

Introduction

Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield

Khwāndan: To read, to recite [...] to sing.¹

What would an auditory history of South Asia sound like? As we walk down a city street or a neighbourhood lane in contemporary India, loudspeakers hanging from electricity poles spread the tune of a choral *bhajan* or amateur singing at a ritual wake, while few neighbourhoods are out of aural reach of an *azan*, the call to prayer. Public spaces are routinely occupied by religious processions with drums, marriage processions with *band baja*, or political demonstrations with loud slogans and public speeches. Every town has public spaces—a *maidan*, *lila* ground, *karbala*, or park—where religious performances and “programmes”, fairs (*melas*), and political rallies regularly attract visitors and broadcast their activities through their lively noises. Amidst the cacophony of traffic sounds—extra-loud car horns, shrill cycle-rickshaw bells, the deeper grumble of buses and trucks—people’s mobile ringtones advertise their musical taste: Punjabi beats, melodious *ghazals*, or the latest Bombay dance number. Several times a day, when your own mobile rings and you pick up, a jingle or a verse addresses you for no apparent reason. This soundscape is not static and unchanging. On the Delhi metro, the bilingual warnings “*metro paridhan ko ganda karna ek dandaniy apradh hai*”

1 Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1892), p. 481. In Indo-Persian literature, *khwānanda* was the most commonly used word for a professional singer. Whether a *khwānanda* was a singer, a reader, or a reciter can only be understood from context.

and “mind the gap” have replaced the scratchy audio cassettes on buses as accompaniments on one’s daily journey through the city, while fewer autorickshaws seem to ride with their radio on full-blast.

South Asia’s visual culture has been the object of much study in recent years, from calendar art to photography, from truck art to political statuary. Yet it would be hard to deny that making sound and hearing or listening to music, songs, speeches, sermons, and stories have been equally constitutive of South Asian social and cultural history until the present day.² But how has the mosaic of sounds, voices, and tellings changed over time? More fundamentally, how can we even write the history of sound at all, given that its nature is ephemeral: over in a moment, gone forever, and never fully captured in words on a page?

This volume explores the interconnected histories of singing, storytelling, and oral performance in early modern and contemporary North India (and Pakistan), in an attempt to restore the auditory realm to the literary and cultural history of South Asia. It does not aim at comprehensive coverage—there is no essay that deals with the rich performance traditions of Punjab, for example³—but presents strategically identified case studies that show different uses of texts in performance, give an idea of the wide range of performance practices, and highlight the significant circulation of aesthetic concepts and ideas about the beneficial effects of music, singing, and storytelling.

In the past two decades, an interest in what has been labelled acoustic or auditory history—the history not just of “music” but of historical soundworlds in their broadest possible sense—has begun to emerge in the study of Western music. This new move has received considerable stimulus from parallel work in ethnomusicology on contemporary soundscapes,⁴ research that has been foundational in the

2 The list of studies of contemporary South Asian soundworlds—musical, literary, and ritual performances—would in itself take hours to recite. As Stuart Blackburn and Joyce Burkhalter Flueckinger noted of *Oral Epics in India*, “[w]hen Milman Parry went to the Balkans in search of oral epics in the 1930s, he had problems locating singers; for researchers in South Asia today, the problem is not where to find oral epics, but which ones to study”; ‘Introduction’, *Oral Epics in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 1.

3 These have been abundantly studied, from Richard C. Temple’s classic *Legends of the Panjāb* (1884) to Michael Nijhawan’s recent study of *dhadhi* singers in *Dhadi Darbar: Religion, Violence, and the Performance of Sikh History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

4 The “soundscape” concept ultimately derives from Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer’s 1977 monograph *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the*

new interdisciplinary of sound studies or “acoustemology”, which takes in fields as diverse as geography, anthropology, environmental science, and music.⁵

While most scholarship on acoustic history and auditory cultures has been restricted to the period of recorded sound (the late nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries), Emma Dillon’s magisterial 2012 monograph *The Sense of Sound* definitively turns musicology’s attention to the European medieval past and to the difficult task of disinterring auditory history, and the history of music as it was sounded and embodied, from its textual traces.⁶ Although such a task is made easier by the existence of detailed musical notation for European music that allows some sense of sounded reality to echo in the present, Dillon’s methodology offers much of relevance to our quest to understand the acoustic and somatic lives of North Indian texts. Historians, too, have recently turned to the auditory, with Mark Smith’s pioneering volume *Hearing History* opening our ears to the sounds of early modern Europe and America.⁷ Typically, though, the pre-twentieth-century acoustic histories of other literate cultures so far remain largely untold. The recent works of Gary Tomlinson and Barbara Andaya, on the soundscapes of the pre-colonial Aztec and Malay worlds respectively, thus provide stimulating foils for us, with their insistence that sound was heard and understood differently in earlier cultural contexts and that sonic power and song were of vital significance and signification to Southeast Asian and American polities.⁸

World (New York: Knopf), but was then more famously taken up by Arjun Appadurai in his 1990 article ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’, *Public Culture* 2.2 (1990), 1-24.

- 5 For an excellent review of these influential developments in ethnomusicology and sound studies, see David W. Samuels et al., ‘Soundscapes: Towards a Sounded Anthropology’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010), 329-45. The term “acoustemology” is a coinage of ethnomusicologist Steven Feld; e.g. ‘Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea’, in *Senses of Place*, ed. by Steven Feld and Keith Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), pp. 91-135.
- 6 Emma Dillon, *The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260-1330* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 7 Mark M. Smith, ed., *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004).
- 8 Gary Tomlinson, *The Singing of the New World: Indigenous Voice in the Era of European Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Barbara Watson Andaya, ‘Distant Drums and Thunderous Cannon: Authority in Traditional Malay Society’, *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 7.2 (2011), 19-35.

In this volume, therefore, we undertake a task that has not, to our knowledge, been attempted before for the literary cultures of North India.⁹ We seek to theorise the deep interdependencies of written text, sound, performer, audience, and meaning that the case studies in this volume make audible, in a situation where in most cases we no longer possess nor can ever recover the soundedness of the texts with which we work (see Schofield in this volume). By and large, texts that were once recited, sung, danced, and enacted have been territory ceded to scholars of literature and religion, who have generally acknowledged their aural and performative dimensions but gone little further.¹⁰ The aural domain, in turn, has been relegated to ethnomusicologists studying the highly exclusive soundworld of North Indian art music.¹¹ And the very few ethnomusicologists who have brought tools of sonic analysis to bear on the textual archive have restricted their studies to instrumental genres and *raga* examples, whose mnemonic notation systems have been easier to translate, if only partially, into sound.¹² Perhaps concerned that their literary understanding might be found wanting, or perhaps because of the sheer inaudibility of most historical texts, music historians have steered clear of explaining how poems subtitled with *raga* and *tala* names might have sounded, or what other sonic hints might tell us about the lives of North Indian texts as they circulated as sounded and embodied entities in a resonant world.

In any case, the overwhelming majority of ethnomusicologists study the present, not the past: music, singing, and storytelling in North India have primarily been the domain of anthropologists of music and scholars of orality, who rarely view the living traditions they study as part of a cultural and literary field that can be mapped historically. This is the connection that this book aims to make: the contemporary ethnographies

9 Though the last chapter, 'Hierarchies of Response', of Aditya Behl's posthumously published monograph is typically prescient; *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012b).

10 An exception is Christian Novetzke's *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

11 Most recently, see the important collection of essays *Hindustani Music: Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by Joep Bor, Françoise "Nalini" Delvoye, Emmie te Nijenhuis, and Jane Harvey (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010).

12 See e.g. Allyn Miner, *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997); and D. Richard Widdess, *The Ragas of Early Indian Music: Modes, Melodies and Musical Notations from the Gupta Period to c.1250* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

by Amy Bard, Christian Novetzke, Richard Widdess, and Richard Wolf show what uses—sometimes startling and counter-intuitive ones—words, texts, and books are put to in contemporary formal and informal performance practices, and the subtle nuances of tone, emphasis, and effect that each performance brings. They show the textual scholars what they are missing and suggest exciting possibilities. Conversely, the essays by textual scholars and music historians reveal that even texts, when examined in this light, turn out to provide a surprising amount of clues about what Stefano Pellò calls the pre-textual and con-textual life of poetry, sermons, and stories: the anecdotes, gossip, and discussions that accompanied and explained how certain texts came into being (Cort, Pellò, Sharma); the correct knowledge that was required in order to understand and appreciate sophisticated oral performances (Hawley, Khan, d’Hubert); the performance needed to bring the texts we have to life (Horstmann, Novetzke, Busch, Bangha, Orsini). Through a number of recurring key words like *raga* (musical mode), *rasa* (juice, sentiment), *rasika* (connoisseur), and *bhava* (emotion), these essays also show how aesthetic and/or spiritual cultivation and understanding were crucial to the listening of music and tales in the early modern period. Such words were part of a code that straddled the multilingual poetic, musical, and visual arts—though declined with subtle differences in the courtly, sufi, and *bhakti* (devotion) contexts where songs and tales circulated (see particularly Miner, d’Hubert, Schofield, and Busch).¹³

Oral-literate, Multilingual, and Intermedial

General accounts of orality in South Asia typically begin with the oral-mnemonic tradition of Vedic and post-Vedic knowledge (the *Upanishads*, Panini’s grammar, etc.). But as Sheldon Pollock has pointed out, this much touted orality, while undoubtedly and bedazzlingly true, has too often been taken as emblematic of a general Indian “indifference” to writing. The cultural premium on memorised knowledge (*kanthastha* or “held in the throat”, as Pollock reminds us) “left indelible traces in secular written culture”. And “from the moment writing was invented

13 Persian and Persianate intellectuals, the essays by Schofield and d’Hubert show us, consciously translated Indic aesthetic terminology and set up equivalences with Perso-Arabic terms, like *vacana* with *sukhan* (as “speech”), or *rasa* with *zauq* and *lazzat* (as “taste” or “pleasure”).

literary culture, the culture of *kavya*, became indissolubly connected to writing, so much so that the history of the one becomes unintelligible without taking into account the history of the other".¹⁴ Similarly, Richard Widdess has noted that although there has been perhaps an even stronger emphasis placed on the superiority of oral-aural modes of transmission in Indian musical discourse, "many systems of 'oral notation' exist, and have existed since ancient times. These systems use solmization or other mnemonic syllables, and are primarily recited or sung, although they can also be written down"—and have been used to notate musical examples in written treatises since the Gupta period.¹⁵ Like Pollock, Stuart Blackburn notes of South India that even the early Sangam corpus of Tamil poetry (third century CE, but edited and anthologised only in the eighth) valorises *both* orality *and* writing: "Many of the poems are presented as if spoken or sung by bards, while, on the other hand, many give prominence to the role of the poet-scholar (*pulavar*)".¹⁶ Both Blackburn and Pollock note the endurance of practices of orality in South Asia "as both fact and ideal" well into the modern period, and their persistence into the present day is particularly obvious in their continuing predominance in music pedagogy.¹⁷ Christian Novetzke notes that pre-modern saints and performers in Maharashtra lived in a milieu where literacy was a fairly ordinary and widespread skill. Yet the public culture of *bhakti* and the logic of performance meant that, though literate, *kirtankars* would still privilege orality. In fact, as he puts it, the *kirtankar* "might be considered an intermediary between text and orality" (p. 180).

Velcheru Narayana Rao coined the very useful term "oral-literate" to describe *pandits*, poets, and storytellers who operate within a culture that is both orally transmitted and literate at the same time—and this is a term that applies in different ways to almost *all* the people, cases,

14 Sheldon Pollock, 'Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India', in *Literary Cultures and the Material Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot, Andrew Nash, and Ian Willison (London: British Library, 2007), pp. 79, 80.

15 Widdess (1995), p. 87. Solmization is a system of attributing a distinct syllable to each note in a musical scale; key examples include European sol-fa (do re mi fa so la ti) and Indian *sargam* (sa re ga ma pa dha ni).

16 S. Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), 'Introduction', p. 20.

17 Pollock (2007), p. 78; Huib Schippers, 'The Guru Recontextualized? Perspectives on Learning North Indian Classical Music in Shifting Contexts for Professional Training', *Asian Music* 38.1 (2007), 123-38.

and genres presented in this volume: from preachers to *kirtankars*, from poets to musicians, from musical treatises to song-poems, from poetry manuals to *tazkiras* that record the gossip around poets, from early modern tales to the contemporary *niyaz kahani* pamphlets of Amy Bard's essay. Perhaps the most surprising group that qualify as oral-literate are musicians; the consensus modern view that Hindustani *ustads* were illiterate is belied by a series of treatises and song collections written by hereditary musicians and their disciples from Mughal times down to the present day, demonstrating literacy in Sanskrit, Persian, Brajhasha, and Urdu.¹⁸ Indeed most of the essays prefer to use the term performative rather than oral, in order to stress that sight, gesture, and sound were all involved.¹⁹ About *qissa* storytelling, for example, Pasha M. Khan notes that the seventeenth-century manual

Ṭirāz al-akhbār makes it clear to us that the term "*qissa-khwan*" does not convey the full range and force of the storyteller's activities. Impressive as it seems that storytellers like Fakhr al-Zamani recited and improvised the interminable *Dāstān-i Amīr Ḥamza* from memory, they did not *simply* read them, but performed them. In his description of the presentation of the *qissa*, Fakhr al-Zamani prescribes not only modulations of the voice, but gestures and postures for the storyteller. (Khan, p. 198)

The same is true of many of the performance practices covered in this book: singing, poetic recitation, and storytelling. Conversely, the mere physical *presence* of a book during a performance—even if it is not consulted—may work symbolically as an authorising gesture, as Widdess shows in his essay.

Methodologically, however, although scholars of literature and religion concerned with the past are aware of the all-important oral dimension of performance, and ethnomusicologists and scholars of orality recognise that the living traditions they study are part of cultural and literary fields that have much longer histories, by and large it is

18 See, for example, Ras Baras Khan's 1698 treatise, the *Shams al-aṣṣūṭ*, trans. by Mehrdad Fallahzadeh (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2012); Khushhal Khan "Anup"'s Braj and Persian *Rāg darshan* (Brajhasha (1800): University of Pennsylvania Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Lawrence J Schoenberg Collection, LJS 63; Persian (1808): Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, University of Madras, D1024 P Ms); and Karamatullah Khan's *Isrār-e karāmat* (Allahabad: Janaki Press, 1908).

19 In other words, we are using the terms performative and performativity not in the sense bequeathed to us by J.L. Austin via Judith Butler, but rather following their more general usage in ethnomusicology and performance studies.

difficult for one person to have the technical training to do both. The documents we have from the past—written texts, manuscripts, visual images, and written descriptions—often bear only scant traces of their oral-performative contexts, or else describe them in terms that are minimal or opaque, as in the musical notation of *ragas* or attempts to describe aesthetic experience. Conversely, current performance traditions that have been orally transmitted, especially the further we move from institutional centres, often bear only oblique traces of their history.²⁰ We will come back to the relationship between texts/books and orality below.

Trying to reconstruct the oral-performative history of early modern North India, as this book tries to do, presents additional challenges. While certain aspects have been well studied—*bhakti* sayings, songs, and performances; the circulation of songs and singers in devotional circles and across North Indian courts (especially the Mughal imperial court); sufi romances in Hindavi²¹—others remain unclear. Texts of the time often contain lively religious discussions, *goshtis*, and repartees, but what relationship do those iconic representations bear to real events and/or practices? Numerous musical treatises contain notated *raga* examples, but what do these actually tell us about how the *ragas* sounded in performance? Many texts that suggest concurrent oral-performative practices such as Puranas or sufi *malfuzat*, or that were explicitly offered to patrons, were written or copied in the high languages of Persian and Sanskrit—does this mean they reflect speech practices, or rather protocols of writing? Much path-breaking work is currently being done on Sanskrit-Persian interactions in the Mughal period,²² and questions like “did the Mughals (or sufis) really know Sanskrit?”, or “did they really speak in Persian?”, regularly arise. While the answers necessarily

20 See e.g. James Caron, ‘Reading the Power of Printed Orality in Afghanistan: Popular Pashto Literature as Historical Evidence and Public Intervention’, *Journal of Social History* 45.1 (2011), 172.

21 On *bhakti*, see e.g. Rupert Snell, *The Eighty-four Hymns of Hita Harivaṃśa: an Edition of the Caurāsi Pada* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991). On songs and singers, see Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye, ‘Collections of Lyrics in Hindustani Music: The Case of Dhrupad’ and the bibliography she gives, in Bor et al. (2010), pp. 141-58, and more generally part I of that volume, ‘The Formative Period’, pp. 35-194. On Hindavi sufi romances, see the work of Aditya Behl, and especially *Love’s Subtle Magic*.

22 See Audrey Truschke, ‘Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court’ (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/10022/AC:P:12951>; see also Busch and Schofield in this volume.

vary according to the educational capital and background of patrons and audiences, we must recognise that the multiple diglossia of the time means that texts written in the high languages existed in an oral context that was vernacular and multilingual.

To state it more clearly, we begin from the premise that the linguistic economy of North India can be described as one of “multiple diglossias”,²³ with several high languages—Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit—and a general spoken vernacular (what we call here Hindavi) that was variously written in the Persian, Kaithi, or Devanagari scripts. We intentionally use the term Hindavi, which was the term (together with Hindi and Hindui) employed for North Indian vernaculars in Persian sources, in order to avoid the split history of Hindi and Urdu that has dominated modern scholarship and language consciousness.²⁴ A concurrent premise is that language and script were a function of written transmission and the competence of patrons and copyists: script was not intrinsic to a language, and the script and language of writing did not necessarily reproduce the language of oral performance or exchange. The protocols of high language meant that discussions in Hindavi between a sufi *pir* and his disciples would be written down in Persian, or that the Hindavi song-poems composed by Persian literati were referred to but not included in Persian-language histories and anthologies.²⁵

Once we are aware of these premises, we begin to see that texts that appear to exist in separate domains sealed by boundaries of script and literacy could and did circulate thanks to oral transmission, translation, exposition, and memorisation. We also see that at times the texts are

23 See María Angeles Gallego, ‘The Languages of Medieval Iberia and their Religious Dimension’, *Medieval Encounters* 9.1 (2003): 107-39.

24 We consider Hindavi here as synonymous with *bhakha*. Though modern scholarship distinguishes between Western and Eastern Hindi, and between Avadhi, Brajbhasha, Khari Boli (Hindi and Urdu), etc., it is our contention—supported by the wide circulation of texts like the “Avadhi” *Candāyan* in Delhi and of Kabir’s poems or Gwaliyari *dhrupad* all over North India—that vernacular (or *bhakha*, “language”, as vernacular sources call it) literary forms travelled easily and widely at this time within a unified language domain. True, terms like “eastern” (*purbi*) and “of Gwalior” (*gwaliyari*) were also sometimes used in this period, but it was only at the end of sixteenth century that Brajbhasha emerged as a separate, specific (partly) codified literary vernacular; see Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

25 For Hindavi and the written protocols of Persian, see Francesca Orsini, ‘Traces of a Multilingual World: Hindavi in Persian Texts’, in *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India*, ed. by F. Orsini and S. Sheikh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 403-36.

themselves translations of oral vernacular tellings/performances. Thus Jack Hawley's essay on Surdas's reworking of a passage from the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* shows us that the Brajbhasha poet-singer Surdas, traditionally memorialised as being blind, knew the Sanskrit canonical text well enough to riff on it and could expect his audience to understand his game.²⁶ His quasi-contemporary, the poet Alam, declared that "since few listen to this tale in Sanskrit, I have bound [this tale] together in *chaupais* in *bhakha*".²⁷ Does he mean that he knew the Sanskrit versions of the tale? The case of 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti's *Mir'āt al-makhlūqāt*, analysed in Muzaffar Alam's essay, is even more intriguing: the Persian text purports to be a translation of a Sanskrit Purana and its author declares and cites evidence of his knowledge of Sanskrit and of the text. The aim is to render public something that the keepers of the original text—the Brahmins—have tried to keep secret, i.e. that Shiva himself predicted the advent of Adam and the Prophet Muhammad and the takeover of India by their descendants, who intermarried with the local population. The text faithfully reproduces in Persian the generic conventions of the Purana—the chain of narrators, the explanation of past and future events, etc.—but what is the relationship of this text to orality? Were 'Abd al-Rahman or his readers familiar with the Sanskrit text and/or oral expositions of the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa*; did he sermonise on it; and if so in which language?

Several essays in this volume seek to tease out the oral-performative dimension of written texts and genres, particularly those in the high languages or whose accessibility is uncertain. Taken together, the contributions of Busch, Schofield, Sharma, and Khan show that texts that have come down to us as part of separate and sophisticated traditions—Brajbhasha *riti* poetry, Hindustani music theory and song lyrics, and Persian poetry and storytelling—were all consumed by the same people at the Mughal court. Thus, while seeking to understand the logic internal to the formation and transmission of each archive (courtly and *madrassa* Persian, Jain, courtly *bhakha*, *bhakti*, sufi), it has been crucial for us to also question their limits and exclusions, and to place them within the larger

26 Already in his 1984 book *Sūrdas: Poet, Singer, Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, and Delhi: Oxford University Press), Hawley argued that Surdas's blindness should be taken metaphorically, and expressed doubts about his illiteracy, too.

27 Alam, *Ālamkṛt Mādhavānal Kāmakandalā*, ed. by Rajkumari Misra (Allahabad: Ratnakumari Svadhyay Sansthan, 1982), 6.5, p. 5, see Orsini in this volume.

framework of orature and oral transmission.²⁸ An approach sensitive to oral circulation and performance highlights the dynamics through which these connections took place. The result is a map of a richer and more densely interconnected cultural and social world.

Of course there is a way in which music in particular has long been viewed as constitutive of premodern India's "composite culture", the aesthetic glue that held the otherwise fractious/centripetal polity together. While parallel religious nationalisms have positioned Hindu (and Jain) and Muslim communities as inevitably hostile and barely reconciled, the discourse of "composite culture" has upheld music and painting as evidence that Hindus and Muslims had been friends and had cultivated similar tastes.²⁹ In this discourse, music or *bhakti* and sufi religions are held up selectively as special cases of "synthesis", representing a "bridge" that connected what are still perceived as separate communities, each with their own traditions. In the process, music, *bhakti*, and sufism get extracted from their social histories and charged with a mysterious agent-less intentionality that obscures the messy and much larger-scale social processes of conscious mixing and intentional borrowing by thoughtful and knowledgeable men and women that historically must have occurred to produce any kind of "composite".³⁰ In contradistinction, while our evidence shows much circulation and translation of music and song genres, singers and performers, stories, and even aesthetic categories, we see these as normal products of a culturally diverse and multilingual polity—a regular multilingualism—with multilayered, distinct, yet interlocking contexts: courtly, urban, ritual/devotional, rural. The evidence also leads us away

28 The term "orature" was coined by the Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu but has been given broader scope by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, e.g. in his 'Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature', *Performance Research* 12.3 (2007), 4-7.

29 On the genealogy of the concept of "composite culture" to refer to Hindu-Muslim interactions over the *longue durée*, see Kathryn Hansen, 'Who Wants to be a Cosmopolitan? Readings from the Composite Culture', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47.3 (2010), 291-308.

30 On the inadequacy of the terms "synthesis", "influence", and "composite" to describe the processes of appropriation between Indian and West Asian musicians that forged Hindustani music, see Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], 'Evidence of Indo-Persian Musical Synthesis? The *Tanbur* and *Rudra Vina* in Seventeenth-century Indo-Persian Treatises', *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* 36-7 (2006), 89-103. On the need to consider traditional culture-producers' intelligence and intent in creating art works, see Molly Emma Aitken's ground-breaking monograph on Rajput court painters, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven: Yale, 2010).

from the idea of the “composite” to thinking in terms of individuals actively appropriating across cultural and linguistic thresholds and between media (from poetry to musical sound to painting, etc.) to produce a widely shared early modern aesthetic of borrowing and reuse that revelled in virtuosity, brilliance, and multilayered depth and richness.³¹

Spaces of Performance and Performers

A major advantage of a multilingual and intermedial approach to orality and performance traditions is that it allows us to explore literary culture beyond the court, to understand the links between forms and performers outside and within the court, and to examine the dynamics of classicisation and popularisation. It also allows us to attend to the oral-performative aspects of poetic culture and wit, so obviously valued as cultural assets (see Pellò in this volume), and to consider the performers who enacted/produced these verbal forms, their social position, their self-presentation, and their own mobility.

Ever since Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye’s pioneering studies of *dhrupad* texts in Persian sources, of the circulation of songs and of song-poets (*vaggeyakar*) from the court of Gwalior to that of the Sultan of Gujarat and thence to Akbar’s court and sub-imperial centres, and of the relationships between Tansen, Swami Haridas in Vrindaban, and Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliori, we have been alerted to the intense circulation of songs, musicians, and musical knowledge between courtly and devotional/ritual domains.³² The striking flexibility in song themes and “retooling” of song texts as well as poems, so that a ruler’s name could be substituted by another, or by the name of Krishna, were a direct consequence of this circulation, as Busch reminds us in her essay.

The essays in this volume cover a wide range of performance spaces and domains. Sharma, Busch, Khan, and Schofield explore the culture of poetic, musical, and storytelling performances at the Mughal court

31 For a fine example of this aesthetic in action, see Aitken’s chapter on Rajput paintings of Layla and Majnun; (2010), pp. 155-209.

32 See e.g. Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye, ‘Indo-Persian Accounts on Music Patronage in the Sultanate of Gujarat’, in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, ed. by Muzaffar Alam, Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (Delhi: Manohar and Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2000), pp. 253-80.

from Akbar's reign to Muhammad Shah's. Sharma's essay, for instance, details the kinds of Persian poetic and prose texts that were recited and discussed at the Mughal court, and notes that "in the Mughal context storytelling, poetic recitation, and discussion also functioned as a form of re-enacting and validating the canon in the face of new literary developments and challenges, especially when it came to poetry" (p. 288). He notes that Emperor Akbar preferred literary gatherings that involved storytelling to poetry recitations (*musha'iras*), whereas his son and successor Jahangir was fond of listening to and discussing Persian poetry, particularly the *ghazal*, during long night gatherings. He also observes that Emperor Shah Jahan was particularly interested in literary works concerned with contemporary history, while Aurangzeb 'Alamgir was especially fond of Jalaluddin Rumi's *Masnavi*. Sharma points out that during Shah Jahan's period (r.1628-1656), many Persian poets at court wrote short topical poems in *masnavi* form to be recited at court, suggesting that "these poems gradually replaced the ceremonial *qasida* as the traditional poetic form to mark formal occasions" (p. 292). As far as the performance of the *ghazal* is concerned, anecdotes show a certain overlap between courtly and sufi practices by the sixteenth century, and *khayal*, now known only as a genre of classical music, enjoyed a dual existence in both the *dargah* and the *darbar* from its sixteenth-century appearance until at least the time of Muhammad Shah (r.1719-1748).³³

Allyn Miner's essay shows how much of that musical knowledge was already cultivated at pre-Mughal courts such as the Sharqi court in Jaunpur, and how the musical knowledge codified there and in other apparently peripheral locations such as Rewa³⁴ circulated among three different kinds of constituencies: one made of connoisseurs and music specialists who wanted to learn the specific qualities of each *raga*; another constituted by those who only wanted the basic vocabulary and took pleasure in the imaginative aspects of *raga* visualisation; and a third one made of practitioners and religious devotees who employed a more restricted range of *ragas* for ritual singing.

33 Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], 'The Origins and Early Development of Khayal', in Bor et al. (2010), pp. 159-96.

34 Apparently being the operative word here; it is worth noting that Tansen was employed at Rewa immediately before his services were requisitioned by Akbar, so the Raja was clearly a patron of considerable discrimination.

Several essays tackle performance texts and traditions at regional courts (Miner, Busch, d'Hubert, Orsini). Orsini's traces the emergence of *kathas* or tales for local courts such as the Baghela of "Amarpur" in the wake of epic and Puranic retellings. Allison Busch's pathbreaking work has shown how *riti* poets like Keshavdas, working in the small court in Orchha, created a new literary culture in the early sixteenth century by carefully studying Sanskrit models and reproducing them in the vernacular.³⁵ She has also shown how, in the wake of political alliances between local rulers like the Bundelas of Orchha and Mughal princes, this literary culture spread into the heart of the Mughal imperial court and found ready patronage not only in the imperial entourage, but also among its ministers (like Todar Mal, whom Alam also mentioned in admiring terms in his 1582 *Mādhavānal Kāmakandalā*) and Rajput *mansabdars*, and who in their home territories developed their own sub-imperial courtly cultures and employed their own array of poets, genealogists, and storytellers.³⁶ In her essay for this volume Busch focuses on the oral and performative dimensions of this literary culture in the form of memorising verses and rules as a necessary preparation for extempore poetic performances, of the retooling of verses by itinerant poets for successive patrons, and on the functions of poetry at these courts, including the performance of martial poetry on the battlefield itself, with the expressed aim of enthusing the warriors. Nor should we forget that these local rulers were also major patrons of ritual and devotional performances and sponsored a whole range of temples, monasteries (*maths*), and festivals.³⁷ A particularly interesting case is that of the sophisticated seventeenth-century poet Alaol, the subject of Thibaut d'Hubert's contribution, whose Bengali narrative poems/romances were informed by Persian, Sanskrit, and Hindavi poetics and literary models. The case of Alaol points to a kind of cosmopolitanism that was directly produced by the confluence of multilingual literary traditions, translated into the local literary language for a small but heterogeneous court in Arakan (now Myanmar). Widdess's essay also touches on the circulation of North Indian musical and literary culture

35 Busch (2011).

36 Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Aitken (2010).

37 See Monika Thiel-Horstmann, *In Favour of Govinddevji: Historical Documents Relating to a Deity of Vrindaban and Eastern Rajasthan* (Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in association with Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1999).

at the Malla court in Nepal. Not only did *sangitashastra* texts circulate there, but it is also here that some of the earliest manuscripts are to be found. He further notes that some of the Malla kings' *dapha* compositions are present in contemporary *dapha* songbooks—a tantalising “tenuous textual continuity can thus be demonstrated between the early seventeenth-century palace context and twenty-first-century farmers' music” (p. 234)—while the wonderful detail in his Figure 8.3 shows how non-courtly genres and performers were visualised in a hierarchical spatial fashion.

Several other essays focus on urban spaces and activities among a range of merchant, service, professional, and artisanal groups. Stefano Pellò shows how *tazkiras* of poets written in Persian from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focus on the activities and the professionalisation of contemporary poets and their disciples outside the court, in the urban spaces of Delhi and Lucknow, and in doing so eulogise and canonise them. But these texts also display keen interest in humbler and more marginal figures in the urban landscape such as madmen, opium-addicts, jesters, and street performers. John Cort's essay focuses on the parallel world of Jain laymen in Mughal Agra, who met regularly in a temple courtyard and constituted themselves into debating circles that produced newly-authoritative doctrinal and liturgical texts and virtually emptied the figure of the *bhattarak* of authority.³⁸ This was a process of vernacularisation of knowledge that happened independently of royal initiatives or patronage, the fruits of which are still part of Jain ritual practices today. Novetzke's essay on *kirtan* performances and Widdess's on *dapha* both straddle premodern texts and contemporary performances and include urban ritual performances among artisanal/subaltern groups, while Richard Wolf's takes us to the diasporic urban streets of Karachi for rhythmically sophisticated performances of Nizami drumming.

With the essays by Horstmann, Novetzke, Hawley, Bangha, and Alam we are taken to spaces that range from small-town (*qasba*) sufi establishments and villages, *maths*, and festivals (*mahotsav*) where Dadupanthi *acharyas* would deliver their sermons.³⁹ The great circulation of Surdas's songs

38 The term *bhattarak* (*bhaṭṭaraka*) indicates the head of Digambara Jain institutions, responsible for managing endowments, running the institutions, and training scholars, as well as for maintaining libraries and presiding over installation ceremonies; see Cort in this volume.

39 As Novetzke puts it: “for the professional performer appearances at the Pune *darbar*

and Bajid's *arilla* verses, and of manuscripts with Bajid's short, humorous tales, points to a popular realm of religious, entertaining, and instructive performance that would definitely include Novetzke's *kirtans*, which nowadays usually comprise "a story from the life of a sant that goes along with the song, and usually other songs or texts are brought in that can range from Sanskritic philosophy to sufi mysticism to the wisdom of political leaders and popular adages and sayings of unknown provenance in any language, including English" (p. 171). That Bajid's manuscripts are also held in royal libraries like the Pothikhana in Jaipur alerts us to the fact that, just as there is a sophisticated oral knowledge that does not depend on literacy (Hawley, Wolf), so elite tastes could and did include popular genres. Conversely, the career of the early-seventeenth-century Iranian *émigré* storyteller Fakhr al-Zamani shows the remarkable mobility from urban to courtly spaces of both performer and genre. "If Fakhr al-Zamani's progress is any indication, *qissas* that began at the 'popular' level could, given a chance and perhaps with some stylistic alterations, eventually be performed in the courts of nobles and preserved as manuscripts in their libraries", notes Khan (p. 192). And while his gestural style of storytelling recalls the figure of the *naqqal*, a professional actor who conveyed "a story with words and actions, attempting to *embody* the narrative and its characters", Khan reminds us that *naqqals* were lower on the scale of professions than *qissa-khwan*,⁴⁰ and Fakhr al-Zamani never used the word *naqqali* for what he did (Khan, p. 198).

Contemporary Ethnography and History

Because of the challenges outlined above, we considered it to be vital to bring ethnomusicologists and scholars of contemporary performance practices into conversation with the more historically-oriented among us. We do not wish to suggest naively that contemporary performances

were few. The regular terrain of the *kirtankar* consisted of the many village centres, pilgrimage networks, and holy sites that dotted the Deccan" (p. 176).

40 *Naqqals* in both Dargah Quli Khan's *Muraqqa'-i Dehlī* (c.1740) and Wajid 'Ali Shah's *Bānī* (1877) were street performers of equivalent status to (and in personnel possibly substantially overlapping with) *bhānds* and *bhagats*; Ibbetson thought *naqqal* and *bhānd* were synonymous. Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa'-e Dehli*, trans. by Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy (Delhi: Deputy, 1989), p. 99; Wajid 'Ali Shah, *Bānī* (Lucknow: Sangit Natak Akademi, 1987), pp. 115-16; and Denzil Ibbetson and Edward Maclagan, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* (Lahore: Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1911), pp. 156-57.

reflect past practices. But what their study reveals holds great imaginative power for historical work. For example, contemporary ethnographies show us a consistent combination of recitation of oral/written text with extempore exposition (*arthav* or, in *raga* performance, *vistar*) right across the genres and contexts we are looking at.⁴¹ For the earliest tales, the text is indeed all we have; but were any of these tales—particularly those rich in ritual, technical, or esoteric meanings—accompanied by exposition? It seems likely, particularly in cases where the length of the stanzas and the narrative “density” in extant copies vary.⁴² There are, for instance, obvious markers of ritual beginning in most of our texts—but how much richer is Philip Lutgendorf’s description of *kathavachaks* (called Vyasas in this instance) taking their seat after worshipping the seat and garlanding the book, etc., in *katha* performances of the *Rāmcaritmānas*!⁴³ Christian Novetzke makes the useful distinction between “didactic *kirtan*” (which includes a wide range of modes, as we shall see) and “ecstatic *kirtan*” on the basis of the protocols of sitting and standing. In the ecstatic “Varkari *kirtan*” everyone stands and dances, whereas in the other forms of *kirtan* only the performer (*kirtankar*) stands while the audience sits, though the audience still participates in many ways, “singing along with the songs, finishing well known verses along with the *kirtankar*, sometimes interacting with the *kirtankar*, and so on” (p. 172).

In many cases, all we have for past musical performances are musical treatises or manuscripts with song texts. Mukund Lath and Winand Callewaert have argued that the form in which the song-texts are collected and ordered in a manuscript can tell us whether it was a singer’s own workmanlike collection or a systematisation, e.g. for ritual purposes, though Miner in this volume suggests that the very presence of a *raga* in *bhakti* texts indicates, at the very least, “that the original compiler or composers moved in or were connected with court or temple circles” (p. 399). Christian Novetzke has made a crucial distinction between formal *pothis* and informal *badas* (more on which below). In the case of the book used in *dapha*

41 Of the specialists who still recite narrative texts (*panchalis*) in Bengal, d’Hubert notes that the names they are called by—*kathak*, *pathak*, or *gayen*—each stress one aspect of their style of recitation: “the two first terms refer to a musically tuned reading cum commentary, and the second more specifically to singing” (pp. 427-28).

42 For interpolations that appear to be the result of storytellers’ intervention, see Orsini in this volume.

43 Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 182-85.

performances, we could muse over the meaning and interpretation of the song texts, were Richard Widdess not to tell us that in *dapha* performance sound and key words and effort are much more important than the text.

We can imagine Bajid's short and entertaining tales retold in intimate familial contexts, and similar *qissas* were printed in chapbook forms not dissimilar from the *niyaz kahanis* that Amy Bard writes about. But while Bajid's mock subversion of the moral ending puzzles us, Bard gives us a rich account of the various ways in which tellers and listeners interpret the *kahanis* and relate them to their own life experiences. Both Bajid's irreverent stories and Amy Bard's contemporary formal and informal miracle tales show an informal relationship between written texts and orality. One intriguing notion she puts forward concerns the different quality of listening in formal and informal *niyaz kahanis*—reading them is perceived as hardly efficacious. Although both types of *mo'jizat* emphasise listening, formal *kahanis* efface narrators, are less “personal”, less interactive, and more listening-oriented. In casual *mo'jizat*, which speak to local, familial needs with clear geographical anchoring, listeners are likely to “talk back”. (Though why Osho was so keen on Bajid and what use he made of his verses and tales remains an intriguing question!)

Books and Performance

The conference from which this volume draws was originally entitled “Tellings, Not Texts”, but one participant pointed out that “Tellings *and* Texts” was a more appropriate title, since texts—in their material form as books—were often present in the performances we talked about. What roles do texts play in performance, we asked, and what is the relationship between them? Which way does the directionality go—from text to performance or from performance/oral exposition to text? Here, too, early modern North India shows a great range of possibilities and choices.

At one end of the spectrum, we see a great deal of interest in books as material objects. Already at North Indian Sultanate courts illustrated manuscripts (and illuminated Qur'ans) were valued and copied in Persianate and Indic styles and provide a tantalising glimpse of the circulation of shared tastes among elites that impacted, for example,

upon Jain book-copying and book-dedicating practices.⁴⁴ It is surely not by chance that the earliest illustrated manuscripts of the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* also appeared in this period. The dazzling and profuse production of the imperial Mughal workshop (*karkhana*) has tended to absorb most scholarly attention, and we still await a comprehensive picture of illustrated book production in this period that devotes parallel and equal consideration to non-imperial manuscripts and book circulation.

Among the religious groups of the period, too, we find a striking investment in books. The most obvious example is that of the *pothis* (compilations) of the early Sikh gurus. Guru Nanak himself, who “believed that he had been assigned by God the vocation of singing his praises [...] and that his hymns were the result of direct communication from God”, nonetheless urged writing God’s name as a devotional act. This has been taken as an implicit hint towards the fact that already in his lifetime disciples wrote down his hymns in a *pothi*.⁴⁵ As G.S. Mann points out, Guru Nanak referred explicitly to the role of the Qur’an in Muslim devotional life and must have been familiar with the practice common in sufi *khanqahs* of placing the Qur’an in the open to allow for full access.⁴⁶ Having a *pothi* became crucial to the authority claims of his descendants and disciples at their various seats (*gaddis*). Textual history shows that the early *pothis* were subsequently added to, though much emphasis has traditionally been placed within the Sikh tradition on the singularity and unbroken continuity of the *Guru Granth*—whose status is very much that of a sacred text, to be read, recited, and sung to *raga* but also worshipped in private and public rituals.

The Sikhs were not the only sant group who invested in writing, compiling, and copying books. Dadu Dayal’s disciples also compiled his utterances (*vani*) together with those of other saints (*panch-vani*), as well as enormous and literally comprehensive compilations (lit. *sarvangi*). They also wrote the first biographies/hagiographies (*parchais*

44 See Éloïse Brac de la Perrière, *L’art du livre dans l’Inde des sultanats* (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), and Preeti Khosla’s PhD dissertation on ‘The Visual Languages of the North Indian Styles of Book Paintings during the Sultanate Period (1411-1525)’ (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2014).

45 Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scriptures* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 10. Jack Hawley also reminds us of Guru Nanak’s dislike for the proliferation of mercenary and beggarly performers (p. 211).

46 Mann (2001), p. 12.

and *bhaktamals*) in the vernacular in North India, and the manuals for sermons that Monika Horstmann writes about.⁴⁷ She notes that, especially from the eighteenth century, “the wealth of manuscripts often of great length and calligraphic quality indicate that the patrons of these were men—and occasionally women—of considerable means” (p. 45). These developments form a striking parallel to the already existing but growing production in sufi circles of compilations of sayings (*malfuzat*) and biographical dictionaries (*tazkiras*) devoted to one’s master—a sure way of placing him on the map. Another related phenomenon concerns the considerable growth in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of writing about and by elite lineages of musicians, especially *kalawants* and those with lineal connections to Delhi. Far from confirming the “illiterate *ustad*” stereotype we have inherited from nationalist musicologists,⁴⁸ the later Mughal period saw major professional musicians and socially prominent amateurs writing their own names into history in the form of two kinds of books: *tazkiras* and song collections⁴⁹ in Persian and Hindavi.⁵⁰ This oral-literate field of musical knowledge transmission probably developed in part as a way of ensuring the longevity of lineages and the preservation of lineal musical property threatened in the eighteenth century by increased economic migration away from traditional centres of familial oral transmission. The evidence of lineages of hereditary performers who, alongside

47 For Dadu-panthi biographies, see e.g. Jangopal, *The Hindī Biography of Dādū Dayāl*, ed. and trans. by Winand M. Callewaert (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988); for Dadu-panthi compendia, see Winand M. Callewaert, *The Sarvāṅgī of Gopāldās: A 17th Century Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1993), and W.M. Callewaert and Bart Op de Beeck, *Nirguṇa Bhakti Sāgara = Devotional Hindī Literature: A Critical Edition of the Pañc-Vāṇī or Five Works of Dādū, Kābir, Nāmdev, Raidās, Hardās with the Hindī Songs of Gorakhnāth and Sundardās*, 2 vols (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1991).

48 See e.g. Janaki Bakhle on V.N. Bhatkhande’s condemnation of Muslim *ustads* as ignorant and illiterate, in *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 109-13, 120-23.

49 The history of song collections in South Asia is patently much older and more extensive (see Busch and Bangha in this volume); but before this eighteenth-century flurry of activity, collections of the courtly repertoire that forms the basis of what is now called Hindustani music (*dhrupad*, *khayal*, *tappa*, etc.) are significantly rarer than, say, *bhakti* collections.

50 For bibliographical details of many of these texts, see the database SHAMSA: Sources for the History and Analysis of Music/Dance in South Asia, held at King’s College London. At the time of writing it holds information on all known major writings (300+ sources) on North Indian music c.1700-1900 written in Persian, Hindavi, English, and modern Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali.

oral transmission, simultaneously contributed to the written lineage of Indo-Persianate musical knowledge furthermore underlines the central importance of community and *silsila*, or what Indrani Chatterjee calls “monastic governmentality”, in sustaining written as well as oral knowledge systems in early modern India.⁵¹

In this period we thus see a marked expansion of textuality—not just in Persian and Sanskrit, but also in the vernaculars—to new groups and new genres, often as the writing down of oral genres, if not whole performances. As Bangha points out, until the sixteenth century only

Puranic, epic and historical narratives and Sufi romances—composed normally in the *doha-chaupai* metre, conveying important religious or political messages, and usually of a performative nature—[...] had been deemed worthy of being committed to writing in the vernacular. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, instead, books began to appear in Brajbhasha that were composed in order to be read and studied and not primarily to be performed (see Busch in this volume). This is also the time when we can spot the beginning of an ever-increasing activity to commit to writing Hindi songs that have so far been transmitted in oral performance. (p. 359)

About Bengali *mangalkabyas*, d’Hubert notes that the poet is typically represented but as the conduit of the Goddess’s wish to tell the story. The ritual act by which he grabs a flywhisk marks not only the beginning of the performance but also the moment in which he remembers the text: “in terms of representation of the literary activity, it is not only that performance is the main way to share the content of a written text; rather it means that no text is ever able to come to existence without a setting of ritual performance” (p. 428).

Courtly literary culture, Busch reminds us, was very much a *written* literary culture—she quotes a description of the court of Bir Singh Deo Bundela by Keshavdas in which “there sat countless writers writing, hundreds, and thousands of them” (p. 254). While her essay painstakingly teases out the performative elements and qualities of the poetic, historical, martial texts, and manuals written by Brajbhasha *riti* poets, she is also keen to stress that this “*riti* corpus was underwritten first and foremost by a *textual* engagement with the Sanskrit past”. Sunil Sharma points out that while history records that Akbar had Persian

51 On the centrality of lineage to political formation and knowledge production in South Asia, see Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia’, *History of the Present* 3.1 (2013), 57-98.

classics like the *Shāhnāma* and the *Gulistān* read out in court and these works were meant to be read aloud in sections, “their orality was accompanied by an equal value placed on these works as books, and it was usually through the copying and use of manuscripts of these texts that they were transmitted with the seals of the members of the royal family and nobility” (p. 288).

Inside and outside the court, the Puranas (which both Muzaffar Alam and Jack Hawley touch upon) present a tantalising case. While Puranas remained written in Sanskrit in North India and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* attracted important Sanskrit commentaries by the main Vaishnava *acharyas*, Hawley reminds us that the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* was performed in a number of ways both in Sanskrit and in the vernacular: through recitation; reading and exposition involving sermons and songs; or in rituals (*yajnas*). Indeed, the *Bhāgavata mātmya* manuscripts that began to appear at the turn of the eighteenth century expressed the need to regulate these performances. In their different ways, both ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s Persian Purana and Surdas’s “song commentary” are evidence of this culture of Puranas circulating between writing and performance.⁵²

By comparison, John Cort’s essay explores the process by which Jain hymns in Sanskrit (*stotras*) were skilfully translated by Banarsidas and his circle in Agra in the early seventeenth century. (As he points out, they chose to translate not Jain scriptures, but ritual texts.) The written translation was itself the result of oral debates, and in turn it became the subject of further debates. Yet “no one wanted to *read* a *kirtan* or an *abhang*, after all—they wanted to see it, hear it, and experience it displayed before them”, as Novetzke forcefully argues. Perhaps the most unexpected arguments about the directionality between performance and text and the role of texts in performance come from his essay and Widdess’s. By contrasting the *bada* (notebook) of *kirtan* performers—“loosely organised and often hastily constructed with lots of margin corrections, lines crossed out, and other emendations”—with the orderly *pothi* (book) of theologians and institutional figures, Novetzke argues that *badas* represent the logic of *kirtan* performance. His argument is worth quoting in full:

52 Vernacular translations of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, particularly of books X and XI, also proliferated from the sixteenth century onwards; see R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), pp. 96-97.

[The *bada*] is a format that privileges performance. Text here is submitted to the demands of performance. The text is a tool, a means and not an end. Furthermore, its role is not preservation—it may function as an archive, but its composition is not intended to ossify a text and convey it into the future as a fixed form. Instead, the text is dynamic, meant to trigger and prompt a performance, existing as a kind of outline of a *kirtan*, but containing no narrative, typological, or historical logic independent of performance. In other words, it cannot stand alone, as can a *pothi* or a fixed, complete composition. (p. 179)⁵³

As the archetypal *kirtankar*, Namdev expresses suspicion of books and scriptures and expresses a theory of practice in which devotion “is on display, through the body and voice, and never on paper”. “Despite the rather impressive rate of literacy among the Marathi sants”, Novetzke argues, “the logic of practice of Varkari religious expression has been oral, or rather performative, and not written”. *Kirtan* is the performance of devotion and is central to *bhakti* practice because it is public and open to all.

Monika Horstmann likewise makes the case that the thematic and musical arrangement of sant *vanis*, and the fact that all these texts are used as manuals by preachers, means that “there can be no doubt that the *Dādūvāṇī* originated from the redaction of sayings by, or used by, Dadu in live homiletic contexts” (p. 59). During Dadupanthi festive occasions today, preachers do not consult a prepared script but “may hold the open sacred scripture in front of them”, though their sermons will draw upon material taken from a range of books. And if they are preaching about a verse in the scriptures they might read the verses out. “The live performance of a sermon is therefore oral in its fullest sense”, she notes, “although it draws on memorised or printed material and perhaps on notes the preacher has taken while preparing for the task” (p. 36). The manuals that she and Khan write about can be viewed in a similar light—not as free-standing texts but as aids to performance. Indeed, she points out that notwithstanding the respect accorded to

53 He also points out the implications for collecting, archiving, preservation, and research: “Major archival institutions—such as university libraries, research centres, and other institutes—amid their many collections of *pothis* do not generally collect *badas*. Even the concern with which these notebooks are preserved today differs from the careful attention given to manuscripts—*badas* are alien to the teak-wood glass case, rarely have an index or catalogue citations, and generally rest in haphazard stacks or even piles in the closets of institutions and private collectors” (p. 175).

Mahant Pokhardas's spiritual stature, his sermons were acknowledged to be hard to enjoy since he read out the manual!

While Fakhr al-Zamani's seventeenth-century Persian manual on storytelling, the *Ṭirāz al-akhbār*, resembles the Dadupanthi sermon manuals in containing useful lists of terms, lexical aids, assorted sayings, and nutshell versions of longer stories, it seems closer to the *ritigranth* manuals (Busch) in operating as a proof, almost a certificate, of its author's own skills as a storyteller, and in elevating storytelling to an art that requires a manual. Khan notes that the text not only tells us much about the process of *qissa* performance but also shows us "one manner in which the *qissa* was defined or 'encoded'" (Khan, p. 186). In the case of the *qissa*, the manual's approach to genre as an assemblage of elements (Khan uses the term *bayaz* or scrapbook) that could and should be combined and recombined in new and attractive ways "undermines the very idea of monolithic genres", because if we look at the range of intertextual and extra-literary material that each *qissa-khwan* was supposed to have "in his throat", the range is stupendous and in fact crosses the line between mimetic and veracious genres that Fakhr al-Zamani otherwise subscribed to (p. 186). Each *qissa* performance was therefore something of an "intertextual tapestry" that "can only be comprehended as a complex of *multi-generic* intertexts that fall under the order of the master genre code of the *qissa*" (p. 205).

By contrast, in the Newar devotional singing (*dapha*) studied by Richard Widdess, the book containing the song-texts is important—but only as a ritual object. It is never consulted, and the boys who are taught the songs from it are not taught to *read* them. For singers and audience the texts only provide clues to meaning: "a word, name or phrase evokes a network of meanings and associations, which may in turn determine when and where the song is sung". What is important, he notes, is the performance, "which has its own meanings and values independently of the text: as religious exertion, as an expression of social identity, and as a component in urban ritual" (Widdess, p. 244). When he asked one group why they go to the trouble of singing the entire Sanskrit poem *Gītagovinda* in one all-night performance when they do not understand the words, "they explained that the *objective* is to sing all night. Therefore they *choose* to sing the *Gītagovinda*, because it takes that length of time" (p. 240).

Beyond Text: Musical Sound and the Inexpressible

This, finally, leads us to the question of the limits of the verbal—what does music, what do singing or vocally heightened forms of recitation, add or do to a text that supersedes what a text can do alone? In considering this issue in particular, the insights of our contemporary ethnographic case studies have proven especially helpful.

Rhythmic patterns are sometimes inserted verbally in performance scenes within tales or poems (Orsini, Busch), and the notated non-lexical syllables of courtly *taranas* that were vocalised and embodied by drummers and dancers in performance are interlaced with Persian couplets in eighteenth-century song collections.⁵⁴ But in Richard Wolf's essay, drum syllables become a code unto themselves, speaking of the performers' mastery and enjoyment of skills recognised by each other and by those few in the audience—like Madhavanal with Kamakandala (Orsini)—who can understand their abstract relationships with verbal texts. And as Widdess concludes, cases like *dapha*, *khayal*, or the *marai kirtan* in Bengal suggest that “some South Asian musical forms escape such conventional categories as *orality* and *text*, but are better understood as *performance*: a process in which text may be present, in written and/or oral form, but is subsumed by musical elaboration and the enactment of religious and social meanings” (p. 245). The presence of cosmic sound within the body is key for *bhakti* poets like Kabir, and for their contemporary performers like Prahlad Singh Tipania, who evoke the continuous inner sound, the subtle voice (*nada*, *jhini avaz*).⁵⁵

For the period before recorded sound, the question of what music does that goes beyond text is more difficult to answer because we no longer have access to the object under discussion. Since Plato,⁵⁶ music in many cultures, past and present, has been used to deal with excess; to go beyond words, to express the inexpressible; to soothe, magnify, and charm the

54 See e.g. Sophia Plowden's song collection, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 380.

55 For a sensitive and embodied discussion, see Linda Hess's forthcoming book, *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India* (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 1.

56 Plato's theory of the “music of the spheres”, which built upon Pythagoras, was a clear influence on Indo-Persian treatises on Hindustani music; see especially Shaikh 'Abdul Karim bin Shaikh Farid Ansari al-Qadiri, *Javāhir al-mūsīqāt-i Muḥammadī* (British Library, MS Or. 12,857).

emotions through the senses rather than the intellect. Because music's mode of communication is abstract, music's semantic and affective associations are more ambiguous than language, capable of expressing a greater depth and number of nuances, often simultaneously.⁵⁷ This is not to say that music's significations are endless: music always exists within a culturally specific net of meaning that determines its limits. What it does mean is that the very choice to recite or to sing, and in many of our cases the choice of *raga* in which to set a text, can both enrich and multiply the possible meanings of text—or conversely render a lyric less ambiguous by intimating one meaning among many.

What is more, the *raga* itself exists both as a specifically musical formula (a set of notes that need to be sung in particular orders and ways), *nadamaya*, and as an icon, *devatamaya*, that conveys a distinct mood and set of associations accompanied by specific instructions as to the correct time or season to stimulate those associations.⁵⁸ In the Mughal court, a clear “scientific” correlation was drawn between each of the seven notes of the Hindustani scale, the seven celestial bodies, and the four elements presiding over each, embedding *raga* firmly in the fields of Islamicate cosmology and Unani medicine.⁵⁹ But this was in large part an attempt to interpret in new terms why the Indic system associated each *raga* with particular iconographies, deities and *nayak-nayikas*, timings, and *rasa*. At the heart of both knowledge systems was an attempt to account for each *raga*'s effect on the listener, its *ta'sir*. This effect was not merely subjective, it was specific; and it was not merely affective, able to transport listeners into a state of meditation or restlessness or tearfulness, it was supernatural—it rearranged the natural world, whether that be a heart sickened by melancholy or a gathering rain cloud refusing to burst. Although the rational, “scientific” underpinnings of the explanation of *ta'sir* had attenuated by the nineteenth century, the

57 Dillon (2012), pp. 6-7, 16-43, especially on Augustine pp. 36-42; see also Laudan Nooshin, 'Prelude: Power and the Play of Music', in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. by L. Nooshin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1-32, especially 1-4 and 9-17; and Victor Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. by Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

58 Discussion of Somanatha's *Rāgavibodha* (1609) in Harold Powers, 'Illustrated Inventories of Indian Rāgamāla Painting', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100.4 (1980), 473-93, especially pp. 473-75.

59 Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], 'Rāga Systems in Performance', in 'Hindustani Music in the Time of Aurangzeb' (PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2003), pp. 177-225.

Ma'dan al-mūsīqī (1869) nonetheless describes in magical terms how the singer's command over *ta'sir* should work. The singer was in effect a necromancer (an *'amil*), and the melodic form of the *raga* was a magical formula (*'amal; du'a ba tarkib*) that, when voiced at the right cosmological time, would conjure up a spirit (a *muwakkal*) that would do his bidding. That spirit was the *ta'sir* of the *raga*.⁶⁰

In other words, sound in and of itself was powerful—effective and affecting—and the silencing of this dimension to the texts with which we work is definitively a loss. We are not *'amils*, and cannot conjure up the inexpressible experience of sounds that have long passed into silence. But all our work in this volume is underpinned by the conviction that we must be constantly mindful of the fact that texts in North India were (and are) frequently experienced as live auditory entities with a fuller range of experiential possibilities than may be apparent on the surface of the page.

60 Munshi Muhammad Karam Imam Khan, *Ma'dan al-mūsīqī* (Lucknow: Hindustani Press, 1925), pp. 111-16.