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Music in Colonial Punjab

Courtesans, Bards, and Connoisseurs, 1800–1947

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

First Edition published in 2023

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023932980

ISBN 978–0–19–286734–6

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192867346.001.0001

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To
Rajmohini & Hari Krishan Khurana,
And their daughter Bindu:
The music in your journeys led me here.

In gratitude to
Fr. Oswald Summerton S.J.
Prof. Vijaya Ramaswamy
&
beloved Simcha;

But also for
Dr Pushkar Raj Kapuria & his son Rajiv:
The legacies of the heart are beyond measure.

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Acknowledgements

This book is born of multiple journeys across South Asia and Europe. It is also inspired by the journeys my grandparents and parents have taken, and the several songs I grew up listening to and singing. Melodies, proverbs, memories, and sounds that travelled with all four of my west Punjabi grandparents in 1947 across the newly minted borders to various cities of India—Bombay, Jabalpur, and Delhi. As a grandchild of the Partition, distant from its horrors, yet intimately acquainted with its complex legacies, I was fascinated by this shared matrix of ideas, songs, and aesthetic sensibilities. The research excursions culminating in this book were prompted by this initial fascination with, and familiar nostalgia for, the 'shared spaces' of pre-1947 Punjab.

It is impossible to thank everybody who has helped me with this book, and I apologize for having left anyone out unintentionally. First and foremost, I thank my doctoral supervisor Katherine Schofield who patiently saw my work from its initial beginnings through to its final shape. Not only is Katherine a pioneering scholar and brilliant guide, but also an exceptional friend. I hope this book does justice to the countless hours spent discussing multiple ideas in various places: whether Delhi, Cambridge, or Berlin, or at King's, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and the British Library. I am grateful to the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission and the Institute for Historical Research, London, for funding my PhD research at King's College London. Prior to King's, my MPhil supervisor Sucheta Mahajan at Jawaharlal Nehru University, offered me both valuable guidance and an incredible space to explore Punjab's musical trajectories for my dissertation on the Harballabh festival. It was the inspirational filmmaker and now remarkable friend Ajay Bhardwaj who planted the initial seeds for researching Punjab's musical cultures.

The impact of Naresh Kumar in Delhi and Balbir Singh Kanwal in London is impossible to describe. Both are my predecessors in researching Punjab's music, steeped in a grounded knowledge of the

region's many cultures, and their guidance has always gone beyond the merely academic. I also must thank my teacher Shahid Amin from the Department of History at Delhi University, where I conducted my MA; his generosity with valuable references and suggestions has enriched this book in more ways than one.

Old teachers at Delhi University, especially Prabha Rani, Smita Sahgal, Vasudha Pande, G. Arunima, Deepti Priya Mehrotra, Dilip Menon, Anshu Malhotra, Amar Farooqui, Vikas Gupta, the late Biswamoy Pati; Tridip Suhrud at Shimla; and at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Neeladri Bhattacharya, the late M.S.S. Pandian, Bhagwan Josh, cannot be thanked enough. At King's, I benefited from working with Jon Wilson, Martin Stokes, Tom Hodgson, Joanna Bullivant, and Andy Fry. Across the United Kingdom, I also thank Virinder Kalra, Anindita Ghosh, Pritam Singh, Richard Widdess, Eleanor Nesbitt, Churnjeet Mahn, Naresh Sharma, the late Firdous Ali sa'ab, and Ayub and Khursheed Aulia and their family. During 2014–2016 in SOAS, I was lucky to be part of the 'Sangat' community led by inspirational people, especially Kavita Bhanot, Amarjit Chandan, and Navtej Purewal. Thanks are also due to Farina Mir and Anne Murphy in North America for their close reading of my research and to Margrit Pernau in Berlin for her consistent encouragement.

In India, I thank Yousuf Saeed, Dhruv Sangari, Irfan Zuberi, the late Pran Nevile, Navjeevan Khosla, B.N. Goswamy, Jasdeep Singh, Vebhuti Duggal, Vidya Rao, Sangeeta Dutta, Yogesh Snehi, and Madan Gopal Singh and the Chaar Yaar Quartet. I am grateful to my music *guru*s, Smt. Sheela Sharma and Smt. Mandakini Swain for being exceptionally patient and loving teachers. I thank Dr Pearl Drego and Sr. Nirmalini A.C. for their foundational influence on my life. In Pakistan, I am grateful for the warmth and encouragement of Zafar Iqbal at the National College of the Arts; Nadhra Khan, Nida Kirmani, Ali Usman Qasmi, and Gwendolyn Kirk at the Lahore University of Management Sciences; Robina Shoeb at the University of Punjab; Uzma Usmani at the Lahore Museum; and Nukhbah Langah, Ghazala Irfan and Rukhsana Zia at Forman Christian College University; and to my dear friend Syed Ali Hamza Naqvi at Lahore.

I remember colleagues and PhD friends at King's and SOAS in London, conversations with whom have enriched this work: Yvonne Liao, Julian Harris, Sacha Scott, Jun Pow, Georgie Pope, Tamara Turner, Lisa-Maria

Brusius, Nur-Izzati Jamaluddin, Gavin Williams, Flora Willson, Richard Williams, Kanav Gupta, Priyanka Basu, Aakriti Mandhwani, Chinmay Sharma, Adrian Plau, Simon Leese, David Landau, and James Kirit Singh. Amongst colleagues at the King's India Institute, I wish to thank Nishant Kumar, Debanjali Biswas, Janhavi Mittal, and Ankita Bannerjee. I also thank Claire Arnold, Sarah Shalan, and Maryia Zhymantovich for their support. At JNU, I thank Subir Dey, Akanksha Kumar, Preeti, Vipul Dutta, Soumi Roy, Gagan Singh, Anchala Paliwal, Sonu Kumar, Preeti, Sourav, and Anupama.

Particular thanks are due to Francesca Orsini at SOAS for including me in discussions with her cohort of South Asia PhD students, and also for the Braj reading group—where I thank Richard Williams and Imre Bangha. Naresh Sharma gave the most lucid Urdu sessions. I thank David Lunn, across the SOAS-King's 'Bloomsbury' *gharānā*, for mountains of support and transliteration-related advice. Beyond the King's-SOAS network, I acknowledge the enriching and abiding friendship of Fakhar Bilal and Aneela Mushtaq, and also Muhammad Altaf, Aditi Krishna, and Mukesh Kulariya, all at Royal Holloway. I am grateful to Altaf for help with translations in the chapter on Patiala. At Oxford, I value the friendship and intellectual discourse with Priya Atwal, co-traveller in the kingdom of Ranjit Singh, and Aashique Iqbal, co-traveller into the world of 1947. I thank colleagues and friends at the British Library, especially Nur Sobers-Khan, Layli Uddin, and Ursula Sims-Williams; and at the Centre for South Asian Studies in Cambridge, Sujit Sivasundaram, Barbara Roe, Anjali Bhardwaj-Dutta, Devyani Gupta, Aishwarj Kumar, and Norbert Peabody. I thank my friends and PhD colleagues from the 2017 EASAS PhD workshop at Naples: James Bradbury, Kankana Talukdar, and Sandhya Fuchs. Kankana, in particular, helped me put the Bibliography into shape, an act of pure generosity I will never forget.

I am grateful to have the best of friends for their ever-present nourishment: Rubina Jasani offered endless encouragement about work discipline and provided a home away from home in Manchester. I thank my stalwart cohort of constant friends from back home: Larah Rai, Nima L. Yolmo, Nisha Thakur, Surabhi Singh, Sumit Bhardwaj, Anusheel Bhan, Ambika Sethi, Seema Siddiqui, Sebanti Chatterjee, Megha Todi, Wajiha Mehdi, Aroma Rajan, Erum Matto, and Ada Bhansali. I also thank Mahima Manchanda and Harmony Siganporia. During my initial

years in London, the warm friendship of Anusheel Bhan, Anisa Hamid, Pallavi Agarwala and Ayesha Sheth sustained me, and at Queen Mum's Hall, the community of King's students from across the world, but especially Meenakshi Dunga, Siddhartha Yashwanth, Mark Li, Anne Estefani Morales, Rachel Hodge, Jean Witters, Katie Earnhardt, I-Jen Cheng, Dayan Farias Picos, among others. I cherish the presence of PhD-mate and kindred friend María Bernardita Battle Larthrop in my life. The companionship of fellow PhD scholar and one of my favourite Pakistanis, Sunila Ashraf, has been a source of boundless love. I thank her for helping with translations in Chapter 2. I acknowledge the affection of Ruchi Kumari Kaushik, Himadri Bhushan Das, Kamran Siddiqui, Sanah Soomro from the Commonwealth Scholars Network and beyond.

In Chandigarh, I thank friends old and new: Darshan Mehra, Poonam Nigam, Jasdeep Singh, Daljit Ami, and especially, Aman Deep. At the Panjab Digital Library, I thank Devinder P. Singh and Parminder Singh. Fieldwork in Patiala in 2016 was only possible thanks to the comforting and cheerful presence of Mrs. Sharanjit Kaur. At Patiala, I thank Mr. Mohiuddin Farooqui and Mrs. Boparai at Punjabi University. At Jalandhar, I thank Rakesh Dada, Monica Sharma, and Pt. Ramakant at the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, the late Baldev Narang, the late Gurdial Singh, Krishnanda Shastri, and Mohan Malsiani. Most of all, to my family in Jalandhar—whose support launched me into researching Punjab's musical publics. I especially thank Radhakrishan uncle, Nidhi Masi, Renu Masi, Anil uncle, and Srishti.

I thank friends, teachers, and colleagues for inviting me to present the research in this book in different academic settings: Layli Uddin at the British Library, Alessandra Consolaro at Procida, Naples, and Nirmal Puwar at the Herbert Museum in 2017; Kelly Boyd at the Women's History Seminar at the IHR, the White Rose South Asia conference organizers at Sheffield in 2018 and York in 2019, and Parmjit Singh for the Empire of the Sikhs exhibition in 2018; Sucheta Mahajan at the Centre for Historical Studies at JNU, Pratyay Nath at Ashoka University, and Richard Williams at SOAS in 2019; and Nandini Chatterjee at Exeter and Amandeep Madra for the UKPHA book club in 2020. Finally, I thank Razak Khan for inviting me to join the panel at the ECSAS Vienna, and Amanda Lanzillo for the stimulating UW-Madison conference, both in 2021. I thank Sarah Ansari and Neil Sorrell for their close reading and critical feedback on

the doctoral thesis. I am grateful to the Royal Asiatic Society—to Taylor Sherman and others on the adjudicating panel—knowing that my PhD made the coveted Bayly Prize shortlist offered just the boost towards publication in its current book *avatar*. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on the book manuscript. Any errors, of course, are mine alone.

For help during the final stretch of the book, I wish to thank each member of the motley crew that makes up my Manchester family. Rubina Jasani, Munazah Andrabi, Danish Umer, and Suddhasattwa GuhaRoy all listened patiently to my frenzied rambling and offered valuable suggestions. Ajinkya Deshmukh, Komal Mohanlal, and Zahra Nouman enlivened proceedings along the way. I also thank Muhammad Hassan Miraj for his abiding interest in my research. For help with finalizing the book title, I thank Naresh Kumar, Katherine Schofield, and Danish Umer for their valuable suggestions. My friends Heeral Chhabra, Ranjana Saha, and Shilpi Rajpal have all read drafts of the chapters and offered useful feedback. Sonia Wigh has read, and re-read, versions of this book from its very early incarnation as journal articles. I couldn't ask for a better editorial eye, or a more accomplished Index-maker, and it is only fitting that she saw this project to its conclusion, given our former lives as editorial assistants ('Jarnail-Karnail') for the journal, *Studies in History* at our alma mater, the Centre for Historical Studies. I am grateful to Astha Mehrotra for her diligence in finalising the Index. I also thank Richard Pike at the C&W Agency, and Kate Pool at the Society of Authors, for their valuable guidance on publication-related matters. At OUP, I am grateful to Nandini Ganguli, Natasha Sarkar, my Commissioning Editors, and also Barun De, Praveena A and Iti Khurana.

At Sheffield, I thank Siobhan Lambert Hurley—the kindest and most encouraging mentor, Adrian Bingham, my head of Department, for his support, and the camaraderie offered by Julia Hillner, Julie Gottlieb, Kate Davison, Claire Burridge, Saurabh Mishra, Charles West, Esme Cleall, and Caroline Pennock, among the several others who make up the lively community at the History Department. At the Sheffield Music department, I thank Andrew Killick, Dorothy Kerr, and John Ball for their interest in my work. Thanks are due to Zelda Hannay and Alex Mason for involving me in valuable knowledge and public engagement projects: in particular, I acknowledge Zelda's creativity in co-curating with

me the 'Bridges' podcast for the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Being Human festival in 2020, a modified version of which features in the Prologue.

Family in London has provided me with an incredible network of love throughout the writing process. Dipika Bua, Amit uncle, and Meher have been a constant source of unconditional love and good times. Manju Bua, always such a rockstar, opened her home to me during the final stretch of the PhD, and Bhoomika *deedee*, Saraansh *bhai*, and Victor uncle have all been pillars of considerable support. I am grateful to my closest family back in India, but also Australia: my Mum, aunts, uncles and cousins, and particularly the support shown by Ma and Baba (Radha and Pinak Chakravarty). Abhishek Chakravarty has been the best companion I could ever ask for—endlessly patient, sufficiently critical but loyally supportive, and forever irreverent. 'Rani' Squeeky Nahariyya-wali, *urf* 'Malai' (our very own one-eyed feline Ranjit Singh), and 'Begum' Tootie Tagore, *urf* 'Kofta', served up the abundant cuddles and unqualified love that so smoothly delivered me to publication's door. The very final stages of proof production saw Squeeky/Simcha's departure from the physical world; her loving companionship saturates every page of this book.

This book is dedicated in the first instance to my remarkable mother, Bindu Kapurea, and to my maternal grandparents (*nānke*) of the Khurana clan; but it also honours the memory of my paternal grandfather, and that of my father, Rajiv Kapuria, who would have been beyond thrilled to see it printed. Finally, it is offered in gratitude to the friendship, care, and wisdom of Father Os and Vijaya Ma'am, who were perfect embodiments of that crisp Simon Weil maxim: 'attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity'.

Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations from Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, or Brajbhasha are my own, except where acknowledged. The transliteration system is adapted from the following dictionaries. For Devanagari, I rely on R.S. McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); for Gurmukhi, on Maya Singh, *The Panjabi Dictionary* (Lahore: Munshi Gulab Singh & Sons, 1895) and for Nastaliq, on J.T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: Allen & Co., 1884). The broad classification is below.

Devanagari and Gurmukhi

अ/ਅ a	आ/ਆ ā	इ/ਇ i	ई/ਈ ī	उ/ਉ u	ऊ/ਊ ū				
ए/ए e	ऐ/ऐ ai	ओ/ओ o	औ/औ au						
क/क k	क़ q	ख/ख kh	ग/ग g	घ/ਘ gh	ङ ṅ				
च/च c	छ/छ ch	ज/ज j	ज़ z	झ/झ jh	ञ ñ				
ट/ट ṭ	ठ/ठ ṭh	ड/ड ḍ	ड़ ṛ	ढ/ढ ḍh	ढ़ ṛh	ण/ण ṇ			
त/त t	थ/थ th	द/द d	ध/ध dh	न/न n					
प/प p	फ/ढph	फ़/ढ़ f	ब/ब b	भ/भ bh	म/म m				
य/य y	र/र r	ल/ल l	व/व v						
श/ਸ਼ sh	ष ś	स/स s							
ह/ह h	◌ं -ṅ/ṁ								

Nastaliq

ا a/i/u

ب b	پ p	ت/ط t	ٹ/ٹ٘	ث/س/ص s					
ج j	چ c	ح h	خ kh						
د d	ڈ/ڈ٘	ذ/ز/ض/ظ z							
ر r	ڑ/ڑ٘	ژ zh	ش sh						
ع ‘	غ gh	ف f	ق q	ک k	گ g	ل l	م m	ن n	
و w/o/u	ھ h	ی y/ī	ں ṅ						

N.B. I have used ‘v’ for the Devanagari व and Gurmukhi ਵ, while ‘w’, for the consonant use of the Nastaliq و. Certain words from everyday parlance in South Asia, like *guru, gurudwara, Sufi, pandit, maulvi* and *Rani* have not been transliterated according to this scheme and have instead been only italicised, as per their standard Romanised usage.

Prologue

If you stand on the bank of Hansli canal, located in Indian Punjab, you will see an expanse of green fields all around. Reaching over the canal is a rustic, simply built iron bridge and if you listen carefully, you might hear the soft sound of anklet-clad footsteps on marble and the gentlest of singing voices . . .

Built in the seventeenth century as the *shāh nehr* or royal canal by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, this canal was meant to channel the waters of the river Ravi, from Madhopur in Pathankot to the Shalamar Gardens in Lahore. In the nineteenth century, the canal was repaired and extended by the Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who constructed a small iron bridge over the canal for, and on the insistence of, his first Muslim wife, 'Moran Sarkar', the famous courtesan of Amritsar. The very journey of the canal waters mirrors the life of these two extraordinary lovers: Moran, who ended her days in Pathankot, the origin point for the Hansli canal, and Ranjit Singh, who died at his kingdom's headquarters in Lahore, the ultimate destination for the Hansli's waters.[1]

The origins of this simple iron bridge or the *pul* over the Hansli canal lie in a charming lovers' quarrel between Moran and Ranjit. Once, Moran was on her way on horseback to the edge of her natal village Dhanoa Kalan to perform before Ranjit, who had halted there before going to the Golden Temple. While crossing the gushing waters, Moran's silver sandal suddenly slipped into the Hansli canal and was swept away. Heartbroken at the loss of her treasured shoe, a dismayed Moran refused to dance for Ranjit again; threatening never to speak to him unless he built a bridge at the very spot she had lost her beloved slipper. The Maharaja, smitten by Moran, and afraid to lose her affections, complied willingly. He immediately issued orders for a bridge to be built over the Hansli waters, a bridge

[1] A longer version of this Prologue is available to listen as a podcast/audio-walk. See Radha Kapuria, 'Bridges–Podcast Audio Experience'. AHRC Being Human Festival at the University of Sheffield. Published 12 November 2020. https://beinghuman.sheffield.ac.uk/2020/events/bridge/

that became famous as Pul Moran, Pul Kanjri, 'Tawā'ifpul', or, the 'Bridge of the Dancing Girl'.

In time, Pul Moran or Pul Kanjri emerged as a truly remarkable site that included, apart from the original bridge, a well, a pond or *sarovar*, a garden, a resting house for travellers, a mosque, a Sikh *gurudwara*, and a Hindu temple, apart from the airy pavilions of the *Bārāhṅ Darī*. Pul Kanjri is today located less than 3 kilometres away from the Indo-Pak border at Wagah between Amritsar and Lahore. It was briefly conquered in skirmishes by both nations: Pakistan in 1965, and then 'reclaimed' by India in 1971. A grandiose war memorial, symbol of a seemingly perennial yet only 75-year-old divide, currently stands at the site of a bridge that was originally built to connect two lovers, 'a memorial to love'.

Today, Pul Kanjri is one of Amritsar's lesser-known historical landmarks. The relative obscurity of this once-famous structure is a product of the historical shifts in social attitudes towards musicians, especially female performers, in Punjab. A symbol of the wealth of the patronage and power enjoyed by courtesans during Ranjit Singh's reign, Pul Kanjri is also an emblem of the 'shared space' of religious cosmopolitanism fostered by the Lahore court.[2] The short-lived reign of Ranjit Singh's successors was followed by British annexation in 1849. Consequent upon the decline of Lahore as a courtly centre, this public structure gradually fell into decrepitude. The powerful wave of socio-religious reform led by the Anglicized middle classes that began in late nineteenth-century Punjab was marked by a hardening of anti-courtesan beliefs. Consequently, this nineteenth-century monument underwent restoration only in the twenty-first, as late as 2010.

Almost parallel to the decline of Lahore as courtly capital in western Punjab—mirrored in the Pul Kanjri story–was the rise of the Patiala court as a powerful locus of cultural patronage in the eastern part of Punjab. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, Patiala had emerged as the one 'genuine' classical musical lineage (*gharānā*) representative of the entire region, absorbing lineages from centres across the Punjab and neighbouring courtly centres like Lahore, Nabha, Jammu, Jaipur, Tonk

[2] 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.

and Delhi, and revealing the much broader 'significant geographies' imperative for musical production in Punjab.[3]

This book uncovers the spatial and temporal breadth of musical transformation in colonial Punjab, beginning in early nineteenth-century Lahore, and concluding in mid-twentieth century Patiala: from west to east, from Majha to Malwa, over the course of the long nineteenth century.[4] A cultural and social history of Punjab that is simultaneously a regionally centred history of musicians, dancers, and patrons, this book uncovers the many histories of music for a large but neglected swathe of the South Asian subcontinent—hitherto understudied both on account of academic disinterest, and the restrictive cultural legacies of a politically divided region.

[3] Francesca Orsini, 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature', *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (2015).

[4] These terms refer to the different geographical regions within Punjab, each marked by their distinct dialects of spoken Punjabi. 'Majha' refers to the central heartland region of the Punjab, covering Lahore and Amritsar and surrounding districts, while 'Malwa' to southeast Punjab, covered by Patiala, Bathinda, Sangrur, among other cities.

Introduction

At the Fawwara Chowk roundabout on Amritsar's 'heritage walkway' in Indian Punjab, there stands a martial statue of the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh brandishing his sword, seated atop his favourite horse. A few metres away, opposite a line of shops selling tea, traditional food items, *phulkārī* stoles, and Punjabi *juttī* style shoes in the Dharam Singh Market, there stood, until January 2020, two platforms showcasing Punjab's folk dancers (see Figure I.1).[1] Depicting a purportedly timeless vision of Punjabi folk culture in the heart of Amritsar, simultaneously the holiest city of Sikhism and the cultural capital of Indian Punjab, the statues are loaded with a nostalgic heft. The platform on the right contained four statues of turbaned Sikh men, captured frozen mid-step while performing the *bhaṅgṛā* dance. Adjacent to it, the platform on the left featured four statues of women in flowing clothes reminiscent of Punjabi village dress, who were

[1] On the installation of these statues as part of a beautification drive led by then deputy CM Sukhbir Badal, see Nirupama Dutt, 'Amritsar's Makeover: Golden Grandeur with a Heritage Tinge', *The Hindustan Times*, 24 October 2016, accessed 21 September 2021, https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ht-special-amritsar-gets-a-majestic-makeover-golden-grandeur-with-a-heritage-tinge/story-0GisnbT7dbOtJj4l6fG2aI.html. On 15 January 2020, the statues were vandalized by seven Sikh youths, an act that itself came on the heels of peaceful protests a few weeks earlier by some Sikh religious organizations against the statues' particular location near the Golden Temple. In fact, the father of one of the students responsible for the vandalism stood by his son's actions, claiming they upheld the Sikh '*rehat maryada*' or code of conduct. See Tribune News Service, 'SGPC Silent on Vandalism of Statues, Police Stay Guard', *The Tribune*, 17 January 2020, accessed 21 September 2021, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/sgpc-silent-on-vandalism-of-statues-police-stay-guard-27484. A few days after the vandalism, apex religious bodies of the Sikhs like the Akal Takht and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, but also, organizations representing musicians like the Shiromani Ragi Sabha (including Kirtanis of Golden Temple) and the Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Shiromani Dhadi Sabha, publicly approved of the sentiment behind the vandalism. Keeping in view this endorsement from religious leaders, the current Chief Minister, Capt. Amarinder Singh of the Congress Party, took a lenient view of the vandalism, recommending their relocation. See Express News Service, 'Heritage Street to Lose Folk Dancers' Statues, Case Against Vandals to Be Dropped Too', *The Indian Express*, 29 January 2020, accessed 21 September 2021, https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/amritsar-heritage-street-folk-dancers-statues-6240756/. At the time of writing, the hunt is on for a suitable new spot for relocating the statues, even as they quite literally gather dust outside the Punjab Heritage Tourism Promotion Board's office. See Neeraj Bagga, 'Uprooted from Vicinity of Golden Temple, Statues Gather Dust', *Tribune News Service*, 17 March 2021, accessed 21 September 2021, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/amritsar/uprooted-from-vicinity-of-golden-temple-statues-gather-dust-226356.

Music in Colonial Punjab. Radha Kapuria, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2023.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192867346.003.0001

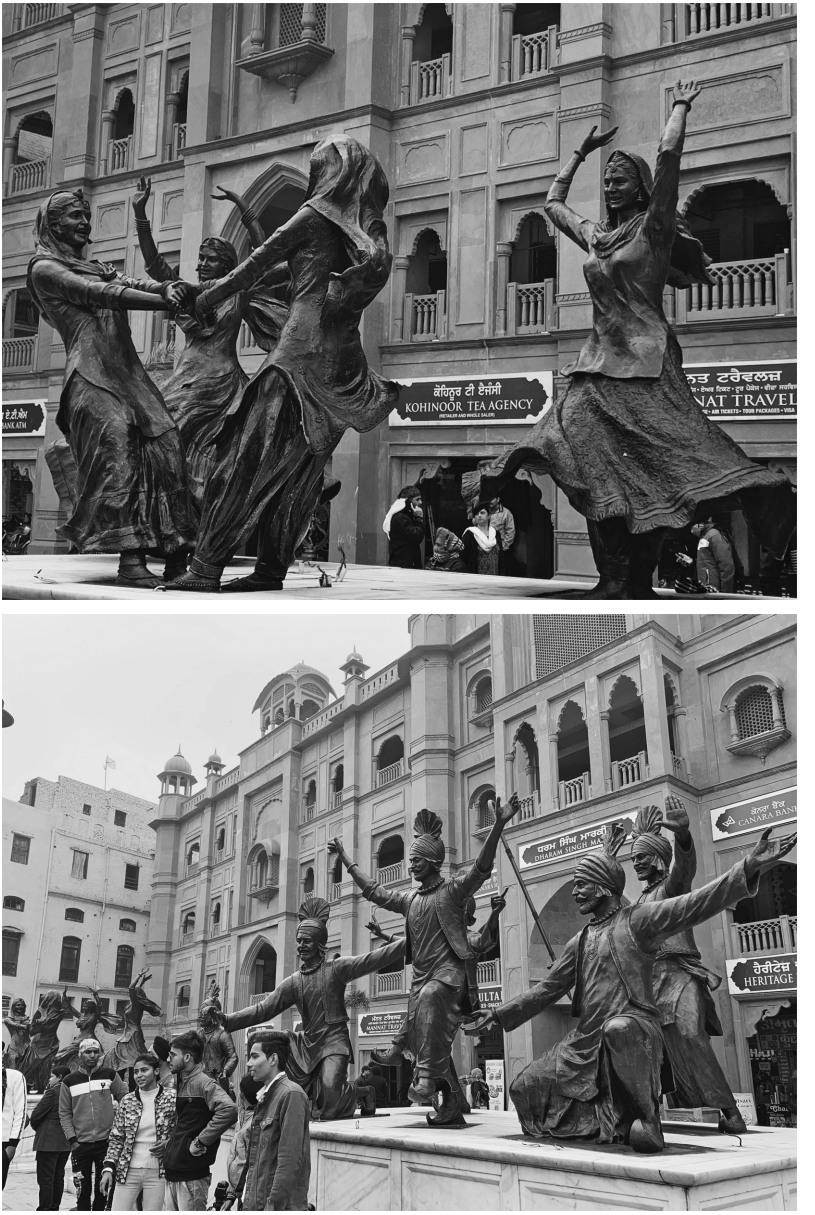

FIGURE I.1 The 'dancing statues' in Amritsar's Heritage Walkway, December 2019.

Photo courtesy: Radha Kapuria.

similarly shown performing the *giddhā* and the *kikklī*, popular women's folk dances.

Inaugurated in 2016 by then Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, leader of the incumbent Shiromani Akali Dal, these elaborate dioramas of carefree folk dancers in Amritsar encapsulate the popular view of Punjabi culture: folksy, rural, convivial, and earthy. Juxtaposed with the martial grandeur of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's statue, the dancers' statues were meant to symbolize quintessential Punjab to the hordes of tourists, both Indian and foreign, that throng the historic city every day.

The brief life these statues had near the Golden Temple before their relocation four years later neatly exemplifies several tropes around the historical representation of Punjab's performing traditions and artistes, and the politics of cultural commemoration around them, that I explore and question in this book.

There is an effortless organicity in the choice of folk music and dance to represent Punjab to outsiders—whether in the built, material heritage as signified by the dancing statues of Amritsar, or in the audio-visual representations evident in popular Bollywood film, solidifying this image beyond South Asia across the globe.[2] It is the strength of this enduring stereotype—and the implication that 'serious music and Punjab were incompatible', to use Sheila Dhar's mordant phrase—that in part, prompted my research into the social history of music in pre-Partition Punjab.[3]

Punjab is widely understood—in both Indian and Pakistani national imaginaries, and also in the substantial South Asian diaspora across the world—as the land of folk culture. In contrast, this book tracks the story of classical, urbane music and culture in Punjab by arguing that music, or specifically classical, Hindustani art music, was an important feature of life in the pre-twentieth-century Punjab courts, especially that of the Sikh

[2] A long list of mainstream Bollywood films and film songs glibly replicate the rural Punjab stereotype as representative of the region. Most recently, see the dialogue building up to the song 'Radha' in Imtiaz Ali's *Jab Harry Met Sejal* (2017), where the apparent 'loudness' of Punjabi song and voices is directly connected to agricultural reasons, by the lead protagonist played by the actor Shah Rukh Khan.

[3] The full quote reads: '"But isn't this place, Harballabh, in the Punjab, near Jullundur of all places?" my father had asked patronizingly, as though serious music and Punjab were incompatible… "I could never have imagined how sensitive and sophisticated the musical tastes of the regular listeners at this festival are. And most of them are Punjabis", Kesar Bai had said with the air of someone who has witnessed a miracle'. Here, Dhar is referring to the legendary Marathi vocalist Kesarbai Kerkar. Sheila Dhar, 'The Muse and The Truck Drivers', in *Raga'n Josh: Stories from a Musical Life* (Delhi: Hatchette India, 2005), 177–178.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh (r. 1801–1839) at Lahore. It proposes a holistic understanding of musicians in the region and attempts to track social attitudes towards the *mirāsī*s (hereditary caste of musicians, genealogists, and bards) and dancing girls in colonial Punjab, who constantly crossed the artificial boundaries since created between 'classical', 'folk' and 'devotional', and between 'urban' and 'rural'.

My book explores the many ways in which the music performed by hereditary professional musicians in colonial Punjab, c. 1800s–1940s (see Figure I.2), was employed by different constituencies for a range of purposes—political, affective, social, and devotional. It thus offers the first social history of professional music-making in colonial Punjab, to

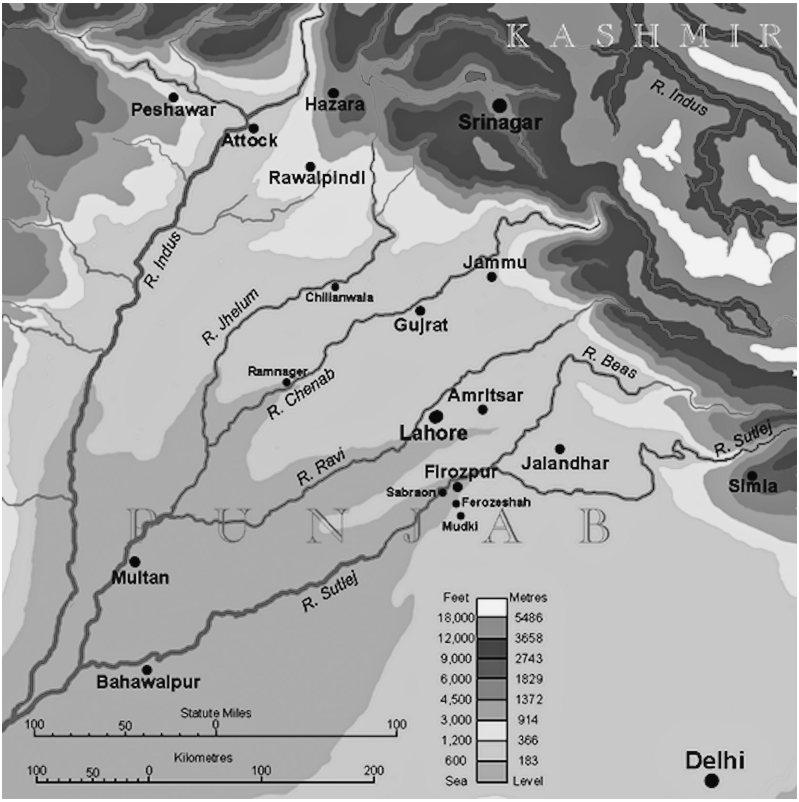

FIGURE I.2 Colonial Punjab, 'The Land of the Five Rivers'.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

show both the adaptability of its musical traditions, and their intrinsic role in shaping multiple identities among performers, patrons, and listeners. In focusing especially on the lesser-known history of art, or Hindustani, music in the region, this study prompts a reassessment of Punjab's regional identity, given that it has long been stereotyped as the land of 'rustic' culture.[4] This is equally a regional history of music and musicians in Punjab, and a study of the shifting place of music in Punjabi social life over time. Focused specifically on the colonial period, a major thematic running through the entire book is the relationship between Indians (or, more specifically, Hindustanis)[5] and Europeans, refracted through the prism of music, and the implications of an entanglement with a specifically Western form of modernity for Punjab.

There is a startling lack of scholarship on the music of undivided (pre-1947) or colonial-era Punjab. There are excellent but isolated studies on Sikh music,[6] Punjabi folk traditions,[7] *Sufi* music,[8] particular instruments,[9] localized microstudies of regions within Punjab,[10] and sociological analyses of contemporary practices.[11] No attempt has been made

[4] My M.Phil. focused on exactly this variety of 'serious' or 'classical' music, by excavating the history of the Harballabh festival—the oldest extant festival of Hindustani classical music in all of north India, held since 1875 in Jalandhar in east Punjab. Radha Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music: The Harballabh Musician's Fair of Punjab, 1947–2003' (MPhil diss., Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2013).

[5] Manan Ahmed has recently argued that between 1000 CE and 1900 CE, the writings of historians' native to the subcontinent posited a multicultural understanding of India as 'Hindustan', a home for all faiths; and that the term 'Hindustani' reveals the common political ancestry for the peoples of contemporary Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. See Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). For the purposes of this book, and mainly to avoid any confusion with the equally ubiquitous term 'Hindustani music', I will mostly stick to the terms 'India' and 'Indian'.

[6] Gobind Mansukhani, *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1982); Bob van der Linden, *Music and Empire in Britain and India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[7] Alka Pande, *Folk Music & Musical Instruments of Punjab: From Mustard Fields to Disco Lights* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 1999).

[8] Regula Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[9] Lowell Lybarger, 'The Tabla Solo Repertoire of Pakistani Punjab: An Ethnomusicological Perspective' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2003); Michael Nijhawan, *Dhadi Darbar: Religion, Violence, and the Performance of Sikh History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Gibb Schreffler, 'Signs of Separation: Dhol in Punjabi Culture' (PhD diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 2010).

[10] J.W. Frembgen, *Nocturnal Music in the Land of the Sufis: The Unheard Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music', 2013.

[11] Virinder Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

to systematically examine the pre-1947 social history of music, and particularly art music, in the Punjab. The rich and vibrant tradition of Sikh *gurmat saṅgīt* and the equally significant strains of folk and *Sufi* traditions have been seen as representative of the region's musical pasts, but crucially, their many interconnections have been under-explored. And the focus on these varieties of music has left out several other equally important genres of music-making—most notably Hindustani music—that have historically constituted a critically important part of the musical landscape of the region.

Histories of Hindustani music in colonial India, conversely, have not touched the Punjab. Rather, they have been focused on the regions of western India (Janaki Bakhle on Bombay/Mumbai and Baroda/Vadodara), South India (Lakshmi Subramanian's, Amanda Weidman's, and Davesh Soneji's work on Tanjore and Chennai) and eastern parts of north India (Sharmadip Basu and Sagnik Atarthi on Calcutta/Kolkata and Richard David Williams on Matiyaburj, Calcutta/Kolkata, and Lucknow). While extant studies emphasize the success of conservative elites in purifying and nationalizing music, I interrogate the consistency of that very project, by focusing on the distinctive modes of patronage that existed in colonial Punjab.[12] These included sections of the royalty, wealthy landowners, Christian missionaries, Hindu and Sikh reform organizations, and, increasingly as the twentieth century wore on, middle-class connoisseurs.

Most existing scholarship on music in Punjab, by largely covering subjects beyond and outside the purview of the classical, also participates, albeit unconsciously, in upholding the 'rustic Punjab' stereotype. Khalid Basra's and Lowell Lybarger's work come closest to directly researching classical music in Punjab. However, both accounts are restricted to west Punjab, in present-day Pakistan. In contrast, Virinder Kalra's book is the first to look at music across the two Punjabs in a holistic manner, offering a wealth of insights on the many shared musical practices and borrowings across the Radcliffe line. As a sociologist, however, his work almost wholly pertains to contemporary practices, with little archival analysis of

[12] Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Lakshmi Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

colonial or pre-colonial times. Kalra only briefly examines the discourse of colonial commentators and native elites, to conclude, rather decisively, 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 colonial terminology'.[13] However, he does not sufficiently account for the marginalization of the classical from discourses on Punjabi culture, when, in fact, classical music was very widely patronized.[14]

In contrast, I wish to demonstrate 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.[15] I thus 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, performed as it has often been in spaces associated with 'folk', *qawwālī* or *gurbāṇī* music, such as *melā*s (fairs), or shrines of *Sufi* saints.

The contemporary elevation (both lay and academic) of genres of music performed *only* in these 'popular' spaces, symbolized by either a bucolic conviviality or a martial vigour, has obscured the important role played by classically trained, *gharānā*-based musicians in the sociocultural history of Punjab. By focusing on classical musicians in Punjab, whilst simultaneously being attentive to their deep interconnections with folk, *gurbāṇī*, and *qawwālī* musicians, I hope to offer a distinctive and more complex perspective situated within wider work on culture in modern South Asia.

[13] Kalra, *Sacred*, 134–135.

[14] While colonialism surely changed the ways in which Hindustani art music was perceived and organized in South Asia, it would be erroneous to assume that the binary between Classical and Folk, or *Mārgī* and *Desī* music was thoroughly a product of colonial modernity, as the assumption seems to be in Kalra's book. For a summary of these debates, see Katherine Butler Schofield, 'Reviving the Golden Age again: 'Classicization', Hindustani Music, and the Mughals', *Ethnomusicology* 54 (2010): 484–517.

[15] I build on recent literature on the social histories of music in other regions, e.g. Richard Williams, 'Hindustani Music Between Awadh and Bengal, c. 1758–1905' (PhD diss., King's College London, 2014); Daniel Neuman, Shubha Chaudhuri, 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.

Undivided Punjab is a telling focus of investigation, given its geographical location—connecting the heartlands of north India with the frontiers of Central Asia—and its inhabitants embraced *both* the popular and elite domains of music in a way that challenges the familiar trajectory of Indian music's embourgeoisement and nationalization under colonialism.[16] Given its unique location, references to this region's music are conspicuous, but scattered and diffused in existing scholarship. I now chart out this uneven terrain of references, to argue the need for a more focused book on the subject.

A Present Absence: Punjab, Music, and Culture in Existing Scholarship

> [t]he ubiquity of music in the social life of India is matched by a pervasive lack of interest in its history.[17]

So the eminent scholar of Hindustani music Amlan Das Gupta tellingly reminds us. We can even more accurately replace 'India' with 'Punjab' in the above statement; since references to the history of musicians, musical instruments, and musical trends in the Punjab in musical histories and traditional ethnomusicological accounts tend to be stray and disconnected. For instance, in Allyn Miner's classic work on the *sitār* and *sarod*, where she notes that the Urdu music treatise, *Sarmāya-e-'ishrat* (1869), specified that the *tāus* and *kamānchā* were from the Punjab—but notes merely that 'they disappeared at an earlier time, and it is tempting to think of them as the predecessors of the *israj*'.[18] Similarly, James Kippen has observed that the history of the *tablā* is quite intimately connected to the Punjab, but without, till date, following up with

[16] Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*; Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court*; and Margaret Walker, *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

[17] Amlan Das Gupta, 'Women and Music: The Case of North India', in *Women of India: Colonial and Postcolonial Periods Series IX*, Vol. 3, ed. Bharati Ray (Delhi, London: Sage, 2005), 444.

[18] Sadiq Ali Khan and Aijaz Raqm Khan 'Dihlavi', *Sarmaya-e-Ishrat: Qanun-e-Mausiqi* (Delhi: Munshi Muhammad Ibrahim, 1895). See Allyn Miner, *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), 59.

extended commentary.[19] While considering Punjab as the possible place of origin for the *sāraṅgī* (bowed fiddle), ethnomusicologist Joep Bor similarly raises a pertinent question regarding a bearded musician playing *ḍholak* (two-headed drum) in a Mughal-era painting:

> Was the bearded musician perhaps Allah Dad Dhadhi, the musician from Jalandhar who is mentioned by Faqirullah in his *Rag Darpan* (1665–6)? Or was he the Dhadhi sarangi player 'Abdullah, a devotee of Sikh Guru Hargobind (1595–1644)?[20]

The question continues to stare at us invitingly; given no researcher of pre-modern Punjab since pursued it. Again, Katherine Butler Schofield's pioneering research into music during the reign of Aurangzeb refers to land in Punjab's Jalalabad districts that was bestowed in 1672 by the ruler upon a court musician's son 'on account of his giving up music as a means of earning'.[21] There also exists a rich visual archive of paintings that depicts musicians in eighteenth-century Punjab, especially the Hill States (roughly corroborating to the present-day Himachal Pradesh), notably the remarkable work of the artist Nainsukh of Guler. Many Pahari artists, experts in painting *rāgamālā*s ('garland of *rāgas*') with inscriptions in Gurmukhi and Takri scripts, often migrated to the Punjab plains, where they were employed at the Sikh courts.[22] No historian of Punjab has coherently investigated these tantalizing nuggets of information, suggesting that further research would be fruitful.

That a detailed historical analysis, particularly of classical music in Punjab, has eluded us this far, and presentist stereotypes about the

[19] James Kippen, 'The History of Tabla', in *Hindustani Music, Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Joep Bor, Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Jane Harvey, and Emmie te Nijenhuis (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010), 459–478.

[20] Joep Bor, 'Early Indian Bowed Instruments and the Origin of the Bow' in *Hindustani Music, Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Joep Bor, Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Jane Harvey, and Emmie te Nijenhuis (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010) 448.

[21] Katherine Butler Brown, 'Did Aurangzeb Ban Music? Questions for the Historiography of his Reign', *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 100.

[22] R.P. Srivastava, *Punjab Painting: Study in Art and Culture* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983), 5. See also J.A. Greig, '*Rāgamālā* Painting', in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 5, South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent*, eds. Alison Arnold and Bruno Nettl (New York: Routledge, 2000), 312–318; B.N. Goswamy, *Piety and Splendour: Sikh Heritage in Art* (New Delhi: National Museum, 2000), 102; and F.S. Aijazuddin, *Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits in the Lahore Museum* (New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1977), 43.

'folkness' of Punjabi music abide with such resilience, is therefore surprising. It is especially so given the extraordinary wealth of classical music traditions in the region, and the pervasive use of *rāga*-and-*tāla*-based music in a range of Punjabi texts of both a secular and sacral nature, across diverse social contexts. For example, the origins of Sikhism in Guru Nanak's musically inscribed teachings, and the increasing use of music by the subsequent Sikh Gurus for broadcasting their message, reveals the pre-eminence in Punjabi society of what I will call here *rāgadārī* music, society since at least the fifteenth century, if not earlier.[23]

References to *rāgadārī* music emerge in many unexpected texts from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Punjab. Apart from the innumerable instances of Sikh scripture and the *kāfī*s of the beloved and popular *Sufi* saint Bulleh Shah that are set to *rāga*s, take, for instance, a beautifully illustrated Persian manuscript housed in the British Library, based on Damodar Gulati's original Heer Ranjha *qissā* composed in Punjabi in 1605.[24] This late eighteenth-century *Qissā Hīr va Ranjhā* was written by Mansaram Munshi in 1744, two decades prior to Waris Shah's classic rendition dated to 1766. Munshi's Persian variation contains miniature paintings in the Punjab Hills style of *rāga*s and *rāginī*s, with one featuring musicians playing for Heer's father, Chuchek Khan. Further, we also find a painting of female instrumentalists on a page where the text highlights a textual and visual discussion on *Rāga Sheśa* or *Khaṭ* (also known as *Zilaf* at the time), a now-obscure *rāga* set in Bhairav *thāṭ* (see Figure I.3).[25] That a discussion on the attributes of a *rāga* or a musical mode is so centrally placed in a high-literary account of this popular and quintessentially Punjabi love ballad, illustrates a recognition, on the part of Munshi and/or his patron, of the value of *rāgadārī* music in the dissemination

[23] For the importance of music in the Sikh tradition, see Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 87–96; Gobind S. Mansukhani, 'The Unstruck Melody: Musical mysticism in the Scripture', in *Sikh Art and Literature*, ed. Kerry Brown (London: Routledge, 1999), 117–128; and S.S. Dhillon, 'Introduction', in *The Seeker's Path: Being an Interpretation of Guru Nanak's Japji*, eds. Sohan Singh and S.S. Dhillon (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004), vii–viii.

[24] Mansaram Munshi, *Qissā Hīr va Ranjhā* (1744), British Library shelfmark, OMS/Or. 1244. Damodar's Heer-Ranjha is the earliest known *qissā* in the Punjabi language. See Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 7–8.

[25] I thank Katherine Schofield for this information. For more on *Zilaf*, see *In the Bazaar of Love: The Selected Poetry of Amīr Khusrau*, eds. Paul Losensky and Sunil Sharma (New Delhi: Penguin, 2011), xxviii.

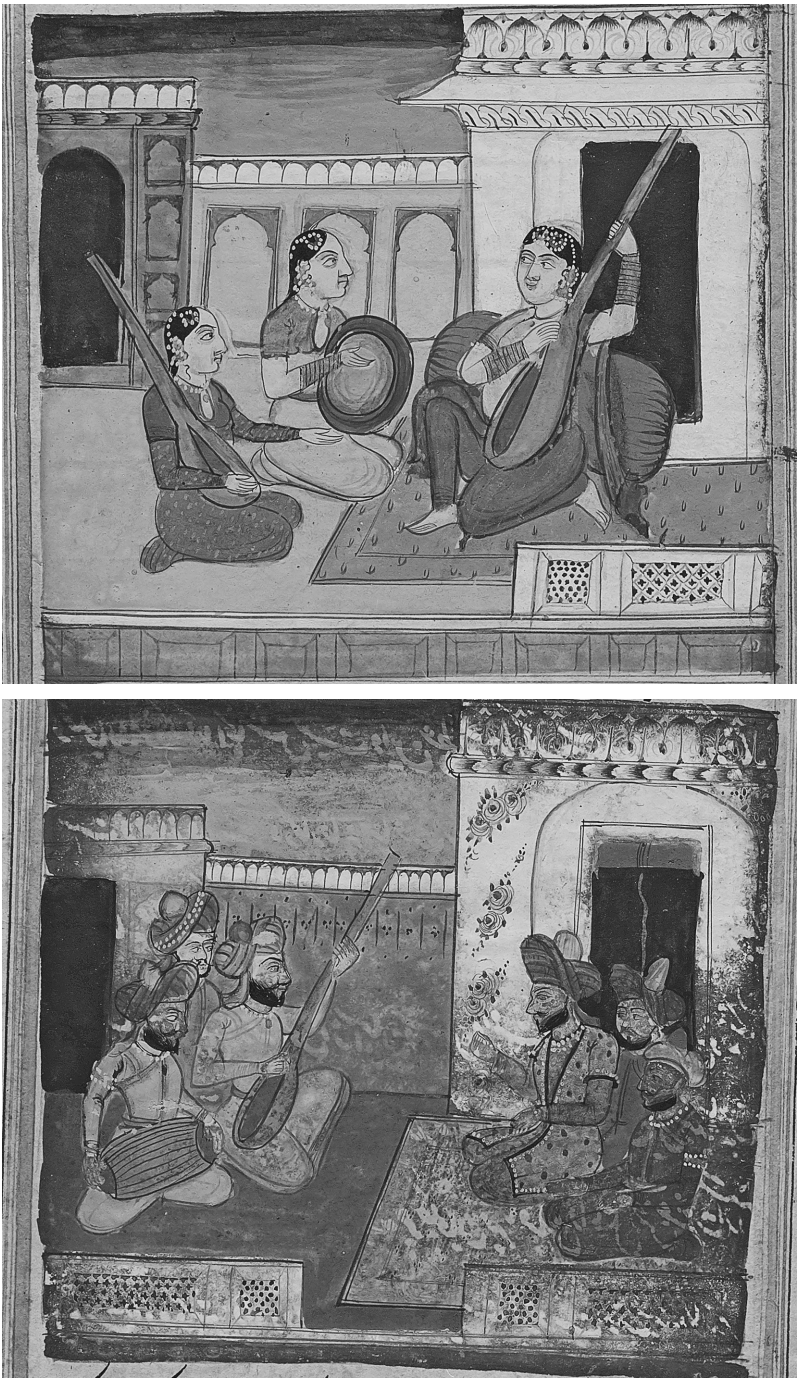

FIGURE I.3 Illustration from *Qissā Hīr va Ranjhā* (1744) of female musicians (top) and of Hir's father Chuchek Khan, listening to musicians (*bottom*)

of Heer's story. It must also be noted that the classic verses from Waaris Shah's Heer are usually sung in tunes emanating from Bhairavi *thāṭ*, which itself is closely associated with Bhairav *thāṭ*.[26]

The writings of various colonial ethnographers and others resident in colonial Punjab likewise include disparate references to a wide variety of music, much of which was *rāgadārī*. In the accounts of British ethnomusicologists and collectors too, like Maud MacCarthy or A.H. Fox Strangways, we find evidence of the rich musical traditions of the Punjab: whether they be MacCarthy's Punjabi friend Moyed Din, who sang for her *Rāga Shrī*, the 'king of the *rāga*s', which she later notated,[27] or the *tablā* player from Amritsar, Bhai Santu, who played for Fox Strangways.[28]

Within the rather circumscribed field of historical accounts on Punjab's music, scholarly attention until now has been limited either to dry compendia that enlist stylistic and genealogical features of the musical *gharānā*s (lineages) of the region, or to the more identifiably 'popular' cultural forms and artefacts. In the history of music in the region, there is a remarkable lacuna, with the exception of two monographs in Hindi and Gurmukhi. The first, by Geeta Paintal in Hindi, entitled *Punjāb Kī Saṅgīt Paramparā* offers a comprehensive view of the evolution of music in the Punjab.[29] Filled with rich anecdotes, the book is a meticulous compilation of information on the different genres of music in the region, especially the various *gharānā*s of classical music in Punjab and their genealogies. Though filled with a greater level of detail and referring to a wider range of sources than Paintal's monograph, B.S. Kanwal's more recent Gurmukhi account on *Punjāb De Saṅgīt Gharāne Ate Bhārtī Saṅgīt Paraṁparā* offers a similar description of the *gharānā*s of music in the Punjab, while also linking them to developments in Sikh *kīrtan* music. Both accounts are nonetheless restricted on account of a limited conception of the link between music and society and conventional opinions

[26] Emmie Te Nijenhuis, *Indian Music: History and Structure* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 53.

[27] Nalini Ghuman, *Resonances of The Raj: India in the English Musical Imagination, 1897–1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15. On the wider influence of MacCarthy, see Neil Sorrell, 'From "Harm-omnium" to Harmonia Omnium: Assessing Maud MacCarthy's Influence on John Foulds and the Globalization of Indian Music', *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* 40 (2010): 110–130.

[28] A.H. Fox Strangways, *The Music of Hindostan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 227.

[29] Geeta Paintal, *Punjāb kī Saṅgīt Paramparā* (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1988).

take the place of rigorous analytical engagement. Overall, these books are valuable as compendia documenting importing descriptive information on the varied musical traditions of the Punjab, in which regard both books are in fact exemplary.

The birds' eye perspective in the writings of Paintal and Kanwal is contrasted with the more focused ethnomusicological and anthropological work on contemporary Punjabi music. Michael Nijhawan's writings on the *ḍhaḍ-sārangī* tradition and Gibb Schreffler's on the *ḍhol* are pioneering and particularly insightful in this regard.[30] Punjab's *Sufi* music has similarly been studied, along with other centres across north India and Pakistan in Qureshi's pioneering study on *qawwālī* from 1995.[31] More recently, Pannke has examined iterations of *Sufi* music beyond *qawwālī* in Pakistan's Indus valley region.[32] Again, Wolf's work on music and drumming across Islamicate South Asia, devotes some space to music in the shrine cultures of contemporary Lahore.[33] As opposed to the contemporary location of these studies, and the unquestionable value of the ethnomusicological method in studying the performing arts, here I undertake a more traditional historical analysis, primarily to counter the inherent presentism in existing anthropological, sociological, and ethnomusicological studies. The idea of Punjabi music as primarily folk is historically incorrect and reveals a curious presentism, wherein we imagine the past of Punjabi music to be of a particular contour, based solely on narrow, current-day notions about it. My aim here is to caution against this broad trend, to promote a more historically grounded awareness of music in the region.

Scholarship on the social history of Punjab in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has, for the large part, focused on religious identity

[30] Nijhawan, *Dhadi*. Nijhawan's book straddles the gap between anthropology and history to offer one of the first accounts of a performing community in Punjab, tracing the history of the *ḍhaḍ-sārangī* musicians from the nineteenth century to the present. Schreffler, in his particularly rich ethnography 'Signs of Separation' focused on *ḍhol* players, arguing for the development of the *ḍhol* as a multidimensional 'sign' embodying aesthetic themes of separation that have such a resonance for Punjabi history and society.

[31] Regula Burkhardt Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[32] Peter Pannke, *Singers and Saints: Sufi Music in the Indus Valley* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[33] Richard Wolf, *The Voice in the Drum: Music, Language, and Emotion in Islamicate South Asia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

or political and economic trends. J.S. Grewal's classic work places the history of Sikhism within the larger trajectory of Punjab history and geography, giving equal space to the development of Panthic Sikhism and the rise of Ranjit Singh's Sikh empire, moving on to describe the new state of Punjab in the 1960s, concluding with the turbulent 1980s.[34] From an anthropological point of view, Richard G. Fox underlined the importance of British authorities in patronizing a distinct Sikh identity, arguing that 'in pursuit of their colonial interests through means dictated by their own cultural beliefs [the British] foreshadowed the reformed Sikh, or Singh identity propounded by the Singh Sabhas'.[35] As opposed to this, Harjot Oberoi's prominent work emphasizes the role of the Singh Sabha reformers themselves in the re-fashioning of Sikh identity.[36] He argues that the religious boundaries of Sikhism were solidly constructed, sharply marking out what constituted Sikh theology and ceremony in conscious opposition to Hinduism and Islam. Heterodox Sikh practices, especially popular belief systems held in common by many Punjabis irrespective of religion, were outlawed and a fixed and monolithic Sikh identity put in its place. Similarly, and prior to Oberoi, Kenneth Jones had contended that for the vast majority of Punjabi Hindus, 'Hinduism' was not the primary operative category of self-definition, but that the 'specific tradition' of an individual's *jātī* or caste rather than the great tradition of his religion dictated social behaviour'.[37] This tradition was altered with the conversions by many high castes to Christianity during the 1870s, which provided the Arya Samaj of Punjab, led by urban and middle-class mercantile men, a major ground from which to refashion Hindu belief and practice along militant lines while simultaneously challenging Sikh and Islamic reformers.

The historiographical focus has changed in recent times, especially with the work of Sethi, Malhotra, Mir, and Murphy. Anil Sethi's doctoral research examined 'the interplay between symbolic and cultural aspects of religion' in quotidian routines by focusing on popular literature and

[34] J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[35] Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 10.

[36] Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[37] Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 5.

tracts to assess the role of 'discursive elements' in the creation of sectarian identities.[38] Anshu Malhotra's was the first major monograph to discuss the move towards greater domestication of women in conjunction with the upper-caste movements for social reform.[39] Farina Mir's pioneering research into the politics of language in colonial Punjab focussed on the rise of a brisk vernacular book trade which maintained the colonial-era market for the traditionally popular and orally recited *qisse* (epic romances), explaining why Punjabi flourished despite an unsympathetic colonial state that favoured English and Urdu.[40] Anne Murphy has more recently revived attention towards the salience of the history of material objects in representing the Sikh past but also in effecting its production in the present, through processes of memorialization.[41] I will build on this literature embodying the cultural turn in the recent historiography of Punjab, part of the wider academic trajectory of cultural history writing on South Asia, that centres culture as embodied practice within varied political and social contexts.[42]

Locating Subaltern Performers in the Archives

> Deep down the hope is that by giving marginalized voices places to speak and shout and sing from, anthropology can in some measure counter the long-standing arrogance of colonial and imperial authority, *of history written in one language, in one voice, as one narrative.*[43]
>
> —Steven Feld

[38] Anil Sethi, 'The Creation of Religious Identities in the Punjab, c. 1850–1920' (PhD diss., Cambridge, 1998).

[39] Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Boundaries: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[40] *Qisse* (plural of) *Qissā*, see Mir, *The Social Space of Language*.

[41] Anne Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past, History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[42] Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, and Bodhisattva Kar, eds., *New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[43] Steven Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, eds. Michael Bull, Les Back, and David Howes (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 223; emphasis added.

How might one write a history that provides a place for marginalized voices 'to speak, shout and sing from', as per ethnomusicologist Steven Feld's formulation? The technical difficulty of accessing voices from the past[44] is combined with the ethical dilemmas of the very possibility of accessing the subjectivities of subalterns, separated from us in time, space, and social location.[45] Still, to paraphrase Marc Bloch's words, one can strain to detect 'the scent of (subaltern) human flesh' in the mainstream archives.[46] In a word, one must attempt to redress hegemonic views of the past, unearthing those local beliefs and popular knowledges sidelined or 'unarchived' by mainstream history.[47]

While there do exist traces of some subaltern figures in the archives, it is a narrow focus on a certain kind of Punjabi rural subject. This privileging of the peasant went hand-in-hand with a prioritization of the rural landscape in Punjab as opposed to the urban one in colonial British discourse.[48] Navyug Gill has thus perceptively argued that 'from the vantage of the archive, much of Panjabi history is the intractable one-act theatre of those deemed peasants'.[49]

The focus on the peasant as Punjabi subject *par excellence* has also diverted attention away from others such as performers from hereditary communities, whether the more popular *mirāsī*s (Punjab's ubiquitous bards), or the more elite *kalāwant* musicians, performers of *rāgadārī* music. When writing a history of musicians in colonial Punjab, this problem of accessing the archives for the voices and presence of

[44] On the conundrum of doing historical musicology, see Richard Widdess, 'Historical Ethnomusicology', in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, ed. Helen Myers (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 219–237. Yvonne Liao resolves this difficulty of a historian accessing sound from the past by asserting the importance of being 'more interested in evidence *of* sound than in evidence *for* sound'. Yvonne J.Y. Liao, 'Western Music and Municipality in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai' (PhD diss., King's College London, 2017), 41.

[45] This has been most famously addressed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

[46] The full quotation reads: 'The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies'. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992 [1953]), 22.

[47] Gyanendra Pandey, *Unarchived Histories: The 'Mad' and the 'Trifling' in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3–20.

[48] William Glover has shown how the British preferred the 'transparency' of the village/rural landscape, as opposed to the more 'unfamiliar' and 'threatening' cityscape. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[49] Navyug Gill, 'Peasant as Alibi: An Itinerary of the Archive in Colonial Panjab', in *Unarchived Histories*, 23.

musicians becomes ever more difficult, given the primarily oral tradition that classical music in South Asia has been. As a result, the trajectories of elite, urbane, educated, connoisseur, Punjabis or indeed those of *rāgadārī* music-making in the Punjab, have been neglected in South Asian historiography.

This is in direct contrast to the conventional stereotype for a region like Bengal, for example, where the elite *bhadralok* were seen as definitive of the region's culture. As a result, any scholarly examination of popular and non-elite groups in Bengal was seen for a long time as irrelevant, since it lay outside the purview of the 'Bengal Renaissance' apparently ushered in with the engagement of Bengal's elites with western modernity.[50] The reverse is true of the Punjab, as we already saw above, with existing literature limited to folk musicians, *ḍhaḍhī*s, and performers of Sikh *kīrtan* like the *rāgī*s and *rabābī*s, with classical musicians in Punjab receiving short shrift.[51]

Isolating classical music-making as a stand-alone tradition of music, however, perpetuates a folk-classical binary that obscures more than it reveals about histories of music. Peter Manuel has recently pointed persuasively to the existence of an intermediate sphere of music between classical and folk music in South Asia.[52] I, too, will show the *connections* between these two purportedly disparate genre-worlds of folk and classical music, but from a sociological/social rather than just a musicological perspective, by focusing on the group that moved in both worlds: the *mirāsī*s, a lineage-based, nomadic, hereditary caste group of bards, genealogists and musicians, traditionally endowed with low social caste status in Punjab, but who often had musical connections with more elite, *gharānedār* musicians.

The discourse on *mirāsī*s is central to my discussion, for they were idealized and ruralized in the writings of colonial scholar-administrators and folklorists. For example, the civil servant H.A. Rose presented what

[50] This trend in scholarship received its first major reversal with the pioneering work of Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and The Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989); and followed up by other remarkable monographs, like Anindita Ghosh's *Power and Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[51] Kalra 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.

[52] Peter Manuel, 'The Intermediate Sphere in North Indian Music Culture: Between and Beyond "Folk" and "Classical"', *Ethnomusicology* 59, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 82–115.