The Illiterate Ustad and Other Myths:
Writing on Music in the Late Mughal World

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The spoken version may be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYxTjOZNYpY

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Let me begin with an old story. In 1908, two very different scholars of Hindustani music met at the confluence of the Ganga and Jumna rivers. One of these men, Karamatullah Khan, was a Muslim *ustad* belonging to the *gharana* of Basit Khan *kalawant*, who had been *rabab* player and *ustad* to the last King of Lucknow, Wajid Ali Shah. The other was a middle-class, Western-educated Maratha Brahmin called Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, now known as the father of Hindustani musical modernity. Bhatkhande had arrived in Allahabad on the very last leg of his tour of India conducting research for what he hoped would be a comprehensive history reconnecting contemporary Hindustani music decisively with its Sanskrit theoretical roots, as part of his project of reforming music into something suitable for a public nationalist platform. It was Karamatullah, though, who sought **Bhatkhande** out — in Janaki Bakhle's retelling — in order to give him a book: a copy of his own recent 300-page publication on the history and theory of Hindustani music.

This meeting did not go well. What could have been a historically decisive moment was diverted into a farcical cul-de-sac of absurd misunderstandings and wasted opportunity thanks to Bhatkhande's blinkered view of hereditary musicians. After presenting his book, Karamatullah tried to engage Bhatkhande in a musicological discussion between equals on an obscure point of Sanskrit theory pertaining to the *śruti*s or microtones of the Hindustani scale. Bhatkhande was having none of it. "By and large," he wrote in his diary of this meeting, "I don't like discussing music with professional musicians. They know little but like to fight a lot [...] They spend a little time with us, learn just a little from us and then say they have known this all along." (Bakhle 2006) Reading betwen the lines of Bhatkhande's self-serving recollections, it seems he deliberately tried to pick a fight with Karamatullah in this conversation, setting him up as his

favourite straw man – the “illiterate, ignorant and narrow-minded” hereditary musician – in order to knock him down as a fabulist who possessed just enough garbled *shastric* knowledge, presumably handed down through some **dubious** oral means, to disfigure it beyond recognition.

Bhatkhande was a far more complex and interesting figure than has recently been painted, and generally I feel he has been much misunderstood. But on this point — the supposedly arrogant, ignorant *ustād* — he was, indeed, implacably prejudiced. More recent scholarship has been much kinder to hereditary musicians and to non-written modes of transmitting traditional knowledge than Bhatkhande was. But Bhatkhande’s assertion that the *ustad*s of Hindustani were illiterate has stuck, and remains the standard in our histories.

My simple aim this evening is to reassess what we think we know about the nature of the *ustads*’ “traditions” and their relationship with written modes of preserving musical knowledge. I’m going to do so by sharing with you a range of musical literature written by *ustad*s and their disciples in the late Mughal period, roughly from the mid seventeenth until the nineteenth century.

In *The intelligence of tradition in Rajput court painting*, Molly Aitken challenges some of our fundamental assumptions about the nature of “tradition” in the work of hereditary painters who were patronised by the Maharanas of Udaipur (Mewar) from the sixteenth century to the present day. In the last paragraph of her introduction she pays tribute to her own master, Bannu, who:

> asked for no remuneration and opened his house and family to me as if I were his daughter. Such generosity was his custom, for, as he explained to me, he took apprentices out of responsibility to the art. In some curious way, I have come to understand [my] book [...] as a tribute to Bannu’s **silence** [...] His profound knowledge of Mughal and Rajput styles was not verbal, and so Bannu never explained what he taught. Rather, he taught by example. Thus I understand my text ultimately to arrive at the threshold of what I suspect was often, like Bannu’s, **the deeply silent knowledge of painters**. (Aitken 2010)

Those of us familiar with the world of Hindustani music will recognise much in this that resonates with the traditional picture of the hereditary Muslim musicians, or *ustads*, who carried the elite musical traditions of the Mughal court in Delhi faithfully through invasions, dispersals, colonisation, impoverishment, all-out war and devastation safely through to the modern age.

Like Udaipur's painters, Delhi's *ustads* taught by practical, and never written means. According to Dard Neuman:

> [they] made students practice rāgs without telling them the rāg names, and sing notes without singing the note names. Musicians never really explained or theorized the[ir] practices. (Dard Neuman 2012: 426)

The *ustads* may have been masters of an art that was the **opposite** of silent in its very nature. But when it came to technical explanation of that art in **words**, the *ustads*' knowledge remained, like that of the painters, deeply (and often frustratingly) silent.

Wordlessness encapsulates what scholars have long considered to be the fundamental nature of "traditional" forms of knowledge transmission among India's hereditary artisans. We have observed that traditional painters and musicians transmit their knowledge through practice and example, without reference to written or sometimes even verbalised explanation. We have noted that mastery for the traditional student takes the form of endless practice, endless repetition, endless wordless internalisation of the forms and techniques of the master's example. And from that we have assumed that the forms of traditional knowledge are of a different order from quote unquote modern ones that are inherently conscious, rational, verbal and literate. In fact, theories of modernity **tell us** that to be modern is **fundamentally** to recognise the existence of the traditional, and to recognise it as disjunct from the modern. Traditional knowledge is embodied and implicit in the performance of the art; modern knowledge is articulated explicitly in spoken and written discourse. Traditional knowledge is inarticulate even when its beauties and virtuosities are publically and patently manifest: – traditional knowledge is a deeply silent knowledge.

It is therefore unsurprising that the encounter of traditional artisans with the modern world, and with modern forms of knowledge such as art history and musicology that would articulate those "traditions" on their behalf, has historically been a difficult one. At our best, scholars have come to understand that while orally, aurally and kinesthetically transmitted systems of knowledge may be configured differently to written systems they are not *a priori* inferior to them; that while their elucidation may require different and highly specialised techniques of study such as musical or formal analysis, they nonetheless demonstrate comparable levels of cognitive complexity. As Dr Ranade put it so presciently nearly 40 years ago:

> Anthropologists, very frequently, tend to bracket oral tradition with pre-literate or folk cultures. It is sheer prejudice to confine possession of culture to the literate and equate the pre-cultured state with the non-literate. A deeper look into the origin, development and function of the oral tradition [of Indian music] does not allow such a...presumption...This should convince us of [oral tradition's] *potentialities in contexts that are both modern and sophisticated*. [Oral] tradition is important *because*...there are intrinsic bonds between creativity and oral tradition. (Ranade, 1984: 25; italics in the original)

But certain problematic notions about traditional artisans have continued to inform art-historical and musicological accounts of their work. In art history, Aitkensuggests it has customarily been assumed – even if noone would perhaps say so in quite such strong language – that the master painters of Rajput miniatures were conservative, conventional, passive, unthoughtful, even unintelligent in their approach to their work – that their silence bespoke a lack of conscious thought or forethought. Aitken has comprehensively demonstrated that **this was not so**: that Mewari "artists and their viewers [instead] enjoyed a high level of knowledge about their art rarely acknowledged today," and that "painters worked conciously," not "instinctively" – that they unmistakeably wielded creative intelligence in their choices (2010). The master painters of Mewar may not have **articulated** what they were doing – but they nonetheless **knew** what they were doing.

Music scholars' understanding of the nature of "tradition" has customarily been slightly different. It has long been recognised, for instance, that the idea that musical pieces have been handed down orally from revered lineal ancestors unaltered by any intervening human intelligence is often simply a rhetorical device used to justify contemporary acts of individual creativity. The question in music history therefore has not been one of whether the *ustads*, as they embarked on their bruising encounter with reformist musicology at the turn of the 20C, exercised conscious knowledge, but a question of the relationship of their musical inheritance, which they **claimed** belonged to the past, to **written** theoretical discourse, specifically the Sanskrit *sangitashastras* – which **incontrovertibly** belonged to a supposedly "Hindu" past that musicologists were actively trying to revive. In a nutshell the issue was not whether the *ustads* **knew** what they were doing, but whether they were **literate** in the ways that mattered to modernity.

Bhatkhande's famous address to the First All India Music Conference in 1916 set out the reformist musicologists' position most succinctly: Hindstani music was in urgent need of rescue and reformation because:

> We all know that theory is the real backbone of practice, and when theory perishes the practice, though it may continue to live on, is bound ultimately to drift away and run into disorder and confusion. That is exactly what seems to have happened in Northern India [...] Our old Sanskrit Granthas [...] having thus become inapplicable to the current practice, we naturally have come to be thrown on the mercy of our illiterate, ignorant, and narrow-minded professionals. Our modern scholars have distinctly seen the disadvantages of this unsatisfactory state of things but in the absence of proper help and facilities they find themselves unable to control the situation just at present. (Bhatkhande 1985: 17, 40; in Dard Neuman 2012: 427–8)

The ideological heft of this triple blow – "illiterate, ignorant and narrow-minded" – is hard to miss; the general inability of the *ustads* to read or write at all, with the result being moral as well as musical degeneracy, had become a standard topos in public debate by this time.

But rather than treat what is so obviously an ideological topos with suspicion, music scholars have absorbed its basic underlying thrust – that many if not most of the hereditary *ustads* could not read or write, or if they did possess some measure of functional literacy, they did not use it in teaching, performing, practice or discourse. This is partly because the ethnomusicological pioneers of the 60s and 70s themselves found this to be the case in their anthropological fieldwork on the *gharana* system. But it is also because we transformed what had been a cause for contempt – non-written knowledge practices – into a highly evolved and virtuous mechanism of knowledge reproduction that was fundamental to and therefore **inseparable** from our understanding of the hereditary system. Here I quote from Daniel Neuman, the seminal Western theorist of lineage in Hindustani music, writing in 1985, to show how he took on board the basic outline of Bhatkhande's story of the failure of Muslim *ustads* to engage with written theory – but turned it on its head, from criticism into approbation of a different way of doing theory: embodiment through *silsila*.

> [From the Mughal period], professional Muslim musicians [...] **did not write theoretical treatises.** Indeed the significance of the kinship or discipular link to Tansen is related to the fact that for Muslim Hindustani musicians, musical theory was coded in an essentially oral medium, and ultimate authority consequently lay not in quasi-sacred texts, as in the South, but in quasi-sacred pedigrees. Neither prescriptive nor descriptive, musical theory for Muslim musicians was essentially ascriptive [in other words they were not illiterate but a-literate...] The substance of Muslim musical theory was never [...] inscribed on

> paper; it was embedded in memory. It was transmitted through the medium of what theory was thought to be, namely performance, which was learned and memorized by each successive generation. The authority for theoretical assertions [thus] rested not on theory itself but in the person who proclaimed it. The sources of a person's authority was dependent on the identity of the person, and that identity was socially defined by his musical pedigree. Musicians who could trace their ancestry to one or more historically important musical figures – a Tansen, a Sadarang, a Khusrau – were **by virtue of such connections** accepted as the main carriers of the musical tradition [...] Muslim scholars who did write on music were members of the nobility, not professional musicians. Indeed Walter Kaufmann claims that many of the great musicians he knew earlier in the century were functionally illiterate. (Daniel Neuman 1985: 100, 103–4 fn. 6; Kaufmann 1968, 6)

[This is somewhat unfair because Neuman has since changed his mind!] This dual notion – that the *ustads* did not write about music 1) because of their low social postion as skilled artisans, and 2) because culturally they had developed a different way of expressing and preserving theory through genealogical pedigree – is still the bedrock of our discussions of theory versus practice, kinesthetic versus verbal learning, orality versus literacy in the transmission and performance of the Hindustani musical system. We have become much more flexible and nuanced in our understanding that these are dialectical modes, not fixed dichotomies; but even so, in 2012, Daniel's son Dard can still assert with the full weight of ethnomusicological scholarship behind him that "many musicians were, until Independence, largely illiterate [...with] little formal theoretical knowledge of their music."

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In the remainder of this paper I will simply present evidence that several lineages of hereditary *ustads* – the chief *kalawants* to the Mughal emperors in Delhi, as well as a number of *qawwāl*s – were literate. Moreover, these professional practitioners were **highly literate** in Persian, Hindavi, Urdu, and sometimes Sanskrit and Arabic; AND they possessed expert knowledge of the canonical written corpus of music theory developed at the 17C Mughal court from Sanskrit models, in both the Persian language and in Brajbhasha.

Yet again, it was Dr Ranade who made two extremely important points first, in his important 1984 book *On Music and Musicians of Hindoostan*—1) that oral and literate traditions in Indian music have not historically been in opposition to each other, 2) and that Hindustani *gharana* musicians are not, in fact, generally illiterate. "Quite often," he wrote,

> it is incorrectly suggested that the oral tradition rules out the existence of writing and the written, by definition. The oral and the written are regarded as mutually exclusive; and as a consequence it is erroneously held that the oral tradition necessarily prospers when
>
> a) writing, printing, etc., are not possible, or
> b) when writing, etc., is not known to a particular culture[...]
>
> This point of view...excludes the possibility of a group's deliberate choice of the oral mode of communication in preference to the written mode in spite of the fact that the group possesses the requisite knowledge and technique of writing. (Ranade 1984: 29–30)

More specifically, he noted that the Hindustani

> oral tradition...emphasizes the unwritten, relies on it, but hardly imposes a blanket ban on writing...Hindustani music *does* accomodate the writing down of composition skeletons...It even encourages writing down of elaboration sketches of certain *raags*. Tomes comprising these are handed down from generation to generation. The written volumes are carefully preserved and extreme secrecy is maintained about their very existence. Some of the musicians or their favoured disciples are allowed access to these treasures. However the point is that these documents...are regarded as supplementary and are held important only because they facilitate the transmission of the frameworks of knowledge to posterity. (Ranade 1984: 38)

Dr Ranade was absolutely right on the reasons why *ustad*s write—to ensure the most vital information survives into the future. But the sheer extent of hereditary *ustad*s' writing on music in the seventeenth through ninetenth centuries, and especially innovative works of music theory, would, I think, have surprised even him. Let's turn to those now.

Over the past ten years in conjuction with a small group of other historians and musicologists I have been conducting a large scale project on written sources for Hindustani music in the late Mughal world, between 1658 and 1858. My own research on what happened to music as the Mughal empire gave way to the British East India Company in the last century of that time frame will be published next year by Cambridge University Press as *Music and Musicians in Late Mughal India: Histories of the Ephemeral, 1748–1858*. It takes the stories of eight largely forgotten musicians of the time—including this fine gentleman here, Miyan Himmat Khan kalawant, the last of the direct line of hereditary *bīnkār*s to the Mughal emperors in Delhi and co-author of an important treatise on *tāl*—as a way into thinking about six different types of writing

on music that arose in the late Mughal period. Because it turns out they wrote a LOT about music – of all arts and sciences in the Mughal world, music is the one most written about. And I also seek to answer the question WHY – why, given they believed it was impossible to "capture the essence of music in pen and ink on the surface of a page" (Sher Khan Lodi, 1691), why did they write about music so copiously? For the archive of writings on Hindustani music for this period is simply enormous—our SHAMSA database includes well over 300 individual works, most of which have been overlooked until now (https://zenodo.org/record/1445775).

It is now clear from a survey of these musical writings that, for reasons that are still obscure, Sanskrit ceased to be a significant medium for music-theoretical writing in North India after 1700. Instead, the legacy of the *sangitashastras* was carried over **in full** into the Persian and Brajbhasha languages. The Brajbhasha musicological traditions, which Richard David Williams is working on, slightly predate the mid seventeenth century flourishing of Persian writings on Hindustani music. The works I am going to discuss today are mostly in the Persian tradition, which has been my life's work to date. A quick side note: neither of these languages was sectarian in the Mughal period; people of all religions wrote in both Persian and Brajbhasha. In addition, Brajbhasha was frequently written in nastaliq script in this period; there was no direct association between script and language or script and religion.

What is more, it has emerged that a number of key *ustads* with hereditary ties to the central Mughal tradition of elite *raga*-based music in Delhi were integral, over several generations, in developing and sustaining this Indic-Persianate tradition **through their own writing** of music treatises from about 1660 until at least 1915. It is still true to say that most musical treatises between 1600 and 1900 were written by patron connoisseurs rather than professional practitioners. But beginning with Mir Salih Qawwal Dehlavi's *Nishatara* in about 1660, and Ras Baras Khan Kalawant's paraphrase translation of Damodara's Sanskrit *Sangitadarpana* the 1698 *Shams al Aswat*, hereditary musicians also began to contribute to – and innovate significantly within – the written theoretical tradition.

Before turning to the most important and sustained multi-generational effort to preserve musical knowledge in writing, I want to make a quick side step to consider two important works written by *qawwāl*s. Qawwals in the Mughal period were not merely Sufi shrine singers; they were the principal performers of khayal at court, which was considered to be the distinctive intellectual property of qawwals, but which they also taught to courtesans and, as is well known, to a young kalawant who took khayal and ran with it, and made it synonymous with his own takhallus -- Sadarang.

The first is Mir Salih Qawwal Dehlavi's *Nishat-ara*. Contrary to some confusing reports, this is not the same person as the aristocratic Mir Salih who was Shah Jahan's chief librarian. Rather, he was memorialised by Faqirullah in the 1666 *Rag Darpan* as "the greatest singer" of Delhi – but more importantly, Faqirullah included a great deal of the information from Mir Salih's book, especially on mixed *raga*s, in his own seminally important music treatise.

The second was written nearly 150 years later and is probably the only Persian treatise to be known by name by most Indian music scholars, the *Usul al-Naghmat al-Asafi*. We now have a much more accurate understanding of its date and author; it is not early nineteenth century as Bhatkhande thought, but about 1790, and it was written by the *qawwal* Ghulam Raza in Faizabad or Lucknow, and dedicated to the Nawab of Lucknow Asaf ud-Daula. Ghulam Raza's father was the Delhi *qawwal* Miyan Muhammad Panah, who studied the *been* with Miyan Anha Baras Khan *kalawant* before joining the service of Saadat 'Ali Khan, Asaf ud-Daula's brother and later successor. Ghulam Raza likewise studied the *been* with his father, and was employed in Saadat 'Ali Khan's household. His father's gurubhai, the gentleman amateur musician Ziauddin, remembered Ghulam Raza as "wise and clever", and indeed, his music treatise is quite remarkable. It is both fully in dialogue with what had by this time emerged as the mainstream of Hindustani music theory in Persian — it's based on the aforementioned Ras Baras Khan Kalawant's *Shams al-Aswat* — AND a genuinely modernising work. Most remarkably, it is the first to produce a reproducible notation of several *raga*s, complete with pitch, duration, and lyrics (or at least nom tom syllables!).

What is sociologically and musicologically interesting here at this point in time, is that Ghulam Raza's heritage firstly as a performer and secondly as a theorist plugs him, a Delhi lineage *qawwāl*, firmly into the main literate *kalāwant* tradition, which I am going to turn to now.

Most crucially, it appears that **all** of the *kalāwant* authors that we can trace belonged to **one – one might say "the" – hereditary brotherhood** – the joint lineages of Tansen and Sadarang, which was conjoined by the dynastic marriage of Anjha Baras Khan to Sadarang's daughter in the mid-eighteenth century, and who served as chief *kalawants* to the Mughal emperors all the way from Akbar to Bahadur Shah Zafar; I call this the Delhi *kalawant biraderi*. Through a series of Persian, Brajbhasha, and Hindi and Urdu texts I have now established the genealogy of this lineage, including many of its non-hereditary disciples, plus important branches of the family that migrated elsewhere in the subcontinent, all the way down past 1900, though in curtailed and tangential form after the trauma of 1857. The high level of their articulate knowledge should not,

frankly, come as a surprise. It is now well known that the *kalawants* of the Mughal courts were considered *vaggeyakaras* – distinguished poet-composers of *dhrupad* songs with highly refined lyrics in the *riti* or courtly style of Brajbhasha. As is clear from Khushhal Khan "Anup's" vast compendium of songs, the c. 1818–36 *Rag Ragini Roz o Shab*, members of the Delhi *kalawant biraderi* continued to compose in Brajbhasha well into the 19C. Of course, song composition does not necessarily indicate **written** composition. But members of this lineage also wrote musical treatises.

These are those I have worked on so far, in chronological order:

- The *Shams al-Aswat* of 1698, written in Persian for Aurangzeb 'Alamgir by his chief *kalawant*, Ras Baras Khan, the great-great-grandson of Tansen.

On the left side of this slide is the genealogy, from the 1788 Edinburgh *tal* treatise, of the direct descendents of Tansen, Akbar's chief *kalawant*, via his son Bilas Khan, and Bilas Khan's son-in-law and chief disciple Lal Khan Kalawant Gunasamudra, who was chief musician to Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Lal Khan's son was Khushhal Khan also called Gunasamudra, and chief musician to Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb 'Alamgir. His son was Ras Baras Khan, who was, like his father, chief musician to 'Alamgir.

According to his disciples, RBK was a Sufi master as well as the greatest performer of his day, and he was clearly literate in either Sanskrit or Brajbhasha, because the *Shams ul-Aswat* is an original translation of Damodara's *Sangitadarpana*, which enjoyed success at the Mughal court in both its original Sanskrit and its Brajbhasha recension by Harivallabh. Indeed, due to its adherence to the newly developed Indo-Persianate epistemology of music treatise writing, and its significant reception history in later centuries, the *Shams ul-Aswat* is one of the corpus of 17C Persian works on Hindustani music that I refer to as canonical. (more of which in the discussion if you're interested)

We have already mentioned

- The Edinburgh treatise on *tal* of 1788, written in Persian by an unknown member of the Delhi *kalawant biraderi* for an unknown patron.

Apart from including a detailed genealogy of the chief line of Tansen down to the date of writing that quite patently is intended to valorise the author's own lineage, this work is an unprecedented

and wholly innovative treatise on the *tal* or metrical and rhythmic system of Hindustani music, which seeks to codify an altered *tal* system that was no longer served at all well by the old Sanskritic notation system, by drawing inspiration from Arabic notation systems for rhythm. It also includes a section on musical instruments, including a number of European instruments, one of which, the harpsichord he enthused about at length.

> The Europeans…have another instrument of the string family that is extremely fine and noble named the *harp-sīkārḍ*. It has 35 fundamental strings [i.e. a five octave range measured using the natural or white notes of a keyboard instrument].[1] The music (*naghma*) is differentiated into high and low melodies (*naghmāt*) which those knowledgeable in this science write in books of music (*mūsīqī*). Between the two [main] melodies other distributions are also made. [This I suggest is an attempt at describing the use of right and left hands (treble and bass melodic lines) and chordal harmony]…[2]This instrument developed from the *qānūn* (the plucked dulcimer). Every string has a plectrum (*mizrāb*) that is placed parallel to each string. [I], the humble drafter of this treatise, composed [music] in every particular using 19 fundamental strings: seven for the lower gamut (*saptak* = octave), that is, the *khūr saptak*; seven for the main gamut (*sur saptak*, middle and main octave);[3] and the remaining five for the upper gamut up to Pa (the perfect fifth of the upper octave). One can create the *sargam* (*sol-fa*) for every *rāga* very well from this. When I play the *shruti*s from the lower Sa to upper Pa strings [in one hand] and also play the 61 other strings [in the other], greater subtleties are possible.[4] The phrases of *dhrupad* can [thus] be created on this [instrument]!

So keen on the harpsichord was he that he gives the date of his manuscript as a chronogram where all the syllables add up to the Christian era date 1788, in such a way that he both demonstrates his new notation system AND his knowledge of European instruments. [demonstrate]

RBK had two sons, one of whom, Anjha Baras Khan, maintained prominence at the court of Muhammad Shah as a "second Tansen" and the Emperor's *ustad*...he was just unlucky to be eclipsed in his lifetime by a musical genius, Ni'amat Khan Sadarang, who is second in greatness only to Tansen in Hindustani musical legend. It appears that Sadarang did not have any suitably proficient musical sons; he famously took on his brother's son Firoz Khan Adarang as his special *shagird*. But he did have a daughter, whom he married to Anjha Baras Khan in a dynastic arrangement that, then as now, would have acted to preserve the longevity of the traditions of both families.

The other way to do this was to teach male members of the wider family who were not direct descendents. One of these was Karim Khan, who was in the Tansen line but it is not entirely clear how; he was taken on by Adarang as his special disciple. Karim Khan's son was the most prolific and interesting author of the lot.

Khushhal Khan "Anup" wrote at least four significant works of musical scholarship in Hyderabad.

- The Brajbhasha *Rag Darshan* of 1800 written for the Maratha general Raja Rao Ranbha Bahadur
- The Persian *Rag Darshan* of 1808 written for Nizam Sikander Jah Asaf Jah IIII of Hyderabad;
- A mixed Persian and Brajbhasha *Rag Darshan* of 1815 written for the great Hyderabadi courtesan Mahlaqa Bai Chanda
- and a massive collection of the repertoire of his lineage, the *Rag Ragini Roz o Shab*, compiled between 1818 and 1834-6, which although not a music treatise is nonetheless a vitally important compendium of musical knowledge.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century KKAwas a senior musician at the court of Hyderabad, but he arrived earlier in the employ of Raja Rao Ranbha, a Maratha general in the Nizam's army. Apart from having been the *ustad* of the famous Hyderabadi courtesan Mahlaqa Bai Chanda, and having produced four vast works of musical scholarship demonstrating his mastery of Persian, Hindavi, and several other North Indian vernaculars, he died wealthy and was buried at the most important Shia shrine of Hyderabad, Maula Ali Dargah, whose most important buildings were funded by his donation. As we see here, his Hindavi *Rag Darshan* of 1800 includes not only a written genealogy of both sides of his lineage, but interestingly, also, a visual one. These are the only 18C paintings I know of of Sadarang (top right) and Adarang (top centre). Moreover the written genealogy includes an early reference to the *kalawant banis* or the peculiar styles attributed to different families in the Mughal court lineages (though he uses the word *jat* rather than *bani*—the Edinburgh tal treatise uses bani). KK refers to the family of Sadarang as Khandari *jat*, a statement that is confirmed in the later *Asl al-Usul* written in Delhi.

KK's works seem designed both to aggrandise himself and his patrons, lucky enough to employ such a star. But they are also designed to memorialise and preserve in a more permanent medium

than memory the genealogy and repertoire of the authoritative Tansen-Sadarang lineage of Mughal Delhi, a long long way away in Hyderabad.

The book he is presenting to Raja Rao in this painting is thus highly significant – his works are the written embodiment of the Delhi *kalawant biraderi* and its knowledge. His Brajbhasha and Persian *Rag Darshans* are works of music theory, and both of them are palimpsests of the canonical Mughal treatise on Hindustani music *par excellence*, the fifth chapter of Mirza Khan's *Tohfat al Hind* written for Mughal prince M'd Azam Shah in c.1675. His first fully Brajbhasha *Rag Darshan* is therefore the most interesting, because it constitutes the reception in an Indian vernacular language of a Persian work that was itself a distillation of all the theory fit to know from Sanskrit written traditions, specifically the *Sangitadarpana*, combined with the Persianate interest in contemporary practice.

KK's song collection is likewise designed to document and to valorise the musical and literary traditions of the Delhi *kalawant biraderi*. Khushhal Khan's collection both validates the song compositions of his ancestors (and authenticates them through his physical person) AND innovates within the tradition, by including several of his own compositions written for patrons in Hyderabad. This draws Hyderabad, and its courtly musical traditions, firmly into the imagined sovereign space of the Mughal court in Delhi. Conversely it also represents the ***authoritative Mughal repertoire*** of the Delhi court, embodied in its lineal musicians and, now, in written form for the very first time.

Khushhal Khan's reference to the lineage of Sadarang as constituting the Khandari *bani* connects it to another remarkable and wholly original treatise on *tal*,

- The *Asl al-Usul* from the early 19C, written in Persian in Delhi by Muhammad Nasir Muhammadi "Ranj", in conjunction with the blind musician Miyan Himmat Khan.

The introduction to this treatise lays out in parallel the lineages of the two authors – Muhammad Nasir Muhammadi "Ranj", grandson of Sufi leader and esttemed poet, Khwaja Mir Dard, and *sajjadanishin* of his grandfather's shrine in Delhi; and Miyan Himmat Khan, the great-nephew of Sadarang, who rose to stardom at the court of Shah 'Alam r.1759–1806, and had recently passed away as the venerable chief *kalawant* of Bahadur Shah Zafar's court by the time Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote about him in the *Asarussanadid* in 1847.

He was already blind by the time James Skinner commissioned this painting of him in 1825, and he entrusted the secrets of his musical lineage to be monumentalised in written form to the current head of a Sufi lineage that had, over the past three generations, enjoyed a close and entangled relationship of mutual *ustad-shagirdi* and *pir-muridi* with his own lineage – Nasir Muhammadi Ranj. This text comprehensively lays out the *tal* systems in use by both *kalawants* and *qawwals*, using a highly readable practical notation system similar to the one found in the Edinburgh *tal* treatise, and again, drawing upon Arabic prosodic and metrical models, which you can see here.

It is clear from these simple but informative diagrammes that the tal system in use in Delhi by the early nineteenth century was very close to our modern one.

Our final authors testify to the movement of the literate Delhi tradition to Lucknow and beyond 1857 to Metiyaburj and Calcutta.

We have long known that some Delhi *kalawants* moved to Lucknow in the reign of Asafuddaula. Chief amongst these must have been the kalawant the Lucknow author of the Naghma-I Andalib reported as Firoz Khan Adarang's son: Miyan Chajju Khan, singer, whose son in turn, Basit Khan, a *rabab* player, flourished under Wajid Ali Shah and by some accounts was the last Nawab's *ustad*. When going into exile in Calcutta with Wajid Ali Shah in 1856, Basit Khan hurriedly commissioned copies of three treatises to take with him – he apparently left without them as they were sent to him as he travelled down the river into Bihar. They were – and this should be no surprise by now

- a copy of the *Shams al Aswat*
- a copy of the *Usul al Naghmat al Asafi*
- And a copy of the mysteriously popular *Sangit sarawali/saravarti*, which very closely resembles the kinds of skeleton notes Dr Ranade described being in the possession of many literate ustads.

After Basit Khan left Lucknow in 1856, he took an Afghan *sarod* player, Niamatullah Khan, as his disciple in the *kalawanti* technique of Indian *rabab*.

Niamatullah Khan had two sons, Karamatullah and Asadullah known as Kaukab, both of whom were renowned in their lifetime as knowledgeable experts on Hindustani music literate in several

relevant languages, including in Karamatullah's case at least, Arabic and English. The work that Karamatullah gave to Bhatkhande was

- The *Israr-i Karamat 'urf Naghmat-i Ni'amat* published in Allahabad in 1908, in Urdu.

It is a tour de force of wide-ranging musical scholarship, drawing on the Indic-Persianate traditions of his forefathers but also introducing new ideas from Arabic and even Western theory. His brother's unpublished work of 1915

- The *Jauhar-i Musiqi* of 1915, written in Urdu in Calcutta.

is of similar quality and was clearly intended for publication in lithograph. The latter explicitly cites several works of musical literature within his lineage's intellectual genealogy as sources for Kaukab's new work, including the *Tohfat al Hind*.

In short, what we have in the Delhi *kalawant biraderi* is a hereditary lineage of distinguished practitioners – in fact *the* most authoritative lineage connected with the Mughal court – combined with a genealogy of highly erudite musical scholarship in full dialogue with the wider music-theoretical discourse of North India. The lineage of the chief musicians to the Mughal emperors was a lineage of **literate *ustads*,** traceable through written records as both professional practitioners and as writers of music theory, from the time of Aurangzeb to the time of Gandhi. (For more details on all of these sources, see my forthcoming book.)

After presenting his book to Bhatkhande, Karamatullah tried to engage him in musicological discussion of an obscure point of Sanskrit theory pertaining to the *shrutis*, or microtones, of the Hindustani scale, and how they mapped onto current practice.

> K: What have you decided about Teevra, Atiteevra, and Atikomal Swaras?
> B: Khan saheb, you must have addressed all of this in the book you wrote.
> K: Yes I have.
> B: Which text did you use as authoritative for your work? Or did you write whatever came into your mind?
> K: Of course not; how could I have written without textual authority?
> B: Tell me the name of one Sanskrit text if you can, please, so that we can then talk about that text.

> K: What is the need for a Sanskrit text? Why only Sanskrit? It is not as if there are not many other texts. I have thought carefully about a lot of them before writing my own.
> B: Were those texts in Sanskrit or Prakrit?
> K: No, what is wrong with reading in Arabic and Persian, there are no lack of texts there.
> [...]
> B: Khansaheb, which is this book, can you tell me its name and year? Was it Sarmaay Ashrat? [Urdu treatise – also incidentally in the Delhi tradition – published in 1875]
> K: No, No. That is not the book I mean, that is a recent book. I am talking about books going back hundreds even thousands of years back, one of which is Tohfat al-Hind, a very important work. (quoted in Bakhle, 2006)

At this last, oblivious appeal to a non-Sanskritic "textual authority", Bhatkhande finally lost his patience and dismissed Karamatullah as a fabricator and a fool. But it was, in fact, Bhatkhande who was the illiterate party in this discussion. For Karamatullah Khan's book shows him to have been one of the last custodians of a major river-system of *śāstrik* knowledge that had flowed continuously from the late sixteenth century down to that very day, preserved not in Sanskrit—though it drank deep from its wellsprings—but in North India's early-modern languages of command and high culture: Persian, Brajbhasha, and latterly 1857 Urdu. Karamatullah naturally assumed that a great pandit would have recognised these writings as the vital supports of musical knowledge that they were through the dark days of Mughal decline and British ascendance. But Bhatkhande neither knew nor valued them, nor cared to understand their critical historical importance. The two men were talking past one another, in mutual incomprehension; and as the voices of Bhatkhande and other Sanskrit nationalists grew louder in the debate on music reform over the next few decades, the voices of those other streams were gradually drowned out. In the intervening hundred years, even our memories of the deep and rich streams of writing on Hindustani music in Persian and early-modern vernaculars have largely dried up. But the many texts musicians wrote still remain in the archives, where we can still read them and hear again, if only faintly, the voices of those long passed into silence.