

Music and its Many Memories: Complicating 1947 for the Punjab

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Music is often invoked as the “glue” that unites people, acting as a perennial symbol of a historically composite culture disrupted by the rupture of Partition.¹ This view posits a kind of pluralistic and decentred South Asian “musical citizenship” that counters the narrow, antagonistic and populist definition of citizenship tied exclusively to either India

¹For a representative example, see Varun Soni, “India, Pakistan and the Musical Gurus of Peace,” *Huffington Post*, 14 June 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/varun-soni/india-pakistan-and-the-mu_b_606870.html. Accessed 2 May 2017.

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or Pakistan.² However, we cannot easily transpose such views of cultural citizenship back in time, as doing so leads to a gravely presentist reading of our musical pasts, and rides roughshod over the complex trajectories musicians' lives took post-1947. At the same time, there is no doubt that the division of the subcontinent on the basis of religion instituted changes in the way music was conceptualised, patronised and understood in the fledgling twin states of Pakistan and India. As demonstrated by Michael Nijhawan, Partition "led to a redistribution of performative styles and repertoires", with a greater emphasis on religious content.³ Virinder Kalra's recent work on Punjab also demonstrates the overlapping boundaries between *kirtan* and *qawwali* music, and how over the course of the twentieth century, and particularly in the wake of Partition, the two "became Sikh and Muslim music, respectively ... despite similarity in audibility and performer overlap."⁴ He thus remarks how, as a result of Partition, "musicians with broad repertoires began to restrict themselves in the face of a narrowing patronage."⁵

In Pakistan, as noted by Pakistani scholar Saeed Malik and Indian documentary filmmaker Yousuf Saeed alike, there was a proactive attempt to Islamicise music, by ridding it of any Hindu referents.⁶ In a parallel way,

²This idea is derived from the IMR Distinguished Lecture Series on "The Musical Citizen" delivered by Martin Stokes, especially the first lecture on "How Musical is the Citizen?," at the Senate House, University of London, 4th May 2017. See <http://www.the-imr.uk/distinguished-lecture-series/>. Accessed 1 May 2017. Stokes focussed on the debates around citizenship which music has been meshed with, building on scholarship across disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology and ethnomusicology; ranging from Aihwa Ong's concept of "flexible citizenship" (1999) in globalised, transnational times, to Hannah Arendt's critique of citizenship under totalitarian regimes (1951). See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1951).

³Michael Nijhawan, "Punjab's *Dhadi* Tradition: Genre and Community in the Aftermath of Partition," *Indian Folklife* 3, no. 4 (October 2004): 5–7; see 7.

⁴Virinder Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 16.

⁵Ibid., 137. He also notes that, mainly on account of their ascriptive identity as Muslims, the "remaining *rababis* in East Punjab no longer found patronage in *gurdwaras* and had to engage in the emerging state-sponsored folk art, with an emphasis on Sufi texts that were seen as part of a distant folk culture." Ibid.

⁶Saeed Malik, *The Musical Heritage of Pakistan* (Islamabad: Idara Saqafat-e-Pakistan, 1983); Yousuf Saeed, "Fled Is That Music," *India International Centre Quarterly* 35, no. 3/4, the Great Divide (Winter 2008–Spring 2009): 238–249.

in India there was a strengthening of the trends of Hinduisation, begun in the nineteenth century by Pandit Paluskar, the man who spearheaded the nationalisation and standardisation of Indian classical music, as well as a more conscious packaging of music as an “ancient” cultural symbol that could represent the new India to the rest of the world.⁷ Yet, while we know of these broader changes in the musical landscape, the impact of Partition on the lives of musicians and artists has been little studied, scattered as it has been across disparate accounts of music, and different biographies of musicians.⁸ As a result, we lack a comprehensive account of the repercussions of this cataclysm on the quotidian lives of the sub-continent’s musicians, relying instead on superficial celebrations of music as a means of building unity and on assumptions about what came before Partition.⁹ However, if we closely examine the life stories and views of a handful of musicians, we find that examples of “Punjabiya”¹⁰ accompany instances of prejudice. The relationship of musicians to Partition

⁷For more on Paluskar, see Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005). With the assertion of a monolithic Sikh identity in the late nineteenth century, music was also defined anew. See Bob van der Linden, *Music and Empire in Britain and India: Identity, Internationalism, and Cross-Cultural Communication* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Chap. 5 on “Sikh Sacred Music: Identity, Aesthetics, and Historical Change,” 129–156.

⁸Barring the work of Yousuf Saeed, there has been little scholarly or sustained engagement on this theme. In 2008, along with Prof. Lakshmi Subramanian, Saeed co-organised a 2-day workshop in August 2008, on “Hindustani Music and Partition” at New Delhi’s Jamia Millia Islamia, where musicians and musicologists from India, Pakistan and beyond participated. For details see <http://ektara.org/workshop08.html>. Accessed 14 May 2017.

⁹In contrast, there is a vast and proliferating literature detailing the impact of Partition on the literature, cinema and intellectual life of South Asia. For a representative and concise example, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, “Dissimilar Twins: Residue of 1947 in the Twenty-First Century,” *Social Semiotics* 19, no. 4 (December 2009): 441–451.

¹⁰Madan Gopal Singh has recounted to the author his early childhood memories of growing up in Amritsar, being able to tune in and listen to Radio Lahore, evoking how the idea of “Punjabiya” in a broader “radio republic,” as it were, that integrates and subverts the border, re-connecting people. On Punjabiya, see Alyssa Ayres, “Language, the Nation, and Symbolic Capital: The Case of Punjab,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 3 (August 2008): 917–946; Pritam Singh, “The idea of Punjabiya,” *Himal Southasian* 23, no. 5 (2010): 55–57; and “Introduction: Punjab in History and Historiography,” in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, ed. Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), xv–lviii.

and to religious difference, therefore, is complex and at times contradictory, and eludes simple characterisation, positive or negative.

In this chapter, I wish to examine, in preliminary terms, the impact of India's partition on practitioners of Hindustani classical music, in particular those belonging to the region of Punjab. Punjab provides an interesting case study, for three reasons. First, as Nijhawan, Kalra and Anjali Gera-Roy have established, the post-Partition restructuring of performance styles has blinded us to the more amorphous performative world of pre-1947 Punjab.¹¹ This is so, even as the shared cultural matrix of ideas and aesthetic sensibilities that characterised the undivided Punjab continues to resonate across the borders today in the many songs and traditions shared by people in West (Pakistan) and East (India) Punjab. Second, in Punjab the degree of personal rupture was more thorough, and achieved in a shorter period of time, given the "genocidal proportions" of the 1947 mass killings, which were in contrast to the lesser degree of violence on the Bengal side (which, thanks to its more porous riverine borders, among other factors, experienced a slower process of population exchange).¹² Third, while the work of Kalra and Nijhawan has addressed folk musicians, *dhadhhis* and performers of Sikh *kirtan* like the Ragis and Rababis, classical musicians have been neglected in these and other scholarly accounts of music in Punjab.¹³ Kalra briefly examines the discourse of colonial commentators and native elites, to conclude that "colonial modernity shaped and crafted designs" of both folk and classical music: while the latter "was able to service the new nation", the former "remained the local residual and thus steeped in

¹¹See Anjali Gera-Roy, *Bhangra Moves: Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond* (London: Ashgate, 2010), 22, 55, 72–75.

¹²Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111. On the nature of Partition-induced migrations in Bengal, see chap. 3, "Partition and Migration: Refugees in West Bengal, 1947–1967," 105–158. Chatterji demonstrates how the bulk of East Bengali Hindu peasants migrated much later, in the wake of communal conflagrations beginning in 1949.

¹³Kalra notes the connections between folk and classical in post-1947 Punjab, while noting the almost exclusive patronage of folk music in the Indian Punjab. Kalra, *Sacred*, 134–146.

colonial terminology.”¹⁴ However, he doesn’t sufficiently account for the marginalisation of the classical from discourses on Punjabi culture.¹⁵ In contrast, I wish to portray the importance of hereditary Hindustani/art musicians for the regional Punjab context, to reveal how classical training had a relevance outside, and beyond, the paradigm of the nation in a more local milieu.¹⁶ I thus wish to challenge the symbolic alienation of the “classical” from Punjab’s culture in both popular and scholarly discourse. While doing so, I am mindful of the paradoxical locations that “classical” music has historically had in the Punjab context, within spaces associated with “folk”, *qawwali*, or *gurbani* music—such as *melas* (fairs), or shrines of Sufi saints. The celebration (both lay and academic) of genres of music performed *only* in these “popular” spaces, symbolised semiotically by either a bucolic conviviality or a martial vigour, has obscured the important role played by classically trained, *gharana*-based musicians in the sociocultural history of Punjab. By focussing on classical musicians in Punjab, whilst simultaneously being attentive to their connections with folk, *gurbani*, or *qawwali* music, I hope to offer a distinctive perspective within work on culture in modern South Asia.

¹⁴Ibid., 134–135.

¹⁵While colonialism surely changed the ways in which Hindustani art (or Classical) music was perceived and organised in South Asia, it would be erroneous to assume that the binary between Classical and Folk, or *Margi* and *Desi* music was thoroughly a product of colonial modernity, as the assumption seems to be in Kalra. For a good summary of these debates, see Katherine Butler Schofield, “Reviving the Golden Age again: ‘Classicization’, Hindustani Music, and the Mughals,” *Ethnomusicology* 54 (2010): 484–517.

¹⁶See my in-progress PhD thesis (expected June 2018). I wish to build on recent literature on the social histories of music in other regions, e.g. the recent PhD theses of Richard D. Williams and Sharmadip Basu on Bengal. For Rajasthan, see Daniel Neuman, Shubha Chadhuri, and Komal Kothari, *Bards, Ballads, and Boundaries: An Ethnographic Atlas of Music Traditions in West Rajasthan* (Oxford: Seagull Books, 2006); and more recently, Shalini Ayyagiri, “Spaces Betwixt and Between: Musical Borderlands and the Manganiyar Musicians of Rajasthan,” *Asian Music* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 3–33.

THE SHARED SPACE OF MUSIC¹⁷

Undivided Punjab has historically been a site of communally amorphous culture-making. Ustad Badar-uz-Zaman of Lahore has described to Yousuf Saeed the “Zinda-dilan-e Lahaur” (lit., “Cheerful folk of Lahore”), an informal club of music lovers, constituted of cloth merchants and vegetable and meat sellers, who hosted evenings of classical music.¹⁸ In this, Punjab was not unusual; as Heidi Pauwels’ recent work demonstrates, musical and literary milieus in Delhi, what is now Rajasthan and elsewhere have long provided a location for dynamic and diverse forms of cultural exchange.¹⁹ In the colonial context, research on culture in Bengal (particularly Sumanta Banerjee’s earlier monograph, and Anindita Ghosh’s more recent one) has also noted the permeable boundaries between elite and popular cultures in South Asia, albeit focussing on patterns of circulations between these two domains.²⁰

The question animating this paper is part of a larger project to explore the several ways in which people from Punjab have been viscerally connected through their shared poetry, music and literature, despite the rigidity of borders. It is fitting that the panel leading up to this book, “Imagining a Lost Present: Situating Memory across/beyond Partition”, was organised in 2016, coinciding with the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of renowned Punjabi poet Waris Shah, whose classic composition of the folk tale of Heer-Ranjha has continued

¹⁷I borrow this term from Farina Mir’s idea of Punjabi *gisse* reflecting the existence of “shared notions of piety.” She posits this in opposition to the notion of “syncretism,” which presupposes a fixed, “pre-existing religious identity,” which was not representative for most of colonial Punjab. See Farina Mir, “Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 3 (July 2006): 727–758.

¹⁸Yousuf Saeed, “Jugalbandi: Divided Scores,” *Himal SouthAsian*, February 2011, <http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/3607-divided-scores.html>. Accessed 30 June 2016.

¹⁹Heidi Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India: Poetry and Paintings from Kishangarh* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2015).

²⁰Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989); Anindita Ghosh, *Power and Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

to unite scores of Punjabis across the border for the past 65 years.²¹ However, while the subversive power of music is well recognised, it would be hazardous to impose any kind of simplistic “syncretism” on the musicians themselves. What musicians—then and now—thought of different circumstances, and of borders themselves, is not very easily categorised. Instead, musicians responded in ways that reflect their specific personal circumstances, just as other humans and agents do. A focus on the musicians of Punjab during the 1940s and 1950s, and indeed, even in the present, sensitises us to how the hard borders (including visa regimes, and passport issuance, etc.) engendered by 1947 did not appear overnight, but instead, materialised over what Vazira Zamindar has called the “Long Partition” of the subcontinent.²²

At one level, musicians are a group for whom borders are consistently envisaged as fluid, if not entirely irrelevant, given their historic tendency to be perennially on the move, in search of patronage and audiences. This physical mobility is also tied to their institutional mobility, as liminal border-crossers, with their musical prowess helping them overcome the traditionally negative ascription of musicianship as a profession.²³ Perhaps it was in recognition of this tendency that the most famous classical musician produced by twentieth-century Punjab, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, said with a ringing certainty that if one child in every family across the subcontinent had learnt classical music, Partition and the violence accompanying it could have been avoided. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and Partition did take place, with calamitous, unintended and sometimes surprising consequences for the subcontinent’s musicians. Bade Ghulam Ali’s somewhat rhetorical statements about the power of classical music are important at a deeper level too. One can read in his statement a celebration of the virtues of patience, the many

²¹See the commemorative event held at SOAS, London on 6 Sept 2016, titled “250 Years of Waris Shah’s Heer,” where speakers included Amarjit Chandan, Mahmood Awan, Madan Gopal Singh, Nur Sobers-Khan, and Navtej Purewal: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/events/heritage-and-history-in-south-asia/06sep2016-250-years-of-waris-shahs-heer.html>. Accessed 11 May 2017.

²²Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²³Katherine Butler Brown, “The Social Liminality of Musicians: Case Studies from Mughal India and Beyond,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 3 (2007): 13–49.

years of rigorous practice required to become even a merely competent classical musician; this is in contrast to the immense speed with which Partition was achieved and the havoc it created in its wake.²⁴ Regardless of his precise meaning, Bade Ghulam Ali recognised the power of music in preventing violence, and building peace; this is an area that demands critical research in the context of South Asia.²⁵

In what follows, I explore the consequences of Partition for the musicians of the Punjab through the life-trajectories of two well-known musicians, Roshanara Begum and Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, and the views of two lesser-known ones, Muhammad Hafeez Khan Talwandiwalé and Pt. Ramakant Sharma. I utilise the moment of Partition, and the divergent views it precipitated amongst musicians, to shed light on a more chequered social history of the musicians in the region. Section 1 of the paper explores the material changes and shifts in the lives of classical musicians in Punjab, as well as attempts at subverting and traversing the Radcliffe line made by musicians and their patrons. Section 2, on the other hand, examines how musicians view the particular character of this divide; I illustrate that views around the *mirasi*, Punjab's caste of hereditary musician-genealogists, became especially central to it. While a Pakistani musician attributes the decline in patronage to the loss of patrons, and consistently defined the *mirasis* as a plague and a negative force to be reckoned with, an Indian counterpart patronisingly appropriates to India the status of "saviour" of the *mirasi*. In both cases, views regarding these two contradictory groups—the *mirasi* at the low end of the spectrum, and elite, state-supported patrons on the other—are at the heart of understanding the differences in the life of music between India and Pakistan. Finally, Sect. 3 takes a step back to consider the recurring trope of nostalgia, delineating its centrality for musicians in South Asia. In the case of musicians affected by Partition, I argue for the existence of a "double nostalgia": one for a better time of musical patronage, performance and audience appreciation, as well as for the undivided space that existed in the pre-Partition times. Throughout the paper, my concern is with how musicians viewed: (a) the shared past; (b) their musical worlds

²⁴I am grateful to Anne Murphy for this insight.

²⁵In the western context, see Morag Josephine Grant, "Music and Human Rights," in *The Sage Handbook of Human Rights*, ed. Anja Mihr and Mark Gibney, vol. 1 (Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington, DC: Sage, 2014).

and communities of musicians across borders; and (c) differences in state patronage in India and Pakistan.

MUSICIANS AND THE MATERIALITY OF PARTITION

Khalid Basra's excellent and intensive ethnography of the Talwandi *gharana*, now based in Lahore, sheds light on the attitudes of musicians towards sociopolitical developments. Ustad Muhammad Hafeez Khan Talwandiwalé came from a long lineage of *dhrupad* musicians, whose family moved from East Punjab to the newly set-up canal colony of Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) in West Punjab in the early twentieth century when his grandfather Mian Maula Bakhsh (1845–1930) accepted the invitation of wealthy Sikh landlords. For the family of Hafeez Khan Talwandiwalé, Partition meant the loss of their family's patron, Sardar Harcharan Singh, who had to move to India in the wake of the violence of 1947. Basra's interviews with Hafeez Khan abound in nostalgia for the abundance of pre-Partition Faisalabad. At one point he tells Basra of the family's pre-Partition wealth, albeit with a hint of exaggeration,

Before partition our circumstances were such that father used to bring fruit and it used to be packed in neat boxes wrapped in cotton—grapes, citrus, litchis—such top quality fruit. His income in those days was at least Rs. 500/- per day ... *Our financial position was such that we used to play hockey with fruit.* Mother also used to have three changes of clothes a day ... of course after Partition conditions went from bad to worse ...²⁶

This evocation of an abundance of quality food in pre-Partition Punjab is of course a common nostalgic trope across Partition narratives, and is noted by Basra elsewhere as well.²⁷

²⁶Khalid Basra, "A Garland of razors': The Life of a Traditional Musician in Contemporary Pakistan" (unpublished PhD dissertation, SOAS, January 1996), 320, Emphasis added.

²⁷"The Sikh patron Sardar Harcharan Singh provided the family with a large house, and was also responsible for supplying them with grain, vegetables, milk, etc. Other pupils like the Hindu barrister Amarnath were also *lavish patrons* of the family." Ibid.

The life-trajectory and career of another Punjabi musician, who hailed from west Punjab, and migrated eastwards to India a few years after Partition, provides one of our case studies. Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, the iconic and legendary vocalist of the Kasur-Patiala *gharana*, faced a problem of patronage in the fledgling state of Pakistan. Recognising greater avenues for survival in India, and disgruntled with the Islamicisation of music in Pakistan,²⁸ Bade Ghulam Ali migrated to India, lured by the offer of Indian citizenship made by Jawaharlal Nehru, and the encouragement of music-loving politicians like Morarji Desai.²⁹ This was also a result of Bade Ghulam Ali's famous tiff with the famous and powerful Director of Radio Pakistan, Z.A. Bokhari, when the latter apparently dismissed Bade Ghulam Ali's singing as "below the level of acceptability."³⁰

Yet, despite the official narrative of the positive reception afforded to Bade Ghulam Ali by representatives of the so-called "secular" Indian nation, and its more open-minded patrons, India posed other problems. A brief example from the Harballabh music festival of Jalandhar (on which more below) during the 1950s bears this out. Harballabh has been feted as a place where musicians performed for a minimal fee, given its status as a space of devotionism, where musicians performed for more mystical reasons. I have described elsewhere how the festival, which started in 1875, had its origins in a tradition of cosmopolitan devotionism (with *dhrupad* music as the primary genre performed), which had shifted by the turn of the twentieth century to a more Hindu devotional sphere, thanks to the efforts of Pt. Paluskar, who also popularised *khayal*

²⁸See Basra, "A Garland," 128–129, for an account of this. He quotes from the Public Relations Directorate Radio Pakistan which goaded Pakistani musicians to "draw inspiration from the music of other Muslim countries," and lauded the efforts of those composers who created "compositions based on Arabic and Iranian music forms."

²⁹Malti Gilani and Qurratulain Haidar, *Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan "Sabrang": His Life and Music* (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 2003).

³⁰Basra, "A Garland," 325.

across India, and especially at the Harballabh.³¹ However, the turn to greater professionalisation ushered in under Mr. Ashwini Kumar, who was charged with the organisation of the festival (on whom more below), was seen as a negative development by many old Harballabh hands, like Jagannath Parti, one of the founder members of the Sangeet Mahasabha in 1922. The finger of blame was unequivocally pointed in the direction of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali's insisting that he be paid a performance fee; he was contrasted with the more pious (and unsurprisingly, Hindu) performers of the past³²—mostly students of Pt. Paluskar, who himself had inaugurated the era of a nationalised, Hindu devotional avatar for Indian classical music, coupled with a suspicion of dancing girls and Muslim performers.³³

This example illustrates the hidden hostility exhibited by upper-caste Hindu music patrons and audience members towards even the most accomplished of Punjabi Muslim musicians. It is no wonder then that not all Punjabi Muslim musicians felt as secure staying on in India as Khan *sahib*: to counterweigh the substantial presence of a sole Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (who chose to migrate to India only late in the day), there was a greater outflow of legendary classical musicians from eastern Punjab to Pakistan. These included Patiala *gharana* doyens like Fateh

³¹Radha Kapuria, "Rethinking Musical Pasts: The Harballabh Music Festival of Punjab," *Social Scientist* 43, no. 5–6 (May–June 2015): 77–91. In his otherwise valuable book, Virinder Kalra erroneously claims that the Harballabh had undergone a process of nationalisation and religious revival *prior* to the arrival of Paluskar, when, in fact, the evidence points to the contrary. Kalra, *Sacred*, 61. As I have demonstrated in my MPhil thesis, Paluskar's visits to the Harballabh (among other reasons) were the prime motivating factor that impelled the organisers to change the character of the festival from a fair to a concert resembling those organised in *metropoli* like Lahore, Bombay and Calcutta.

³²Kapuria, "Muse for Music," 99–103.

³³For a more detailed account of Paluskar's reception in Punjab, see James Kippen, *Gurudev's Drumming Legacy* (London: Ashgate, 2006), 24–26. For a more general account on Paluskar, apart from Bakhle's seminal work, see Michael David Rosse, "The Movement for the Revitalization of 'Hindu' Music in Northern India, 1860–1930: The Role of Associations and Institutions" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

Ali-Amanat Ali³⁴ and the brothers Salamat-Nazakat Ali, exponents of the Sham Chaurasi *gharana*, amongst many others.

Ashwini Kumar, the man responsible for the modernisation of the Harballabh classical music festival in Jalandhar in the Indian Punjab, represents a mature form of nationalism, not grounded in cultural exclusivism. One of India's most highly decorated policemen, he went on to become the Director General of the Border Security Force, one of the high points of his illustrious career. He retired from the latter position and was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1972 for his outstanding service in the Indo-Pak War of 1965. In the 1950s he also modernised the Harballabh festival, which he had attended since childhood. His favourite vocalist was Calcutta-born Roshanara Begum, a cousin of the legendary Ustad Abdul Karim Khan who went on to become one of Pakistan's most accomplished female classical musicians. She migrated to Pakistan in 1948 with her husband, who hailed from Lala Musa of the Gujrat region in West Punjab. In a 2011 interview, Kumar recounted the story of surreptitiously collaborating with Roshanara Begum's husband (who, like him, was a policeman) to enable her to cross the border, so that she could perform at Harballabh.

People were ready to pay 10 lakhs for (her to sing) a 10-minute raga in Bombay. They would say, please just do the 'aaa' of an 'alaap'; she still didn't come. Her husband was a policeman, so that's how I got to her. He used to be in the police in Bombay, then in Pakistan.

When I went to Lahore, I called her husband. I said: Please ask your wife to come and perform at Jalandhar. She sang ... and I tell you, (even) Bhimsen Joshi couldn't control the crowd that night, it was so rowdy. I said (to her), you go and sit. She sang, the moment she said 'aaaa', the whole crowd, must have been about 15–20,000 people, it was raining outside, winter, 27th of December, they wanted to listen to her. With one hour, she captured the audience, and stilled the entire crowd.³⁵

³⁴Fateh Ali-Amanat Ali made their first spectacular debut in Lahore in 1945, thanks to the sponsorship of Pt. Jeevan Lal Matto, Program Executive of the All India Radio in the city. Matto was also the man responsible for spotting the musical talent in a young Mohammed Rafi, who was working at a barber's shop in Lahore, and encouraging him to sing on Radio.

³⁵Interview with Ashwini Kumar dated 2 Feb 2013.

This example demonstrates how Kumar utilised his precolonial professional ties in the police bureaucracy to actually subvert the Radcliffe line, so that an Indian audience could revel in the unparalleled artistry of a Pakistani musician. His musical zeal thus existed simultaneously with his status as an Indian policeman at the forefront of a war against Pakistan, revealing the complications and contradictions in the postcolonial middle-class patronage of music in India.

These narratives of migration across the border came together in real time when the organisers of the Harballabh festival in 2011 scaled immense bureaucratic hurdles to ensure the performance of Lahore-based *dhrupad* musicians of the Talwandi *gharana*. Exponents of this *gharana* were performing in Jalandhar for the first time in almost 135 years, when their forebear Miyan Qalandar Bakhsh was first offered a *nazrana* (homage) of one and a half rupees by the *mahant* of the Devi Talab *sakti peeth* site and festival founder Baba Harballabh, as an invitation to come and perform there.

Although Partition impeded musicians from performing across the 1947 borders, there exist numerous instances indicating how these boundaries did not daunt all musicians. In a version of the Roshanara Begum anecdote, Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's father and uncle, who migrated to Pakistan in 1947 (but were originally based in Jalandhar's Pathan *bastis* or settlements), made the journey back to their home town in 1952 as a kind of pilgrimage—to perform at the annual *urs mela* (fair) held at the shrine of Sufi saint Hazrat Imam Nasr. Jalandhar's Hindu and Sikh inhabitants apparently turned out in vast numbers to listen to their former co-residents perform at the legendary fair for the first time in more than five years.³⁶ Thus, the very real boundaries that existed were also subverted at times, allowing for performance opportunities across the border. At the same time, however, older caste prejudices continued to create *internal* borders, within individual national contexts.

³⁶Anecdote narrated by Jalandhar-based musician Mohan Malsiani in an interview dated 19 Oct 2011. Malsiani recounted listening in rapt attention, as a young man, to the *qawwalis* they performed in the saint's honour.

CLASSICAL MUSICIANS AND THE *MIRASI*

Pt. Ramakant Sharma, tabla maestro, before his retirement the most senior music teacher at the old Kanya Mahavidyalaya of Jalandhar, and the longest-serving performer at the Harballabh, hails from a family, from the Nurmahal district close to Jalandhar, that had participated in the struggle for freedom. He represents the devotional Hindu strain of performers at the Harballabh, who, whilst participating in its Hindu façade and veneer, nonetheless have a somewhat romantic-nostalgic view of the *mirasi*.

There has been a tradition of having Mirasis in Punjab, even though common people viewed them negatively, yet there was also such a time when *these very* Mirasis nourished music, kept it alive ... To a great extent they kept our classical music alive.

Also, *just look* at the regard in which they are held here, these people don't enjoy the same respect in Pakistan ... Over there 60–70 per cent people don't view the Mirasis from a good perspective. I have seen this: the High Commissioner of India used to say that *the Mirasi who has crossed the Ravi dariya [river], he goes to India and becomes Allah (God)*.

You see, before Partition, whatever mehfils used to take place were primarily run by Hindus. Nobody used to differentiate (between people) ... (but), for those who used to sing, it was the children of the Hindus who touched their feet, and took their blessings, [even] ate together—there was no differentiation. Because the 'vidya' [knowledge] of music is 'Brahm Vidya'.³⁷

After proffering a (somewhat grudging) acknowledgement of the positive role played by the “socially low” *mirasi*, Ramakant thus glorifies India, while at the same time, looking down at Pakistan from a superior, subtly condescending position. We also witness Ramakant's tendency to generalise and attribute all positive patronage of art musicians to “India” and/or Hindus. This positioning is typical: India is often seen—by

³⁷ Interview dated 24 Oct 2011, in Kapuria, “A Muse for Music,” 300–320.

musicians on both sides of the border—as a space with greater avenues for the fostering and reproduction of classical music.³⁸

Yet, despite an external patronising attitude and the apparent encouragement proffered vis-à-vis the *mirasi* in India, as we see in Ramakant's account, there has been, on the whole, a steady current of censure towards this community. Similarly, according to the world view of Pakistan-based Hafeez Khan, who inherited the majority of his *mirasi* students “from his father, grandfather, and other ancestors through various pupillary linkages”,³⁹ we find a strongly negative stereotype and “Othering” of the *mirasi*. Otherwise praised for their “profound understanding of the *ustad-shagird* [master–student] relationship”, they were condemned for their “dangerous” proclivity to “pass off the knowledge learnt from the *ustad* as ‘inherited’. They attempt to fabricate identities and use the knowledge, the composition and *rags* as weighty evidence in the politics of pedigree.”⁴⁰ In the following quote on the *mirasi*, Hafeez Khan sets up a strict dichotomy between them and more accomplished purveyors of classical music, or *gavayyahs*:

So in the villages all the Sikhs and other *dihati* [rural] people etc., got hooked on to their *rags* [throat movement] *avazaan* [peculiar voice culture] and manner and style of singing. When the *riasats* finished and the *gavayyahs* came to these towns and places these ‘*mirasis*’ had already been accepted as *gavayyahs*. Their voices were very different. *Gavayyahs*’ voices were polished and cultured whereas their [*mirasis*] voices were raw and uncouth like *dangaris*; tremulous and thick and loud like the village watchmen who boast of having the capability of being heard across the village. Sikhs used to like these voices a lot as these resembled theirs and [they] accepted them (as *gavayyahs*). This is also a reason for the downfall of classical music.⁴¹

³⁸In this regard, the eminent Pakistani musicologist and inventor of the Sagar Veena, Raza Kazim—who migrated in 1947 from Lucknow—argued in a 2009 interview with filmmaker Yousuf Saeed that despite the veneer of state patronage, classical music in India was not doing well either. See Yousuf Saeed, *Khayal Darpan: ‘A Mirror of Imagination’* (New Delhi: Ektara, 2007).

³⁹Basra, “A Garland,” 101.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 111–112. More references to the ignominies of being a *mirasi* are found on 113; and 208–211.

Hafeez Khan thus constructs a clear connection between the *mirasi* and the Sikhs—ascribing to them the common qualities of being “uncouth” and “loud”, and indeed holding them responsible for the downfall of the classical style in the Punjab.

Ironically, though unsurprisingly, many Sikhs themselves saw the *mirasi* as being extraneous to the Punjab itself. For example, the Sikh Memorandum in [July 1947] to the Boundary Commission argued against the division of Punjab, which they claimed, belonged more to them than other Punjabis. Pointing to the long history of Sikh–Muslim antagonism, the political machinations of the Muslim League and Congress, and mainly to counter the Muslim predominance in the population of Punjab, they singled out the “floating population”, which accounted for around 31 per cent of the entire Punjabi Muslim population, comprising, among others, mendicants, cobblers, blacksmiths, potters, bards, and *mirasi*, a group which:

is not rooted in the soil of the Punjab and is essentially of a floating character. The floating population amongst the Hindus and Sikhs, according to the census returns, is almost nil ... ⁴²

It is interesting how, on account of their itinerant nature, the *mirasi* and other low-status Punjabi Muslims are seen as being “un-Punjabi” and extraneous to the land by representatives of the Sikh Memorandum to the Commission.⁴³ In short, on account of their lower-caste status, the *mirasi* were roundly castigated by all middle-class and elite Punjabis, regardless of religious orientation.

To return to the Talwandi *gharana*, a close examination of Hafeez Khan’s views helps us see the very real effects of division. His eagerness to reclaim *dhrupad* as an Islamic practice (where the genre’s characteristic *alaap gayaki* [singing] is claimed to be a corruption of “Allah Aap” or “God Thyself”⁴⁴), as well as negatively stereotyping Sikhs and *mirasi* as

⁴²“Sikh Memorandum to the Punjab Boundary Commission,” in *Select Documents on the Partition of the Punjab 1947*, ed. Kirpal Singh (New Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991), 226–263.

⁴³This was not necessarily the view of all Sikhs in Punjab.

⁴⁴I borrow this translation from Saeed, “Fled Is That Music,” 2009, 242.

being cut from the same (musical) cloth, can be situated in the social and ideological attitudes of a Pakistan preoccupied with Islamicisation. This contrasts both with his positive romantic-nostalgic memories of pre-Partition Sikh and Hindu patrons, and his adoption of certain Hindu-Sikh practices (such as not eating beef).

In both India and Pakistan, however we have seen how the *mirasi* function in tropes of self-identification that the more elite *kalawant* musicians narrate and believe about themselves. Lower-caste communities, *mirasi* and *kanjris*—viewed through a derogatory lens—are at the heart of this variety of “Othering”. An observation of the opinions of musicians therefore reveals how the “Other” is often not simplistically identified with the enemy nation; rather, older asymmetries (on the lines of caste) persist, are re-enforced, and are common to musicians on both sides of the border. The hostility towards the *mirasi* remains a constant, throughout time and across space.

A DOUBLE NOSTALGIA: IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE PASTS AND FUTURES

There have been attempts to revive Punjabiya through music, theatre and other cultural forms in recent years. Navtej Purewal, among others, has noted the substantial cultural efforts made in contemporary times to transgress borders.⁴⁵ Musicians have been at the forefront of this transgression, for sound is a medium that has relentlessly offered an opportunity to subvert man-made boundaries, and musical memory has always been perpetuated and shared across these hard borders. Throughout South Asia, scenes and settings for music which existed before, and which go beyond national borders, are alive in the memories of music lovers. For example, M.A. Sheikh’s reminiscences about a soirée in pre-Partition Lahore at which the teenaged Roshanara Begum supposedly outshone Bade Ghulam Ali Khan belong to a cultural space where the

⁴⁵There have been successive attempts, in independent India and Pakistan, at subverting the effects on the cultural life of the nation as created by the borders of 1947. The efforts of the Pakistan India People’s Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPPFD), have, in particular been inspiring. For a more general account of these efforts, see N. Purewal, “The Indo-Pak Border: Displacements, Aggressions and Transgressions,” *Contemporary South Asia*, 12, no. 4 (2003): 539–556.

1947 borders are irrelevant, regardless of the fact that those two musicians later became inscribed as citizens of rival nations.⁴⁶ Studying the broader cultural “whole” of Hindustani art music that has historically existed across the length and breadth of north India, across religious and linguistic lines, is thus a productive site for tracking subversion of the 1947 borders.

Given the fact that Bade Ghulam Ali Khan’s home town was Kasur, in the Pakistani Punjab, and that much of his professional life was spent in Lahore, toward the end of his life, he deeply longed for his place of origin, reminiscing over facets of it including the quality of the land, its water and especially the grain, and other food-related experiences. Svetlana Boym’s pithy and humorous words about the conditions in which nostalgia can flourish are rather apt here: “nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship.”⁴⁷ We have already noted Hafeez Khan’s longing for the flourishing patronage and cultural (even agricultural!) milieu of pre-Partition Lyallpur. In Roshanara Begum’s interviews too, we find her professing nostalgic memories and love for her native Calcutta, the cities of Bombay and Lucknow (from where her family hailed) and for the audiences of the first two cities.⁴⁸ Hence, we also note a strain of nostalgia for the learned audiences of connoisseurs, who could appreciate the intricacies of the classical.

We thus encounter mirror images of nostalgia for musical forms and cultural milieus on opposite sides of the border. There is a need to distinguish between the temporal nostalgia for a different time, i.e. the time of the past, and the nostalgia for an undivided Punjab, undergirded by visions of Punjabin. The first is what Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, in an incisive article on the social location of Begum Akhtar, calls the “nostalgia for the feudal past.”⁴⁹ In the case of Punjab, the second is the nostalgia for the shared past of pre-Partition times. Nostalgia is important, because

⁴⁶M.A. Sheikh, *Great Masters, Great Music* (Bloomington, USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2010).

⁴⁷Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 18.

⁴⁸See Roshanara Begum’s PTV “Program Mulaqat” interview by Khalil Ahmad and M. Iqbal: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjstjdxlVhE>. Published 12 September 2015; Accessed 14 November 2017.

⁴⁹Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, “In Search of Begum Akhtar: Patriarchy, Poetry, and Twentieth-Century Indian Music,” *The World of Music* 43, no. 1, Ethnomusicology and the Individual (2001): 97–137.

“unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.”⁵⁰ Boym also cautions us against nostalgia without an eye to the future, because, “fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future.”⁵¹

We see in these memories, then, a nostalgia for an alternative past that has been lost. This is embodied in physical structures,⁵² symbols of a now-forgotten musical past. Pul Kanjri or Tawaifpul (the Bridge of the Dancing Girl) is located between Amritsar and Lahore, near the present-day Wagah border. This abandoned precinct consists primarily of a bridge that included on it, at one point, “a *dharamsala*, a well, a tank, a garden and a *sarai*”;⁵³ it was built for, and on the insistence of, the Muslim courtisan who went on to become Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s favourite wife, Moran Sarkar. The structure is located on the present-day border of the two states, and has been briefly conquered in skirmishes by both nations: by Pakistan in 1965, after which it was “reclaimed” by India in 1971. If “consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales”, as Boym urges us to do, then we must take a newer look at the past, and excavate fresher stories from it about the divergent figures peopling it.⁵⁴ The story of Bibi Moran, Ranjit’s favourite wife, for whom he braved stiff Sikh orthodoxy, is one such story, pointing to a time of remarkable cosmopolitanism, when many parts of Punjab witnessed a cultural efflorescence, and where religious and/or political ideologies failed to stifle art.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Boym, *Future*, 27.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 26.

⁵²See Churnjeet Mahn’s chapter in this volume on the Aam Khas Bagh complex in Sirhind.

⁵³Ganesh Das, *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab: From Ganesh Das’s “Char Bagh-i-Panjab,”* trans. Grewal and Banga (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1975), 139.

⁵⁴Boym, *Future*, 26.

⁵⁵The Maharaja’s marriage with Moran brought his way severe opposition from the orthodoxy: he was summoned to the Akal Takht and awarded the punishment of a hundred lashes, which he apparently went forth to receive valiantly. H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs, Vol. V: The Sikh Lion of Lahore (Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 1799–1839)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991), 35. For more, see chap. 1 on “Musicians and Dancers in Pre-Colonial Punjab, with a focus on Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s Court,” in Radha Kapuria (in-progress PhD, expected June 2018), “Music in Colonial Punjab: A Social History,” King’s College London.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted how the lives of musicians were impacted by 1947. First, the reasons for migration across the borders during and after 1947 have been varied: marriage (Roshanara Begum and Iqbal Bano); career progression and professional recognition (Bade Ghulam Ali Khan); and, of course, the most common factors, fear of violence (the *mirasi* from Pakistan, according to Ramakant; Nusrat's father and uncles; and the Talwandiwalé's patron Sardar Harcharan Singh). We have also discussed some important examples of border-crossings post-1947: Ashwini Kumar and Roshanara Begum, Nusrat's father and uncle coming to perform at Jalandhar, plus many more. These border-crossings stand out in sharp relief against the context of increasing intolerance toward cultural expression in South Asia—whether this takes the form of Hindu right-wing activists in India asking for a ban on performances by Pakistani artistes today, or of Islamist groups attacking musicians (as in the brutal assassination of Pakistani *qawwal* Amjad Sabri in 2016).

Second, divisions of caste and community in the eyes of musicians themselves have persisted across the border: practitioners of classical music across the border, have in common an “Othering” of, and distancing from, the *mirasi*. The ambivalent and consistently negative attitude toward the *mirasi*, which has a longer genealogy, perhaps holds a clue to the outlying of the classical in Punjab.⁵⁶ Partition, and the exclusions and tensions manifest within it, drew on existing issues and tensions in the social fabric that preceded it—and which adversely impacted practices comprising the shared spaces of Punjab.⁵⁷ As we saw, elite *kala-want* musicians such as Pt. Ramakant and Us. Hafeez Khan—regardless of their own social origins—held a common disdain for Punjab's *mirasi*. Whether Indian or Pakistani, therefore, maintaining a strict social distance from the *mirasi* is a crucial marker for the “respectability” of professional, *gharana*-based musicians in both Punjabs.

⁵⁶See chap. 2 “A Genealogy of the *Mirasis* and *Kanjris* in Colonial Punjab,” in my in-progress PhD.

⁵⁷Anil Sethi's research excavated the shift from the secular to the religious in naming practices in 19th century Punjab, Sethi, “The Creation,” 66–71. On the practices, e.g. ritual and public mourning among others, shared by women across religious boundaries in Punjab, see Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Boundaries: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Finally, Partition inaugurated a new era: in some cases marked by what I have called a “double nostalgia” for (a) the feudal past comprised of benevolent patrons (as exemplified in Us. Hafeez Khan’s discourse) and (b) the shared past of “Punjabiya” (evident in Bade Ghulam Ali’s interviews). We have also witnessed other results: a self-congratulatory nationalism and condescension towards the conditions of musical production in Pakistan (Pt. Ramakant); and an emphasis on *dhrupad*’s Islamic origins, combined with an “Othering” of both the *mirasi* and Sikhs (Us. Hafeez Khan).

The impact of the 1947 borders on the new nation-state dispensations is thus very evident in the minutiae of everyday life, and in quotidian notions about music and musical communities. These beliefs, held by practising classical musicians on both sides of the border, coupled with the troubled legacies of musical genres emerging from a century of socio-religious reform and division, reveal the futility of glibly romanticising musicians as carriers of a “syncretic” phenomenon. Rather, this paper has tried to resituate musicians and patrons as historical agents functioning within complex and diverse historical contexts.

While I have consciously focussed more on views of and around musicians, and less on the music itself, future research needs to map musicians’ specific memories of trauma, violence and loss in 1947, employing ethnography and biography. More crucially, it will need to excavate how the primacy of the moment of performance itself may hold the power to transform prejudice or hostility.⁵⁸ Roshanara Begum’s command over the restless crowds at Harballabh, mentioned in the anecdote related by Ashwini Kumar, is a good example of the power of music. Further, as we know from the extensive literature on the *impact* of Indian music, especially the *ta’sir* (effect on the listener and the supernatural world) of a *raga*,⁵⁹ music can also have the opposite result. An anecdote from 1947,

⁵⁸For the proactive uses of music in current-day peacebuilding in Palestine, see Yara El-Ghadban and Kiven Strohm, “The Ghosts of Resistance: Dispatches from Palestinian Art and Music,” in *Palestinian Music and Song: Expression and Resistance Since 1900*, ed. Moslih Kanaaneh, Stig-Magnus Thorsén, Heather Bursheh, and David A. McDonald (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 175–200.

⁵⁹Munshi Muhammad Karam Imam Khan, *Ma’dan al-musiqi* (Lucknow: Hindustani Press, 1925), 111–116; quoted in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 26–27.

featuring two foremost Delhi-based musicians with significant ties to the Patiala *gharana* and court, captures this:⁶⁰

At a musical soiree in early 1947 in Delhi, the renowned *sarangi* player Ustad Bundu Khan⁶¹ insisted on playing *Raga Deepak*, a Raga charged with the brilliance and power to create fire. This was despite protestations from his cousin, foremost vocalist of the Delhi *gharana*, Ustad Chand Khan.⁶² Later that year, the entire subcontinent was consumed by the fire of mass violence that spread across the land. Chand Khan went on to lay the blame solely on his cousin's shoulders, exclaiming, 'I had told you, hadn't I, not to play this sinister (*manhoos*) Raga?'

This anecdote holds a clue as to how at least some musicians made sense of the frenzy, insanity and "fire" of 1947, attempting to understand it through a musical metaphor, squarely outside the rational causes of "high politics" or other explanations. Perhaps this was an attempt to locate a modicum of control (albeit allegorical) within musicians' hands, during an otherwise chaotic and utterly tumultuous time? Ultimately, the anecdote holds a key for metaphorically countering Deepak's fiery impact with the cathartic showers of a raga Megh, in the way Tansen's daughter Saraswati purportedly did at Akbar's sixteenth-century court;⁶³ a possibility more relevant than ever for South Asia in 2017.

⁶⁰I am grateful to Ayyub Auliya, the London-based independent music historian, for sharing with me this anecdote—that he read in an Urdu translation of a collection of essays by B.R. Deodhar.

⁶¹Ustad Bundu Khan hailed from a Rajasthani family that later settled in Delhi. His uncle and *guru*, Ustad Mamman Khan was connected to the Patiala tradition and court. See Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organisation of an Artistic Tradition* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980), 156; Regula Qureshi, *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 185.

⁶²See Neuman, *Life*, 157. According to Amal Das Sharma, Ustad Chand Khan served as court musician at the Patiala court from 1913–1937. Amal Das Sharma, *Musicians of India* (Calcutta: Noya Prokash, 1993).

⁶³Bonnie C. Wade, *Imaging Sound: An Ethnomusicological Study of Music, Art, and Culture in Mughal India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 116–117.

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Partition and the Practice of Memory

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