and disciple, who was given the duty of tying the *ganḍhā*, the symbolic thread of discipleship, upon Mir Nasir Ahmad's two sons.⁹

The presence of Mir Nasir Ahmad's family had a profound and lasting impact on music in the town of Jalandhar and the Punjab as a whole, the family creating many influential disciples in the region. Some of the earliest Urdu books to be published on Hindustani music were written by disciples of Mir Nasir Ahmad. The first such known publication was the *Ġuncā-i-Rāg*, written in 1862 by Muhammad Mardan Ali Khan Rana, Bikram Singh's revenue officer and also a disciple of Mir Nasir Ahmad (Kapuria 2018: 265). Author of the *Sarmāyā-i-Israt* (1869), Sadiq Ali Khan, had also studied from Mir Nasir Ahmad (Schofield 2018a). Baba Harivallabh (d.1885), or Harballabh in Punjabi/Urdu enunciation, *mahant* of the Devi Talab mandir in the north of the city and founder of the oldest known festival of Hindustani music – the *Harivallabh Saṅgīt Mahāsabhā* of Jalandhar – was also a disciple of Mir Nasir Ahmad (Ram 1930: 70). Rakesh Dada, in his book on the history of north India's oldest music festival, suggests that the presence of Mir Nasir Ahmad in Jalandhar was a notable influence on Baba Harivallabh and his interest in music (Dada 2019: 9).

Upon the death of Harivallabh in 1885, when his disciple Pt Tolo Ram took over the organisation of the festival, Bikram Singh became one of its major patrons.¹⁰ Diwan Aziz Bakhsh, prime minister of the Kapurthala state and a disciple of Baba Harivallabh, was also a noted patron of the festival (Ram 1930: 70). It is from this time onward that the festival expanded under the name *Rāg Mēlā* (Festival of *Rāg*), attracting artists from beyond Punjab such as Pt Shankar Rao and Pt Bhaskar Rao Bakhle (Dada 2019). By the early-twentieth century, it had become one of north India's leading gatherings of Hindustani musicians, enjoying the continued patronage of notable members of the Kapurthala state who had learnt from the family of Mir Nasir Ahmad including Diwan Aziz Bakhsh's son Diwan Abdul Hamid (Ram 1930: 70) and Kunwar Bikram Singh's son Raja Sir Daljit Singh (Khanna 2018). It is thus clear that the presence of Bikram Singh and Mir

⁹ In an interview on 14 March 2019, Lalita Khanna suggested that Mir Nasir Ahmad's two sons Mir Kallan and Mir Rahmat Ali were born and raised after his arrival in Punjab – quite possible given that he is noted as being relatively young in his time at Delhi (Schofield 2015a).

¹⁰ Interview with Shailaja Khanna on 13 March 2019.

Nasir Ahmad played a vital role in the establishment of what is today India's oldest surviving festival of Hindustani music.

Interestingly there is no known record of Mir Nasir Ahmed, or his sons Mir Rahmat Ali and Mir Kallan, ever performing at the festival, thus supporting the narrative of Kunwar Bikram Singh's descendants: the *kalāvants* only performed for their patron within the confines of Bikram Hall. According to Lalita Khanna, *mahfils* would take place every evening at Bikram Hall, where leading musicians would often be invited to perform, considering it a privilege to also hear the music of Mir Nasir Ahmad.¹¹ Given that the elite *mahfil* culture of north India was established within the Mughal courts (Brown 2003: 119) and that a figure like Mir Nasir Ahmad was the embodiment of this culture, his presence at Kapurthala and Bikram Hall transformed these spaces into sites of reproduction of this elite music culture.

Mir Nasir Ahmad's 'presence' was more than just physical. The discourse, attitudes and behaviours which he represented were crucially constitutive in this regard. In particular, his adherence to a strict etiquette (*ādāb*), as defined in the Indo-Persian literature (Nijenhuis and Delvoye 2010: 47), was crucial to his status as a representative of this elite *mahfil* culture. Just as the Sikh rulers came to perform their newfound ruling status through ritual displays (Dhavan 2011: 143), the musicians they patronised also performed their elite sociomusical status through their adherence (or lack of) to an elite musical etiquette. One notable aspect of *ādāb* for musicians such as Mir Nasir Ahmad was to refrain from performing before an '*ām* (ordinary) audience of lesser professional musicians. According to the *mīrzānāmā* literature of the Mughals, concerned with prescribing the comportment expected of the nobility (i.e. *mīrzās*), in the context of the *mahfil* "it was considered disgraceful for a *mīrzā* to sing either too often, or when professional musicians were present, lest he be mistaken for one of them" (Brown 2003: 143). As a *sayyid*, a nobleman, and a *kalāvānt*, Mir Nasir Ahmad was strictly bound by such norms, meaning he was not to perform outside of the confines of Bikram Hall without the express permission of his patron.

¹¹ Interview with Lalita Khanna 14 March 2019.

Illustrating the reluctance to perform before professional musicians, Lalita Khanna recounted a pertinent anecdote. Whilst contradicting the multi-generational ties of Mir Nasir Ahmad and his maternal grandfather to the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order of Sunni Sufism (Schofield 2018a), this oral history is nevertheless intriguing for several reasons. The account suggests that Bikram Singh had, on one occasion, granted Mir Nasir Ahmad permission to visit Lucknow for the month of Muharram, thus implying that he was a practising Shia rather than Sunni. Harboured a great desire to hear this legendary musician, the *mīrāsīs* of Lucknow are said to have devised a plan to do so. They requested Mir Nasir Ahmad to sing a *marsīyā* for them, which, being a religious genre, he was seemingly unable to decline.¹² Being thus coerced, Mir Nasir Ahmad is said to have sung forty-four *marsīyās*, each in a different *rāg*, leaving such an impression that the incident is thus recalled to this day.

Overlooking the inherent discrepancy regarding Mir Nasir Ahmad's religious identity, the narrative is important for the message it contains in relation to Mir Nasir Ahmad's elite status and musical skill. The fact that the incident is said to have taken place in Lucknow, also situates Kapurthala in musical competition with a city that had been considered one of north India's most important centres of elite musical tradition in the mid-nineteenth century. Mir Nasir Ahmad's own distant cousins via the Delhi *kalāvānt* lineage – the *rabāb* exponents Pyar Khan and Basat Khan (Schofield 2015a; Miner 1993: 119–20) – had lived there and trained disciples that went on to establish the Lucknow *gharānā* (Katz 2017: 47). Despite the disbanding of Wajid Ali Shah's court in 1858, the musical reputation of Lucknow endured through its musicians. We might, therefore, also interpret this oral history as Kapurthala laying claim, in the post-1858 era, to the former musical status of Lucknow.

In addition to his distinguished lineage and his being a custodian of the *mahfil* etiquette, Mir Nasir Ahmad's status was also constructed around his former position as chief *bīnkār* of the Mughal court. The discourse associated with the *bīn* was unparalleled, being an instrument which, more than any other, was endowed with “mystical and esoteric significance” (Sanyal and Widdess 2004:

¹² The *marsīyā* is a Shia song of lament sung during the month of Muharram to remember Imam Hussain, grandson of the Prophet, who died in the Battle of Karbala in the year 680 CE.

24–25). On the “mystique” of the *bīn* during the late colonial period, Miner (1993: 161–62) notes how:

bīn techniques became the prized and guarded possession of a few family lines. The antiquity, the high musical standard expected of its players, and the increasing secrecy of professionals regarding techniques gave the instrument a special mystique, especially as it was disappearing in the late 19th century.

In relation to the secrecy of the *bīn*, Schofield (2018) notes Muhammad Karam Imam’s (author of the *Ma’adan ul-Mūsīqī*) claim that true *kalāvants* would not even teach their daughter's sons the *bīn* – an apparent slight at Miyan Himmat Khan, who did precisely that by teaching the *bīn* to Mir Nasir Ahmad. The art of the *bīn* had thus been inherited by Mir Nasir Ahmad in somewhat controversial circumstances. It is noteworthy, however, that this supposed contravention of protocol in actual fact allowed the *bīn* tradition of the Mughal court to endure, subsequently travelling with Mir Nasir Ahmad to Punjab.

Silver (1984: 329) notes how etiquette “provides the musician with a means of surviving, even thriving, in the crucible of a changing world”. In the case of Mir Nasir Ahmad, we see how the various discursive, behavioural, and physical aspects of his presence led to a reproduction of the Mughal *mahfil* culture within his new home at Bikram Hall. At the same time as preserving continuity, he represented the degree of flexibility with respect to the pedagogical aspects of etiquette, which had allowed to inherit the *bīn* tradition and subsequently pass it on to the family of his later patron Kunwar Bikram Singh. As a patron of this elite musical tradition, we can envisage how Bikram Singh established Bikram Hall in cultural competition with places like Lucknow and indeed the court of his own brother Randhir Singh at Kapurthala. In light of the personal circumstances surrounding the inheritance dispute that arose between the two brothers following the death of their father Raja Nihal Singh, Bikram Singh’s official subordination to his brother, at the behest of the British, was in a way subverted through his

unparalleled status as a patron, specifically as the patron of the last *bīnkār* of the Mughal court.¹³

The relationship of patronage and discipleship between Bikram Singh and Mir Nasir Ahmad was inherited by Bikram Singh’s two sons, Kunwar Pratap Singh (1871-1911) and Raja Sir Daljit Singh (1882-1946), who both studied vocal music and the *bīn* from Mir Nasir Ahmad’s sons, Mir Kallan and Mir Rahmat Ali.¹⁴ Both have been noted as skilled musicians by K.L Ralia Ram (1930: 70). Raja Daljit Singh was also a composer with some of his compositions still being sung by present-day *khayāl* singers (Khanna 2018). Kunwar Pratap Singh’s son, Kunwar Jasjit Singh (1893-1943) has also been noted as a skilled musician as has Raja Sir Daljit Singh’s son, Raja Padamjit Singh (1909-71), the father and teacher of Lalita Khanna (Ram 1930: 70). Representing the Kapurthala *gharānā* of royal *bīnkārs*, Figure 3 illustrates the descendants of Bikram Singh who were trained in the instrumental tradition established by Mir Nasir Ahmad.

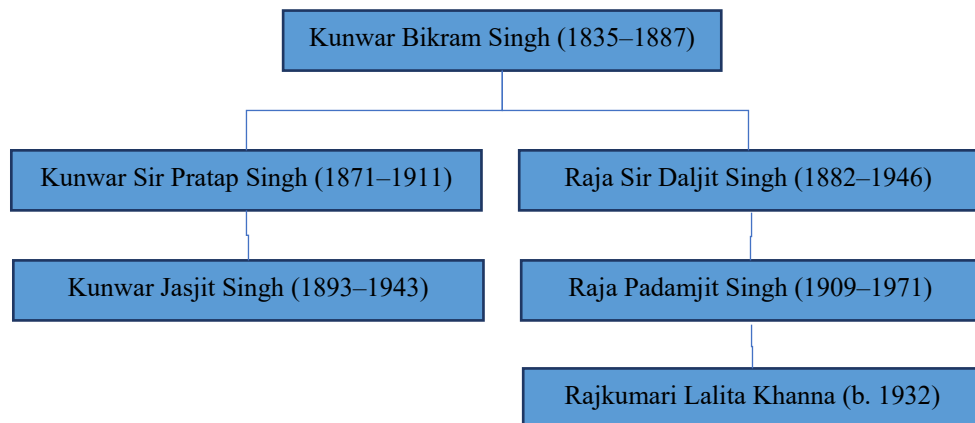


FIGURE 3 KAPURTHALA *GĦARĀNĀ* - PRACTISING MUSICIANS IN THE FAMILY OF KUNWAR BIKRAM SINGH

¹³ Kunwar Bikram Singh’s other notable patronage activities also include being a founding member of the Singh Sabha reform movement, which went on to be pivotal in defining a normative Sikh identity in the early twentieth century (Oberoi 1994), and the establishment of the Khalsa Press Lahore, one of the first Gurmukhi-based publishing houses who produced the *Khālsā Akhbār* newspaper.

¹⁴ Kunwar Harnam Singh (1851-1930), the younger son of Raja Randhir Singh and thus member of the other (main) branch of the Kapurthala dynasty, is also said to have studied from Mir Rehmat Ali (Paintal 1988).

In summarising the success of the Kapurthala dynasty's founding figure, Dhavan (2011: 95) notes that "it was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's skill in giving away land and money that cemented his sovereignty and authority in a way that some of his more close-fisted rivals never accomplished". Following in the footsteps of his ancestor, Bikram Singh was similarly able to assert his elite princely status through the patronage of musicians who represented the elite *mahfil* culture of the Mughal courts. Central to the elite musical environment established at Bikram Hall was the prestigious symbol of the *bīn* and *bīnkār*, the association of the musicians themselves with the erstwhile Mughal court, and the aspect of *mahfil* etiquette which, when strictly adhered to and performed, allowed for a de-territorialised recreation of the Mughal *mahfil* environment.

Just as the playing techniques, organology, and sonic aspect of the *bīn* are endowed with an esoteric power which equipped *bīnkārs* with the ability to perform miracles,¹⁵ so too the discourse surrounding the *bīn* itself was powerful in its ability to transform and contest social hierarchies. Mir Nasir Ahmad's coming to Punjab thus profoundly altered the musical reputation of the Kapurthala state, Jalandhar city, and the Punjab as a whole. The vivid recall of historical narratives pertaining to Mir Nasir Ahmad and his sons, by the descendants of Kunwar Bikram Singh today, four generations later, demonstrates the discursive significance of this elite music tradition in relation to the status of this family historically and indeed in the present.

Given the relative obscurity of the Kapurthala *gharānā* today, parallels emerge in relation to the trajectory of the Lucknow *gharānā*, whose current representatives similarly clung to an oral history which subverts their relative obscurity in the present. The Lucknow *gharānā* musicians, today, also claim to represent an elite musical lineage through their connection to Mir Nasir Ahmad's cousin Ustad Basat Khan (b.1787), and also by way of their *asrāf* (aristocratic) status as Muslims of Afghani descent (Katz 2017: 99).¹⁶ Refusing to impart knowledge of

¹⁵ In an anecdote associated with the *bīnkār* Ustad Bande Ali Khan, he is said to have proven the power of his music by charming cobras that were put into the two gourds of his instrument (Erdman 1985: 56).

¹⁶ Demonstrating their link as cousins, Lalita Khanna also mentioned to me that Mir Nasir Ahmad's son Mir Rehmat Ali had once visited Calcutta to gain training in the *sur singār*, a modern derivative of the *rabāb*, from Basat Khan's sons, Ali Muhammad and Muhammad Ali, the last exponents of the *rabāb* in their lineage (Miner 1993: 149).

the *rabāb* – an instrument closely guarded and considered similar in status to the *bīn* (Khan 1879) – Basat Khan taught Niamatullah Khan of the Lucknow *gharānā* the *sarōd* instead (Katz 2017: 45–47). By contrast, being princely patrons who would never perform music professionally or in a public setting, the Kapurthala royal family were afforded the privilege of inheriting the secretive *bīn* tradition of the Delhi *kalāvants*.

The relative obscurity of the Lucknow *gharānā* and Kapurthala *gharānā* today ultimately reflects upon the unrelenting fidelity of the representatives of these *gharānās* to the traditional musical etiquette and discourse of the Mughal courts. Whilst positioning them at the apex of the Hindustani sociomusical hierarchy as rare custodians of the musical traditions of the Mughal court, this etiquette and discourse has also contributed toward their fate. Somewhat precariously, the secrecy of the *bīn* was both formative of its ‘mystique’ and the special status of *bīnkārs* whilst also tending to drive it toward obscurity. It was only the flexible approach toward pedagogical etiquette, demonstrated by Miyan Himmat Khan in teaching his daughter’s son the *bīn*, that allowed the *bīn* tradition of the Mughal court to endure and travel to Punjab after 1857-58. Ironically, by clinging so firmly to the discourse and etiquette of the tradition they inherited, for the elite status that it guaranteed, the family of Kunwar Bikram Singh have been unable to ensure the continued transmission and survival of the *bīnkār* tradition.

Mir Nasir Ahmad’s sons, Mir Rehmat Ali and Mir Kallan, are not known to have had any direct family successors and, as members of the aristocracy, the Kapurthala family preserved this tradition only within their own family. Kunwar Bikram Singh’s grandson Raja Padamjit Singh did in fact break with gender norms by teaching his daughter Rajkumari Lalita Khanna music, the *bīn*, however, being substituted by the *sitār* in this case. Lalita Khanna went on to take further instrumental training in music under the *sarōdīya* Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan (1888–1972), who could not refuse to teach her on account of the seniority and prestige of the musical lineage she represented.¹⁷ Her daughter Shailaja Khanna, whilst not formally undertaking training in music, is a notable music critic and

¹⁷ Hafiz Ali Khan’s teacher was the *bīnkār* Ustad Wazir Khan (1860-1926) of Rampur (Brahaspati 2010: 270), who was also linked to the Delhi *kalāvant* lineage through his paternal grandfather Umrao Khan (Bruguière 2010: 420).

writer in Delhi today. Despite the demise of its practical aspect, the Kapurthala *bīn* tradition lives on in memory, continuing to serve as a musical symbol of the family's elite status and illustrious past. As material symbols of the elite lineage they represent, the family of Kunwar Bikram Singh still possesses two *bīns* inherited from Mir Nasir Ahmad's family. Though these are silent relics today, the instrumental techniques and knowledge linked to the Kapurthala tradition can still be traced through numerous non-family disciples of this *gharānā* who studied the *sitār* and *surbahār* from Mir Nasir Ahmad and his sons. Notable among these was Bhai Mehboob Ali, an instrumentalist of *rabābī* descent, whose story is taken up below.

2.2.2 THE COLONIAL *BĪNKĀRS* OF PATIALA

Since the origins of the Patiala state, there has also been the tradition in which, during the music *darbārs* of Basant and Dussehra, *pūjā* [ritual worship] of instruments, namely *pūjā* of the *vīṇā*, used to take place, which was symbolic of the worship of the goddess Saraswati. Each *bīnkār* was presented with a shawl from the state. This honour, for a few years, first went to the leading musician Bhai Mehboob Ali, then to Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan *bīnkār*.

(Kanwal 2017: 77)

As a notable historian of Hindustani music within Punjab, Balbir Singh Kanwal has documented some of the rich history of music at the Patiala state, much of which has come through his close association with Raja Mrigendra Singh (1929-2014), musician and son of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (r.1900-1938). The ritual *pūjā* of the *bīn* and the circumstances of two early-twentieth-century *bīnkārs* of Patiala in particular present another interesting case with regards to the role of the *bīn* in the politics of musicians and patrons alike. Dhavan (2011: 147) notes how, amid the developments of Sikh sovereignty and the establishment of a Sikh ruling culture, in the late eighteenth century, “a desire to distinguish the lifestyle of the chiefs from ordinary Khalsa soldiers gradually led to the adaptation of rituals and patterns of social behaviour associated with established elite warrior cultures”. Ceremonies were among the practices borrowed from the courts of existing rulers

with the biannual *pūjā* of Saraswati, the goddess of music, through her instrument the *bīn*, likely to have been borrowed from Rajput courts specifically.¹⁸

The goddess Saraswati represents both knowledge and music in Hindu religious discourse and by virtue of its association with her, the *bīn* itself is perceived to convey “wisdom and spirituality” (Qureshi 2000: 810). Despite being rooted in Hindu discursive tradition, descriptions of the *pūjā* of the *bīn* in such contexts reveal how it was marked by Sikh, Hindu and Muslim participation, with Muslim practitioners being honoured for their skill in wielding this auspicious instrument.



FIGURE 4 BHAI MEHBOOB ALI, PICTURED HOLDING A SURBAHĀR. COURTESY OF THE CMRC, RADIO PAKISTAN.

The first of the two Patiala *bīnkārs* in question, Bhai Mehboob Ali (1854-1946), also known as Bhai Booba, was born into a family of *rabābīs* who trace their descent to Bhai Firanda, the maker of the famed *rabāb* which accompanied Guru Nanak, throughout his life, in the hands of Bhai Mardana (Madan 1986: 109; Kanwal 2010: 118).¹⁹ Given his family lineage, it is no surprise that he was a beneficiary of the patronage of the leading Sikh princes of his times. It was as a court musician of Kapurthala that Bhai Mehboob Ali gained access to training in the art of the *sitār* and *surbahār* from Mir Nasir Ahmad’s son Mir Rehmat Ali. Becoming

a disciple of such a distinguished lineage of *bīnkārs*, Bhai Mehboob Ali’s status as a musician grew and he came to be offered a position as court musician at the state of Bahawalpur, in south-west Punjab, where he remained for a considerable period of time (Madan 1986: 109).²⁰ Whilst at Bahawalpur, he became a *murīd*

¹⁸ The festivals of Basant Panchami in spring and Dussehra after the monsoon season are both associated with the practice of Saraswati *pūjā*.

¹⁹ On account of the connection with Guru Nanak, this clan of *rabābīs* are sometimes known as *Kartārpuriē* after Kartarpur Sahib, the place where Guru Nanak settled toward the end of his life (Kanwal 2010: 118).

²⁰ According to Gita Paintal (1988), Bhai Mehboob Ali remained a court musician at Bahawalpur under four successive Nawabs. However, given that only three rulers presided over the period from 1866 to 1955, this seems an impossibility. Assuming he arrived as a young man in his early twenties and in the knowledge that he was invited to Patiala at the start of Maharaja Bhupinder

(follower) of Khwaja Ghulam Farid (1845-1901), the noted Sufi poet-saint who was also a beneficiary of the Bahawalpur state patronage, and is thus remembered by his descendants as Miyan Mehboob Ali Faridi.²¹ It was also at Bahawalpur that Bhai Mehboob Ali was handed the opportunity to study the highly coveted art of the *bīn* from Pt Ganga Giri, a *bīnkār* and court musician there, who was also a disciple of the Delhi *kalāvānt* lineage.²² It was thus that Bhai Mehboob Ali could later be invited to Patiala as a *bīnkār* in his own right.

After the death of Maharaja Rajinder Singh (1872-1900), his son and successor Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (1891-1938) became ruler of Patiala whilst still a minor, resulting in the management of state affairs during the first nine years of his rule being presided over by a Council of Regency. The young Maharaja subsequently gained full ruling powers in 1910 following his nineteenth birthday, quickly garnering a reputation for his “legendary” charity and munificence, and “reckless” and “irresponsible” spending habits (Natwar-Singh 2005: 10).

Demonstrative of his political ambition and interest in music, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh quickly set about expanding his contingent of court musicians.

As noted by Kapuria (2018: 273) and in accordance with his notable role and interest in Sikh identity politics of the early twentieth century, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh came to foster a court culture that was markedly more Sikh in character than that of his predecessors. Toward this end, he had Mahant Gajja Singh, a renowned exponent of the *tāūs* and “the greatest minstrel of the Sikhs” according to Orientalist observer M. A. Macauliffe (1909: xxvi), appointed as his chief court musician and music teacher (Madan 1986: 108).²³ Like Bhai Mehboob Ali, Mahant Gajja Singh (1849-1914) had studied from Mir Rehmat Ali and so under his recommendation, as chief court musician, his old co-pupil was also invited to Patiala in 1910 (Madan 1986: 108).

Singh’s rule, a plausible period of Bhai Mehboob Ali’s employment at Bahawalpur would be from around the late 1870s until 1910.

²¹ Interview with Aqeel Tahir on 26 August 2019, descendant of Bhai Mehboob Ali.

²² Pt Goswami Ganga Giri (Paintal 1988), also referenced as Pt Ganga Sri (Madan 1986: 109), was a disciple of the renowned *bīnkār* Nirmal Shah, another musician linked the Delhi *kalāvānt birādarī* of Sadarang and Adarang.

²³ The *tāūs* (lit. ‘peacock’ in Persian) is a bowed instrument with metal strings and a fretboard akin to the *sitār* and *surbahār*. The soundbox takes the shape of a peacock, from which the instrument takes its name. It is noted in the *Sarmāyā-i-‘Īsrāt* as being particularly popular in the Punjab region (Khan 1884: 277).

The arrival at Patiala of these two eminent disciples of the *bīnkārs* of Kapurthala certainly marked a significant shift in the broader sociomusical landscape of Punjab. At a time when the Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala (r.1899-1948) “preferred the pleasures of Salmon-fishing in Scotland and life in Paris to those at the Versailles-like palace in his capital” (Ramusack 1978: 175), Patiala, under the leadership of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, came to establish its role as leading patron of music in the region, now home to several prominent musicians who, through discipleship, represented the prestigious *bīnkār* tradition of the Delhi *kalāvants*.

The marked sense of musical competition between princely patrons following 1857 if anything was further heightened in the early twentieth century by the co-participation of their respective musical cohorts in Bhatkhande’s famous All-India Music Conferences between 1916 and 1925. Trasoff (2010: 353) notes how these conferences “provided the first national showcase for many of the finest musicians of the day, and the listings of invited musicians and the summary of prizes and medals awarded give us a picture of who were the important and influential musicians of the period”. Though the first conference was dominated by the musicians of its chief patron and host, the Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda, the subsequent conferences grew in size, garnering involvement and representation from a greater number of India’s princely states.

In the reports of the second and third All-India Music Conferences we find notable mention of the musicians’ whose services were “lent” by Patiala. Attesting to his status as one of the eminent *khān sahibs* in attendance, Bhai Mehboob Ali features as “Mahboob Khan” whilst the other *rabābīs* of Patiala in attendance (Bhai Chhaila, Bhai Ghasita and Bhai Mulkha) retained the humbler Sikh honorific “Bhai”.²⁴ In both the second and the third conferences in Delhi (1918) and Benares (1919), respectively, Bhai Mehboob Ali is explicitly noted as performing the prestigious *bīn* rather than the *sitār* or *surbahār*. On such a stage and amid such a gathering of north India’s elite musicians, this was a powerful statement for him and his patron, asserting his own *bīnkār* status and

²⁴ The Sikh association of the prefix “Bhai” in fact causes Trasoff to conclude that “The largest contingent of non-Muslims were vocalists from Gwalior and Patiala” (Trasoff 2010: 340). These *rabābīs* were, however, nevertheless Muslims.

demonstrating that the elite *bīnkār* tradition of the Delhi *kalāvants* was now represented at the court of Patiala. Bhai Mehboob Ali was, in fact, awarded a prestigious gold medal at the Benares conference for his performance, which was described glowingly in the conference report as follows:

Mahboob Khan of Patiala then displayed to the wondering eyes of the audience an instrument called the Rudra-vina and played “Maligoura” on it. Unfortunately the time really needed for a display of the intricacies of this instrument was wanting and both the audience as well as the performer had to remain unsatisfied as a lecture by Prof. Barve of the Bombay Press had to follow on.

(*Report of the Third All-India Music Conference Benares 1920:*
109)

In addition to his choice to play the *bīn*, we might further interpret his choice of *rāg* – *Mālīgaurā* has been described as a rare and difficult *rāg* (Moutal 1991: 493) – as an assertion of his knowledge and musical training.

Bhai Mehboob Ali is also recorded as attending the 1911 Delhi Darbar as part of the Patiala retinue, where he performed alongside the likes of other renowned *sitār* maestros such as Ustad Imdad Khan, father of Ustad Vilayat Khan, and Ustad Yusuf Ali Khan of the Lucknow *gharānā* (Kanwal 2010: 118).²⁵ Given his eminent status as a leading *bīnkār* of the Patiala court, Bhai Mehboob Ali is naturally remembered by descendants of the Patiala royal family as a central figure in the instrumental legacy of Patiala, a musician who was practically undefeated in his art (Kanwal 2017: 74).²⁶ This contrasts dramatically to the diminutive manner in which he is remembered by the descendants of the Kapurthala royal family, to whom he is simply “Booba”, a disciple of their

²⁵ The Delhi Darbar of 1911 was held in commemoration of George V’s coronation, which had taken place earlier that year in Britain, and involved the attendance of practically all of India’s princes and nobility.

²⁶ Histories of the Patiala instrumental tradition (Kanwal 2017: 73–74), frequently informed by Kunwar Mrigendra Singh, son of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh and disciple of Bhai Mehboob Ali, often cite Bhai Mehboob Ali as a student-representative of the lineage of Mir Nasir Ahmad and Mir Rehmat Ali.

gharānā who was only afforded permission to study the *sitār*.²⁷ Bhai Mehboob Ali's descendants today remember him primarily in association with the Kapurthala *gharānā* as it is from there that he received his primary training.²⁸ Although the etiquette and hierarchy attached to the Kapurthala tradition dictated that he was subordinate and ineligible to play the *bīn* there, he nevertheless remained indebted and loyal to his erstwhile patrons and still visited to perform at Kapurthala even after he took employment at other courts.²⁹

Through the journey of this one musician, we see how the complex sociomusical hierarchies hinged significantly on factors among which patronage ties and the association of the *bīn* were particularly prominent. Born into a prominent *rabābī* family of Kartarpur, situated between Kapurthala and Jalandhar, the young Bhai Mehboob Ali first came under the patronage of the nearby Sikh princes of Kapurthala. Becoming a *sitār* and *surbahār* disciple of the *bīnkār* Mir Rehmat Ali whilst there, he acquired a musical pedigree that propelled his status within the broader social sphere of Hindustani music. Moving to Bahawalpur, he gained the association with the iconic *bīn* under the guidance of Pt Ganga Giri. Finally, with the invitation to Patiala, he was afforded the status of chief *bīnkār*, representing the state publicly on occasions of considerable sociomusical significance such as at the Delhi Darbar of 1911 and the All-India Music Conferences. Reflecting the diverse social milieu in which Bhai Mehboob Ali circulated, he was at once Bhai Booba the *rabābī* in Sikh circles, *khān ṣāhib* Ustad Mehboob Ali Khan in the sphere of Hindustani music, and Miyan Mehboob Ali Faridi in his Sufi lineage; he was a *sitārīya* at Kapurthala and a *bīnkār* at Patiala.

A similar story of transformation relates to Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan (1881-1946), the second *bīnkār* to feature at the court of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh. Abdul Aziz Khan was initially a well-known *sāraṅgī* player who decided to abandon his instrument due to the well-documented stigma and lack of social status associated with *sāraṅgī* players (Bor 1987; Qureshi 2000: 819). Having previously lived and worked in Bombay and/or Jamnagar as an accompanist to female performers, he

²⁷ In an interview on 14 March 2019, Lalita Khanna stressed that Bhai Mehboob Ali was not permitted to play the *bīn* at Kapurthala, the house of his *ustāds*.

²⁸ Foremost disciple of Bhai Mehboob Ali was Bhai Lal, whose son Ghulam Hassan Shaggan spoke of the family's connection to the Kapurthala *gharānā* in an interview (*Ustad Ghulam Hasan Shaggan: a conversation* [n.d.]).

²⁹ Interview with Lalita Khanna on date 14 March 2019.

went on to become a disciple of Ustad Jamaluddin Khan (1859-1927), a noted *bīnkār* attached to Jaipur and then later Baroda (Bruguière 2010: 422).³⁰ It is not known precisely when, but he appears to have arrived at the court of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh in the 1910s.

It was here, with the encouragement of the Maharaja of Patiala, that Abdul Aziz Khan invented a new type of *bīn* known as the *vicitra vīṇā* (Madan 1986: 111).³¹ Organologically, the *vicitra vīṇā* was still a zither with two attached gourds, like the *rudra vīṇā* upon which it appears to have been modelled, and so clearly classified as a *bīn*-type instrument. It differs from the *rudra vīṇā* in two significant ways – the removal of frets and the incorporation of sympathetic strings (*tarafs*) – each of which appears to reflect the incorporation of elements from the *sāraṅgī*, which its inventor had previously played. With less than two years of practice on this new instrument, Abdul Aziz Khan was granted the position of *bīnkār* at the Patiala court in 1920 (Bor 1987: 126).



FIGURE 5 USTAD ABDUL AZIZ KHAN PLAYING THE *VICITRA VĪṆĀ*.

Given his status as a *sāraṅgī* player, we might surmise that, having accepted him as a student, Ustad Jamaluddin Khan was nevertheless not willing to pass on the art of the *bīn* to Abdul Aziz Khan. The latter's invention of and practice on the *vicitra vīṇā*, therefore, along with the mere association of a notable *bīnkār ustād* like Jamaluddin Khan, and the crucial support

and encouragement of his patron, seem to have been sufficient for him to overcome this hurdle and make the transition against the odds. So it was that Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan came to be accepted, promoted and venerated as a *bīnkār* at Patiala.

³⁰ According to Madan (1986: 111), Abdul Aziz Khan was an accompanist at Jamnagar, Gujarat, whereas according to Pt D. C. Vedi, a fellow musician at Patiala, he had been an active accompanist in Bombay (Bor 1987: 126).

³¹ Reflecting the trend toward Sanskritisation of terms within Hindustani music, pioneered by figures like Raja S. M. Tagore in the early twentieth century (Miner 1993: 172), the *bīn* of north India increasingly came to be known as the *rudra vīṇā*. The choice of the name *vicitra vīṇā* for this new type of *bīn*, meaning 'wonderful' or 'striking' *vīṇā*, also reflects this.

With a well-known history of accompanying female performers as a *sāraṅgī* player, Abdul Aziz Khan was a *bīnkār* who reflected the changing environment in which he found himself, one in which the old norms associated with the elite Mughal *bīnkārs*, such as Mir Nasir Ahmad’s family, were increasingly irrelevant.³² Seemingly unconcerned with the traditional hierarchies and norms governing who was and was not eligible to play the *bīn*, it appears as though Maharaja Bhupinder Singh was only too keen to have another *bīnkār* in his midst, bolstering the status of his court both through the traditional symbol of the *bīn* but also through the value attached to novelty and innovation.

The unconventional character of Abdul Aziz Khan is not only reflected in his unique instrument and his background as a *sāraṅgī* player, but also in his music and his willingness to share it with the public, recording numerous 78 rpm records when the elite *bīnkārs* would not perform outside the elite *maḥfils* of their patrons, let alone consider commercial recordings. Representing a marked shift away from traditional *dhrupad*-influenced *bīn* style (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 24), these recordings reveal the clear influence of *ṭhumrī* style on Abdul Aziz Khan’s *vicitra vīṇā* playing.³³ The precedent for incorporating vocal styles into the solo instrumental realm had already been established by musicians of the mid-to-late nineteenth century such as Bande Ali Khan, a *bīnkār* who was also associated with the *sāraṅgī* and is said to have incorporated elements of *khayāl* into his *bīn* playing (Miner 1993: 136), and the musicians of the Lucknow *gharānā*, who had incorporated popular *ṭhumrī*-based repertoire from the court of Wajid Ali Shah onto the *sitār* and *sarōd* (Katz 2017: 55–58). Nevertheless, Abdul Aziz Khan was perhaps the first so-called *bīnkār* to incorporate *ṭhumrī* style and repertoire into his playing, illustrating a further shift in relation to the traditional cultural discourse associated with the *bīn*. At a time when the last generation of *bīnkārs* to have witnessed the Mughal era were on the decline, a new generation of ‘colonial’ *bīnkārs*, such as Abdul Aziz Khan and Bhai Mehboob Ali, emerged in what was a transitional moment for the culture surrounding the *bīn*.

³² In an interview with Shailaja Khanna on 13 March 2019, she told me of how on one occasion Mir Rehmat Ali crossed the fury of his father Mir Nasir Ahmad for teaching a courtesan.

³³ Numerous 78rpm records of Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan are available on YouTube (*Abdul Aziz Khan: Vichitra Veena - Raga Pilu* [n.d.]; *Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan: Vichitra Veena - Raga Bhairavi* [n.d.]).

Though his background was equally unconventional, by all accounts, the playing style of Bhai Mehboob Ali was more representative of earlier *bīnkārs*. Raja Mrigendra Singh, son of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh and disciple of Bhai Mehboob Ali, asserts that his *ustād* was versed in and taught him the seven *bājs* (playing styles/repertoires) of the *sitār* and the five *qāidās* (systems) of the *bīn*, whilst simultaneously asserting that the Rampur instrumentalists were only versed in two *bājs*, namely the *masūtkhānī* and *razākhānī*.³⁴ The aura around the playing techniques of the *bīn* is attested to by the attitude among other instrumentalists toward it. The *sāraṅgī* player Ustad Bundu Khan, for example, who also happened to be employed by the Patiala state during the early twentieth century and was related to the *bīnkār* Ustad Jamaluddin Khan, in one of his own recordings, states, “You won’t hear these *tāns* from a *sāraṅgī* player, even were he to practise for twelve years. They are gone. *Bīn* players (*bīnvālē*) employ these [*tāns*]” (Kanwal 2017: 67).

Also illustrative of the increasingly loose attitude towards playing the *bīn* in public, Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan’s younger brother and disciple Ustad Habib Ali Khan (1898-1971) was probably among the first Hindustani musicians to have ever been recorded on film. In a rare three-minute clip constituting the seventh episode in a short film series known as the ‘Variety Program’, produced in 1937 by the Wadia Movietone production house (Pradhan 2014), Ustad Habib Ali Khan is featured, playing *rāg Sōhinī* alongside a young Ustad Ahmad Jan Thirakwa on the *tablā*.³⁵ The clip begins with the written introduction: “The only time that Khan Sahib Habib Khan one of the few great musicians of his generation appeared on the Screen”. The paradoxical commentary, intimating toward viewer privilege and the prestige and exclusivity of the *bīnkār* despite the fact that the *bīn*, that is, the *vicitra vīṇā*, was now essentially being played for the public, perfectly illustrates this moment in the trajectory of the *bīn* and the evolving nature of the *bīnkār* in the late colonial era.

³⁴ The seven *bājs* of the *sitār* are given as: *masūtkhānī*, *razākhānī*, *firōzkhānī*, *bēgamī*, *ṭhumrī*, *bahir*, and *nāc*. The five *qāidās* of the *bīn* are given as: *ālāp*, *ālāpatī*, *ālāpatan*, *brahm bāj*, and the *nibadh bāj* (Kanwal 2017: 74).

³⁵ This clip of Ustad Habib Ali Khan is available on YouTube (*Ustad Habib Khan and Ustad Ahmedjan Thirakwa 1937* [n.d.]).

Moving to Pakistan at the time of Partition, Ustad Habib Ali Khan was subsequently recorded by EMI (The Gramophone Company of Pakistan), on an LP record in which he and his brother are described as having transitioned from the *sāraṅgī* to the *vicitra vīṇā* “in the quest of tonal perfection” (Khan [n.d.]).³⁶ Rather than obfuscate their past as some *sāraṅgī* players are noted to have done (Bor 1987), Abdul Aziz Khan and his brother Habib Ali Khan openly acknowledged their past and justified their transition away from the *sāraṅgī* through a discourse revolving around the tonal limitations of the instrument. Regardless of whether their quest was for tonal perfection or simply improved sociomusical status, Abdul Aziz Khan and Habib Ali Khan represent the polarised tensions exerting upon the tradition of the *bīn* in a changing environment. Perceptions of pedigree, authority, and knowledge certainly continued to be significant: the liner notes of the above record, for example, note how Habib Ali Khan belonged to “the line of Ustad Behram Khan’s disciples and in his lifetime was acknowledged as the most knowledgeable theorist of Pakistani music”.³⁷ At the same time, by participating in the new public sphere of Hindustani music, the brothers forwent the secrecy and exclusivity historically associated with the *bīn*.

Catering to the increasingly Anglicised native elite among their audience in the colonial courtly setting, some musicians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are noted for their adoption of Western sounding titles, such as ‘Professor’, in place of indigenous titles such as ‘Ustad’. Like Maula Bakhsh of Baroda, one of the first prominent examples to do so (Bakhle 2005: 53–56), Abdul Aziz Khan is referred to on his HMV recordings as ‘Prof. Abdul Aziz Khan’, essentially conveying his perceived knowledge and authority, the very qualities typically associated with the *bīnkār*, only now in an idiom targeting the *bīn*’s new audience.

³⁶ Details of the record of Ustad Habib Ali Khan have been provided on a blog post (Tawfiq 2012).

³⁷ It is likely that Ustad Jamaluddin Khan, the *bīnkār* who taught Abdul Aziz Khan, was or claimed to be a disciple of the legendary *dhrupad* singer Ustad Behram Khan, certainly plausible given the latter lived and died at Jaipur (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 107) around the time when Jamaluddin Khan and his father Amiruddin Khan were also attached to the court of Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II (Bruguière 2010: 422).

Given their unique respective transformations to *bīnkār* status, the Patiala *bīnkārs* Bhai Mehboob Ali and Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan were evidently less subject to the strict sociomusical norms, etiquette and secrecy typically associated with the instrument. In a sense, they *had* to perform in public to prove themselves as *bīnkārs* and materialise their transformation, thus paradoxically forgoing the secrecy and privacy that was historically so formative of a *bīnkār*'s status. The ritual participation of these musicians in the *vīṇā pūjā* on Basant Panchami and Dussehra, however, also demonstrates the continuity of particular discursive aspects in relation to *bīn* and *bīnkār*, namely those of authority, knowledge, and esoteric power.

As the Mughal *bīnkār* became an increasingly rare breed by the early twentieth century, the bold and ambitious Maharaja Bhupinder Singh employed unconventional *bīnkārs* to ensure the continuity in cultural discourse of this instrument and bolster the perceived status of his musical retinue in the process. In his court, the *sitār* player (of *rabābī* birth) Bhai Mehboob Ali and the former *sāraṅgī* player Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan were accepted and revered as *bīnkārs*, a development that was of mutual benefit to patron and musicians alike. With much of their power having been circumscribed by the British government and with major political shifts on the horizon – in a political environment increasingly dictated by communalism and nationalism – the native princes became evermore reliant upon patronage, be it cultural, religious, or social-reformist, to maintain a sense of political relevance in the early twentieth century. Indeed, patronage of Punjabi (Ganda Singh 1997) and of the Singh Sabha religious reform movement (Ramusack 1978: 171) have been frequently cited as means by which the Maharaja of Patiala managed to politically overshadow the other Sikh princes of Punjab, eventually being awarded the epithet ‘Leader of the Sikhs’ by the British. I have attempted to illustrate how cultural domains such as music also constituted crucial arenas in which the politics of India’s native princes played out, the *bīn*, in this respect, serving not only as a musical instrument but a political instrument too.

2.3 PUNJABIYAT AND THE PATIALA *GĦARĀNĀ*

2.3.1 ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The transformation of musicians (specifically *sārangī* players) during the colonial period, is a theme also present in the history of the Patiala *gharānā* of *khayāl* vocalists. The Patiala *gharānā* is frequently counted among the major *gharānās* of *khayāl* vocal music to have emerged in the post-1857 period (Wade 1984). Just as Kapurthala came to establish their own instrumental *gharānā* with the arrival of Mir Nasir Ahmad, Patiala also emerged as an important centre for music patronage during the reign of Maharaja Narinder Singh (r.1845-1862), attracting eminent musicians of the erstwhile Mughal court that contributed toward the establishment of the Patiala *gharānā*. Maharaja Narinder Singh is remembered as a great patron of the arts (Kanwal 2017: 64) and was responsible for significant development of the city of Patiala itself, notable additions of his including the Moti Bagh palace, the Sheesh Mahal (Palace of Mirrors), the Ala Singh Samadh, built in memory of the founder of the Patiala dynasty, a rampart encircling the entire city, and a Darbar Hall inside the Qila Mubarak, the fort at the heart of the city (Verma 2004).

It is under his rule that Patiala *gharānā* of vocalists was established, a story at the centre of which lies a nineteenth-century musician known variously as Miyan Kalu or Bhai Kalu. The discrepancies in how he has been referenced alludes to the confusion and disagreement surrounding whether or not he was a *rabābī*. Numerous scholars, particularly those whose research has been India centric, have argued that he was a *rabābī* of Anandpur (Madan 1986: 116; Sharma 1993: 163; Wade 1984: 228; Kanwal 2017: 64; Paintal 1988).³⁸ However, during my fieldwork and interaction with the *rabābīs* and music scholars of Pakistan, I noticed how this aspect of his identity was either missing or actively contested.³⁹ The fact that there was another distinct Bhai Kalu (d.1947), who was indeed a *rabābī* of Anandpur, albeit in the early twentieth century, and the fact that Miyan

³⁸ According to Raja Mrigendra Singh (1929-2014), prince of the Patiala state, Bhai Kalu was a *rabābī* from Anandpur, whose father Miyan Ditta Khan was granted a position at the Patiala state by Maharaja Karam Singh (r.1823-1845) and whose ancestor Bhai Nand belonged to the village Chogavan near Amritsar, but moved to Anandpur around the turn of the eighteenth century to serve under Guru Gobind Singh (Kanwal 2017: 64).

³⁹ The descendants of Miyan Kalu assert that he was a metal worker of Wazirabad who had a passion for singing and ended up being employed at various courts (*Interview with Rustam Fateh Ali Khan* 2012). The *rabābīs* of Katri Bawa, Lahore, also reject that Miyan Kalu was a *rabābī*, asserting instead that one among his descendants married a *rabāban*, that is, a daughter of the *rabābī* community. Other scholars such as Ustad Parvez Paras (*Interview with author* on 7 October 2019) and Haq (1982) have also suggested that he was not a *rabābī*.

Kalu, the court musician of Patiala, likely performed *śabad kīrtan* – the work of the *rabābīs* – for his Sikh patron, have exacerbated the confusion on this matter.⁴⁰ Regardless of this, however, what is important to the present discussion is that he came to be known primarily as a Hindustani court musician of Patiala and *not* as a performer of *śabad kīrtan*. Going forward, for the sake of clarity and consistency, I shall thus refer to him as Miyan Kalu.

Despite the fact that his descendants vehemently contest this claim, Miyan Kalu has been widely cited as a *sāraṅgī* player who was closely associated, as accompanist and perhaps teacher, to the famous courtesan and female vocalist Gokhi Bai (Haq 1982; Sharma 1993: 163).⁴¹ It has been suggested that Miyan Kalu was perhaps one of the first *sāraṅgī* players, if not *the* first, to successfully make the transition to becoming a fully-fledged vocalist in the nineteenth century (Bor 1987: 114). Several notable observations have been made with regard to the colonial-era trend in which musicians increasingly transitioned away from the *sāraṅgī*, all of which seemingly relate to their low sociomusical status. Neuman (1990: 93) highlights how their subordinate rank relates to their being accompanists rather than soloists. Qureshi (2000: 819–20) identifies the long-established, specific and negative association of the *sāraṅgī* with the realm of the courtesan, the *ṭavāif* and the *kōṭhā*, an idea closely linked to the instrument's perceived feminine character – the accompanist's passive-submissive role (Bor 1987). In any case, among the consequences of being a *sāraṅgī* player was the fact that Miyan Kalu was not permitted to sit among the singers of the Patiala court (Madan 1986: 114). Whether for this reason or another, it is clear that he was set upon becoming a vocalist.

⁴⁰ In an interview with Bhai Baldeep Singh, on 18 October 2018, he recounted a story of Bhai Kalu of Anandpur who enjoyed the patronage of the *nāmdhārī* Sikh community of Sri Bhaini Sahib (Ludhiana district) in the early twentieth century and died at the time of Partition. Wade (1984, 228), whilst noting Miyan Kalu as a *rabābī* also footnotes this claim with an acknowledgement of the confusion around his identity, even suggesting the possibility of two separate individuals.

⁴¹ Fateh Ali Khan and his son Rustam Fateh Ali Khan have claimed he was always a vocalist and never played the *sāraṅgī* (*Interview with Rustam Fateh Ali Khan* 2012). According to Fateh Ali Khan, in a conference held at Patiala, it was apparently Miyan Kalu's vocal rendition of *rāg Bilāskhānī Tōḍī* which enamoured Gokhi Bai and initiated the pair's association, forcing them to leave Patiala (Adnan 2013: 6). In some accounts Gokhi Bai was also the second wife of Miyan Kalu (Sharma 1993: 163). It has been posited that the love between the two was the reason why the pair were forced to leave Patiala (Adnan 2013). Neuman (1990, 63) references the *bīnkār* Ustad Bande Ali Khan as a teacher of Gokhi Bai.

Whilst the exact circumstances under which it occurred vary, it is widely acknowledged that both Miyan Kalu and Gokhi Bai had studied under the legendary Ustad Behram Khan (Bor 1987: 114; Paintal 1988; Sharma 2006), a prominent figure in the Dagar family of *dhrupad* singers who in his long career was employed at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab, at the court of Bahadur Shah Zafar in Delhi, and also at the court of Maharaja Ram Singh II of Jaipur (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 107).⁴² Such an affiliation with one of the most eminent *dhrupad* singers of the nineteenth century was certainly an important factor in Miyan Kalu's transition to becoming a vocalist. Also significant in this regard was the other of Miyan Kalu's most noted teachers, Ustad Tanras Khan (1787-1884), the leading *khayāl* vocalist of Bahadur Shah Zafar's court and a prominent figure of the Delhi *gharānā* of vocalists. Wade (1984: 227) and Madan (1986: 113–14) have suggested that, amid the turmoil of 1857-58, Ustad Tanras Khan fled Delhi and sought refuge at Patiala for a period (perhaps until the death of Maharaja Narinder Singh in 1862). During his stay at Patiala, Miyan Kalu, as the *sāraṅgī* player tasked with accompanying him, was so impressed by his music that he became his disciple.⁴³ In yet another account, Ustad Tanras Khan is said to have visited Jaipur, where Miyan Kalu was staying at the time, and that the latter became his disciple there (Paintal 1988; Sharma 2006). In any case, the various accounts agree on the fact that Miyan Kalu first became a disciple of Ustad Behram Khan and then of Ustad Tanras Khan.

Importantly, in the context of the emergence of the Patiala *gharānā*, Miyan Kalu also deliberately set about training his son Ali Bakhsh and his son's closest friend (and perhaps cousin) Fateh Ali as vocalists, creating a crucial second generation of vocalists that would form the basis of the Patiala *gharānā*.⁴⁴ The training of the

⁴² In one account Behram Khan visits Patiala to perform and on hearing him, Miyan Kalu becomes his disciple, travelling to Jaipur to learn from him, developing an association with the courtesan Gokhi Bai whilst there (Paintal 1988; Sharma 2006). Another possibility, implied by oral histories of the Dagar family, is that both Miyan Kalu and Gokhi Bai were taught in Punjab during the early-twentieth-century period in which Behram Khan was under the employ of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (*Dhrupad* 1983).

⁴³ If correct, Ustad Tanras Khan's stay likely corresponded to the last five years of Maharaja Narinder Singh's life and reign (i.e. 1857-1862) after which Maharaja Mahinder Singh ascended to the throne as a minor and the thriving court scene at Patiala diminished for a period (Madan 1986: 117).

⁴⁴ According to Ustad Fateh Ali Khan (1935-2017), leading vocalist of the Patiala *gharānā* and descendant of Ali Bakhsh, Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali were cousins (Adnan 2013). The pair have also been described as *mūhḥbōlē bhāī* – so-called brothers with no blood relation (Khan 1959: 93;

young duo was a process in which Gokhi Bai is said to have had an equal if not greater role.⁴⁵ In accordance with the musical connections of Miyan Kalu and Gokhi Bai, the young duo of Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali subsequently went on to learn from various renowned musicians associated with different courts, imbibing a unique mix of north Indian vocal styles in the process. The pair are thus understood to have acquired training in *dhrupad* and the intricacies of *rāg* under Ustad Behram Khan (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 106; Sharma 1993: 163; Wade 1984: 228; Kanwal 2017: 68); *khayāl* under Ustad Tanras Khan of the Delhi *gharānā*, Ustad Haddu Khan of the Gwalior *gharānā*, Ustad Mubarak Ali Khan of Jaipur (Paintal 1988; Kanwal 2017: 68), and Ustad Bade Muhammad Khan at Jaipur/Rewa (Wade 1984: 228; Sinha 1996); as well as three years of training in the singing of *tarānā* under Ustad Bahadur Hussain Khan of Rampur (Sharma 2006; Malik 2009; Kanwal 2017: 68).⁴⁶ Special note has been made of the training imparted to Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali by Ustad Tanras Khan, this being acknowledged as perhaps the most significant and instrumental aspect of the pair's rise to fame (*Interview with Rustam Fateh Ali Khan* 2012; Malik 2009; Paintal 1988; Kanwal 2017: 68).⁴⁷ Over a period of training and travel said to have lasted between thirty and forty years (Kanwal 2017: 200; Madan 1986: 119), spread across various sites of north India's musical landscape, especially within Rajasthan, Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali thus emerged with the requisite musical pedigree to be counted among the leading vocalists of north India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and so the Patiala *gharānā* was born.

Having gained much renown under the alias Aliya-Fattu, Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali went on to be appointed as court musicians of Tonk, Rajasthan, by Nawab

Sharma 1993: 163). Fateh Ali is variously described to have been either the son of Miyan Shah Jan, a friend of Miyan Kalu (Paintal 1988), the son of a *tablā* player Mehboob Ali (Haq 1982), or the son of Kharayati Khan from a family of *naqārcīs* (*naqārā* players) (Kanwal 2017: 196,225).

⁴⁵ Gokhi Bai is said to have trained the two boys primarily (Malik 2009). This training, lasting twenty years, is said to have been undertaken in a basement so that nobody would be able to hear and copy their singing (Kanwal 2017: 68).

⁴⁶ *Tarānā* is a type of composition which, whilst bearing similarities with the *tilānā* of the south Indian music tradition (Nijenhuis 2010: 99), often combines Persian verse with rhythmic and percussive syllables, and is linked to *khayāl* both stylistically and by virtue of the fact that both genres were historically sung especially by *qavvāl* musicians (Qureshi 2010: 230; Brown 2010: 163).

⁴⁷ The Agra vocalist Vilayat Hussain Khan (1959: 93–94) suggests that Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali were made disciples of Ustad Tanras Khan at an important feast and gathering of musicians at Jaipur. This gathering has been described elsewhere as a *mahfil* at the home of the Jaipur *bīnkār* Rajab Ali Khan (Kumar 2007).

Ibrahim Ali Khan (r.1867-1930), most likely sometime between the 1880s and early 1890s, during which time Ali Bakhsh is said to have been the Nawab's *ustād* (Kanwal 2017: 68). The duo are subsequently understood to have returned to Patiala during the reign of Maharaja Rajinder Singh (r. 1876-1900) (Adnan 2013: 12), most likely in 1898 when the Maharaja reached maturity and was granted full ruling powers. When Maharaja Rajinder Singh died two years later, in 1900, the pair left Patiala again as the successor Maharaja Bhupinder Singh was still a minor. In the decade prior to Maharaja Bhupinder Singh's assumption of full ruling powers in 1910, Fateh Ali went to the court of Jammu where he died in 1909 (Paintal 1988) and Ali Bakhsh returned to Tonk, with an intermediary three year stay in Nepal between 1901 and 1904 (Madan 1986: 119). Ali Bakhsh finally return to Patiala in 1910, at the behest of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, where he remained until his death in 1925 (Sharma 1993: 163).

2.3.2 MUSICAL-MILITARY METAPHOR AND PUNJAB-HIND POLITICS

The specific cases of Kapurthala and Patiala reaffirm the widely acknowledged role of *gharānā* formation and the transition of musicians away from the *sāraṅgī* (towards vocal music and better respected instruments such as the *sitār* and *bīn*) in relation to the individual politics of musicians and patrons. However, I wish to highlight here how the formation of the Patiala *gharānā* of vocalists also bears significance with respect to the geopolitical relationship between Punjab and Hindustan, thus demonstrating the link between the Patiala *gharānā* and Punjabi regionalism. As we shall see, oral histories pertaining to Aliya-Fattu and their disciples are particularly revealing with regard to the place of the Patiala *gharānā*, and more broadly speaking the place of Punjab, within the realm of Hindustani music.

Today, Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali are frequently remembered and referred to by the titles of '*Jarnail*' (General) and '*Karnail*' (Colonel), respectively, reflecting a military idiom of authority that came to be used by the Patiala *gharānā* musicians to reflect their musical conquest of Hindustan. Like so many oral histories, there are differing narratives as to the precise circumstances under which the duo received these titles, the greatest consensus being that the titles were at least confirmed if not originally bestowed by the Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan of Tonk

(Khan 1959: 93–94; Paintal 1988; Deodhar 1993: 213; Wade 1984: 228).⁴⁸

According to one version, the Nawab of Tonk, himself a poet and musician, held a large *mahfil* in which he requested various musicians to give their best rendition of one of his own compositions whereby the duo triumphed and thus received these titles.⁴⁹ Rustam Fateh Ali Khan (2012), great grandson of Ali Bakhsh, on the other hand, has suggested that Lord Victor Bruce Elgin, Governor-General and Viceroy of India (1894-1899), was in fact the first to grant the title ‘General’ to Ali Bakhsh upon hearing him sing.⁵⁰ This title was contested by other musicians, on account of the Governor being culturally ill-equipped to judge Hindustani music, only to be later confirmed in a *mahfil* held by the Nawab of Tonk in the presence of many other musicians, where Fateh Ali was also granted the title ‘Colonel’. Yet another version suggests that it was Ali Bakhsh’s defeating of the renowned *sārangī* player Mirch Khan at Tonk which led to the Nawab awarding him the title (Deodhar 1993: 213).

Though the particulars of this history are thus difficult to be certain of, what the pervasiveness of this narrative in oral histories and some of its key aspects demonstrate is the significance of these titles to the musicians, both from within the *gharānā* and outside it. By virtue of military rank, it situates Fateh Ali ‘*Karnail*’ below Ali Bakhsh ‘*Jarnail*’, most likely because the latter was the son of Miyan Kalu and thus the direct inheritor of the tradition. More importantly, however, it conveys a general sense and recognition of the duo’s high sociomusical rank within the broader sphere of Hindustani music, having successfully conquered the places they visited and musicians they encountered. Whilst somewhat inconsistent across the various sources, the significance of the bestower of these titles is evident; whether it was the Nawab of Tonk or the Viceroy of India, both figures represented authority in colonial India.

⁴⁸ Some have suggested that Aliya-Fattu were granted the titles of ‘*Jarnail*’ and ‘*Karnail*’ at Patiala (Sharma 1993: 163) and others have suggested the court of Alwar (Madan 1986: 115).

⁴⁹ Kanwal (2017: 204) gives the composition lyrics as: *Satalēsar phuhār chālī jahām tāī uh sīrat lāgat pyārī. Sēj sajī chaṭakī gulāb kī pankharī tōhē jamāyī sārī. Candar cīr sajē mrig nainan atar kapūr lagāvat pyārī. Kab tak urak payī ‘Ibrāhīm’ ēlaj jāg rahī matavārī.*

⁵⁰ Rustam Fateh Ali Khan suggests that it was Lord James Bruce Elgin, Viceroy of India (1862-1863), who awarded the title to Ali Bakhsh in 1862. This is unlikely given that Ali Bakhsh would have still been a child at the time. It could indeed have been the former’s son, Lord Victor Bruce Elgin, however, given that he became Viceroy of India (1894-1899) at a time when Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali would have been vocalists in their prime.



FIGURE 6 USTAD FATEH ALI KHAN OF PATIALA.

Extending the military metaphor, Fateh Ali has also been specifically referred to as ‘*Tān Kapatān*’ (captain of *tāns*).⁵¹ This remarkable use of Western military nomenclature by Patiala’s musicians might be interpreted in a variety of ways. Having subjugated most of the subcontinent and successfully defended the attempted rebellion of 1857, the British army was perhaps the ultimate symbol of power and authority in the era of the Raj. Moreover, with Punjabis going on to serve in the British Indian army

at a ratio far greater than any other region in India, colonial Punjab is noted to have been significantly shaped by army recruitment policies of the colonial government (Mazumder 2003). As the language of the ruling classes, English was also increasingly in vogue among the growing Anglicised native elite, a group particularly clustered in urban centres and at the courts of native princes. It was in this environment that Western military titles were appropriated as an idiom through which the musical authority of the Patiala musicians came to be conveyed.

In addition to the idiomatic shift, the titles of Aliya-Fattu represent somewhat of a thematic shift away from the titles that were bestowed upon musicians during the Mughal period. The duo’s teacher Ustad Tanras Khan, for example, was so named by his patron, the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, his original name being Ustad Qutb Bakhsh. Whereas ‘*Tān Ras*’ was suggestive of the musician’s aesthetic ability to evoke emotion (*ras*) among the listeners through his singing of *tāns*, ‘*Jarnail*’, ‘*Karnail*’ and ‘*Tān Kapatān*’ evoke military authority, rank, and conquest. That is not to say that rank and authority were absent from earlier titles: eminent members of the Delhi *kalāvānt* lineage, most notably Sadarang and Adarang, for example, were endowed with the lofty title ‘*Śāh*’, suggestive of kingship, nobility and high social as opposed to military rank.

⁵¹ In *khayāl* vocal music, *tāns* are rapid, melismatic note-sequences.

It has been noted that the Mughal nobility were defined around notions of manhood in which “skill in the arts of war, and connoisseurship of the arts of pleasure” were *both* essential ingredients (Schofield 2015b: 407). Further reflecting the interaction of the musical and military spheres in Mughal society, classes of musicians such as the *dhādhīs* are known to have been employed in military campaigns to sing ballads of great warriors and beat war-drums (Ashok 1973: 14; Qureshi 2010: 231; Rose 1911a: 109; Neuman 2010: 257–58). Members of the military elite would have naturally also partaken in the pleasures of the courtly *mahfil*. There is also the inherent aesthetic-discursive overlap between the military and musical spheres as represented by *vīr ras* (warrior sentiment), a sentiment of battle and bravery that music is considered capable of evoking, according to Indic aesthetic theory. Whilst this musical-military intersection thus existed in Mughal society, as I shall demonstrate, the extent to which the Patiala musicians adopted a militarised idiom of rank and authority was unprecedented, reflecting a combination of their unique circumstances as Punjabi musicians seeking to assert their musical authority as vocalists.

Further to the military titles of Aliya-Fattu, there are a number of *khayāl* compositions of the Patiala *gharānā* in which the military metaphor is extended, specifically with reference to Fateh Ali Khan. His leading disciple and brother-in-law Ustad Alladiya Khan ‘Meharban’ dedicated these compositions to him, repeatedly referencing his warrior-like musical abilities.⁵² One such example, shown below, is a popular composition in *rāg Aḍāṇa*, itself a *rāg* associated with *vīr ras*:

*tāna kapatāna kahā gayō jaga mēm fatah alī khāna
jaba gāvē taba gunī rījhāvē, gunī bhayē ‘miharabāna’, tāna
balavanta kī aisī phirata hai jyoñ arjuna jī ke bāna*

Fateh Ali Khan has been called the captain of *tāns* in this world.
When he sings, the experts take pleasure and [his disciple]
‘Meharban’ has become skilled. The *tāns* of this warrior fly like
the arrows of Arjuna.

⁵² Alladiya Khan ‘Meharban’ was a vocalist of Amritsar (Paintal 1988: 196–98) and is not to be confused with the more well-known Alladiya Khan of Jaipur.

(Sharma 2006: 89)

Alluding to the skill of Fateh Ali Khan, the composer has cleverly interwoven virtuosic *tān* passages, normally an improvisatory element, into the composition itself, the words ‘*tāna*’ and ‘*Khāna*’ sung with rapid melisma.⁵³ In addition to the adaptation of Western military language in ‘*Tān Kapatān*’, Fateh Ali Khan is referred to as ‘*balvant*’ (warrior); invoking battle scenes of the Mahabharata epic by likening his *tāns* to the arrows of Arjuna.

The competitive, and at times perhaps even combative, aspect of interaction between Hindustani musicians has an extensive history, the occurrence of challenges between musicians being recorded from at least the Mughal period onwards. Members of the *Qavvāl Baccē gharānā*, for example, bear the oral history of the encounter between thirteenth-century musical legends Amir Khusrau and Nayak Gopal.⁵⁴ Similarly, the challenges between eminent musicians of the sixteenth century, including Nayak Baiju, Gopal Lal and Miyan Tansen, are recorded through the song-texts which they responded to one another with (Madan 1986: 73–74). It has been suggested that the element of competition between musicians was heightened by the fall of the Mughal court and the unification of India under British government during the period of the Raj. Whilst musicians have always been mobile, a politically unified territory and improved transport infrastructure meant that musicians could more freely embark on “extended sojourns” between the various native states (Neuman 1990: 18). Speaking of this period, Bakhle (2005: 142) notes:

Musicians on tour treated each performance as a test or duel in a larger struggle for reputation. One secured victory over an opponent by asking a question he could not answer, singing a raga he could not identify, engaging in vocal gymnastics that defied easy imitation, or by currying favor with the princely ruler.

⁵³ A recording of this composition by the vocalist Roshan Ara Begum is available on YouTube (Begum [n.d.]).

⁵⁴ Today residents of Karachi, Pakistan, Fareed Ayaz and Abu Muhammad of the *Qavvāl Baccē gharānā*, at a performance in New Delhi on November 3rd, 2006, presented the musical items said to have been sung by Nayak Gopal and Amir Khusrau in response to one another.

Weidman (2006) notes how the courtly music scene in south India during the nineteenth century was similarly competitive, a context in which the “titles bestowed on musicians were not mere honorifics but equivalent to costly presents, because such a title would forever call up the memory of ... victory” (Weidman 2006: 72). The titles ‘*Jarnail*’, ‘*Karnail*’ and ‘*Tān Kapatān*’ thus comprised a form of symbolic capital for Aliya-Fattu and the emergent Patiala *gharānā*, representing their successes and victories within north India’s highly competitive music circuit, just like the medals of a seasoned veteran soldier represent their military achievements. In fact, as widely attested to by images from the period, and seemingly also inspired by British military practices, many Hindustani vocalists of the colonial period, Fateh Ali Khan included (Figure 6), received military style medals from their patrons, typically upon emerging victorious from a particular musical competition or duel.

Capturing the itinerant tendency of musicians in this setting and glorifying the acclaim that Fateh Ali Khan garnered on his travels is another composition of Ustad Alladiya ‘Meharban’, set to *rāg Darbārī*:

nagara nagara phira gāyē hinda mēm, saba gunīyana kē āgē
sanamukha dhūma-dhāma sauñ
svara kā putalā fatah alī khāna, ‘miharabāna’ bai saba rājē
mōṭiyām hāra pahināyē mana māra nagara nagara phira gāyē

Wandering from city to city within *Hind*, Fateh Ali Khan has sung to much acclaim, in front of all the [musical] experts.

Fateh Ali Khan is the embodiment of musical notes;

‘Meharban’ [says]: the benevolent rulers, in their wonder, have presented him with pearl necklaces.

(Kanwal 2017: 69)

In this and yet another of Alladiya Khan’s compositions, set to *rāg Kēdārā*, Fateh Ali Khan’s acclaim is explicitly territorialised, his name and fame existing throughout ‘*Hind*’, a term which in colonial India was still likely to reference the Hindi-speaking Gangetic plains, a distinct geopolitical area to the south-east of Punjab, rather than the more inclusive idea of modern India:

hinda mēm nāma kīyō fatah alī khāna nē
tāna talavāra maidāna mēm chalanē lagī, kuchha faraka hī
nahīm janarala kapatāna mēm

Fateh Ali Khan has made a name throughout *Hind*.

The *tān*-sword has begun to slice through the battlefield. There is not even the slightest difference between the ‘General’ [Ali Bakhsh] and the ‘Captain’ [Fateh Ali].

(Kanwal 2017: 69)

The image of Fateh Ali Khan, the warrior, conquering ‘*Hind*’ with his weaponised *tāns* is a striking one. When sung by members of the *gharānā*, these compositions comprised an evocative means by which the authority of the Patiala *gharānā* could be asserted before patrons and musicians alike, representing a unique example of compositions as expressions of *gharānā* identity (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 211). In as much as they were composed, sung by and about Punjabi musicians and their triumph across ‘*Hind*’, they might also be interpreted as expressions of musical regionalism, an idea discussed in further detail below. Such composition also comprised a symbiotic expression of musical authority that was at once discursive and performative. This strategy, as it were, did not go unnoticed, leading Niaz Hussain Shami of the Sham Chaurasi *gharānā* to suggest that Alladiya Khan ‘Meharban’ was the “propaganda secretary” of the Patiala *gharānā* (Kanwal 2017: 68).

Whilst the extent to which the military allegory was taken up by musicians of the Patiala *gharānā* is remarkable, compositions of this nature were not without precedent. Not only have great musicians frequently been eulogised through the compositions of their disciples and contemporaries, but we also encounter musical-military metaphor in much earlier compositions. A *dhrupad* composition in *rāg Bhūp*, attributed to Haridas Dagur – an eminent seventeenth-century musician at the court of Jahangir and a seminal figure in the Dagar *gharānā* (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 99–100) – or perhaps one of his students, makes extensive use of such musical-military allegory:

*tāna taravāra tāra kī sipara liyē phirata gunī jahām tahām jīta
subhaṭa apanē anumāna jahām tahām jītata turata.
sura kamāna bōla bāna chūṭata jēha lāgata rījhata jēha sabhā
jānē vidyā dhara saba jurata.
saptaka kē tarakasha ucarata surata nējā asamāna vakhatara
bājū laya upaja nāi pankha bājū phurata
tahīm sabhā kē bīca larata haridāsa ḍāgura jō jō kē hētyōm
sunōm sughara suñāna añāna āgē phauñjēm surata.*

Taking his *tān*-sword and *tāl*-shield, the expert roams; wherever the great warrior is victorious, his reputation immediately prevails.

He shoots word-arrows from his bow of notes, causing injury; knowing the science [of music] the assembly all unite, taking pleasure from these wounds.

The quivering of the octave ascends, and the spear of concentration launches into the precarious sky, flanked by the wings of tempo and spontaneous improvisation.

Here, amid this assembly, Haridas Dagur battles with various types of weapons, before the enraptured armies of the beautiful, wise, and ignorant, who listen on.⁵⁵

Notably, where Fateh Ali Khan is figuratively portrayed as having conquered *Hind*, Haridas Dagur's victory is territorially disembedded – he conquered wherever (*jahām tahām*) he went. Another noticeable distinction is the narrow focus on Fateh Ali Khan's *tāns* whilst Haridas Dagur refers more broadly to the musical aspects of *tān* (melodic phrase), *tāl* (rhythmic cycle), *sur* (notes), *bōl* (words), *lay* (tempo), and *upaj* (spontaneous improvisation). The “vocal gymnastics” (Bakhle 2005: 142) of Aliya-Fattu – their singing of *tāns* at unmatched speed (Khan 1959: 93–94) – was evidently the primary means by which the pair triumphed in their competitive encounters with other musicians. Pt D. C. Vedi, a young vocalist at Patiala in the early twentieth century, is noted to have recalled that even in his old age Ali Bakhsh's *tāns* were “very clear, fast and

⁵⁵ The original song-text is included in the *Nād Vinōd Granth*, an image of which has been included in a blog post by *dhrupad* singer Ashish Sankrityayan (2013).

in tune” (Bor 1987: 114). Such was the fame of their *tāns* that, in their era, many musicians conceded that “these days, the *tān* resides in Patiala” (Kanwal 2017: 66).

Other musicians, from outside the *gharānā*, have also dedicated compositions to the *tān* singing ability of the duo. The following composition in *rāg Hamīr* was composed by Pt Ramkrishna Bua Vaze, a vocalist of the Gwalior *gharānā*:

nazara nahīm āvē tāna kī safara kō, jō lēvē lēvē.
gunīyana mēm jaba gāvē alīyā-fatū, kavana gunī? aisē guna
kahām pāvē?

One cannot see their fleeting *tāns*, as much as he may try.

When Aliya-Fattu sing amongst the [musical] experts, who is the greater expert? How does one attain such skill?

(*Patiala Gharana: Ali Bux-Fateh Ali* 2017; Sharma 2006: 89)

Referring to the pair by the informal alias Aliya-Fattu, rather than by their full names, and acknowledging the unattainability of their skill in the singing of *tāns*, this composition demonstrates an affectionate comradery in relation to the Patiala musicians, a humble recognition of their unmatched vocal prowess.

Another account relates to Mirch Khan, a renowned *sārangī* player of Tonk who could replicate the *tāns* of any singer and was so revered that his instrument was carried around on a palanquin (Bor 1987: 123). On the occasion of his accompanying Ali Bakhsh ‘*Jarnail*’, however, he could not keep up with his *tāns* and had to accept defeat after a six-hour sitting (Madan 1986: 119; Kanwal 2017).⁵⁶ In another anecdote, Fateh Ali Khan ‘*Karnail*’ was once singing *rāg Darbārī* at the *Rāg Sabhā* musical conference of Amritsar. During the *vilambit khayāl*, Pt Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, who was sitting in the audience, exclaimed that the *ustād* should take care with the way in which he was singing the *gandhār* and *dhaivat*, the third and sixth notes of the scale, both of which are subject to a

⁵⁶ On the occasion of defeat, Mirch Khan is said to have admitted to the Nawab of Tonk, “Your majesty, I have played the *sārangī* with ‘Jarnail’ Sahib’s *ustād*, Miyan Tanras Khan Sahib, for seventeen years. It is regrettable that today I could not keep up with him. If I play one *tān*, he drops seven more *tāns* on me. I would be ready to accompany any singer, even were he to descend from the heavens, but sadly today I could not manage...” (Kanwal 2017: 67).

very particular intonation and use of *āndōlan* – a wavy modulation of pitch – in *rāg Darbārī*. After several such interjections by Paluskar, Fateh Ali Khan began the *drut* or fast composition, paving the way for his famed *tāns*. He then countered Paluskar, saying, “*Pandit jī*, try and catch if I omit a *gandhār* or *dhaivat* now”, to which Paluskar responded, “*Khān Śāhib*, now nobody has the courage to try and catch this”.⁵⁷ Thus, whilst being challenged on the intricacies of *rāg* by a prominent exponent of the Gwalior *gharānā*, Fateh Ali Khan asserted his authority through his speed and prowess in the fast section of the performance, causing Paluskar to accept his superiority in this regard.

Perhaps herein lies the success of the Patiala duo. Whereas the subtle intricacies of *rāg* can be argued over, the virtuosity and speed of a musician’s *tāns* were objectively comparable to those of another. They offered an irrefutable measure by which superiority and authority could be asserted, compounded, in colonial context, by the symbolic articulation of this superiority through a Western military idiom. With the lingering association of Ali Bakhsh’s father Miyan Kalu having been a *sārāngī* player, *tāns* constituted a vocal weapon with which Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali could conquer their rivals. Given that notions of feuding, honour, and masculinity have been suggested to be deeply rooted in Punjabi rural culture (Dhavan 2011: 147), it is tempting to interpret the Patiala musicians’ focus on a military idiom of authority based on their simply being Punjabi. Having been noted to influence the musical discourse of other musicians in the region, the well-documented history of Sikh military tradition (Madra and Singh 1999) may also be considered an influence on the emergence of the musical-military discourse of the Patiala *gharānā* musicians.⁵⁸ In any case, it is worth

⁵⁷ The anecdote pertaining to Fateh Ali Khan and V. D. Paluskar was recounted to me by Ustad Parvez Paras, during interview on 7 October 2019, which he had heard from his music teacher Ustad Chhote Ghulam Ali Khan.

⁵⁸ The *khaṇḍā* (double-edged sword), an important symbol in Sikh military tradition, for example, has been etymologically linked to the *khaṇḍērī* (i.e. *khaṇḍār*) *bānī* style of *dhrupad* singing in the discourse of certain Talwandi *gharānā* musicians (Basra 1996: 388). The Sikh *dhādhī* tradition is also noted to reflect the ‘martial character’ of the ‘Sikh religious aesthetic’ that developed in response to the repeated need of the Sikh community to defend themselves from outside forces throughout their history (Nijhawan 2006: 55).

noting that Hindustani musicians of Punjab today continue to be linked to the tendency to challenge other musicians.⁵⁹

Acknowledging the above influences, I suggest that the historical geopolitical context, out of which the Patiala *gharānā* emerged, was a particularly important factor in the emergence of this discourse. Only less than a decade prior to the attempted rebellion of 1857 was the Punjab region annexed by the East India Company, following the so-called ‘Anglo-Sikh’ wars (1846-1849). In effect, this moment symbolised a significant loss of political independence for the Punjab as a region. The era of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, nostalgically invoked by many Punjabis today, had marked the first time in 800 years that vast swathes of the Punjab region had come under the rule of a Punjabi. For many Punjabis, therefore, the ‘Anglo-Sikh’ wars, in fact, represented a war between two geopolitical entities, Punjab and Hindustan. The revealingly titled *Jaṅg Hind-Pañjāb (The Hind-Punjab War)* – the verses penned by a Punjabi soldier, Shah Muhammad, who fought in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh – offer a unique insight into the mind and sentiment of Punjabis at this time (Mir 2010: 135). Despite being subsequently integrated into the British Indian territories following defeat, Mir also highlights how the Punjab States Agency – the princely states of the region – still maintained a distinct political identity within the hierarchy of the colonial administration. With several Punjabi princes, including Kapurthala and Patiala, serving as allies to the British in 1857-58, the failed rebellion led to a further alienation of Punjab from Hindustan despite now being theoretically unified under British rule. The subsequent predominance of Punjabi recruitment into the British army has also been noted to reflect upon the relative lack of Indian nationalist sentiment among Punjabis (Mazumder 2003).

I suggest that we might, therefore, interpret the military discourse of the Patiala musicians through the lens of Punjabi regionalism. Following the ‘Hind-Punjab’ war, Punjab’s annexation to the British Indian territories, the subsequent allegiance of Punjabis to the British during the 1857 rebellion, and the unmatched

⁵⁹ The grandson of Ali Bakhsh ‘*Jarnail*’ and leading representative of the Patiala *gharānā* in the late twentieth century, also named Ustad Fateh Ali Khan, issues an open challenge during a performance, available on YouTube (*Amrik Singh Of Chase Music Presents Ustad Fateh Ali Khan At The Asian School Of Music Manchester UK* [n.d.]). Similarly, Ustad Tafu Khan, *tablā* player of the Punjab *gharānā*, issues a challenge to other *tablā* players to match his speed in a video recording also available on YouTube (*Ustad Tafu Khan of Punjab Gharana* [n.d.]).

serving of Punjabis in the British Indian army, the perceived musical conquest of Hindustan by the Punjabi musicians of Patiala might be seen as a twofold act of subversion, being as much an assertion of regional musical superiority as it was an assertion of the Patiala *gharānā*'s status as vocalists and not mere *sāraṅgī* accompanists. The compositions of Alladiya Khan 'Mehtarban' and other narratives surrounding Aliya-Fattu's musical triumphs, presented herein, all position the Punjabi musicians as having conquered in some form or other the musicians of a geopolitically distinct notion of Hindustan.

The acclaim achieved by the Patiala-*gharānā* founders across Hindustan, and more importantly its relevance with respect to Punjabi regionalist sentiment, is arguably what spurred the Patiala *gharānā* on to eventually dominate as leading representatives of Hindustani vocal music within Punjab, something which Kapuria (2018: 274) highlights and which I discuss further below. With an unequivocal supremacy in their singing of *tāns* and a discourse of authority to accompany it – one expressed in a musical-military idiom very much rooted to the times out of which it emerged – Aliya-Fattu established the honour of Punjabi musicians in the broader social sphere of Hindustani music. As such, other Punjabi musicians increasingly sought to associate themselves with the Patiala *gharānā* and so it was that many local *gharānās*, courtesan singers, and *rabābīs* within Punjab came to be students of the Patiala *gharānā* (see Appendix A).

2.3.3 GENDER AND 'PUNJABI' VOCAL STYLE

In due course, the vocal style associated with the Patiala *gharānā* musicians increasingly came to be characterised as the 'Punjabi' vocal style, an idea which warrants further exploration in relation to conceptions of Punjabinat. History is replete with reference to the kind of perceptions held by non-Punjabi musicians with respect to Aliya-Fattu and Punjabi musicians more generally, evidencing a stylistic and cultural divide that echoed the aforementioned political divide. Kapuria (2018: 235) notes the following anecdote of Ustad Baqar Hussain, a descendant of the Patiala *gharānā* through Nabi Bakhsh, the son-in-law of Miyan Kalu:

...when the two brothers [Aliya-Fattu] were accepted as disciples of the great Tanras Khan after a *baiṭhak* in Jaipur, the

prominent Jaipur musicians were enraged, and said, ‘take away the *tanpurās* of these Punjabis.’ An elite notable of Jaipur, Haafis Babbar intervened, saying that any of the Jaipur musicians was welcome to defeat the Punjabis if they could sing better than them. At this, there was silence, for no musician dared to truly challenge Aliya-Fattu’s vocal prowess.

Coloured by rivalry and perhaps jealousy, use of the term ‘Punjabi’ here, by the musicians of Jaipur, appears somewhat denigrating in its connotation. It posits Aliya-Fattu as a seemingly unentitled ‘other’ within the realm of Hindustani music. In fact, in the post-1857 era, one increasingly encounters the appellation ‘Punjabi’ attached to the names of Punjabi musicians when referenced by non-Punjabi musicians.⁶⁰ In the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *tazkirā* literature, place names – typically villages, towns and cities – were used to distinguish musicians, via the use of suffixes such as ‘Gwaliori’, ‘Lahori’, ‘Guj(a)rati’ etc. (Ahmad 1984: 154).⁶¹ Reflecting the sense of Punjab’s identity as an independent geopolitical region, something that was clearly evidenced by the mid-eighteenth century but strengthened further in the nineteenth century under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Punjab-Hind politics of 1857-58 as outlined above, the suffix ‘Punjabi’ appears to have gained currency, with reference to musicians, by the mid-nineteenth century, coming to replace the older, typically city-specific, locative suffixes such as ‘Lahori’.⁶² Whilst having obvious political, territorial, and linguistic connotations, the term ‘Punjabi’, as I shall demonstrate, had also accrued cultural – more specifically, musical-stylistic – significance to non-Punjabi musicians.

⁶⁰ The Agra vocalist Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan refers to Pyare Khan ‘Punjabi’ (Khan 1959: 157) and Farid Khan ‘Punjabi’ (Khan 1959: 161) in his biographical entries on various musicians. Similarly, Banne Khan, a Punjabi musician from the lesser known Nowshera Nangli *gharānā*, became a disciple of Ustad Haddu and Hassu Khan of Gwalior, who was nicknamed ‘*Pañjābī dhaggā*’ (Punjabi ox) by his *ustāds* Haddu and Hassu Khan of Gwalior. Ustad Roshan Abbas Khan, descendant of Banne Khan, in an interview on 2 April 2019, explained how on one occasion at Gwalior, Banne Khan had stood in for an ox that had died in the heat while pulling a cart of children.

⁶¹ The suffix attached to the name of Bakht Khan Gujrati, a disciple of Bilas Khan, in Faqirullah’s *Rāg Darpan* (Faqirullah 1996: 198–99) is potentially ambiguous. Whilst most likely referring to the region Gujarat, it could also theoretically refer to the town of Gujrat in western Punjab given that the latter is situated on the route frequently taken by the Mughals from the regional capital of Lahore to Kashmir during the hot Summer months (Bhatt 2017).

⁶² The notion of a geopolitically distinct Punjab, in relation to the Gangetic plains of Hind, was evidently well established in the eighteenth century as evidenced by Waris Shah’s use of the two terms in the fifty-sixth verse of his famous *Hīr* (1986: 27), written in 1766.

In the realm of Hindustani music, Punjabi musicians, Aliya-Fattu included, have been noted for a certain performative exuberance. On a visit to Baroda in 1894, Aliya-Fattu's "spectacular" performative style evidently struck the local musicians as somewhat inappropriate:

While singing, they tugged at the carpet on which they were sitting cross-legged, ground the heels of their feet together while leaning back with arms outstretched, hurred their bodies from side to side, gesticulated wildly, and emphasized the *sam* with a loud clap. Baroda musicians suggested to them that they significantly reduce if not altogether delete the flamboyant content when singing for the ruler.

(Bakhle 2005: 221)

The Agra *gharānā* vocalist Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan also makes several revealing statements in relation to the perceived idiosyncrasies of Punjabi musicians. In one anecdote, an anonymous musician who visited the court of Maharaja Ram Singh (r.1835-1881) of Jaipur, was terribly out of tune and equally hopeless with regard to rhythm, is remembered not by name but for being Punjabi. Once again, insinuating the musical ineptitude and outward flamboyance of Punjabi musicians, the Maharaja is said to have ordered an award of five hundred rupees for his spectacular clothes and a mere five cents (*takā*) for his singing. Although this unnamed musician is noted to have redeemed his honour, returning after three years of hard work to prove his musical ability, the fact remains that Punjabi musicians tend to be associated with showmanship rather than serious music (Khan 1959: 37–38).

In another biographical entry, Vilayat Hussain Khan goes on to describe the singing of Ali Bakhsh's nephew Miyan Jan Khan as both "enjoyable" (*mazēdār*) and "open" (*khulā*), the inference being that these qualities were generally absent among other Punjabi singers (Khan 1959: 94). The inability to sing a good, open *ākār* (i.e. 'ā' sound) is certainly a critique that was repeatedly levelled against Punjabi vocalists.⁶³ Incidentally, to counter such critique, it appears as though

⁶³ The vocalist Pyar(e) Khan of Nowshera Nangli, a disciple of the Patiala *gharānā* (see Appendix A), was also taunted for not being able to sing *ākār* properly (Deodhar 1993: 212).

subsequent representatives of the Patiala *gharānā* may have consciously developed an exaggerated *ākār* such that the Patiala vocal style is today, on the contrary, renowned for its openness.⁶⁴ Whilst we might only speculate as to why the singing of Punjabi musicians was not enjoyable to non-Punjabi musicians – perhaps due to a tendency to focus on technical virtuosity – the perceived lack of openness is likely linked to the influence of the Punjabi language and its pronunciation; the open ‘*ā*’ vowel in Hindi/Urdu vocabulary is frequently transformed to the more abrupt and closed sounding ‘*a*’ in Punjabi.⁶⁵ Whilst there were evidently exceptions, a stylistic stereotype of Punjabi vocalists thus emerges from the accounts of non-Punjabi musicians, defined most notably by the perceived closedness of pronunciation, outward flamboyance, and perhaps also a tendency to focus singly on the aspect of *tāns* and virtuosity.

In light of such perceptions, Aliya-Fattu’s fame and reputation takes on yet further significance. As Punjabi musicians with a flamboyant and *tān*-centric style, they simultaneously contributed to the stereotypes of Punjabi musicians whilst also establishing the honour of Punjabi musicians through the recognition of their unmatched abilities, most frequently conveyed by their military titles. Though they were disapproving of the Punjabi musicians’ style, the Baroda musicians were also hesitant to sing after the duo, even under the Maharaja’s orders – a mark of the musicians’ respect for the ability of the duo (Bakhle 2005: 221).

Turning to Punjabis’ reflexive perspective on the Patiala *gharānā*, and Punjabi vocal style more generally, perhaps unsurprisingly, we encounter a palpable sense of pride and superiority. A notable *rabābī* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was Bhai Rura (also known as Ustad Turab Ali Khan), disciple of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan ‘*Karnail*’ and idol of the famous twentieth-century

⁶⁴ Patiala-*gharānā* representative Parveen Sultana states in an interview with Pt Arvind Parikh, “In the Patiala *gharānā*, they give more importance to the *ākār*, full *ākār*.” (20th Session - Special Features of Patiala and Kirana Gharanas 2017). Similarly, in a video demonstration, Shantanu Bhattacharya, also a current representative of the Patiala *gharānā*, says, “In the Patiala style, the *rāg* is attempted with an open-mouth *ākār*” (Shantanu Bhattacharyya Illustrates Patiala Gharana Style 1stPart [n.d.]).

⁶⁵ Examples of the shortening or closing of the ‘*ā*’ vowel from Hindi/Urdu to Punjabi include: *ālāp* as *alāp*, *kām* (work) as *kamm*, *āj* (today) as *ajj*, etc.

vocalist Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan.⁶⁶ Bhai Rura’s grandson, Kaleem Hussain, in an interview, was very particular in outlining Bhai Rura’s connection to the Patiala *gharānā*, noting that he had first learnt from the noted Ustad Wazir Khan of Rampur and *then* from Ustad Fateh Ali Khan of Patiala.⁶⁷ Kaleem Hussain’s accompanying explanation stresses the notion that Bhai Rura became a disciple of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan in the quest for a “better” *ustād*. Though Wazir Khan was a legendary musician in his own right, a *bīnkār* linked to the *kalāvants* of the Mughal court, within Punjab this association was evidently less consequential than an association with the *ustāds* of the Patiala *gharānā*.



FIGURE 7 BHAIRURA. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CMRC, RADIO PAKISTAN.

Along similar lines, Tufail Farooqi (1916-1988), noted music director and composer of the Pakistani film industry (also of *rabābī* descent), claims that Bhai Rura was a true representative of the vocal style (*gāyaktī*) of Punjab. He suggests, “One does not learn to sing by leaving Punjab. There is nothing like Punjab. Bhai Rura is one who truly knows the singing style (*gāyaktī*) of Punjab” (Saqib 2013: 39).⁶⁸ Speaking as a proud Punjabi, Farooqi thus suggests that it was the Punjabi vocal style that distinguished great musicians like Bhai Rura.

Ironically, Bhai Rura’s teacher, Fateh Ali Khan, had done precisely what Farooqi seemingly disapproved of – he had learnt music outside of Punjab. It might, in fact, be argued that the fame and success of the Patiala *gharānā* founders outside of Punjab, to an extent, rested upon their association with well-established, non- Punjabi musicians (Behram Khan, Tanras Khan, Haddu-Hassu Khan etc.) of the courts of Hindustan (Gwalior, Jaipur, and Delhi). Within Punjab, however, the perceived greatness of the Patiala *gharānā* musicians was linked to their Punjabi-ness. The name and fame they acquired

⁶⁶ In an interview with Kaleem Hussain on 22 September 2019, he quotes Bade Ghulam Ali Khan as saying “You have heard me... However melodious I may be, think of them as *mīṭhā śarbat* (a sweet drink) and me as *phīkā śarbat* (a tasteless drink) in front of them. They were great personalities. I became who I am as a result of listening to them”.

⁶⁷ Interview with Kaleem Hussain on 22 September 2019.

⁶⁸ “*Pañjābōm bāhir jākē sikhānā nā gānā, Pañjāb vargā nāhīm. Pañjāb dī gāyaktī tē Bhāi Rūrē nūm āundī ē*” (Saqib 2013: 39).

beyond Punjab, rather than the training they acquired outside of Punjab, was thus discursively foregrounded by Punjabi musicians and disciples of the *gharānā*.



FIGURE 8 BHAI LAL MUHAMMAD.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CMRC,

Along a similar vein, Farooqi also bemoans the non-Punjabi singing style of another eminent vocalist of the *rabābī* community, Bhai Lal Muhammad. Born in Amritsar but a resident of Lahore for the last fifteen years of his life following Partition, Bhai Lal Muhammad (1887-1962) (Figure 8) was an eminent disciple of Pt Bhaskar Bua Bakhle and primarily identified with the Gwalior *gharānā*.⁶⁹ Farooqi disparagingly describes Bhai Lal's singing as being of the "Hindu type" (*Hindū tāip*) (Saqib 2013: 39). Echoing this sentiment, Bhai Lal's

teacher's singing style has also been similarly described by another Punjabi musician. On Bhaskar Bua Bakhle's first visit to Punjab, a local Punjabi musician Mubarak Ali was advised by his father Gaman Khan to take the opportunity to listen to one of Hindustan's greatest musicians. Mubarak Ali exclaimed, "A Hindu pandit and that too from Maharashtra! And our father says he is going to show us what real music is. I think the old man is not in his senses" (Deodhar 1993: 100).

In spite of an extensive and complex history of Hindu musicians serving Muslim patrons and vice versa, the twentieth century saw religious communalism and Hindu-Nationalist ideology increasingly encroach upon the sphere of Hindustani music at the institutional level (Subramanian 2006; Katz 2012). Paluskar's work has been noted as a particularly formative influence in this regard (Bakhle 2005: 173). At first glance and in postcolonial context, it may be tempting, therefore, to focus on the aspect of religious difference in the comments of Tufail Farooqi and Mubarak Ali. Doing so, however, would neglect the inherent regionalist (Punjab-Hind) tension that is also plainly evident. Speaking as Punjabis, their use of the

⁶⁹ Bhai Lal's father, Ata Muhammad, was a disciple of Ustad Banne Khan, another Punjabi musician who was a leading disciple of Ustad Haddu Khan of the Gwalior *gharānā*. Bhai Lal himself was a disciple of Pt Bhaskar Bua Bakhle, who also imbibed the Gwalior style among others (Wade 1984: 38; Khan 1959: 157).

term ‘Hindu’ is not strictly in the normative religious sense but rather in a broader geopolitical sense, endowing the singing style of Bhaskar Bua Bakhle and his Muslim disciple Bhai Lal Muhammad with the connotation of a Hindustani (as opposed to Hindu) ‘other’. This would echo the use of the term ‘*Hind*’ in the Patiala *gharānā* compositions of Alladiya Khan ‘Mehtarban’, examined earlier.

Scholars have highlighted how the politics of religion and nation became deeply intertwined in the late colonial period, ultimately resulting in the Hindu-India and Muslim-Pakistan divide (Dalmia 1997; Chatterjee 1995). Punjab was embroiled in the process of Partition by virtue of the simple fact that it was the only Muslim-majority region in British India, thus comprising a major part of what went on to become the Islamic republic of Pakistan. Long before the communalist ideologies of the colonial period, before British and even Muslim rule on the subcontinent, however, it has been highlighted that the people, culture and geography of the region of the Indus valley and its tributaries, part of which we now call Punjab, maintained inherently distinct characteristics from those of the Gangetic plains (Ahsan 1996). The branding of a Punjabi Muslim musician’s singing as ‘Hindu’ in character, therefore, was because it did not represent the regional musical identity – the Punjabi vocal archetype – as championed by musicians of the Patiala *gharānā*.

In relation to the idea of Punjabiyaat, we thus clearly detect a Punjabi identity rooted not in language or geography – Bhai Lal Muhammad was indeed Punjabi in these respects – but rather in musical style. Regarding the mobilisation of *bhaṅgrā* music/dance in the production of a postcolonial Punjabi identity that was also culture- rather than language- or geography-centric, Schreffler also notes that “Being ‘from’ Punjab or living in Punjab is not necessarily the minimum requisite for being ‘Punjabi’”(2014: 65).

What I emphasise here, therefore, is that there was indeed a distinct Punjabi musical identity long before the mobilisation of *bhaṅgrā*, one very clearly evidenced in the sphere of Hindustani music during the colonial period and that was dialogically evolving in relation to an established but also evolving sense of Punjabi geopolitical identity. Punjabi musical identity thus has a more extensive history, influenced in the postcolonial context by a transnational Punjabi identity

politics, but also during the colonial period by the establishment of the Patiala *gharānā* and in relation to the Punjab-Hind geopolitics that resulted from the annexation of Punjab to the British Indian territories and the Punjabi aristocracy's lack of support for the attempted rebellion of 1857-58. Despite the markers of Punjabi musical identity being radically transformed with shifts in the social landscape over the twentieth century, the fact remains that music has continually served as an important domain for the production and negotiation of Punjabiyaṭ over this time period.

Similar examples of regional musical identity are also to be found within South Asia, for example, in the particular form of 'classical' music associated with the Odisha region, which conforms neither to the Hindustani nor the Carnatic system and yet claims to be commensurate with both (Dennen 2010). Dennen notes how Odishi music tradition is distinguished by its own instruments (the *mardala* drum), a localised musical lexicon with its own *rāg* and *tāl* names, and its own dance genre (Odissi).⁷⁰ Whilst not distinct enough from Hindustani music to be considered a "third stream" of 'classical' music, to the extent that Odishi music perhaps warrants, the localised form of Hindustani music in Punjab was nevertheless distinguished on similar grounds, that is, by unique instruments, local *rāgs* (Tandon 2003) and *tāls* (e.g. Punjabi *ṭhēkā*), a localised musical lexicon (discussed briefly in Chapter Three), and, pertinent to the present discussion, a local vocal style.⁷¹

Whilst we have noted some of the performative traits of Punjabi musicians, as observed by outsiders, the question remains as to what in particular characterised the Punjabi vocal style, as represented by the musicians of Patiala. One frequently acknowledged characteristic in relation to the Patiala style is the greater use of "florid" ornamentation – specifically *murkīs*, *khaṭkās*, *harkats*, and *zamzamā tāns* – within their singing (Wade 1984: 238; Alaghband-Zadeh 2013: 138; Magriel and du Perron 2013: 21).⁷² This feature is said to reflect the influence of both

⁷⁰ Odissi was 'recognised' as a distinct form of dance following a revival in the 1950s. As such, it has also been considered in terms of an 'invented tradition' (Kar 2013: 6–8).

⁷¹ The *tablā-pakhāvaj* hybrid known variously as *jōrī* or *āṭēvālā tablā* was a speciality of the Punjab *gharānā* as discussed by Kippen (2010: 461) and Stewart (1974: 9–10).

⁷² In an interview with Arvind Parikh, renowned vocalist Parveen Sultana (2017) identifies the Patiala and indeed Punjabi vocal style by its use of specific ornaments, namely *murkīs*, *khaṭkās*, and *zamzamā tāns*.

local genres – specifically *ṭappā* and *kāft* – as well as the *ṭhumrī* and *ḡazal* styles of courtesan singers.⁷³ Whilst the singing of *tāns* is generally understood to have entered *khayāl* from *qavvālī*-related genres, and through Bade Muhammad Khan of the *Qavvāl Baccē gharānā* in particular (Brown 2010: 164–65), it has also been suggested that the specific rapid *tāns* found in *ṭappā* also influenced the singing of *tāns* within *khayāl* (Nijenhuis 2010: 104). In addition to the influence of regional genres, the influence of the highly ornamented courtesan vocal style seemingly stems from the *gharānā*'s founders being trained by a former *sārangī* player and a courtesan in Miyan Kalu and Gokhi Bai respectively. Subsequent representatives of the *gharānā* also continued to associate with courtesan singers both as accompanists and as teachers (Wade 1984: 227–32) (see Appendix A).

The incorporation of *ṭhumrī* style by the Patiala *gharānā* musicians has been the cause of some controversy among Hindustani musicians and music aficionados. In her study of *ṭhumrī*, Alaghband-Zadeh (2013: 189) notes how:

This use of florid, *murkī*-like ornamentation in *khyāl* renders its performers vulnerable to criticism, often formulated in gendered terms. In his book, *The Lost World of Hindustani Music*, for example, the music connoisseur Kumar Prasad Mukherji writes disparagingly of those *khyāl* singers whose use of ornamentation displays the influence of *ṭhumrī* and *ghazal*. He writes, “Khayal gayaki, of course, has been changing, as it must over the years, but my elders were lucky to have missed the invasion of Punjabi harkats and murkees from the bazaars of Lahore and Peshawar, reserved earlier for their brand of thumris and ghazals by petty tawayefs” (Mukherji 2006: 68). Here, “harkats and murkees” are explicitly associated not only with a Punjabi style, with “thumris and ghazals” and with female performers but specifically with disreputable, “petty” courtesans who dwell in “bazaars”.

⁷³ Whilst *ṭappā* compositions are associated with the Punjab and the Punjabi language (Nijenhuis 2010: 104), it is important to note that the development of the genre was also transregional, with a significant contribution attributed to Shori Miyan during his time in Lucknow (Schofield 2017: 190).

Mukherji thus ascribes the ornaments a Punjabi identity, evidently critical of the blurring of styles between the courtesans and *khayāl* singers in the region. As a Bengali, he is almost certainly referencing the famous disciple of the Patiala *gharānā*, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (1902-1968), who had settled in Calcutta toward the end of his life and earned much popularity in the city during his life. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan hailed from a family of musicians from the Punjabi town of Kasur, but his father Ali Bakhsh (not to be confused with Ali Bakhsh ‘*Jarnail*’) and uncle Miran Bakhsh (more commonly known as Kale Khan) (1872-1915) had become disciples of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan ‘*Karnail*’ of the Patiala *gharānā*, a connection which he himself strengthened by learning from Fateh Ali Khan’s son Ashiq Ali Khan (Wade 1984: 231; Paintal 1988: 196).⁷⁴ Bade Ghulam Ali Khan plainly acknowledges his Punjabi musical identity: “I am a Punjabi and people think of me as a musician who is adept at *harkats* of Punjabi style” (Deodhar 1993: 253).

Pt D. C. Vedi, a Punjabi vocalist who served at the court of Patiala in his youth, specifically recalled that Ustad Fateh Ali Khan ‘*Karnail*’ was adept at “lighter” forms of music and that, consequently, the influence can be found in his disciples of Kasur (Bor 1987: 114). Fateh Ali Khan’s son, Ashiq Ali Khan (d.1952), is also said to be responsible for the development of a Punjabi *ang* (branch) of *ṭhumrī*, known as ‘*vaḍār*’, by infusing elements from the regional singing style of the *kāfi* genre (Madan 1986: 121).⁷⁵ Having learnt from Ashiq Ali Khan, it was Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and his brother Barkat Ali Khan who were most well-known for popularising the Punjabi *ang* of *ṭhumrī* throughout India (Alaghband-Zadeh 2013: 138).

If the *bhaṅgrā*-centric Punjabi musical identity of the postcolonial period has been linked to a cultural discourse that posits the Punjab as an arena that is “qualitatively rustic, loud and brash, and by implication, ‘low’” (Kapuria 2015: 78), then in this earlier musical identity, at least in the style associated with the region’s *khayāl* vocalists, we encounter a quite different picture. As Alaghband-Zadeh (2013: 193) notes, *ṭhumrī* style is frequently interpreted from a

⁷⁴ Deodhar (1993: 255) suggests that Ali Bakhsh and Kale Khan of Kasur had initially studied under Miyan Kalu whilst at the Tonk state.

⁷⁵ The Punjabi *ang* of *ṭhumrī* is often associated to the brothers Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Barkat Ali Khan.

gendered perspective, its influence on the Patiala vocal style thus imbuing it with a ‘feminine’ association that defies the stereotypical associations of ‘masculinity’ in relation to Punjabi culture. Moreover, contrary to the rustic character associated with *bhaṅgrā*, the *ṭavāifs* and their music, and by extension aspects of the Patiala vocal style, were associated with “immaculate refinement” (Sampath 2010: 19).

As the favoured instrument of accompaniment within the courtesan music tradition, the *sāraṅgī* itself is not only gendered in the feminine but described in the image of the feminine body (Qureshi 2000: 820). In fact, at least partly for this reason, the *sāraṅgī* was only hesitantly adopted as an accompaniment instrument by male *khayāl* singers relatively late on:

Because of its musical and social associations and its tonal quality, [the *sarangi*] was not readily adopted into the ensemble by some of the leading male *khyaliyas*. Dilip Chandra Vedi recalled (Interview: 1978) that the *sarangi* was used for *thumri* and by female singers 'in the early days', and that around 1925 it became acceptable for *khyal*. Sumati Mutatkar of Delhi University also recalled (Interview: 1978) hearing that in the early decades of this century the *sarangi* was used to accompany only women singers of *khyal* and *thumri*, and that widespread *sarangi* accompaniment started in the 1930s or so.

(Wade 1984: 33)

In another illustrative narrative pertaining to the nineteenth century, Haider Bakhsh, the renowned *sāraṅgī* player of Panipat, went to Gwalior to challenge Ustad Haddu and Hassu Khan there. “After the recital was over, Haddu Khan exclaimed: ‘All the others play sarangi, but you play saranga. You are the first one who has brought honour to this instrument’” (Bor 1987: 122). By renaming the instrument in the masculine (*sāraṅgā*), Haddu Khan was acknowledging the perceived masculinity of Haider Bakhsh’s playing, thus distinguishing it from the ‘feminine’ courtesan-influenced style of other *sāraṅgī* players. Haddu Khan’s statement also reveals the link between masculinity and honour, by extension highlighting the dishonourable status of *sāraṅgī* accompanists and courtesan

styles in relation to *khayāl* singers and styles. Such gendered associations of honour, specifically in relation to instruments, also feature in the prevalent nineteenth-century narrative regarding the emergence of the *sarandā*, a masculine-gendered instrument, in Sikh musical tradition.⁷⁶

With regard to the courtesan vocal style, Qureshi (2000: 828) notes how the renowned *sāraṅgī* player Pt Ram Narayan consciously chose to eliminate the effeminate ornamentation, associated with courtesan genres, in order to bring honour to the *sāraṅgī* and establish it as a solo instrument in the twentieth century. Whereas *khayāl* is considered ‘masculine’ relative to the genres and styles of female performers, it has also been described as ‘feminine’ relative to the even more ‘masculine’ *dhrupad* genre (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 57). With song-texts that so often portray the sentiments of the *nayikā* (heroine) figure (Magriel and du Perron 2013), and with its relative ornateness, *khayāl* could indeed be considered ‘feminine’ to a degree. Of course, *khayāl* song-texts, as we have seen in this chapter, can also include more ‘masculine’ themes, *dhrupad* has indeed been sung by female performers (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 47–49), and *ṭhumrī* and *gāzal* are today widely sung by male performers, thus challenging the normative gendering of these styles and genres. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century, a loose gender-honour continuum is certainly detectable, in which *dhrupad*, male performers (and instruments), a less embellished vocal style, and honourable status sat at one end, and *ṭhumrī*, female performers (and instruments), a more embellished vocal style, and dishonourable status at the other, with *khayāl* somewhere in the middle (Du Perron 2007: 6). Genre, style, and instrumentation were thus coupled to notions of gender and honour.

The ornate style of the Patiala *gharānā* musicians pushed their *khayāl* style toward the feminine-dishonourable end of the spectrum. By contrast, other *khayāl* *gharānās*, such as Gwalior and Agra, were characterised by their *dhrupad*-like masculinity. Deodhar (1993: 142), for example, describes V. D. Paluskar, a representative of the Gwalior style, as having “an uncompromisingly masculine

⁷⁶ Baba Sham Singh Addanshahi (1803-1926) in his *Har Bhagat Prēm Prakāś granth* states that Guru Arjan on one occasion was impressed with the sound of the *sāraṅgī* but regretted that, being feminine in gender, it could not be used in his court. He therefore asked one of his carpenter disciples to create a masculine equivalent so that it might be used to accompany *śabad kīrtan*. Thus the *sarandā* is said to have come into the *śabad kīrtan* tradition (Singh 1914: 403).

style without any feminine overtones whatsoever. For the same reason, he could never be a good *thumari* singer”. Given that a ‘feminine’ style is thus understood to be required to sing *ṭhumrī* well, it is notable that the Patiala *gharānā* is one of the only *khayāl gharānās* to have developed a specialisation – the Punjabi *ang* – in *ṭhumrī* singing.⁷⁷

The emerging ‘Punjabi’ vocal style, developed by musicians of the Patiala *gharānā*, understandably enjoyed a mixed reception in Hindustan. For some it was too ornate, too ‘feminine’, bringing *khayāl* into the dishonourable stylistic territory associated with courtesans. For others it carried great appeal, explaining, in part, why the *gharānā* nevertheless garnered popularity across north India. The enduring success of the Patiala *gharānā* and the Punjabi vocal style, was arguably enabled by the balance that was struck between seemingly opposed gender-honour associations. On the one hand, Aliya-Fattu had sought honourable status as *khayāl* singers in Hindustan by disassociating from the *sārangī*, becoming disciples of eminent Hindustani vocalists, and cultivating a measurable competitive advantage for themselves through the speed of their *tāns*, reinforced by an assertive discourse based upon musical-military allegory. Counterposed to this, however, they were also able to incorporate elements of the ornate and effeminate vocal style, associated with the courtesans, *tappā*, and *kāfi* genres, into their *khayāl* singing, giving rise to a unique, localised *khayāl* style.

The emergence of the Patiala *gharānā* and its rise in popularity had significant consequences for Hindustani music in Punjab. Not only was it influenced by and formative of notions of Punjabyat, but it also contributed to the steady demise of the four *dhrupad*-centric *gharānās* of the region, namely Talwandi, Kapurthala, Sham Chaurasi and Hariyana (Kanwal 2017: 94), Banne Khan (1835-1910) of Nowshera Nangli being the only other notable propagator of *khayāl* in the region from the late nineteenth century onwards (Paintal 1988: 197).⁷⁸ As the Patiala state achieved political dominance among the Sikh states of Punjab in the early twentieth century (Ramusack 1978), so too the Patiala *gharānā* musicians achieved a musical dominance in the region, the parallel rise of patron and

⁷⁷ The Benares *gharānā* is also associated with the singing of *bōl banāō ṭhumrī* (Manuel 2010: 244).

⁷⁸ Banne Khan was a disciple of Ustad Haddu and Hassu Khan of Gwalior (Wade 1984: 38; Khan 1959: 157).

musicians echoing one another. The *gharānā*'s dominance is evidenced by the manner in which successive generations of other notable music families in the region remained their disciples (see Appendix A). As the most famous *khayāl* vocalists beyond the region's borders, who 'conquered' the Hindustani music circuit whilst representing Punjab in both style and name, the Patiala *gharānā* musicians came to represent both musical authority and authenticity within the region.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have highlighted various political dimensions of the emergence of the Kapurthala *gharānā* of instrumental music and the Patiala *gharānā* of vocal music. In the process, I have shown the specific ways in which music, and more importantly its accompanying cultural discourse, comprise a powerful means for the negotiation and transformation of social hierarchies (Stokes 1994: 4). In the case of Kapurthala, the discourse of the *bīn* and the *bīnkār*, in particular, proved to be a potent political apparatus for Kunwar Bikram Singh and his descendants. As patrons and custodians of the secretive, elite, and prestigious *bīn* tradition of the Mughal court, his family accomplished a form of cultural subversion that belied their subordinate position within the Kapurthala ruling dynasty. The arrival of noted disciples of the Kapurthala *gharānā* at Patiala in the early twentieth century signalled a shift in the of sociomusical hierarchy among Punjab's rulers. Reflecting the increasingly dominant political influence of the Patiala state in the early twentieth century, musicians such as Bhai Mehboob Ali and Ustad Abdul Aziz Khan also rose in status within this environment, emerging as elite though somewhat unconventional *bīnkārs*.

The history of the Patiala *gharānā* of vocal music, on the other hand, as I have shown, presents an interesting case of musical regionalism, demonstrative of the complex and, at times, conflicted relationship between Punjab and Hindustan. The Patiala *gharānā* illustrates the function of music as a means for the negotiation of cultural difference, a means by which identity is performed. The enduring success of the Patiala *gharānā* was, at least in part, a result of the manner in which its musicians carefully negotiated their concurrent Hindustani and Punjabi identities. As disciples of eminent musicians from Delhi, Gwalior,

and Jaipur, they themselves had relied upon the pedigree and training of Hindustan's leading musical authorities. They rose in status partly by this virtue and through the fame and recognition they earned beyond Punjab's borders. Nevertheless, they simultaneously subverted this hierarchy through the propagation of an assertive discourse focussed on their indomitable *tān* speed, their musical rank being articulated through an anglicised musical-military idiom. The efficacy of this discourse was all the more powerful for the manner in which it was incorporated as an aspect of their performances and unique repertoire of compositions.

As I have shown, the Punjabi vocal style of the Patiala-*gharānā* musicians represents but one of the ways in which the term 'Punjabi' carried meaning within the realm of Hindustani music. It also highlights how Hindustani music comprised an arena for the expression and formation of Punjabyat. In this regard, this chapter points to the significance of the events of Punjab's annexation by the British in 1849 and the attempted rebellion of 1857 with respect to the trajectory of Punjab-Hind politics and the evolving notion of Punjabyat. The political unification of India under the British, whose government was unprecedented in its centralised nature, presented a new environment in which social and political hierarchies between competing indigenous groups and identities came to be contested and renegotiated. The subsequent rise of identity politics along regional, religious, linguistic, and eventually national axes, was ultimately an expression of this process. Broadly speaking, the emergence of the *gharānā* system can also be seen as a manifestation of musician communities negotiating and contesting the hierarchies within the new environment in which they found themselves. The case of the Patiala *gharānā*, specifically, represents an intersection of this contestation with specific regionalist politics, impacted both by recent political events as well as a longer history of distinct regional identity. It would be interesting to explore further whether such an intersection occurs with respect to *gharānās* located in regions with a comparably strong sense geographical-linguistic identity, such as the Vishnupur *gharānā* of Bengal.

With Pakistan absorbing more than half of the land mass normatively defined as Punjab, as well as most of the descendants of the Patiala *gharānā*, at the time of Partition, the discourse around Punjabi musical identity, at least in the realm of

Hindustani music, has today come to be partially conflated with nationalist discourse in relation to a Pakistani musical identity. Whilst this topic also warrants further study, it is easy to imagine how political antagonism and the divergence in nationalist discourse between India and Pakistan since Partition have played a role in further exacerbating the regional differences between Punjabi musicians within Pakistan and non-Punjabi musicians in India.

Contrary to prevailing stereotypes with respect to the idea of Punjabinat, in this chapter I have shown that the ‘Punjabi’ vocal style, shaped significantly by the Patiala-*gharānā* musicians, incorporated aspects of ornamentation typically associated with the refined, ‘feminine’, and ‘dishonourable’ courtesan genres, as well as local *tappā* and *kāfi* genres. The admixture of elements on seemingly opposite ends of this gender-honour spectrum emerges as a notable trend in the colonial period, evident in the developments of the Lucknow *gharānā* of instrumentalists (Katz 2017: 55–58), and in the case of the Patiala *bīnkār* Abdul Aziz Khan: both of which were characterised by their incorporation of *thumrī*- and *sārangī*-influenced repertoire into their instrumental playing. Despite the discursive attack on the courtesan tradition that resulted from the anti-Nautch movement during the colonial period, Williams (2017: 610) highlights how the circulation of courtesan song-texts, through print media, reveals a “continuity of older aesthetic sensibilities”. Perhaps then, in addition to lyrics, the musical style and vocal aesthetic of the courtesans also sought out new modalities of acceptance within this changing landscape, finding avenues for self-preservation in what were perceived to be more ‘honourable’ vessels, namely instrumental music and the *khayāl* singing of male vocalists.

In relation to this, another notable conclusion pertains to the ‘stickiness’ of old discursive tropes (of status and honour), throughout the colonial period, specifically in relation to objects of a material nature – instruments such as the *bīn* and the *sārangī* – and bodies both male and female. The more ephemeral and intangible aspects of repertoire and musical style, associated with these instruments and bodies, came to be disembodied from their traditional sites of reproduction, materially resituated in accordance with the new paradigm. The social transformation of musicians such as Miyan Kalu and Abdul Aziz Khan was thus only enabled by their abandoning of the *sārangī* in both cases, not

necessarily its style and repertoire, which simply came to receive a more ‘honourable’ guise in *khayāl* and the *vicitra vīṇā*. This would chime with the findings of other scholars who note intangibles as an important domain for continuity.⁷⁹

The renegotiation of the sociomusical norms associated with the Mughal period, during the colonial period, can simply be seen as a product of the change in regime, reflecting the social, cultural and political shifts that coincided at this moment in history. At the same time, the high incidence of social mobility of musicians in the Sikh courts of Punjab, especially vocalists and instrumentalists of Patiala, might also reflect upon both the particular character of Punjabi society and the unique circumstances of the Sikh princes. Punjabi society, for one, was distinguished by its own localised form of the caste system, described by observers as more tribal and vocational in character (Bayly 1999: 139), giving rise to an environment in which the “downgrading and upgrading of caste was constantly taking place” (Chowdhry 1996: 140). This hierarchical flux within Punjabi society is often attributed to the region’s unique geopolitical positioning as a corridor and frontier from the subcontinent to Central Asia (Jones 1976: 1). The anti-hierarchical tendencies inherent within Islamic and Sikh tradition, two religious traditions which were particularly influential in the region, have also been noted for their influence in this regard (Dhavan 2011: 147): We might thus interpret the high incidence of successful upward mobility among musicians and the disruption of pre-existing sociomusical norms, within the courts of Punjab’s Sikh princes, at least in part, as representative of tendencies within Punjabi society and of patrons who themselves had risen from peasant-warrior to ruling status in the not too distant past.

⁷⁹ See Mir (2010, 24) in relation to the Punjabi language as an important medium for the continuity of “older ways of being”, and Soneji (2012) in relation to the performative practices of *dēvadāsī* communities as a medium through which their tradition is kept alive despite their social marginalisation.

3 MULTIVALENT MUSICOLOGY: HINDUSTANI MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SIKH RELIGIOUS SPHERE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Moving beyond the confines of the courtly sphere of Hindustani music, in this chapter I highlight an equally important and perhaps more prolific social context in which Hindustani music flourished in nineteenth-century Punjab – the Sikh religious sphere. In particular, I focus herein on the abundant corpus of Hindustani musicological literature, today buried in the archives of Punjab, that circulated in nineteenth-century Punjab and yet has remained largely untapped by scholars and historians of Hindustani music, seemingly due to the obstacles of Gurmukhi literacy (more specifically the lack thereof) and the chronic underrepresentation of the Punjab as a region (as discussed in Chapter One).

Existing scholarship on Hindustani musicological literature has tended to focus on works of Mughal and Rajput patronage, written in Sanskrit, Braj Bhasha and Persian (i.e. the Devanagari and Nastaliq scripts) (Nijenhuis and Delvoye 2010; Schofield 2010, 2015b; Miner 2015; Williams 2019; Brown 2003). Though Sanskrit works continued to be commissioned throughout the Mughal period (Nijenhuis and Delvoye 2010), such works were also increasingly referenced by and repurposed into Braj Bhasha and Persian translations from the fifteenth century onwards, in accordance with shifts in literary trends.¹ With the decline of Mughal and Rajput cultural hegemony in the colonial period, the emergence of regional forms of musicology has also begun to be highlighted. Williams (2014), for example, highlights the emergence of Bangla Hindustani musicological literature, through the new medium of print in the nineteenth century, as “a reflection of the new Bengali self-assertion as the centre of British India” (Williams 2014: 297).

¹ See Williams (2019) for a study of the Braj Bhasha translations of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* and Brown (2003) for an extensive study of Persian treatises and their referencing of Sanskrit sources on musicology.

In this chapter, I examine the Gurmukhi-based musicological literature that emerged from Punjab during this same period, exploring, in particular, the significance, meaning and utility attached to musicological texts by patrons within the Sikh religious sphere. In doing so, I highlight the extent to which this body of literature served as an important point of intersection between Hindustani music and the *śabad kīrtan* tradition. The link between Hindustani music and *rāg*-based devotional music traditions has been explored by scholars, particularly from the perspective of repertoire and performance practices, and especially in relation to Sufi and *bhakti* traditions. Whilst *qavvālī*'s idiosyncratic performance practices and distinct social context have been noted (Qureshi 2006), it is also widely acknowledged that the crystallisation of the *khayāl* tradition lies at the intersection of Mughal courtly music tradition and the Sufi *qavvālī* tradition (Brown 2010). The intersection between *bhakti* music traditions, such as *havēlī saṅgīt*, and Hindustani music is just as significant, the extensive and uninterrupted flow of repertoire between traditions frequently cited (Ho 2013; Thielemann 2001, 1997). *Havēlī saṅgīt* is thus noted to be distinguished from the Hindustani courtly music tradition less on account of the music itself than by its distinct social setting (Gaston 1997: 268).

In the domain of musicology, Miner differentiates between traditions in her comparison of *rāgmālā* texts, courtly musicological treatises, and *bhakti* song text compilations (including the GGS) of the sixteenth century.² She suggests that these different textual sources “portray a broader picture in which *ragas* were understood differently among various audiences and practitioners” (Miner 2015: 404), and that, in the devotional context, “*raga* sets became canonised for *bhakti* use where they took on a life independent of courtly performance contexts” (Miner 2015: 397). Identifying three distinct functions of *rāgs*, she suggests that the meaning attached to them varied according to social context: *rāgs* could thus constitute objects of aesthetic appreciation, canon for song texts of devotional lineages, and specialised objects at the musical-technical level (Miner 2015: 399). In this chapter, I attempt to highlight the extent to which Hindustani

² *Rāgmālā*, meaning ‘garland of *rāgs*’, refers to the *rāg-rāginī* sets that comprised an important aspect of Hindustani musicology historically.

musicological and aesthetic understandings were essentially shared across courtly and religious contexts, differing rather in their precise application.

In relation to the *śabad kīrtan* tradition, van der Linden (2015: 154) has argued along these lines, suggesting that “pre-twentieth-century Sikh sacred music was essentially Hindustani (classical) music”. Citing continuity across contexts, he argues that “the *ragas* and *ragamala* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the instruments used and classical singing styles of *dhrupad* and *khayal*, as well as interactions with musicians of various *gharanas*, firmly position Sikh *kirtan* within the world of Hindustani music” (Linden 2015a: 154). Whilst his broad argument has been challenged by scholars who highlight the unique features and repertoire of *śabad kīrtan* performance, van der Linden’s observations with regard to shared instruments, genres and musicology are in no way invalidated.³ Exploring the sizeable yet neglected body of musicological literature that subsequently came to circulate in the Sikh religious sphere, particularly in the nineteenth century, in this chapter I foreground the fundamental role of Hindustani musicology in Sikh tradition. More than simply comprising a musical canon for the GGS, I show how *rāgs* assumed *all* of the functions described by Miner (2015) in the context of Sikh religious tradition.

By highlighting the extent to which Hindustani music and musicology flourished within the Sikh religious sphere, this chapter foregrounds a distinct social space for Hindustani music during the colonial period, one that existed in parallel to the courtly sphere. Dialogue between these spheres was enabled particularly by the movement of musicians between them and at specific sites where the courtly and religious spheres came within close proximity of one another. The Sikh princes maintained public, state-sponsored gurdwaras within their cities, for example the Kapurthala State Gurdwara and the Dukh Niwaran Gurdwara of Patiala, where state-appointed *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* would perform.⁴ They also maintained smaller, more private gurdwaras within their royal palaces. In the case of Patiala, each of the ten gates of the old walled city also incorporated a small gurdwara with an

³ See Cassio (2015) and Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011) in relation to the distinctness and originality of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition.

⁴ Lalita Khanna described, in an interview on 18 March 2019, how Bhai Jawala Singh used to be invited to perform at the Kapurthala State Gurdwara on special occasions.

attachment of *rāgīs* employed by the state.⁵ In such contexts, the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* who performed *śabad kīrtan* were highly accomplished professional musicians who might equally partake in Hindustani music *maḥfils* in the courtly setting.

In highlighting the lack of musical boundaries between the courtly and religious spheres and by foregrounding the fact that Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan* traditions cohabited the same musicological terrain, in this chapter I seek more nuanced points of distinction. Whilst musicians, musical style, and performance practices could traverse boundaries of social space, there remained notable distinctions between these performance contexts: religious sites, especially Sufi and Sikh shrines, were generally open to all members of the public (Mir 2010: 113) whilst the private courtly *maḥfil* was the preserve of the rulers and their courtiers (Brown 2003: 120).⁶ The proliferation of Hindustani music and musicology in the Sikh religious sphere in the nineteenth century also calls into question the oversimplified notion that the early twentieth century marked a major shift in Hindustani music, from the elite and private sphere of the *maḥfil* to the public sphere of music schools, societies and concerts. In acknowledging the religious sphere – this space ought to be conceptualised not just by a vast network of sites but a bustling calendar of customary festivals also – as a key space for the reproduction of Hindustani music and musicology, we might conceptualise a precolonial and public sphere in which Hindustani music flourished.⁷

Another important consideration with regards to the religious sphere is in relation to the colonial processes of Anglicisation and social and administrative reform, both of which are noted to have significantly influenced the courts of native princes early on in the colonial period (Ramusack 2004; Bakhle 2005). Being somewhat removed from and thus less directly influenced by the colonial state, it has been suggested that religious sites were less immediately subjected to these

⁵ Raja Mrigendra Singh (1929-2014), son of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, states in an interview (*Raja Mrigendra Singh* 2014) that each of Patiala's ten gates had an attachment of five *rāgīs*, suggesting that the state employed between fifty to sixty *rāgīs* alone.

⁶ Sufi shrines and Sikh gurdwaras, in particular, have been noted as sites which were open to the public, irrespective of gender and caste (Mir 2010: 112).

⁷ Malhotra (2017: 154–55) notes the participation of female performers as well as the place of *rāg* music more broadly at festivals and occasions including Holi, the 'urs of Sufi saints, and other similar cultural and religious *mēlās* (fairs).

processes. In her study of the Punjabi *qissā* literature, Mir (2010: 113) notes that, with the exception of the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar, Sufi shrines and Sikh gurdwaras were generally zones of limited colonial control, perhaps especially so for those which were rurally situated by virtue of their physical distance from the urban administrative centres. Despite the fact that the Singh Sabha was gaining popularity by the start of the twentieth century, for example, it was not until the mid-1920s that their influence radically increased as a result of the formation of the SGPC and the acquisition of administrative control over Sikh gurdwaras (Mir 2010: 25).⁸ As such, religious sites comprised spaces within which older cultural practices, such as the performance of Punjabi *qissā* literature, continued to thrive throughout the colonial period.

Building on this idea, in this chapter, I demonstrate the continuity of Hindustani musicology and its associated literary practices within the Sikh religious sphere well into the late nineteenth century. In doing so, I show that whilst Braj Bhasha musicological literature elsewhere was increasingly “ignored and forgotten” in favour of new printed books, in the modern vernacular, concerned with ancient Sanskrit works (Williams 2019: 106), Punjab, at least as far as it concerns the Sikh religious sphere, was a region in which the older Braj Bhasha literary culture continued to thrive until the turn of the twentieth century. With the Punjabi language and literature assuming the focus of Mir’s useful concept of the “Punjabi literary formation” and yet Punjabi being somewhat peripheral in relation to the institutionalised production of Sikh literature up until the late nineteenth century (Murphy 2019: 322), in this chapter I explore the Sikh religious sphere from a less language-oriented perspective, focussing instead on the referential content and function of the musicological literature discussed.

3.2 *RĀG* AND *RĀGMĀLĀ* IN THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Before delving into a discussion of the Sikh religious sphere in the nineteenth century and then looking at the musicological literature that circulated therein, it is important to frame the discussion by first foregrounding the role of *rāg* and

⁸ Administrative control over Sikh gurdwaras was granted to the newly formed body of the SGPC by the colonial government in 1925, with the passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act (*The Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925* 1939).

rāgmālā in Sikh religious tradition, arising primarily from its place within the GGS. Like *bhakti* compilations that came before it, the GGS, or *Adi Granth* as it was initially known, was organised on the basis of (thirty-one) *rāgs* (Singh 2000: 131). The incorporation of *rāgs*, with their associated moods, seasons, and times of day, immediately brings the performance-oriented aspect of the GGS and its organisation to our attention. Finding no link between the *rāgmālā* systems of Hindustani musicological literature and the *rāgs* used in *bhakti* compilations, Miner (2015: 405) has suggested that “*Ragas in bhakti collections are used to group poems without references to raga-ragini sets, connections among ragas, or genre names*”. As I shall demonstrate, however, the GGS does in fact make extensive reference to the concept of *rāgmālā*, that is, the theory of *rāg-rāginī* sets, and like other *bhakti* song-text compilations (Williams 2020: 347), it also includes various genres. Among the explicitly named genres are the *padā*, *chhant*, *vār*, *salōk* (i.e. *dōhā*), and *savaiyā*, as well as several song items associated with lifecycle events in Punjabi customary culture, for example the *ghōṛīāṁ* (marriage songs) and *alāhaṇīāṁ* (funeral songs). *Dhrupad*, on the other hand, emerges implicitly from a subset of the *padās* of the GGS, most notably those *padās* which clearly reflect the poetic aesthetic and four-part structure of *dhrupad* song-texts.⁹

Initially compiled in 1604 under the watch of Guru Arjan (1563-1606) and later amended by Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) to include the *śabads* of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), the thirty-one *rāg* sections of the GGS conclude with some extraneous *salōk* couplets and *savaiyās*, followed by a *rāgmālā* composition. The *rāgmālā* that was included in the GGS, written in Braj Bhasha, has been identified as a verbatim copy of the *rāgmālā* of Sufi poet Kavi Alam, originally featuring in his *prēm kathā* (romantic tale), the *Mādhavanal Kāmakandalā* (MK), written in 1583, twenty-one years prior to the compilation of the *Adi Granth* (Alam 1965: 2).¹⁰

In the context of the original narrative, the *rāgmālā* constitutes a passage describing the performance of Kamakandala, courtesan of a ruler named Kam Sen

⁹ See, for example, the *dhrupad śabad* of Guru Arjan: “*guna nāda dhuna ananda bēda*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1322)

¹⁰ The date of 991 Hijri, provided in the *Mādhavanal Kāmakandalā* itself, corresponds to 1583, although Orsini (2015: 351) has suggested a date of 1582.

in a place known as Kamavati, as she sought to impress a *brāhmiṇ* musician named Madhavanal on his visit to her court (Orsini 2015: 352). The interweaving of a complete *rāgmālā* in the context of the original narrative, as Orsini notes, can be seen not only to convey Kamakandala’s “complete” skill and knowledge as a courtesan, but also, from an educational perspective, to “impart technical knowledge – or at least to provide a model for its memorisation” to the audience (Orsini 2015: 354).

The inclusion of Kavi Alam’s *rāgmālā* in the GGS has been the cause of significant controversy among the Sikh community throughout history, a question mark hanging over its inclusion even to this day (McLeod 2004: 63). As detailed by Ashok (1965), numerous works have been written on the subject, typically arguing for or against its inclusion. Though historical manuscripts of the GGS are sometimes found without the *rāgmālā*, what is almost beyond question is the likelihood that it was indeed included with the blessing of Guru Arjan; the original copy of the Adī Granth, known as the Kartarpuri *bīr* (recension), includes the *rāgmālā* in the same hand as the rest of the text, indicating that it cannot have been added at a later date by another scribe (Singh 2000: 147).

Following the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, as the Sikh community transitioned into a new era marked by the absence of a human Guru – a single, living source of religious authority – the question of the authenticity of the GGS and its contents fairly quickly emerged as a subject to be addressed by Sikh literature. Written primarily in Braj Bhasha and combining historiography with hagiography, several of the *gurbilās* works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries address the subject of Guru Arjan’s compilation of the GGS and its textual content (Mann 2001: 18–25).¹¹ One of the earlier such sources is Bhagat Singh’s *Gurbilās Pātsāhī Chēvīm*, initially written in 1718 and later added to in the early nineteenth century (Bhagat Singh 1997).¹² He writes the following passage in relation to the Guru’s inclusion of the *rāgmālā*:

¹¹ *Gurbilās* literally translates to the ‘Merriment of the Guru’. See Dhavan’s (2011) work for a discussion of how the *gurbilās* literature served as a site of contested history among various Sikh claimants in the eighteenth century, and Vig’s (2020) recent work regarding the subsequent reception history of the *gurbilās* literature.

¹² I am grateful to Manvir Singh, a learned Sikh scholar of Seattle, USA, for alerting me to this passage on the *rāgmālā* in the *Gurbilās Pātsāhī Chēvīm*.

dōharā:

*vāra vadhīka salōka likha mundāvaṇī aura likhāi.
tatakarā likha sabha girantha kā bhōga girantha jī pāl,*

chaupaī:

*taba lau rāga sabhī ikaṭhāi, guru arajan kē sanamukha āē.
kripāsindha ustatī karī, bhānta bhānta mana ānanda bharī.
ustatī kara gurū paga lapaṭāē, dayā sindha pūchiō mana lāē.
nija āvana kā kārana kahō, tinai kahā tuma sabha kicha lahō.
hama jaga mai atī hī dukha pāē, āē taki tumarī saranāē.
iha bidha hama jagu mahi dukha pāvaṇhi, putarī sātha pitā
nara gāvaṇhi.
aura sanukhā sātha sasurārē, pūta māta karahahi ika ṭhārē.
samajha na prāta samā madhiānām, viparajē gāvaṇhi dhāra
gumānām.*

dōharā:

*tām tē jatana kōū asa karō hē prabha dīnā nātha,
bhinna bhinna sabha kō likhō hama sabha karahum sanātha.
tāgani kī binatī sunī gura arajana sukha khāna,
rāga māla taba hī likhī bhōga taṁhi para ṭhāna.*

Having written the couplets (*salōks*) that are extraneous to the *vārs*, the Guru also had the *Mundāvaṇī* composition included.¹³ Following the inclusion of a complete table of contents, the *granth* was completed.

Then, all of the *rāgs* decided to gather and came before Guru Arjan. They praised the Ocean of Grace and their minds were filled with bliss in countless ways. Praising the Guru, they clung to his feet and asked from the Ocean of Mercy what was on their minds. “Tell me the reason for your coming”, the Guru said, “and you shall obtain everything [you desire]”. [The *rāgs* answered,] “Great suffering has befallen us in this world and so

¹³ The *Mundāvaṇī*, meaning ‘seal’, or ‘riddle’ in the Pothwari dialect of north-western Punjab, is a composition of Guru Arjan that features at the end of the GGS.

we have come to seek your sanctuary. The nature of our suffering is as follows: fathers are singing alongside their daughters; innocent daughters with their in-laws; mothers are in the same place as their sons; and morning has become indistinguishable from afternoon. The perturbed [musicians] sing with pride”.

“O Lord and Master of the Poor, for this reason, let one make such an undertaking: write all of the distinct *rāgs* and subject us [to correct order]”. Guru Arjan, Granter of Joy, heard the plea of the *rāginīs* and wrote the *rāgmālā* at the end [of the *granth*].

(Bhagat Singh 1997: 148)

In accordance with the hagiographic character of the text, Guru Arjan is thus portrayed as the saviour of the *rāgs* and *rāginīs*, who complain to the Guru about the perturbed set of circumstances they find themselves in. Carrying an almost incestuous suggestion, the scenario portrayed is one in which the innate familial ties between various *rāgs* and *rāginīs* have become confused, neglected, and distorted. The passage thus intimates a lack of knowledge among musicians, specifically with regard to the true relationships between *rāgs* and *rāginīs*, and their inherent time associations, the consequence of which is that dishonour and suffering has been inflicted upon them. Implied here as the author of the *rāgmālā*, the Guru becomes the saviour of the *rāgs* and *rāginīs* by espousing the true relationships between them.

Whereas Bhagat Singh suggests the Guru as the author of this *rāgmālā*, subsequent scholarship among Sikhs led to a clarification in the mid-nineteenth century. In his voluminous *Srī Gurpratāp Sūraj Granth* (also known as the *Sūraj Prakāś Granth*), dating to 1843, the renowned poet Kavi Santokh Singh noted:

*iha sudha nahīm likhī iha gura nē kidhauṁ sikkha kāhū likha
dīna,
rāga nāma sabha jānaṁhi rāgī iha kārana likha daī prabīna.*

This is not an authentic composition of the Guru. A Sikh or another added it [to the GGS]. It has been beautifully written such that the *rāgīs* might know the names of all the *rāgs*.

(Singh 1989: 512–16)

Going on to acknowledge the *rāgmālā* as a composition of Kavi Alam in the same passage, and adopting a more practical interpretation of its inclusion, Kavi Santokh Singh suggested that a Sikh had it added to the GGS such that the *rāgīs* might come to know the names of all the *rāgs* and *rāginīs*. Such an explanation would fit neatly into the narrative surrounding the origin of the *rāgīs* as an amateur class of musicians ordained by Guru Arjan himself, a subject Kavi Santokh Singh also takes up later in the text (Singh 1989: 448–78). In this narrative (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four), the *rabābī* musicians of the Guru, in their pride, abandon his court. In their absence, the Guru grants his blessing to some of his Sikhs, who were naturally not hereditary trained musicians, to start performing *kīrtan*, from which time on there ever remained two classes of performers of *śabad kīrtan*, the *rabābīs* and the *rāgīs*. The initial nonprofessional status of the *rāgī* musicians – specifically their lack of musical training and musicological knowledge – supports the idea of the *rāgmālā* being included, therefore, for instructive purposes.

Indeed, Bhagat Singh’s narrative, whilst more hagiographic and less historiographic in character, ultimately suggests a similar function with regard to the inclusion of the *rāgmālā* – as an instructive tool that establishes the correct knowledge of the *rāg-rāginī* system and its inherent familial ties. The explanation of both authors thus chimes with what Orsini (2015: 354) describes as the instructive role of the *rāgmālā* in its original context of Kavi Alam’s work. She (2015: 347) notes that narrators of such *kathās* often proclaimed to impart musical knowledge and so we might also interpret the inclusion of the *rāgmālā* as a literary symbol of the Guru’s musical knowledge.

Another perfectly plausible interpretation of the inclusion of the *rāgmālā* by Guru Arjan, proposed by Callewaert and Lath (1989: 97), is that this ‘Garland of Rags’ simply served as a tribute to the highly revered and respected *rāgs* – the melodic vessels through which the *śabad* was revealed and transmitted. The Gurus’

reverence toward *rāg* and their acknowledgement of a gender-based *rāg-rāginī* collection, organised by familial relations, is certainly apparent within their *śabads*. The following excerpt from a *śabad* in *rāg Āsā* by Guru Nanak illustrates the spiritual efficacy of the *rāgs* and their families:

rāga ratana parīā paravāra,
tisa vica upajai amrita sāra,
nānaka karatē kā ihu dhana māla,
jē kō būjhai ēhu bīcāra.

[Hearing] the jewel-like *rāgs*, their fairy-like wives, and families, the sublime essence of the nectar of immortality manifests within. Nanak says: this is the wealth of the Creator, if only one were to fathom this wisdom.

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 351)

The *rāgs* and their relatives are thus eulogised by Guru Nanak for their ability to invoke a spiritual experience in the listener. Such understanding can be considered congruent to the broader theory of *ras* within Hindustani musicology, the aesthetic-theoretical framework that associates *rāgs* to particular sentiments. Schofield (2015c: 417) notes how words like *lazzat* (pleasure) and *zauq* (taste) in the Sufi idiom are semantically relatable to the idea of *ras* (juice/essence/sentiment), thus tying the Sufi episteme into the broader musicological episteme of South Asia. In this respect, the concept of *amrit* (nectar of immortality) also bears semantic affinity with idea of *ras*. The work of the Sikh gurus, therefore, can clearly be seen to relate the sentiments associated with *rāgs* to the spiritual experience of an enlightened/realised individual.

Whilst Hindustani musicological theory thus intersected with the epistemes of various religious communities, it also found different idioms of expression. In Sikh context, the expression ‘*rāg ratan*’ (‘jewel-like *rāgs*’), in particular, finds

repeated use, first by Guru Nanak and then by Guru Amar Das, thus acquiring somewhat of a specific idiomatic use in Sikh context.¹⁴

rāga ratana paravāra parīā sabada gāvāṇa āīā.

The jewel-like *rāgs*, their fairy-like wives, and families have come to sing the *śabad* [of the Guru].

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 917)

Extending the metaphor, Guru Ram Das speaks of the inexpressible value of the jewel-like *rāgs* as follows:

*rāga nāda sabha saca hai kīmata kahī na jāī,
rāgai nādai bāharā inhī hukama na bījhiā jāī.*

The *rāgs* and their sound current are all true, their value cannot be told. Those disaffected by *rāgs* and their sound current do not come to understand the [divine] order (*hukam*).

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1423)

The reverential idiom cultivated by the Gurus in relation to *rāg* speaks to their spiritual efficacy in the path and endeavour of the devotee. Once again, tying into the musicological *rāg-ras* theory, specific qualities of certain *rāgs* have been highlighted by the Gurus for their spiritual benefits. Guru Amar Das, for example, praises the qualities of *rāg Malār* in several different couplets:

*malāra sītala rāga hai hara dhiāiai sānta hōi,
hara jīu apaṇī kripā karē tām varatai sabha lōi.*

Malār is a cooling *rāg*; meditating upon Hari [in this mode] brings peace. When my dear Hari grants his grace, then it rains, and all become illuminated.

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1283)

¹⁴ The expression ‘jewel-like’, specifically the Persian term ‘*javāhir*’ (jewels), has been used in relation to music by other writers (Schofield 2018b: 74), but not specifically with the Sanskrit-origin term ‘*ratan*’ nor in direct reference to *rāgs*.

*guramukha malāra rāga jō karahi tina tana mana sītala hōi,
gura sabadī ēka pachāñiā ēkō sacā sōi.*

Soothed are the mind and body of those [disciples] who attune themselves to the word of the Guru in *rāg Malār*. Through the word of the Guru, they realise the One, the only True One.

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1285)

Beyond simply serving as a musical canon for *bhakti* song-texts, as noted by Miner (2015), *rāgs* (embedded within a broader musicological framework pertaining to *rāgmālā* sets and *ras* theory) were revered in devotional contexts for their capacity to invoke spiritual experiences, much in the same way that they were in the Mughal courtly and Sufi contexts (Schofield 2015b). Just as the monsoon rains brought respite after the long, hot summer months, so the monsoon melody of *rāg Malār* – associated here with *sānt ras* (peaceful sentiment) – is described by the Guru as having a cooling effect on mind and body, placating the five passions (desire, anger, attachment, pride, and ego) otherwise deemed as antagonists to spiritual progression. Metaphorically, the rain is a symbol of divine grace (*kripā*), requisite for the devotee seeking the divine experience, the melody of *rāg Malār* being a sacred sonic entity endowed with the ability to induce such an experience.¹⁵

Reflecting the highly changeable nature of feelings associated with *rāg Malār* (Rajamani 2018: 35) – longing and fulfilment, joy and sorrow, hope and despair, peace and unease – the Gurus have also invoked the monsoon and its melody to convey the aspect of *biraha* (longing), so common to monsoon-themed *ṭhumrī* songs in particular (Rao 2018: 417). The following couplet of Guru Angad, in *rāg Malār*, references the dispositions of a *nāyikā* (heroine) in the monsoon month of *Sāvan* (*Śravan*), as a symbol for the soul-bride. In particular, the auspicious (*suhāgaṇ*) and inauspicious (*duhāgaṇ*) soul-brides are contrasted, the former being a *nāyikā* who longs for her beloved (i.e. the devotee who seeks God) and

¹⁵ Relevance of *rāg-ras* theory in Sikh tradition thus echoes the “theology of feeling” inherent to the Radhavallabhi *vaiṣṇav* sect, whereby God is experienced (through the feelings of the monsoon and its melody among other things) rather than comprehended (Williams 2018: 93).

the latter being a *nāyikā* who has abandoned her beloved for another (i.e. one who has fallen in love with the material existence) and suffers as a consequence:¹⁶

*sāvaṇa āyā hē sakhī kantai chita karēhu,
nanaka jhūra marahi dōhāgaṇī jinha avarī lāgā nēhu.*

The month of *Sāvan* has come, O sister-friend, remember your husband-Lord. Nanak says: the wretched soul-bride who has attached herself to another, dies distraught.

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1280)

The link between seasonal imagery and the seasonal associations of *rāgs* is repeatedly demonstrated in the GGS, the Spring melody of *rāg Basant* comprising another prominent example. Numerous *śabads* in *rāg Basant* invoke the imagery of nature blossoming to symbolise the blossoming of the devotee whose soul and consciousness are merged with God. The following example of Guru Amar Das illustrates:

*basanta caṛiā phūlī banarāi,
ēhi jīa janta phūlahi hara cita lāi.*

[The season/melody of] Spring has emerged, and the flora has blossomed. These living beings and creatures blossom, attaching their consciousness to Hari.

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1176)

Relating to *nāyak-nāyikā* theory is the tradition of *rāg dhyān* in which *rāgs* and *rāginīs* are themselves depicted as heroes and heroines. Depicted in *rāgmālā* paintings as a warrior *nāyak* figure, and thus associated with the *vīr ras* (warrior sentiment), *rāg Mārū* has been invoked by the Guru for its efficaciousness in the symbolic internal battle with the five passions, thus reflecting Nijhawan’s (2006: 55) observations with regard to the overlap between ‘pietism’ and ‘heroism’. A couplet of Guru Arjan expounds this aspect of *rāg Mārū* as follows:

¹⁶ The idea of the soul-bride who loves another (other than her husband-Lord) resembles the *parakīyā nāyikā*, whose lamentable love of the material existence is often expressed by the Gurus in terms of *dūjā bhāu* (second love) (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 33,34,38).

gura kai sabada arādhīai nāma ranga bairāga.
jītē panca bairāā Nānaka saphala mārū ihu rāga.

Conduct worship through the word of the Guru; imbued with the Divine Name (*nām*), practise renunciation of worldly desire. *Rāg Mārū* is fruitful in conquering the five enemies [of desire, anger, attachment, pride, and ego].

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1425)

In aggregate, these examples serve to demonstrate that the musicological understandings evinced by the GGS, with which the Gurus were evidently deeply familiar, correspond closely to those on display within the Persian literature of the Sufis and Mughals (Schofield 2010: 498) and the Braj Bhasha literature of *vaiṣṇav* sects. In each of these contexts, *rāg-ras* theory, as well as shared cultural imagery and tropes of north Indian aesthetics (e.g. *nāyak-nayikā*) intersected with different religious idioms and theological understandings, giving rise to distinct musical-theological amalgams. A shared Hindustani musicological framework thus cut across sectarian boundaries, as did the literary tropes of Braj Bhasha song-texts (Williams 2020: 344).

It has been suggested that Sufi understandings focussed particularly on the aspect of *śringār ras* (romantic sentiment), a sentiment which appealed to them as a mode of expression for divine love or *‘īśq* (Schofield 2015b: 421). Divine love, conveyed through a number of terms including *prēm*, *pyār*, *‘īśq*, *raṅg*, *prīt* etc., is certainly a prominent theme within the GGS also. The portrayal of the soul as feminine, as in the Sufi episteme (Schimmel 1997), and tropes of the *nāyak-nayikā* tradition, often employed to invoke the love of Radha and Krishna in *vaiṣṇav* and *bhakti* context (Schofield 2015b: 421), were equally important modes of expression within the Sikh tradition. Far from being predominant to the same extent, however, within Sikh tradition, *śringār ras* finds place alongside other sentiments, including *vīr ras* and *śānt ras*, each of which are deemed efficacious in the devotee’s quest to conquer/placate the passions and cultivate a divine rather than worldly love. Whilst the ‘Sikh religious aesthetic’ has been described to have imbibed an increasingly martial character in response to historical circumstances in which the Sikh community had to repeatedly defend itself

(Nijhawan 2006: 55), this was clearly not the case in early Sikh tradition. A complete treatment of *rāg-ras* theory and its relationship to the literary themes of the GGS being beyond the scope of this chapter, the examples provided above suffice to illustrate the inherent and rich usage of Hindustani musicology within the GGS.

My brief analysis of *rāg* and *rāgmālā* in the GGS thus confirms what Miner tentatively suggests with respect to the use of *rāg* in *bhakti* compilations:

We do not fully understand the work of *ragas* in the compilations, but *ragas* have always been coded with associations of time, season and emotional content. Surely they must have been chosen by specialists to signal the emotions and other associations that the expert singers considered appropriate to the poem.

(Miner 2015: 405–6)

The highly symbiotic relationship between song-text and *rāg* choice, as displayed in the GGS, is likely reflective of the fact it was not merely “expert singers” who dealt with the musical setting of *śabads* but a collaborative process between professional musicians, that is, the *rabābīs*, and the Gurus as poets with a considerable familiarity with Hindustani musicology. In addition to the common acknowledgement that poets in north India were often themselves singers (Busch 2015: 264), some scholars have espoused that the Gurus themselves were musical specialists of sorts, if not practicing musicians, though further discussion on the topic remains beyond the scope of this chapter.¹⁷ The fact that the Gurus famously patronised hereditary specialists, including *mīrāsīs*, *rabābīs* and *dhādhīs*, does certainly suggest that the composition, musical setting and performance of *śabads* was collaborative, professional musicians offering practical skill and musical-technical knowledge that helped canonise the words of the Gurus’ into musical form.

¹⁷ See the work of Sikh scholars such as Mansukhani (1982) and B.B. Singh (2011) for discussions on the Gurus as musicians.

The inclusion of Kavi Alam's *rāgmālā* and the extensive and intrinsic referencing of aspects of Hindustani musicology within the GGS offers an alternative perspective to the findings of Miner (2015: 404), who suggests that comparative study of *rāgmālā* texts, courtly musical treatises, and anthologies of devotional song texts points to different understandings of *rāgs* among various groups and audiences. On the contrary, though the specific idioms of expression and interpretive application of Hindustani musicology were subject to variation across different devotional and courtly literary contexts, my analysis stresses the commonality and congruence in the theoretical understandings on display between traditions. Whilst only able to briefly touch upon it here, this shared episteme and shared cultural imaginary extended beyond the realm of musicology to include several other aesthetic realms, poetry and literary practice, in particular, intersecting significantly with music. Indeed, Braj Bhasha poetry, songcraft and musicology have increasingly been acknowledged as important aspects of a broad culture that traversed the courtly and religious spheres as well as sectarian boundaries therein (Williams 2020: 345).

Scholars have frequently cited the movement of hereditary musicians between courtly and devotional settings in order to explain the similarities with respect to musical style, performance practices, and repertoire (Miner 2015: 399; Gaston 1997; Ho 2013). The inclusion of Kavi Alam's *rāgmālā*, in particular, thus foregrounds the extent of literary exchange between these contexts. Although it is unknown exactly where Kavi Alam was employed, the manner in which he praises emperor Akbar and his chief finance minister (*vazīr*) Todar Mal in the opening passages of the *MK*, intimates that he may well have been attached to the court of the Mughal emperor in the late sixteenth century. Akbar was indeed the first of the Mughal emperors to shift the Mughal capital to Lahore in 1584 (Glover 2007), just a year after Kavi Alam's work was completed. The geographic proximity of the Mughal court in Lahore and the Guru's court in Amritsar, the chronological proximity of Kavi Alam's *MK* (1583) and Guru Arjan's *Adi Granth* (1604), and the fact that Akbar visited the court of the Guru on amicable terms in 1598 (Grewal and Habib 2001: 55), all serve to highlight the intimacy of the Mughal and Sikh courts in the late sixteenth century, a result of which was undoubtedly considerable cultural exchange.

In highlighting the intrinsic role of *rāg*, *rāgmālā* and Hindustani musicology more broadly, within the GGS – providing organisational structure, a mode of performance, and moreover a revered tool in the spiritual endeavour of the devotee – I have attempted to frame the Sikh community’s profound and inherent interest in Hindustani musicology. The manner in which the Adi Granth evolved into the GGS, an eternal and immutable scriptural embodiment of the Guru, only further legitimised and stimulated subsequent Sikh engagement with *rāgmālā* literature, the likes of which I deal with later in this chapter. Before doing so, however, I briefly outline the Sikh religious sphere of the nineteenth century, highlighting the extent to which it comprised a distinct social arena for the propagation of Hindustani music performance.

3.3 THE SIKH RELIGIOUS SPHERE

3.3.1 PRIESTLY PATRONS

Beyond the courtly sphere, as I shall demonstrate, there emerged a significant network of priestly patrons of Hindustani music, comprised of the various Sikh religious orders and sects. A predominance of Sikhs among the ruling classes of Punjab in the early nineteenth century had given rise to unprecedented levels of patronage for Sikh religious orders and institutions: whilst Sikhs constituted only 6% of the Punjabi populace, 60% of Punjab’s *jāgīrdārs* were Sikh (Grewal 1981: 32–33). Under the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikhs are recorded as having received more than half of the total revenue-free grants, allocated for *dharmarth* (religious charity) (Grewal 1981: 34). Subsequently, following the annexation of Punjab, the Punjab State Agency – the office formed by the colonial government to oversee the native states of the region – consisted of eighteen states, of which one third were presided over by Sikh princes. Sikh religious orders and institutions thus continued to enjoy the support of wealthy Sikh patrons into the late nineteenth century.

Chief beneficiaries of this patronage, among the Sikh religious orders, were the *Sōdhīs* and *Bēdīs*, the auspicious lineages of descendants of the Sikh Gurus,

treated by much of the Sikh populace as gurus themselves (Oberoi 1992: 379).¹⁸ Close behind them were the *udāsīs*, a sect of renunciates and ascetics affiliated with the lineage of Guru Nanak’s son, Baba Sri Chand.¹⁹ Sandhu notes that, “The Sikh rulers patronized the *Udasis* because of their popularity with the people and this patronage in turn increased their influence” (2011: 83). Sulakhan Singh (1999) also highlights how alongside the chiefs of the major Sikh clans and lesser Sikh *zamīndārs*, non-Sikh rulers in and around the Punjab region – the courts of Raikot, Sahiwal and Jammu – also extended patronage to the *udāsīs*. Whereas prior to Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s rule, hardly a dozen *udāsī* establishments existed, by the end of his rule the number of *udāsī* establishments was approximately two hundred and fifty (Sulakhan Singh 1999), demonstrating the huge expansion of this important religious order among the Sikhs.

The *nirmalās* were another Sikh religious order, with a scholarly bent, who significantly expanded in the nineteenth century.²⁰ The Patiala state was perhaps their most important patron, a new headquarters – the *Nirmalā Pancāyatī Akhārā* – established for them in the city of Patiala, in 1862, under the watch of Maharaja Narinder Singh (r.1845-62). Attesting to their religious and cultural significance is the fact that many of the preeminent Sikh scholars and authors of the eighteenth century onwards had some affiliation with the *nirmalā* order.²¹ Though several smaller offshoot sects also emerged in the nineteenth century, including the *gulābdāsīs*, *nāmdhārīs* and *nirāṅkārīs*, the four predominant groups of mainstream religious authority were the *udāsīs*, *nirmalās*, *Bēdīs*, and *Sōdhīs*, of

¹⁸ The *Bēdīs* were descendants of Guru Nanak’s family and the *Sōdhīs* were descendants of the family to which the last six Gurus, that is, from Guru Ram Das to Guru Gobind Singh, belonged. The *Trēhāns* and *Bhallās* were descendants of the second (Guru Angad) and third (Guru Amar Das) Gurus respectively. However, they were less numerous and thus not as significant as the *Bēdīs* and *Sōdhīs*. By the end of the period of Sikh rule, the *Sōdhīs* and *Bēdīs* received four and five lacs, respectively, of revenue-free grants annually (Sulakhan Singh 1980).

¹⁹ The *udāsīs* received two lacs per year in revenue-free grants from the Lahore court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Singh 1980).

²⁰ It has been suggested that the *nirmalā* tradition was founded by five Sikhs sent by Guru Gobind Singh to Varanasi in order to study Sanskrit and Vedānta philosophy there (Gujral [n.d.]).

²¹ Examples of leading *nirmalās* scholars among the Sikhs include Pt Gulab Singh (b.1732), Kavi Santokh Singh (1787-1843), Pt Tara Singh Narotam (1822-1891), Gyani Gyan Singh (1822-1921), and Mahant Ganesha Singh (d.1954).

which the *udāsīs* were most prolific, outnumbering the *nirmalās* by at least eight to one (Sandhu 2011: 95).²²

In ethnographic terms, these orders were dominated by the social group known as *khatrīs*. As suggested by the name, the *khatrīs* are understood as ‘Prakritised’ *kśatriyas* (the warrior caste), albeit that they have long been associated with trade and administrative work, their history as warriors belonging to a distant past (Grewal 1981: 24). The following is an excerpt on the *khatrīs* from Sir George Campbell’s *Ethnology of India*:

Trade is their main occupation; but in fact they have broader and more distinguishing features. Besides monopolising the trade of the Punjab and the greater part of Afghanistan, and doing a good deal beyond those limits, they are in the Punjab the chief administrators, and have almost all literate work in their hands. So far as the Sikhs have a priesthood, they are, moreover, the priests or *gurus* of the Sikhs. Both Nanak and Govind were, and the Sodis and Bedis of the present days are, Khattris. Thus then they are in fact in the Punjab, so far as a more energetic race will permit them, all that Mahratta Brahmins are in the Mahratta country, besides engrossing the trade which the Mahratta Brahmins have not.

(Rose 1911b: 506)

The preponderance of *khatrīs* in roles involving administrative and literate work extended from the mercantile domain to the religious domain, the latter in which they served as managers of religious institutions and as patrons and agents of scholarly and scribal traditions.

Though the *khatrīs* formed an important group within the Sikh religious sphere, it is important to acknowledge the fact that they did not conform to normative religious categories as we understand them today.²³ Ibbetson observes the

²² For a broader history on the *gulābdāsīs* see Malhotra (2017) and for more on the *nirankārīs* and *nāmdhārīs* see Jolly (1988).

²³ For a discussion on the shifts in meaning in relation to the terms ‘Sikh’ and ‘Hindu’ see Murphy (2012a).

following of the religion of the *khatrīs*: “The Khatri is staunch Hindu; and, it is somewhat singular that, while giving a religion and priests to the Sikhs, they themselves are comparatively seldom Sikhs” (Rose 1911b: 506). Not wishing to get overly concerned with unpacking such a statement, suffice it to say that as of the late nineteenth century the terms Hindu and Sikh did not carry the same meaning they do today (Murphy 2012a: 107). Moreover, the religious fluidity of groups in colonial Punjab has been widely cited by scholars (Oberoi 1994; Mir 2010; Linden 2008). While it is right, therefore, to approach the accounts of colonial ethnographers with due consideration for the power structures at play, the agenda and cultural bias of those who wrote them, Ibbetson has nevertheless been noted for his “sophisticated” theories of social and ethnic groups in Punjab (Bayly 1999: 139) – his ethnographies were not simply the uninformed comments of an out of touch foreigner. What the case of the *khatrīs* serves to highlight is that the Sikh religious sphere itself had fluid boundaries by virtue of the behaviour of groups who participated in it.²⁴

Whilst dominant in the realms of trade and literacy, the hegemony of the *khatrīs* as religious functionaries meant that they constituted a socially elevated and economically powerful socioethnic group within the Punjab, occupying a status not dissimilar to the *brāhmins* in other parts of India. By contrast, and relative to the Punjabi *khatrī*, the Punjabi *brāhmin* was possessed of “little wealth and learning” (Jones 1976: 2–3). Jones goes on to highlight the cultural aspect of the *khatrīs* in the following terms: “Monied, literate, serving in business, commerce, government and the professions, the Khatri, Baniya, Arora and Sud comprised a sensitive and creative section of Punjabi society” (Jones 1976: 3).

Conceiving of the Sikh religious sphere as comprised of groups of “traditional intellectuals” (Oberoi 1994: 123) defined by their religious function – *gyānīs* (exegetes), *granthīs* (reciters of the GGS), *pujārīs* (agents of ritual worship), *ardāsīs* (reciters of prayer), and *rāgīs* (musicians) – many functionaries belonged either to the Guru lineages or the *udāsī*, *nirmalā* and other religious orders that trace lineage to the Gurus through discipleship. Among these, there were certainly large numbers of *khatrīs*, with *brāhmins* and *zamīndārs* featuring

²⁴ See Oberoi (1994) for discussions around religious boundaries in colonial Punjab.

to a lesser extent, as attested to by records of the personnel attached to Sikh shrines in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ As far as music is concerned, the *dhādhīs* and *rabābīs* (discussed in Chapter Five) were also important groups in the Sikh religious sphere, though socially distinguished as Muslim hereditary specialist performers of low social status.

The Guru lineages and *udāsīs*, however, certainly sat at the top of the Sikh religious hierarchy, led in turn by guru-like figures who not only represented these religious lineages but were often in charge of religious institutions. As noted by Copeman and Ikegame (2012), the guru concept itself is multifaceted, encompassing multiple roles and participating in a remarkable range of activities and fields. Members of this class were frequently engaged as *mahants* (monastic superiors) who served as heads and custodians of important Sikh historical shrines and gurdwaras all over the region, as well as leaders of establishments particular to their own order. They fulfilled performative roles for the public at important religious sites, on pilgrimage circuits and during festival cycles within the region (Malhotra 2017). They often also assumed political responsibilities, especially in the case of the *Bēdīs* and *Sōdhīs*, who were frequently consulted in, and actively engaged with, matters of Sikh politics. Baba Sahib Singh Bedi (1756-1834), for example, was invested with the ritual authority to coronate the young Ranjit Singh as Maharaja of the Punjab in 1801 (Oberoi 1994: 114–15). Baba Khem Singh Bedi (1830-1905), his great grandson, was one of the founders of the original Singh Sabha movement, whose initial aims were to preserve Sikh tradition and facilitate Sikh relations with the colonial government (Oberoi 1994: 247, 235–36). Eminent *udāsīs* in Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court also served as political counsellors and ministers.²⁶

Scholars have also noted how guru-like figures often shared traits with sovereign rulers. Oberoi (1992: 379), for example, notes that “it was expected of a Sikh to show the same allegiance to the leading representatives of the guru lineages as that by ‘a subject to his ruler’”. More broadly, Fenech (2008) has highlighted how

²⁵ The *jāgīr* (land grant) records of the Khalsa Darbar (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII), at the time of British annexation in 1849, show how many of the religious functionaries of the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar, the most important of Sikh temples, were *khatrīs*.

²⁶ See the *udāsī* Bhai Ram Singh, who served as prime minister to Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Oberoi 1994: 119).

symbols, nomenclature and practices associated with Mughal royalty are deeply embedded within Sikh tradition. There are numerous guru-like figures of the Sikh religious sphere in the nineteenth century who represent the kind of conflation between guru and sovereign, spiritual and temporal, in this regard. Notable examples include: Gulab Das, founder of the *gulābdāsī* sect with ties to the *nirmalās* (Malhotra 2017: 154); Baba Khem Singh Bedi (see Figure 9), who not only dressed like a maharaja but resided in a palace-like dwelling;²⁷ and rebel guru figures like Bhai Maharaj Singh and Satguru Ram Singh who were deemed by the British to be political threats to the stability of the colonial government and were exiled as a result (Oberoi 1994: 119).



FIGURE 9 BABA KHEM SINGH BEDI

The institutions presided over by these gurus, known variously as *dērās*, *dharamsāls*, *darbārs*, *akhārās*, and in the special case of the Darbar Sahib as *buṅgās*, are mostly likened to hermitages but at times were somewhat palatial in character (see Figure 10). Gurus could and would often be addressed with the type of honorifics normally associated with princes and emperors, for example *sacē pātsāh* (true emperor), *mahārāj* (great king), *hazūr* (his majesty/grace). These gurus would hold court (*darbār/dīvān*) whilst sat upon a throne (*takht/gaddī*), were attended to with a flywhisk, and offered edicts (*hukms*) to their followers. The aura around such religious figures of authority thus in many respects echoed that of princes and emperors. In relation to the present discussion, just as north India's princes were important patrons, connoisseurs and practitioners of music, so too were religious figures within the Sikh religious sphere.

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²⁷ The Bedi palace survives in Kallar (Rawalpindi district), Pakistan.



FIGURE 10 *UDĀSĪ DARBĀR* OF BABA BHUMMAN SHAH, OKARA, PAKISTAN. PHOTO COURTESY OF 'SAVE HISTORICAL PLACES OF PAKISTAN' FACEBOOK PAGE.

Given the intrinsic place of *rāg* in the Sikh tradition, as discussed earlier, and enabled by the significant resources made available to them by the Sikh ruling classes and aristocracy, the *mahants* and gurus of Sikh religious institutions, *udāsī*, *nirmalā*, *Sōdhī*, *Bēdī* or otherwise, comprised a unique class of patrons of Hindustani music beyond the courtly sphere. To begin with, I focus on their patronage of musicians in particular, subsequently highlighting how they were sometimes also practitioners of music, and lastly highlighting how they were important patrons of Hindustani musicological scholarship.

The *mahant* of almost every *dērā*, *darbār*, and gurdwara maintained an attachment of musicians (Sandhu 2011: 99), required for the daily performance of *śabad kīrtan*. According to the size and importance of the hermitage, temple or shrine, the number of attached musicians would vary, sometimes specifically stipulated in the terms of the grant endowed to an institution by a ruler (Singh 1980). Given the relative administrative and financial autonomy typically afforded to a *mahant*, however, he was at liberty to further extend patronage to musicians as he saw fit and in accordance with the resources made available to him. The largest and most important of all *udāsī* institutions was the Brahmbuta Akhara, connected to the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar, which, in the 1840s, was said to be receiving nearly Rs. 18,000 a year in *dharmarth* funds, had about two hundred resident *sādhs* (ascetics), and around seventy musicians (Sandhu 2011:

41). Smaller institutions in village and rural settings would naturally host much smaller attachments of musicians.

The expansion of the Sikh religious sphere under the patronage that was forthcoming from the expanding Sikh aristocracy and ruling class in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, gave rise to an increased demand for musicians. Filling the demand were musicians from the many *gharānās* that together comprised Punjab's sociomusical landscape, including the likes of Talwandi and Sham Chaurasi, and the lesser known *gharānās* of Haryana, Nowshera Nangli, and Jandla.²⁸ Representatives of these *gharānās* today bear the memory of their forefathers' receiving patronage under figures of Sikh religious authority. Ustad Latafat Ali Khan and Ustad Shafqat Ali Khan, whose grandfather Ustad Vilayat Ali Khan moved to Lahore at the time of Partition, are representatives of the Sham Chaurasi *gharānā* originating in the Hoshiarpur district of east Punjab. In an interview, they shared how their grandfather would sometimes perform in gurdwaras in the pre-Partition era, and not just *śabads* but Hindustani music repertoire of their *gharānā* also.²⁹

Ustad Roshan Abbas Khan, a descendant of Ustad Banne Khan of the Nowshera Nangli *gharānā*, spoke of how, prior to Partition, his elders sang in gurdwaras and mandirs. In fact, his great-uncle Ustad Pyare Khan, a direct disciple of Banne Khan, was a singer employed at the Bhumman Shah Darbar in Okara, Pakistan (see Figure 10), one of the largest, oldest, and most prominent of the *udāsī dērās* in nineteenth century Punjab (Sulakhan Singh 1999). Pyare Khan's son, the renowned singer Umeed Ali Khan, was raised and trained at the Bhumman Shah Darbar. Again, reenforcing the sovereign character of such religious sites, Ustad Roshan Abbas described this *darbār* as if it were the court of a prince, telling of how his uncle Umeed Ali Khan was raised in the lap of the "*rānī*" (queen) of the Bhumman Shah Darbar.³⁰

Such sites were evidently home to both *śabad kīrtan* performance and Hindustani music performance more generally. In the early twentieth century, a local resident

²⁸ There is various literature on Punjab's *gharānās*, mostly in Hindi and Punjabi (Kanwal 2017; Paintal 1988; Madan 1986; Narula 1995; Dhankar 2003; Sharma 2006).

²⁹ Interview with Ustad Latafat Ali Khan and Ustad Shafqat Ali Khan on 11 May 2019.

³⁰ Interview with Ustad Roshan Abbas Khan on 2 April 2019.

and devotee of the shrine, in his verse eulogising the incumbent *mahant* Bhajan Das, writes, “In his presence, the *rāgīs* lovingly recite *śabads* in *rāgs Kānarhā* and *Basant*” (Singh 1910: 93).³¹ Alongside the patronage of *rāgīs* and Hindustani vocalists such as Pyare Khan, we also encounter suggestions of the employment of female performers within the shrine, as intimated by wall paintings in the *dīvān* hall, where such activity would have likely occurred (see Figure 11).



FIGURE 11 WALL PAINTINGS DEPICTING A MUSIC PERFORMANCE AT BHUMAN SHAH DARBAR. PHOTO COURTESY OF 'SAVE HISTORICAL PLACES OF PAKISTAN' FACEBOOK PAGE.

A similar scenario is painted at the *ḍērā* of Gulab Das (1809-1873) in Chattianwala, near Kasur. Gulab Das was a guru who, having undergone a religious education under the *udāsīs* and *nirmalās*, went on to establish his own sect based upon Sikh, Sufi and *advait* ideas, but was nevertheless still seen to be a part of the “amorphous Sikh heritage” as of the late nineteenth century (Malhotra 2017: 14). Malhotra, in her study on the *gulābdāsīs*, notes how female performers would perform *mujrās* at the *ḍērā*. She includes a picture depicting a regal Gulab Das sat on a throne with his consort Piro beside him, under a canopy, with his successor in attendance with a flywhisk, being entertained by a female *kalāvānt* (Malhotra 2017: 152). In this image a *sārangī* and *tablā* player are accompanying the female performer who, whilst kneeling and gesturing, appears to be performing the seated *abhinay* – the expression- and gesture-based part of a typical *mujrā* performance.

³¹ “*Paṛhaṇa śabada rāgī kōla prēma karkē rāga kānarhā gāna basanta piāre*” (Singh 1910: 93).

A corpus of poetry set to music, known as the *Rāg Sāgar* (*Ocean of Rāgs*), has been attributed to and was likely commissioned by Gulab Das, though many of the verses it contains were authored by his consort Piro, who had otherwise authored a separate set of 160 *kāfi* songs of her own (Malhotra 2009).³² Another contributor to the text was Kahan Singh, seemingly a devotee of Gulab Das who perhaps served at the *ḍērā* in the capacity of a *rāgī*. Not only does his name appear as the author of some of the verses within the text but he is also explicitly mentioned as the one who was responsible for setting the verses to music:

*dāsa gulāba diāla gura kītō sāgara rāga,
kāmhana siṅgha hara rāga mōm dhālē gurmata lāga.*

Gulab Das, the merciful Guru, has prepared the *Ocean of Rāgs*.
Applying the wisdom of the Guru, Kahan Singh has fashioned it
into each and every *rāg*.

(Das [n.d.-a]: 1)

The *Rāg Sāgar* employs forty-two *rāgs* in total and a rich variety of musical genres illustrating the range of music that was performed at the *ḍērā*. It includes the *śabad*, *padā*, and *partāl* genres, also found in the GGS, as well as more familiar Hindustani genres (*hōrī*, *khayāl* and *śahānā* etc.) and local Punjabi-language genres such as the *kāfi* and *kalī*.³³ As noted by Malhotra (2017: 154–55), the significant number of *hōrī* compositions, within the *Rāg Sāgar*, alludes to the importance of *rāg*-based music at religious festivals like Holi, where groups of female performers, in particular, are noted as having historically played a prominent performative role.

Another example of the patronage of Hindustani music within the Sikh religious sphere is the figure Baba Khem Singh Bedi (Figure 10), a fourteenth-generation descendant of Guru Nanak. His palace in Kallar (Rawalpindi district) was home

³² The two *Rāg Sāgar* recensions, published online by the Panjab Digital Library, both begin by attributing the work to Gulab Das: “*ath rāg sāgar srī gurū gulāb dās jī kā likhyatē*” (Das [n.d.-a], [n.d.-b]). However, Piro’s name features frequently in the last line of many verses and Malhotra (2012a: 1511) references a *Rāg Sāgar* manuscript that has been attributed to Piro: “*ath rāg sāgar granth mātā gurū pīrō jī*”.

³³ The *kāfi*, typically composed around the theme of divine love, is a Sufi genre said to have emerged in the Multan region (Pande 1999: 21). See Bhutta (2008) for further discussion on the *kāfi* genre. The *kalī* as a genre associated with the *dhādhīs* (Pande 1999: 125).

to the famous Gwalior vocalist Pt V. D. Paluskar, for a period of eight to nine months in 1900, who was employed to teach the sons of his patron (Narula 1994).

Members of the Talwandi *gharānā* have also been noted to have been employed in both Sikh religious and courtly contexts (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 30–33). Up until Partition, Basra (1996) documents how Ustad Mehr Ali Khan, for example, was under the employ of the Sikh landowner Sardar Harcharan Singh. The *nāmdhārī* sect of Sikhs, important patrons of music since the late nineteenth century, also patronised exponents of the Talwandi *gharānā*.³⁴ Likely inspired by the early-twentieth-century educational reforms in the realm of Hindustani music, Satguru Pratap Singh (r.1906-1959) went on to employ the Talwandi *gharānā* singers Udho Khan and his son Rahim Bakhsh, from the village of Rampur (Ludhiana district), specifically to teach members of the *nāmdhārī* community, including his sons, at Bhaini Sahib from 1932 onwards (‘History of Namdhari Music I’ [n.d.]).

Instrumental accompanists, especially *tablā* players and *pakhāvājīs*, were naturally also much in demand, both for *śabad kīrtan* and Hindustani vocal or dance performance. In this regard, we find reference to Miyan Qadir Bakhsh (1902-1961), *khalīfā* or head of the Punjab *gharānā* of percussion, being employed for three years at Nankana Sahib Gurdwara in the early twentieth century.³⁵ Baba Malang (1872-1948), another renowned *pakhāvāj* and *tablā* player linked to the Punjab *gharānā*, from Bohan Patti (Hoshiarpur district), frequently partook in *śabad kīrtan* performance.³⁶ His nephew Talib Hussain (1931-1995) similarly relied upon patronage from the local gurdwara in his pre-Partition youth. Incidentally, it was memory of the lyrics of the *Āsā dī Vār* composition in the GGS, which he used to accompany early in the morning at the gurdwara, that saved his life during Partition, as he sought to make his way to Pakistan. Under interrogation by a group of Sikhs who had apprehended him on

³⁴ Patronage of music among the *nāmdhārīs* is known to go back at least to the time of Satguru Hari Singh (r.1872-1906). From an interview with Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari on 4 February 2018.

³⁵ From an interview with Sikh *rāgī* Davinder Pratap Singh, whose father used to perform at Nankana Sahib prior to Partition, on 22 March 2019.

³⁶ Personal communication with Balbir Singh Kanwal on 28 March 2019.

his way, his ability to recite passages of *gurbāñī* convinced them to let him go, giving them the impression that he was a *rabābī* (Saqib 2013: 206).³⁷

The extent to which Hindustani musicians of Punjab performed in the Sikh religious sphere for an appreciative class of gurus and *mahants* thus emerges, highlighting an important aspect of the social history of Hindustani music in the region. The Sikh religious sphere is but one of potentially numerous (Sufi, *vaiṣṇav* etc.) social spheres that existed beyond the courts, in which Hindustani music performance flourished, prior to the formation of music societies in and public concert circuits in the region.³⁸ Whilst often neglected, such peripheral spheres were clearly a major source of patronage for the region's musicians. As a space shared by specialist performers of *śabad kīrtan* (*rāgīs* and *rabābīs*) and performers of Hindustani music (*mīrāsīs*, *kalāvants*, *ṭavāifs* etc.), the Sikh religious sphere exemplifies the fluidity of musical exchange and lack of musical boundaries within the region. It serves as a further example illustrating the challenges in attempting to musically distinguish between the 'classical' or 'art' music tradition of the courts and the 'religious' or 'ritual' music of the temples, hermitages and shrines.

3.3.2 MUSICAL MAHANTS

In addition to providing a class of music patrons, the Sikh religious sphere was replete with figures of religious authority who were themselves trained musicians – *udāsīs* and *nirmalās*, *gyāñīs* and *mahants*, who doubled up as *rāgīs*. In fact, the *dērās* of certain *mahants* were known as schools of music where would-be students would come to learn under expert musicians. Mahant Gajja Singh (1849-1916), as a disciple of the *bīnkār* Mir Rehmat Ali (see Chapter Two), was a particularly prominent example in this regard. Though towards the end of his life he was appointed chief court musician and teacher to Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, he had previously been engaged as the *mahant* of a *nirmalā dērā* at the village of Gurusar (Bathinda district). Under his supervision, Gurusar developed

³⁷ The Sikh interrogators understood Talib Hussain as “*Mardāñē kiā*”, that is, “related to Bhai Mardana” (Saqib 2013: 206).

³⁸ Whilst music societies emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in the urban hubs of the colonial empire such as Bombay (Rosse 2010), Kapuria (2018: 216) notes how music clubs and associations had begun to proliferate in Punjab from the 1920s onwards, thanks in significant part to the efforts and influence of Paluskar in the region.

into an important music school (*dharamsāl*) from at least the late nineteenth century. It appears to have remained as such well into the twentieth century as other *nirmalā* musicians are recorded as having studied there. Pt Kartar Singh (d.1995), who toward the end of his life (1989-1995) served as the *mahant* of Dera Antarjamian in Amritsar, for example, was a musician who had studied at Gurusar, as indicated by his personal music handbooks (Figure 12).³⁹

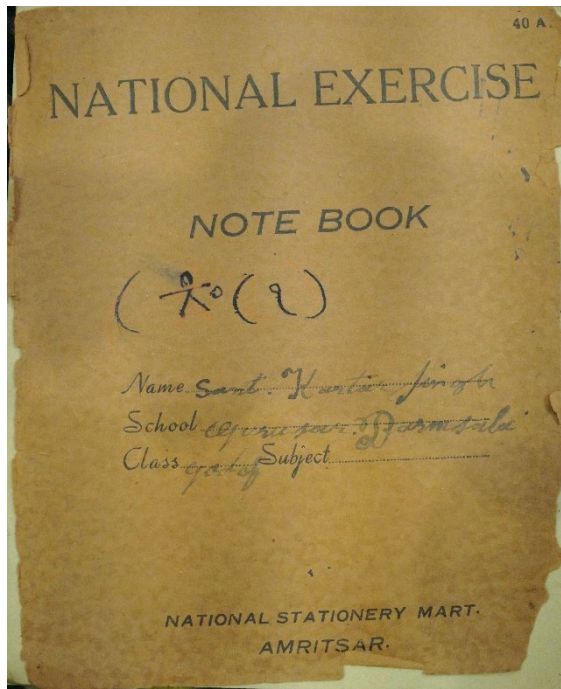


FIGURE 12 COVER OF MUSIC HANDBOOK OF PT KARTAR SINGH.

Home to two hundred and fourteen *dharamsāls*, twelve *udāsī akhārās* (Soch 1985: 35–37), and the Darbar Sahib with its more than eighty ancillary institutions (*buṅgās*), Amritsar was a thriving hub within the Sikh religious sphere and consequently an important centre for music in the region prior to Partition (Lybarger 2003: 24). Several *dērās* and *akhārās* in the city were noted schools of music, a notable example of which was Dera Antarjamian. Teacher and predecessor of Pt Kartar Singh was

Mahant Ganesha Singh, who was *mahant* of the *dērā* between 1927 and 1954.⁴⁰ While Mahant Ganesha Singh is renowned as a *nirmalā* scholar and author, he was also an accomplished *sitārīyā*, his personal musical handbook full of notated *sitār gats* (see Figure 13).⁴¹ Though the lives of Mahant Ganesha Singh and Pt Kartar Singh correspond to the twentieth-century era in which Hindustani music is widely acknowledged to have been democratised beyond the confines of hereditary specialists (Bakhle 2005), they nevertheless represent the continuity of a musical-pedagogical tradition that was already widespread in the nineteenth

³⁹ The handbook of Pt Kartar Singh is in the personal collection of Bhai Narinder Singh ‘Sant’ of Amritsar, an ex-musician of the Darbar Sahib who also studied under the *nirmalā* order.

⁴⁰ From interview with Amritsar-based *rāgī* Bhai Narinder Singh ‘Sant’ on 21 February 2019.

⁴¹ Mahant Ganesha Singh’s renowned publications include the *Mēgh Binōd Sṭīk on vaidya* (indigenous medicine), the *Bhārat Mat Darpan* on the sects and religious orders of India, and *Itihās Nirmal Bhēkh*, a history of the *nirmalā* order. His handbook of *sitār* notation was inherited by Bhai Narinder Singh ‘Sant’ of Amritsar from Pt Kartar Singh.

These examples serve to illustrate the extent to which *mahants* were often themselves practicing musicians, their hermitages serving as music schools. The educational role of *udāsīs* and *nirmalās*, in particular, is widely acknowledged (Oberoi 1994: 129), their institutions often responsible for disseminating training in a broad array of subjects including language (Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic), *vyākaraṇ* (grammar), literature, history, Vedantic philosophy, *kāvya* (poetry), *piṅgal* (prosody), *nīti* (ethics), medicine (*āyurvēd/hikmat*), and music (Kansal 1984; Sulakhan Singh 1999: 40). As demonstrated by the music-centric *ḍērās* such as Gurusar, Dera Antarjamian and Sekhwan, certain religious institutions would specialise in particular branches of knowledge.

Early in the twentieth century, the gurus of the *nāmdhārī* sect took to specialising in music and its education. Satguru Pratap Singh (1889-1959) was not only a patron of musicians as discussed earlier but also himself a keen musician, having studied the *dilrubā* from Bhai Mastan Singh, a leading disciple of Mahant Gajja Singh (Narula 1995: 103; ‘History of Namdhari Music I’ [n.d.]). He opened a music school in the early 1930s at Bhaini Sahib (Ludhiana district) and had his two sons, Satguru Jagjit Singh (1920-2012) and Maharaj Bir Singh, trained in music there under Bhai Harnam Singh, *ustāds* of the Talwandi *gharānā*, and two *rabābīs* of Amritsar, Bhai Taba and Bhai Nasira, all of whom had been brought in to teach at the school (‘History of Namdhari Music I’ [n.d.]).⁴²

Though the Sikh religious sphere was primarily oriented toward *śabad kīrtan* performance, the musical handbooks of these musical *mahants* reveal the extent to which they also studied and performed Hindustani music vocal and instrumental repertoire. The *rāgī* Baba Jawala Singh, for example, was taught *dhrupad* compositions attributed to Swami Haridas by his *udāsī* teacher Baba Vasava Singh (Bhai Baldeep Singh 2011: 283). The musical handbook of Bhai Jawala Singh’s younger brother, Gyani Bhagat Singh, contains not only *śabads* but *dhrupads* attributed to Tansen and the Talwandi *gharānā*, as well as various *ṭhumrīs* and percussive repertoire of the Punjab *gharānā*.⁴³ Pt Kartar Singh’s handbook (Figure 13) likewise includes *ṭhumrīs* and *dhrupad* compositions

⁴² Bhai Harnam Singh was a leading *dilrubā* player and disciple of Mahant Gajja Singh (Narula 1995).

⁴³ Interview with Bhai Baldeep Singh in Delhi on 14 March 2019.

alongside *śabads* of the GGS. An undated Sikh musician's handbook (BGL MSG 04), most likely dating to the late nineteenth century, contains a similarly diverse array of repertoire including *dhrupads*, *khayāls* of Sadarang and Adarang, *thumrīs* and *ṭappās*, *kabitts* of Bhai Gurdas, *sargams*, and even a type of *prabandh*.

Whilst employing instruments that were particularly popular in the region such as the *tāūs*, *jōrī* and *sarandā*, musicians of the Sikh religious sphere were evidently influenced by instrumental trends among Hindustani musicians more broadly.⁴⁴ As we have seen, the *sitār*, in particular, was popular among the *mahants* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflecting its growing popularity across north India (Miner 1993) and within the region through the eminent disciples of the Kapurthala *bīnkārs* (see Chapter Two). Echoing Gaston's (1997: 23) observations with regard to the musical similarities across the *vaiṣṇav* religious sphere and the courtly sphere, for the most part the Sikh religious sphere and courtly spheres were also musically congruent despite comprising distinct social contexts. With specialist performers of *śabad kīrtan* – the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* – and Hindustani music traversing both the courtly and religious spheres, as van der Linden (2015) highlights, there was little demarcation between the devotional *śabad kīrtan* tradition and Hindustani music tradition on a musical or musicological level. The distinction of *śabad kīrtan* arose primarily from it comprising its own unique body of devotional song-text repertoire.

To the extent that Hindustani music performance was institutionalised in the courtly sphere, *śabad kīrtan* performance was perhaps even more institutionalised within the Sikh religious sphere. Whilst beyond the scope of the present discussion, the precise rules, rituals and temporal-spatial circumstances in which *śabad kīrtan* performance occurred were also somewhat distinct to those under which a *maḥfil* of Hindustani music might be convened; the unique circumstances surrounding *havēlī saṅgīt* performance were similarly what distinguished it from the Hindustani music *maḥfil* (Gaston 1997: 268). Nevertheless, with Hindustani music being taught at Sikh religious institutions, and being patronised and practised by figures of Sikh religious authority, it clearly permeated the Sikh

⁴⁴ The *taus* and *sarandā* have been noted for their Punjabi or even Sikh origin, for example, in the *Sarmāyā-i-Īsrat* (Khan 1884). Similarly, the *jōrī* has been identified as originating in the Punjab (Kippen 2010).

religious sphere in a diffuse manner, making it impossible to segregate from the *śabad kīrtan* tradition. Exploring the significant body of Hindustani musicological literature that circulated in the Sikh religious sphere in the nineteenth century, I proceed to discuss the literary and scholarly aspect of Hindustani music in this context.

3.4 MUSICOLOGICAL LITERATURE IN THE SIKH RELIGIOUS SPHERE

3.4.1 INSTRUCTIVE MUSICOLOGY: TRANSLITERATIONS, TRANSLATIONS AND *ṬĪKĀS*

Rather than Punjabi, Braj Bhasha has been identified as the favoured language of Sikh literary production up until the early twentieth century, and Gurmukhi the favoured script (Murphy 2019: 321–22). Literally meaning ‘from the mouth of the Guru’, Gurmukhi was developed and popularised by the Sikh Gurus, subsequently becoming institutionalised as the preeminent script of the Sikh religious sphere (Shackle 1983: 2). The *udāsīs* and *nirmalās* played an important role in providing instruction in Gurmukhi to the general public, many *ḍērās* having Gurmukhi schools attached to them (Sulakhan Singh 1999). It is important to note too that, prior to the colonial period, Gurmukhi was equally favoured among Punjab’s Hindu populace, Devanagari never enjoying much currency as a script in the region (Linden 2008: 144).

Given the widespread circulation of Braj Bhasha treatises on Hindustani musicology in the Devanagari character up until the mid-nineteenth century (Williams 2019), it is unsurprising that the Sikh religious intellectuals’ primary concern was in transliterating such texts into the Gurmukhi character to cater for a local readership. Williams (2019: 96) notes the role and effect of transliteration in the following terms:

Beyond translation by rewording, changing the script was a standard procedure for communicating texts to different audiences. On the page, transliteration creates the optical illusion of profound transformation, when the change is perhaps more nuanced: alphabets carry their own cultural connotations,

which inform the way a text is read without altering the words themselves.

Given the local origins of the Gurmukhi script and its inherent connection to the scribal tradition of the Gurus, the act of transliterating existing texts from Devanagari into Gurmukhi not only facilitated accessibility but also instilled them with a material familiarity to the local readership. Editorial additions such as the prefixing of the text with a *maṅgalācaraṇ* (invocation) that invoked the Guru – “*ik ōṅkār satgur prasād*”, that is, “The One [Creator] of the form *ōm*; [realised] by the grace of the True Guru” – essentially endowed a text with the sanction, blessings, and religious authority of the Guru. Transliteration into Gurmukhi can thus be considered a form of literary appropriation – doing so legitimised a text of potentially Mughal or Rajput origin for use within the Sikh religious sphere. By virtue of expanding its readership, the act of transliterating a text also enhanced the reputation of the original work.

Transliteration also offered an almost unbounded degree of freedom and flexibility; scribes could and would often freely extract passages or sections of interest from a text, rather than copy it in its entirety. In this way, scribes can be considered co-authors of the transformed texts (Williams 2019: 106). As we shall see, the editorial process, involving a choice of inclusion, exclusion and addition, can be particularly revealing with regard to what precisely was of common interest across regions, groups and indeed time, with centuries-old works still being circulated anew, across large swathes of territory, often far removed from their original contexts. By inference, this editorial process also serves to highlight differences in the interests of regions and groups.

It is also relevant to consider the routes via which works originating further afield found their way into the region. Having already noted how the rise of the Sikh states coincided with a broad decline in Mughal power, it is only natural that scribes, scholars, and poets were attracted into the region in addition to musicians and artists. With such intellectuals travelled knowledge and copies of texts in myriad subjects. In this way, works produced under Mughal and Rajput patronage would have easily found their way into Punjab. Relevant also is the fact that the *udāsīs* and *nirmalās* had networks that transcended the boundaries of Punjab,

their branches reaching into important centres of Hindu learning such as Haridwar and Varanasi, meaning that seemingly distant scholarly streams were in fact not so far away. In the realm of written scholarship, linguistic and regional boundaries were thus less of an obstacle than might first be assumed.

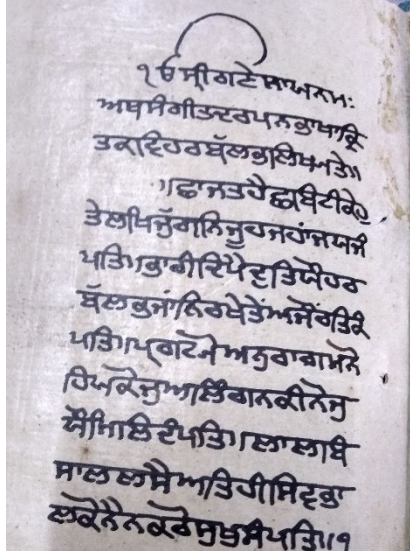


FIGURE 14 FIRST FOLIO OF THE *SANĠIT DARPAN* (BGL MS 5023).

Among the most notable Braj Bhasha works on musicology during the Mughal period was the *Saṅgīt Darpan*, a popular translation of a Sanskrit work by the same name (*Saṅgītadarpana*).⁴⁵ Written in 1625 by Damodara, a court musician to emperor Jahangir, the Sanskrit original has been described as “the preeminent Sanskrit source for Indo-Persian treatises during Aurangzeb’s reign” (Brown 2003: 36). It was subsequently translated into Braj Bhasha during the reign of Shah Jahan – in 1653 or perhaps slightly earlier – by a music scholar named Harivallabh (Sodhi

1999).⁴⁶ The existence of multiple Gurmukhi recensions of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* in nineteenth-century Punjab attests to its enduring popularity, more than two centuries after its creation. A very neat and well-preserved complete copy (PSAP M/1045), dating to 1855, exists at the Punjab State Archives (PSA), Patiala. Another incomplete recension (BGL MS 5023) is held at the Bhai Gurdas Library (BGL) of Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU), Amritsar, containing only the chapter on *rāg prakīraṇ* (*rāg* miscellanea).

In its complete form, the *Saṅgīt Darpan* covers the various elements of musical theory including *svar* (musical notes), *tāl* (rhythmic cycles), *nritya* (dance), *vādya* (instruments), *gīt* (song types), and of course *rāg*, in which various *rāgmālā* systems (*mats*) are presented, including the popular Hanuman *mat* and the

⁴⁵ See Williams’ (2019) article with regard to the widespread circulation of the *Saṅgīt Darpan*.

⁴⁶ Whilst perhaps simply assuming as much from his name, Gupta (1999) has suggested that Harivallabh was a *brāhmiṇ* poet-musician, linked to the Radhavallabh *sampradāy* as well as being employed at Shah Jahan’s court.

rāgmālā of an earlier text known as the *Mān Kutūhal*.⁴⁷ The Amritsar recension (Figure 14) of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* seems to indicate that, in colonial Punjab, we encounter a continuity of an earlier trend in which “[t]he chapter on *raga* seems to have been the most copied and circulated portion of the treatise” (Williams 2019: 97). We might also, however, interpret the selective circulation of this chapter as reflective of the specific interests of religious intellectuals within the Sikh religious sphere, given the prominent place of *rāg* and *rāgmālā* in the GGS, as noted earlier in the chapter.

The format of the Amritsar recension is further revealing of its purpose and context. The excerpt of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* is positioned within a small manuscript alongside an eclectic mix of other texts, or fragments thereof, in a literary collection known as a *saṅgrahi*. In this instance, the *saṅgrahi* includes a diverse collection of literary works, including a text on *sāmudrik śāstra*,⁴⁸ a Punjabi translation of the *Karīmā*,⁴⁹ and a Vedantic work known as the *Adhyātam Prakāś*.⁵⁰ The portable form and diverse contents of such a *saṅgrahi* illustrate how it was a personalised item, a miniature library of sorts, representing the specific interests of the individual to whom it belonged. As alluded to earlier, the diversity of subjects transmitted among the *udāsī* and *nirmalā* sects suggest that such a manuscript might well belong to a religious intellectual belonging to one of these orders. In particular, the inclusion of *rāgmālā*-centric musicological texts served to equip the bearer with the requisite knowledge to fulfil their potential roles as music patron and perhaps practising musician. The considerable crossover in literary interests between Sikh religious intellectuals of the nineteenth century and the Mughal elite is also noteworthy. In the realm of aesthetics, for example, not only did they share interests in Hindustani musicology, but the Sikh religious intellectuals also shared interests in the Persian poetry of Sa’adi with the Mughals (Brown 2003: 132), producing their own Punjabi translations of some of his famous works (Oberoi 1994: 250–51).

⁴⁷ The *Mān Kutūhal* was commissioned by Raja Man Singh of Gwalior in the late fifteenth century, following his convening of a conference of music scholars, including Nayak Bakhshu (Brown 2003: 61).

⁴⁸ *Sāmudrik śāstra* is the ancient art of face, body, and aura analysis.

⁴⁹ The *Karīmā* is a work of Persian poetry by Sufi Sheikh Sa’adi Shirazi (1210-1292), whose works enjoyed significant popularity in South Asia from the Mughal period onwards.

⁵⁰ The *Adhyātam Prakāś* is a work on the nature of the Supreme Spirit, from a Vedantic perspective, written by Kavi Sukha, a court poet of Guru Gobind Singh (Singh [n.d.]).

In addition to recensions of the original text, we encounter a commentary (*ṭīkā*) of the first chapter of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* circulating in the nineteenth century Sikh religious sphere. There are at least two separate recensions of this commentary in which verses of the original Braj Bhasha poetry are quoted followed by expansive comments (*bārtā*) in Hindi prose.⁵¹ Noting a shift away from courtly Braj Bhasha toward more modern forms of the vernaculars, Williams (2019: 106) suggests that:

By the 1880s, Indian musicologists were either monumentalizing Sanskrit works as the classics of *sāngita-shāstra* or writing their own vernacular studies: the earlier generations of Brajbhasha scholarship were for the most part ignored and forgotten.

These commentaries, both of which were written in 1881, certainly intimate a decline in Braj Bhasha familiarity under colonial rule, hence the need for Hindi interpretation. They also, however, suggest that, in Punjab at least, scribes were still meaningfully engaging with the older Braj-Bhasha-based musicological scholarship, into the late nineteenth century, such commentaries representing an intermediate stage in the gradual transition away from Braj Bhasha. I would further posit that the enduring engagement with and relevance of Braj Bhasha literature in the Punjab, well into the late nineteenth century, was reflective of the fact that it was the last region to come under colonial rule – the Punjab was only annexed several decades prior to the production of these texts. The distinct lack of disruption to literary practices in the region, despite the transition to colonial rule and associated societal transformations, has otherwise been noted by Mir (2010: 64) in relation to her study of the Punjabi *qissā* literature.

Given the detail of translation present in such commentaries, Williams (2019: 100) has suggested that such Hindi commentaries of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* may well have been intended for or commissioned by foreign readers. The two Gurmukhi recensions of this particular commentary, however, appear consistent with patterns of Sikh patronage and literary practice. The *ṭīkā*, as a literary genre, was

⁵¹ One recension of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* commentary is held in the BGL, GNDU, Amritsar (BGL MSG 13), and the other at the PSA, Patiala (PSAP M/1046).

popular among Sikh religious intellectuals of the nineteenth century, representative of a general concern for the need to correctly interpret earlier linguistic forms, familiarity with which was seemingly on the decline.⁵² The colophons of the two recensions of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* commentary reveal that one was scribed in late April of 1881 by a Kalu Rai Mistri (PSAP M/1046),⁵³ and the other, perhaps a copy of the first given the similarities, in late June of the same year by Brahm Bala Sadh (BGL MSG 13), quite possibly an *udāsī* ascetic given his name.⁵⁴

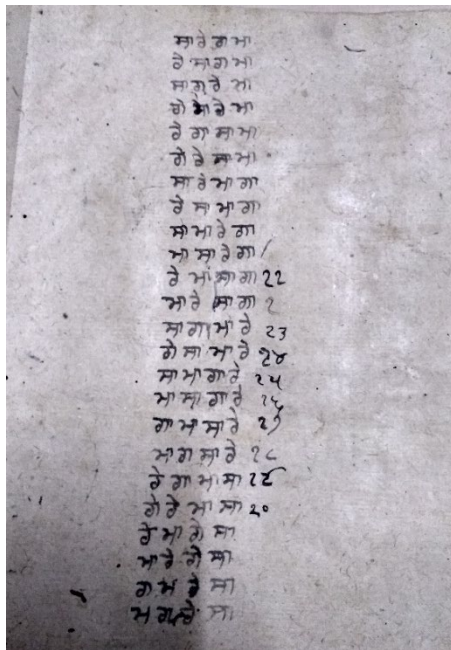


FIGURE 15 FIRST FOLIO OF THE SAṄGĪT DARPAṆ COMMENTARY (BGL MSG 13).

In this commentary, it was the first chapter of the *Saṅgīt Darpan*, dealing with the fundamental theoretical elements of Hindustani musicology (*sur*, *grām*, *tān*, etc.) rather than the chapter on *rāg* that was translated. Evidently, extensive effort was being made to accurately interpret and understand the theory being expounded in the original text. The textual comments are also supplemented in places by tabulated enumerations of concepts such as *mūrchanā* and *tān*, offering a more visual depiction.

The fact that the first folio of one of the recensions also contains a cursive enumeration of a four-note *sargam* pattern (Figure 15), quite likely the basis of a vocal/instrumental practice exercise, or *paṭṭā*, also suggests that the author was genuinely concerned with relating theory to practice. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the commentary might also be considered to relegate the

⁵² There were numerous *ṭīkās* of Guru Nanak's *Jap jī* composition, for example, produced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, including that of the *udāsī* scholar Anand Ghan and the *Garab Gañjanī Ṭīkā* of the *nirmalā* author Kavi Santokh Singh. A commentary on the Guru Granth Sahib, known as the *Farīdkōṭī Ṭīkā*, was also commissioned by the Sikh aristocracy of the Faridkot state in the late nineteenth century, seen as a response to correct foreign attempts to translate the GGS, namely the translation of Ernest Trumpp.

⁵³ Dated 4 *badī Basākh 1938 sammat*, that is, the fourth day of the waning moon in the month of *Visakh* (mid-April – mid-May).

⁵⁴ Dated 1 *badī Hārḥ 1938 sammat*, that is, the first day of the waning moon in the month of *Hārḥ* (mid-June – mid-July).

aesthetic function of the original Braj Bhasha poetry, foregrounding instead its utility and instructive or scholastic function.

Another interesting feature of this commentary is that it is preceded by the opening verses of a separate late-eighteenth-century musicological treatise known as the *Srī Rādhā Govind Saṅgīt Sār* (*SRGSR*), dating to 1799 and compiled by Sawai Pratap Singh (1764-1803) of Jaipur after holding a conference of music scholars.⁵⁵ The first 134 verses of the *SRGSR*, in which the various *rāgmālā mats*, musicological *granthas*, and music scholars of the past have been enumerated, carry an invocatory aura, acknowledging the broad scholastic history and its notable contributions before turning to the *Saṅgīt Darpan* commentary itself. Originating in the not-too-distant Jaipur and less than a century earlier, the *SRGSR* understandably circulated widely in nineteenth-century Punjab. It is said to have been transliterated into Gurmukhi in its entirety, in the first half of the nineteenth century, by Ram Sukh Rao, a courtier and chronicler of the Kapurthala ruler Raja Fateh Singh (r.1801-37) (Rao 1980).

The manner in which sections of existing musicological works were freely combined, and supplemented with translatory passages, demonstrates not only the individualised character but the considerable breadth of musicological scholarship in the Sikh religious sphere. In another example of a *saṅgrahi* manuscript (BGL MS 122), scribed by one Amar Singh in 1841, we encounter sections of four separate musicological works alongside one another. This manuscript contains two works of a seventeenth-century author named Lachhiram, the first simply titled *Rāgmālā* and the second known as the *Buddh Prakāś Darpan*, which I shall come to shortly. It also contains the chapter on *rāg* from the *Mān Kutūhal*, a fifteenth-century musicological treatise, produced under the patronage of the then ruler of Gwalior, Raja Man Singh Tomar,⁵⁶ and (part of) an undated work of unknown authorship, titled *Sarab Saṅgīt Bit*, comprising a Braj Bhasha commentary of an older Sanskrit musicological treatise (perhaps from whence the

⁵⁵ The misleading opening has led to the work being catalogued as recensions of the *SRGSR* where, in fact, the commentary of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* actually forms a larger part of the work.

⁵⁶ Based on the sequencing of *rāgs* contained therein, this section of the *Mān Kutūhal* clearly corresponds to the same passage that was translated into Persian by Faqirullah in his *Rāg Darpan* (Faqirullah 1996).

work derives its title, that is, *Sarvasaṅgītavṛtta* – ‘Account of All Music [Systems]’).

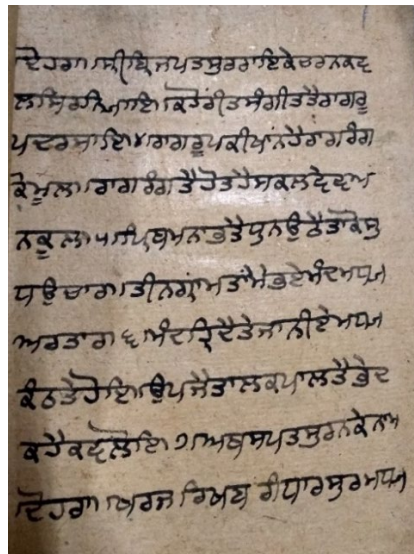


FIGURE 17 SECOND FOLIO OF THE *GĀN KANTŪHAL* (BGL MSG 21).

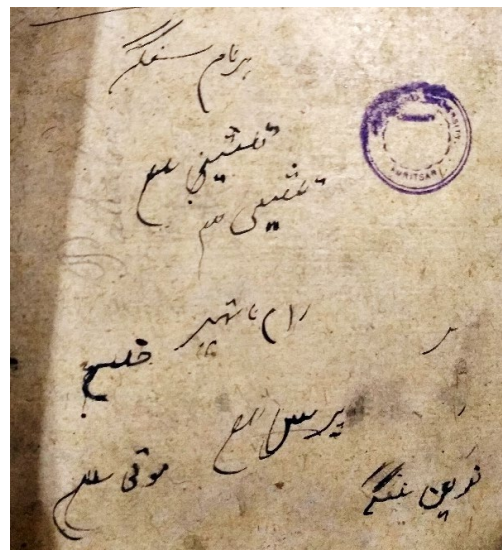


FIGURE 16 FIRST FOLIO OF THE *GĀN KANTŪHAL* (BGL MSG 21).

What the breadth of musicological texts circulating in the Sikh religious sphere in the nineteenth century demonstrates is a serious scholastic effort to study and scrutinise multiple differing sources on musicology. Miner (2015: 389–93) notes that the *rāgmālā* system included in the *Adi Granth* (1604), originally authored by Kavi Alam (1583), most closely corresponds (in terms of the *rāgs*, *rāginīs* and their relationships) to the *rāgmālā* authored by Khemakaran/Ksemakarna (1570) of Rewa and the *rāgmālā* of the *Mān Kutūhal* (c.1500).⁵⁷ Broadly speaking, all of these *rāgmālās* have been identified as variants of the Hanuman *mat*, the preeminent system of *rāg-rāginī* theorisation throughout much of the Mughal period in which *Bhairav*, *Śrī*, *Hiṇḍōl*, *Mālkauns*, *Dīpak* and *Mēgh* comprised the six main *rāgs* (Brown 2003: 184–85). The place of this *rāgmālā* within the GGS certainly contextualises the extensive Sikh scholarly concern for this subject.

Texts such as the *Mān Kutūhal*, whilst including *rāgmālā* enumerations, also deal with *rāgs* at the musical-technical level (Miner 2015: 394), illustrating the direct relevance of such texts to practicing musicians. A manuscript (BGL MSG 21) seemingly containing part of Kavi Krishna’s late-eighteenth-century *Rāg Kutūhal*

⁵⁷ Seemingly informed by the work of Gangoly (1948), and apparently referring to the same author and text, Schofield refers to Ksemakarna as Mesakarna and dates his work *Rāgamālā* to 1509 rather than 1570 (Brown 2003: 33).

(labelled in this instance as *Gān Kantūhal*),⁵⁸ which again deals exclusively with *rāg* and *rāgmālā*, was copied out in Gurmukhi by a Harnam Singh, quite possibly Bhai Harnam Singh of the Patiala court, the disciple of Mahant Gajja Singh, given the faded Romanised text “Patiala”, written in pencil, to the left of the folio (Figure 16). The inclusion of a *dhrupad* composition (ascribed to Miyan Tansen) on the last folio of the manuscript, combined with the fact that the hand is evidently not of a professional scribe, further suggest that the scribe was likely a practicing musician. The combined use of Nastaliq and Roman script on the first page also marks somewhat of a departure from what one would expect of a scribe operating in the nineteenth-century religious sphere. It is thus likely that this manuscript was written in the early twentieth century and by a musician who was likely familiar with the literary practices of the colonial courtly setting. Such a late dating of this manuscript would certainly serve as a remarkable testimony to the enduring significance of Braj Bhasha musicological literature in late colonial Punjab.

Whilst there has been a “lingering question” over the extent to which practicing musicians themselves interacted with musicological texts over the centuries (Williams 2019: 97), intellectuals of the Sikh religious establishment, as both practitioners and/or patrons of music, were evidently engaging significantly with musicological texts as a source of knowledge throughout the nineteenth century, representing a continuation of the manner in which musicians of the Mughal court have been shown to.⁵⁹ Through a closer analysis of the above-mentioned *Buddh Prakāś Darpan*, another text oriented around the Hanuman *mat rāgmālā* and perhaps the most popular of all musicological works in circulation in nineteenth-century Punjab, I proceed to demonstrate how verses of these musicological texts were not merely instructive but also performative in nature and how circulation of this text in particular reflected upon its link to the localised music practice of Punjabi and Sikh musicians.

3.4.2 PERFORMATIVE MUSICOLOGY: THE *BUDDH PRAKĀŚ DARPAN*

⁵⁸ Kavi Krishna, poet of the Uniyara court, Rajasthan, whilst drawing inspiration from the *Saṅgīt Darpan*, focussed particularly on the aspects of *rāg lachan* and *rāg dhyān* in his work *Rāg Kutūhal*, which was completed in 1796 (Williams 2019: 103).

⁵⁹ Ras Baras Khan, musician of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, for example, wrote a translation of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* (Brown 2003: 76–77).

I am aware of at least eight separate Gurmukhi-based recensions of the *Buddh Prakāś Darpan (BPD)*, that is, *Mirror of the Illuminated Intellect*, the sheer number of which highlights the extent to which this text circulated in nineteenth-century Punjab.⁶⁰ The *BPD* was written in 1681, during the reign of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, by Diwan Lachhiram of Lahore, who was also the author of the *Rāgmālā* discussed earlier.⁶¹ As of the late seventeenth century, despite having recently lost its status as the capital of the Mughal empire, Lahore was still the regional capital and undoubtedly one of India’s largest and most culturally vibrant cities. As testimony to the city’s ongoing cultural significance, Aurangzeb had the impressive Badshahi Masjid, one of South Asia’s largest mosques, constructed in Lahore in 1673.

Whilst the author’s title (*dīvān*) might at first be suggestive of a ministerial position in a courtly setting, it is important to recall that nomenclature of the courts often penetrated the religious sphere in South Asia, with religious office holders also taking such titles.⁶² Given the character of the text and the opening invocation (“*ik ōṅkār srī krisanāy namah*”), it appears as though Lachhiram held a position in one of Lahore’s *vaiṣṇav* temples (often known as *ṭhākurdvārās* within Punjab). Another name, mentioned in the text as its patron and perhaps the guru or *mahant* of Lachhiram’s lineage or institution, is that of Mall Bhat:

*sāstra sakala sakēla kai tā kō sabha rasa līna,
malla bhāṭa sāsana kahyō bāndhahu grantha navīna.*

*lachīrama masananda dipata prathamahi jvālānātha,
malla bhāṭa caranana gahiyō bhāla dhariō tiha hātha.*

⁶⁰ Six copies of the *BPD* exist in the BGL, GNDU, Amritsar (BGL MS 122, BGL MS 294, BGL MS 778, BGL MS 1000, BGL MS 5039, BGL PPS 31), one copy in the British Library, London (BL Or. 2765), and one version published online by the Panjab Digital Library (Lachhiram 1681). I am grateful to Radha Kapuria for making me aware of the copy in the British Library.

⁶¹ “*sambata dasa ara sāta sai aṭhatī hai sanga tāsa, budha prakāsa darapana sunō guna jana karō prakāsa*”, that is, “[In the year] seventeen hundred and thirty-eight of the [Bikrami] Samvat calendar (1681 CE), it has been [written]; listen to the *Buddh Prakāś Darpan* and enlighten yourself, skilled people”.

⁶² The *sajjādā naśīms* of Baba Farid’s shrine at Pakpattan, for example, also used the title ‘*dīvān*’ (Gilmartin 1984).

Collating all the scriptures, [Lachhiram] is absorbed in all their sentiments. Mall Bhat gave the order for the binding of a new *granth*.

Lachhiram says: first of all, the throne of Jwalanath glistens; I clasp the feet of Mall Bhat, placing my forehead in his hands.

Although little is known about the figure Mall Bhat, he also appears to have been a poet who worked under the patronage of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) at one point.⁶³ Assuming his surname to be an indication of caste, Mall Bhat belonged to the *bhatt* community, who are likened as Hindu equivalents of the *mīrāsīs* (Ashok 1973: 7) and whose traditional role included literary, musical and ritual elements as poet-musicians, chroniclers, and priests (Rose 1911c: 94–100). Mall Bhat's inherited concern for poetry and music would certainly explain the commissioning of a text such as the *BPD*. Although the reference to Jwalanath is somewhat ambiguous, another passage in the text suggests this refers to a particular deity:

*kripā kīnī mahām māī brahama ansa bara dāī tanaka na rahai
dōkha carana parasa tē.
cārōī barana jā kē nisa dina ṭhāḍhē rahai mana ichai phala
pāvai aisē sumanasa tē.
kāhū sōm na baira au birōdha hai na kāhū hū sōm sabha sōm
samāna hita ātama darasa tē.
mōhana gusāī suta sīla au santōkha pūrō rōma rōma sukha
jvālānātha kē darasa tē.*

The great goddess-mother bestowed her grace upon the manifestation of Brahma, the granter of wishes; touching his feet, not the slightest suffering remains.

The fruits of the incessant, inner desires of people of all the four castes, are obtained from such a deity.

Neither enemy nor hostile to anyone, he equally and lovingly

⁶³ Mall Bhat's name appears on a list of authors whose works were kept in the Sikh Reference Library at the Golden Temple prior to 1984 (Tatla 2020: 9). His name also appears among the names of poets who were active in the court of Guru Gobind Singh (Padam 1976: 218).

reveals himself to the souls of all.

From the blessed vision of Jwalanath, child of the enticer-lord,
each and every pore is filled with joy, virtue and contentment.

In the search for further clues toward the social context of Lachhiram and Mall Bhat, a potential candidate might be the remnants of Jwala Dai *thākurdvārā*, a notable Hindu temple located in Vachhowali Bazar within the old walled city of Lahore.⁶⁴ Hindu merchants and businessmen, which Lahore historically had a sizeable population of, have indeed been noted as patrons and consumers of musicological texts (Williams 2019: 97). Mall Bhat's connection with Guru Gobind Singh would be indicative of the overlapping of the Hindu and Sikh spheres of patronage in the late seventeenth century.

As was often the case with other Indic musicological texts (Nijenhuis and Delvoye 2010: 47), it appears as though the *BPD* was also translated into Persian. Aurangzeb's reign has indeed been highlighted as a crucial period in which Sanskrit and Braj Bhasha musicological treatises were increasingly translated into Persian, representing "an increasing indigenisation of Mughal culture" (Brown 2003: 45). A work titled *Tasrīḥ ul-Mūsīqī* by Hakim Arzani (d.1722), the only known recension of which lies in the Punjab University, Lahore, has been described as a translation of the "*Buddh Prakāś*" (Ahmad 2012). Noting that the text itself claims the "*Buddh Prakāś*" as a work of the legendary musician Miyan Tansen, Ahmad has assumed this to be so, though Schofield (2015a) has suggested that this is erroneous. Without having had the opportunity to examine the manuscript myself, it is impossible to know whether the "*Buddh Prakāś*" that forms the basis of Arzani's translation is indeed the *BPD* of Lachhiram or a similarly titled but separate work. The fact that Arzani's and Lachhiram's lives correspond chronologically and that the only known recension of the *Tasrīḥ ul-Mūsīqī* is located in the archives of Punjab University, Lahore, the same city where Lachhiram's *BPD* was written, certainly adds to the probability that the "*Buddh Prakāś*" referenced by Arzani was indeed Lachhiram's *BPD*. While the content and format of many musicological texts of this period were similar,

⁶⁴ Shiraz Hassan, writer for Sunday Magazine in Lahore, writes about discovering the "Thakurdwara Jawala Dai" temple complex, in what was evidently an area of Lahore with a high Hindu concentration in the pre-Partition era (Hassan 2015).

Ahmad's description of the third, fourth and fifth chapters of the *Taśrīh ul-Mūsīqī* are certainly congruent to the contents of Lachhiram's *BPD*.

In the first chapter of Lachhiram's *BPD*, the author references the textual sources which inform the production of his text, namely the *Saṅgīt Cūrāmani*, *Saṅgīt Darpan*, *Saṅgīt Ratnākar*, *Saṅgīt Makarand*, and *Hanumān (Hanavant) Nāṭak*. Though the first four of which are well-known Sanskrit musicological treatises (Nijenhuis and Delvoye 2010: 36–38), several of which also had Braj Bhasha translations, reference to the *Hanumān Nāṭak*, a work describing Hanuman and his devotion to Ram Chandra, is noteworthy. Lachhiram's consulting of the *Hanumān Nāṭak* may relate to the fact that Lachhiram's work is based on the *rāgmālā* of the Hanuman *mat*, the most popular of the *rāg-rāginī* systems in the late seventeenth century (Brown 2003: 184).

The second chapter of the *BPD* outlines the *rāgmālā* system of the Hanuman *mat*, enumerating the six *śuddh* (pure) *rāgs* and how all the other *rāgs* and *rāginīs* relate to them. The remaining six chapters, corresponding to *Bhairav*, *Śrī*, *Hiṇḍōl*, *Mālkaums*, *Dīpak*, and *Mēgh*, respectively, deal with the *lachan* (characteristics) of the *rāgs* and *rāginīs* attached to each of the six *śuddh rāgs*. Comprising the crux of the *BPD*, the content of these chapters is worthy of closer examination. In similar fashion to the *rāg dhyāns* – the *rāg* meditations – of the *Saṅgīt Darpan* and other music treatises, Lachhiram provides poetic visualisations of each *rāg* and *rāginī*, describing the iconography and characteristics that one would expect to find in visual representations of *rāgs*, namely *rāgmālā* paintings. These *rāg dhyān* verses are interspersed with what Miner (2015) describes as the “music-technical” aspect of *rāg* theory, that is, how the notes of certain *rāgs* combine to create other *rāgs*, as well as details of the associated season, sentiment, and time of day of a *rāg*.

In his verses, Lachhiram employs a fairly typical array of Braj Bhasha meters – *bisanapad* (i.e. *viṣṇupad*) or *padā*, *caupaī*, *savaiyā*, *kabitt* and *dōharā* (i.e. *dōhā*) – several of which can simultaneously be considered as genres of song.⁶⁵ In fact,

⁶⁵ The four-part *kabitt* is understood to be a genre closely related to *dhrupad* (Delvoye 2010), featuring in song-text anthologies such as the *Sahasaras* of Nayak Bakhshu's *dhrupads* (Sharma 1972: 34) and the Fatehpur manuscript which contains a *kabitt* attributed to Tansen (Suradasa 1984: 30–31). In the *śabad kīrtan* tradition *kabitts* are also frequently sung as *dhrupads*. The

in one of the *BPD* recensions (BL Or. 2765), the first line of the *viṣṇupad* verses are labelled ‘*ṭēk*’, a textual-musical marker indicating that the first line comprises the refrain of the verse when performed as a song-text (Callewaert and Lath 1989: 75). The following is an example of such a *viṣṇupad*, taken from the *BPD*, in *rāg Mēgh*:

*mēgha tana ambara raṅga anēka,
nabha kē bhāla bhayō jiha utapati dipata saṅkha kara ēka. tēk.*

*nagana kripāna lasata kara bijula gaura gāta siva rūpa,
kēkī sabada sōdha sura līnī sadā prasanna sarūpa.*

*kamalā kara ara nīla kaṅṭha taha mēgha rāga kō bāsa,
bēnī ati bisāla jiha laṭakata ravanī mundrā tāsa.*

*sampuraṇa sura naṭa kamōda kalyāna basanta milāyō,
ādi anta dhaivata jiha rākhī yā bidha mēgha sunāyō.*

*sāvana ara bhādo barakhā ruta bahuta lōga tiha gāvē,
mēgha ghaṭā unata jaba dēkhē ṭēra ṭēra mana bhāvē.⁶⁶*

The body of *rāg Mēgh* is adorned with many shades of amber. His forehead is formed of the sky and in one hand he holds the conch shell.

With the naked sword of lightning in hand, his body is light like the form of Shiva. Resembling the call of the peacock, he has played the musical notes, his countenance ever joyful.

With lotus-hands and blue throat, *rāg Mēgh* abides in water. His extremely beautiful braids hang, delighting with his ears.

savaiyā, whilst having a different meter, shares the same rhyming scheme and four-part structure, and often contains internal rhyme akin to many *dhrupad* compositions (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 232–35). The *viṣṇupad* was a generic song item that was frequently used to describe devotional *dhrupad*-type compositions in Punjab up until the late nineteenth century, as observed by Henry Court (1888).

⁶⁶ This version of the verse is based on the greatest consensus across multiple recensions.

Combine all of the notes of the *rāgs Nat, Kamōd, Kalyān* and *Basant*; having kept the *dhaivat* [at bay], from start to end, sing *Mēgh* in this way.

In the months of *Sāvan* and *Bhādō*, in the monsoon season, many people sing *Mēgh*. Seeing the rainclouds gathering, they cry out with appeased hearts.

Musical compositions in which the *rāgs* themselves are the subject of the song-text are well known in Hindustani music. The genre in which the musical-technical characteristics of a *rāg* form the subject of song-text is known as a *lakṣan* or *lathan gīt*, an abundance of which are to be found in some of the well-known published collections of Hindustani music.⁶⁷ Whilst certain musical-technical characteristics of *rāg Mēgh* are described in the above verse, other musicological aspects including *rāg dhyān* and seasonal association are also prominent. At once both a verse of poetry and a performable song-text, these verses represent an important but often neglected link between the iconographic and the sonic form of a *rāg*, between musicological theory and practice. This is a link which, as Schofield (2018: 71) notes, has remained “unclear” despite the repeated attempts of scholars to better understand it. She situates *ras* and *bhāv* as the link between the sonic and iconic forms of *rāg*, “emotional essences evoked through the different technical means of painting, poetry and music, but felt similarly, and more intensely, when experienced together” (Schofield 2018b: 80).

What the performative verses of the *BPD* illustrate, therefore, is a symbiosis in which the melody of a *rāg*, partly prescribed by the words they were to accompany, combined with words to enhance the sentiments inherent within one another. Besides melody and meaning, the role of Braj Bhasha, as the language of expression, has also been highlighted to have “amplified the beauty-oriented properties and sonic textures of texts” (Williams 2019: 96). Despite often being subsequently conjoined to *rāgmālā* paintings, Schofield (2018: 72) has suggested that the *rāg dhyān* verses were “never intended to be illustrated”. If *rāgmālā* paintings and musicological verses pertaining to *rāg* were indeed separate

⁶⁷ See Bhatkhande’s *Kramik Pustak Mālikā* (1962) and Muhammad Nawab Ali Khan’s *Ma’ārif-un-Naḡmāt* (2014) for examples of *lathan gīt* compositions.

“material traditions”, the same cannot be said of such musicological verses in relation to musical compositions and song-texts. The musical-textual relationship, in which *rāgs* are both being sung and sung about, was inherent to the verses of a text like the *BPD*, paramount to its intended function and mode of consumption. The fact that musical markers, such as the labelling of the *ṭēk*, were repeated by scribes in recensions of the text circulating as late as the nineteenth century, indicates the enduring relevance of the performative aspect of such texts.

Whereas verses from the *Saṅgīt Darpan* were frequently encountered accompanying *rāgmālā* paintings (Williams 2019: 97), it is noteworthy that the *BPD* has been explicitly highlighted for not appearing alongside paintings (Gangoly 1948). This might further reflect upon the significance of the texts oral dimension, and, more broadly, upon the preference of performative rather than visual arts in the plains of Punjab. It also likely relates to the fact that texts authored in late-seventeenth-century Punjab, specifically in the Gurmukhi script, appear not to have circulated beyond the region.⁶⁸

Shedding further light on the connection between musicians and musicology, theory and practice, we find two revealing references to the *BPD* in a nineteenth-century musician’s handbook – the use of Gurmukhi, and inclusion of several *kabitts* of Bhai Gurdas, chief scribe of Guru Arjan, suggest the musician in this case was indeed a Sikh.⁶⁹ Contained within, are two *sargam* compositions in *rāg Mārvā*, in which Hindustani solfa syllables are intertwined with lexical passages within a *dhrupad*-like composition structure.⁷⁰ The first of these, set to *gīt tāl* of seven beats, concludes with the following *sañcārī-abhōg* verse:

*sura kalapa sura birata sura prichiniyā gāvai, gīta kē pramāna
sō budha prakāsa kī kripā tē, nī dha ma ga rē sā*

⁶⁸ See, for example, the *Prem Ambodh*, which deals with the love and devotion of Mirabai and was written in 1693 at the court of Guru Gobind Singh in Anandpur (Mann and Hawley 2014: 131).

⁶⁹ Catalogued as *Rāg Sikhshā (Lessons on Rāg)*, the manuscript (BGL MSG 04) is in fact untitled and constitutes the handbook of a (likely Sikh) musician, used to record the song-texts of compositions that he had learnt. Having consulted with Jasdeep Singh, a PhD scholar specialising in paper production and binding techniques in the Punjab region, the manuscript likely dates to the late nineteenth century.

⁷⁰ These *sargam* compositions utilise the fourfold *dhrupad* composition structure of *asthāī*, *antarā sañcārī* and *abhōg*.

The law of notes, the account of notes, and the examination of notes are sung; the reference of singing is [obtained] by the grace of the *Buddh Prakās* [*Darpan*].

(BGL MSG 04, fol. 2)

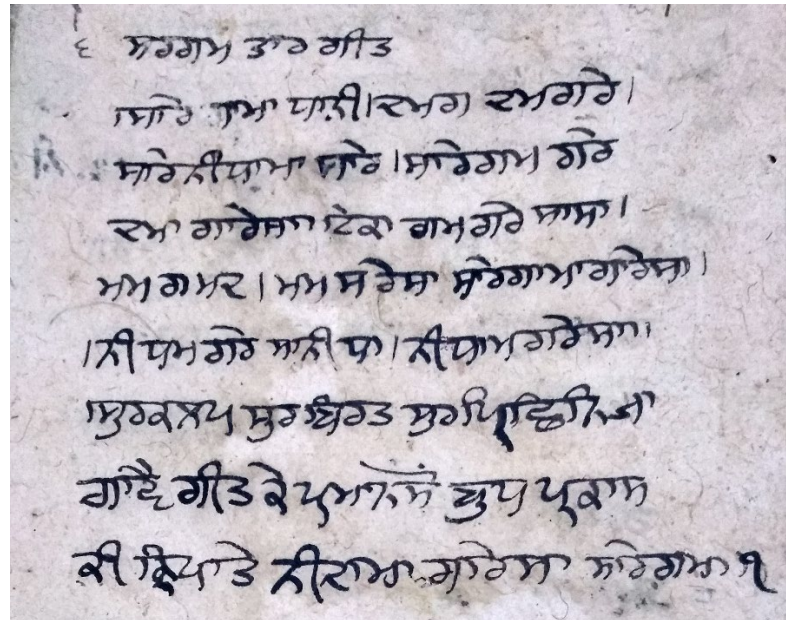


FIGURE 18 FOLIO OF *SARGAM* COMPOSITION FROM A SIKH MUSICIAN'S HANDBOOK (BGL MSG 04).

In the above example, the *BPD* is endowed with the ability to bestow grace (*kripā*) upon musicians, much like a living *gurū* or *ustād* was considered capable of. The reverence of objects and texts in the context of Hindustani music has been highlighted by Wolf (2015: 150), who alludes to how, at times, “one should treat a book ... exactly as one would treat an image of a deity or a great human being who is worthy of reverence”.

This tendency, if anything, was heightened in the Sikh religious sphere because of the unprecedented status of scripture within Sikh religious tradition, whereby the GGS embodies the Guru. More generally, Murphy (2012: 54) remarks upon the importance of texts as religious objects within Sikh tradition, in which possession of a text sometimes endowed the possessor with religious authority. Given the inherent performative and oral dimension of the verses of the *BPD*, we might also consider the possibility that the phrase “*gīt kē pramāṇ*” (“reference of singing”), in the above composition, alluded to the authority of the text through its oral dimension, that is, its verses as songs themselves.

In another *sargam* composition, from the same handbook, we find specific mention of the knowledge and theory contained within the *BPD*. Its concluding *sañcārī-abhōg* verse is as follows:

āra kavāra pahāra dugana sama thāi dikhāi lagāi sunāvai
khāṛava rāga
samma balampata duta mada aura sulaṅga sañkīrana sudha
budha prakāsa batāi daī

One sings the *rāg* [*Mārvā*] of six notes, whilst demarcating the *sam* (first beat) and applying the tempo patterns (*layakārīs*) of *ār* (one-and-a-half), *kuvār* (three), *pahār* (six), *dugan* (double), *thā* (single), etc. The *Buddh Prakāś* [*Darpan*] has explained the slow, medium, and fast tempos, and the *śudh* (pure), *chāyālag* (combined of two *rāgs*) and *sankīraṇ* (combined of multiple *rāgs*) *rāgs*.

(BGL MSG 04, fol. 4)

In this instance, it is very clear that the musician was concerned with the theory of *rāg* and *lay*, contained within texts such as the *BPD*. Though knowledge transmission within Hindustani music is often described as “entirely oral” and embodied in nature (Qureshi 2009: 165), what these compositions thus demonstrate is a working familiarity and dynamic engagement with musicological texts among certain musicians. The idea that Muslim *ustāds*, in particular, were illiterate and had no knowledge of theory of musical treatises – an idea propagated by Hindustani music reformist Bhatkhande especially (Bakhle 2005: 121) – has been dispelled by the likes of Schofield (2021) and Katz (2017: 130), who highlight the tradition of writing on music, in Persian, Braj Bhasha and later Urdu, among Muslim musicians from the Mughal period through to the colonial period.⁷¹ Similar examples, in which musicological treatises are referenced within song-texts, have been observed in relation to the *Saṅgīt Ratnākar* of Sharangadeva, whose work is referenced in the compositions of

⁷¹ Among the notable Muslim *ustāds* who wrote on music are the names of Mir Salih Qawwal (mid-seventeenth century), Ras Baras Khan (late-seventeenth century), Ghulam Raza Qawwal (late-eighteenth century), Khushal Khan ‘Anup’ (late-eighteenth century), Karamatullah Khan (1848-1933) and Kaukab Khan (c. 1850-1915).

Tansen and Nayak Bakhshu, reflecting the text’s “cherished position in seventeenth-century oral theory” (Brown 2003: 37–38). In this regard, we might interpret these eulogistic references of the *BPD* within song-texts as testimony to its unparalleled position in the oral theory of Punjabi musicians.

The multiple functions of these *sargam* compositions, as objects of aesthetic, musicological, and pedagogical value, is also noteworthy. Not only do they establish the authority of a text like the *BPD*, encouraging musicians to consult it, but, as compositions, they also convey the correct melodic signature and form of a *rāg*. Their value, as pedagogical tools, is illustrated by the fact that certain musician families refer to such *sargam* compositions rather as *ṭīkās*, denoting someone or something that ‘bears the mark of specialty’.⁷² Just as a literary *ṭīkā* (i.e. commentary) of a musicological text revealed its true essence and meaning, therefore, these musical *ṭīkās* were considered to reveal the authentic melodic form of a *rāg*.

Closer analysis of the various recensions of the *BPD* highlights the fact that the text was indeed circulating primarily in the Sikh religious sphere. Mostly included in *saṅgrahis* alongside other works of scholastic, devotional – these typically include passages from the GGS – or aesthetic texts, the colophons of these recensions, where present, specifically indicate the environment and patron under which the manuscript was produced. By way of example, Amar Singh, the scribe of one of the *BPD* recensions (BGL MS 294), states in his colophon that he completed the manuscript in 1833 whilst residing at the *dharamsāl* of Gurbakhsh Singh, in the village Churian, just north of Amritsar:

bijai drugā suragā samāna sabha lōgā kahai nīta nyāi nīkē
subha rīta hūm calāi hai,
taṁhi dharamsālā bikhai rahata gurbakhśa sīngha āṭhō jāma
brita likhabe mai thahirāi hai,
pōṭhī kavī ballabha ki aura rāgā mālā bhalī badō hita dhāra
amar sīngha hūm likhāi hai,

⁷² In an interview with Bhai Baldeep Singh, on 14 March 2019, he noted that in his family tradition such *sargam* compositions are referred to as *ṭīkās*, for their pedagogical value.

*padhai sunai prīta lāi cārō phala pāi vahu rāja sabhā māna
dāna amita badāi hai.*

Everyone likens the triumph over difficulty to the attainment of heaven; the righteous path has been established [in this world] only with good ethics and judgement. In this *dharamsāl* resides Gurbakhsh Singh, who appointed me to stay here, writing in all eight watches of the day. With great interest, he has assigned Amar Singh to write this volume, containing the work of Kavi Vallabh and the excellent *rāgmālā*.⁷³ He who reads from and listens to it, with love, attains all the four fruits [of life] and unbounded praise, honour and charity, in the royal assembly.

The scribe thus explicitly confirms the functions and modalities of consumption that we have thus far discussed in relation to such texts. Both reading (*padhai*) from *and* listening (*sunai*) to *rāgmālā* texts, or the performance thereof, are considered successful ingredients in the quest for the four fruits of life – *dharma* (righteous living), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (pleasure), and *mōkśa* (liberation). In her study of musical connoisseurship practices in the Mughal context, Schofield (2015c: 408–9) notes how connoisseurship practices tend to remain consistent across cultures. From both a Hindu *and* Sikh philosophical perspective, scholarly and aesthetical pursuits – studying, performing, and listening to music and musicological texts – were evidently considered as efficacious means toward the attainment of the fourfold fruits of life. The author also alludes to the overlap of the courtly and religious spheres by suggesting that the rewards of such practices were especially obtained at the hands of princely patrons.

The fact that the *BPD* was undoubtedly one of the most popular music treatises and *rāgmālā* texts to circulate in nineteenth-century Punjab and yet did not circulate widely beyond the region, suggests that a somewhat localised tradition of musicological scholarship was prevalent within the region from at least the late seventeenth century onwards. Although numerous Braj Bhasha texts to originate in other regions were being transliterated, translated, and commented upon in

⁷³ As alluded to in the colophon, this recension is a *saṅgrahi* in which a *vaiṣṇav* work, titled *Haricharan Das*, by Kavi Vallabh sits alongside Lachhiram's *Rāgmālā* and the *BPD*.

nineteenth-century Punjab, the *BPD*, as a work of local origin and relevance, enjoyed unmatched popularity. Aside from its local provenance and that it circulated primarily in the Gurmukhi script, there are several other distinct features which imbue the *BPD* with a localised character and relevance.

Appealing to a territorial sense of identity, in the opening passages the author dedicates a verse to the region and city of Lahore:

*pāñca āba kī sōbha hai sahara nāma lāhaura,
nara nārī sobhata jahā dēsana kō sirmaura.*

The city of Lahore is the excellence of the [land of the] five rivers.

Splendid are the men and women of this land that is the crown of all lands.

Another important and distinguishing feature of the work is the inclusion of six “*bhinn*” (distinct) *rāgs* – *Āsā*, *Mājh*, *Mālī Gaurā*, *Lācārī*, *Sūhā/Sūhu*, and *Rāisā/Rāisan*⁷⁴ – which do not feature within the *rāgmālā* system but are included rather as an addendum to the last chapter. Other treatises such as the *Mān Kutūhal*, the culmination of a conference at the Gwalior court of Raja Man Singh Tomar involving many musicians and scholars, have also included *rāgs* that did not feature in the *rāgmālā* but were evidently being sung by court musicians of the period (Miner 2015: 393). In this respect we might view the *BPD* as a reflection of current music practice as of late-seventeenth-century Punjab. The *rāgs* *Āsā* and *Mājh* have indeed been noted as regional melodies, associated specifically with the Punjab (Tandon 2003). In fact, four of these *bhinn* *rāgs* – *Āsā*, *Mājh*, *Mālī Gaurā*, and *Sūhu*⁷⁵ – also feature in the *Adī Granth* of Guru Arjan, compiled just seventy-seven years prior to the *BPD*, at Amritsar, just fifty kilometres from Lahore.

⁷⁴ There is some variation in the *rāg* names between the eight recensions of the *BPD*.

⁷⁵ *Sūhu* appears as *Sūhā* in some recensions of the *BPD*, seemingly corresponding to the *Sūhī* of the GGS. While the equation of *Sūhu* with *Sūhī* may seem presumptive, it becomes less so given the type of transmutations that occur in the process of transliteration and from one manuscript to another, particularly from Nastaliq to either Gurmukhi or Devanagari; *Sūhu*, for example, can easily become *Sūhav*. The volumes known as the Govindwal *pothīs*, which preceded the compilation of the *Adī Granth* and are regarded as its precursors (Mann 1996), for example, use the name *Sūhavī*, which later became *Sūhī* in the *Adī Granth*. Thus, we have a clear sequence of transmutations which might bring use from *Sūhu/Sūhā* to *Sūhav* to *Sūhavī* to *Sūhī*.

The ability for practice to influence theory has indeed been noted with reference to *rīṭī* poetry, whereby new texts were commissioned to fill an emerging gap between current practice and pre-existing theory (Busch 2015: 279). In this vein, therefore, we might speculate that the production of localised musicological literature, like the *BPD* in Punjab, was driven partly by the desire to accommodate local performance practices, namely the singing of regional *rāgs* that were extraneous to any of the *rāgmālā* systems. The *rāgmālā* of Kavi Alam and the GGS also seemingly reflects a localisation of the *rāg-rāginī* set of Ksemakarna: among the *rāginīs* of *rāg Mēgh*, for example, *rāg Āsāvārī* was replaced with the popular local melody of *rāg Āsā*. In the *rāgmālā* literature of Punjab, therefore, from at least the sixteenth century onwards, we detect notable editorial attempts to reconcile popular *rāgmālā* systems of north India with the local *rāgs* of the region, thus reaffirming an extensive history in which theory and practice were dialogically engaged with one another. The widespread circulation of the *BPD* in the region, up until the late nineteenth and perhaps even early twentieth centuries, speaks to the specific relevance of the text to musicians, patrons and connoisseurs of the Sikh religious sphere.

3.4.3 RECONCILIATORY MUSICOLOGY: TRAVERSING RELIGIOUS IDIOMS

Given my focus on the Sikh religious sphere and having noted the regional character of some of the musicological literature discussed thus far, the question remains as to whether any other distinctly Sikh features emerge from this literature. As we have seen, most musicological texts that circulated in nineteenth-century Punjab were either copies of local works such as the *BPD* or transliterations of earlier works that otherwise circulated in Devanagari. As such, it is only scribal practices of the Sikh religious sphere – the favouring of the Gurmukhi character and the use of *maṅgalācaraṅs* which invoke the Guru – and the information contained in the colophons that reveal the context in which they were written. Where translation has been attempted, however, we potentially encounter original writing, which, as we shall see, does indeed reveal a Sikh idiomatic influence. Whist there was nothing notably Sikh about the style and content of the Hindi commentary of the *Saṅgīt Darpan*, discussed earlier, the translation of an unnamed text (BGL MS 5093) titled *Rāgā(m) kē Nām Rūp (RNR)* – *Names and Forms of the Rāgs* – distinctly reveals the Sikh identity of its

author. Although his name is not mentioned, the author not only employs a particularised form of Hindi prose in which the influence of Punjabi is apparent, but also uses specific expressions that are frequently found in the GGS. His opening *maṅgalācaraṇ* also invokes the ten Gurus in addition to the deities Ganesh and Saraswati.⁷⁶

In a departure from the aesthetic and poetic style of Braj Bhasha texts, the author's choice of title and writing style is functional and abrupt. For example, beginning his text by enumerating the familiar theoretical terms of *sur* (musical notes), *grām* (register), *bājē* (instruments), and *gāyan dōṣ* (demerits of singing), the author describes the three *grāms* as follows:⁷⁷

*mand kahīyē jō ridē tē hōi. madham kaṅṭh tē bolatā hai. tār
dasam duār tē hōtā hai.*

The *mandra* [register] is that which emanates from the heart.

The *madhya* [register] speaks from the throat. The *tār* [register] emanates from the 'tenth gate'.

(BGL MS 5093, fol. 2)

Whereas the higher register, referred to as *tār*, is typically associated with the head (*sar*), forehead (*mastak*) or cranium (*kapāl*) in musicological texts, here it is related to the 'tenth gate' (*dasam duār*), a term frequently encountered in the GGS, referring specifically to the energetic centre located on top of the cranium.⁷⁸ In a *śabad* in *rāg Mārū*, for example, Guru Arjan describes the experience of divine realisation in the following terms:

*adisata agōcara pārabrahama mila sādihū akatha kathāiā thā,
anahada sabada dasama duāra vajiō taha amrita nāma cuāiā
thā.*

⁷⁶ “*ik oṅkār satgur prasād. srī gaṅṅēsāy namah. srī susvatīyāy namah. srī dasē gurū jī sahāy*” (BGL MS 5093, fol. 1).

⁷⁷ The three *grāms*, in this instance, are what have come to be more commonly known as the three *saptaks* (octaves): *mandra* (low), *madhya* (mid), and *tār* (high).

⁷⁸ The *dasam duār* or 'tenth gate', extraneous to the nine bodily openings, is a subtle energetic centre at the top of the cranium, equivalent to the crown or *sahasrāra cakra* in Yogic terminology.

Meeting with the unseeable, imperceptible, supreme Brahma,
the saint has recited the untellable.

The unstruck sound resounds at the tenth gate; there, the nectar
of immortality has trickled down.

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1002)

Given the intersection between yogic philosophy and Hindustani music (Beck 1993: 107) and the fact that the Gurus have described the spiritual experience in such yogic (and sonic) terms, to the Sikh reader the theory of sound production within the body was relatable in yogic and spiritual terms. Moreover, by invoking specific language used by the Gurus, the author of the *RNR* resituates established theory of sound and voice production in specific terms that appeal directly to a Sikh readership.

More than transliteration, translation fundamentally transforms a text such that it *both gains and loses* dimensions. Despite conveying familiar theoretical concepts as found in Hindustani musicological texts more broadly, therefore, the *RNR* assumes a character of its own through its particular use of language, which in turn firmly locates it within the Sikh religious sphere. At the same time, written in a very functional prose, it is bereft of the aesthetical qualities and function, associated with Braj Bhasha verse. As such, the performative dimension is non-existent, suggesting that the text can only have served the function of transmitting knowledge to the reader in a manner that was relatable.

The only other music-related text that I am aware of, to be authored by a Sikh in nineteenth-century Punjab, is the *Rāg Ratan Candrikā (RRC) – Splendour of the Jewel-like Rāgs* – of Kavi Budh Singh.⁷⁹ One of the foremost Braj Bhasha poets of early-nineteenth-century Punjab, Kavi Budh Singh was attached to the important Shahid Bunga, a subsidiary shrine within the Darbar Sahib complex of Amritsar. He has been described as the “poet laureate of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court” (Kaur 1983: 185), suggesting he was also active in the courtly domain. Ganesh Dass Wadehra (1965: 295), writing in 1849, sometime after the death of

⁷⁹ Three separate recensions of the *RRC* are held at the BGL, GNDU, Amritsar (BGL MS 725, BGL MS 777, BGL PPS 72).

the poet, describes him as follows: “In Braj bhasha poetry, Bhai Budh Singh was a master of his times”.⁸⁰

Though not strictly musicological in its content, the *RRC* was nevertheless musical in character, its thirty-one *savaiyā* verses corresponding precisely to the thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS. Illustrative of the porous religious boundaries of this period (Oberoi 1994), the text is a unique amalgam of Sikh musical and *vaiṣṇav* devotional idioms, each *savaiyā* portraying Krishna, his associated traits, and deeds. The *maṅgalācaraṇ* at the start of the text is also a reflection of this Sikh-*vaiṣṇav* synthesis: “*ik ōṅkār srī krisanāy namah*”, that is, “The One [Creator] of the form *ōṁ*; salutations to the great Krishna”. Within each *savaiyā*, the link to a *rāg* of the GGS is elegantly established with a reference to Krishna either singing or playing that *rāg*. By way of example, the first *savaiyā* corresponds to *rāg Śrī* (*Sirī*), the first to appear in the GGS:

*ali haṁsa sutā avataṁsa jinai hati kaṁsa suvaṁsa kī racchi
karī,
khala kōra marōra ḍarē mura sē tara tōra sugrīva kī pacchi
dharī,
baka bārana tārana bāra badhū bana bāṁsana jāṁ paga lāgi
tarī,
puta nāpa tarī budha siṅgha harī sōū gāi uṭhyō arī rāga sirī.*

He, the crowned, bumblebee-like beloved of Yamuna, protected his family by defeating his tyrant uncle Raja Kans of Mathura. His demonical enemies squirmed in fear like the demon Mur; by breaking the tree, he upheld the side of Sugriva. Burning Bakasur [the crane demon sent to kill him], he rescued his wife [Radha] again, who, residing in the jungle, was saved by clasping his feet. Budh Singh says, this son Hari crossed the expanse [of this world]; o friend, it is he who sang and awakened the melody of *Srī rāg*.

⁸⁰ “*bhāī budh siṅgh dar aśār-i-zabān-bhākhā sar-āmad-i-vaqt-i-khud būd*” (Wadehra 1965: 295).

With each *savaiyā* verse consisting of four rhyming lines, set to a clearly defined metre, and referencing a single *rāg*, it is likely that they were intended as song-texts to be performed. The fact that the author also includes his *chāp* (signature) in the concluding line of each verse, rather than once at the beginning or end of the work, is further illustrative of his intent for the individual verses to be recited or sung on their own.⁸¹ Like the four-part *kabitt*, the *savaiyā*, also bears a close affinity to the format of *dhrupad* song texts (Widdess 2010), and may also have been performed in this style. The poetry, with its rich alliteration, internal and end rhyme, is also inherently musical in quality, bearing strong affinities with the poetic aesthetic often encountered in *dhrupad* compositions (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 232–35). Like the *BPD*, therefore, the *RRC* also appears to have been composed with a performative function in mind.

Unlike other musicological texts I have examined, however, Kavi Budh Singh's *RRC* is clearly not instructive or scholastic in nature. By interweaving references to the thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS with *vaiṣṇav* textual themes, I argue that Kavi Budh Singh's text serves a reconciliatory as well as aesthetic function. Like the unknown Sikh author of the *RNR*, Kavi Budh Singh also employs specific expressions associated with the work of the Sikh gurus: the title thus incorporates the expression '*rāg ratan*' (jewel-like *rāgs*), which, as discussed earlier, was utilised by several of the Gurus. At the same time, the term '*candrikā*' (moonlight) invokes a *vaiṣṇav* idiom – Krishna is often described as '*candra-badan*' (moon-like face). By synthesising the musical idiom of the Gurus with *vaiṣṇav* literary themes in this way, the *RRC* was evidently appealing to a broad readership that cut across the normative religious categories of Sikh and Hindu as they are understood today.

The *RRC* may thus be seen as a kind of *vaiṣṇav* cosmology of the *rāgs* of the GGS, invoking the well-established religious authority of Krishna in order to portray the unique thirty-one *rāg* selection and structure of the GGS as by the divine sanction and grace of Krishna. As noted earlier, the authority of the GGS as a religious text remained a persistent subject of Sikh literary concern, prominent in the *gurbilās* literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

⁸¹ The inclusion of the poet's signature in the last line of a verse has been noted as one of the key markers that indicate a poem was intended to be sung (Callewaert and Lath 1989: 55)

(Mann 2001: 18–25). Sikh religious authority, represented primarily by the GGS, was thus evidently in continual contestation and negotiation throughout this time period. For a deity like Krishna, therefore, to be depicted singing the *rāgs* of the GGS, was to offer legitimacy to the unique music-organisational structure of the GGS within a long-established, popular, and authoritative Hindu religious idiom.⁸²

Simultaneously, the fact that the *rāgs* of the GGS serve as a musical framing for the narration of the Krishna mythology, co-locates the Sikh and *vaiṣṇav* devotional traditions within a shared musical space, comprised of the thirty-one *rāgs*. The judicious textual-musical-religious synthesis of Kavi Budh Singh speaks not only to the significant intersections between religious communities historically but also to the importance of shared cultural streams such as Hindustani music and Braj Bhasha poetry in their mediatory and reconciliatory social function. As a language, Punjabi has also been noted for this function, giving rise to a literary formation, a “social space” (Mir 2010) or “affective domain” (Murphy 2019), that cut across religious communities. Whilst Punjabi was especially popular in Sufi and Sikh spheres (Shackle 2012) and Braj Bhasha in Sikh and Hindu spheres, the domain of Hindustani music cut across all spheres, eclipsing language in its universality and allowing for a multiplicity of religious idioms to operate within it. Whether it be the Punjabi lyrics of Sufi saints, the Braj Bhasha poetry of *vaiṣṇav* saints, or the *śabads* of the Sikh gurus, all lyrics were performed in *rāgs*. Whilst scholars have thus tended to focus on the linguistic and literary aspect of shared social space, I argue that the aesthetic and performative domain of Hindustani music was just as significant in the formation of such a space, if not more so. Language and literature, after all, are transmitted through performance, where they enter into affective modalities that allow for co-participation across communities.

As a minority ruling class, for the Sikhs, the significance of a text like the *RRC*, if anything, assumed added importance, promoting social cohesion between them and the communities over whom they ruled and with whom they lived. The need

⁸² It is noteworthy that *vaiṣṇav* themes were not foreign to the Sikh tradition. Guru Gobind Singh, for example, wrote extensively on this subject, most notably in his lengthy *Caubīs Avatār* (‘Twenty Four Incarnations [of Vishnu]’) composition.

for social cohesion in a region such as the Punjab, was perhaps even more pronounced than elsewhere given its unique status as the only region with a significant presence of all three major religious communities – Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Whilst we cannot know the intentions of Kavi Budh Singh with any certainty, the multireligious and overtly aesthetic and performative (rather than instructive) character of the *RRC* certainly serves to highlight this function. Literary techniques such as translation and more subtle methods such as the echoing of the *rāg*-structure of the GGS through a sequence of seemingly unrelated *vaiṣṇav*-themed verses, comprised inventive ways in which a Sikh author could reiterate the epistemological and cultural bridges between themselves and the various groups in their immediate social landscape, music and literature together serving as crucial domains in the process of negotiating and reconciling group difference.

3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have highlighted the need to expand the purview of scholars of Hindustani music beyond the courtly sphere, which has undoubtedly dominated historiographies of Hindustani music to date. The fundamental role and place of Hindustani music and musicology in the GGS, as I have demonstrated, gave rise to a Sikh religious sphere that, in the nineteenth century, was host not only to *śabad kīrtan* performance but also Hindustani vocal and instrumental music. Vital to the existence of this social sphere was the circulation of a wide-ranging body of musicological literature that served multiple purposes for what was a diverse readership. As patrons and sometimes practicing musicians within this sphere, the *mahants*, gurus, *rāgīs* and other Sikh religious intellectuals circulated musicological texts often simply for instructive purposes, to educate themselves on the specialised knowledge that was useful if not essential for the effective discharging of their roles.

Reflecting the scholarly bent of some of Sikh religious intellectuals, I have shown how multiple *rāgmālā* texts were sometimes collated in single manuscripts, reflecting the will to compare and scrutinise variants of the Hanuman *mat* system of *rāgs* and *rāginīs*. Although Braj Bhasha was still widely understood and relevant to many well into the early twentieth century, the circulation of

translations and commentaries, bereft of poetry and performative character, asserts the instructive function of such literature.

At the same time, however, much of the Braj Bhasha literature discussed was inherently and overtly performative in nature. With the vast networks of Sikh *dērās*, *dharamsāls*, and gurdwaras collectively giving rise to a socioreligious landscape that was abundant in performance opportunity, it is no surprise that Braj Bhasha texts continued to be most widely circulated. The practicing musicians of the Sikh religious sphere could draw upon such literature not only as a source of knowledge but as a source of performative repertoire, with poetical verses doubling up as song-texts. Whilst musicological texts survive in the archive today as material objects, therefore, this chapter reminds us of the historic multidimensionality, multimodality, and multivalency of such texts. The fact that *mahants* could often simultaneously be patrons, scribes and practicing musicians, foregrounds what was evidently a more intimate relationship between Hindustani music theory and practice than is often assumed. This link is perhaps epitomised by the existence of musical compositions that referenced musicological texts.

From the *rāgmālā* of Kavi Alam and the GGS to the popular *BPD*, I have traced a localised tradition of Hindustani musicological scholarship within Punjab, from the sixteenth century until the turn of the twentieth century, distinguished by its attempts to incorporate local *rāgs* that were extraneous to the prevailing Hanuman *mat rāgmālā* and by the use of the Gurmukhi script as its primary medium. The unmatched popularity of the *BPD* in nineteenth-century Punjab, a text relatively unknown beyond the region's borders, in particular, epitomises the localised character of this tradition. This of course has interesting implications for notions of Punjabinity in its historical context, in which the role of the Punjabi language was perhaps less central than it has become today, as recently highlighted by Murphy (2019). Instead, local melodies and the influence of the Gurmukhi scribal tradition take centre stage to produce a localised tradition of musicological scholarship that corresponded specifically to local music practice.

In addition to highlighting the multivalency of the musicological literature discussed, in this chapter I have shown how Hindustani music comprised an important cultural domain, shared between and cohabited by different religious

communities. Experienced equally through the shared practice and affective modalities of performance and understood through a common theory of aesthetics, Hindustani music acted as a cohesive force within the social fabric of nineteenth century Punjab, allowing for the expression, negotiation, and reconciliation of group difference. Notably, whilst the inclusion of regional *rāgs* distinguished some of the musicological literature within Punjab, this was simply an act of extension and expansion rather than one of transformation. Despite the influence of particularised local scribal practices and the idiom of the Sikh gurus in translation, essentially, the musicological literature circulating within the Sikh religious sphere exhibits overwhelming consistency and continuity with that which circulated beyond the region's borders, and indeed, in the centuries preceding.

The late arrival of colonial rule in the region combined with the somewhat greater distance of the Sikh religious sphere from immediate and direct colonial influence seems to have prolonged the longevity of the Braj Bhasha manuscript tradition in Punjab, whilst regions under long-established colonial rule, such as Bengal, took to book publishing considerably earlier in the nineteenth century.⁸³ In relation to the Bangla print literature on Hindustani musicology to emerge in the nineteenth century – noted as a literary expression of Bengali identity within the new colonial paradigm (Williams 2014: 297) – the manuscript tradition of nineteenth-century Punjab reflects a distinct and remarkable continuity with precolonial literary tradition. It is thus that the Sikh religious sphere and its Gurmukhi scribal tradition emerges as a resistant literary space in the nineteenth century in which the centuries-old body of musicological literature enjoyed a final flourish. As we shall see in the next chapter, the early twentieth century saw a major discursive shift in the musicological literature being produced by the Sikhs. Under the influence of colonial religious reform and a rapidly transforming climate of identity politics, and in stark contrast to the reconciliatory role of musical literature observed in this chapter, asserting group difference came to dominate the literary endeavours of Sikh musicians in the early twentieth century, thus giving birth to the notion of *gurmat saṅgīt*, the music of the Sikhs.

⁸³ The earliest known published music treatise, the *Saṅgīt Tarāṅg* in Bangla, was published in 1818 (Williams 2014: 257).

4 CIRCUMSCRIBED CONTINUITY: THE EARLY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY ORIGINS OF *GURMAT SAṄGĪT*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in my introduction, recent scholarship on the *śabad kīrtan* tradition has focussed to a significant extent around the post-1984 developments within the field, namely the neo-traditionalist *gurmat saṅgīt* movement and the revivalist *gurbāṇī saṅgīt* movement (Khalsa 2012, 2014; Cassio 2015; Kalra 2014).

Reflecting the neo-traditionalist character of the movement, advocates of *gurmat saṅgīt* have sought to institutionalise it as an academic subject, codifying *śabad kīrtan* and the *rāgs* of the GGS using modern Hindustani music theoretical apparatus, genres and *rāg* forms as a means and reference (Cassio 2015: 26; Khalsa 2012: 211).¹ By contrast, the *gurbāṇī saṅgīt* movement, in particular the revivalist efforts of Bhai Baldeep Singh, has been portrayed as the ‘authentic’ tradition in terms of style, repertoire, and pedagogical methods, one that has been preserved through multigenerational transmission from the time of the Gurus (Bhai Baldeep Singh 2011, 2019a; Cassio 2015).

As highlighted in Chapter One, the historiographical work of van der Linden (2015b: 134) identifies the emergence of *gurmat saṅgīt* in the early twentieth century as an example of “imperial knowledge formation”, comparable to the parallel emergence of other regional traditions such as *Rabindra saṅgīt*. He situates the identity politics of the early twentieth century, namely the influence of the Singh Sabha movement, as playing a formative role in this process, whereby “Sikhs self-consciously began to define and canonize Sikh sacred music as a distinct musical form” (2015b: 135). The idea that *śabad kīrtan* underwent a trajectory of ‘classicisation’, like Hindustani and Carnatic music during this time (Linden 2015b: 135), however, is based on inaccurate characterisations of the colonial reforms that occurred with respect to these music traditions, neglecting,

¹ I use modern Hindustani music to refer to the practical and theoretical understandings of Hindustani music prevailing in the twentieth century, following the theoretical reforms and canonisation of V. N. Bhatkhande (Bakhle 2005).

in particular, the inherently ‘classical’ elements and hierarchies that have been shown to permeate Hindustani musicology in the Mughal period (Schofield 2010).² Whilst colonial knowledge production projects, in South Asia context, have been repeatedly linked to communal identity politics, be they nation-, region-, or religion-centric, the character of reforms in each case must be analysed in closer detail. In this chapter, therefore, I seek a more accurate and nuanced characterisation of the *gurmat saṅgīt* reforms of the early twentieth century.

With regard to the early-twentieth-century reforms within Hindustani music, scholarship has come to demonstrate that it was comprised of multiple streams, each with varied approaches and operating under different influences. Noting Western Orientalist scholars’ commentaries upon the *rāgs* of the GGS by Macauliffe (1909b) and Pincott (1886), van der Linden (2012: 385) suggests that Orientalist ideas influenced aspects of the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement. Orientalist discourse also influenced a particular stream of writing on Hindustani music, most notably the work of S. M. Tagore, but has been shown to be limited in its influence on the broader literature on Hindustani music to emerge during the colonial period (Williams 2014: 254). Nationalist and *brāhmin*-centric (or anti-Muslim) discourse has been shown to cut across the musical reforms of both V. D. Paluskar and V. N. Bhatkhande, each of whose approach was nevertheless quite different (Bakhle 2005). For Paluskar, Hindustani music was envisioned through a purist and religious (i.e. *bhakti*-centric) paradigm, situating a *brāhmin*-centric version of the master-disciple tradition, or *gurū śiṣya paramparā*, at its core and thus marginalising the Muslim *ustāds*, who came to be portrayed as having tainted and corrupted music’s pure purpose (Bakhle 2005: 137). Bhatkhande’s vision of Hindustani music, on the other hand, has been described as “modern, scholastic and secular”, his obsession with texts reflecting his theory-centric approach toward music’s standardisation and institutionalisation (Bakhle 2005: 97–98). As we shall see, in the Sikh context, the formation of *gurmat*

² The trajectories of Hindustani *śastrīya saṅgīt* in north India (Bakhle 2005), Carnatic music in South India (Allen 2008; Weidman 2006), *Rabindra saṅgīt* in Bengal (Linden 2015b), and indeed *gurmat saṅgīt* among the Sikhs (Linden 2015b) can all be seen with respect to the intersection between music and identity politics in the early twentieth century.

saṅgīt offers an alternative and importantly non-*brāhmin*-centric perspective on musical reform in the early twentieth century.

Central to such reforms is the inherent tensions and interactions of the colonial period, between continuity and change, tradition and modernity, Western and indigenous epistemes. By delving deeper into the early-twentieth-century formation of *gurmat saṅgīt*, in this chapter, I attempt to contribute to our understandings of such processes of colonial knowledge formation by carefully exploring the various epistemological apparatuses and influences involved, demonstrating, in particular, the important role of the precolonial and indigenous episteme in reformist discourse and thus limiting the influence of colonial power structures. In doing so, I ultimately highlight the significant degree of continuity between *gurmat saṅgīt* and what immediately preceded it, suggesting that the process of knowledge formation was at times somewhat superficial in nature, revolving primarily around circumscription, that is, inclusion/exclusion, reorganisation, and reassociation of that which already existed.

My argument thus engages with van der Linden’s question as to whether we might consider “modern Sikh sacred music making an invented tradition” (2015b: 145). In her study of the reform of Carnatic music in the early twentieth century, Weidman (2006: 9) downplays the utility of ‘invented tradition’ as a concept (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), noting that it merely sets up a binary between the ‘invented’ and the ‘real’ – between discourse and history – when in fact the two overlap. As noted in Chapter One, the polarisation of discourse and history is what has plagued the field of *śabad kīrtan* and the debate between scholars therein. In this chapter, I highlight the overlap and interaction between the Singh Sabha discourse, in particular, the threefold reformist doctrine revolving around Guru, Granth and Gurdwara (Oberoi 1994: 316). and the older history of *śabad kīrtan*, at the intersection of which lies *gurmat saṅgīt*.

Linked to the Singh Sabha quest for a normative Sikh identity, I demonstrate how the reformist aspect of the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement primarily constituted the exclusion of non-normative performers and performance practices. Members of the Sikh community who did not conform to the emerging normative constructs of what was Sikh, often referred to as *sahajdhārī* Sikhs – these

included the Muslim *rabābīs* but also the often-forgotten Hindu *khatrī* performers of *śabad kīrtan* – came to be marginalised and replaced by *amritdhārī* Sikh *rāgīs* – those who had undergone ritual religious initiation and were committed to a lifestyle normative conformity. Whilst the exclusion of the *rabābīs* has been highlighted by various scholars (Purewal 2011; Kalra 2014; Khalsa 2014), discussions of their exclusion have centred around the “disciplining” of *śabad kīrtan* through the establishment of exclusive codes for the “correct” running of Sikh institutions (as per the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* of 1950), the abstraction of the text from the performed tradition and training of *rāgīs* to replace them (Kalra 2014: 72–73), and lastly the physical segregation resulting from the 1947 partition of Punjab. In this chapter, I delve deeper into the marginalising discourse that paved the way for the *rabābīs*’ exclusion, contextualising the epistemological influences involved therein. Whilst “moral languages”, based upon Victorian and Protestant values and beliefs (Linden 2008), are often cited as dominant influences in such reformist contexts, I demonstrate how the marginalising discourse employed against the *rabābīs* relied rather upon an older, precolonial, and indigenous sense of morality shaped by both Sikh and Punjabi cultural influences, thus challenging the often asserted hegemony of the Western episteme in such colonial reformist projects.³

With regard to the reform of performance practices, I explore how the historically multitextual character of *śabad kīrtan* performance was limited by the establishment of a bounded Sikh canon of permissible texts. As I shall demonstrate, whilst the textual terrain was more easily circumscribed, at least conceptually, performance practices could not be disciplined in the same way, continuing to comprise a mode in which Hindu *bhakti*, Sufi, and other textual sources were invoked by *śabad kīrtan*’s performers. The fact that Sikh authors published non-canonical song-texts in print is indicative of the fact that orality and textuality existed not in a dichotomy but in conversation with one another. Texts associated with old performance practices found their way into new print media just as new print media was equally used to discourage the singing of texts associated with old performance practices. Echoing aspects of Mandair’s (2009:

³ See Walker (2016) and Kersenboom (2013) for examples of how social reforms, rooted in the moral values of the colonial government, targeted courtesan and *dēvadāsī* performers respectively.

353–54) critique of Oberoi (1994), whose work focusses on the GGS as an important religious boundary in the quest for a normative Sikh identity, my findings thus reiterate the fact that we can neither view orality and textuality in isolation from one another, nor simply associate the former with indigeneness, timelessness and plurality, and the latter with violence, foreignness, and linearity.

My findings in this chapter are primarily informed by written sources from the early twentieth century, namely Sikh-authored print material on music. As a form of new media which came to represent bodies of colonial knowledge, print has been repeatedly identified as an important tool in the identity politics of the communities who utilised it, serving as a material form of symbolic capital.⁴ While identified as a disruptive technology, linked to notions of modernity (Appadurai 1996: 3), print also “prepared a platform for multiple idiosyncratic amalgams of traditional and new knowledge, rather than creating a linear spectrum between preservation and change” (Williams 2014: 283). As we shall see this was certainly true for the case of the early-twentieth-century *gurmat saṅgīt* literature, just as it was for the case of Punjabi literature more broadly (Mir 2010: 64), and in the literature that emerged from other regions such as Bengal (Ghosh 2006: 298–99). At the same time, as a form of mass media, print literature took on a new function in the emerging public sphere, galvanising public ideas and opinion (Orsini 2002: 9) and thus allowing for the widespread propagation of Sikh reformist discourse and ideas. Representing a marked transformation away from the private and often personalised manuscript tradition discussed in the previous chapter, print literature came to serve as a means for public discursive contestation. Whilst admittedly not constituting the only means by which the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement gained traction – the founding of educational institutions and the Sikh Education Conferences being other important aspects (Linden 2015b: 136–37) – print undoubtedly comprised a core part of the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement.

4.2 RECASTING *ŚABAD KĪRTAN*

⁴ See, for example, the use of print media in the Hindi-Hindu-Nationalist project (Dalmia 1997; Orsini 2002).

4.2.1 INSTITUTIONALISATION AND DEMOCRATISATION OF ŚĀBAD KĪRTAN EDUCATION

Influenced by the British civilising mission, social reforms inspired by Victorian and Protestant values came to be instantiated across South Asia in the late colonial period, often aided and championed by native Anglicised elites, many of whom had themselves undergone a Western education (Linden 2008). Among the religious reformists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were many such figures, concerned not only with the issue of identity formation and political representation but also social reform. Leadership among the Sikhs, in particular, fell to such Anglicised reformists during this time (Jones 1976: 21). Representing the growth and organisational success of the Singh Sabha reform movement was the establishment of the Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD) in 1902, the key objectives of which were: to uplift Sikhs spiritually, socially, morally & economically; to propagate the Gurus' teachings; to remove illiteracy and spread education irrespective of caste & creed; and to protect the political rights of Sikhs (Singh 1973). Among these objectives, the educational reforms and specific targeting of caste distinctions conspicuously chimed with the colonial government's civilising mission, both aspects which came to impact upon the trajectory of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition in the early twentieth century.

Within several years of its establishment, the CKD succeeded in establishing the first educational institutions specifically intended to offer a 'Sikh' education.⁵ Barrier (1988: 177), for example, notes how the CKD "helped create schools for preachers, ragis and granthis and then systematically scheduled their activities". Among these educational institutions were the *Central Khālṣā Yatīmkhānā* (CKY), a Sikh orphanage at Amritsar established in 1904 which homed and educated blind and disabled children, and the *Khālṣā Parcārak Vidyālā* (KPV), a college for training Sikh religious functionaries, established at Tarn Taran (less than thirty kilometres from Amritsar) in 1908. Synthesising religious and educational reform, these two institutions taught subjects that were deemed necessary for the ideal Sikh religious functionary, including scriptural exegesis and music.

⁵ The Khalsa College, Amritsar, had been founded by Singh Sabha activists in 1892 but was primarily aimed at offering Sikhs a Western education.

Such educational reform sought to democratise education and as such represented a challenge to the hereditary and often caste-based hold over specialist knowledge that was characteristic of precolonial society. The offices of religious functionaries among the Sikhs, along with the requisite knowledge associated with these roles, often ran in certain families belonging to specific castes. Relating to my discussion of the Sikh religious sphere in Chapter Three, records from the mid-nineteenth century affirm that the position of *gyānīs*, *granthīs*, and *rāgīs* tended to be dominated by *khatrīs* (including Arora and Khosla communities) and then, to a lesser extent, *brāhmins* and *zamīndārs* also.⁶ The *rabābīs*, as religious functionaries and musicians who specialised in the performance of *śabad kīrtan* (see Chapter Five), comprise yet another example of caste specialisation within Sikh tradition.

Music, or specifically *śabad kīrtan*, constituting perhaps the most important religious activity associated with Sikh gurdwaras, was naturally one of the core subjects that was taught at both the *CKY* and the *KPV*. Being the first schools of their kind, these nascent institutions represented a blend of old and new, indigenous and foreign, pedagogical modes. Whilst facilitating teaching in a distinctly new, Western-style school environment, they employed various well-known *ustāds* to train pupils through what was ultimately a continuation of the old, oral, person-to-person mode of training – the *gurū-śiṣya paramparā* – only within an institutional environment.⁷

Whilst the democratisation of education was a challenge to custom, specifically caste-based knowledge and occupational specialisation, the low social status of professional hereditary musician communities meant that music *as a profession* carried a stigma for the new aspiring Punjabi elite, whilst being encouraged *as a hobby*. In fact, the term ‘*mīrāsī*’, meaning a hereditary musician, was and still is employed as a pejorative in Punjab (Lybarger 2011: 97), connoting a “witty and vulgar character” (Nijhawan 2006: 60). As Kalra (2014: 90–91) has highlighted, an orphanage such as the *CKY*, therefore, was the perfect environment in which

⁶ The *Daftar-i-Jāgīrāt* records of the Khalsa Darbar (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII), recorded at the time of British annexation of the region in 1849, list the land grants afforded to the religious functionaries of the Darbar Sahib prior to British interference at the shrine.

⁷ Kalra (2014: 90) notes how the *rabābī* Bhai Sain Ditta, for example, was employed at the *CKY* between 1914 and 1932.

already marginalised sections of society, including the blind and disabled, could be taught music, providing them a means by which they might earn a living. In fact, so many blind *rāgīs* emerged from these institutions and the association became so strong that “anyone who was blind would automatically attract the nickname *ragī*” (2014: 91).⁸ Therefore, while there was a voraciousness for adopting certain Western ideals, they nevertheless had to be reconciled with pre-existing indigenous customs and attitudes.

In this way *śabad kīrtan* came to be institutionalised as a subject in Western-style schools, even if the traditional *ustāds* initially remained the pillar of the pedagogical process. Along with the institutionalisation of *śabad kīrtan*, the same decade saw the arrival of the gramophone and recording technology to the subcontinent. During the second (1904-05) and third (1906-07) far eastern tours of The Gramophone Company, a total of 417 recordings were made at Lahore, with more than one fifth (88) of these classified as ‘Sikh’ (Kinneer 1994). While the classification system used by the recordists was predominantly language based, including such categories as ‘Persian’, ‘Hindustani’, ‘Bengali’ and ‘Punjabi’, that *śabad kīrtan* recordings were seemingly accorded a special status and labelled as ‘Sikh’ suggests their being drawn from Sikh scripture or being associated with the Sikh community specifically. The classification of the early *śabad kīrtan* recordings at least reflected if not contributed toward the institutionalisation of a ‘Sikh’ music. Notably, recordings of comparable and commensurate traditions, such as *qavvālī*, were not afforded such treatment and remained categorised by the language of the text being sung.

Coinciding with the institutionalisation and democratisation of *śabad kīrtan*’s education, the first decade of the twentieth century saw the first printed manuals of notated *śabad kīrtan*. It has been noted how colonial language policies and identity politics combined to entrench associations between languages, scripts and religious communities – Muslim-Urdu-Nastaliq, Hindu-Hindi-Devanagari, and Sikh-Punjabi-Gurmukhi (Mir 2010: 84). Like most of the Singh Sabha literature, the Sikh-authored print literature on music to emerge in this period was

⁸ Large lists of the blind *rāgīs*, presumably trained at the *CKY*, who were employed at the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, between 1947 and 1980, are provided in *Sri Harimandar Sahib da Sunahiri Itihas* (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 229–32).

overwhelmingly written in the Gurmukhi character, though, as we shall see, not necessarily in Punjabi. Just as aural forms of *śabad kīrtan* were being commodified in the new gramophone market, so too books on *śabad kīrtan* came to be commodified in the print market. Printed manuals on music, often containing notated music of some sort and claiming to eliminate the need for an *ustād*, were already well known in the new print sphere, particularly by the large number of *sitār* manuals that appeared in Urdu from around 1870 onwards and in Hindi from the 1890s (Miner 1993: 46). The Bengali literary sphere, being among the earliest due to a longer history of colonialism in the region, also exhibited a thriving music book sector from even earlier in the nineteenth century (Williams 2014).

Mir has noted that as of the late nineteenth century books were already accessible and affordable to a large section of Punjabi society (Mir 2010: 115). However, the slightly later emergence of printed books on music among the Sikhs is seemingly linked to the prolonged endurance of the manuscript tradition and relatively late arrival of colonialism in the region (see Chapter Three). It is no coincidence that these books start to appear in the first decade of the twentieth century, shortly after the establishment of the CKD (1902), CKY (1904), KPV (1908), and the Sikh Education Conferences (1908), and in tandem with events such as the passing of the Anand Marriage Act (1909), a “watershed” moment in Sikh history that, for the first time, provided Sikh separatism with government recognition (Oberoi 1994: 342–43).

Notably, it was during the same decade that V. D. Paluskar established the *Gāndharva Mahāvīdyālaya* (1901) in Lahore, one of the first music colleges of its kind (Bakhle 2005: 148), and began to publish some of the earliest books to contain Hindustani music theory and notation (Narula 1994). Although he was targeting a specifically Hindi-speaking and largely Hindu *brāhmin* readership, his noted popularity in the region (Kapuria 2018: 210) suggests that his publications likely inspired similar work in the Punjabi-Gurmukhi literary sphere. Importantly, it has been noted that rather than targeting musicians, much of Paluskar’s work was concerned with listeners: “Notation allowed for a previously impossible access to music that made for a new audience that had some, if only a rudimentary, knowledge of the theoretical basics of music” (Bakhle 2005: 70).

The emerging *śabad kīrtan* literature, that we shall shortly come to, therefore, can equally be seen to be conducive of establishing a literate ‘public’ who practised and studied *śabad kīrtan* on an amateur level.

In 1909, the earliest known book dedicated entirely to *śabad kīrtan*, titled *Śabad Saṅgīt* (Singh 1909) was published, in Lahore, by Bhai Mit Singh Gyani of Amritsar. The author in his introduction states how the work was facilitated by the CKD as well as the princely patronage of Tikka Ripudaman Singh of the Nabha state. Bhai Mit Singh’s work, of two volumes, clearly evinces the fact that it was intended for a new audience otherwise unfamiliar with the subject of music. The first volume contains notated *śabads*, all in *rāg* and based on Hindustani *rāg*-based genres, including *dhrupad*, and the second contains *śabads* relating to the four lifecycle rituals (birth, initiation, marriage, and death), composed to popular regional songs (*dēsī pracalit gīt*) such that anyone familiar with popular Punjabi culture might be able to pick them up.⁹

In relation to the targeting of customary lifecycle rituals by the reformists, Oberoi (1994: 339) notes that:

Because life-cycle rituals are statements of group identity and help generate communal solidarity, the Tat Khalsa launched an all-out campaign to abolish these so-called Hindu customs and replace them with the Khalsa rites. Between 1884 and 1915 at least twenty-four manuals were published on how Sikhs ought to arrange their life-cycle rituals.¹⁰

In dedicating an entire volume of *śabads* associated with the major lifecycle events, set to popular tunes, therefore, Bhai Mit Singh’s work was intertwined with the broader Singh Sabha agenda, equipping lay Sikhs with the knowledge to perform their own lifecycle rites in a distinctly ‘Sikh’ way. With the GGS being one of the focal points of the reformist doctrine, much of the reformed customs prescribed recitation of passages of *gurbānī* that were in some way relevant to a particular lifecycle event. By utilising musical settings based on popular tunes,

⁹ I have not examined the first volume of *Śabad Saṅgīt* but its contents is described in such terms by the author in the second volume (Singh 1909: 1).

¹⁰ The Tat Khalsa was the name ascribed to the faction of reformist Sikhs who subscribed to a neo-orthodoxy, to all intents and purposes representing the ardent group of Singh Sabha activists.

śabad kīrtan was simplified such that it required no extensive training. Another musician-author, Prof. Sundar Singh of Amritsar, similarly published a two-volume work titled *Hārmōniam Kīrtan Sikhiā* (1932a; 1932b) – *Learning Kirtan on the Harmonium* – of which the second volume is similarly focussed on notating simple tunes of *śabads* that would accompany Sikh lifecycle events. These publications evidently set out to subvert the hierarchies of knowledge and caste specialisation, eliminating the customary ritual participation of hereditary specialists such as the *rabābīs*, on such occasions, in the process.¹¹

The aforementioned Prof. Sundar Singh was a musician of Amritsar and a prolific author of music books, all of which encouraged the use of the harmonium, an instrument of foreign origin that was relatively novel in the subcontinent.¹² An excerpt from the introduction of one of his subsequent books and his portrait (Figure 19) reveal the extent to which he was influenced by Western attitudes (and attire):

The creator of this book is your humble servant, Sundar Singh, ‘Professor of *Rāg Vidyā*’, who has attained a professorship degree under the Rag Sabha Amritsar, and, notably, also earned respect in the Jalandhar *Rāg Sabhā*. He has earned great respect by demonstrating his wonderful talents in the great courts of Jammu, Nabha, Khairpur etc. He has forty years of singing and playing [music] behind him.

(Singh 1932a: 6)

Rather than acknowledging his music *ustād* or *gurū*, as one may expect in traditional literary works,¹³ the author writes of how he attained a degree. He refers to his music school – his *baiṭhak* at Chitta Akhara – as “*Kālaj Rāg Vidyā*” (College for the Science of *Rāg*) and adorns himself with the title “Professor” in addition to the traditional Sikh title *bhāī*. Rather than invoking a family lineage

¹¹ The ritual role of the *rabābīs* is taken up in Chapter 5.

¹² Prof. Sundar Singh published at least four books on music: *Gurmat Saṅgūt* (Prof. Sundar Singh 2008), *Harmonīam Kīrtan Sikhiā* in two volumes (Singh 1932a, 1932b), *Harmonīam Tarz Kavālī* (Singh 1932c), and *Harmonīam Gyān Darpan* (Prof. Sundar Singh 1920).

¹³ By way of contrast, Baba Sham Singh (1803-1926), a saintly musician who performed *śabad kīrtan* outside of the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar for seventy years of his life, in his handwritten *granth* known as the *Har Bhagat Prēm Prakāś*, references his *gurū* in music (Singh 1914).

(*khāndān*) or a particular *gharānā*, he speaks of his “years” of accrued experience. The fact that the harmonium, an instrument of Western origin whose incorporation was yet controversial, is central to all of Prof. Sundar Singh’s publications on music, is telling of his willingness to embrace change like Bhai Mit Singh, who also incorporated the harmonium in his books.¹⁴ Both authors were clearly aligned with Singh Sabha reformist ideals, being keen to simplify *śabad kīrtan* education through their books and a focus on the harmonium— an instrument that was considerably easier to learn than the traditional stringed instruments.

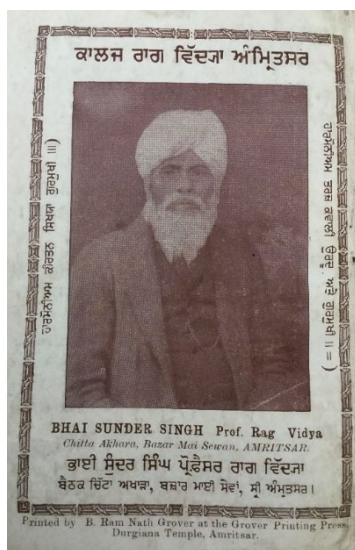


FIGURE 19 PROF. SUNDER SINGH AS PICTURED IN HIS BOOK *HĀRMŌNĪAM TARZ KAVĀLĪ*

Another common feature of both Bhai Mit Singh’s and Prof. Sundar Singh’s books is the notating of *śabads* to tunes (*tarz*) borrowed from popular *gīts* and *gāzals*.¹⁵ These tunes are often based on *dēsī* (regional) *rāgs* such as *Zillā*, *Pahārī*, and *Sindhṛā*, and are characterised by a simple melodic line and narrow tessitura. As such, they require a low degree of musical specialisation and clearly serve the agenda of *śabad kīrtan*’s democratisation by facilitating a greater degree of the general Sikh community’s engagement with it as an integral aspect of what it means to be a Sikh. Prof. Sundar Singh plainly states that with his books one can

learn whilst sat at home, and that one will no longer require an “*ustād*” or teacher.¹⁶ The idea that *śabad kīrtan* ought to be an integral aspect of a Sikh’s education and religious practice also comes to the fore in his writing:

This book has been written in such an elegant and simple way such that boys, girls, adults and children, providing they play on

¹⁴ The use of the harmonium for Hindustani music was fiercely debated in Bhatkhande’s All-India Music Conferences in the second decade of the twentieth century (Trasoff 2010), its use in *śabad kīrtan* at the Golden Temple was challenged by Orientalist-inspired literature (Faletti’s Hotel 1913), and was later banned for over thirty years on All-India Radio, from 1940 until 1971 (Rahaim 2011).

¹⁵ By way of example, Prof. Sundar Singh notates the *śabad* “*Suta aparādha karata hai jētē*” to the *tarz* of the song “*Hama kō chōra calē bainī mādho*” (Prof. Sundar Singh 1920: 59).

¹⁶ The author’s original text is: “*āpjī nūṃ ustād dī kōī lōṛ nahī rahēgī*” (Singh 1932c: 5).

their respective scales, will be able to recite *śabads* very well. A dozen copies of this book ought to be kept in schools, schools for girls, and gurdwaras.

(Singh 1932a: 6)

From the above, the influence of British social reformist ideology, in particular around women's education, is also apparent, as was the case with Paluskar's reformist work (Bakhle 2005: 70).

4.2.2 KNOWLEDGE FORMATION: QUANTIFICATION AND SYNTHESISATION

As we have seen, whilst the democratisation of education was clearly a significant motivation behind much of the emerging print literature on *śabad kīrtan*, the intent to codify and circumscribe *śabad kīrtan* into a distinct body of knowledge was also integral to the Singh Sabha project around Sikh identity formation, as highlighted by van der Linden (2015b: 145). Influenced by Western Orientalist writings and a renewed focus on ancient Sanskrit music theory, he goes on to observe that "Following *Sri Guru Granth bani beora* (1902) by Charan Singh (1853–1908), the *ragas* of the Gurus were increasingly examined by reformist Sikhs in a (pseudo-) scientific manner and sometimes notated in traditional or Western staff notations" (2015b: 137). This process, he stipulates, was "in line with what happened within the modern intellectual formation of Hindustani music" (2015b, 141).

Charan Singh (1853-1908) was an author and scholar who came to be influenced by the Singh Sabha movement like his son after him, the famous poet and author Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957). Whereas Orientalist writers sought connections between modern Hindustani music and ancient Sanskrit musicological texts, however, Charan Singh's writings on music, featuring as a section within his larger work titled *Srī Gurū Granth Bāñī Bīōrā*, relied on Braj Bhasha musicological treatises that had circulated widely in the Punjab throughout the preceding century (see Chapter Three).¹⁷ In attempting to describe the thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS, he frequently draws upon and quotes directly from the *BPD*,

¹⁷ The chapter on music was reproduced in a later publication titled *Gurmat Saṅgīt* (Charan Singh 2008).

which, as noted in Chapter Three, was not only the most popular musicological treatise circulating in Gurmukhi in the nineteenth century but, being of local origin, was also one of the few treatises that included theory pertaining to several Punjabi *rāgs* that are included in the GGS. Not being a musician himself, Charan Singh is heavily reliant on the text of the *BPD*, essentially paraphrasing passages into Punjabi prose and thus conveying relevant details pertaining to how each *rāg* fits into the *rāgmālā* system, which notes it employs, and its various associations of time, season etc.

In addition to providing theoretical details of the thirty-one *rāgs*, he also sought to provide details of the nine *dhuns* (or *dhunīs*), the melodic tunes that have been explicitly mentioned in association with the *vārs* of the GGS. Rather than notating the tunes, however, he sets about documenting the original lyrics with which these *dhuns* were originally sung and explaining the narratives of these tales. In doing so, we can perhaps interpret this aspect of Charan Singh's work in light of the Western folklorist tendencies that arose in the colonial gaze toward Punjab. Kapuria has noted that during the colonial period, "It is the Punjab alone of all the major Indian regions that is seen as possessing a purely/primarily folk culture" (2018: 129). Concern for documenting the lyrics of 'folk' song and oral traditions, therefore, likely manifested in Charan Singh's attempt to collate the lyrics of the *dhuns* mentioned in the GGS.

While the ambit of Charan Singh's work was to describe and interpret various aspects of the GGS, of which music was but one, his approach to musicology laid the foundation for subsequent works on *śabad kīrtan*. Writing in 1902, he was probably among the first authors to refer to the notion of "*gurmat dā saṅgīt*" (Charan Singh 2008: 241) – music of the Guru's tenets – which later gained popularity as just *gurmat saṅgīt*, in reference to the music tradition of the GGS. The term *gurmat* became very popular in the Singh Sabha literature of this period, used to invoke the ultimate Sikh religious authority that was the Guru – one of the three Gs of the Singh Sabha's core "doctrine" (Oberoi 1994: 316). Whilst another of these Gs, namely the GGS, was obviously more central to Charan Singh's work, it was over the course of the next decade that *gurmat saṅgīt*, in particular, gained popularity as a term, eventually featuring as the title of Prof. Sundar Singh's 1913 book. Combining the theoretical and GGS-centric organisational

structure of Charan Singh with the music-educational approach of the likes of Bhai Mit Singh and Prof. Sundar Singh, in the years that followed, several important contributions, authored by Sikh *rāgīs*, emerged with reference to the new idea of *gurmat saṅgīt*.

The *śabad* repertoire, based on popular *gīt* and *ġazal* tunes as presented in the second volume of Bhai Mit Singh's *Śabad Saṅgīt* (Singh 1909) and in the later works of Prof. Sundar Singh (1920; 1932c, 1932a, 1932b), would arguably not be considered *gurmat saṅgīt* given that the tunes borrowed had no connection to the music of the Gurus. In Prof. Sundar Singh's first book however, titled *Gurmat Saṅgīt*, we find more 'traditional' repertoire that was seemingly transmitted down through lineages of *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*. In the books of Bhai Mit Singh and Prof. Sundar Singh, therefore, we detect what appears to be a conscious effort to distinguish between the traditional *rāg*-based *śabad kīrtan* repertoire and the singing of *śabad kīrtan* to popular *gīts* and *ġazals*, the former of which might be considered *gurmat saṅgīt*, the latter not.

The development of *gurmat saṅgīt* was lent considerable support by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, who had become the fully-fledged ruler of Patiala in 1910. As a significant patron of the Singh Sabha movement and of music in general (see Chapter Two), *gurmat saṅgīt* was a cause closely aligned to the prince's personal and political interests. Reflecting his involvement with the Sikh identity politics and reforms of the early twentieth century, the Patiala court came to be more ostensibly Sikh in character under his reign, when compared to that of his predecessors.¹⁸ Gurmukhi-based Punjabi, for example, increasingly viewed by this time as the de facto language of the Sikhs, became the official language of the Patiala court under his watch (Ganda Singh 1997). The Maharaja also broke with the pattern of other north Indian courts by making a Sikh musician, Mahant Gajja Singh, his teacher and chief court musician, rather than a Muslim *ustād* (Madan 1986: 108) and brought his court *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* to Bhatkhande's All-India Music Conferences (*Report of the Second All-India Music Conference Held in Delhi 1919; Report of the Third All-India Music Conference Benares 1920*).

¹⁸ See Ramusack (1978) on Maharaja Bhupinder Singh's involvement in Sikh identity politics.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Mahant Gajja Singh was one of the most renowned Sikh musicians of his times, consulted by M. A. Macauliffe in his efforts to notate the *rāgs* of the GGS using Western staff notation, in the fifth volume of his famous work, *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* (Macauliffe 1909b). Reflecting a perspective typically associated with the Orientalists of the period, Macauliffe suggests that “The rags were merging into oblivion, and have been collected with much difficulty by Mahant Gaja Singh, the greatest minstrel of the Sikhs” (Macauliffe 1909a: xxvi). Whether true or not, the narrative of Orientalists such as Macauliffe and Pincott (Linden 2012b: 385) and the recent work of Charan Singh had clearly captivated the likes of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, who tasked Mahant Gajja Singh to produce a *granth* on the music of the GGS (Kanwal 2010: 116).

To complete the task, Mahant Gajja Singh was appointed as the head of a six-member committee, that also included: Pt Ram Kishan Singh, a Sanskrit scholar employed for his knowledge of Sanskrit musicology; Bhai Durga Singh, another court musician of Patiala and calligraphist who was employed as a scribe; Mahant Dyal Singh and Mahant Mela Singh, two *nirmalā* scholars, whose exact role in the work is unknown; and Mahant Kapur Singh, a blind musician of the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, also belonging to the *nirmalā* sect, who was in charge of notation (Kanwal 2010: 116). A reported Rs. 30,000 was spent on the preparation of the work which was to be known as *Gurmat Saṅgīt Sār* (Kanwal 2010: 116) – *The Essence of the Music of the Guru’s Tenets*. Given the resemblance in name and the fact that the *Śrī Rādhā Govind Saṅgīt Sār* – the musicological treatise written at the Jaipur court – was also published, in seven parts, around this very time (1910-1912), it is possible that it also served as an inspiration behind this work.

The fact that the committee constituted various *nirmalā mahants*, illustrates how members of the traditional religious establishment (discussed in Chapter Three), with their intellectual and scribal specialisations, were still of central importance in such scholarly endeavours in the early twentieth century. Each member, with a particular specialisation, was called upon to contribute in a specific way, demonstrating the utility of the combined skillset at the disposal of scholarly networks such as that of the *nirmalās*. With Patiala being the foremost patron of

the *nirmalā* order – Maharaja Narinder Singh had established a new headquarters for their order within his city in 1861 – Maharaja Bhupinder Singh could freely call upon their skills and services whilst handsomely remunerating them for their services.

The passing of Mahant Gajja Singh on 12 June 1914, however, meant that this *granth* remained incomplete, the whereabouts of the manuscript today being unclear.¹⁹ An unnamed contributor to the online Sikh Encyclopaedia (‘Gajja Singh, Mahant - Musicology and Musicians’ [n.d.]), who presumably examined the work at some point, mentions it including notation of traditional *śabad rīts* (compositions) and *vārs* (ballads), of the thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS, as well details of the *cauñkī* system, that is, the schedule of *kīrtan* sessions of the Golden Temple, Amritsar (see Chapter Five). We can perhaps surmise that it would have been structured around the thirty-one *rāgs* like Charan Singh’s work and that it also included some theoretical detail on each *rāg* as well as notated compositions.

Whether coincidental or not, within just a month of the passing of Mahant Gajja Singh, Bhai Prem Singh, another *rāgī* and poet who served at the Patiala court, on the full moon of July 1914, began work on a very similar project, which was completed over the course of a year and yet was only published as a book several years later under the title *Gurmat Saṅgīt athavā Gurmat Ratan Bhaṅḍār – Gurmat Saṅgīt or the Treasure of Jewels of the Guru’s Tenets* (Singh 1922). Original copies of this book are rare and so here I reference the reproduced version which appears alongside the work of Charan Singh in the more recent compilation also titled *Gurmat Saṅgīt* (Prem Singh 2008).²⁰ As with Mahant Gajja Singh’s work, ‘*gurmat saṅgīt*’ is again central to the title of the work. Perhaps to avoid confusion over numerous works employing similar titles, and to avoid the non-music-specific alternative title of *Gurmat Ratan Bhaṅḍār* as given by the author himself, the editor of the reproduced version combined the extended

¹⁹ After the dissolution of the native states, in the wake of the independence of India, the manuscript was kept in the Punjab State Archives at Patiala (Sikh Sacred Music Society 1967: 68–69). At present, however, it does not appear as a catalogued item in the archive and therefore maybe assumed to have been moved to another location.

²⁰ I have had the opportunity to cross check the reproduced version (Prem Singh 2008) with an original copy of the *Gurmat Saṅgīt athavā Gurmat Ratan Bhaṅḍār*, held in the Punjab Public Library, Lahore, and can verify that it has been reproduced verbatim.

title into the composite form *Gurmat Ratan Saṅgīt Bhaṅḍār (GRSB)*, which I adopt for clarity's sake going forward.

Although Bhai Prem Singh had left Patiala and come to reside at Dera Sri Maharaj Singh in Amritsar sometime before the publication in 1922, it is apparent that his time at Patiala influenced this work, given the amicable terms in which he describes his time there.²¹ All but one of the scholars and musicians who offer their signatures of recommendation at the end of the work were also employees of the Patiala state.²² The title page states that the book was published with the support (*uddam*) of Baba Raghubir Singh, the head of Dera Sri Maharaj Singh. The fact that Prof. Sundar Singh, discussed earlier, was also attached to an *udāsī* institution in Amritsar, known as Chitta Akhara or Ganga Ram Akhara, illustrates the continuing importance of the *ḍērā*, as an institution, in new modes of Sikh scholarly production and in the Singh Sabha reform activity.

Bhai Prem Singh was a seventh generation *rāgī* and *kavī* (poet) hailing from a family who were blessed with the tradition of *śabad kīrtan* by Guru Arjan himself.²³ As both poet and musician, with an auspicious family lineage behind him, Bhai Prem Singh had the requisite skills needed to take up the task of documenting the music of the GGS after Mahant Gajja Singh. His introduction to the text is revealing of the motivation behind the work:

For some time, many enthusiasts [of *kīrtan*] have had the desire to see [the publication of] an enumeration of the *śabads* of *gurbāṇī*, the characteristics of the *rāgs* in which *śabads* have been composed, and the notation of one composition for each *rāg* with the *sargam* [notation] below. The characteristics should include the *vādī*, the flattened and sharpened notes, the

²¹ The author states in his introduction, “*srī bhūpindar mrigēs jū paṭalēsūr kē pās, tahi baḍō sukh pāi kē āi sudhāsar bās*” (Prem Singh 2008: 72), that is, “Having attained much joy under the great Bhupinder [Singh] the brave, ruler of Patiala, I came to reside at Amritsar”.

²² Scholars who offered their approval of Bhai Prem Singh's work were: Gyani Gyan Singh, the famous Singh Sabha poet, scholar and author; Bhai Thakur Singh Gyani, Amritsar; Bhai Bishan Singh Gyani, Patiala; Mahant Ram Singh, Patiala; Bhai Gopal Singh *pakhāvājī*, court musician of Patiala; Bhai Buba *sitārīya*, *rabābī* and court musician of Patiala; Khan Sahib Ali Bakhsh ‘*Jarnail*’, singer and court musician of Patiala.

²³ “*gur arjan bakhśīs se kavikul mem bhō rāg, sapt pīrītām śabad par āi aj din lāg*”, that is, “By the charity of Guru Arjan, [knowledge of] *rāgs* came into [our] family of poets; today, we have been reciting *śabads* for seven generations”. Bhai Prem Singh also provides the names of three of his immediate ancestors, in chronological order, as Chatare, Sujan Singh, and Nand Hari.

ascending and descending scales, the weather, the time [of day], and the effect of the *rāg*. Such a music of the house of the Gurus should be established, which would contain the complete system of rules (*kāidā*) of *rāg*, upon reading which all people could benefit. Contemplating this, the holy congregation greatly inspired me, your humble servant. The respected Master Hari Singh of Khalsa College, Amritsar, has especially expressed the great need for such a volume.

(Prem Singh 2008: 70)

The direct Singh Sabha influence on the author is evidenced by his reference to the encouragement received by the Khalsa College – an institution founded in 1892 by Singh Sabha reformists – as well as in the recommendation and signature of Gyani Gyan Singh – a leading Singh Sabha author – to feature in the book’s end matter. Bhai Prem Singh also makes the purpose of his book very clear: it is for the educational benefit of “all people” and specifically to establish a “music of the house of the Gurus” containing a “complete system of rules of *rāg*” (Prem Singh 2008: 70).

Bhai Prem Singh’s self-acknowledged attempt toward codification of the music of the GGS under the name *gurmat saṅgīt* resembles Bhatkhande’s *Hindustānī Saṅgīt Paddhati*, in which aspects of *rāg* theory were combined with notated compositions. Whilst presenting their work under the new label of *gurmat saṅgīt*, authors such as Bhai Prem Singh, Charan Singh and likely Mahant Gajja Singh also, actually drew significantly from the existing Braj Bhasha musicological literature that circulated widely in Punjab throughout the nineteenth century (see Chapter Three). The early *gurmat saṅgīt* literature thus inadvertently highlights the great degree of musicological continuity between the *śabad kīrtan* tradition and Hindustani music more broadly and the extent to which this ‘new’ body of knowledge simply involved the repurposing and repackaging of existing musicological knowledge. Evidently, the *Budh Prakāś Darpan* remained most frequently cited by Sikh authors owing to its local origin, its enduring regional popularity, and its unique coverage of local *rāgs* that also featured in the GGS. Given that Braj Bhasha had occupied a prominent role in Sikh liturgical,

exegetical, historiographical literature from the time of the Gurus (Murphy 2019: 322), it is unsurprising that such sources continued to be of prime importance to Sikh authors of the twentieth century.

Whereas Charan Singh included quotes from the Braj Bhasha musicological literature, supplementing it with his own Punjabi translation, Bhai Prem Singh paraphrases pre-existing theory into his own Braj Bhasha verses, thus representing still greater continuity, at least in terms of style and form, with the existing musicological scholarship. Contrary to the idea that the advent of print media in the colonial period represented a break from the manuscript tradition, scholars have frequently highlighted how print media bore significant continuities with pre-print traditions.²⁴ In not citing his sources, Bhai Prem Singh's approach also lends his work a sense of originality and independence from Hindustani music theory, in service to his aim to establish *gurmat saṅgīt* as a standalone music tradition.

Both Charan Singh and Bhai Prem Singh use the thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS to structure their work. Whilst being novel as a structure within which to discuss musical theory, this was not without precedent more generally; Kavi Budh Singh's early-nineteenth-century *Rāg Ratan Candrikā* (see Chapter Three), for example, utilised the thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS as an organising principle. As a practicing musician, Bhai Prem Singh also includes a notated composition for each *rāg*.²⁵ Like Bhatkhande, he also includes a musical glossary at the start of his work, defining key musical terms and describing numerous *tāls* (rhythmic cycles) along with various corresponding *bōls* (spoken repertoire), indicating a non-specialist readership.

In addition to including aspects of *rāg* theory and a notated composition for each of the thirty-one *rāgs*, Bhai Prem Singh includes a few verses, titled “*bāṇī dī giṇatī*” (“enumeration of utterings”), in which he enumerates the *śabads* that

²⁴ Ghosh (2006: 298–99) shows how the continuity of the manuscript tradition fused with the new technology of print media giving rise to new hybrid forms in the Bengali literary sphere. Moreover, Mir (2010: 15) suggests that due to the lack of state patronage, Punjabi print culture was in fact characterised by yet greater continuity with the pre-print traditions when compared to that of Urdu or Hindi.

²⁵ For the nine *rāgs* which contain a *vār* composition with a prescribed *dhun* (tune), Bhai Prem Singh notates the *dhun* also.

appear under that *rāg* in the GGS, by author and type (e.g. *dupadā*, *caupadā*, *chant* etc.). The following example from *rāg Ṭōḍī* illustrates:

caupāī:

ṭōḍī mēm gura cauthē ēka, ucarana kīna caupadā nēka.

pañcama paccī dupada ucārē, caupada tinna ika pañcapadā rē.

In *rāg Ṭōḍī*, there is one [*caupadā*] of the fourth Guru.

Countless *caupadās* have been composed. Spoken by the fifth Guru, there are twenty-five *dupadās*, three *caupadās* and one *pañcapadā*.

doharā:

sabha uṇattī dupadā ikō nauma gurū si katīsa,

dupada tīna nāmē bhagata sakala jōra cautīsa.

After all the twenty-nine *dupadās*, there is only one of the ninth Guru, making thirty-one. There are three *dupadās* of Bhagat Namdev; combining them all makes thirty-four.

(Prem Singh 2008: 120)

Whilst enumerations of musicological terms such as *tāl*, *rāg*, *sur*, *tān* and *mūrchanā* were commonplace in the earlier musicological literature, the enumeration of a repertoire of song-texts, such as the *śabads* of the GGS, through Braj Bhasha verse, appears somewhat novel, particularly on account of the explicit reference to the term *giṇatī* (enumeration). Appadurai (1996: 117–20) highlights the role of numbers in the colonial imagination, demonstrating how they were used, in conjunction with categories of classification, by the British administration (in census reports, gazetteers etc.) to organise, structure and divide colonial society into homogenous bodies that could be numerically represented. In this regard they also came to be utilised by native groups to claim political representation. In this context, Bhai Prem Singh's enumeration of the *śabads* of the GGS served to emphasise its fixity and boundedness, a prominent concern of the Singh Sabha reformists (Linden 2012b: 385), whilst also numerically representing *gurnat saṅgīt* through the quantity of its repertoire. Similar to the manner in which maps and censuses were used by the colonial administration, to

describe and quantify the demography and geography of India, Bhai Prem Singh quantifies *gurmāt saṅgīt* in terms of the thirty-one *rāgs* and the number of *śabads* within these, providing a kind of musical-literary map of the GGS. Both constituted forms of knowledge production that relied significantly upon number and quantification in order to demarcate entities and their boundaries.

Another important feature of the text, serving to reinforce its identity and boundaries, is Bhai Prem Singh's insertion of passages that amplify its Sikh character through the association of various Sikh symbols. His opening *maṅgalācaran*, for example, eulogises all of the ten Sikh Gurus and is significantly longer than those encountered in the earlier manuscript-based musicological treatises (see Chapter Three). The author also includes several verses dedicated to eulogising the GGS and the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar – the site of foremost religious and political authority to the Sikhs – representing continuity with a well-established tradition of praising Amritsar and the Darbar Sahib in verse.²⁶ By infusing these elements to what is otherwise a music-centric text, however, Bhai Prem Singh conspicuously invokes all of the three elements of the Singh Sabha doctrine, namely Guru, Granth and Gurdwara (Oberoi 1994: 316), thus instilling the *GRSB* with an undeniably Sikh identity.

In addition to the invocation of these crucial Sikh symbols, Bhai Prem Singh's work reveals the significance of a sense of Sikh territoriality, constructed around Amritsar and the Darbar Sahib in particular. Indeed, gaining control of the Darbar Sahib became the focal point of reformist Sikh concerns in the early 1920s, through the popular Akali agitation movement (Singh and Caveeshar 1973), reflective more broadly of the manner in which Sikh conceptions of territory were transformed by British ideas of property (Murphy 2012b: 183–87). In her study of Punjabi *qissā* literature, Mir (2010: 123) posits territoriality, along with caste and gender, as central to the construction of individual and communal identity in precolonial Punjabi society. She highlights the attachment of Punjabi people to the local and in particular their natal places. In this respect, Amritsar and the

²⁶ Numerous nineteenth-century manuscripts contain verses in praise (*ustat*) of the Darbar Sahib and Amritsar are held in the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library and in the Rare Books and Manuscripts department of the BGL, GNDU, Amritsar.

Darbar Sahib were perhaps viewed as the natal place of the Sikh community and, by extension, of *gurmat saṅgīt*.

Although Bakhle (2005: 137–38) downplays the success of Bhatkhande in relation to his contemporary Paluskar, the fact remains that almost every Hindustani musician is aware of Bhatkhande's contribution and that his notation system is still widely used today. By contrast, the fact that few Sikh *rāgīs*, today, are familiar with the work of Bhai Prem Singh indicates that the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement was not as pervasive in its impact as the *gurmat saṅgīt* revival that emerged later in the twentieth century. Whilst Bhai Prem Singh and his patron Maharaja Bhupinder Singh's efforts did indeed coalesce with Sikh identity politics and religious reforms of the early twentieth century, the significance of the early *gurmat saṅgīt* project was apparently eclipsed by issues that were deemed to be of greater importance to the Singh Sabha, such as the outward and more material disciplining of Sikh bodies and gurdwara spaces (Oberoi 1994; Murphy 2012b).

The enduring low social status attached to music as a profession within Punjabi society, would likely also have proved a hinderance to the efficacy of the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement and to greater uptake of *śabad kīrtan* among the general Sikh community in the early twentieth century. The huge cultural rupture and turmoil brought about by Partition is undoubtedly another factor which detracted from its relevance in the middle of the century. In the decades following Partition there does seem to have been periodic revivals of interest in *gurmat saṅgīt*. Some of the early twentieth century *gurmat saṅgīt* literature, including that of Prof. Sundar Singh, Bhai Prem Singh, Charan Singh, and his son Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957), was reproduced in a 1958 publication, titled *Gurmat Saṅgīt*, by the CKD. In fact, the motivation behind this publication appears to have been the much-lamented death of Bhai Vir Singh – prominent author, Singh Sabha activist, and son of Charan Singh – a year earlier.

The steady rise and influence of popular *filmī* styles on *śabad kīrtan* (Khalsa 2014: 39–40), from around the middle of the century, as also observed in the case of *qavvālī* (Qureshi 1999), and the perceived decline of traditional styles and repertoire, appears to have been another important motivation behind the renewed

interest in *gurmat saṅgīt* in the second half of the twentieth century. In a book titled *Sikh Sacred Music* (1967) published by the Sikh Sacred Music Society, the unnamed author warns with a sense of foreboding: “who can imagine, at this stage of technical progress what further onslaughts on our sacred music may be expected” (Sikh Sacred Music Society 1967: 80). In fact, several archival efforts, undertaken by the Punjabi University Patiala as well as others, emerge in the 1960s and 70s, in an attempt to preserve the old repertoire sung by some of the few remaining hereditary families of *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*, resulting in several important publications.²⁷ A major and more concerted revival of the *gurmat saṅgīt* movement, however, occurred in the post-1984 era, as a response to the events of 1984 (Kalra 2014: 76–77), thus locating *gurmat saṅgīt*, once again, firmly within the realm of Sikh identity politics (Khalsa 2012).

The early-twentieth-century formation of *gurmat saṅgīt* can more generally be seen to be illustrative of a wider pattern of colonial-era knowledge production, tied to the shifting identity politics of the time. During this period, various other forms of indigenous knowledge, many less intrinsically bound to Sikh religious tradition, came to be embroiled within the process of Sikh identity formation. In such cases, however, scholars have tended to focus on how the Punjabi language and Gurmukhi character served as a crucial means by which Sikh authors politicised their texts, as in the case of Sikh-authored works on Ayurveda:

The representation of Ayurvedic knowledge by Sikh practitioners in their writings and speeches therefore formed a process of renegotiating its particularist vocabulary and historicized accounts, to rationalize an ethnic, Sikh community constructed through the claims of Punjabi.

(Sivaramakrishnan 2006: 276)

Whilst the important role of language in identity politics of the late colonial period has been stressed time and again (Mir 2010; Orsini 2002; Dalmia 1997),

²⁷ The brothers Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh had much of the repertoire inherited from their father Bhai Jawala Singh published in the two-volume *Gurbānī Saṅgīt Prācīn Rīt Ratnāvalī* (1979). Gyan Singh Abbottabad similarly published his two-volume *Gurbānī Saṅgīt* (2010; 1981), based to a large extent upon the repertoire of Bhai Taba, a *rabābī* of Amritsar, who was settled in Lahore since Partition but had been invited to Delhi in the late 1950s for the specific purpose of archiving his repertoire (*Interview with Dyal Singh* 2010).

Bhai Prem Singh's extensive use of Braj Bhasha verse illustrates that despite the increasingly entrenched association between Punjabi language and the Sikh religion, Punjabi was not paramount to the assertion of Sikh identity in the late colonial period. The doctrine of Guru, Granth, and Gurdwara, was seemingly of greater importance, proving fundamental to the assertion of Sikh identity in Bhai Prem Singh's work. Though the importance of Braj Bhasha within Sikh tradition was weakening by the early twentieth century, it had not disappeared entirely and new works in Braj Bhasha continued to be produced, especially among communities of traditional intellectuals.

Woven into the fabric of the GGS, music more than other streams of knowledge was an inevitable target in the intellectual pursuit toward creating overtly Sikh bodies of knowledge through the increasingly ubiquitous modality of the printed book. A centuries-old oral tradition of *śabad kīrtan* of course existed, sharing much in common with Hindustani music as well as its own idiosyncratic style, repertoire and practices (Cassio 2015), but had not been codified in written form for general educational purposes until now. Hindustani musicological treatises and *rāgmālā* texts on the other hand, were widely circulated among the Sikh intellectual and priestly class throughout the nineteenth century (see Chapter Three) and it was precisely these texts which provided the underlying theoretical content to *gurmat saṅgīt*'s formation in the early twentieth century.

Existing Hindustani musicology was combined in the new *gurmat saṅgīt* literature with notated repertoire, using the GGS as an organisational map to provide structure and bounds, and Sikh religious and territorial symbols to assert a Sikh identity. Using the printed book and the new name of *gurmat saṅgīt*, these syntheses were presented as something original, obfuscating the inherent links with Hindustani musicological literature of the nineteenth century. Whereas indigenous bodies of knowledge had been historically shared across communities without the significant need to assert ownership or difference, the identity politics of the early twentieth century altered this. As identified in the case of language and nation in postcolonial context (Ayres 2012), music thus became a form of symbolic capital for the Sikhs. Rather than representing an intellectual trajectory of 'classicisation', as suggested by van der Linden (2015b: 135), as I have shown, the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement was characterised by its strategies of synthesis

and circumscription. Beneath the intellectually constructed façade, much of the underlying musical repertoire and theory it comprised of, represented an unperturbed continuity with the immediate past.

4.3 ASSERTING TEXTUAL-MUSICAL NORMS

4.3.1 CONDITIONING LISTENERS, CONSTRUCTING TEXTUAL BOUNDARIES

Having highlighted the extent of continuity inherent to the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement, it is important also to consider what breaks were brought about through the process of circumscription and exclusion. Viewed through the new lens of *gurmat saṅgīt*, the *śabad kīrtan* tradition assumed a new set of norms, very much aligned to the Singh Sabha doctrine. As we shall see, however, the assertion of these norms – the exclusion of recalcitrant elements, namely performers and performance practices from the *śabad kīrtan* tradition – was not straightforward. Given that many of the advocates and agents of the *gurmat saṅgīt* reforms were themselves *rāgīs*, who were at once custodians of *śabad kīrtan* tradition and yet subject to and influenced by the Singh Sabha ideology, they were somewhat conflicted in their position with respect to the negotiation of both traditional and reformist attitudes. It is worthwhile remembering at this point that up until 1925, when the Singh Sabha gained rights to the management of Sikh gurdwaras by law, the reformists had no power to enforce reform other than by arguing and petitioning for it in the public sphere and through print material.²⁸

Turning our attention to the targeting of performance practices first, we see how Bhai Prem Singh attempts to assert some norms of *gurmat saṅgīt* in the closing couplets of the *GRSB*:

*rāg rāgaṇī mēm racē sabada gurū jō āpa,
unahī mēm guna jana sabhī gāvō guramata thāpa.
hōra rāga hōrō sabada jē hōvē ālāpa,
guramata sē hai bridha uha gāika kō hōi pāpa.*

²⁸ The passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras act in 1925 (*The Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925* 1939), following the growing agitations of the Akali movement from 1920 onwards, was a landmark victory which granted right to the management of historical gurdwaras to a management body that went on to be known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

According to established *gurmat*, all people of skill should sing in only those *rāgs* and *rāginīs* in which the Gurus themselves composed *śabads*. The singer who sings other *rāgs* and other *śabads*, contrary to *gurmat*, will acquire sin.

(Prem Singh 2008: 174)

The author thus asserts two norms, one musical and one textual. Firstly, *rāgs* other than those used by the Gurus ought to be avoided. As noted earlier, however, by notating many *śabads* using tunes from popular *gīts* and *gāzals*, several other authors, including Bhai Mit Singh and Prof. Sundar Singh, clearly did not limit themselves to these *rāgs*. The latter even adopted *Gurmat Saṅgīt* as the title of one of his books, in which he notates a *śabad* in *rāg Āsā* where it is originally designated under *rāg Kānarā* in the GGS. Bhai Prem Singh, on the other hand, throughout his book provides notation for only those *śabad* compositions which match the *rāgs* under which the *śabads* appear, thus treating the *rāg* designations of *śabads* as prescriptive rather than descriptive. In this normative approach toward *rāg*, a *śabad* is associated to a *rāg* because it ought to be sung in that *rāg*, rather than because it was originally sung in that *rāg*.

Secondly, Bhai Prem Singh asserts a textual norm by asserting that no *śabad* beyond the realm of *gurmat* ought to be sung. Again, *gurmat* is not explicitly defined and thus assumed to be understood by the reader. In fact, the renowned Singh-Sabha author Bhai Vir Singh published a series of notes (*nuktē*) on *gurmat saṅgīt* as part of the *Srī Gurū Granth Kōś* (1927), a dictionary-like text edited by him and not dissimilar to the *Srī Gurū Granth Bāṇī Biōrā* of his father Charan Singh. These notes were said to be compiled based on the unfinished and unpublished work of Mahant Gajja Singh, discussed earlier (Kanwal 2010: 109).²⁹ Therein Bhai Vir Singh specifies the five textual sources that are acceptable (*parvāṇ*) in *gurmat saṅgīt*, namely the GGS, the writings of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Nand Lal, and the handwritten *rahitnāmās* (letters of conduct) or *hukamnāmās* (letters of instruction) associated with the Gurus (Vir Singh 2008: 28). Demonstrating similar concern, Bhai Mit Singh, in

²⁹ These notes on *gurmat saṅgīt* were also reproduced in the CKD's *Gurmat Saṅgīt* (2008) compilation, in which Bhai Prem Singh's work is also included.

his book *Śabad Saṅgīt*, also explicitly states that the *śabads* in his book are only drawn from these sources (Singh 1909: 1).

A milestone for the Singh Sabha was the 1950 publication of the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā*, or Sikh code of conduct, which for the first time outlined who a Sikh was, what his beliefs should be, and what he should practise.³⁰ The manual contained the protocol for how a gurdwara should operate, including a brief passage outlining correct *kīrtan* praxis. Unsurprisingly and in accordance with the early authors of *gurmat saṅgīt*, it similarly states, “In the congregation, *kīrtan* can be of *gurbāṇī* or from its exegetical texts of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal” (*Sikh Rahit Maryādā* 1950: 17).³¹ Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal, close Sikhs of Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh respectively, produced extensive bodies of literature, containing both exegetical and eulogistic elements. Due to their close association and devoted service towards the Gurus, the writings of these Sikhs were deemed to carry the blessing and authority of the Gurus and their texts were admitted into the modern *śabad kīrtan* canon, all other textual sources thus excluded. The fact that only the writings of the Gurus and those Sikhs who lived in the personal service of the Gurus were accepted in this new Sikh canon, seemingly reflects the importance of direct relationships with the Guru, as highlighted by Murphy (2012b: 47). In any case, the textual aspect of *śabad kīrtan* practice came to be circumscribed in this way.

Echoing the manner in which excerpts of *gurbāṇī* were often invoked to justify reformist ideologies in the Singh Sabha literature (Oberoi 1994: 414), Bhai Prem Singh’s work tellingly begins with the following quote from the GGS, which, in isolation, carries the suggestion that the Guru’s utterings alone are of merit:

*gurabānī gāvahu bhāī.
ēh saphala sadā sukhadāī.*

O brother, sing the utterings of the Guru. This is fruitful and eternally rewarding.

³⁰ Whilst published in 1950, the contents of the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* had been a subject of deliberation over the preceding decades – a committee was established for this purpose in the early 1930s (*Sikh Rahit Maryādā* 1950: 4–5).

³¹ “*Saṅgat vic kīrtan kēval gurbāṇī jam is dī viākhiā-sarūp racanā Bhai Gurdas jī tē Bhai Nand Lal jī dī bāṇī dā hō sakdā hai*” (*Sikh Rahit Maryādā* 1950: 17).

(‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 628)

Speaking to this topic, Oberoi (1994: 242) notes, “Although hymns not found in the Adi Granth were still being recited in Sikh shrines, the columns of the Sabha’s magazine advised that this practice be discontinued”. Indeed, there is no shortage of evidence demonstrating the Singh Sabha reformists’ will to reign in the singing of texts from beyond the newly imagined Sikh canon within Sikh places of worship. In a book titled *Kaṣṭ Nāmak Gurmatē atē Faisalē (Guru-Edicts and Verdicts called Grievances)*, published by the Panch Khalsa Diwan, one of the ‘grievances’ pertaining to *śabad kīrtan* performance was expressed as follows:³²

Often, groups of the community, groups of *kīrtanīs*, perform *kīrtan* by creating their own verses, [sung] in place of the chorus etc., according to their own will, which is increasing day by day, leading to the fear that one day such verses might be confused for *gurbāñī*; although this has already been decided several times before, nevertheless, our brothers do not pay heed to it.

(Panch Khalsa Diwan [n.d.]: 8)

The authors were thus targeting the practice of incorporating self-composed refrains that were extraneous to the newly defined canon of Sikh texts. In another published list of pleas, specifically targeting the Darbar Sahib and its management, *Srī Darbār Sāhib Srī Amritsar Jī dē Mutallak Bēntīāñ* (Bhai Pratap Singh 1920: 6), we find a similar request aimed at the “*gurū kē rabābī*” – the Muslim musicians of the Gurus:

...sometimes, instead of *śabads*, [the *rabābīs*] memorise famous *ṭappās* and *kāfīs*, or poetry and musical episodes (*parsāṅgs*) of others, and it has become a trend to recite them within the greater circumambulatory walkway (*parikarmā*) [of the Golden Temple], which is contrary to the splendour of the

³² The Panch Khalsa Diwan was a branch of the Singh Sabha established by the radical reformist Teja Singh Bhasauria in 1893.

respected Sri Darbar Sahib. For this reason, the ancient way must be continued.

Use of language like the “ancient way” (“*purātan tarīkā*”), is typical of the manner in which reformists attempted to demonstrate continuity of their reformist ideals with an ancient past, regardless of whether that was actually the case or not. The author explicitly mentions some of the particular genres sung by the *rabābīs*, including *tappā* – Punjabi songs of love and separation, still sung today among some Hindustani musicians – and *kāfī* – a genre of mystical song associated with the Sufi saints of Punjab and Sindh in particular, sung mostly in the context of *qavvālī* today (Bhutta 2008). Mir (2010: 17) has highlighted how Punjabi *qissās*, tales of romance such as the famous Hir-Ranjha, were also performed in gurdwaras and Sufi shrines. The *bhajans* and *viṣṇupads* of Sur Das were also extremely popular among Sikhs up until the early twentieth century, evidenced both by their inclusion in the manuscripts of Sikh intellectuals in the nineteenth century and by the printed reproduction of such repertoire within the Sikh religious sphere even in the early twentieth century.³³

It has been frequently noted that, up until the late colonial period, “in rural Punjab, religious boundaries were extremely fluid. People did not see themselves simply as Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs” (Linden 2008: 49). Mir has also interpreted the widespread popularity of the Punjabi *qissā* literature in the region through the aspect of shared piety and devotion, which “without conflicting with an individual's nominative religious identity, constituted a sphere of religiosity and devotion that cut across the boundaries that distinguished the Punjab's major religious traditions” (2012: 246). Thus, the *bhajans* of a *vaiṣṇav* saint like Sur Das and the *kāfīs* of a Sufi saint like Shah Hussain could be sung and revered in the Sikh religious sphere, and likewise the *śabads* of Guru Nanak in the Hindu and Sufi religious spheres.³⁴ Central to this shared piety, Mir suggests, was a common tendency toward saint veneration, a theme not only present in the *qissā*

³³ A significant number of Gurmukhi manuscripts containing the verses of Sur Das are held in the Rare Books and Manuscripts and the Prof Preetam Singh collections of the BGL, GNDU, Amritsar. *Bhajans* from the *Sūr Sāgar* were also published by Sikhs attached to the Jhanda Bunga shrine within the Darbar Sahib complex “for the benefit of the holy congregation (*sādh sangat*)” (Singh and Singh [n.d.]).

³⁴ The endurance of such shared devotional music practice, with its multireligious and now transnational aspect, has been demonstrated in the context of postcolonial Punjab (Kalra 2014).

literature but which also occupied a place in Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious traditions (Mir 2012: 253).

Equally important, I suggest, were the shared literary tropes and mystical ambivalence across these religious traditions and texts, in which the feminine hero's yearning to be united with her beloved could be interpreted as a metaphor for the soul seeking to be united with God.³⁵ The image of the soul-bride (*suhāgan/dhan*) and Lord-husband (*pir/sahu*) – the discourse of mystical love – was certainly invoked in Sufi, *bhakti*, and the Sikh traditions (Schimmel 1997: 23).³⁶ Schimmel (1997: 24) notes how the *qissās* of Punjab and Sindh are emblematic of the link between “human experience” and “mystical theories”. This rich shared tradition of mystical interpretation surrounding the feminine hero and bridal imagery in relation to the soul's yearning (*birah*) and love (*prem/ 'išq*) for the divine, is precisely what not only permitted but inspired the singing of song-texts from varying traditions and sources, in the context of *śabad kīrtan* historically. It is worth recalling that the GGS itself embodies the shared mystical understandings between traditions through its inclusion of the mystical poetry of Sufi and *bhakti* saints such as Farid, Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, Ramanand, etc.

Given the fundamental role of the listener in interpretation and the fact that much of the print literature discussed was evidently not intended for professional musicians but a more general Sikh readership, reformist threads in these texts can thus be seen as attempts to condition listeners rather than discipline musicians, over whom they anyway had no direct authority. By influencing the listening public and moulding audience expectations, the reformists sought to modify the practices of performers indirectly. The critical role of audience participation in South Asian music performance has been widely commented upon, further contextualising the rationale behind such efforts.³⁷ That much of Paluskar's reformist efforts, in the realm of Hindustani music, revolved around listeners, has

³⁵ Orsini (2014) argues that *vaiṣṇav* symbols and imagery were reinterpreted within Sufi tradition, thus not simply shared with the *bhakti* tradition. She does not, however, contest the notion of the soul-bride being shared amongst multiple traditions in South Asia.

³⁶ Marital imagery and the bride-soul is a recurrent theme in the GGS, especially so in the *śabads* composed in *rāg Sūhī* (Singh 2000: 104).

³⁷ Audience involvement in music performance, particularly genres with a significant improvisatory component, has been discussed in relation to *qavvālī* (Qureshi 2006) and Hindustani music more broadly (Clayton 2007).

been highlighted by Bakhle (2005: 153): “His aim was not just to train musicians, but to produce a musically educated listening public that would associate music not with entertainment or pleasure, but with religious devotion”. Given the considerable successes of Paluskar and indeed the Singh Sabha in this regard, the effectiveness of such a strategy becomes apparent.

The epistemological apparatus employed in the argument for the removal of such textual sources invoked Protestant beliefs and attitudes that were often significant influences in the reforms of the colonial period, namely the so-called “moral languages” (Linden 2008) and “language of disenchantment” (Yelle 2013). Testifying to such influences, we have the commentary of Ruchi Ram Sahni, an important activist in the sociopolitical realm of early-twentieth-century Punjab, who became a particularly vocal advocate of the Singh Sabha efforts towards gurdwara reform. In his book the *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, he wrote disparagingly of the fact that “On the Basant and the Holi days licentious songs were sung by musicians inside the [Golden] Temple.” (Sahni 1922: 142). Use of the term “licentious” is typical of the manner in which eroticism in the *bhakti* tradition, for example, playful depictions of Krishna and the *gōpīs* in Holi song-texts, came to be vulgarised under the influence of Victorian attitudes toward sexuality (Gupta 2001: 34–38). It also epitomises the influence of Protestant Literalism, leading to the process of ‘disenchantment’, whereby such texts were denied of their mystical dimension and interpreted solely at face value.

The Anglicist policies of the colonial government led to the proliferation of such reformist discourse not in isolation but rather entangled with Sikh and indigenous epistemological influences also. As we have seen, Bhai Prem Singh employed quotes of *gurbānī* itself to suggest that the singing of *gurbānī* alone was rewarding and that listening to or singing other lyrics induced *pāp* – often translated as ‘sin’ but more accurately part of an indigenous idiom of morality, used to express the idea of virtuous (*punya*) and unvirtuous (*pāp*) action (*karma*). Rooted in both the precolonial and colonial, indigenous and foreign epistemes, such multi-faceted reformist discourse naturally reflected and appealed to a broad section of colonial society, thus increasing the chances of its widespread adoption within the Sikh community.

4.3.2 TEXTUAL-MUSICAL AMALGAMS OF TRADITION AND REFORM

As custodians of *śabad kīrtan* tradition and proponents of *gurmat saṅgīt* reform, the various Sikh *rāgīs* who aligned themselves with the Singh Sabha cause were compelled to reconcile older practices with new discourse in some way or another. We have seen how Bhai Prem Singh, despite being an eighth-generation poet-musician, was advocating for textual and musical boundaries in *śabad kīrtan* performance. A wider survey of the *rāgīs* of the Sikh establishment during this period, however, reveals that despite being overwhelmingly in support of the Singh Sabha cause, many were less willing to do away with existing performance practices associated with the tradition they inherited. As well as singing devotional and mystical poetry from the Sufi, *bhakti*, and other regional sources, many among the hereditary *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*, like Bhai Prem Singh, were also themselves poet-musicians, adept and accustomed to composing their own devotional poetry and compositions to be performed in the Sikh religious sphere.

As we shall see, prominent *rāgīs* composed and even published their own *parsaṅgs* (musical tales) and *gāzals*, genres which were targeted in the Singh Sabha reformist literature (Bhai Pratap Singh 1920). These genres, which might today fall under the label of *dhārmik gīt* (religious song), were often eulogistic in nature, celebrating miraculous events associated with the lives of the Gurus and reflecting the importance of saint veneration in Punjabi religiosity (Mir 2010: 253). Such *parsaṅgs* were often intended to be sung on the Gurus' birthdays (*gurpurabs*), events which came to comprise the basis of a new Sikh religious calendar, promoted by reformists to dissuade Sikhs from celebrating traditional festivals associated with the Hindus such as Diwali, Holi and Dassehra (Oberoi 1994: 346–48). Bhai Mehar Singh, a *rāgī* of Amritsar, includes a collection of *parsaṅgs* alongside *śabads* that were relevant to the lives of the Gurus, in his book *Gurpurab Darśan* (Singh 1945b). Another important collection of such *parsaṅgs* and *gāzals* is found in the book *Das Gur Mahimā* (Singh 1927), authored by Bhai Sundar Singh (1892-1938),³⁸ a *rāgī* who “occupied a place of prime importance amongst Sikh *kirtanīyas* of the first quarter of the twentieth century” as head *rāgī* of the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, from 1932 to 1938 (Paintal

³⁸ Bhai Sundar Singh is not to be confused with the Prof. Sundar Singh, another *rāgī*-author who was discussed earlier in the chapter.

1978: 273). He hailed from a family of *rāgīs* of the Arora clan of Sikhs who lived in the Ata Mandi neighbourhood of Amritsar, with many members of his family also being renowned musicians.³⁹

Like many of the *rāgīs* of this period, Bhai Sundar Singh was significantly influenced by the Singh Sabha movement. In addition to *Das Gur Mahimā*, he also authored at least one separate educational book on *śabad kīrtan*, titled *Ghar dā Rāgī (Rāgī of the Home)*, designed for Sikhs to learn and practise *śabad kīrtan* in their own homes.⁴⁰ Bhai Sundar Singh was thus actively engaged in the democratisation of *śabad kīrtan* like the other *rāgī* authors discussed in this chapter. His book *Das Gur Mahimā* contains a collection of *parsāṅgs*, largely penned by himself, each of which is ascribed to a pre-existing tune (*tarz* or *dhārnā*), with which the reader is assumed to be familiar (no notation is given). These *parsāṅgs* and several *ġazals* are composed in either Punjabi or Urdu, the latter sometimes admitting influences of the former.

A prominent and seemingly popular subject among his compositions was that of martyrdom (*śahīdī*) in relation to the lives of the Gurus, their families, and close disciples. Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur's *śahīdī*, for example, are glorified along with the *śahīdī* of the sons (*sāhibzādās*) of Guru Gobind Singh, and Guru Gobind Singh's close disciple Bhai Mani Singh. The narrative of the *pañj pyārē*, the five beloved ones, which come into particular focus during the Singh Sabha period in order to promote qualities of religious strength and sacrifice, also features as a *ġazal* in Bhai Sundar Singh's work.⁴¹ In addition to Bhai Sundar Singh, Bhai Chhanga Singh, a *rāgī* of Dera Sahib Gurdwara, Lahore, includes a

³⁹ Bhai Sundar Singh's father and initial teacher was Bhai Amar Singh, himself a renowned musician ('Sundar Singh, Ragi - 1900' n.d.). One of his paternal uncles (*tāyā*) who accompanied him was Bhai Uttam Singh (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 230), who was a representative of the Talwandi *gharānā* and a teacher of the great vocalist Pt D. C. Vedi (van der Meer 1980). Another uncle of Bhai Sundar Singh's was the renowned *pakhāvajī* Bhai Mehtab Singh (Paintal 1988: 280).

⁴⁰ *Ghar dā Rāgī* is advertised as part of the end matter of his book *Das Gur Mehma* (Singh 1927).

⁴¹ See Fenech's (2021) recent work on the evolution of the *pañj pyārē* narrative throughout Sikh history.

parsaᅅg on the *śahīdī* of the *sāhibzādās* of Guru Gobind Singh, in his book titled *Granth Saᅅgīt Sār (Book on the Essence of Music)* (Singh 1915).⁴²

Fenech (2000: 14) notes how the notion of a *śahīd* as one who suffers oppression for their religion was in fact a product of the Singh Sabha period. Oberoi (1994: 332–33) attributes the emotive potential attached to narratives of sacrifice and suffering as the reason for their popularity in the Singh Sabha literature and especially that of Bhai Vir Singh. We might imagine how these martyrdom narratives carried even further emotive and affective potential when performed to music in the form of *parsaᅅgs*. The martyrdom of the younger children of Guru Gobind Singh, in this regard, was particularly prominent, featuring as a *parsaᅅg* in both Bhai Sundar Singh’s and Bhai Chhanga Singh’s books. In the opening verse of Bhai Chhanga Singh’s *Chōᅇ Sāhibzādīām dā Parsaᅅg (Musical Tale of the Younger Sons [of Guru Gobind Singh])*, the author appeals to the listeners as follows:

*asī akritaghana hōkē gurū jī nūm bhulāyā hai,
nā kītā yāda usa gurū nūm jisē sarbaᅅsa lāyā hai.*

Being ungrateful toward our beloved Guru, we are misled.
We have not remembered that Guru who offered his whole
family.

(Singh 1915: 103).

Paradoxically then, prominent *rāgīs* such as Bhai Mehar Singh, Bhai Sundar Singh and Bhai Chhanga Singh, whilst propagating aspects of the Singh Sabha discourse in the early twentieth century, did so in a traditional way that drew upon their inherited musical-poetical training. As such, they were simultaneously defying other aspects of the reformist discourse. These *parsaᅅgs*, *dhārmik gīts* and *gāzals* were inevitably intended to be performed in the Sikh religious sphere, yet by definition they contravened the textual norms that were being asserted by the Singh Sabha and *rāgīs* such as Bhai Prem Singh. It appears the emotive

⁴² Bhai Chhanga Singh was the son of Bhai Bhagat Singh who was also a *rāgī* at Dera Sahib gurdwara, Lahore, suggesting his family were hereditary *rāgīs* likely going back multiple generations (Singh 1915).

efficacy and fidelity to Singh Sabha discourse within these song-texts compensated for the fact that they were extraneous to the new Sikh canon.

In addition to devotional *parsaṅgs*, Bhai Sundar Singh's book also includes several *gāzals* written on the theme of *vairāg* – reclusion from the material world.⁴³ The title under which these *gāzals* are presented is significant in that they comprise excerpts of *gurbāṅī*. Under a title borrowed from a *śabad* of Baba Farid – “*jhūṭī duniā laga na āpa vañāī*”, that is, “Do not lose yourself in attachment to this false world” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 488) – Bhai Sundar Singh includes a *gāzal* with the following opening verses:

ahil-ē-duniām kī khajālat mat uthānām dēkhanā,
cōr ban kar in sē mat āṅkhē curānā dēkhanā.
in kī dam bāzī mēm ai ham dam na ānā dēkhanā,
aisē dam bāzōm kā hargiz dam na khānā dēkhanā.

Do not look to assume the indignity of an inhabitant of the world.

Do not look to steal his eyes like a thief.

Do not look to come as his companion – o, his life is lost in deceit.

Do not look to ever assume the life of such a person.

(Singh 1927: 72)

Similarly, under a title borrowed from a *śabad* of Guru Nanak – “*duniā muqām-i-fānī*”, that is, “The world is a transitory place” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 721) – the author includes a *gāzal* with the opening verse:

dār duniām mēm musāfar jō kōī āyā gyā,
ēk dō din sē zyādā vōh nā ṭhahirāyā gyā.
kōī is duniām kī majlas mēm nā biṭhlāyā gya,
aur jō biṭhlāyā gyā fil-faur uṭhvāyā gyā.

⁴³ The *gāzals* were also seemingly composed by Bhai Sundar Singh though his pen name ‘Sundar’ does not feature in the last verse of these song-texts, as it does in most of his other compositions.

Whichever traveller has come into the home of this world,
he was not kept here for more than a day or two.
Nobody has been made to sit in the assembly of this world,
and he who was made to sit, was instantly made to leave.

(Singh 1927: 73–74)

The thematical link – both relate to the false or transitory nature of the world – between these *gazals* and the *śabads* with which they have been associated is clear to see. By invoking this connection to the authoritative source of *gurbānī*, the author qualifies the singing of these *gazals*, perhaps even in temporal proximity to the *śabads* with which they have been associated, despite their not belonging to the newly advocated Sikh canon of texts. Bhai Sundar Singh's book is thus a striking example of how a Singh-Sabha-influenced *rāgī* negotiated the inherent conflict between his tradition and the reforms of the period. Whilst promoting Sikh devotional ideals and the emotive themes of sacrifice and martyrdom, in affinity with the Singh Sabha discourse, he simultaneously saw no problem in promoting the singing of *parsāngs*, *gazals* and non-canonical song-texts in general. Often written in widely understood languages such as Punjabi and Urdu, these song-texts would have undoubtedly been popular among audiences of the early twentieth century, likely more accessible than the archaic linguistic forms of the GGS.

The work of Bhai Sundar Singh and Bhai Chhanga Singh illustrates the extent to which *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* were historically not just musicians but *vāgyakārs*; they were equally adept poets and composers. The poetical talents of the *rāgī*-authors discussed, is certainly evident from the use of verse in their books. Dating back to the time of the Gurus, the precedent for this is established within the GGS itself, which includes eulogistic compositions of the musician-poets attached to the Gurus.⁴⁴ Subsequently, *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* had maintained a tradition of composing and, in accordance with musical trends of their times, not only

⁴⁴ The *rabābīs* of the Gurus, Bhai Mardana and Bhai Satta and Balvand, had their own compositions included within the canon of *gurbānī*, as did the *bhatts* of the Gurus.

composed *parsaṅgs*, *gāzals* and *dhārmik gīts*,⁴⁵ but *ślōkas*,⁴⁶ *dhrupads*,⁴⁷ *sargams*,⁴⁸ *ṭhumrīs* also.⁴⁹

Whilst the establishment of textual norms, that is, a Sikh canon of permissible texts, was undoubtedly central to the idea of *gurmat saṅgīt*, both Charan Singh and Bhai Prem Singh – authors influenced by Orientalist attitudes towards music and concerned particularly with the musicology of the *rāgs* of the GGS – also promoted musical norms in that they were critical of using *rāgs* other than those present in the GGS. For Charan Singh, who was *not* a *rāgī*, it was perhaps easier to disapprove of such performance practices:

Thus, the *rāgīs* are abandoning the ancient science of *rāg*, because, with the blooming of *dēsī rāgs*, entertainers (*tamāsē vālē*) have ruined people’s ears (*kann*), the fruit of which is that people’s ears are no longer accepting of the old *rāgs* and instrumental tunes. So, the helpless *rāgīs* have been forced to swap their instruments and sing *śabads* on tunes from theatres (*thīēṭarām dī dhāranām*), which has led to the disappearance of the old, true testimony of *rāg*.

(Charan Singh 2008: 205)

Whilst not blaming the *rāgīs*, Charan Singh thus cites the emerging popularity of *dēsī rāgs* – the kind of melodies which he clearly associates with the songs of theatre and other forms of popular entertainment – as the cause for changing tastes among the listeners of *śabad kīrtan*. For many eminent *rāgīs* of this period, however, most of whom were aligned with much of the Singh Sabha reform,

⁴⁵ There are two 78rpm recordings of Bhai Taba (1885-1963), *rabābī* of Amritsar, singing *dhārmik gīts* relating to Guru Gobind Singh, available on YouTube (*Bhai Taaba Ji - Tere Darshan Nu Dashmesh Pita (Rare Recording)* [n.d.]; *Bhai Taaba Ji (Amritsar) - Kalgiyan Valeya Daras Dikha* [n.d.]).

⁴⁶ In an interview with Patiala University, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand (1927-2015), one of the last *rabābīs* to have performed at the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, prior to Partition, recounted how his father Bhai Sundar used to begin his *kīrtan* performance by reciting a *ślōka*-type verse composed by one of his ancestors (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004).

⁴⁷ A *dhrupad* in praise of Guru Gobind Singh, by Bhai Joginder Singh, has been notated by Principal Dyal Singh of Delhi (Singh 2012a: 143).

⁴⁸ Several traditional *sargam* compositions have been archived by the descendants of Bhai Jawala Singh (Singh and Singh 1979a).

⁴⁹ The *rāgī* and archivist, Principal Dyal Singh (1934-2012) of Delhi, has notated a *ṭhumrī* composition of Bhai Jodh Singh ‘Mastana’ (D. Singh 2012, 3:170), and one of Gyani Gyan Singh ‘Almast’ (Singh 2012b: 197).

incorporating popular genres and tunes does not seem to have been an issue. As discussed earlier, a significant portion of the *śabad kīrtan* repertoire published by Bhai Mit Singh and Prof. Sundar Singh was of this nature. Bhai Chhanga Singh similarly composes his *parsaṅg* using popular theatre tunes (“*nātak/thīṭar dī tarz*”), referenced in his book simply with the refrain of the original song. Similarly, Bhai Sundar Singh includes no original musical notation for his *parsaṅgs* and *ġazals* but rather references the lyrics of existing *ġazals* and *ġīts* from which the tunes are to be borrowed.

Like Charan Singh, however, Bhai Prem Singh advocated for the singing of “*gurmat rāgs*” only, and yet as a musician himself he emerges as somewhat of an exception among the *rāġīs* of this period in that he embraced and promoted the aspects of the early-twentieth-century *gurmat saṅgīt* reforms targeting the performance practices of his inherited tradition. Other *rāġīs* were evidently less inclined to abandon the practices which were seemingly popular with their audiences, comprising an essential part of the means to their livelihood. Self-preservation concerns, therefore, likely also created resistance to practical change where it targeted popular practices and styles.

With the advent of new media and technology (both recording and print), the emergence of new popular and often hybrid musical styles as seen with respect to the *ġazal* genre (Manuel 2010), and the growing popularity of the Singh Sabha reformist discourse, the *rāġīs* of the late colonial period were presented with no shortage of conflicting influences and interests. Negotiating these shifts entailed the amalgamation of old and new styles, repertoires, instruments, and values, accordingly. Whilst Orientalist and Singh Sabha discourse certainly inspired and influenced many of the *rāġīs* during this period, they remained selective about which aspects of reform they subscribed to, reflecting their own interests as performers. For most performers, listening trends and audiences’ musical tastes appear to have been a greater consideration than both the practical reforms proposed and propagated by the Singh Sabha and Orientalist notions of musical purity and authenticity. To varying extents, we thus see *rāġīs* adopting novel instruments such as the harmonium, incorporating popular styles and genres such as *ġazal*, and composing their own texts, clearly meant to be sung in the context of *śabad kīrtan* despite the newly asserted textual boundaries.

The artistic license and creative freedom afforded to traditional performers, historically, meant that *śabad kīrtan* performance did *not* have rigid musical or textual boundaries. The *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* – trusted custodians of tradition with family legacies going back many generations and often to the times of the Gurus – defined the ever-evolving and living tradition through their own performance practices. They were empowered to contribute and develop the tradition in this way and, through traditional pedagogical modes, had inherited the sensibility to do so appropriately. Provided that texts were thematically linked to *gurbānī* or conveyed appropriated devotional themes, and that the performer could effectively interweave them into performance, therefore, *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* could compose their own texts and even draw from varied existing textual sources to create a poetically rich performance sequence, as is still the case with the *qavvālī* tradition today.⁵⁰ Musically also, the lack of codification meant that musical styles were admitted into the tradition over time and in accordance with wider musical developments and trends.

4.4 THE REMOVAL OF THE *RABĀBĪS*: EPISTEMOLOGICAL INFLUENCES IN A MARGINALISING DISCOURSE

The last significant aspect of the early-twentieth-century *gurmat saṅgīt* project, intertwined with the processes of democratising its education and asserting its bounded identity, was the removal of the *rabābīs*, a hereditary performer community who straddled what we now understand as normative Sikh and Muslim religious identities. The marginalisation of similar groups of hereditary specialists emerges as somewhat of a broad pattern in the late colonial period, with scholars noting how various art forms came to be abstracted from their traditional performer groups in the process. Such examples include the marginalisation of Muslim *ustāds* in Hindustani music (Bakhle 2005), the *mīrāsīs* of Punjab with respect to *bhaṅgrā* dance (Roy 2017: 55), the *dēvadāsīs* of south India with respect to *bharatanāṭyam* dance (Kersenboom 2013; Soneji 2012), and the *ṭavāīfs* with respect to their art forms of *kathak* and *ṭhumrī* (Walker 2016; Manuel 2010), to name but a few. All of these hereditary specialist groups were targeted by colonial elites, both in the British government and among

⁵⁰ See Qureshi (2006) for more on the performance practices of *qavvālī*.

Anglophone natives, through reforms that were typically reliant upon Victorian and Protestant moral discourse (Linden 2008). Although the *rabābīs* and *śabad kīrtan* might seemingly represent yet another example of a community of hereditary specialists who came to be marginalised and whose art, knowledge and practice was appropriated as a result of the intervention of colonial elites, below I highlight how the marginalising discourse used to do so, in their case, was distinct in relation to that associated with the examples above.

In her study of the marginalisation of the *dēvadāsī* community, Kersenboom (2013) identifies three aspects, all of which are equally observed in the case of the *rabābīs*. Firstly, the appropriation of the art from the hereditary specialists was achieved through educational reform and a renaming and redefining of the tradition – the dance of the *dēvadāsīs* was stripped of its erotically suggestive elements, rebranded as *bharatanāṭyam* and taught to daughters of middle-class families, just as *gurmat saṅgīt* was circumscribed around a Sikh canon of texts and taught to Sikh children in academies such as the *CKY* and *KPV*. Secondly, the exclusion of hereditary performers was enforced through a form of legislation, for example, the 1947 Devadasi Act in the case of the *dēvadāsīs*. With administrative control over sites of *śabad kīrtan* performance only being acquired by the Singh Sabha reformists from 1925 onwards, with the passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act following a five-year-long campaign of agitation associated with the Gurdwara Reform (or Akali) movement (Singh and Caveeshar 1973), it was only in the late 1920s that we start to see the forced eviction of the *rabābīs* by the newly empowered reformist Sikhs. The following observation from K. L. Ralia Ram (1930: 71), an amateur musician of Lahore writing just five years after the passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, highlights how the *rabābīs* had been removed from duty fairly quickly after the reformists' acquisition of control over the Darbar Sahib:

Qabl azīm darbār sāhib kī ṭaraf sē achē rabābīōm kō vazīfa milā kartā thā. Lēkin jab sē is kā intazām akālīōm kē hāth mem āyā hai, inhōm nē rabābīōm kō mauqūf karkē sikhōm kō rakh liyā hai.

In earlier times, excellent *rabābīs* used to receive allowances from the Darbar Sahib. But since its management has come into the hands of the Akalis, they have put an end to the *rabābīs* and kept Sikhs [in their place].⁵¹

The regretted exclusion of the *rabābīs* came to be further entrenched by the new gurdwara management body of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), with the subsequent publishing of a code of conduct for Sikhs and their institutions in the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* (1950: 17). In this code of conduct it was stipulated that only a ‘Sikh’ (in the new normative sense, also defined within the same text) was allowed to perform *śabad kīrtan* in a gurdwara. Together, the removal of the incumbent patrons of the *rabābīs*, the *mahants* discussed in Chapter Three, and the subsequent legislating of their exclusion by the reformist Sikhs who replaced them, constituted two of the three watershed moments, highlighted by Purewal (2011: 379), in the twentieth-century marginalisation of this community, the third being the partitioning of Punjab along religious lines in 1947.

The manner in which *rabābīs* were already being removed from duty at major shrines by the SGPC almost immediately upon their gaining administrative jurisdiction over these sites from 1925 onwards, however, is indicative of a powerful marginalising discourse against the *rabābīs* that was already at play, long before Partition and the publishing of the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā*. Indeed, it is a discursive strategy which constituted the third means by which the *dēvadāsī* tradition was ended, in what Kersenboom describes as the referential break between form and content. In the case of the *rabābīs*, as we shall see, this was enacted through a discourse in which *gurmat saṅgīt* was presented as an endowment to the Sikh *rāgīs*, the *rabābīs* being marginalised on account of their perceived Muslimness and tendencies toward greed, corruption and disloyalty.

Kalra (2014: 71–72) attributes the emergence of a discursive attack on the *rabābīs*, perpetrated by the *rāgīs*, to the increased professional competition that resulted between them, arising from increased commercialisation and the

⁵¹ Akalis was the name given to activist participants within the Gurdwara Reform (or Akali) Movement.

“changing market” of *śabad kīrtan* in the early twentieth century. Whilst oral histories of many *rāgī* families certainly attest to the competitive environment during this period,⁵² and whilst this was undoubtedly a contributing factor to the emergence of this hostility between *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*, the environment was already fraught with tensions relating to socioreligious reforms and the shifting identity politics of the late colonial period.

Khalsa (2014: 64) notes how the removal of the *rabābīs* echoed the narrative of purity that was employed by the likes of V. D. Paluskar, in the early twentieth century, to marginalise the hereditary Muslim *ustāds* in the sphere of Hindustani music. Having resided ten years in the region (1898-1908), Paluskar gained much popularity in Punjab, his period there being formative of his success and subsequent career – it was in Punjab that Paluskar developed his notation system, publishing his first music books, and establishing the first *Gāndharva Mahāvidyālaya* school for Hindustani music in Lahore (Narula 1994). According to Bakhle (2005: 137), Paluskar’s reformist efforts were threefold: firstly, to remove music from its association with entertainment and instead reframe it within a purely devotional (i.e. *bhakti*) context; secondly, to form a number of institutions, dedicated toward the education of music; and thirdly, to propagate a *brāhmiṇ*-centric *gurū-śiṣya paramparā*. Part of this process involved proliferating a narrative which scapegoated the Muslim *ustāds* who came to be portrayed as having dragged music from its divine origins into the lesser realm of worldly entertainment from the Mughal period onwards. This Orientalist discourse appears to have struck a chord among the Sikh *rāgīs* who invoked a similar discourse to implicate the *rabābī* musicians.

The following quote, from 1909, written by Paranjpe Dattatreya Sharma, the steward of Paluskar’s *Gāndharva Mahāvidyālaya*, exemplifies the type of rhetoric employed against Muslim musicians:

“Even though Sangeet Vidya [the science/wisdom/knowledge of music] originates with the Vedas, in the time of the Yavan

⁵² A legendary three-day competition took place between Bhai Jwala Singh, one of the leading *rāgīs* at the turn of the century, and Bhai Moti, one of the leading *rabābīs*, around 1910 (interview with Bhai Baldeep Singh on 18 October 2018). Bhai Gurdeep Singh (1934-2019), an ex-*rāgī* of the Darbar Sahib, also alluded to his family challenging the *rabābīs* in his youth (interview on 11 December 2018).

(Muslim) rulers, this Vidya went underground. And whatever little of it spread among the people, even that is rapidly disappearing. But our institution, ever since it has been founded, has given it new life and is making it available to the common man.”

(Bakhle 2005: 156)

With an unmistakable ideological and even linguistic semblance to these ideas, Bhai Chhanga Singh, writing from the same city just six years later, in the introduction to his *Granth Saṅgīt Sār* (1915), states, “At that time [of Mughal rule], as misfortune fell upon the Vedas of the Hindus, so it fell upon music, meaning the practice of this science came into the hands of the Muslims (*yavan*)” (Singh 1915: 2). The rhetoric, common to both, focusses on the downfall of the Vedas and music under Muslim rule. Similarly, Bhai Prem Singh, in the introduction to the *GRSB*, states:

In times gone by, people knew this science [of music]. Doctors removed diseases through music and sages had perfected this science for this purpose. The singing of *rāg* melts stones and entices the beasts, it connects us in meditation to God (*hari*). The supreme being especially created this science for the purpose of the worship of the divine (*īśvar*) alone. Beings of this dark age (*kalijugī jīvām*) have ruined it in the manner of mixing poison into sacred food. Dirty songs have started to be sung in music. For a while, under the influence of the times, this science has disappeared. The respected Guru restored honour upon this science. All of *gurbāñī* has been uttered in *rāg* and, dismissing these dirty songs, the command was given, 'Oh brother, sing *gurbāñī*, this is fruitful and will forever grant you peace'... The respected Guru has steadied the wavering feet of this science such that while the world is living, nobody can dismantle it. Establishing the mint of *rāg*, the respected master, Guru Arjan, taught the compositions of *śabads*, *partāls*, and the *paurīs* of the *vārs* belonging to different times [of day], to the

genuine (*taksālī*) *rāgīs*. *Rāg* was established for the singing of *śabad kīrtan* in sacred gatherings; this is available for all to see now.

(Prem Singh 2008: 69)

It was noted earlier how song-texts inherent with *śringār ras* (romantic sentiment) were targeted by a colonialised moral discourse in which erotic and romantic aesthetics were regarded as “dirty” (Gupta 2001: 53–55). Whilst not implicating Muslims explicitly, in the opening passage to his *GRSB*, Bhai Prem Singh blames the anonymous “beings of this dark age” for the introduction of “dirty songs” (*gandē gīt*) into the otherwise pure sphere of music. It thus becomes apparent that Muslim musicians were widely deemed as a corrupting force in the domain of music. The lasting impact of this discourse is in fact still evident today through the legacy of institutionalised communalism that persists in modern Hindustani music (Katz 2012).

According to Paluskar’s rhetoric, however, the position of the *rabābī* community was unclear. Whilst they identified as Muslims, their specialisation was in the singing of *śabad kīrtan*, which in Paluskar’s view was music in its ideal context – music as *bhakti*. Interestingly, in the 1890s, amid the rise of the anti-Nautch campaign that targeted various groups of female performers, just several years prior to Paluskar’s arrival in the region, the *rabābīs* were posited as a kind of solution to the Nautch problem. Up until this time, in Punjab, it was entirely common for the festivities associated with marriages to include performances from troupes of female performers. In a publication of the Punjab Purity Association, titled *Opinions on the Nautch Question* (1894), one Pandit Devi Chand proposes, as an idealised substitute to the ‘nautch girls’, a class of musicians who might provide some “songs or other similar amusements” whilst posing no moral threat to the occasion. The *mīrāsīs* are dismissed as candidates on the grounds that “their company is very seldom of a wholesome character”. Instead, he suggests that:

The class may be like that of the Rababis who can be met with in Lahore or Amritsar. It may be a sort of religious song – a hymn or may be other songs which were very much cultivated

and respected in old days. Our native Rags and Raginis are really an inexhaustible store, but the thing that we lack is that we do not encourage music.

(Opinions on the Nautch Question. Collected and Published by the Punjab Purity Association. 1894: 13)

In the same publication, one Lala Raja Ram Khosla writes of how his “clan” (*birādrī*) employed such a strategy but with limited success:

Our *sarin* Biradri has substituted Rababees and other musicians but as youngmen are not necessarily Samajic members and may not like to hear religious songs in all and every occasion, you must introduce the formation of entertainment clubs where social Theatres may be performed and the leading members of the several religious and social societies may take an active and controlling part in such institutions.

(Opinions on the Nautch Question. Collected and Published by the Punjab Purity Association. 1894: 31)

The religious bent and ‘respectable’ moral character of the *rabābīs* was thus seen as an antidote of sorts with respect to the Nautch issue. In the eyes of such anglophone elites the *rabābīs* represented a respectable community of musicians, by virtue of their intrinsic association with the honourable *śabad kīrtan* tradition, as opposed to the pimp-like perception of *mīrāsīs* who accompanied stigmatised female performers. In this respect, Paluskar’s *bhakti*-centric narrative would have failed to exclude the *rabābīs*.

In the writings of Bhai Chhanga Singh and Bhai Prem Singh, we see how the *rāgīs* combined Paluskar’s discourse of ‘purity’ with Singh Sabha strategies of association/disassociation, that which Kersenboom (2013) describes as a referential break. Whereas Paluskar perhaps saw himself as assuming this role, the narrative of the Sikh *rāgīs* portrayed the Gurus as the saviour of music and themselves as the true inheritors of this tradition. The *rāgīs* thus described themselves as the legitimate (“*taksālī*”) custodians of the music tradition of the

Gurus.⁵³ Despite the *rabābīs*' distinguished history of *śabad kīrtan* custodianship, they were suddenly and conspicuously excluded from this discourse. Going a step further than simply failing to mention them, Bhai Chhanga Singh explicitly invoked an aspect of history pertaining to the *rabābīs* of Guru Arjan in a strategy that came to be particularly important in the marginalising discourse against the *rabābīs*. As Kalra (2014: 71) notes, the early twentieth century saw the propagation of “stories of *rababis* only seeing *kirtan* as employment rather than a service, and of having no attachment to the sacred text”. Of these ‘stories’, perhaps none was as popular and potent as the historical narrative of Satta and Balwand, resulting from its authoritative place in the *gurbilās* literature.

Satta and Balwand were the *rabābīs* of Guru Arjan and the historical context in which they have most often come to be remembered relates to a narrative first emerging in the late-eighteenth-century *gurbilās* literature.⁵⁴ Both Bhagat Singh's *Gurbilās Pātsāh Chēvīm* (1997: 130–40) and then later Kavi Santokh Singh's *Srī Gurpartāp Sūraj Granth* (1989: 3:448–78) both recount the story of Satta and Balwand in the same context and with similar emphases, that is, to explain why the *vār* in *rāg Rāmkalī*, composed by them, was included in the GGS. A paraphrased summary of this narrative is provided below.

On one occasion the pair had requested money from the Guru in order to cover the expenses of Satta's daughter's marriage. Unhappy with the offerings they received and the promise of more to come, the brothers forsook the Guru and began to slander (*nindīā*) the lineage of the Gurus, which is said to have led to their beginning to suffer from illness. In their absence the Guru had instructed some of his Sikhs to take up the singing of *śabad kīrtan* in their place, thus sowing the initial seeds of what later came to be institutionalised as the *rāgī* tradition. In their suffering, Satta and Balwand sought out a generous Sikh of Lahore named Bhai Ladha '*Paraupakārī*' ('The Benevolent') who, hearing their plight, agreed to help them, risking his own honour in the process. In accordance with the harsh conditions set by the Guru for anyone who was to associate with these *rabābīs*, Bhai Ladha set off on a procession from Lahore to Amritsar with

⁵³ *Ṭaksāl* means 'mint' (where coins are struck), and so *ṭaksālī* implies something (or someone) which carries the mark of authenticity and legitimacy.

⁵⁴ According to some accounts Satta and Balwand were brothers; according to others they were father and son (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 224).

his head shaved, his face blackened, mounted on a donkey, with the beating of the *dhōl* drum behind him, in order to make a plea on behalf of the dishonoured *rabābīs*. Arriving in this humble manner, the Guru accepted his plea on behalf of the *rabābīs* and invited them back to his court. Satta and Balwand thus returned and atoned for their mistaken pride and greed by composing a *vār* in praise of the first five Gurus, upon hearing which the Guru was so pleased that he had it included in the *Adi Granth* ('*Guru Granth Sahib*' [n.d.]: 966–68). Satta and Balwand then took a bath in the *sarōvar*, or sacred tank, of Amritsar and their suffering was cured.

Alongside the concern for contextualising Guru Arjan's inclusion of various compositions in his compilation of the *Adi Granth*, a number of secondary but nevertheless important morals emerge in the Satta-Balwand narrative: that pride, greed and slander lead to suffering; that humility is a virtue; that the sacred pool of Amritsar has healing qualities; and that the Guru is merciful and forgiving. Collectively, these secondary themes can be considered as being representative of values specific to South Asian society more broadly, and/or the Punjab region and Sikh religious tradition more specifically. The recirculation and invocation of the Satta-Balwand narrative, by *rāgīs* in the early twentieth century, however, came to represent a shift in emphasis, now focussing on the betrayal and corrupt tendencies of the *rabābīs* while neglecting their atonement and the subsequent inclusion of their *vār* in the *Adi Granth* by Guru Arjan.⁵⁵

Recent scholarship by Vig (2020) has explored the reception history of the *gurbilās* literature, particularly highlighting how in the early twentieth century Singh Sabha authors utilised such sources to assert a Sikh literary authority and suggest a continuity with the past whilst adding and removing from its contents to suit the requirements of reformist discourse. Focussing on the battle of Bhangani narrative associated with Guru Gobind Singh's life, Vig demonstrates the nature and extent of the editorial role undertaken by the leading Singh Sabha author Bhai Vir Singh in his retelling of it, noting that both Hindu and Puranic elements and negative portrayals of Sikhs that featured in the *gurbilās* narrative were omitted. Instead, virtues of courage, heroism and sacrifice were foregrounded by

⁵⁵ The Satta-Balwand narrative has been referenced in books by Sikh *rāgīs* such as Bhai Chhanga Singh (1915) and Bhai Mehar Singh (1945b).

Bhai Vir Singh in an attempt to propagate idealised qualities of a Sikh from a reformist perspective (Vig 2020: 38). She also highlights how the ‘honour’ aspect of the battle narrative was more central in the original narrative, reflecting late-eighteenth-century context in which social status was influenced by such honour feuds (Dhavan 2011: 148).

Also speaking to the repurposing of narratives from the *gurbilās* literature during the Singh Sabha period, specifically with reference to ideas of martyrdom and the story of the *panj pyārē*, Fenech’s (2000; 2021) work also demonstrates how such narratives were edited to align with reformist discourse. Adopting a similar approach in exploring the circulation of the Satta-Balwand narrative during the Singh Sabha period, we see how retellings of this narrative exhibited a similar tendency toward exclusion of certain elements in order to suit the reformist agenda.

Writing significantly earlier in the Singh Sabha movement (1889), Gyani Gyan Singh (1977: 36–37), one of the leading Singh Sabha authors of his times, concisely paraphrases the narrative in its entirety. Although the purpose of his writing is no longer to explain the inclusion of compositions in the GGS – he includes the Satta-Balwand narrative whilst describing the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* of the Darbar Sahib, as part of a hagiographical history of Amritsar titled *Tavārīkh Srī Amritsar* – Gyani Gyan Singh’s retelling does not in any significant way depart from the original narrative. He concludes his version by noting that Satta and Balwand and subsequently their descendants were granted permission to perform in the Darbar Sahib, illustrating how his retelling serves to legitimise the integral place of the *rabābīs* within the foremost Sikh religious institution of the Darbar Sahib.

By the early twentieth century, however, we find Sikh *rāgīs* propagating the narrative out of its original context, with a more palpable intent to portray the *rabābīs* in a negative light. Bhai Chhanga Singh (1915: 5), for example, simply alerts his readers to the fact that Satta and Balwand acted out of arrogance (“*hañkār kītā*”) resulting in the Sikhs being blessed by the Guru (“*sikhām nūm āgyā dittī*”) to perform *śabad kīrtan* in their place. The language used locates the *rabābīs* as arrogant outsiders, especially in the literary context of being preceded

by Bhai Chhanga Singh's discussion of the corrupting role of Muslims (*yavan*) in Hindustani music. Whereas Bhai Gurdas, the scribe of Guru Arjan, names Mardana in his list of the closest Sikhs of Guru Nanak (Gurdas 1964: 120), by the early twentieth century, with the changing definition of what it was to be Sikh, the Muslim aspect of *rabābī* identity increasingly became paramount (see Chapter Five). Newspaper articles from this period also reveal a conspicuous effort to foreground the role of great *rāgīs* of the period, thus marginalising the *rabābīs*.⁵⁶

What the case of the *rabābīs*' marginalisation thus illustrates is that the influence of the Western episteme in this process was limited. With the inapplicability of Protestant moral rhetoric in their case, we instead detect references to precolonial and indigenous notions of morality, informed by both Punjabi and Sikh elements. Dhavan (2011: 147) and Vig (2020: 38) have both noted that notions of honour ('*izzat* or *māṇ*) were central to eighteenth-century Punjabi society and literature, the latter, in particular, suggesting that this aspect of historical narratives became less central in the early-twentieth century retellings of authors like Bhai Vir Singh. As Fenech (2000: 202) notes, however, Bhai Ditt Singh, another Singh Sabha author, invoked notions of honour in his literary attempts to recruit modern Sikh 'martyrs'. Similarly, in reference to the Satta-Balwand narrative, Sikh authors also allude to the dishonour of the *rabābīs*. Within the context of the traditional *jajmānī* system of server-patron, the *rabābīs* abandoning the Guru in search of patronage from elsewhere would have certainly been considered a matter of dishonour for both parties. In the original narrative, honour was redeemed by Satta and Balwand through the intervention of Bhai Ladha, who mediated their return to the Guru by risking his own honour, and by their composing of a *vār* which was accepted by the Guru.

Central to the Satta-Balwand narrative, therefore, was a moral idiom associated with early Sikh tradition, prominent in which were ideas of *nindīā* (slander), *pāp* (sin), and *hankār*, as well as notions of honour that were rooted in precolonial Punjabi society. By ignoring the honourable conclusion of the narrative and emphasising the mistake of the *rabābīs*, Sikh authors effectively marginalised the

⁵⁶ An article in *The Khalsa* (Singh 1933: 6), for example, bemoans the death of great *rāgīs* such as Bhai Hira Singh and Baba Sham Singh, suggesting that there is "not one musician left who could keep the audiences spellbound with his *kirtan*", thus entirely neglecting the *rabābīs* of this period.

rabābīs without recourse to Western moral codes that had characterised the discursive attack on other hereditary performer groups such as the *mīrāsīs*, *ṭavāīfs*, and *dēvadāsīs*. Although the discursive means for the marginalisation of hereditary performer groups during the colonial period thus varied from case to case, the end inevitably involved the devaluing of hereditary specialisation such that the new Western-educated native elites were no longer reliant upon such communities. Print media also seems to inevitably feature as a primary means by which the discursive marginalisation was propagated, as noted by Oberoi (1994: 359):

To disseminate their newly-acquired values, beliefs and ideologies, the Punjabi elites utilized printing presses, newspapers and new literary genres like the novel.

Communities like the Bharais, Mirasis and Nais who had a key role to play in the transmission of customary culture, primarily oral, had virtually no role to play in these new communication codes.

Print was certainly one of the most important communication modes through which a new public sphere was established (Orsini 2002), in which discursive battles were fought and won. Whilst the *rāgīs* clearly engaged in these new communication modes, the absence of a *rabābī* voice in the print material is conspicuous. Whilst it may be tempting to attribute this absence to a perceived reliance on oral modes of communication and transmission, typically associated with such hereditary performer communities (Qureshi 2009), the *rabābīs* were often literate in Gurmukhi and are even known to have served as Gurmukhi teachers (Kalra 2014: 104). Their lack of participation, therefore, was more likely reflective of a lack of both institutional support and access to the printing presses, the latter being largely controlled by the new elites (Oberoi 1994: 262).

Ultimately, the marginalising discourse employed by the Singh-Sabha-influenced *rāgīs* merely paved the way for enforced exclusion of the *rabābīs* once the reformist Sikhs were granted administrative control over gurdwaras with the passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1925. It is important to note, however, that, even then, some of the most popular *rabābīs* remained as performers at Sikh

gurdwaras, *dērās* and shrines right up until Partition, when communal violence finally necessitated their migration, thus illustrating the difficulty with which centuries-old socioreligious ties were broken. In smaller, rurally situated gurdwaras and *dērās*, sites over which Singh Sabha influence remained less than total in the early twentieth century (Mir 2010: 25), the *rabābīs* continued to remain fairly widely employed until 1947.

The life of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand (1927-2015), whose family was associated with a *dērā* in the village of Gurusar Satlani near Amritsar, exemplifies the endurance of *rabābīs* beyond the periphery of reformist control in the years leading up to Partition. Despite being born after 1925, he was nevertheless raised into the tradition of *śabad kīrtan* and used to perform as a young adult up until Partition. It was only upon migrating to Lahore in 1947, with the sudden absence of Sikh patronage, that he stopped performing *śabad kīrtan* for a living. With the gradual removal of the *rabābīs*, the demand for Sikh *rāgīs* to replace them steadily increased. The *CKY* and *KPV* academies established in the first decade of the twentieth century were evidently unable to keep up with the demand leading to the establishment of the Shaheed Missionary College of Amritsar in 1927 specifically for the training of Sikh *rāgīs*. It remains one of the leading institutions in this regard to this day.

4.5 CONCLUSION

With *śabad kīrtan* constituting such a fundamental aspect of Sikh religious tradition, it comes as no surprise to observe how *gurmat saṅgīt* served as an important political apparatus for the Sikh community at two important points in the twentieth century. It first emerged as an instrumental part of the process of Sikh identity formation, in the early decades of the twentieth century, and then again in the wake of 1984, amid reignited Sikh-Hindu hostilities and a renewed focus on identity politics (Kalra 2014: 76–77). The early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement and the post-1984 *gurmat saṅgīt* revival, therefore, were similar in that they were both deeply intertwined with the identity politics of their respective periods. In character, however, they were markedly distinct.

The early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement relied largely on newly formed associations and the perception of difference in which the notion of a bounded Sikh music tradition was conveyed, through the medium of print, by recasting pre-existing musical knowledge and synthesising it with Sikh symbols. Rather than following a trajectory of ‘classicisation’ (Linden 2015b: 135), the early-twentieth-century *gurmat saṅgīt* project, represented in the work of Sikh authors such as Bhai Prem Singh, involved repackaging the existing musicological literature that had circulated widely throughout the Sikh religious sphere in manuscript form up until around the turn of the twentieth century, and combining it with notations of existing *śabad kīrtan* repertoire. With such a significant degree of continuity with the immediate musical past, therefore, the reformist aspect of the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement, observed across its various aspects in this chapter, came to be defined through the processes of exclusion and circumscription.

Musical exclusion, where propagated, was determined by the canon of thirty-one *rāgs* of the GGS. Similarly, textual exclusion was defined by the construction of a bounded canon of Sikh texts and the discouragement of the singing of song-texts extraneous to this. Lastly, the socioreligious exclusion involved the removal of non-normative (later referred to as *sahajdhārī*) performer communities, most notably the *rabābīs* but also Hindu-identifying communities, an aspect which might be taken up in future study.⁵⁷ As I have shown, however, whilst these new musical, textual and socioreligious norms were asserted by reformist authors, the degree to which they were embraced and implemented by the wider community of *rāgīs* was limited. The singing of non-canonical texts, the inclusion of varied musical styles and *rāgs* beyond the thirty-one of the GGS, and the popularity of the *rabābīs*, endured throughout the early twentieth century and so *gurmat saṅgīt* remained somewhat of an idealised concept at this early stage, challenged by the popularity of pre-existing practices and entrenched traditions. It took several decades of discursive influence, the successful acquisition of administrative control over sites of *śabad kīrtan* performance by the reformists from 1925 onwards, the eventual publishing of the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* in 1950, and the

⁵⁷ I have been told across various interviews how Hindu musicians also used to partake in *śabad kīrtan* performance prior to Partition.

further entrenching of religious boundaries linked to Partition, in order for these reforms to be more actively enforced and more consistently adopted.

Negotiating between the newly asserted reforms and existing performance practices led to, at times, paradoxical amalgams that typify the contested transitions of the colonial encounter. *Rāgīs* continued to employ what were now viewed and asserted by some as recalcitrant practices and musical styles, whilst also propagating many Singh Sabha reformist values, including the democratisation of *śabad kīrtan* education and newly idealised Sikh devotional and moral values. Developments of this period were driven by what was a complex admixture of various epistemological influences, also typical of the colonial encounter. Although Orientalist and Anglicist policies of the colonial period were undoubtedly influential, they were by no means totalising. The marginalising discourse employed against the *rabābīs*, as I have shown, demonstrates that colonial reformist discourse, in fact, often equally relied upon indigenous epistemological apparatus as it did Western. Precolonial, Sikh- and Punjabi-influenced notions of honour and morality, were invoked as a crucial part of the discursive attack on the *rabābīs*, illustrating how the moral languages of socioreligious reform in the colonial period did not exist under the exclusive hegemony of the Western episteme.

If early *gurmat saṅgīt* effectively created the perception of separateness, to the extent that it might serve as a form of symbolic capital amid the religiously driven identity politics of the period, the post-1984 *gurmat saṅgīt* movement became more concerned with achieving institutional representation for *gurmat saṅgīt* at the university level, resulting in the establishment of a *gurmat saṅgīt* department at Punjabi University Patiala. Amid more concerted attempts toward creating a standardised body of theory, necessary for the construction of a formal syllabus, this second round of reform in actual fact represented a much deeper musical rupture from tradition than the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement did. Old *rāg* forms were discarded in the quest for a standardised and homogeneous interpretation of *rāgs*. Whilst it has been argued that this process was modelled on the *rāg* forms of modern Hindustani music, specifically Bhatkhande's work (Khalsa 2012; Cassio 2015), my own inquiry suggests that influential figures involved in this process actually wanted to arrive at *rāg* forms that were different from those

found in modern Hindustani music, resulting in a greater need for the invention of difference.⁵⁸ This was not the case with the early *gurmat saṅgīt* movement which, as we have seen, was instead concerned with exclusion on different levels, and the assertion of Sikh identity through simple strategies of association/disassociation, in order to achieve at least the perceived sense of a bounded Sikh musical tradition.

⁵⁸ During an interview (1 December 2018), Prof. Kartar Singh, a senior Sikh *rāgī* who was involved in the *Rāg Nirnāik Committee* of 1991, spoke of how the criteria for selecting between multiple forms of *rāg Mārū* was governed by that which was *most different* from the forms of *Mārū* remembered by musicians of Hindustani music. It is noteworthy also that, by contrast, Bhai Prem Singh, writing in the early twentieth century, took *Mārū* simply as an alias for the popular *rāg Mārṅā* of Hindustani music. Similarly, *rāg Kalyāṅ Bhōpālī* has come to be interpreted as *rāg Kalyāṅ* in ascent and *rāg Bhōpālī* in descent (<https://www.jawadditaksal.org/raag-kalian-bhupali/>) rather than *rāg Bhōpālī* of the *Kalyāṅ* family (Prem Singh 2008: 166).

5 PARTITIONED MEMORIES: THE *RABĀBĪS* OF AMRITSAR

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The migration of the *rabābī* community from eastern Punjab to the newly formed Islamic republic of Pakistan, amid the rapidly escalating communal violence of 1947, represented a watershed moment of physical distancing and separation from the wider Sikh community (Purewal 2011: 379). More than seventy years on, with enduring political antagonism between India and Pakistan and a legacy of Sikh religious reform that continues to exclude non-normative performers of *śabad kīrtan*, the *rabābī* tradition has significantly faded out of the collective memory of the Sikhs, into the margins of mainstream histories.¹ Remembered mostly by a small minority of elders, who happen to have been witness to the pre-Partition era, the *rabābī* tradition today no longer comprises a significant part of the lived experience of Sikhs and as a consequence is little-known to subsequent generations of Sikhs.² Working towards a history of the *rabābī* tradition during the colonial period, framed in particular by the memory of the *rabābīs* themselves, in this chapter I aim to foreground this significant but neglected aspect of Sikh history, supplementing and contrasting my own ethnographic research with the ethnographic research of others whilst also referencing relevant textual sources.

In recent years, several significant developments have led to a notable increase in both the awareness of and interest in the *rabābī* tradition. In 2004, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand (1927-2015) of Lahore, one of the last surviving *rabābīs* to have lived in the pre-Partition era, was ‘discovered’ by the Sikhs and invited to India almost sixty years after Partition, where he and his performances were received with much acclaim and affection.³ This exposure sparked a renewed

¹ Reflecting the marginal place of the *rabābīs* in mainstream Sikh history, Fenech and McLeod’s *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (2014), for example, does not have an entry for the *rabābīs*.

² I am aware of only one group of *rabābīs* in Lahore who perform *śabad kīrtan* from time to time at some of the local gurdwaras, reflecting the limited interaction between the local Sikh and *rabābī* communities.

³ From an interview with Bhai Moeen Ahmad, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s son, on 3 September 2019.

interest in the *rabābī* tradition, particularly among the diaspora, where resistance to modern, commercial forms of *śabad kīrtan* and self-conscious efforts towards the recovery of a ‘traditional’ *śabad kīrtan* have been noted to be more pronounced (Lallie and Purewal 2013: 382–83). Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand became the subject of Purewal’s brief social history of the *rabābī* tradition (2011), one of the few scholarly attempts toward a social history of the *rabābīs*. Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand also featured prominently in Kalra’s recent book (2014), exploring postcolonial trajectories of sacred and secular music in the Punjab. The attention from UK-based scholars Purewal and Kalra led to a memorable UK tour for Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand in 2011, parts of which I was also fortunate to attend and many recordings of which are available on YouTube.⁴

More recently, in November 2019, the Kartarpur Corridor – a special, visa-free border crossing that facilitates the visit of Indian Sikhs to Kartarpur Sahib, a site attached to the history of Guru Nanak in Pakistan – was inaugurated as part of the celebrations of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, harbouring potential opportunities for increased cross-border dialogue and interaction between Sikhs in India and the *rabābīs* in Pakistan.⁵ This chapter is, in no small part, inspired by and seeks to build upon the scholarly contributions and growing interest with respect to the *rabābī* tradition over the last decade.

Following a similar approach adopted by Soneji in his work with the marginalised *dēvadāsī* performing community (2012), in my research I have especially sought to explore what is remembered of the *rabābī* tradition by the *rabābī* community themselves. In light of the postcolonial trajectory of estrangement between the *rabābīs* and Sikhs and in acknowledgement of the fact that there is one past but often a multiplicity of collective memories (Halbwachs 2007: 141), I seek to relate what is remembered by the *rabābīs* with what is remembered, or rather forgotten, by the wider Sikh community. In the process, this chapter foregrounds

⁴ One of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s recorded performances, from his 2011 UK tour, has had almost two hundred thousand views on YouTube (*Bhai Gulaam Mohammed Chand Ji - YouTube* [n.d.]).

⁵ On major festivals and special occasions, the family of Bhai Naeem Tahir Lal and Sarfraz Hussain Lal, a group of *rabābīs* who still actively perform *śabad kīrtan*, are variously invited to perform at some of the major gurdwaras in Pakistan including Kartarpur Sahib, Dera Sahib, and Nanakana Sahib.

some of the more neglected and obscure aspects of the *rabābī* tradition in its historical context, illustrating their integral place and multifaceted (e.g. musical, ritual, and exegetical) role within Sikh tradition prior to Partition, thus reorienting the history of *śabad kīrtan* in a way that situates them at its core.⁶ Touching upon some of the complexities and subjectivities associated with *rabābī* identity in its colonial and postcolonial trajectories, I highlight how the *rabābīs*' collective memory of past 'places' – territorial, institutional, musical, socioreligious, and textual – continue to be formative of their identity today.⁷

Kabir's (2013) study of Partition in relation to memory, highlights the utility of postmemory and post-amnesias – remembering and forgetting as processes which are productive of the present and future – in this context. Pulling on these strands, I show that whilst purposefully forgetting the *rabābī* tradition has been crucial to the maintenance of a normative Sikh identity on the one hand, persistent remembering continues to be fundamental to *rabābī* identity on the other. Kabir (2013: 18) has also noted the modern tendency to approach Partition from a Freudian trauma-centric perspective that dwells upon the aspects of violence, loss, division, displacement, and suffering, all aspects which tend to constitute amnesias for those that endured them. Building upon Kabir's (2013: 25) idea of the "post-Partition memorial terrain" as a de-territorialised space that allows for "reparation" between nations and communities and across generations, in this chapter I demonstrate how the *rabābīs* and Sikhs in fact remain intimately connected through memories.

I focus particularly on the community of *rabābīs* that was historically situated in Amritsar, most of whom were attached to the Darbar Sahib, arguably the single most important of all Sikh sacred sites. Threatened by the first local outbursts of communal violence in 1947, the *rabābīs* of Amritsar traversed the short (~50km) but symbolically vast distance to Lahore, now situated in newly formed Pakistan, where they came to settle in a quarter (*muhallā*) known as Katri Bawa, within the

⁶ Bearing similarities to the case of the *rabābīs*, Shelemay (1992: 255–56) highlights how the multifaceted socioreligious role of the Ethiopian Dābtāra community of hereditary musicians came to be obscured as a result of the Western gaze, which tended to portray them simply as musical specialists.

⁷ The *rabābīs* are typically described as a community of Muslim hereditary musicians who performed *śabad kīrtan* for Sikh patrons (Lybarger 2011: 120).

Chuna Mandi neighbourhood of the old walled city.⁸ Though not dissimilar in character and proportion to the home they had left behind in Amritsar, the social and demographic environment in which they now found themselves were of course radically transformed. Speaking to the difficulties facing the *rabābīs* in the wake of Partition and in the absence of Sikh patronage, Malik highlights how “In the beginning, life was very tough for the musicians, as there was very little, if any, demand for their art. They had to brave extremely harsh conditions in order to survive.” (Malik 2006: 31). In due course, however, and out of necessity, their community adapted to life in modern Pakistan with the radio and film industries in particular proving to be important sources of patronage for the musical skill inherent within their community.⁹

Attesting to the vastness of the ‘distance’ that now separates the Sikhs of Amritsar and the *rabābīs* of Lahore and highlighting some of the practical hurdles that accompany research of the Punjab as a unified whole, my own fieldwork, following the migratory path between these two cities, required two separate visas and more than 25,000 kilometres worth of international flights. I am also all too aware of the privilege afforded to me as a British passport holder, being able to visit both India and Pakistan with relative ease whilst Pakistani and Indian nationals continue to be frequently denied this right. Speaking to local informants, musicians and otherwise, in Amritsar,¹⁰ *rabābīs* and Hindustani musicians and music scholars in Lahore,¹¹ and consulting relevant textual sources from archives on both sides of the border has allowed me to piece together a more accurate and representative history of the *rabābī* tradition than might otherwise be possible for scholars restricted to either side of the border.

⁸ One Baba Hardayal Singh is said to have granted this neighbourhood to the *rabābīs* at the time of Partition in the hope that, because of their religious heterodoxy or tolerance, they might respect the cluster of small mandirs situated within (Aslam 1999: 33).

⁹ Interview with musician-scholar Ustad Badaruzzaman on 28 September 2019.

¹⁰ Arora’s (2000) article, containing useful snippets of oral history on the *rabābīs* of Amritsar, served as a useful pointer to the Chowk Passian neighbourhood of Amritsar where the *rabābīs* used to reside, on a street or *muhalla* known as *rabābīvālī galī*.

¹¹ Aslam’s (1999) ethnographic survey of the *rabābīs* of Katri Bawa, Lahore, kindly shared with me by the scholar Saqib Razaq, served as an important starting point guide to identifying the leading *rabābī* families of Lahore. Interviews with senior scholars of Hindustani music history in Pakistan, namely Ustad Badaruzzaman (b. 1940), a vocal disciple of the *rabābī* Bhai Faiz Ali and *tablā* disciple of the *rabābī* Bhai Nasira, and Ustad Parvez Paras (b.1944), a scholar and vocalist of the same generation, were also useful.

Before proceeding, it is relevant to summarise the origins of the *rabābī* tradition, a history intimately tied to the life of Guru Nanak and the origins of the Sikh tradition itself. In the extensive hagiographical *janam sākhi* literature, the narratives of Guru Nanak’s life and travels (*udāsīs*) are punctuated throughout by the steadfast presence of his disciple and companion Bhai Mardana.¹² A hereditary musician (*mīrāsī*) of Guru Nanak’s village, attached to the Guru’s family through inherited patron-server (*jajmānī*) ties (Ashok 1973: 6), Bhai Mardana accompanied the Guru for the better part of forty years on his travels across South and Central Asia. In a verse enumerating the prominent disciples of Guru Nanak, Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636), the scribe of Guru Arjan, provides one of the earliest (and perhaps most succinct!) references to Bhai Mardana as follows:¹³

bhalā rabāba vajāindā majalasa maradāna mīrāsī.

Mardana the *mīrāsī* played the *rabāb* excellently in the assembly [of the Guru].

(Gurdas 1964: 120)

The particular and enduring association with the *rabāb*, an Indic plucked lute of Persian origin, led to Bhai Mardana and his successors’ coming to be known as *rabābīs*.¹⁴

Following Bhai Mardana, the next names to feature as seminal figures in the early *rabābī* tradition are Bhai Satta and Balwand, the *rabābīs* who most famously served Guru Ram Das (1534-1581) and Guru Arjan (1563-1606).¹⁵ Whilst it has been suggested they were of the same family (*khāndān*) as Bhai Mardana (Ashok

¹² See McLeod (1980) for an extensive study of the *janam sākhi* literature.

¹³ Murphy (2012a: 107) highlights how the meaning of the word ‘Sikh’ changed over time, used to describe a follower of the Guru throughout the *gurbilas* literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

¹⁴ Bhai Gurdas also refers to Bhai Mardana as a ‘*rabābī*’ in the thirty-fifth verse of his first *vār* (Gurdas 1964: 18). It is important to note that the *rabābīs* within Sikh tradition are not known to have any direct links with the namesake *rabābīs* of the Mughal court who were associated with the same instrument and famously descended from the legendary Tansen through the line of his son Bilas Khan (Dhar 1989).

¹⁵ Bhai Mardana is said to have had a son named Bhai Sajada who served Guru Angad (1504-1552) (Ashok 1973: 35). Bhai Sadu and Bhai Badu are also mentioned as *rabābīs* who served the second and third gurus, Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), but little is known of them besides this (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 223–24).

1973: 35), some *rabābīs* have suggested that Bhai Mardana had no descendants.¹⁶ Guru Arjan’s inclusion of a *vār*, composed by Satta and Balwand, in the GGS (see Chapter Four), explicitly names Satta as a *ḍūm*, a term typically considered either synonymous with (Rose 1911c: 106) or indicative of a particular type of *mīrāsī* (Lybarger 2011).¹⁷ At this nascent stage of Sikh history, therefore, we see how the terms *rabābī*, *mīrāsī*, and *ḍūm* were evidently used interchangeably, the specific designation *rabābī* becoming institutionalised at a later date. Following Bhai Satta and Balwand, the names of Bhai Natha and Abdulla emerge as two cousins, belonging to the *dhādhī* community, who served in the court of Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) at Amritsar, the former of which played the *dhadd* and the latter the *rabāb* (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 224).¹⁸ Bhai Babak is another seminal *rabābī* figure, who was attached to the court of Guru Hargobind. After him the names of Bhai Sadda and Madda are remembered as leading *rabābīs* of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 224). From the descendants of these seminal figures, belonging variously to the *mīrāsī* and *dhādhī* communities, a distinct and endogamous community known as the *rabābīs* developed, distinguished by their hereditary specialisation in *śabad kīrtan* performance and their ancestral patronage ties to the Gurus (Lybarger 2011: 120). As primary custodians of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition – as transmitters of *gurbāñī* in its original sonic form – they remained prolific beneficiaries of Sikh patronage up until the early twentieth century and the onset of religious reform (see Chapter Four).

¹⁶ The *rabābī* Tufail Farooqī is recorded in an interview for suggesting Bhai Mardana had no descendants (Saqib 2013: 35).

¹⁷ Bhai Satta and Balwand’s composition appears in the GGS under the heading “*rāmkaḷī kī vār rāi balvaṇḍ tathā satai ḍūm ākhī*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 966), that is, “*Vār* of [*rāg*] *Rāmkaḷī*, uttered by the *ḍūms* Rai Balwand and Satta”.

¹⁸ The *dhādhīs* are another type of endogamous hereditary musician community, frequently conflated with but distinct from *mīrāsīs*. They historically specialised in the playing of the *dhadd*, from whence their name comes, and the singing of the *vār*, in which deeds of past heroes are eulogised (*Punjab States Gazetteers: Phulkian States. Patiala, Jind and Nabha with Maps* 1904: 247). Said to have originated from Punjab (Yajurvedi and Brihaspati 1976: 200), the *dhādhīs* are known to have subsequently spread across north India, finding patronage at Mughal and Rajput courts and adopting courtly forms of music in the process. Initially serving as accompanists to courtly musicians, the *dhādhīs* subsequently acquired soloist status as performers of genres such as *dhrupad* through discipleship to the *kalāvants* (Brown 2003: 154–70). It has been suggested that the Gurus’ patronage of *dhādhīs* followed the model of the Mughals (Nijhawan 2006: 56).

The following *kabitt*, associated with the *mīrāsīs*, highlights the shared traits and tendencies across the various distinct yet closely related communities of hereditary performers:

*gunana kē sāgara haiṁ jāti kē ujāgara haiṁ nāgara haiṁ bānī
kē bhikhārī haiṁ rajādōm kē,
prabhōm kē mīrāsī rāga tāna abhiāsī sadā singhōm kē rabābī tē
kavvāl pīrazādōm kē,
ḍhāḍī haiṁ raīsana kē bhāṭ rājapūtana kē jāti au sanāta yahī
sūramē haiṁ yādōm kē,
sabhī hamēm jānata haiṁ mānata haiṁ tīna lōka bhaṇḍa au
nakkāla hama ḍūma mālazādōm kē.*

We are the oceans of skill, enlighteners of caste, cities of poetry, and beggars of kings.

We are the *mīrāsīs* of our lords, forever practitioners of *rāg* and *tān*, *rabābīs* of the Sikhs, and *qavvāls* of the *pīrs*.

We are the *ḍhāḍhīs* of the nobility and the *bhāṭs* of the Rajputs; in matters of caste and tradition, we alone are the masters of memory.

All know of us, our recognition extending across the three worlds; whether *bhāṇḍ* or *naqqāl*, we are the *ḍūms* of the wealthy.

(Ashok 1973: 14)

Specifically, the cultivation of skill in the fields of music and poetry, fulfilment of the role of genealogists for a specific patron group, and the begging of alms for sustenance were traits that were evidently shared by the different hereditary performer communities. The term *ḍūm* appears to have been used as a catch-all for hereditary performer communities, at least in the Punjab region, similar to the term *mīrāsī*. The latter term specifically invokes the role these communities fulfilled as genealogists to their respective patrons, the Arabic root *mīrās* meaning ‘inheritance’ (Nettl and others 1998: 763–64). Importantly, whilst distinguished by their specialisation in *śabad kīrtan* performance and through their social ties to Sikh patrons, the *rabābīs* continued to share many characteristics and social

functions with other hereditary performer communities, the particulars of which I take up later in the chapter.

5.2 THE ‘PLACES’ OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

5.2.1 INHABITED PLACES: CHOWK PASSIAN AND *RABĀBĪVĀLĪ GALĪ*

During my fieldwork with the *rabābī* community of Lahore, several sites and symbols struck me as significant collective memories, shared by a broad spectrum of their community and comprising a crucial means by which they continue to identify as *rabābīs* today, despite estrangement and separation from the Sikh community at large. With collective memory being a concept that has been theorised from varying perspectives, Kansteiner (2011: 302) notes that:

...although collective memories have no organic basis and do not exist in any literal sense, and though they involve individual agency, the term ‘collective memory’ is not simply a metaphorical expression. Collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective collective.

Given how the Sikh past is often invoked through material and territorial representations (Murphy 2012b), here I explore how similar symbols of territory and possession are invoked in the collective memory of the *rabābīs* of Amritsar, only in a ‘disembedded’ and de-territorialised form, reflecting the fact that the *rabābīs* have been largely displaced from the sites associated with their past.¹⁹

Naturally, one of the foremost memories of the *rabābīs* is that of *Pāsiāmvālā Cauk* (Chowk Passian on a modern map), their erstwhile home in Amritsar. Situated less than a kilometre from the Darbar Sahib to its north-east side, Chowk Passian is marked by a small mandir, opposite which one finds a narrow street known today as *rabābīvālī galī* (or *galī rabābīām*, *kūcā rabābīām*) – the alley of the *rabābīs*. Following Partition, the original *muhallā* of the *rabābīs* in fact came to be demolished in 1973-74 to cater for the expansion of the adjacent Guru Ke

¹⁹ In a globalised world, ‘disembeddedness’ is often linked to deterritorialization and the migration of communities (Eriksen 2014: 19).

Mahal gurdwara; as a consequence, the original *galī* was redirected and now runs alongside the gurdwara whilst still retaining the name *rabābīvālī galī*.²⁰

The fact that this alley in Chowk Passian still retains the name of the *rabābīs* after more than seventy years of their absence, attests to the community's historical association with this place. Kabir (2013: 22–23) suggests that while territorial notions of *vatan* (homeland) and *dēs/mulk* (country) are frequently linked to a sense of nostalgia and longing, smaller localities – the city, village, and *muhallā* – tend to remain liminal in post-Partition memory. For the *rabābīs*, it is notably the specific localities of Amritsar, the Darbar Sahib, and the neighbourhood of Chowk Passian which are remembered, not the land of 'India'. Together, these places serve as referential anchors in the collective memory of the *rabābīs*, multigenerational nostalgias recounted by young and old alike. Despite most having never been able to visit, many *rabābīs* repeat the reminiscences of their elders, which include nostalgic reference to Amritsar's foodstuffs – *pūrīs* (fried flatbreads) and pure-ghee *pinnīs* (winter sweets), the likes of which were not to be found in Lahore – and the brotherly atmosphere which prevailed between them and the Sikhs and Hindus alongside whom they lived.

The history of *rabābīvālī galī* may well extend back to the time of the Gurus. With Guru Arjan and Hargobind Sahib being the last of the Gurus to hold court at the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar, we might surmise that their *rabābīs*, Bhai Satta and Balwand, Bhai Babak, Bhai Natha and Bhai Abdulla, had established homes in the vicinity of the shrine, thus potentially laying the origins of the *rabābī muhallā*. It is well known, however, that the city was radically transformed and developed during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (r.1801-1839). Though Lahore was the capital, Amritsar represented the glory of the Sikh empire, superseding Lahore in the early nineteenth century not only in the size of its population but in industry and trade also.²¹ M. A. Macauliffe commented upon the shifting power in the region in his article titled *The Rise of Amritsar and the alterations of the Sikh Religion* (1881). During a period of concerted and

²⁰ Personal communication with Ashok Tejpal, local resident of Chowk Passian, on 9 October 2018.

²¹ By 1855, Amritsar had a population of 112,186 compared to 94,143 of Lahore (Datta 1967). As of 1830, the manufactured goods of Amritsar accounted to more than three times that of Lahore and the annual income of the city constituting more than half that of the whole of the Punjab (Gaubā 1984).

extravagant Sikh patronage from the late eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century, Amritsar grew from being a small market town to Punjab's preeminent city.

The Darbar Sahib at the heart of the city was the chief beneficiary of patronage, not only from Maharaja Ranjit Singh but from all the other eminent Sikh *sardārs* of this time. The central shrine was gold plated, ivory doors installed, and vast amounts of marble laid to enhance the *parikarmā* – the circumambulatory walkway around the *sarōvar* (sacred water tank). More than eighty buildings, known as *bungās*, were constructed around the *parikarmā*, serving as ancillary shrines, personal residences for wealthy *sardārs*, accommodation for pilgrims, centres for education, as fortifying structures, or any combination of the above (Kaur 1983: 179–80).²² A rough calculation, based on figures provided by Sodhi Hazara Singh (1938), show that close to one crore (i.e. ten million) rupees was spent on the beautification of the Darbar Sahib, a huge sum with respect to the value of money at the time. On top of this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the entire octroi revenue (a state tax on goods sold) generated from Amritsar dedicated to the Darbar Sahib for its upkeep (Sahni 1922). He and the other Sikh chiefs also granted numerous *jāgīrs* (land-revenue grants) to the religious personnel attached to the main and ancillary shrines (Kaur 1983: 59).

Bhai Sant Singh (1768-1832) was placed in charge of the refurbishment and general oversight of the shrine during this period. Writing in 1889, Gyani Gyan Singh (1977: 46) suggests that under Bhai Sant Singh's generous watch, various *rabābī* families employed "flattery" (*khusāmad*) with him in order to secure positions at the premier shrine of the Sikhs during this time. In support of this idea, Babar Ali Bela, son of the famous *rabābī* vocalist Hamid Ali Bela (d.2001) of Katri Bawa, Lahore, recounted his own family history as follows:

We are called *Khadūrīē*... We were residents of Khadur Sahib. Two hundred years ago, we migrated from Khadur Sahib and came to Amritsar. Amritsar became our actual home, but people call us *Khadūrīē*.²³

²² *Bungā* comes from the Persian *bungāh*, meaning 'institution' or 'dwelling-place'.

²³ Interview with Babar Ali Bela on 27 September 2019.

Descending from Bhai Satta and Balwand, the *rabābīs* who had served Guru Amar Das at Khadur Sahib, Babar Ali Bela's family came to migrate to Amritsar at a time when the city and the Darbar Sahib was rapidly expanding, giving rise to new patronage opportunities. It is during this period of expansion that the *muhallā* of the *rabābīs* at Chowk Passian would have likely expanded to accommodate the arrival of *rabābī* families from elsewhere (Aslam 1999: 49–50). Just like the wards of *mīrāsīs* found in other urban centres (Neuman 1990: 131; Qureshi 2009: 181), often close to a fort, palace, temple, or similar source of patronage, the *rabābīs* congregated in a *muhallā* in the neighbourhood of Chowk Passian, a short walk away from the Darbar Sahib.

Writing in 1808, British spy Captain Matthews noted on his visit to the Darbar Sahib how “there are from 5 to 600 Rababees or Priests of this temple, who have built good houses for themselves out of the voluntary contributions of people visiting it” (Ahluwalia 1984: 62).²⁴ Having likely visited the neighbourhood of the *rabābīs* at Chowk Passian, he goes on to comment on the favourable condition of their community:

The priests of this Temple may justly be considered a most happy people, as they acknowledge themselves to be, ever employed in prayer, song and heavenly musing, their minds weaned from all worldly pleasures, and never in want; the Raja having set apart certain lands in Jaidad (retention) which alone would supply all their wants.

(Ahluwalia 1984: 62)

Such accounts confirm the memory of the *rabābīs* themselves with regard to their favourable living conditions prior to Partition. Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand (1927-2015), for example, one of the last *rabābīs* to have been trained in the art of *śabad kīrtan* prior to Partition, in perhaps his last interview, was noted by the historian and writer Harun Khalid for recalling the following, in relation to one of his paternal uncles of Amritsar:

²⁴ Captain Matthews had been sent to Punjab on a spying mission by the EIC in order to gain intelligence on the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Madra and Singh 2004: 226). His diary entries contain useful details of his sojourn in the Punjab during the first decade of Sikh rule.

My *chacha*, Bhai Chand, was a *rubabi* at the Golden Temple. He had three houses in Amritsar, all of which were three storeys high. He was a millionaire at that time. He used to live in *Bhaiyyon ki gali*, named after the *rubabi* family. He became a pauper in Pakistan.

(Khalid 2018)

Although Bhai Chand lived away from *rabābīvālī galī*, the street where he lived nevertheless came to be known as *bhāīyōm kī galī* because of the eminent *rabābī*'s presence there, '*bhāī*' (brother) being the affectionate and respectful title afforded to the *rabābīs* and other recognised Sikh figures of piety (Oberoi 1994: 118). Whilst based on conjecture, it is quite probable that his relatively late appointment at the Darbar Sahib, in around 1934 (Aslam 1999: 68), meant that the *muhallā* at Chowk Passian was unable to accommodate Bhai Chand's family at this time – much of the inward migration of *rabābīs* had occurred in the nineteenth century implying that the *rabābīvālī galī* was most likely a crowded place by the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the fact that the street of Bhai Chand's home in the east of the city was named *bhāīyōm kī galī*, because of his presence there, represents another example of the strong *rabābī*-place association and the prominent status they enjoyed within Punjabi society historically.

Another important landmark that emerges from the memory of the *rabābīs* is the well (*khūh*) of *rabābīvālī galī* at Chowk Passian. Despite since being covered up, it persists in memory as an enduring symbol of the musical prowess and status of their community prior to Partition, a silent witness to memorable *maḥfils* and musical contests that defined the *rabābī* community's place in pre-Partition society. Muhammad Mehmood (b.1940), an elder *rabābī* of Katri Bawa recounted how this well served as a site where the *rabābīs* gathered, where patrons would come to invite the *rabābīs* for performances, and where *maḥfils* would take place.²⁵ Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, in an archived interview with Dr Gurnam Singh, shared a similar memory, stating, "There was a well of the *rabābīs*. There, renowned singers (*gavaiyē*) came to sing because they felt it

²⁵ Interview with Muhammad Mehmood on 30 September 2019.

an honour to have sung before the *rabābīs*. Such were the *rabābīs* regarded” (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004).

Mehmood went on to recount a particular story in which the young Aliya-Fattu, the founding figures of the Patiala *gharānā*, visited the well of the *rabābīs* of Amritsar in order to sing before them. On this occasion, they are remembered for singing *rāg Mārū Bihāg*, after which Bhai Vadhava, an elder *rabābī*, stood up and, with an air of self-confidence and perhaps somewhat condescendingly, said, “Carry on singing, and you’ll become good”.²⁶ As is typical of such contests, Aliya-Fattu requested the senior *rabābī* sing something for them in response. Bhai Vadhava politely declined their request with the reply, “When the time comes, I will certainly sing for you”. Bhai Vadhava subsequently invited the duo to attend a performance of his where he also sang *rāg Mārū Bihāg*, demonstrating his skill in the same *rāg* that the duo had sung for him. So impressed by his performance, Aliya-Fattu are said to have humbly responded, “You were right. If we carry on singing, we’ll become good”. In a written interview with renowned film music composer Tufail Farooqi (1916-1988), another *rabābī* of Lahore whose father Bhai Mehar Bakhsh was Bhai Vadhava’s disciple, the same story is recounted almost identically, illustrating how such stories occupied an important place in the collective memory of the *rabābīs* (Eyerman 2011: 305–6).²⁷ Whilst having learnt from musicians of the Patiala *gharānā* (see Appendix A), such a narrative asserts that the *rabābīs* were in no way less skilled than some of Punjab’s most eminent musicians.

Despite the absence of the *rabābīs* from Amritsar for more than seventy years, and almost fifty years since their former houses were demolished, their imprint on the local geography surprisingly endures. For today’s residents of Chowk Passian, most of whom have never met a *rabābī* in their life, *rabābīvālī galī* still belongs to the *rabābīs* at least in name. Similarly, whilst the vast majority of Lahore’s *rabābīs* have never visited their historical home in Amritsar, they still identify as *rabābīs* of Chowk Passian, its famed well now a site from which important

²⁶ Bhai Vadhava was the son of Bhai Atra (1845-1910), who incidentally was a disciple of Aliya-Fattu’s teacher Miyan Kalu (Paintal 1978: 265).

²⁷ Tufail Farooqi quotes Bhai Vadhava as responding to Aliya-Fattu with, “*Vāh, oē! Kālū diyām putarām, o tusīm gāundē rahōgē tē barē achē hō jāōgē*”, that is, “O, bravo! Sons of Kalu, you carry on singing and you will become very good” (Saqib 2013: 31).

musical memories rather than water are excavated. With the struggles associated with Partition and the subsequent loss of patronage faced by the *rabābīs* in adapting to life in Pakistan (Malik 2006: 31), places and sites associated with the pre-Partition era have come to represent symbols of the *rabābīs*' illustrious past, bringing the social, musical and religious status of the community's ancestors into the present.

5.2.2 INSTITUTIONALISED PLACES: THE *CAUNKĪS* OF THE DARBAR SAHIB

With the Darbar Sahib being the primary source of patronage for the *rabābīs* of Amritsar during the colonial period and an iconic place in its own right, unsurprisingly it also emerges as a focal point in the memory of the *rabābīs* today. Several *rabābīs* I spoke with referred to how their elders gave *hāziri* (attendance) at the Darbar Sahib, referring to their historical service as performers of *śabad kīrtan* there. Although only sporadic details are recalled by the *rabābīs* in relation to this aspect of their past, the written archives offer an important source with which we might further contextualise the significance of the *rabābīs*' service at the most important of Sikh sacred sites. As I shall demonstrate, the institutionalised place they occupied within the Darbar Sahib comprised a noted aspect of *rabābī* identity.

The schedule of *śabad kīrtan*, established at the Darbar Sahib by Guru Arjan and his successors, is noted as initially comprising an early-morning session dedicated to the singing of *Āsā dī Vār*, and an evening session for the singing of the *Sō Dar*, in addition to one-and-a-half hours of *śabad kīrtan* during the day (Kaur 1983). Under the period of expansion overseen by Bhai Sant Singh Gyani around the turn of the nineteenth century, as alluded to earlier, the number of musicians greatly expanded as did the schedule of *śabad kīrtan* in the shrine's inner sanctum. It is during this period that an almost uninterrupted daily schedule of *śabad kīrtan* was established at the Darbar Sahib, starting in the pre-dawn hours and concluding well into the night (Sikh Sacred Music Society 1967: 47).

According to the Khalsa Darbar Records of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court, by the end of the period of Sikh rule (1849), there were 115 *jāgīrs* (land-revenue grants) allocated to the various personnel of the Darbar Sahib and its major ancillary

shrines.²⁸ Of these, eleven were allocated to families of *rāgīs* (five) and *rabābīs* (six) who performed in the temple’s inner sanctum. As endowments that generally endured through a system of patrilineal inheritance, each *jāgīr* named the beneficiary family’s current male chief along with his sons, whilst providing details of their respective entitlements. These documents constituted material symbols of the relationship between patrons and service providers, representing a position of office or duty held by the musicians, and a grant promised as remuneration by the patron. The benefactors of these *jāgīrs* are also explicitly mentioned in these records and include the names of some of the leading Sikh *sardārs* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.²⁹

The schedule of *śabad kīrtan* was divided into sessions, known to this day as *cauñkīs*. Maya Singh’s *The Punjabi Dictionary* (1991: 203), first published in 1895, defines *cauñkī* as a “a band of musicians”, and the compound verb ‘*cauñkī karnī*’ as, “To hold a musical concert before a great man or *Granth Sāhib*”. According to sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there also emerges the idea that a *cauñkī* ought to comprise four musicians.³⁰ We might also interpret *cauñkī* simply as a ‘duty’ or ‘watch’, from the verb *cauñkanā*, to be alert.

In his article on the *cauñkī* schedule of the Darbar Sahib, Pashaura Singh (2011) notes how, in historical Sikh literature, the number and names of the various *cauñkīs* of the Darbar Sahib is seldom cohesive, described at various points in history as being four, five, eight, eleven or fifteen in number. Based on the

²⁸ The Khalsa Darbar Records, held in the PSA, Chandigarh, contain records of the *jāgīrs* (*Daftar-i-Jāgīrāt*), recorded by finance minister Raja Dina Nath at the time of Punjab’s annexation in 1849. The *Daftar-i-Jāgīrāt* is divided into four areas: military, civil, *dharmarth*, and misc. Among the *dharmarth* records is the *Jāgīr-i-Darbār Ṣāhib* (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII) containing details of the *jāgīrs* pertaining to the main shrine and the most important ancillary shrines: Akal Bunga, Dera Baba Atal, Jhanda Bunga, Gurdwara Bibeksar, Shahid Bunga and Bunga Sarkarvala.

²⁹ For example, the *jāgīr* of *rabābī* Pir Bakhsh was granted “By appointment of the seal of Sardar Bagh Singh Ahluwalia” (“*az qarār-i-sanad-i-mohrī-i-sardār bāgh siñgh halūvālīā*”) and the *jāgīr* of *rabābīs* Savan Chand and Nathan Sahiba “By appointment of the seal of Sardar Jodh Singh Ramgarhia” (“*az qarār-i-sanad-i-mohrī-i-sardār jōdh siñgh rāmgarīā*”) (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII, fols. 105, 113).

³⁰ The implication of four people could potentially link to an etymology of *cau-* (four) *kī* (of). The *Bakhśāšnāvā* (letter of benevolence) document was created upon the instantiation of Bhai Bura as a *rabābī* of the Darbar Sahib in 1876 and specifies that he is expected to perform with a group of four where possible (Kaur 1983: 207). This document is discussed in further detail later in the chapter. Similarly, Bhai Vir Singh, in his *Sri Guru Granth Kosh* (Singh 1939: 1178), suggests that a *cauñkī* must have one *mahant* (leader), two accompanists or “creators of melody” (*sur racāunvālā*), and one *jōrīvālā* or *pakhāvajī*, who provides rhythmic accompaniment.

premise of eight, he draws similarities between the *cauṅkī* schedule and the *aṣṭayām* schedule of *kīrtan* in the *havēlī saṅgīt* and other *vaiṣṇav* temple music traditions. Assuming five, on the other hand, he draws parallels with the fivefold *naubat* of the Mughal court, a system of sonic markers that punctuated the day and aided in timekeeping. However, a closer look at textual sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals a more nuanced picture of how the *cauṅkī* schedule of the Darbar Sahib evolved with respect to the institutionalised place of musicians attached to the shrine.

Gyani Kirpal Singh (1918-1993), head *granthī* of the Darbar Sahib from 1973 to 1983, has suggested that there were once eleven *cauṅkīs*, likely corresponding to the eleven *jāgīrs* of *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* during the period of Sikh rule, and that this number was subsequently expanded to thirteen and then fifteen as the *śabad kīrtan* schedule was expanded in the early nineteenth century under the watch of Bhai Sant Singh (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 331). Based on separate sources written at different points during the colonial period, it can be established that there were already fifteen *cauṅkīs* by 1859 and that this number remained consistent well into the early twentieth century.³¹

The first and most important reference of the fifteen *cauṅkīs* appears in the *Dastūr ul-ʿAmal Sirī Darbār Ṣāhib*, a document produced in 1859 just after the Indian territories of the East India Company were claimed by the British Crown. With the establishment of the British Raj, a more formalised government came into being along with specific policies defined to deter a repeat of the attempted rebellion of 1857.³² Given that the Darbar Sahib had served as a political as well as religious centre for the community and that the British had recently fought two bitterly contested wars with the Sikhs, the new government was keen to instigate oversight of the Darbar Sahib. A management committee of thirteen members was thus formed and a *sarbarāh* (steward) of the government’s choosing – someone who had proved themselves to be a loyal subject – appointed as its head, responsible for reporting to the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar. The

³¹ Reference to the fifteen *cauṅkīs* appears first in the *Dastūr ul-ʿAmal Sirī Darbār Ṣāhib* of 1859, then subsequently in Gyani Gyan Singh (1977) *Tavārīkh Sirī Amritsar* of 1889, and also in the *Har Bhagat Prēm Prakāś Granth* completed by the longstanding saint-musician of the Darbar Sahib, Baba Sham Singh Addanshahi (1914), in the early twentieth century.

³² The *Dastūr ul-ʿAmal Sirī Darbār Ṣāhib* is reproduced in a book on the history of the Darbar Sahib (Kaur 1983: 199–202).

formalisation of the *Dastūr ul-‘Amal* document, with its stated aims of formalising the temple administration and eliminating the bickering over temple offerings between temple functionaries, was an important outcome of this committee. Contained within the *Dastūr ul-‘Amal* we find a list of the fifteen *cauṅkīs* – the first eight belonging to the *rāgīs* and the seven, from around midday onwards, belonging to the *rabābīs* – along with the names of the musicians responsible for them (Kaur 1983: 200–201).

The *cauṅkīs* are subsequently listed, with some updated musician names, by Gyani Gyan Singh (1977: 46–47) in 1889, and also by the longstanding saint-musician of the Darbar Sahib, Baba Sham Singh Addanshahi (1914: 329), prior to the impact of the Gurdwara Reform Movement and removal of the *rabābīs*. Whilst the period of Sikh rule represented a period in which the *cauṅkī* schedule was greatly expanded, the period of British oversight (1859-1925) brought a new degree of formalisation, to which the *Dastūr ul-‘Amal* stands testimony. Representing a form of stagnation, it has been shown that the diminished autonomy and sovereignty of the Sikhs over the Darbar Sahib during this period led to a decline in patronage and power of the religious functionaries attached to the shrine: the system of *jāgīrs* was steadily phased out resulting in the disempowerment of their holders in the process (Navtej Singh 1999; Nazer Singh 1999).

The division of the morning and afternoon-evening *cauṅkīs* between the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* respectively, demonstrates the musician-centric organisation of the schedule. Whilst not explicitly referenced in the *jāgīr* records, it is probable that the eleven *jāgīrs* of the Darbar Sahib’s *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*, as recorded at the end of the period of Sikh rule (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII), developed into the fifteen *cauṅkī* duties that characterised the schedule of *śabad kīrtan* at the Darbar Sahib during the colonial period. The stifling aspect of British administrative oversight combined with the entrenched tendency toward patrilineal inheritance meant that the families of musicians who held duties at the start of the colonial period continued to do so until the subsequent reforms of the shrine once administrative control was ceded to the Singh Sabha reformists in 1925.

The security of the *rabābīs*' position as hereditary incumbents of their *caunkīs* came to be challenged by the discursive attacks they began to suffer at the start of the twentieth century (see Chapter Four). The popular Gurdwara Reform Movement (also known as the Akali Movement) of the early 1920s posed a serious threat to the institutionalised place historically afforded to the *rabābīs*. In a way, the period of British oversight and the institutionalised rigidity that it gave rise to, had become an antagonising force between the Darbar Sahib's incumbents and the reformists who sought change. This sentiment of the incumbents and the threat they sensed at this time reveals itself in a memorial collectively written and delivered to the British government in 1920, amid the growing agitations of the reformist Akali Sikhs, described therein as "turbulent personalities".³³ Signed by more than a hundred of the Darbar Sahib's religious functionaries (*granthīs*, *pujārīs*, *rabābīs* and *rāgīs*), the document was supported by a strong representation of *rabābīs* (27) and yet less than a handful of *rāgīs* (4), testifying to the fact that most *rāgīs* of this period had come to support the reformist cause and were increasingly antagonistic toward the *rabābīs*.

The memorial pleaded with the government to retain their oversight of the temple and maintain the positions of all existing religious functionaries, expressing their right to these positions of office in the following terms:

Origin or births of our rights dates, not since the annexation of the province, not since the origin of Sikh Government, not since the date of Sikh Republic but since the lifetime of the Gurus and by the definite sanction of theirs. Sikh history is a reliable evidence on this point... Your Honour will kindly note also, that method adopted for inheritance disposal in these temples it not our invention. It was invented and introduced by the Gurus

³³ Representing a historical usage of the word, here 'memorial' means a statement of facts, presented in relation to a petition. The memorial document exists amid a collection of miscellaneous colonial government documents pertaining to the Darbar Sahib, held in the PSA, Chandigarh (PSAC CS HG 5495/67).

themselves. Sikh history is clear on this point. We have been quite obedient to the customs from the time of the 4th Guru.³⁴

(PSAC CS HG 5495/67, fol. 28)

Whilst somewhat of an extrapolation from history given that many *rabābīs* were granted *jāgīrs* and the right to perform *cauñkīs* at the Darbar Sahib only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the *rabābīs* had evidently come to view these rights as inalienable and sanctioned by the Gurus themselves.

According to precolonial systems of patrilineal inheritance, these rights were generally retained by the male descendants of the grantee, subject to the will of the grantor. Whilst the system of patrilineal custodianship and multigenerational relationships of patronage were certainly precolonial, the introduction of landed property laws by the British and the granting of proprietary rights in perpetuity accentuated multigenerational claims to property (in this case the intangible *cauñkī* duties rather than land), rendering them more “inelastic” and “absolute” than was previously the case (Murphy 2012b: 183). The transformation of religious incumbents from *jāgīrdārs* (accountable to their patrons) into independent owners of landed property in the colonial period, has been noted as the cause of succession disputes, more broadly, at Sufi shrines (Gilmartin 1984: 228) as well as Sikh shrines (Sandhu 2011: 96).

In any case, the *rabābīs*' signatures on the memorial reveal how each *rabābī* was identified not only by his own name and the name of his father but also by the *cauñkī* which he performed – the *cauñkī* which belonged to him. Bhai Moti (d.1930), for example, is identified as “Bhai Moti, son of Bhai Hakim, *cauñkī* Bhai Atra, *rabābī* of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar” (see Figure 20) (PSAC CS HG 5495/67, fol. 35). He was the inheritor of the *cauñkī* named after his grandfather Bhai Atra (1845-1910) (Aslam 1999). Bhai Atra, in turn, was the son and inheritor of the position of office held by his father Bhai Savan Chand (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII, fol. 113), one of the *rabābīs* to have been granted a *jāgīr* during the period of Sikh rule.

³⁴ From the English translation that was forwarded to C. M. King, Commissioner Lahore Division, on 2 August 1920, by F. H. Burton, Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, along with the Urdu original.

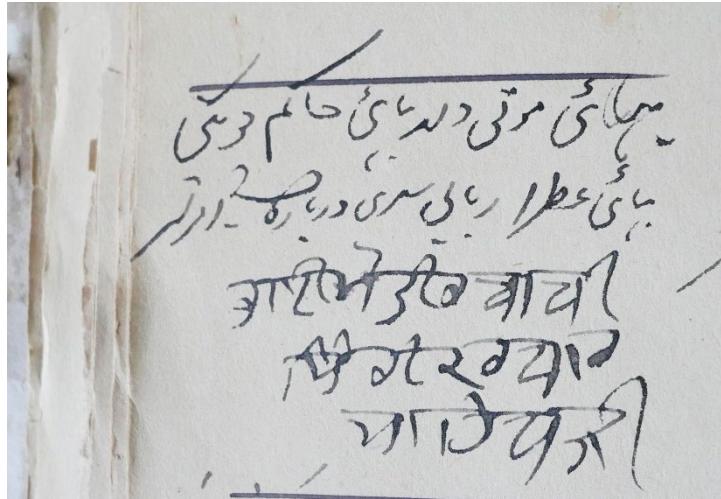


FIGURE 20 GURMUKHI SIGNATURE OF BHAII MOTI, FROM THE MEMORIAL WRITTEN BY RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARIES OF THE DARBAR SAHIB TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IN 1920 (PSAC CS HG 5495/67).

In his study of the *mīrāsīs* of Delhi, Neuman aptly notes how, for hereditary performer communities, musicians of the past are often invoked in the present in such a way that “the most distant and most recent ancestors occupy the same plane in time. Historical time and historical geography are juxtaposed so that those units which bear significant relationships to one another are placed not in terms of their absolute distance, but in terms of their relative importance” (Neuman 1990: 230). Given that the *cauṅkī* retained his name, we might assume that Bhai Atra’s status, musicianship and renown were perceived to be unmatched by any of his descendants, probably linked in part to his being a disciple of Miyan Kalu of the Patiala *gharānā* (Paintal 1978: 265). As an ongoing testimony to his memory and renown, even today, several of his eminent descendants in Pakistan continue to attach his name to their own.³⁵

From the *rabābī* signatures on the memorial of 1920, it emerges that three of the seven *rabābī cauṅkīs* were named after eminent nineteenth-century *rabābīs* who once performed those *cauṅkīs* (Bhai Atra, Bhai Rao, and Bhai Amira),³⁶ two were

³⁵ Rashid Attre (1919-1967) and Wajahat Attre (1945-2017), the eminent film-music composers and directors of Pakistan, are descendants of Bhai Atra and as such use his name as their surnames (Aslam 1999).

³⁶ According to Baba Sham Singh Addanshahi (1803-1926), a saint-musician who voluntarily sang every morning outside the Darbar Sahib for seventy years of his exceptionally long life (Kamaljit Singh 2004), the *rabābī* Bhai Rao (d.1844) was granted a *cauṅkī* at the Darbar Sahib at the behest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Maharaja had been listening to the *kīrtan* of Bhai Rao, who, as informed by one of his leading spiritual counsellors Bhai Vasti Ram, was linked to the family of Bhai Mardana. The Maharaja decided to test Bhai Rao by asking him a series of

named after the ancestral places of the *rabābī* families who performed them (*Amritsarīē* and *Śikārpurīē*), and two were named after specific compositions of *gurbāṇī* that were necessarily performed as part of those duties (*Caran Kamal* and *Sō Dar*) – compositions that comprised part of the original liturgical schedule of *śabad kīrtan* established at the shrine during the period of the Gurus (Sikh Sacred Music Society 1967: 46–47).³⁷ What these naming conventions reveal is how the *cauṅkī* duties were intimately associated with the musicians who performed them, one almost inseparable from the other. Not only were several *cauṅkīs* named after *rabābīs* but the *rabābīs* were identified not just by their association with the Darbar Sahib but specifically by their *cauṅkī*, as evidenced by the memorial and other references to *rabābīs* in Sikh literature prior to 1925.³⁸

By way of contrast, the *rāgī* signatories on this same document do not reference their respective *cauṅkīs*, and often reference the name of their teacher rather than their father, for example, “Bhai Budh Singh, disciple of Bhai Kapur Singh, *rāgī* of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar”. This highlights how the institution of *rāgīs* was less hereditary in character, their association with specific *cauṅkīs* more flexible as a consequence. The *Daftar-i-Jāgīrāt* records of the mid-nineteenth century (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII) indeed reveal that *rāgīs* were historically drawn from a variety of castes – these included landowning *zamīndārs*, the merchant classes of *khatrīs* and Aroras, as well as *brāhmiṅs* – none of which were associated with a hereditary specialisation in music or *śabad kīrtan*. As a result of the more diverse and diffuse mode of transmission among *rāgīs*, none of the eight *cauṅkīs* of the *rāgīs* appear to have been named after a particular *rāgī*. Like the *Caran Kamal* and *Sō Dar cauṅkīs* of the *rabābīs*, two of the *rāgī cauṅkīs* were

questions about his *rabābī* contemporaries. He asked of Bhai Bahilo, Bhai Mul, Bhai Savan Chand, Bhai Nathan Sahiba, and Bhai Nanu, several of whom were eminent *rabābīs* of the Darbar Sahib’s inner sanctum. Rather than attempting to defame them and assert his own superiority, as one might expect from one keen to use an audience with the Maharaja to his own advantage, Bhai Rao responded with nothing but praise for his contemporaries. So impressed was the Maharaja by Bhai Rao’s humility, that he granted him a *jāgīr* and had him installed as a *rabābī* of the Darbar Sahib (Singh 1914: 327). Whilst the *rabābīs* Savan Chand and Nathan Sahiba are not widely remembered, their eminent descendants, Bhai Atra (1845-1910) and Bhai Amira, each went on to have *cauṅkīs* named after them.

³⁷ The *Caran Kamal cauṅkī* was marked by the singing of a *śabad* by Guru Arjan in which the refrain was “*Caran kamal prabh kē nit dhiāvau*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 806) (Sikh Sacred Music Society 1967: 47). The *Sō Dar cauṅkī* was marked by the singing of Guru Nanak’s *Sō Dar* composition (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 347–48).

³⁸ In a small publication prescribing the customs to be observed by the Arora clan of Sikhs on various rites of passage, for example, Bhai Khair, as the head of the *Caran Kamal cauṅkī*, was referred to as “*Caran Kaulāṁ*” (Arorabans Sabha 1917: 71).

named after specific compositions of *gurbāṇī* that were sung as part of those duties (*Āsā dī Vār* and *Anand*). A few of the *rāgīs*' *cauṅkīs* were named after the morning *rāg Bilāval*, and another was named after the Nakai Sikh *misl*, a clan who seemingly provided the *rāgīs* for that particular *cauṅkī* (Singh 1914: 329).³⁹

Within the broader context of music patronage during the colonial period, the *cauṅkīs* emerge as a unique form of institutionalised patronage in relation to a community of hereditary performers. In the sphere of Hindustani music, the identity of *mīrāsīs* typically came to be linked to *gharānās* during the colonial period, often named after places – typically ancestral villages or the courts of their patrons (Neuman 1990: 162). For the *rabābīs* of Amritsar, on the other hand, though they studied freely from various *gharānās*, their court and patron in chief was the Darbar Sahib and so families were uniquely identified by this association and their specific *cauṅkī* therein. Whilst ancestry and ancestral places – aspects fundamental to the idea of *gharānā* – certainly carried great significance to the *rabābīs*, as I shall shortly come to, the *cauṅkīs* represented their unique position within Sikh tradition. As a multigenerational symbol of identity, carrying echoes of illustrious ancestors gone by and representing an institutionalised place within the most important of Sikh shrines under the perceived sanction of the Guru, the *cauṅkī* was clearly formative of the *rabābīs*' position and status within the Sikh community. It is thus no surprise that the removal of the *rabābīs* from their *cauṅkīs*, after 1925, effectively coincided with their alienation from the Sikh community.

Those *rabābīs* who retained a fragile place within the Sikh community even after 1925, were typically attached to smaller shrines and patrons, at sites which remained out of reach of the institutional reforms of the SGPC until later. One such example is that of the *rabābī* Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, whose father was known as Bhai Sundar *Gurūsar Satlānī vālē* because of the *cauṅkī* he held at a *ḍērā* in the village of Gurusar Satlani near Amritsar (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004). In an interview with the author Haroon Khalid, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand recalled, “My father was the *gadi nasheen* (custodian) of the *rubabī* seat there, which meant I would have taken over his

³⁹ A table representing the schedule of the *cauṅkīs* of the Darbar Sahib during the colonial period is provided in Appendix B.

position eventually” (Khalid 2018). The lineage of *mahants* of the Gurusar Satlani *ḍērā* were associated with the greatly revered late-eighteenth-century *udāsī* saint Bhai Vasti Ram – an important religious counsellor to Maharaja Ranjit Singh during his life (Latif 1892: 244) – and so the *rabābī* position at this *ḍērā* would have also carried with it considerable status.⁴⁰ Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s family continued to perform there until the time of Partition. Similarly, the family of Bhai Ashiq Ali Lal (1929-2012) had been attached to the important historical gurdwara of Goindwal Sahib prior to Partition.⁴¹ In this manner, *rabābī* families were historically spread out across Punjab, serving at the myriad Sikh gurdwaras and *ḍērās* to which they remained attached over multiple generations.

Today, almost a century on from the reforms which removed the *rabābīs* from the Darbar Sahib, and seventy years on from Partition, the *cauṅkī* system stands transformed. In a system whereby the temple management committee appoint groups of *rāgīs* who each rotate between different *cauṅkī* duties, the *cauṅkīs* are themselves no longer associated to specific musicians. Reflecting the transition away from precolonial and indigenous attitudes, in which people and personalities were highly revered, today, the referential content of the *cauṅkī* eclipses the relevance of its performers – the *kīrtan* takes precedence over the *kīrtanī*. In the wake of the post-1984 wave of *gurmat saṅgīt* reform that targeted musicological concerns in particular, the *cauṅkīs* once named after great musicians are now mostly named after *rāgs* of the corresponding time of day (Singh 2003: 19). Bereft of their historical significance, it has been observed that the names of *cauṅkīs* today need not necessarily even be known to the *rāgīs* who perform them (Pashaura Singh 2011: 125–26).

With Sikh institutions comprising the primary sites targeted by the Singh Sabha reforms in the twentieth century (Oberoi 1994: 316), the institutionalised place of the *rabābīs* therein has been largely erased from Sikh memory. Falling into the category of an “amnesia” (Kabir 2013) for the Sikh community at large, specific

⁴⁰ In an interview with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, from 21 November 2011, conducted by Jasdeep Singh, he mentions that the *mahants* of the Gurusar Satlani *ḍērā* – his family’s patrons – represented one branch of disciples linked to the famous late-eighteenth century *udāsī* saint Bhai Vasti Ram.

⁴¹ Interview with Bhai Naeem Tahir Lal and Bhai Sarfraz Hussain Lal on 6 September 2019.

details regarding the history of the *rabābī caunḱīs* are now only to be found buried in the written archive. Whilst no longer cognisant of the specific details of this history, the *rabābīs* of today are nevertheless well aware of the institutionalised place their ancestors held at the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar.

5.2.3 ANCESTRAL PLACES: THE TWELVE *RABĀBĪ KHĀNDĀNS*

Speaking to Pola Mehar, a *rabābī* elder of Katri Bawa, the enduring relevance of the *rabābīs*' ancestral places was quite apparent.

Amritsar is a city, Khadur Sahib is a city, Goindwal is also a city as is Kartarpur. In the time before Partition, our elders were born and raised in all these places... Even today, Khadur Sahib belongs to us *Khaḍūrīē*... I am a *Khaḍūrī*. I am a descendant of Satta and Balwand.⁴²

As a *Khaḍūrīē rabābī*, a descendant of Bhai Satta and Balwand, Pola Mehar felt that Khadur Sahib, the historical court of Guru Angad where his ancestors had first served the Gurus, belongs to him and his lineage even today. Prior to the rise of Amritsar and the inward migration of numerous *rabābī* families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the *rabābī* community appears to have been more rurally distributed, spread out across various ancestral villages. Irrespective of how temporally and physically distant these ancestral places are, in relation to the *rabābī* community of Pakistan today, they remain markedly etched into the social organisation of the community today.

Muhammad Mehmood, another senior *rabābī* of Katri Bawa, elaborated upon the twelve *khāndāns* (families/lineages) of *rabābīs* who had all migrated to Amritsar, where they came to live together at Chowk Passian (see Table 1).⁴³ It is likely that the influx and congregation of various distinct *rabābī* family lineages at Amritsar led to the emergence of a system of social organisation for the community, based around the names of the villages from where they respectively originated. As Mehmood described it, these patrilineal family distinctions also

⁴² Interview with Pola Mehar on 27 September 2019.

⁴³ Aslam (1999: 49) also notes the twelve families of Amritsar who had “belonged to different small villages where they had been working in different small Gurdwaras, and they had moved to the much bigger Gurdwara, The Golden Temple, Amritsar”. Kanwal (2010) also gives concise genealogical charts for ten families of *rabābīs*.

governed the allocated share of the income (known as a *paṭṭī*) they received from the Darbar Sahib; a one-to-one interchangeability thus emerged between *khāndān* and *paṭṭī*, both terms being used interchangeably by the community today to refer to their various family lineages.⁴⁴

	<i>Khāndān</i>	Ancestral Place
1	<i>Khadūrīē</i>	Khadur Sahib, Amritsar district
2	<i>Raukē</i>	Thatha Bhai Rao, Ferozepur district ⁴⁵
3	<i>Ḍabbē</i>	Dabbayan, Amritsar district
4	<i>Manāvīē</i>	Manavan, Amritsar district
5	<i>Śikārpurīē</i>	Shikarpur, Kapurthala district
6	<i>Gailē</i> ⁴⁶	Amritsar
7	<i>Diōkē</i> (or <i>Paṭiālīē</i>)	Patiala
8	<i>Vangiāvālē</i>	Unknown
9	<i>Rōrāmvalīē</i>	Roranwala, Amritsar district
10	<i>Dilvālīē</i>	Delhi
11	<i>Ġafūrīē</i>	Unknown
12	<i>Mudrīē</i>	Unknown

TABLE 1 THE TWELVE *RABĀBĪ KHĀNDĀNS* OF AMRITSAR.

Whilst difficult to verify the ancestry of the twelve *khāndāns*, it is generally assumed that they all descend from the various *rabābī* figures of the Guru period for that is what qualifies them as *rabābīs*.⁴⁷ Aside from the *Khadūrīē* who descend from Bhai Satta and Balwand, Baba Sham Singh Addanshahi suggests that the *Raukē*, named after Bhai Rao, descend from Bhai Mardana (Singh 1914:

⁴⁴ Based on interview with Muhammad Mehmood on 30 September 2019 as well as ongoing discussions with Aqeel Tahir and Muslim Shaggan, two *rabābīs* of the younger generation.

⁴⁵ Ustad Badaruzzaman told of the village Thatha Bhai Rao, during an interview on 28 September 2019. During personal communication with Balbir Singh Kanwal on 19 June 2020, he suggested that this village was in the Ferozepur district.

⁴⁶ The *Gailē* appear not to be named after a particular place. They are in fact listed as a clan of *mīrāsīs* by Ibbetson in his ethnographic comments on the *mīrāsīs*, so named as they historically served the Gill *jaṭts* (Rose 1911a: 113). Regardless of how they came to be *rabābīs*, they definitely formed a core *khāndān* of the Amritsar *rabābīs*.

⁴⁷ Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand states in an interview that to be considered a true *rabābī* one must be a descendant of either Bhai Mardana, Bhai Satta and Balwand, Bhai Babak, Bhai Natha and Abdulla, or Bhai Sadda and Madda (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004).

327).⁴⁸ The *Manāvīē* claim to be descendants of Bhai Sadda and Madda of Guru Gobind Singh's court (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004), and the *Dabbē* and *Gailē*, potentially among the earliest of the *rabābī* families to settle in Amritsar, descend from Bhai Babak, a *rabābī* of the Darbar Sahib during the time of Guru Hargobind (Aslam 1999: 67). Given that there were only seven *rabābī caunkīs* in the inner sanctum of the Darbar Sahib, however, these duties were not neatly allocated among the families but rather distributed among the twelve *khāndāns*, with the heads of particular families nevertheless inheriting the leadership role for specific *caunkīs*.⁴⁹

It should be noted that some of the Amritsar *rabābīs* were linked to *rabābī caunkīs* at various ancillary shrines within the greater Darbar Sahib complex and elsewhere in Amritsar. Writing in the late nineteenth century, Chandhar Singh (1894: 10) notes how the five major shrines in the Darbar Sahib complex *collectively* constituted the seal of the Darbar Sahib:

The Durbar Sahib, Akal Bunga, Baba Attal, Shahid Bunga and Jhanda Bunga are known as the five Gurdwaras or sacred places. Each Gurdwara is provided with a seal: and the seals of the whole five Gurdwaras are affixed to every Sikh religious document issued from Hari Mandar.

The details of the *jāgīrs* of these ancillary shrines are also included in separate sections within the *Jāgīr-i-Darbār Śāhib* records (PSAC KDR VII B5 vol. VIII). The Akal Bunga, the largest of these subsidiary shrines, for example, had separate *jāgīrs* for the *rabābīs* employed there. Bhai Firoz and Bhai Patha sign the aforementioned memorial of 1920 (PSAC CS HG 5495/67), identifying themselves as performers of the *caunkī* at the Akal Bunga.

In addition to the *jāgīrs*, which in any case came to be phased out by the British toward the latter half of the nineteenth century, the twelve *paṭṭīs* comprised a system by which the *rabābī* families distributed their shared of the offerings they received from the Darbar Sahib. Whilst not mentioning the *paṭṭīs* of the *rabābīs*,

⁴⁸ Several *rabābīs* have suggested that Bhai Mardana's lineage finished with him (Saqib 2013: 35) or his sons Shazada and Razada (Aslam 1999: 49).

⁴⁹ The associated *caunkīs* of the *rabābīs* illustrate how different *khāndāns* participated in shared *caunkīs* (PSAC CS HG 5495/67).

the *Dastūr ul- 'Amal Srī Darbār Ṣāhib* of 1859, does mention the six *paṭṭīs* of the *pujārīs* of the Darbar Sahib, which comprised equal shares of the shrine's aggregate collections (Kaur 1983: 200). This is described in further detail in an early-twentieth-century printed guide to the shrine:

On the close of every year, about the end of April, the current accounts are closed, out of which Rs. 10,000 are debited to miscellaneous expenses accounts, which contain payments to the singers, persons holding charges of religious offices and places, etc. The whole rest is divided among the priests, who get Rs. 2 a day, in all, at first. An item is divided into 6 parts called patties.⁵⁰ Each *patti* (part) into many petty shares.

(*A Guideway to the Visitors to the Golden Temple Amritsar*
[n.d.]: 25)

Surprisingly, some *rabābīs* of Lahore, today, still recalled specific details of this system of remuneration at the Darbar Sahib with respect to their ancestors' duties there. At the end of every year, one quarter – four of the sixteen annas in a rupee (*chuvannē*) – of all of the offerings of the Darbar Sahib was allocated to the *rabābīs*.⁵¹ Just as the *pujārīs* further divided their share of the aggregate offerings into six *paṭṭīs* between them, it appears as though the *rabābīs* divided their share into twelve further shares (*paṭṭīs*). Each of the twelve *khāndāns* who lived together in Amritsar and served at the Darbar Sahib thus received a share of the offerings that were dedicated, in aggregate, to the *rabābīs*.

As is observed among *mīrāsī* communities (Neuman 1990: 131), the *rabābī khāndāns* were identified by their ancestral villages and preserved through rules of patrilineal descent. This system is certainly coherent with regard to the type of socioeconomic organisation observed among the tribes of Punjab, more generally:

... the social and economic identity of the individual depended on his membership in a given descent group. The group owned certain rights and occupied a fixed position in the social system,

⁵⁰ Amended from the original text: "In item is divided into 6 parts called patties".

⁵¹ From interviews with Bhai Tahir Iqbal on 26 August 2019 and Ustad Mazhar Shaggan on 14 September 2019.

and the privilege of exercising these rights was available to the individual only as a member of one or other descent group.

(Nazir 1993: 2898)

Whilst the twelve *paṭṭīs* obviously no longer serve the socioeconomic function they once did, every *rabābī* I met was nevertheless acutely aware as to the name of the patrilineal *khāndān* to which they belong. As an endogamous community that remains very tightly knit, the *khāndāns* continue to represent kinship groups, bound together through affinal ties that are often repeated and thus strengthened over multiple generations. Neuman (1990: 99) similarly notes how, among *mīrāsīs*, such inter-*khāndān* marriages were often strategic and political in nature, allowing members of one family to learn from musicians in the other and ensuring the longevity of the skills cultivated within the community.

Mir (2010), in her study of the popular *qissā* literature of Punjab, notes how individual and communal identity in customary Punjabi culture are often constructed and negotiated through the three crucial aspects of caste, territoriality and gender. With regard to my focus here on territoriality, I have highlighted how the names of ancestral places, long since abstracted from the territory to which they correspond, continue to serve as a means of social organisation for the *rabābīs* today, distinguishing kinship groups and governing affinal ties among them. Reflecting the decreasing importance of localities in community formation within an increasingly globalised world (Shelemay 2011: 359), the ancestral localities themselves, being distant and inaccessible, are of little significance to the various *rabābī khāndāns* today. Rather, it is the fact that these ancestral place names continue to serve as symbols of the various patrilineal descent groups, thus aiding the community's internal social organisation, that ensures their continued relevance.

As expressed by Eyerman (2011: 305), “the past is a collectively shaped, if not collectively experienced, temporal reference point, which is formative of a collective and which serves to orient those individuals within it”. Memorised and transmitted over multiple generations of *rabābīs*, a map of the *rabābīs*' ancestral villages, disembedded from the actual localities, today, continues to facilitate and orient the place of individuals and families within the *rabābī* community. As with

any map, however, it is subject to changes in the social landscape over time, expanding in the post-Partition era to include other families of *rabābīs* who were not among the twelve *khāndāns* of Amritsar but have since integrated with the *rabābīs* of Katri Bawa, for example.⁵²

5.2.4 TEXTUAL PLACES

Another significant aspect of the collective memory of the *rabābīs* pertains to the immutable textual and ‘scriptural’ place occupied by their ancestors.

The Guru Granth Sahib is like your Quran, that is if you treat it with the same respect. So, talk about what it is in it. It mentions the *rabābīs*. It mentions Khadur Sahib... There are seven or more verses of our Khadur Sahib [*rabābīs*] – the writings of the *Khaḍūrīē*.⁵³

Speaking in an interview, Pola Mehar thus invoked the eight verses of Bhai Satta and Balwand’s *vār*, included in the GGS, as a symbol of the religious status of the *rabābīs* within Sikh tradition. In the postcolonial context dominated by secularist ideas of religion as a cultural universal, as objects for comparative study, Sikhism has come to be portrayed as a ‘religion of the book’, commensurate to the Abrahamic religions against which it is so often defined (Mandair 2009: 326–28). Pola Mehar suggests that the GGS is a religious scripture like the Quran and, as such, the inclusion of Bhai Satta and Balwand’s *vār* alongside the *śabads* of the Gurus and *bhagats* is testimony to the religious authority of the *rabābīs* in Sikh tradition.

Oberoi (1994: 316) highlights how the GGS comprised one of the focal points of the Singh Sabha reformist doctrine, an entity that served the construction of religious boundaries. Whilst Mandair (2009: 354) has critiqued some aspects of this argument, in particular the tendency toward a binary and linear view on orality and textuality, the indigenous and the foreign, the idea nevertheless remains an important one: the GGS had boundaries from which the *rabābīs*’

⁵² As explained by Muhammad Mehmood, the *Bhaknīē*, *Sangrūrīē*, *Kartārpurīē*, *Kapūrthalīē* and *Lahōrīē khāndāns* were neither resident in Amritsar nor employed by the Darbar Sahib but since Partition have become integrated into the community of *rabābīs* at Katri Bawa.

⁵³ Interview with Pola Mehar on 27 September 2019.

names and compositions could *not* be excluded. Whilst the precise contents and form of the GGS has a history of evolution and contestation (McLeod 2004: 59–63; Singh 2000; Mann 2001), Guru Arjan’s inclusion of the *bhagats*’, *bhatts*’, and *rabābīs*’ compositions, being such an integral part, was never a serious subject of controversy.

The idea of the textual ‘place’ of the *rabābīs* is an interesting metaphor with respect to the manner in which the GGS has been structured and described by Guru Arjan as if it were a ‘city’. Within the thirty-one *rāg*-based chapters, the compositions are further segregated by author with the Guru’s *bānī* coming first and the *bhagats*’ *bānī* coming second. Each Guru is represented as a “*mahalā*” – this could mean palace (*mahal*) or neighbourhood (*muhalla*) – in conjunction with an ordinal or numeral that identifies them by their sequential position within the Guru lineage, for example Guru Nanak is represented either as “*mahalā* 1” or “*mahalā pahilā*”. Each *mahalā* is further subdivided into sections denoted as *ghars* (houses), a term whose significance has perplexed scholars to this day (Bhai Baldeep Singh 2011: 279). Representing a numerical index of sorts, each composition of the GGS is numbered according to its sequential position within the *ghar* and the *mahalā* respectively. For example, the *śabad* “*dhāiō rē mana dahadisa dhāiō*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 712) appears under the title “*ṭōḍī mahalā 5 ghar 2*”, the second house of the fifth Guru in *rāg Ṭōḍī*, and is indexed with the numbers “1,3”, indicating that it is the first *śabad* within the second house and the third *śabad* within the *mahalā* of the fifth Guru, the preceding house containing two *śabads*. The GGS is thus figuratively structured like a ‘city’ within which the thirty-one *rāgs* might be considered ‘areas’, each of which is methodically organised into ‘neighbourhoods’ that ‘house’ the *śabads* therein. As such, the contents of the GGS could not be easily tampered with, nor *śabads* expelled without disrupting the system of organisation.

Whilst the *rabābīs* could be marginalised by Sikh reformist discourse, excluded from Sikh institutions, and displaced by Partition, their textual place in the GGS, the writings of Bhai Gurdas, the *janam sākhi* literature, and *gurbilās* literature, more broadly, was immutable. Reflecting the important link between written and oral memory (Frow 2007: 151; Goody 2011), several stories from the *janam sākhis* – hagiographical texts contextualising the life and teachings of Guru

Nanak in particular – are recalled by the *rabābīs* today to demonstrate Bhai Mardana’s lifelong service and closeness to the Guru, the presence of him and his *rabāb* punctuating many of the narratives associated with the Guru’s life.

References to *rabābīs*, encountered in the *gurbilās* literature, are also keenly recounted by the *rabābīs* today. Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, in his interview with Sikh musicologist Dr Gurnam Singh (2004), suggested that the “true” *rabābīs* were only those who could trace their lineage back to the five *rabābī* families who are mentioned in the *gurbilās* texts – Bhai Mardana, Bhai Satta and Balwand, Bhai Babak, Bhai Natha and Abdulla, and Bhai Sadda and Madda. Several *rabābīs* with whom I interacted would also quote from Bhai Gurdas’ texts, citing his reference to Bhai Mardana.⁵⁴

Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand has also referred to a story of Bhai Babak, the *rabābī* who helped rescue Guru Hargobind’s daughter Bibi Viro during the Battle of Amritsar (1628) when she was left behind as the Sikhs came under an attack from Mughal forces at Lohgarh fort to the east of the city.⁵⁵ Narrated in full in the *gurbilās* literature (Bhagat Singh 1997: 466–85), Bhai Babak along with Bhai Singha, a “family priest” (“*kul purōhit*”) of the Guru, were tasked by Guru Hargobind to go and rescue Bibi Viro in the guise of Mughal dress and under the cover of darkness. In this historical narrative, Bhai Babak is described as “fearless” (“*nirbhai*”) and “free from worldly desire” (“*nihakāmā*”) – a devoted servant of the Guru with a virtuous and heroic character. Whilst the *rabābīs* remember this aspect of the narrative, prevalent retellings of the Battle of Amritsar among the Sikh community tend to overlook this detail, focussing rather on the Guru’s victory over the Mughal general Mukhlis Khan in a personal duel.⁵⁶

Whilst considering the textual place occupied by the *rabābīs*, it is important to note that texts are also inherently multimodal. On the one hand representing static and fixed forms of memorisation themselves, texts can serve as triggers to more diffuse and dynamic memorial representations (Frow 2007: 151). When recited or

⁵⁴ The thirteenth verse of Bhai Gurdas’s eleventh *vār* states “*bhalā rabāba vajāindā majalasa maradānā mīrāsī*” (Gurdas 1964: 120).

⁵⁵ From an interview with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand conducted and published by Virinder Singh Kalra on YouTube (*Bhai Chand Interview Part 4* [n.d.]).

⁵⁶ See *The Sikh Gurus* (Duggal 1980: 148–49) for an example of a retelling of the history of the Battle of Amritsar.

recounted, they become affective experiences, dynamic processes by which the *rabābīs* of the past are remembered and revered. An unbroken reading (*akhaṇḍ pāṭh*) of the entire GGS – an auspicious activity regularly undertaken by Sikhs – would of course include the recitation of the *vār* of Satta and Balwand. Moreover, the seventh verse of this *vār*, in praise of Guru Ram Das, is also frequently sung by Sikh *rāgīs* in the context of *śabad kīrtan* performance today.⁵⁷ Once committed to oral memory, by the likes of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, narratives of *rabābīs* from the *gurbilās* literature tend to be transmitted from one generation to the next in a more dynamic form and through the potentially more affective performative mode of a retelling or recounting. On the one hand the textual places occupied by the *rabābīs* are irrefutable, fixed, enduring, and in the case of the GGS also sacred and revered. On the other, when recounted by the *rabābīs*, these textual places serve as authoritative anchors to memories of a more diffuse, processual, and affective nature.

Ironically, whilst the *vār* of Bhai Satta and Balwand might serve as a reminder of Guru Arjan’s inclusion of the *rabābīs*, as a symbol of their special place in Sikh tradition historically, the legacy of the reforms discussed in Chapter Four – the circulation of the *gurbilās* narrative in a way that vilifies the *rabābīs* – has come to eclipse this alternative reading. In Sikh circles, the heroic deeds of Bhai Babak are thus forgotten and the mistakes of Bhai Satta and Balwand remembered. In stark contrast of course, the exact opposite is true among the *rabābīs*, demonstrating how amnesias and recollections comprise two sides of the same coin, complementary pieces of history’s puzzle that together reveal so much about that which has come to pass. As an unaltered window into history, the textual place of the *rabābīs* – their inclusion in the GGS, in the work of Bhai Gurdas, and in the *gurbilās* literature – serves as an important reference point for understanding their historical place in Sikh tradition prior to the religious reforms of the late colonial period. The way in which the Sikhs and *rabābīs* respectively relate to and invoke these textual references speaks a great deal to the historical trajectory of the *rabābī* tradition in the twentieth century.

⁵⁷ The opening line of the seventh verse or *paūrī* of Bhai Satta and Balwand’s *vār* is “*dhanna dhanna rāma dāsa gura jina siriā tinai savāriā*”, that is, “Blessed, blessed is Guru Ram Das; the one who created you has also exalted you.” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 968).

5.3 ‘*SINGHĀM DĒ MAULVĪ*’ – PRIESTS OF THE SIKHS

5.3.1 ANCESTRAL AUSPICIOUSNESS AND ORALITY

Writing in the early nineteenth century, Captain Matthews described the *rabābīs* of Amritsar as “priests” (Ahluwalia 1984: 62). Whilst acknowledging the inherent issues associated with translation (Mandair 2009), we might nevertheless be at license to explore the outsider’s perception resulting in such choice of language, to explore the validity of this idea with regard to the historical status, roles and responsibilities of the *rabābīs*. We certainly ought not to be dismissive of the accounts of such colonial officers as it has been shown that many colonial interpreters developed highly nuanced understandings of the society around them (Bayly 1999: 139).

Captain Matthews’ description of the *rabābīs* as “priests” is of particular interest in that it echoes the way in which the *rabābīs* of Lahore today describe their own ancestors as “*singhām dē maulvī*” (“priests of the Sikhs”). Whilst the *rabābīs*’ description invokes an Islamic idiom that likely reflects upon a seventy-year history of living in an Islam-centric social and epistemological environment, the remarkable similarity between the *rabābīs*’ own characterisation of their ancestors and Matthews’ characterisation of the *rabābīs*, more than two centuries prior, begs further investigation. It intimates the socioreligious status and role of the *rabābīs*’ among the Sikhs historically, one which was clearly far greater than that of mere musicians. Other hereditary musician communities of north India have certainly been noted for assuming priestly characteristics.⁵⁸ Having shown how the *rabābīs* occupied hereditary positions at Sikh religious institutions, linked to their *cauñkī* performance duties, below I explore their ritual role in Sikh tradition and how this relates to the unique aura of auspiciousness associated with their presence, both physical and sonic.

Neuman (1990: 131–33) highlights how widespread rural-to-urban migration of *mīrāsīs* during the Mughal period led to a transformation that saw them increasingly specialise solely in Hindustani vocal and instrumental music, essentially becoming freelance musicians within the royal courts and courtesan

⁵⁸ Musicians attached to small shrines in Rajasthan, for example, have been noted for functioning in a priestly capacity (Neuman and others 2006: 64).

salons. By abandoning their ancestral villages, many *mīrāsīs* increasingly forsook the social responsibilities and duties that were associated with the ancestral patronage relationships they had previously inherited. The migration of the *rabābīs* to Amritsar in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, whilst echoing this rural-to-urban trajectory, did not necessarily entail the same consequences. As we shall see, many *rabābīs* maintained close ties to specific Sikh patrons, meaning that they continued to perform many of the traditional ritual roles and responsibilities, associated with hereditary performing communities historically, well into the early twentieth century.

The patron-server relationship, commonly known as *jajmānī* (or *sēpī* in the Punjab region), between hereditary performer groups and their patrons has been understood to comprise, and manifest through, a system of regular occasions for exchange that were seasonal, ceremonial, ritual and performative in nature (Neuman and others 2006: 42). The hereditary performers typically take on a ritual performative role at the major lifecycle events – births, marriages and deaths – of their patrons, in return for which they might receive cash, foodstuffs, or other similar commodities (Neuman and others 2006: 39). These relationships were multigenerational, meaning that patronage ties between a family of patrons and servers were inherited from one generation to the next, as determined by custom.

One of the primary performative services rendered by *mīrāsīs* to their patrons, on such occasions, was as genealogists or “dividers of inheritance” (Neuman 1990: 131). It appears as though the *rabābīs* continued to fulfil a similar role for their Sikh patrons, albeit in a slightly adapted form. Often being attached to particular religious (rather than family) lineages, they recounted and praised the saintly and guru-like figures that formed that lineage. In fact, the *vār* of Bhai Satta and Balwand, written for Guru Arjan and his religious predecessors, serves as a perfect such example, in which the Guru lineage is eulogised through performance. Following in this tradition and despite over sixty years of physical separation, the late *rabābī* Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand was similarly able to

recount the lineage of the Gurusar Satlani *mahants*, the patrons of his ancestors prior to Partition.⁵⁹

The *rabābīs* certainly played a central role at the major lifecycle events of their Sikh patrons, as attested to by the various sources of history on this point. In a handwritten document, described as a *bakhśāśnāvā* (from *bakhśīs-nāmā*), that is, letter of benevolence, written for the *rabābī* Bhai Bura in 1876 by various members of the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar, we find specific details concerning the duty of the patron and the *rabābī* on such occasions.⁶⁰

To protect (*pālaṇā*) Bhai Bura, the following offerings have been prescribed and are understood to be what he is entitled to for the recitation of *śabad kīrtan*. On the occasion of the birth of a boy, half a rupee and a small measure of *gur* (raw cane sugar) are to be offered. On the engagement of a boy, the same should be given. On the *sahrā* (tying of the turban) of a boy, the same should be given. On all these occasions half a rupee should be given as offering. This committee would not stop those who would give more. And at the time of a death, the following is appropriate: If an enclosure (*vēhar*) is to be made... at this time, two turbans and a two quarter rupees cash; and on the fourth day 5/8 rupees; and at the time of the cremation rite, one-and-a-quarter rupee. For those that have *kīrtan* done daily from the fourth day until the cremation day, they will give two-and-a-quarter rupees on the day of the cremation rite. For those who will hold a *caunkī* for the singing of *vār*, they will give five *ānē* daily. For those who have their funeral rites without a *vēhar*: on the first stage, one-and-a-quarter rupees; on the fourth stage, 5/8 rupees; and on the cremation, one rupee is given. And whatever is written above will be given to Bhai Bura as an offering with a

⁵⁹ In an interview with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, from 21 November 2011, conducted by Jasdeep Singh, he recounted the lineage of the *mahants*, who were his former patrons from the *ḍērā* at Gurusar Satlani, as Baba Labh Singh, Baba Sadhu Singh, Baba Kuma Singh (r.1803-1853), Baba Daya Singh, and Baba Bir Singh 'Kaladhari'. According to him, this lineage represented a religious lineage that followed on from that of the Gurus.

⁶⁰ A scan of the *Bakhśāśnāvā* is included in the appendix of Madanjit Kaur's book on the history of the Darbar Sahib (Kaur 1983: 207).

prayer. But it is appropriate and necessary for Bhai Bura to take four persons, including a *jōrī* player, to every occasion... If one is an obedient Sikh of the Guru, they will act in complete accordance with this. If one among the *granthī* Singhs and *pujārī* Singhs does not follow this, they will be indebted to Sri Guru Ram Das and the Sikh *birādārī* (community). With the wish and seal of Bhai Bura, this *Bakhśāsnāvā* has been written, in order to serve as a deed (*sanad*).

(Kaur 1983: 207)

The *Bakhśāsnāvā* thus highlights the integral role of the *rabābīs* at the major lifecycle events of their Sikh patrons: births, engagements, marriages, and funerals. The explicit manner in which this document is intended to “protect” Bhai Bura suggests that *rabābīs* were perhaps at times left aggrieved by the (lack of) emoluments they returned with from such ritual performances. With the seal of officials of the Darbar Sahib, this document certainly carried an authority that enabled a *rabābī* like Bhai Rura to stake his claim to due reward.

The role of the *rabābīs* at Sikh funerals seems to have been a particularly important institution. In the ethnographic data of colonial writers, based on the earliest British census reports in the region in the 1880s and 90s, the *rabābīs* are noted to “play the Rabab before a Sikh's bier when it is being carried out to the burning ground” (Rose 1911a: 111–12). Bhai Vir Singh, the renowned Singh Sabha reformist and author, also notes the ritual role of the *rabābīs* at Sikh funerals in his work on *gurmat saṅgīt*, illustrating the fact that, in the early twentieth century, even the reformists struggled to imagine the Sikh funeral without the *rabābīs*:

After death, whilst the body is still around, *rabābīs* sing *śabads* in *rāg Mārū* and the *Mārū kī Vār*. When the body is given to the fire, the *Alāhanīām* (funeral dirges composed by Guru Nanak) in *rāg Vaḍhans* are sung. After bathing, the *Kīrtan Sōhilā* is recited.

(Singh 1939: 1177).

As noted in Chapter Three, *rāg Mārū* is associated with *vīr ras* (warrior sentiment) and death is a recurrent textual theme within the *śabads* and *vār* of *rāg Mārū*. Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, recalling from his youth in Amritsar, noted that the following *śabad* in *rāg Mārū* by Kabir, was sung by the *rabābīs*: “*rāma simara pachatāhigā mana*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1106), that is, “O mind, remember the Lord (*rām*) otherwise you shall regret it”. With a tangible sense of distress over its loss, he corroborates that this tradition remained active up until Partition:

When somebody dies, did the *rāgīs* or *rabābīs* recite *śabads*? At that time, the *rabābīs* recited [*śabads*]. No *rāgī* recited *śabads* in front of the bier as it was taken to the cremation ground; the *rabābīs* went with them – the Amritsar *rabābīs*... At that time, all the *rabābīs* would go, reciting *śabads* from the front, with *tablās* tied to their waste and harmoniums strapped to their necks. *Śabads* in *rāg Mārū* were sung. These were the customs. Now who can do it? Without the *rabābīs*, who can do it, eh? ... Only my elders did not go. [My uncle] Bhai Chand did not go, and my father did not go for this work. All of the other *rabābīs* went in this way. And as much offerings as they received, they would have to divide between them... Such were the customs which have now all been forgotten; purposely forgotten, so that they could remove us... These days, they think: seeing as our [Sikh] brothers do *kīrtan*, what is the need for the *rabābīs*? They do not realise that it ought to be the *kīrtan* of the *rabābīs*! They have forgotten this custom. This is a custom which has been there from the very beginning. But they have removed the *rabābīs*. This is a cause of pain for all of us *rabābīs*.⁶¹

Two interesting points emerge from this account, the first relating to the non-participation of certain *rabābī* families. Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand belonged to the *Manāvīē khāndān* and despite living in Amritsar his family was attached to a *ḍērā* at the village of Gurusar Satlani. His elders, therefore, did not

⁶¹ From an interview with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, on 21 November 2011, conducted by Jasdeep Singh.

join the other Amritsar *rabābīs* on such occasions, as his family primarily served their own patrons. Similarly, in a small booklet detailing the specific customs and traditions of the Arora clan of Sikhs of Amritsar (Arorabans Sabha 1917), the customs to be followed for a funeral stipulate that Bhai Amira, Bhai Moti (*Ḍabbē khāndān*), and Bhai Khair (*Gailē khāndān*), all eminent *rabābīs* of the Darbar Sahib at the time, ought to be invited. As an established Sikh community of Amritsar, the local Arora Sikhs likely had ties with the Amritsar *rabābī* families over several generations.

The second point that emerges from Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s comments and indeed the writings of Bhai Vir Singh, is how the ritual performance at Sikh funerals was reserved for the *rabābīs* alone – it was a place and duty that no *rāgī* could fill. With the marginalisation and eventual displacement of the *rabābīs*, perhaps unsurprisingly, these ritual performative traditions – the singing of *śabads* in *rāg Mārū*, *Mārū kī Vār*, and the *Alāhaṇīām* in *rāg Vaḍhans* – have disappeared rather than being taken up by the Sikh *rāgīs*. Of the traditional compositions to be performed, only the singing of the *Kīrtan Sōhilā* continues to be widely sung by *rāgīs* to mark Sikh funerals within gurdwaras.

As was traditional of the ritual services rendered by *mīrāsīs* to their patrons, the *rabābīs* were also customarily called upon for ritual participation in seasonal festivals. Makar Sankranti (known as *Māghī* in the Punjab), the harvest festival that marks the receding of winter and start of longer days, has been noted as an occasion on which the services of musicians was called upon in different parts of the subcontinent.⁶² In Punjab, the preceding night, known as *Lōhrī*, is also celebrated, marking the start of two-and-a-half-month period in which *rāg Basant* is sung at the Darbar Sahib (Singh and Singh 1979b: 665; Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 237–38). A largely forgotten aspect of the history of the *rāg Basant* tradition at the Darbar Sahib pertains to the ritual manner in which the *rabābīs* “opened” this season, as described by Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand:

⁶² The *pāñcāī bājā* groups in Nepal, for example, would perform on Makar Sankranti (Tingey 1994).

Rāg Basant is sung for two and a half months; it is not sung before or after that. And at the Darbar Sahib there was the principle that when the day to open *rāg Basant* came, everyone was wearing yellow turbans, and the ladies had yellow headscarves and suits, such that in every direction the yellow [of spring] was seen. When the time came for my uncle, the late Bhai Chand, to do *kīrtan*, when he came and sat, the *granthī* prepared a plate in which some sugar, cloth, and money was placed, and offered it to Bhai Chand, saying “*Bhāī Sāhib*, please open *rāg Basant*!” Then my uncle would open *rāg Basant*... After that, all the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* would sing *Basant* as and when their time came... But *first*, *rāg Basant* was opened by Bhai Chand because this is the work of *rabābīs*. The *rabābīs* conveyed the congratulations to the congregation... Whenever a joyous occasion took place, the *rabābīs* were invited, *kīrtan* was sung, and congratulations were given. In this way, the opening of *Basant* was a time of much joy.⁶³

With *Lōhrī* being a joyful occasion that marks a major seasonal shift, the performative presence of the *rabābīs* was deemed necessary to both lend auspiciousness to the occasion and usher in the new season. Custom dictated that the leading *rabābī* of the Darbar Sahib (Bhai Chand as of the late 1930s and 40s) sing the first *śabad* that appears under the section of *rāg Basant* in the GGS thus symbolically “opening” the season of spring but also the chapter of *rāg Basant* within the GGS.⁶⁴ The singing of *rāg Basant* was also ritually “closed” on the day of *Hōlā Mahallā* with the singing of the last *śabad* that appears under *rāg Basant* (Singh and Singh 1979b: 666).⁶⁵ Although the tradition of singing *rāg Basant* at this time continues to this day, various ritual elements and obviously the involvement of the *rabābīs* are now absent.

⁶³ From an interview with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, from 21 November 2011, conducted by Jasdeep Singh.

⁶⁴ The first *śabad* of *rāg Basant*, written by Guru Nanak, is “*māhā māha mumārakhī carīā sadā basanta*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1168), that is, “Of all the months, that month is auspicious in which Spring is in eternal ascent”.

⁶⁵ The last *śabad* to appear in *rāg Basant*, written by Kabir, starts “*suraha kī jaisī tērī cāla*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 1196), that is, “Your gait is like that of a cow”.

The perceived auspiciousness ascribed to hereditary performer communities in social custom, has been ascribed as “divine intervention” (Tingey 1994: 4). Within Sikh tradition, the auspiciousness of the *rabābīs*’ was also by virtue of the fact that their ancestors had directly served the Gurus. The founding figures of their community – Bhai Mardana, Bhai Satta and Balwand, Bhai Babak, Bhai Natha and Abdullah, and Bhai Sadda and Madda – had thus received the direct blessings of the Gurus. Rather than departing with generations gone by, these blessings are understood to pass in *sīnā-ba-sīnā* (heart to heart) fashion. Just like the direct descendants of the Gurus, the *Sōḍhīs* and *Bēdīs* (Oberoi 1992: 379), and other Sikh families who trace their ancestry to direct disciples of the Gurus, the *rabābīs* were highly revered personalities because of their ancestral links and inherited blessings. Bhai Tahir Iqbal of Lahore, grandson of Bhai Chiragh and a member of the *Gailē khāndān* descending from Bhai Babak, explained that:

We have a link to *Gurū jī*. Guru Nanak made Bhai Mardana his brother. We have a respect (*adab*) for him and a spiritual link with him. This will continue. There will be no break among us. It will go to them, [my children,] whether somebody invites us [to perform] or not.⁶⁶

Bhai Naeem Tahir, a *rabābī* of the *Khaḍūrīē khāndān* associated with Bhai Satta and Balwand, also spoke of how “There was a grace (*karam*) of Guru Nanak that was with the *rabābīs*. That is with *us* alone”.⁶⁷ In a similar vein, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand further narrates how Sikhs used to seek these blessings from the *rabābīs*, as follows:

Guru Nanak took the likes of Bhai Mardana with him for the purpose of praising (*sift-ō-sanā*) the almighty. Why? Because we are capable of praising the almighty. We can praise somebody, we can give somebody blessings, we can pray for somebody. Our prayers will manifest. What effect will the *rāgīs*’ prayers have?... A *rabābī* can grant such blessings. A *rāgī* cannot. Because this is the work of the *rabābīs* – to offer

⁶⁶ Interview with Bhai Tahir Iqbal on 13 September 2019.

⁶⁷ Interview with Bhai Naeem Tahir on 6 September 2019.

prayers and grant blessings ... Only *he* can offer prayers who is capable of doing so. And Guru Nanak endowed the *rabābīs* with this capability, such that the prayers of the *rabābīs* manifest. If a *rabābī* cursed an individual, the curse will also manifest. If he prayed for somebody, his prayers would manifest. This is by [the grace of] Guru Nanak. Why? Because his name is on our tongue, his name is in our hearts, his name is in our minds... So why would our prayers not manifest? ... This is [Guru Nanak's] grace that whatever we utter with our tongues shall come to pass.⁶⁸

The power attached to the tongues of *mīrāsīs* was indeed well known in customary Punjabi culture:

‘You can recognize a true *Mīrāsī* by his black-bordered tongue.’ This saying from *Mīrāsī* lore means that the hereditary (male) musician’s blessings and curses are equally effective.

(Nettl and others 1998: 763)

In the case of the *rabābīs*, this innate quality they inherited as hereditary performers was intertwined with and enhanced by the status they derived from being members of the class of Sikh *bhāīs* – religious figures who were associated with blessings and revered as “embodiments of the holy” (Oberoi 1994: 119). Reflecting a more explicitly Sufi mode of expression, Aqeel Tahir, son of Bhai Tahir Iqbal, described the blessing inherited by the *rabābīs* as a “*rūhānī faiẓ*” – a spiritual grace.⁶⁹ In Sufi traditions, *faiẓ* is conceived as a spiritual energy “that emanates from holy bodies, objects, and spaces, whether a saint's shrine or a sacred text. It adheres to objects but also penetrates bodies” (Ingram 2018: 126). Whilst inherently intangible, *faiẓ* is nevertheless understood to emanate from bodies, that is, from the physical presence of the *rabābīs*.

Given the power associated with their tongues in Punjabi custom and the inherent orality of multigenerational transmission observed among hereditary performer

⁶⁸ Interview with Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, from 21 November 2011, conducted by Jasdeep Singh.

⁶⁹ Interview with Aqeel Tahir on 13 September 2019.

communities (Qureshi 2009: 165), we might conceive that this *kripā*, *karam* or *faiẓ* was transmitted particularly through the singing of the *rabābīs*. Not only did orality characterise much of the intergenerational interaction between members of such hereditary performer communities, but an “absence of materiality” is also noted with respect to their primarily performative interaction with their patrons (Neuman and others 2006: 42). The auspiciousness of the *rabābīs*’ presence might thus be understood as equally sonic in nature as it was physical, experienced fully only when accompanied by their *śabad kīrtan* performance.

This idea is further compounded in light of the idea of *śabad-gurū* within Sikh tradition, that is, the *śabad* (sound/word) as the sonic embodiment of the Guru (Cassio 2019: 155).⁷⁰ As families who were chosen and blessed by the Gurus, and as custodians of the *śabad* in its essential sonic form, the *rabābīs* embodied what was an authoritative and Guru-sanctioned medium of transmission for the *śabad-gurū*.⁷¹ The exclusivity and authority associated with their tradition was expressed to me in such terms by Mazhar Shaggan, grandson of the *rabābī* Bhai Lal Muhammad (discussed in Chapter One): “We are what you call pure (*khālīṣ*) *rabābīs*... we are the ones who were chosen by *Bābā jī* [Guru Nanak]”.⁷² Thus, a threefold auspiciousness emerges in relation to the presence of the *rabābīs*: firstly, as a result of being hereditary performers, that is, from the power attached to their word/tongues in customary culture; secondly, in relation to their position as *bhāīs* of the Sikh tradition, whose unbroken family lineages harbour the blessings of the Gurus; and thirdly, in their being the preeminent and Guru-sanctioned custodians of the *śabad-gurū* in its essential sonic form. Whilst the Sikh community’s relationship with the past has been discussed in relation to its often material representations and forms of mediation, objects, texts and places in particular (Murphy 2012b: 12), the *rabābīs* represent a case in which this relationship was mediated primarily through the intangible yet powerful oral dimension.

⁷⁰ Emphasising this important idea, in his article ‘What is *Kīrtan*?’, Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011: 259) notes, “*Kīrtan* is not merely the singing of *gurbani* but it is *gurbani* itself”.

⁷¹ The importance of singing *śabads* in a traditional or original form – the idea of the *purātan* (ancient) or *ṭaksālī* (authentic) *rīt* (composition) (Paintal 1978: 259; Cassio 2015: 4–5) – is, today, often stressed by *gurbānī sangūt* revivalists: “In these *reets*, the *nada* of their authors is audible. The loss of this *nada* would make the *bani* silent and interpretation near impossible” (Bhai Baldeep Singh 2011: 248).

⁷² Interview with Mazhar Shaggan on 14 September 2019.

As a subject that could be notated, theorised, taught, and thus democratised, *śabad kīrtan* was abstracted from the *rabābīs* (see Chapter Four). The same cannot be said of the intangible blessings, ancestral auspiciousness, and oral power associated with the *rabābīs*, however, all aspects which remain inseparable from the *rabābī* tradition and for which the *rabābīs* were especially revered. Historically, visitors to the Darbar Sahib would often, for example, bring two garlands, one to offer to the GGS and one to the *rabābīs* (Arora 2000: 164).⁷³ The famous nineteenth-century *rabābī* of Amritsar Bhai Atra, in particular, was held in such esteem that devotees “knelt down at his feet in reverence” (Paintal 1978: 266).

Today, whilst *rāgīs* are certainly respected within the Sikh community, they lack these specific qualities and, as such, occupy a more unidimensional role within Sikh tradition as transmitters of *śabad kīrtan*; their physical presence and ancestral identity bearing little significance with respect to their roles and responsibilities. That is not to say that the aspect of materiality is entirely absent – *rāgīs* are required to physically conform to the normative Sikh identity, bearing the five Ks as symbols of their religiosity for example.⁷⁴ The radical trajectory of technologisation in the twentieth century has also undoubtedly exacerbated the degree to which *śabad kīrtan* performance has become abstracted from its performers. As widely cited, with distributed forms of media, broadcasting, and internet streaming now often serving as a medium of transmission, the relevance of the physical presence of the performer is further diminished and their agency reduced (Manuel 1991; Frederickson 1989; Farrell 1993). In accordance with the trajectory of “disenchantment” (Yelle 2013), therefore, innate auspiciousness and blessings, linked to a performer’s caste and lineage in the old “enchanted world” (Oberoi 1994), have thus come to be subordinated by a much more functionalist relationship between performer and performed content.

Despite this trend, it is noteworthy that the legacy of disenchantment today is far from hegemonic. I was fortunate to witness the memorable performances of Bhai

⁷³ An elderly Sikh gentleman Dr Jagtishwar Singh also recalled the *rabābī* Bhai Chand always having a garland around his neck whilst performing at the Darbar Sahib (*Days with Bhai Chand Ji - Puratan Rababi at Sri Harmandar Sahib Ji - YouTube* [n.d.]).

⁷⁴ The five Ks are *kēś* (unshorn hair), *kanghā* (comb), *kaṛā* (bracelet), *kirpān* (dagger), and *kachahirā* (underwear).

Ghulam Muhammad Chand, for example, during his UK tour of 2011, which moved members of the audience to tears. Whilst undoubtedly intensified by more than sixty years of separation from the *rabābīs*, his aura of auspiciousness and skilled renditions combined to produce a unique affect in his performances, the likes of which would have seldom been experienced by most Sikhs before or since. His son Bhai Moeen, who accompanied him on these tours to the UK and India, recounted to me how many members of the congregation would come and touch his father's knees both as an expression of respect and reverence, and to seek his blessings.⁷⁵

Like other hereditary performer communities across the subcontinent – the *mīrāsīs* of north India, the *dēvadāsīs* of south India (Soneji 2004), the *langās* and *māṅgaṇiyārs* of Rajasthan (Neuman and others 2006), the *dāmāī* of Nepal (Tingey 1994) etc. – the *rabābīs* were a source of auspiciousness at the rites of passage and religious occasions of their Sikh patrons. Fundamental to their auspicious presence on such occasions, was not only their person but their performance of *śabad kīrtan*, a specialisation that was integral to *rabābī* identity, through which not only the wisdom but blessings of the Gurus might be sonically distributed among their audiences.

5.3.2 *KĪRTAN AS KATHĀ* – MUSICAL EXEGESIS

Alongside the *granthīs*, *udasīs*, *nirmalās*, *gyānīs*, *pujārīs*, *dhādhīs* and *ardāsīs*, Oberoi (1994: 123) counts the *rabābīs* among the “traditional intellectuals” of the Sikh religious establishment. Together, the *bhāīs* of the Sikh religious establishment have been described by Oberoi (1994: 118) in the following terms:

Etymologically the word *bhai* means brother, but within the early Sikh tradition the word was also used as an honorific for the holy men of the Panth. To qualify for this title a person had to demonstrate a capacity to interpret the *Adi Granth*, communicate the wisdom of the gurus it enshrined, and be publicly recognized for his piety. If in addition he could work miracles, heal the sick and give succour to the distressed, he

⁷⁵ Interview with Bhai Moeen on 3 September 2019.

was sure to occupy a position of considerable reverence and influence within the community.

To qualify as a *bhāī* of the Sikh priestly class, therefore, was to be pious and to be able to interpret the GGS. Though often neglected, this exegetical ability was in fact at the heart of the *rabābīs*' specialisation in *śabad kīrtan*. In an interview with Ustad Tari Khan, the renowned *tablā* maestro whose maternal grandfather Bhai Chanan was a *rabābī* of Darbar Sahib prior to Partition, he elaborated on the exegetical knowledge of the *rabābīs* as follows:

Those [*rabābī*] elders were amazing, who knew everything, who explained this knowledge. Just imagine that they were our priests of the Sikhs (*singhām dē maulvī*). Imagine that! They did not simply do *kīrtan*, they systematically explained it; they performed *kathā* (narrative-based exegesis) ... And *he* can perform *kathā* who is *knowledgeable*... They were so knowledgeable that they educated our Sikh brothers, our friends, our people... In this way, this lineage [of *rabābīs*] held *lots* of knowledge about the house of the Gurus (*gurū ghar*) and about the Guru. Amazing knowledge! Now, we will miss this knowledge. Why? Because those people are no longer around.⁷⁶

The narrative-based performative tradition of *śabad kīrtan*, inferred by Ustad Tari Khan, involves the interweaving verses from different textual sources – now limited by the textual circumscription and reforms of the Singh Sabha period (see Chapter Four) but historically less restricted in scope – in order to elaborate a particular theme. In drawing upon various textual references, this performative style of *śabad kīrtan* is often described as *parmāṇik*, that is, evidential. In its intertextual character, this aspect of *śabad kīrtan* performance likely developed through cross-fertilisation with other narrative-based genres such as *kathā* and *qavvālī*, with which it thus came to bear significant similarities (Kalra 2014: 75). Indeed, the Punjabi *vār* genre, which features within the GGS, is itself noted as a narrative-musical form (Nijhawan 2006: 54), which is itself intertextual in character, comprising of *paurī* verses sung to a fixed melody (*dhun*), tied together

⁷⁶ Interview with Ustad Tari Khan on 8 September 2019.

and interspersed with *salōks* sung in a more improvisatory and recitative style. One might imagine that the performative style of the Punjabi *qissā* literature, historically sung in Sikh gurdwaras and Sufi shrines (Mir 2010: 17), and the popular *parsaṅg* genre (see Chapter Four) also influenced *śabad kīrtan* style in this regard.

In an interview with Dr Gurnam Singh of Punjab University Patiala (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004), Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand has described the narrative aspect of *śabad kīrtan* performance in terms of “methodically” (*bāqāidā*) constructing a “story”, based on a “topic” (*mazmūn*) occurring within the *śabad* being presented. Reflecting the popularity of the *parmāṅik* style of *śabad kīrtan* in the pre-Partition era, among *rāgīs* as well as *rabābīs*, we encounter published books in which *śabads* and passages of *gurbāṅī* were organised by textual themes.⁷⁷ Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand also illustrates the importance of gesture in conveying the meaning of the words as he sings. Studies of gesture in Hindustani music have been largely analysed with respect to their relationship to the sonic dimension of performance (Rahaim 2012; Clayton 2007). However, in *kathā*-like genres such as *śabad kīrtan*, being somewhat closer to everyday speech, the semantic dimension of gesture becomes equally important. In stark contrast to modern tendencies, which attempt to analyse *śabad kīrtan* from a primarily musical-technical perspective, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand emphasises the referential content of the words in *śabad kīrtan*.⁷⁸ In another interview, conducted by scholar Virinder Kalra (Singh [n.d.-a]), he describes the pedagogical process of imbibing *śabad kīrtan* from his father Bhai Sundar and elder brother Bhai Muhammad Shafī purely in terms of text and hermeneutics: “This work is such that one ought to memorise it and then

⁷⁷ In his book titled *Gurmat Parmāṅ* (Singh 1945a), *rāgī* Bhai Mehar Singh offers selected passages of *gurbāṅī* for the following themes: *bēntī* (supplication), *ustat* (praise), *satgur* (True Guru), *gurbāṅī* (utterings of the Guru), *nām* (Divine Name), *saṅgat* (congregation), *sant* (saint), *mānas janam* (human birth), *māyā* (illusion), and *kīrtan* (devotional praise).

⁷⁸ The emphasis on *śabad kīrtan*'s musical aspect in the twentieth century can be seen to be reflected in the increasing preference of the term ‘*saṅgīt*’ (namely *gurmat saṅgīt* and *gurbāṅī saṅgīt*) rather than ‘*kīrtan*’. Several authors have dedicated discussion to *śabad kīrtan* in terms of Hindustani music genres and theory (Mansukhani 1982; Paintal 1978). Demonstrating little concern for the referential content of *śabad kīrtan* and its exegetical aspects, the post-1984 revival of the *gurmat saṅgīt* movement has been to a large extent concerned primarily with the adoption of ‘traditional’ stringed instruments and the standardisation of *rāg* forms, with academic scholarship also echoing concerns of musical authenticity (Cassio 2015; Bhai Baldeep Singh 2011; Linden 2015a; Khalsa 2012).

understand the words. *What* do they mean?”. Whilst his musical-technical skill is clearly evidenced in his performances, his own understanding of *śabad kīrtan* clearly subordinates music to hermeneutics, illustrating how *śabad kīrtan* was traditionally understood as a form of musical exegesis.



FIGURE 21 BHAI CHAND. IMAGE COURTESY OF BHAI MOEEN.

As musician-exegetes, the multidimensional role of the *rabābīs* is reflective, more broadly, of the often blurred and overlapping functional boundaries between the different classes of Sikh *bhāīs* (Oberoi 1994: 123). Exemplifying the extent to which *rabābīs* possessed knowledge that equally qualified them as *gyānīs*, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s father was in fact known as Bhai Sundar ‘*gyānī*’ (d.1944), reflecting his vast knowledge of the GGS and his ability to deliver religious “lectures” (Khalid 2018). The *rabābīs*, like other *bhāīs*, also engaged in religious education in the community, most notably as Gurmukhi teachers (Oberoi 1994: 134; Kalra 2014: 104). Bhai Rao, an eminent early-nineteenth-century *rabābī* who held a *cauṅkī* at the Darbar Sahib, is noted for having made his Amritsar home into a *dharamsāl* – a religious educational establishment – in which he kept the GGS and the Dasam Granth (Singh 1914: 327). *Rabābīs* were not just musicians, therefore, but *kathākārs* and *gyānīs* at the same time.

Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s grandfather Bhai Buddha was apparently so well versed in Sikh religious texts that he had committed the voluminous historiographical work of Kavi Santokh Singh, the *Gur Pratāp Sūraj* (or *Sūraj Prakāś*) *Granth* to memory (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 228).⁷⁹ Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand’s illustrious uncle, from whom he took his surname, Bhai Chand (1905-1949) (Figure 21) was also extremely famous for his *parmāṅik* style of *śabad kīrtan* – he was known to elaborate a single *śabad* with extensive and inspired use of *parmāṅs* (thematically related verses) over the course of hours at a

⁷⁹ Bhai Buddha is often incorrectly said to be the father of Bhai Chand (Paintal 1978; Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991). However, he was in fact the father of Bhai Sundar and elder brother of Bhai Sardar, who was father to Bhai Chand (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004).

time (Kanwal 2010: 250) – to the extent that he is frequently, though incorrectly, credited as being the originator of this style.⁸⁰ It is certainly extraordinary that he was installed at the Darbar Sahib in the early 1930s (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004), after the SGPC had already assumed administrative control and removed most of the other *rabābīs*. One senior *rāgī* I interviewed, who heard Bhai Chand in his youth, recalled with great affection how people that came to listen to Bhai Chand would be so engaged by his use of *parmāṅs* that nobody would leave once seated.⁸¹ Others who heard him also allude to the popularity of his *cauṅkī* (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 228). Pola Mehar, a senior *rabābī* of Lahore, described Bhai Chand’s position among the Sikhs as follows:

Bhai Chand was that individual for whom, when his train arrived at a particular station to attend a gurdwara function, people would lay a carpet from the station to the gurdwara and throw flower petals to welcome him. They would say, “The sky has its moon (*cānd*), but the moon of the earth is Bhai Chand”.⁸²

Whilst the *parmāṅik* style of *śabad kīrtan* is today chiefly associated with some of the last known *rabābīs* to be skilled in this tradition, such as Bhai Chand and his nephew Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand, they simply represented what was clearly an important style of *śabad kīrtan* in the pre-Partition era. Hindu and Sikh *rāgīs* of this period, for example, are equally remembered for having performed in this style.⁸³ This aspect of *śabad kīrtan* performance thus highlights how the role of *rāgīs* and *rabābīs*, historically, was also exegetical in nature. As Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011: 260) highlights, *śabad kīrtan* “is not ‘a musicians’ music and mere musicians cannot, perhaps, comprehend it”; it is not simply sacred or devotional music but also a form of musical exegesis in which the wisdom of the

⁸⁰ In interviews with *rāgīs* Prof. Ranjit Singh (29 June 2016) and Ajit Singh Matlashi (28 June 2016), both claim Bhai Chand as being the originator of the *parmāṅik* style of *śabad kīrtan*. It is evident, however, that Bhai Chand himself learnt this style from his elders, including his cousin Bhai Sundar (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand* 2004).

⁸¹ Interview with Bhai Gurdeep Singh on 11 December 2018.

⁸² Interview with Pola Mehar on 27 September 2019.

⁸³ In an interview with Bhai Mohinder Sikh ‘Milkhi’ Shah (d.2021), a senior *rāgī* from Delhi, on 17 March 2019, he recalled of his youth how Hindu performers also employed a narrative-based style. Other Sikh *rāgīs* of the pre-Partition era such as Bhai Hira Singh and Bhai Bhag Singh are also remembered for their *parmāṅik* style (Kanwal 2010: 133).

Gurus and *bhagats* of the GGS was orally transmitted to listeners through the affective medium of music. This aspect of *śabad kīrtan* tradition has come to be somewhat neglected both due to the decline of performers skilled in this style and due to the recent prioritisation of the musical-technical aspects of the tradition (*rāg* forms, genres, instruments etc.) over its hermeneutics since the post-1984 emergence of the *gurmat saṅgīt* and *gurbanī saṅgīt* revival movements.

Through the history of the *rabābīs*, we thus recover a more representative understanding of *śabad kīrtan* in its historical context, highlighting its inherent links to narrative-musical genres that were popular in colonial Punjab (*qavvālī*, *qissā*, *parsaṅg* etc.), in addition to its more widely acknowledged intersection with Hindustani courtly music tradition, evidenced in the use of genres such as *dhrupad* and *khayāl*, for example (Cassio 2015; Bhai Baldeep Singh 2011; Linden 2015a). In a way, the sharing of musical styles across socioreligious contexts should come as no surprise given the significant intersection of repertoire between religious traditions, the song-texts of Farid, Kabir, Namdev, etc., for example, inherently linking *śabad kīrtan* to *qavvālī* and *bhakti* music traditions.

5.3.3 PERSISTENT PIETY IN A SHIFTING SOCIORELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Having explored the ‘priestly’ character of the *rabābīs*, it remains to consider the aspect of multi-religiosity also evoked by the expression ‘*siṅghām dē maulvī*’. Today, the *rabābīs* of Lahore, perhaps unsurprisingly, all identify as “*pakkē Musalmān*” (“proper Muslims”), most claiming that their ancestors have always been so. Prevailing attitudes within the Sikh community and in the literature available on the *rabābīs* seemingly confirm this (Arora 2000; Lybarger 2011). The issues surrounding the idea of religion in the colonial, postcolonial, Punjabi, and more specifically Sikh contexts, have been analysed with considerable nuance by various scholars, from which several important ideas emerge. Firstly, it has been shown that the meaning attached to the term ‘Sikh’ evolved over time. Used initially to describe a direct ‘disciple’ of the Guru, it subsequently came to represent membership to the diverse community, or *panth*, that emerged from the legacy of the Gurus (Murphy 2012a). The rise of religious communalism and the quest for political representation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries led to religious reforms, the result of which was the emergence of a narrower and more normative conception of Sikh identity (Oberoi 1994). The Sikh *panth* thus emerged in the twentieth century as a religious community bound together by a common set of beliefs, practices, and well-defined material representations (texts, objects, and places), rather than by the complex network of multigenerational social ties that had loosely defined it historically (Murphy 2012b: 154). By increasingly “privileging the religious over the social as a means of interpretation” (Purewal 2011: 370), the *rabābīs* came to be marginalised as a Muslim ‘other’.

It has been shown how Sikh-ism has emerged as a world religion within the Western secularist paradigm, fundamental to which are the uncertain underlying assumptions of a secular-religious binary and the idea of religion as a cultural universal (Mandair 2009; Dressler and Mandair 2011). Within the Western academic pursuit of comparative religious study, religion has been objectified and the possibility of alternative interpretation subverted by a paradigm that revolves around innately foreign theological and epistemological axes, rooted in Christianity and Western civilisation. Whilst precolonial and early colonial Punjabi society is often described in such terms, the idea of ‘syncretism’ has also been critiqued for its rootedness in the same secularist paradigm – it assumes distinct and normative religious categories which coalesce to form ‘syncretic’ amalgamations. Exiting from these traps, useful ideas of “shared piety” and multivalent values within a shared “moral economy” (Mir 2012: 246; Malhotra 2012b) might help us better understand the complex ‘religiosity’ of the *rabābīs* prior to Partition.

Many *rabābīs* I spoke with were not shy and often proud in proclaiming that they remain “believers in the Guru” (“*gurū dē mannanvālē*”).⁸⁴ On occasions, I even encountered playful rhetoric among elders, where one would proudly profess to be a Muslim whilst jokingly pointing at another who he considered to be a Sikh at heart. I was thus struck at how some *rabābīs* clearly retained a meaningful connection with their Sikh past and, to an extent, with Sikh identity. Another idea encountered, both in Aslam’s ethnography of the *rabābīs* (1999: 50) and indeed

⁸⁴ Interview with Sayeeda Bibi on 27 September 2019.

my own fieldwork in Pakistan, suggests that the *rabābīs* were previously Sikh and that they became Muslim or at least adopted a more normative Muslim identity at the time of Partition.⁸⁵ If anything, the various interpretations of the *rabābīs*' religiosity simply reflect the complex and intertwined trajectories of migration, religious reform and secularisation in the twentieth century.

Testifying to the multi-religious identity of the *rabābīs*, various colonial accounts refer to the *rabābīs* in conflicting terms. Based on some of the earliest ethnographic census data collected by the British (1883,1892), Denzil Ibbetson describes the *rabābīs* as “Sikhs” (Rose 1911a: 111–12), a designation that is hard to reconcile in postcolonial context. In his study of the various hereditary musician groups of Pakistani Punjab, Lybarger (2011: 100), for example, characterises Ibbetson's labelling of the *rabābīs* as Sikhs as “strange”. As Oberoi (1992: 366–67) notes:

Religious boundaries in nineteenth-century Punjab were highly flexible and the categories “Sikh”, “Muslim”, and “Hindu” semiotically did not have the same implications as they do today. Second, the census officers were epistemologically not equipped to handle beliefs and practices that did not mesh with the three great traditions of the Punjab.

Ibbetson, in particular, has been highlighted as one of the more “sophisticated theorists of caste” during the colonial period, with considerable nuance displayed in his observations of Punjabi society (Bayly 1999: 139), suggesting that we ought not to be dismissive of his interpretation. Purewal (2011: 370–71) cites a quote of another British observer, Candler, from 1910:

All through the day the worshippers flock to the Granth...the musicians are constantly in attendance, singing hymns to the rebeck and the lute. These are the Rababis, the descendants of the Muhammadan fakir, Mardana Mirasi of Merawat, who loved Nanak, and set his hymns to music nearly five hundred years ago. As Mardana sat by Nanak's side and ministered to

⁸⁵ Interview with Ustad Parvez Paras on 7 October 2019, Akram Farooqi on 2 October 2019, and Muslim Shaggan on 14 September 2019.

him, yet kept his own faith, so his family have made music for the Gurus or for their deputy, the Book, these five hundred years, and served the Khalsa and held to Islam through generations, when to be a Sikh meant to slay "a Toork" at sight or be slain by him. What were these Muhammadans doing in the shrine? I asked. When I was told they were the children of Mardana, I understood.

For Candler, therefore, the *rabābīs* were Muslims who had a place within Sikh tradition, as “the children of Mardana”. Max Arthur Macauliffe, who studied the Sikhs perhaps more closely than other British observers, also describes the *rabābīs* as Muslims (1881: 60), as did Robert Needham Cust (1898: 411), the administrator in charge of the Punjab after its annexation by the East India Company. Even the *Dastūr ul-’Amal Srī Darbār Ṣāhib*, produced in 1859 at the behest of the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, in relation to the management of the Darbar Sahib, describes the *rabābīs* as Muslims and the *rāgīs* as Sikhs and Hindus (Kaur 1983: 200). J.D. Cunningham, in his *History of the Sikhs*, first published in 1849, however, states that “many hereditary musicians call themselves *Rubābee Sikhs*, from the *Rubāb*, or particular instrument on which they play; and these affect to regard *Murdāna*, the companion of *Nānuk*, as their founder” (Cunningham 2012: 401). What these contradicting accounts intimate is that, in precolonial and colonial Punjab, religiosity could not be easily carved into discrete and exclusive categories; the *rabābīs* were thus, to varying and perhaps non-uniform extents, both Muslim *and* Sikh.

Murphy (2012a: 95) has highlighted how religion is “configured within embedded social practices and operations of power (state and non-state driven) that defy singular and universal characterization”. Within the power structure of the *jajmānī* system, therefore, and like the *langā* and *māngañiyār* musicians of Rajasthan who adopted practices of their Hindu Rajput patrons despite being Muslim (Neuman and others 2006), we might see the *rabābīs* as Muslims who adopted Sikh practices – growing of hair, tying of turban etc. – to varying degrees. However, whilst they certainly shared aspects of their lifestyle with the Sikhs among whom they lived, Ibbetson (Rose 1911a: 111–12) also noted that they “believe” in Guru Nanak, just as many *rabābīs* continue to do today. The

fact that the *rabābīs* freely combined Sikh practices and beliefs with the practices of Muslims – they buried their dead, for example (Rose 1911a: 111–12) – has led to them being described as *sahajdhārī* Sikhs (easy-adopting Sikhs) in relation to *amritdhārī* Sikhs (ritually initiated Sikhs).⁸⁶ Epitomising the multireligious identity of *rabābīs*, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand recalled how the death of his father Bhai Sundar was marked by the uninterrupted recitation of the GGS (*akhaṇḍ pāth*) in the gurdwara and the recitation of the Quran in the mosque (*Interview with Ghulam Muhammad Chand 2004*).

I suggest that the *rabābīs*' belief in and reverence toward the Gurus – a form of “shared piety” – comprised the *rabābīs*' most significant intersection with the Sikh community: it qualified them as ‘Sikhs’ in the old sense of the word (as ‘disciples’ of the Guru). In this sense, we might go so far as to argue that some *rabābīs* remain Sikh to this day. Indeed, the plurality of the Sikh *panth*, enduring up until the late nineteenth century (Oberoi 1994: 381), represented the nonpartisan attraction of Guru Nanak as a figure of spiritual or religious authority, as a guru to the Hindus and *pīr* of the Muslims.⁸⁷ Within a paradigm of shared piety, whilst perhaps not precisely equivalent, the *gurū* and *pīr* were commensurate ideas of the spiritual preceptor figure. Within the Sufi-Islamic idiom, the *rabābīs* were entitled to be Muslims whilst also being *murīds* (disciples) of Nanak the *pīr*. Crucially, therefore, the relationship between the Sikhs and *rabābīs* cannot be merely characterised from the perspective of patron and server; it is also a relationship between spiritual co-disciples. Representing the religious brotherhood to which they belonged, Sikhs and *rabābīs* alike were afforded the pious and familial honorific *bhāī*.

There are numerous accounts attesting to the *rabābīs*' piety toward the Guru. The *rabābī* Bhai Kalu (d.1947), for example, is remembered for waking every morning at around 2am and reciting the Sukhmani Sahib prayer of Guru Arjan before performing the *Āsā dī vār* at Anandpur Sahib gurdwara. Only after this pious routine would he break his silence and converse with others. In a cruel twist

⁸⁶ See Harbans Lal's article (1999) for more on the notion of *sahajdhārī* Sikhs, among whom he includes several of the eminent Amritsar *rabābīs* of the early twentieth century, namely Bhai Chand and Bhai Lal.

⁸⁷ Guru Nanak has been described in the following terms: ‘*Bābā Nānak śāh faqīr, Hindū kā gurū Musalmān kā pīr*’.

of fate, whilst migrating from east Punjab toward Pakistan, he was killed on route by a group of Muslims on account of his perceived Sikh-ness.⁸⁸

Tufail Farooqi (1916-1988), a renowned film music composer of Pakistan who hailed from the *Śikārpurīē khāndān* of *rabābīs*, in an interview, recalls how his paternal grandfather, Bhai Sain Ditta, used to wake up and take the name of the Gurus first of all, exclaiming “*Hē Gurū Angad Dēv! Hē Gurū Nānak!*” (Saqib 2013: 35). Arriving in Pakistan, Farooqi recalls having to explain to his grandfather the “*Musalmānī tarīqā*” (“the Muslim way”). Along similar lines, in his last interview, with Haroon Khalid (2018), Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand explained that “While we knew the [Guru] Granth by heart, we knew nothing about being Muslim, besides the *kalma*”.⁸⁹ Disciples of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand recounted to me that in his old age and ill health he would often recite the *śabad* of Guru Arjan: “*tātī vāu na lagaī pārabrahma saraṇāī*” (‘Guru Granth Sahib’ [n.d.]: 889), that is, “The hot wind does not touch one under the sanctuary of the Supreme Creator”.⁹⁰

In addition to their piety toward the Gurus, we encounter reference to the *rabābīs*’ piety toward Sufi saints too. Bhai Mehboob Ali aka Booba (discussed in Chapter Two) was a *murīd* of Khwaja Ghulam Farid (1845–1901) of Kot Mithan, the famous Sufi saint of the Chishti-Nizami order, whom he met during his period of employment at the Bahawalpur court, in the late nineteenth century. From this time onwards, he took the appellation ‘Faridi’ and is remembered by his family descendants today as Miyan Mehboob Ali ‘Faridi’.⁹¹ By way of pilgrimage, he used to attend the ‘*urs* (death anniversary) of Khwaja Ghulam Farid in Kot Mithan every year (Kanwal 2010: 119). In addition to Sufi religiosity, Shia piety also manifests strongly among the *rabābīs* today. Having visited them during the month of Muharram, I witnessed first-hand how important this occasion is to their community, with a daily schedule of Shia religious activities on display at the Katri Bawa during this time.

⁸⁸ Interview with Bhai Baldeep Singh on 5 February 2018.

⁸⁹ The *kalma* is an Islamic oath recited by Muslims as a profession of one’s faith.

⁹⁰ Interview with Saleema and Zainub Jawwad on 9 September 2019.

⁹¹ Interview with Aqeel Tahir on 26 August 2019.

It has been suggested that the values of shared piety emerge from a Sufi-Sikh-*bhakti* cultural exchange in which certain ideas and practices find aspects of commonality, whilst perhaps differing in their religious idiom (Malhotra 2012b). Among such shared pious practice, saint veneration – linked to notions of *gurū* and *pīr* – has been identified to be particularly prominent within the Sikh, Sufi and Hindu traditions of Punjab (Mir 2012: 253). Particular religious ideas such as that of martyrdom (*śahīdī/śahādat*), are also noted as being prominent in both Shia and Sikh tradition (Fenech 2000). Whilst having not been explored to great depth in the literature, devotional and sacred music practice also features strongly across the various religious traditions of Punjab and indeed South Asia, comprising an affective and participatory mode through which shared piety could be expressed and experienced.

The Punjabi language has also been identified as an important medium in this regard, its vocabulary and aesthetics facilitating the expression of shared piety in the region (Mir 2012; Murphy 2019). As a subset of language, names in particular stand out in relation to the case of the *rabābīs*. In the pre-Partition period, many *rabābīs* had Muslim names but were known among the Sikhs by their distinct nicknames (*urf nām*). Iter Ali, therefore, was known as Bhai Atra, Ata Muhammad as Bhai Atu, Chiragh Din as Bhai Chand, Tabe Hussain as Bhai Taba, Nasir Din as Bhai Nasira, Saifuddin as Bhai Sain, Muhammad Bakhsh as Bhai Mahanda, Murad Ali as Bhai Santu, Mehboob Ali as Bhai Booba, Turab Ali as Bhai Roorā etc. Representing the twofold nature of their religiosity, these naming conventions allowed the *rabābīs* to be at once Muslim and Sikh. Although seemingly rarer, there are even instances in which *rabābīs* have been known to take the surname ‘Singh’, perhaps indicative of such individuals’ having embraced practices that we now associate with normative Khalsa Sikh identity.⁹²

Having highlighted, in Chapter Four, how the literary discursive attack on the *rabābīs* in the early twentieth century revolved around the suggestion of their tendency toward *nindīā* (slander), *pāp* (sin), and *hanḱār* (arrogance), the memory of Sikh *rāgīs* also reveals an oral history in which their piety toward the Gurus

⁹² In an interview on 14 September 2019, the *rabābī* Muslim Shaggan spoke of how his great-great-great-grandfather was known as Bhai Joon Singh.

came to be doubted. Khalsa (2014, 70) records Bhai Gurcharan Singh (1915-2018), a young *rāgī* in the pre-Partition era, as recalling that “Bhai Chand..., when asked if he had faith in Gurbani, responded that his faith in Gurbani was as much as the Sikhs have in the Quran”. Such a statement is certainly difficult to reconcile with the reported Sikh affection toward Bhai Chand noted earlier in the chapter. Principal Dyal Singh (1934-2012), another Sikh *rāgī* born in the pre-Partition era, also passed similar comment: “Bhai Lal, the cream of the crop of the *rababis* of his day, after singing *Gurbani*, would quietly rinse his mouth to cleanse it, having sung the unclean verses of the infidels” (Kalra 2014: 71). The veracity of such claims, however, is not as important as the fact that they indicate “the sealing and closing of religious boundaries throughout the twentieth century” (Kalra 2014: 71) – the breakdown of this shared piety.

My own interaction with the *rabābīs* of Pakistan today suggests to me that the piety of the *rabābīs* did not cease to exist following their alienation from the Sikhs. As expressed by an elderly resident of Amritsar, who lived alongside the *rabābīs* of Chowk Passian in his pre-Partition youth, the breakdown of the relationship between religious communities in the region resulted from the rise of communal politics.⁹³ We might imagine that were it not for the fear of violence and the very real threat to their survival, the *rabābīs* would not have abandoned their place within Sikh tradition so readily. The *rabābīs* of today are very clear on this point: they left Amritsar for Lahore out of necessity not want. Having abandoned his three houses and prestigious place at the Darbar Sahib, Bhai Chand was reduced to a beggar in Lahore (Khalid 2018), told by the then Pakistan government that he ought to go and sweep a mosque to prove he was a Muslim, if he wanted to receive a pension in Pakistan (Kanwal 2010: 252). Almost as if his life and soul remained behind in Amritsar, Bhai Chand died just two years after Partition, aged forty-four.

Another important aspect of *rabābī* piety relates to its moral dimensions. The *rabābīs* I interacted with frequently describe themselves as a *nēk* (pious) and *śarīf* (noble) community, both qualities which we might conceive of as part of the shared “moral economy” of Punjabi society (Malhotra 2012b). As noted in

⁹³ Interview with Pt Tilak Raj (b.1922) on 9 October 2018.

Chapter Four, the nature of their specialisation in *śabad kīrtan*, a religious music tradition, came to endow the *rabābīs* with a good moral reputation in relation to other groups of *mīrāsīs*, who are often stigmatised for their association with female performers and the courtesan tradition. *Pardā* practices, concerning the unveiled appearance of women in public, in particular, did play and continue to play a role in the moral economy of Punjab, perhaps more so in Pakistani Punjab today given the pronounced influence of Islamic veiling practices.⁹⁴ The fact that female performers came to be mostly classified as prostitutes in the colonial ethnographies (Morcom 2013: 16) likely further exacerbated the stigma surrounding unveiled women in the public domain. The emergence of both English and Punjabi literature in the late nineteenth century, stigmatising the *mīrāsīs*, demonstrates the extent to which various sections of Punjabi society coalesced in their discursive attack on the community.⁹⁵

In this context, the *śarīf* character of the *rabābīs* emerged as a matter of great significance to the community, distinguishing them from the *mīrāsīs* and thus ensuring a respectable place within the shifting hierarchies that characterised colonial society. As noted by Lybarger (2011: 120), the *rabābīs* today vehemently cling to the memory that they have never accompanied or associated with female performers in order to assert their superior moral character and sociomusical standing in modern Pakistan. Despite the fact that the courtesan tradition no longer exists as it did historically, the memory of having never associated with courtesans continues to be a crucial aspect of modern *rabābī* identity.⁹⁶ Although their ties to *śabad kīrtan* performance have been greatly reduced by the events of the twentieth century, the memory of their historical association with it continues to be of great significance to the *rabābīs*, a testimony to their *nēk* and *śarīf* character.

Katz's work (2017: 77) on the Lucknow *gharānā* reveals how the social status of musicians was constructed around two hierarchical axes, one musical and one

⁹⁴ Brown (2005) discusses notions of nobility and respectability, in relation to public performance of women, in her ethnographic work with the female performing communities of Lahore's red light district, Heera Mandi.

⁹⁵ Kapuria (2018: 131) highlights the *Mīrāsīnāmā*, a Punjabi *qissā*, published in 1891, in which the *mīrāsīs* are portrayed in a disdainful light.

⁹⁶ See Morcom's (2013) work regarding the transformation of the courtesan tradition in postcolonial context.

socioreligious. The Lucknow *gharānā* musicians assert their socioreligious superiority through their Afghani (*paṭhān*) status as noble (*aśrāf*) Muslims in relation to the *mīrāsīs*, who were seen as Hindu converts (Katz 2017: 73–74). In the elite *maḥfil* culture of the Mughal courts, musical rank arose from one’s lineage and the instrument or genres with which one associated, *sāraṅgī* and *tablā* accompanists typically being considered low in musical rank and vocalists or soloists of the *bīn*- and *rabāb*-linked instruments being highest in rank (Neuman 1990: 93–102). While other Punjabi musicians have grouped the *rabābīs* with other classes of *mīrāsī* accompanists, the *rabābīs* have remained adamant of their separation from the courtesan tradition and the *sāraṅgī*, an instrument which has struggled to free itself from the stigma associated with the context in which it was historically played (Qureshi 2000).⁹⁷

Reflecting the distinct socioreligious landscape of precolonial Punjab, the *rabābīs*’ status was historically defined by their respected place within Sikh tradition. The rejection of titles that were otherwise highly coveted in the Hindustani *maḥfil* context illustrates their unique status in this regard. In a TV interview, for example, Ustad Ghulam Hassan Shaggan corrects the interviewer for making the mistake of referring to his father as Ustad Lal Muhammad instead of Bhai Lal Muhammad (*Ustad Ghulam Hasan Shaggan: a conversation* [n.d.]), the honorific ‘*bhāī*’ being a symbol of the *rabābīs*’ piety and honour. Similarly, at the All-India Music Conference, the *rabābī* Bhai Mehboob Ali is said to have rejected his certificate due to the fact that it addressed him as ‘*khān sāhib*’ instead of ‘*bhāī*’ (Kanwal 2010: 68).

Colonial and postcolonial shifts in the socioreligious landscape of India have greatly impacted certain musicians such as those of the Lucknow *gharānā*, whose status was rooted in erstwhile Mughal society. The socioreligious shifts of the Punjab, in the twentieth century, have been even more pronounced, impacting the *rabābīs* to an even greater extent. Whilst most *rabābīs* I met were openly proud of their *rabābī* identity, some have attempted to obfuscate their past and, in so much as it relates to the present, thus their *rabābī* identity also. Moving out of the

⁹⁷ Ustad Hafiz Khan of the Talwandi *gharānā* suggests that *naqālīs*, *bhāṅds*, *rabābīs* and *sapardās* only started to garner a reputation as *gavaiyās* (soloist singers) during the colonial period (Basra 1996: 112).

Katri Bawa neighbourhood was cited as one means by which certain members of their community have attempted to limit their *rabābī* association, at least publicly.⁹⁸ With a general lack of understanding surrounding the distinct histories of the *rabābīs* and other groups of *mīrāsīs* in Pakistan (Lybarger 2011: 97), there is the tendency to conflate them all as one and the same. I happened to witness the stigmatisation of the *rabābīs* first-hand in the interaction between a young *rabābī* and his ‘friends’, who frequently joked about his (dark) complexion, him being the son of an illegitimate relationship, or the poor condition of his clothes. These are precisely the perceived traits – low social status, sexual promiscuity of women, and a tendency for begging – for which the *mīrāsīs* were attacked in the nineteenth century (Kapuria 2018: 136), demonstrating how demeaning discursive tropes continue to be invoked against hereditary performer groups in Punjabi society today, irrespective of the distinct histories of subgroups among them.

Another challenge presented by the changed social circumstances of the *rabābīs* relates to their navigation of a more Islamised moral economy in which certain orthodox interpretations regard music as *ḥarām* (forbidden). The notorious regime of General Zia-ul-Haq (1978-88), in particular, is implicated in the significant downfall of Hindustani music traditions in Pakistan, especially genres that could not be linked to Islamic influences (Saeed 2008). For the *rabābīs*, this might have posed a significant threat given that they were specialists in ‘Sikh music’. Within an environment of such radical discursive shifts, the piety which the *rabābīs* served the Sikhs could quite easily have become a cause for their stigmatisation. On the contrary, however, we find the persistence of piety, both among the *rabābīs* and within the Punjabi moral economy, has, for the most part, ensured the *rabābīs* a respectable place in Pakistani society. Performing piety through religious genres such as *qavvālī*, *nāt*, *sōz*, *marṣiyā* etc. and working in

⁹⁸ In a telephone conversation with Naqi Abbas, great grandson of the *rabābī* Bhai Desa, on 15 May 2021, he mentioned how his elders moved out from the overtly *rabābī* Katri Bawa neighbourhood to a more modern and inconspicuous part of Lahore in order to limit this association.

honourable sections of the music industry – in film, TV and radio – the *rabābīs* of Pakistan have retained a piousness and deep-rooted sense of religiosity.⁹⁹

Through a religion-centric lens, there arises the inevitable tendency toward a discourse of difference and division, whereby the *rabābīs* end up in some kind of postcolonial no man's land, estranged and separated from the Sikhs and alienated within modern Pakistan on account of their Sikh past. From a perspective of piety, however, the *rabābīs* are permitted an enduring connection to the Sikh tradition, albeit often behind closed doors and with little public outlet, as well as an honourable place in modern Pakistani society as devout Muslims. Their piety has served as a socioreligious constant, irrespective of their positioning within the Sikh-Muslim spectrum. It is a moral pillar upon which they continue to stand, proving formative of their identity as a distinct community of hereditary performers. Whereas Soneji (2012: 163) has noted that the act of recalling the past can, in cases such as the *dēvadāsīs*, magnify the liminal identity of hereditary performer communities, in the case of the *rabābīs*, we see how memory can be invoked in such a way as to reiterate their honourable and pious place in society.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Echoing the partition of a land and its people, in this chapter I have highlighted how the terrain of memory in which the Sikh past lies is also partitioned, the recollections of the *rabābīs* often comprising the amnesias of the Sikhs. Despite over seventy years since Partition, I have shown how places – territorial, institutional, ancestral, and textual – comprise important memorial representations in the collective memory of the *rabābīs*, serving not only as maps of the past but also as processes that are formative of individual and communal identity in the present. Despite living in Lahore and retaining limited interaction with the Sikh community at large, collective memory ensures they continue to

⁹⁹ The *rabābīs* dominated the Pakistani film industry during its heyday in the late 1950s and 1960s (Malik 2006: 25). Some eminent *rabābī* music composers and directors were: Master Ghulam Haider (1908-1953), Tufail Farooqi (1916-1988), Amjad Bobby (1942-2005), Muhammad Afzal and Wazir Ali (together known as Wazir-Afzal), Rashid Attre (1919-1967), Wajahat Attre (d.2017), and Safdar Hussain (d.1989). They have also produced eminent singers of Sufi devotional music such as Hamid Ali Bela (d.2001), Sain Akhtar Hussain, and Sain Khawar Hussain. In the realm of Hindustani music, the *rabābī* vocalist Ustad Ghulam Hassan Shaggan (1928-2015) was arguably the most celebrated Hindustani vocalist of his generation in Pakistan, and the *rabābī* Ustad Tari Khan (b.1953) is not just Pakistan's but one of South Asia's most internationally renowned *tablā* players of his generation.

identify as *rabābīs* of Amritsar. Within the de-territorialised terrain of memory, the localities so intimately linked to early Sikh tradition and once occupied by their *rabābī* ancestors – the Darbar Sahib, Khadur Sahib, Goindwal etc.– still symbolically belong to them. Through the memory of the *rabābīs*, I have shown how we garner an alternative lens into the Sikh past, unhindered by the Sikh reformist discourse of the twentieth century and revealing of aspects that are neglected in popular Sikh histories.

Exploring the ritual role of the *rabābīs* historically, I have shown how their auspiciousness was embodied in person and sound, both being requisite at the rites of passage of their Sikh patrons. Foregrounding the exegetical aspect of *śabad kīrtan* performance, I have highlighted the *rabābīs*' role as musician-exegetes and sought to reorient our understanding of the historical *śabad kīrtan* tradition in such a way that prioritises its hermeneutical as well as musical-technical aspects. Doing so is crucial to understanding *śabad kīrtan* in its historical context, whereby its performance served as an affective means for knowledge transmission, and, in the case of the *rabābīs*, the transmission of the Gurus' blessings, as well as a sonic expression of piety and devotion for performer and listener alike. With literacy being less widespread in Indian society prior to the twentieth century, *śabad kīrtan* performance would have been one of the primary modalities through which people received the profound message of the Gurus and *bhagats* in its essential musical form as *śabad-gurū*.

Given the extent to which the *rabābī* tradition was embodied by the *rabābīs* themselves, the significant extent to which they were so quickly forgotten once they were marginalised and separated from the Sikhs is perhaps unsurprising. As I have shown, one of the most material and thus enduring references to the history of the *rabābīs* and their place in Sikh tradition is that which is found in Sikh texts and in the GGS. Contrary to their exclusion from Sikh institutions, their marginalisation within Sikh reformist discourse, and their separation resulting from Partition, the *rabābīs*' place within Sikh tradition, historically, continues to be represented through the immutable textual references to their ancestors. Though static in textual form, these narratives are brought to life in a dynamic and mutable form when narrated orally, serving as textual anchors to multigenerational memories which, as we have seen, are adapted and selectively

invoked to suit the divergent discourses and needs of the Sikhs and *rabābīs* respectively.

Lastly, building upon the idea of shared piety and seeking to transcend the exclusive and normative religious categories that crystallised during the late colonial period, I have highlighted a continuity in the *rabābī* tradition, despite Partition and even with their community situated in Pakistan today. Several *rabābī* families in fact continue to perform *śabad kīrtan* today, though they receive few opportunities and struggle to make a livelihood from doing so.¹⁰⁰ Despite the severing of multigenerational socioreligious ties at the hands of a violent form of identity politics in the twentieth century, many *rabābīs* still feel a connection with the Sikh community and the Gurus, a connection kept alive through the powerful process of memory.

Recalling the *kabitt* from early on in this chapter, in which hereditary performer communities such as the *rabābīs* saw themselves as “masters of memory” (“*sūramē yādōm kē*”), the ability to remember has clearly been crucial to such communities historically, particularly with respect to their customary role in society. The colonial-to-postcolonial transition of the twentieth century, however, transformed society and its customs such that the *rabābīs* today no longer inherit the social role of their ancestors. Nevertheless, as I have shown, memory continues to be crucial to their identity at both the individual and communal level. Despite having been forgotten to a large extent, the *rabābīs* themselves continue to remember, an act which in itself continues to constitute who they are.

Despite the obstacles to interaction in the postcolonial context, what the UK tour of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand in 2011 demonstrated is that a sentiment of affection toward the *rabābīs* also endures among the Sikhs. Like estranged siblings reunited after decades apart, a Sikh approached the venerable *rabābī* after one of his performances and said, “Where have you been all this time? We feel like that which we lost has been returned to us – that which was separated from us

¹⁰⁰ Among the notable *rabābīs* that continue to perform *śabad kīrtan* today are the families of Bhai Moeen (son of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand), Bhai Tahir Iqbal (grandson of Bhai Chiragh), Bhai Naeem Tahir Lal (son of Bhai Ashiq Ali Lal), and Bhai Inam Ali (disciple of Bhai Ghulam Muhammad Chand).

has now come back”.¹⁰¹ It is through the process of remembering the *rabābīs* of Amritsar that territorial and religious boundaries of the postcolonial present are transcended. In doing so, this chapter offers a glimmer of hope for the future – a reminder that that which is simply forgotten is not necessarily lost.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Bhai Moeen on 12 September 2019.

6 CONCLUSION

In the twentieth century, transformative identity politics, Partition, and postcolonial cultural trajectories in both India and Pakistan have cumulatively obfuscated the rich and entangled history of Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan* in Punjab. By excavating this history, this thesis speaks to recent developments in the critical study of Hindustani music as well as contributing to Sikh and Punjabi historiography more broadly. As I have demonstrated, the musical developments and patterns of patronage within the Sikh courtly and religious spheres of colonial Punjab highlight the intimate link between performative traditions and group identity politics, both Punjabi and Sikh. Amid a climate of sociopolitical transformation, music comprised an important domain for the continual negotiation and expression of social hierarchies, cultural cohesion and difference.

Foregrounding the Sikh courtly and religious spheres, I have highlighted what was a formidable aspect of Punjab's cultural landscape from the late eighteenth century onwards. While the 1857 rebellion can be seen as a point of rupture for Hindustani music culture and patronage in the Mughal context, the restructuring of social hierarchies among the native elite that ensued proved favourable for the Sikh princes of Punjab, who emerged as beneficiaries of these shifts through their loyalty to the British. In particular, three defining aspects of their circumstances coalesced to dispose the Sikh princes as prominent yet distinct patrons of music in relation to their Mughal, Rajput and Nawabi counterparts: their favourable socioeconomic standing as firm allies of the British government, their pronounced need to legitimise their ruling status through cultural patronage (stemming from the lack of antiquity of their kingdoms), and their innate concern for music, rooted in the deeply embedded place of music within Sikh religious tradition.

Despite its fluid boundaries, the Sikh religious sphere and its diverse network of institutions (*gurdwaras*, *ḍērās*, *dharamsāls*, *darbārs*, *akhārās* etc.), orders of religious authority (*udāsīs*, *Bēdīs*, *Sōḍhīs*, *nirmalās* etc.), and other participating communities, emerges from my findings as a conceptually useful aspect of Punjabi society, one that intersected with and yet was distinct from the Sikh

courtly sphere. Under the extensive patronage of the Sikh princes, aristocracy and landed elite, the *mahants*, gurus and religious intellectuals of the Sikh religious sphere comprised an important patron class in their own right, fostering spaces for music performance and the circulation of musicological literature. Although an elite minority among the eminent Sikh religious figures were almost princely in character and status, the majority played host to more humble and accessible settings in which Hindustani music and *śabad kīrtan* performance was made accessible to the general public. Contrary to the dominant histories of Hindustani music, focussed largely on the elite courtly setting, my study foregrounds an alternative history in which religious settings, at least in Punjab, served as a publicly accessible sphere for Hindustani music and musicians, parallel to and indeed predating the emergence of music societies, concert halls, and recording and broadcasting media in the colonial period.

Offering a regional perspective on the crystallisation of *gharānā* in the post-1857 era, I have shown how geopolitics also played a role in addition to the ‘politics of pedigree’ typically associated with musicians and princely patrons. The centrality of the Punjab-Hind politics in the discourse of Patiala and Punjab’s musicians can thus be seen as an echo of the separatist actions of the Punjabi princes during the 1857-58 rebellion – a rejection of the idea of Hindustani collectivism – and as an assertion of independent regional identity despite the political unification of Punjab and Hindustan under colonial rule. The emergence of a Punjabi vocal style in discourse with the Punjab-Hind politics thus foregrounds the significant role of the events of the mid-nineteenth century with respect to the formation of modern notions of Punjābiyat, an idea that certainly warrants further scholarly attention.

As I have highlighted, the history of the Patiala *gharānā* also offers an alternative perspective on Punjābiyat, oriented not in terms of language, territory or the postcolonial and often ‘folk’-centric cultural discourse of the region, but in terms of colonial-era geopolitics and regionalist discourse within the shared domain of Hindustani music. Moreover, the ornate aspect of the Punjabi vocal style, linked both to embodied forms of femininity (courtesans and the *sāraṅgī*) as well as local vocal genres such as *ṭappā* and *kāḥṭī*, is qualitatively incongruous with the rustic, masculine, and patriarchal character stereotypically associated with

Punjabi society and culture in postcolonial context. The assertive discourse of the Patiala *gharānā*'s musicians, on the other hand, whilst linked to a pre-existing history of musical-military metaphor and sharing an affinity with Sikh martial discourse in the region, came to be expressed through a new idiom of Western military rank and titles, influenced by the hierarchies and power structures of colonial society. As I have shown, this discourse can be interpreted as a modern strategy for the subversion of traditional sociomusical hierarchies, especially given the association of the *gharānā*'s founders with the *sārangī* and the fact that they had been trained by musicians of other Hindustani *gharānās*.

The subversion of sociomusical hierarchies, historically associated with the Mughal *maḥfil*, among musicians of the Sikh courts can also be seen as a reflection of the subversion of hierarchies that was inherent to the Sikh princes' own transition from peasant-warriors to rulers; it reflected upon their perceived need to legitimise their ruling status, something they successfully achieved through patronage of material symbols of the elite *maḥfil* culture of the Mughals – the *bīn* and *bīnkār*, in particular. The fact that *sārangī* players were admitted as eminent vocalists and *bīnkārs* in the court of Patiala, and that *ṭhumrī* styles and repertoire consequently entered the *khayāl* singing and *bīn* playing of these musicians, comprised a transgression of traditional sociomusical norms by mixing elements on opposite ends of the gender-honour spectrum. In each case, the 'dishonourable' and 'feminine' stylistic elements were reembodyed within 'honourable' and 'masculine' material vessels – male musicians and the *bīn* – thus offering *ṭhumrī* styles and repertoire a respectable place for continued circulation at a time when female bodies and instruments like the *sārangī* were increasingly stigmatised.

Not wanting to fall into the trap of Punjabi exceptionalism, it would perhaps nevertheless be remiss not to consider how the transformation of Sikh peasant-warriors to rulers and *sārangī* players to *bīnkārs* reflects conspicuously upon what is often perceived as the distinct character of social hierarchies within Punjab. Whether attributed to the influence of anti-hierarchical tendencies within Sikh and Muslim religious tradition, or the geographic positioning of Punjab as a frontier region, a corridor from the subcontinent to Central Asia, hierarchies within Punjabi society unquestionably took on a distinct character. With a muted

influence of the *brāhmin*-centric caste system, otherwise entrenched across much of the subcontinent, and a more tribe- and vocation-centric understanding of caste prevailing locally, it could certainly be argued that Punjab’s social structure facilitated greater social mobility among musicians. Speaking to this idea is an old Punjabi proverb: “*Karanī pramāṇ, kyā Hindū kyā Musalmān*” – human action speaks more than social labels.¹

Having noted the adaptations of elite *mahfil* culture and Hindustani music tradition within the courts of Punjab’s Sikh princes, my findings also highlight the degree of continuity represented by the music culture of the Sikh courts and Punjab more broadly. As home to one of the last native empires to flourish – the empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh – and one of the last regions to be annexed to the British territories, the impact of colonialism Punjab was delayed relative to other parts of the subcontinent. As a consequence, the Braj-Bhasha-based Hindustani musicological literature, often originating in other regions and from centuries prior, enjoyed a late blossoming in the Sikh religious sphere of the colonial period. At a time when print media had begun to transform the musicological literature in longer-established parts of the British empire such as Bengal, I have shown how the manuscript-based tradition of musicological literature endured in Punjab, driven to a significant extent by the deep-rooted interest in and concern for *rāg* and *rāgmālā* theory within Sikh tradition and among Sikh religious intellectuals and patrons. As patrons and sometimes practitioners of music, the *mahants*, gurus and intellectuals of the Sikh religious sphere drew upon this literature for its scholarly, instructive, and performative functions, highlighting the multivalent and multimodal character of such musicological texts.

The enduring and widespread pervasiveness of Hindustani music as a shared cultural practice, system of aesthetics, and body of knowledge, often represented in literary form but historically experienced by a much larger section of society through performance, attests to it comprising an important aspect of the sociocultural fabric and cohesion of such an expansive and socially diverse geographic area. Not only was Hindustani music a transregional culture,

¹ This proverb was conveyed to me by Roshan Abbas Khan, a Punjabi vocalist of the Nowshera Nangli and Gwalior *gharānās*, in an interview on 2 April 2019.

celebrated from Afghanistan in the west to Nepal in the north and from Bengal in the east to the Deccan in the south, but even within a region such as Punjab, with its notable socioreligious diversity, Hindustani music comprised a crucial domain in which communities could and did co-participate. As I have argued, Hindustani music thus served as an affective cultural domain that facilitated the negotiation and reconciliation of communal difference. As a minority religious community who had acquired ruling status over their fellow Hindus and Muslims, the significance of such shared cultural practice and its patronage was particularly important to the Sikhs.

Whilst essentially shared, I have also demonstrated how the Hindustani musicological literature took on particularised forms and expressions in Punjab, characterised most notably by the use of the Gurmukhi script and other local scribal practices that reflect a primarily Sikh readership. The singular popularity of the *Buddh Prakāś Darpan*, a work of local origin that included local *rāgs*, not only foregrounds an extensive history of localised musicological scholarship within Punjab but also highlights the often-overlooked link between written theory and music practice.

In response to the identity politics and religious reforms of the early twentieth century and facilitated by the establishment of a new print-based public sphere in the region, I have illustrated how Sikh literary engagement with the subject of music was transformed by the emergent focus on *gurmat saṅgīt* as an idea. Despite outwardly presenting as a break from the musical literature which preceded it, I have demonstrated the extent of continuity in the early-twentieth-century *gurmat saṅgīt* literature, both in terms of musicology, repertoire and even literary style. The inclusion of notation and borrowing of popular tunes, on the other hand, comprised the novel aspect of this literature, reflecting its democratising function with respect to the dissemination of *śabad kīrtan* education among a broad non-specialist Sikh readership.

In relation to the process of Sikh identity reformation, as I have shown, the early *gurmat saṅgīt* project was also equally concerned with the construction of boundaries and the exclusion of non-normative elements, a process that was strengthened by the synthesis of music notation and theory with symbols of

Sikh identity. Whilst the singing of texts beyond the newly defined Sikh canon came to be discouraged, I have highlighted how Sikh *rāgīs* nevertheless continued to compose and sing non-canonical texts, which often contained and propagated reformist ideologies and themes, representing the kind of paradoxical amalgams that can emerge from the tension between tradition and reform.

Whereas discursive attacks on hereditary performer communities during the colonial period have frequently been linked to the influence of Protestant and Victorian conceptions of morality, I have shown how precolonial Punjabi and Sikh values were equally significant to the marginalising discourse employed against the *rabābī* community specifically. Reflecting the complex entanglements of indigenous and Western cultural and epistemological influences during the colonial period, the marginalisation of the *rabābīs* thus exemplifies how colonial reforms were not uniformly characterised by a hegemony of Western ideas and the Western episteme.

Tracing the neglected history of the *rabābīs* during the colonial period through oral and written histories, I have highlighted the neglected ritual and exegetical function that was so integral to their auspicious and revered place within Sikh tradition, thus offering an alternative perspective on the history of *śabad kīrtan* and complicating the simplistic perception of *rabābīs* as mere hereditary musicians. It was through a process of ‘disenchantment’ that these aspects came to be marginalised along with the *rabābīs* themselves; the *rāgīs* who replaced them came to be viewed simply for their function as musicians. However, despite the alienation resulting from the religious reforms of the early twentieth century and over seventy years of separation since Partition, both of which have brought about the almost total demise of the *rabābī* tradition in practical terms, I have shown how the *rabābī* tradition lives on in memory. In this respect, the disembedded terrain of memory and the act of remembering are powerful means by which boundaries and divisions might be transcended and a spirit of inclusivity re-envisioned. After all, it is such inclusivity which is embodied in the GGS itself and in the message contained within, reflected historically in the transmission of the *śabad kīrtan* tradition through diverse and diffuse communities that straddle socioreligious spheres.

Whilst conceptual boundaries can prove useful and at times necessary, for example in limiting the scope of the present study, they can also prove inhibitory to the lateral perspective required for the study of history, especially in colonial-postcolonial contexts and with respect to a region such as the Punjab. My findings reiterate the socially divisive impact of colonial rule, out of which an unprecedented environment emerged in which increasingly divided communities became competitive claimants upon culture and bodies of knowledge. Under the highly centralised government of the British Raj, India was politically unified and ushered into a system of representational politics. Within this new political system, existing bodies of knowledge and branches of culture came to represent forms of symbolic capital that could be co-opted by competing communities to support their respective political claims.

When considering boundaries (or the lack thereof), it is important to remember that Punjab was situated between Sindh, northern Rajasthan, the hill states of Jammu and Kashmir, and the plains leading toward Delhi, all regions which influenced and were influenced by Punjabi culture and society, thus blurring what we conceive to be the region's limits (Kapuria 2018: 281). Similarly, the Sikh religious sphere was admitting of elements that were simultaneously Hindu and Sufi, highlighting the significant intersections between socioreligious spheres. The classes of Punjab's wealthy Hindu businessmen and merchants, the courts of Punjab's Rajput hill states, and the Nawabs of the Punjab plains, as well as the broad Hindu and Muslim religious spheres supported by these wealthy patrons were undoubtedly culturally productive spheres during the same period and yet also find little representation in the literature. A study of the vibrant Sufi music and *qavvālī* tradition, in its Punjabi incarnation, during this period, might prove a particularly fruitful endeavour in its engagement with some of the arguments I have presented. At the boundaries of the present study, therefore, lies an invitation into intersecting social and geographic spheres, each of which warrants further study and the combined results of which promise only to further enhance our historical understanding of music across these regions.

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APPENDIX A – PATIALA *GĦARĀNĀ* (PRE-1947)

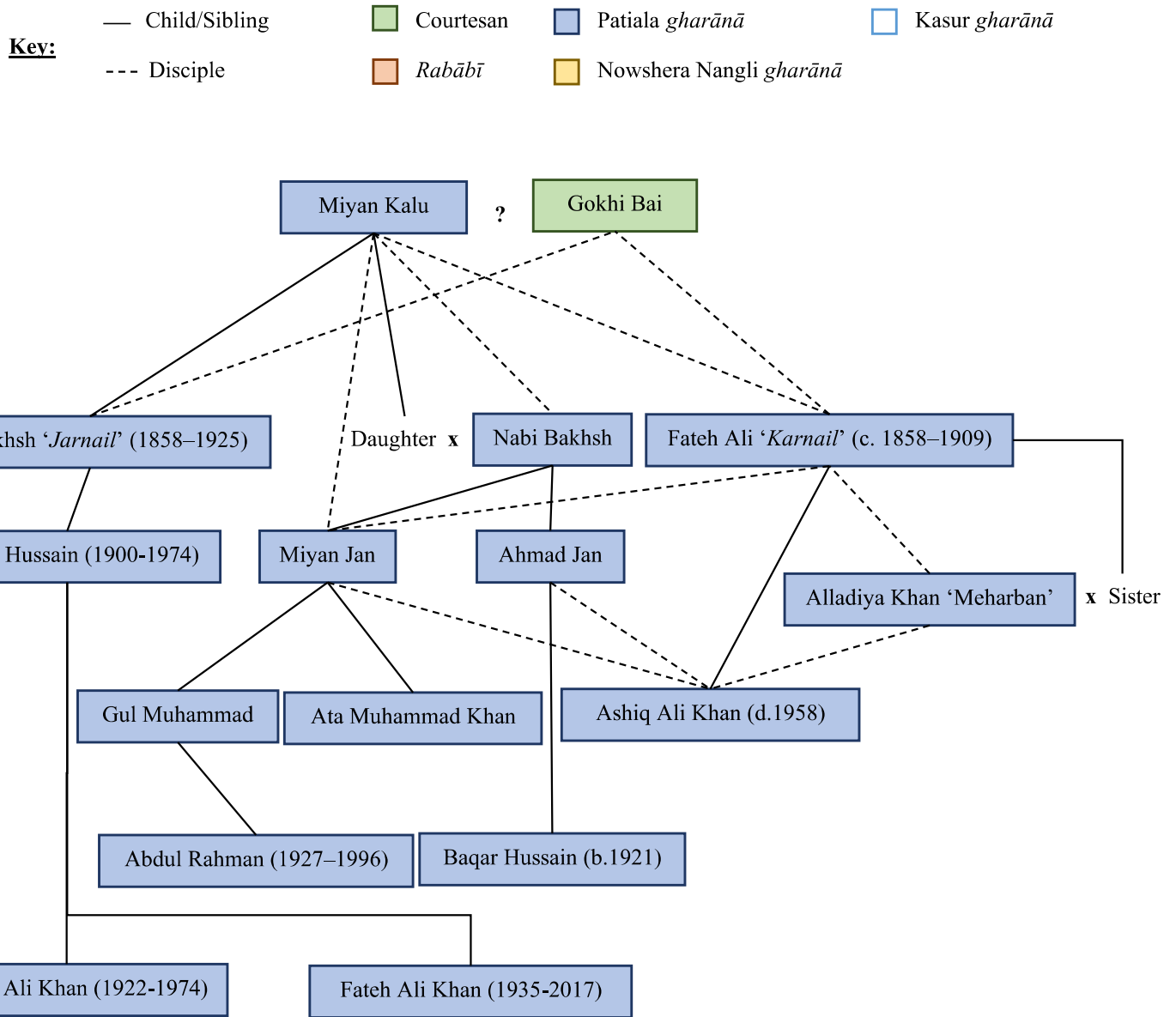


FIGURE 22 PATIALA *GĦARĀNĀ* FAMILY

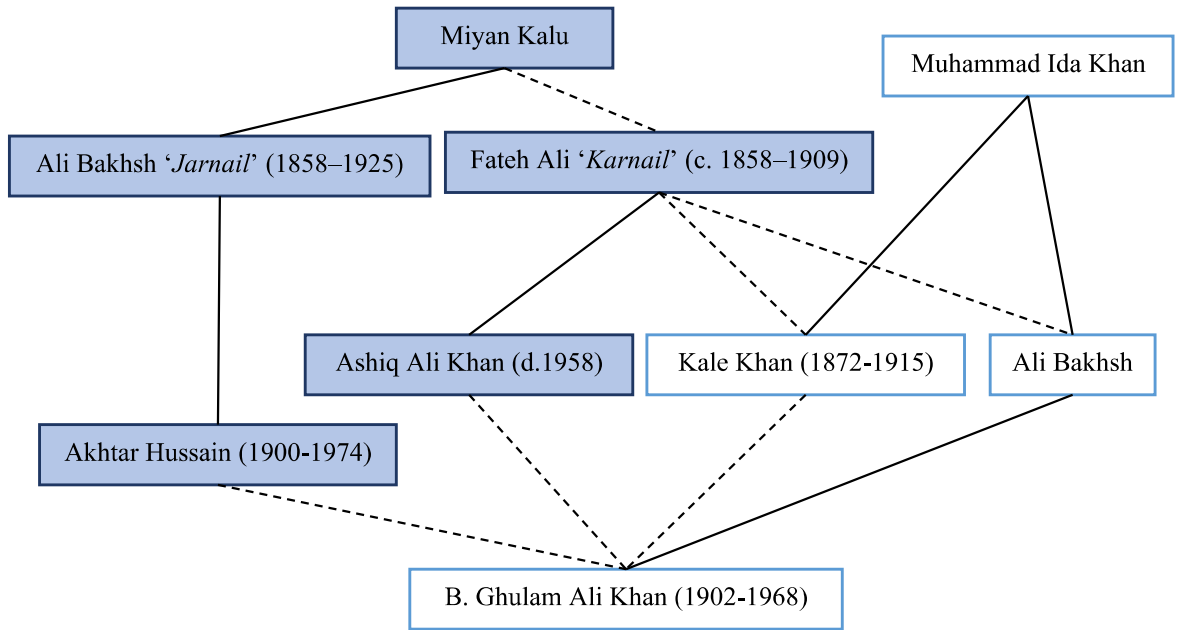


FIGURE 25 KASUR *GHARĀNĀ* DISCIPLES OF PATIALA *GHARĀNĀ*

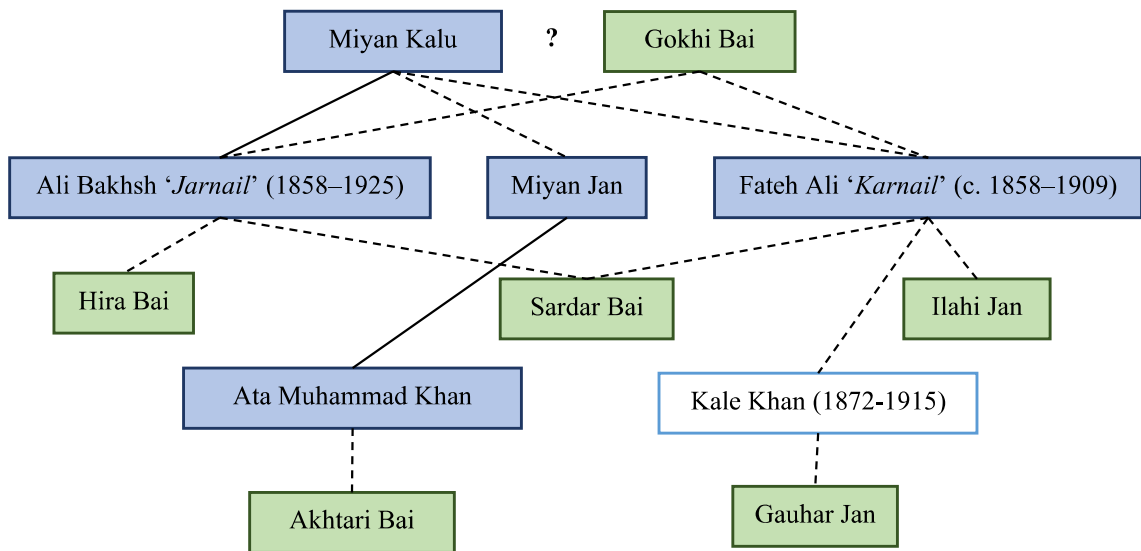


FIGURE 26 COURTESAN DISCIPLES OF PATIALA *GHARĀNĀ*

APPENDIX B – CAUNKĪS OF THE DARBAR SAHIB

The following summary of the *caunḱī* system of the inner sanctum of the Darbar Sahib, from roughly the start of the colonial period until the temple came under the management of the SGPC in 1925, has been compiled from the following sources: *Har Bhagat Prēm Prakāś* of Baba Sham Singh (1914), *Dastūr ul-’Amal Srī Darbār Ṣāhib* (1859), *Tavārikh Srī Amritsar* by Gyani Gyan Singh (1889), Karam Singh’s *Amritsar dī Tavārīkh* (1998), the 1920 memorial presented to the government by the personnel of the shrine at that time (PSAC CS HG 5495/67), *Srī Harimandar Sāhib dā Sunahirī Itihās* by Gyani Kirpal Singh (1991), and Ajit Singh Paintal’s biographical notes on the *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* of the early twentieth century (1978). Where known, instrumental specialisation is indicated in parentheses.²

	<i>Caunḱī</i>	Time ³	Musicians		
			1859	1889	1920
1	<i>Āsā dī Vār</i>	~3am	Bhai Man Singh, Bhai Deva Singh, Bhai Chet Singh, Bhai Ram, Bhai Hazara Singh, Bhai Jasa Singh, Bhai Shudh Singh, Bhai Ram ji (<i>jōrī</i>)	Bhai Jit Singh, Bhai Chet Singh, Bhai Hazara Singh	Bhai Makhan Singh (<i>tāūs</i>), Bhai Labh Singh, Bhai Bishan Singh, Bhai Pratap Singh (<i>jōrī</i>)

² Historically, many *rāgīs* and *rabābīs* were adept at singing and potentially several instruments also. The elder-most disciples/sons of musicians often started off as accompanists (vocal/instrumental) to their seniors, later to assume the leading role. Nevertheless, some musicians maintained a specific instrumental specialisation.

³ The clock time of the *caunḱīs* changes throughout the year, by as much as one hour, in accordance with the seasonal shifts in sunrise and sunset (Gyani Kirpal Singh 1991: 236). Times provided are thus approximate.


2	<i>Rāmkalī- Bilāval I</i>	~6am	Bhai Mishra Singh	Bhai Mishra Singh, Bhai Kapur Singh (<i>sarandā</i>), Bhai Makhan Singh (<i>tāūs</i>)	Bhai Kapur Singh (<i>sarandā</i>), Bhai Kartar Singh, Bhai Nahar Singh (<i>jōrī</i>)
3	<i>Bilāval II - Nakāī Gursikh⁴</i>	~8am	Bhai Lehna Singh	Bhai Pairha Singh, Bhai Kishan Singh, Bhai Gurditt Singh	
4	<i>Bilāval III - Anandīām</i>	~10am	Bhai Ratan Singh	Bhai Ratan Singh, Bhai Karam Singh, Bhai Mangal Singh	
5	<i>Bilāval IV – Bhai Ganda Singh</i>	~10:45am	Bhai Ganda Singh	Bhai Ganda Singh, Bhai Jamiyat Singh, Bhai Mangal Singh	Bhai Prem Singh
6	<i>Anand - Anandīām</i>	~11:30am	Bhai Agya Singh	Bhai Man Singh, Bhai Amir Singh	
7	<i>Amritsarīē</i>	~12pm	Bhai Buta	Bhai Mala, Bhai Hussaina, Bhai Bori	Bhai Chiragh, Bhai Haider, Bhai Himu, Bhai Sulakhan, Bhai Rakhu


⁴ The *caunkī* of the ‘*Nakāī Gursikh*’ was held by *rāgīs* of the Nakai clan of *jaṭ* Sikhs.


8	<i>Caran Kamal</i> I	~1:15pm	Bhai Khana	Bhai Gulab, Bhai Mehra, Bhai Sadhu	Bhai Khair (<i>dōtārā</i>), Bhai Labu (harmonium), Bhai Sain (<i>jōrī</i>)
9	<i>Caran Kamal</i> II –Bhai Rao	~2:30pm	Bhai Lala	Bhai Rao II, Bhai Lada, Bhai Peru	Bhai Khaira, Bhai Khushia (harmonium), Bhai Taba, Bhai Mahanda (<i>jōrī</i>), Bhai Inayat (<i>sitār</i>)
	<i>Kathā by</i> <i>gyānīs</i>	~3:45pm		Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh	
10	Bhai Atra	~4:30pm	Bhai Atra (<i>rabāb</i>), Bhai Bagh (<i>jōrī</i>)	Bhai Atra (<i>rabāb</i>), Bhai Vadhava, Bhai Vasava, Bhai Bagh (<i>jōrī</i>)	Bhai Moti, Bhai Khushia (harmonium), Bhai Vilayat, Bhai Amir (<i>jōrī</i>), Bhai Chiragh (<i>jōrī</i>)
11	<i>Sō Dar</i>	~5:45pm	Bhai Dittu	Bhai Dittu, Bhai Jammu, Bhai Mammu,	Bhai Farid, Bhai Amir
12	Bhai Amira	~6:30pm	Bhai Amira	Bhai Amira, Bhai Jhanda, Bhai Mehra	Bhai Rakha (<i>jōrī</i>)

13	Bhai Bishan Singh	~7:15pm	Bhai Bishan Singh	Bhai Bishan Singh, Bhai Budha Singh	
14	<i>Śikārpurīē</i>	~8pm	Bhai Hira	Bhai Nathu, Bhai Rakhu, Bhai Khairu	Bhai Sain Ditta, Bhai Jhanda, Bhai Khairu, Bhai Mahanda (<i>jōrī</i>)
15	Bhai Budh Singh	~9pm	Bhai Budh Singh	Bhai Mangal Singh, Bhai Ram Singh	

Key:

 - *rāgīs' cauṅkī*

 - *rabābīs' cauṅkī*

 - *kathā*