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Indo-Muslim Music, Poetry, and Dance in North America

Karen Leonard and Hiromi Lorraine Sakata

For South Asians in North America, art and aesthetics from the homelands continue to be important components of identities. When art forms travel, becoming rooted in new sites yet still powerfully connected to their places of origin, surprising things can happen. In aesthetic performances the links between value, meaning, and embodied practice are in some cases difficult to break or transform, while in other cases there is a relatively easy separation of embodied performance from meaning and value, a relatively successful transformation of an art form in a new setting.¹ Here, we contrast several types of Indo-Muslim cultural performances in North America to demonstrate how traditional forms can take on a wider significance and appreciation, as language, rhythm, and themes are differently understood and appreciated. We use the adjective Indo-Muslim, while others might use Mughlai (influenced by the Mughal empire) or Indo-Persian (influenced by Persian language and culture) or Islamicate (influenced by Islamic civilization rather than the religion of Islam).

Art forms that were originally associated with religious (Islamic) or ethnic (Indo-Muslim) identities have acquired new meanings and audiences in America. Through reproduction and trans-

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formation, these new cultural expressions of identity are being shaped not only by the new national context but by transnational forces as well. Ironically perhaps, while secular Indo-Muslim art forms are being faithfully reproduced by first-generation immigrants, far more popular are performances by artists from abroad, artists whose “authentic” performances are specifically Islamic in content but whose audiences are hybrid and cosmopolitan, part of an emerging global art world.

We are especially interested here in the successful establishment of *qawwali*, an explicitly Islamic and Sufi devotional musical tradition in North America. It is not yet locally rooted, but it is clearly reaching out to non-Muslim, non-South Asian, and young audiences through enormously popular transnational performers. At the same time there is a distinct decline in the patronage of *qawwali* by first-generation South Asian Muslims themselves. This decline is not attributable to the broadening audience for the music but to the narrowing concepts of Islamic identity among newly orthodox immigrant Muslims.²

The situation with respect to *qawwali* contrasts with that of Indo-Muslim secular and romantic poetry, songs, and dance, all being produced by immigrants settled in North America.³ The Indo-Muslim performance traditions include *mushairas* (poetry recitations) and *ghazal* and *geet* evenings (classical musical renditions of poetry)⁴; there is also *kathak* dance (a North Indian form associated with Mughal court culture). These Indo-Muslim aesthetic traditions have been less successfully transferred to the new context, at least when one looks to second-generation and non-South Asian audiences. However, for first-generation Urdu speakers, these poetic and musical performances continue to be strong markers of a secular linguistic identity. This identity bridges political boundaries back in South Asia, bringing together older immigrants of diverse religions—Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs—who know Urdu well. *Kathak* performances fall in an intermediate category, as one of the South Asian dance traditions studied by young women of diverse backgrounds in America, at best a component of ethnic, not religious, identity. *Kathak*, then, is like *bharatanatyam* and *bhangra*, other South Asian dances broadening their appeal in North America, although it is less popular.

The availability and vibrancy of Indo-Muslim culture in America has increased dramatically since the changes in Canadian and U.S. immigration laws, in 1962 and 1965, drew rising numbers of immigrants from India and Pakistan to both countries. In

the decades before the 1960s, when South Asian immigrants were only a few thousand in number and most were Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus from India's Punjab province, recreational activities were few and religious divisions were less salient than linguistic commonalities.⁵ By the late 1960s, Hindi movies from India were being screened, and then the numbers and relative wealth of the new South Asian immigrants produced a flowering of South Asian culture in North America. Where there are enough Pakistanis, Indians, Afghans, and/or Bangladeshis to support a radio or television station, special cultural programs are mounted regularly, and poetry and singing are featured. Television and radio programs in Hindi and Urdu are widely available in American cities, and smaller linguistic populations (for example, Persian or Pushto speakers) also support programs in their native languages.

Today, the new South Asian Muslim immigrants sponsor and attend cultural performances and other popular recreational activities that are almost as accessible as they were in the homelands. These activities provide many resources for the construction of immigrant identities and sometimes strongly influence the host society as well. Cultural performances of a quality to satisfy the most demanding of purists take place, along with "fusion" and "crossover" arts and activities. The most popular Indo-Muslim cultural events are the *qawwali*, *mushaira*, and *geet* and *ghazal* performances.

Performance traditions among South Asian immigrant Muslims usually feature music and poetry rather than dance. Sufi traditions in Islam often encourage music and dance in their traditions,⁶ but Sufi tombs and shrines, the sites for *qawwali* performances, are still lacking in North America.⁷ *Qawwali* performances in North America take place in concert halls and other secular sites and reach out to non-Muslim audiences who view the tradition as "world music." The late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan from Pakistan is the most widely known figure (he died in 1997 in London on his way to Los Angeles).

Across North America, South Asian organizations sponsor poetry recitations, concerts, and other cultural performances by local and visiting artists. These events are held throughout the year, their timings often adjusted to coincide with American holidays. The performances often run on "Indian" or "Pakistani" time, meaning that they start late (and later than scheduled) and continue far into the night, or they may be more attuned to

American timings, starting when scheduled and ending at a “sensible” hour. The events are advertised in South Asian ethnic newspapers and by flyers distributed in local grocery stores and religious centers. For a big name performer, the mainstream press may give advance notice and review the performance.

The Indo-Muslim cultural scene in North America is strikingly transnational, and in ways that reunite Muslims from now-separate nation-states. Thus leading Sufi *qawwali* singers from Pakistan, notably the Sabri Brothers or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, were enjoyed by Indians and Bangladeshis when they performed in America. *Ghazal* singers too are in demand, and when the famous Pakistani *ghazal* singer Mehdi Hassan cut the ribbon for the expansion of a Los Angeles travel agency, local guests included the heads of both Pakistan’s and India’s national airlines.⁸ *Mushaira* evenings frequently feature performers from other diasporic sites such as Sweden and the U.K. as well as from Pakistan or India.

Transnational visitors are highly visible performers, but there are permanently settled South Asians providing instruction in music, dance, and other arts all over North America. As with Arab arts in Detroit,⁹ American museums and funding agencies can be sources of support for Indo-Muslim music, poetry, and dance traditions. Many of the artists train non-South Asian performers as well, but they are not promoters of fusion art since they are teaching mostly traditional arts in mostly traditional ways. An outstanding example here is Ali Akbar Khan, master of the *sarod* (a stringed instrument), whose northern California Ali Akbar College of Music has become a national institution. Claiming descent from the lineage founded by Tansen, the renowned court musician of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, he believes that sixteenth-century north Indian classical music can be learned better in America than in India now.¹⁰ With respect to performers and audiences, then, these art forms can be viewed as examples of “crossover” arts.

Qawwali: Sufi Devotional Music

Traditional *qawwali* is a musical expression of Sufi poetry, a genre of mystic, religious songs of South Asia associated with the Sufi devotional practice of “audition” or “listening.”¹¹ This spiritual genre is intended to make the listeners receptive to the message of the songs. The term *qawwali* comes from the Arabic, *qaul*, meaning “to speak” or “to say.” The term *qawwal*, meaning “fluent” or

“eloquent,” came to be applied to the singer, so that today, *qawwal* refers to a singer of *qawwali*. Thus, the very etymology of the word emphasizes the “word” or “text” of a song.

The word or message of these song texts consists of poetry which makes love the foundation of the Sufi’s relationship with God. This spiritual love is often likened to the worldly love between man and woman. Sufi poets used worldly images to signify the mystic state and mission of the Sufis. Wine, the cup-bearer, the tavern—all forbidden in orthodox Islam in their outward form—are interpreted by Sufis as symbols of the mystic state. Wine is the catalyst that brings about the meeting of the mystic’s soul and spiritual vision. Drunkenness or a state of intoxication, *mast*, is a metaphor for the ecstasy excited by divine love. It refers to figurative drunkenness, a condition reached through ecstatic experience that enables the Sufi to discover a hidden dimension beyond his normal habit of thought. The cup-bearer, *saqi*, brings the wine of love and symbolizes the guide or teacher who leads the mystic to the drink of Divine knowledge. The tavern refers to the heart of the mystic or the Sufi meeting place, a dwelling-place of love. Thus, Sufi poetry may appear irreverent to the uninitiated, but it embodies sacred meaning to the initiated.

Sufi poetry is set to music because Sufis found music had the “mystical power to draw out the deepest emotions, but also, when coordinated with symbolic words and rhythmical movements, has power over man’s will.”¹² The musical setting of Sufi texts highlights the mystical meaning of the text and helps transport the inspired Sufi to an altered state of consciousness. Those who are *mast* or “drunk” are lovers of God; they are the Sufis who have a vision of the Beloved, the Divine.

The Sabri Brothers from Pakistan were probably the first *qawwals* to introduce *qawwali* to a predominantly non-South Asian, North American audience. In 1975, they performed at New York’s Carnegie Hall, and their performances quickly became legendary after a review of that performance was published in the *New York Times*:¹³

Near the end (this reporter had to leave before the very end), the audience was clapping and shouting deliriously, and one man went so beyond himself that he bloodied his head—banging it into the side of the stage. If it seemed a long way from the polite boredom of so many Western concerts, it was really a reaffirmation of the power of music and an extreme

extension of the very sort of ecstasy that Western music-lovers experience with their own music.

Although this very dramatic display of the effect of music upon its listeners is probably a common occurrence at rock concerts and experienced by young rock music fans on a regular basis, it must have been quite surprising and dramatic for the polite concert attendees of Carnegie Hall. One who saw the Sabri Brothers at a later date remarked, "Alas, I didn't see them at Carnegie Hall, but at Avery Fisher, probably in 1981. The story of ecstasy (and blood!) was still fresh in everybody's mind and Beate Gordon [of the Asia Society which sponsored their early concerts] gave a little lecture on concert decorum."¹⁴

Following the Sabri Brothers, it was Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, from Pakistan's Punjab province, who brought *qawwali* into the consciousness of world popular music audiences everywhere.¹⁵ Through the media of concerts, recordings, film soundtracks and collaborative works with international musicians, Nusrat cultivated an international following that thought of him as synonymous with *qawwali*. He worked with Peter Gabriel, Michael Brook, young Pakistani Britons such as Bally Sagoo and Talvand Singh, American popular musicians such as Eddie Vedder, and South Asian artists such as Javed Akhtar. Although Nusrat never downplayed his Pakistani citizenship, he was well on his way to becoming a citizen of the world at the time of his death in 1997. Nusrat's collaborations with popular international musicians endeared him to world music audiences, and his popularity in India also grew. He worked with composers and lyricists from the Mumbai film industry and was becoming a cultural ambassador of sorts to India. Music, like cricket, enabled these cultural ambassadors to cross political boundaries. His untimely death was announced on the BBC news and mourned in obituaries in leading American newspapers. Three years after Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's death, a Google search on the Web for his name brought up more than 15,000 references, while the term *qawwali* brought up over 5,500.

What is it about *qawwali* that seems to attract audiences who may or may not understand the key element of the genre, the song texts? As noted in the newspaper review of the first concert at Carnegie Hall in 1975, the ecstatic reaction by the audience underscores the strong attraction *qawwali* holds for audiences. Other attractions come from the powerfully emotional language, the rhythmic music, and the devotional religious content.

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Seattle Washington 1993.

Photograph by Tom Sakata, Courtesy of S. T. Sakata.

The importance of the language of the songs cannot be overlooked. For those who understand the language of the song texts as well as the musical style of *qawwali*, a certain refrain or a musical turn of a phrase can bring about a flood of emotions which are expressed in verbal shouts and in bodily movements such as the raising of the arms or full body movements likened to dance. *Qawwals* constantly observe and “read” their audiences in order to perform in ways to help the listeners attain a heightened sense of

the songs. Because of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's association with Punjabi culture and his mastery of the Punjabi language, he had an enormous following of Punjabis—Pakistani and Indian, as well as Muslim, Sikh and Hindu Punjabis—yet during his first U.S. performance (at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1989), he sang mainly Urdu songs. When asked why he did not sing more Punjabi songs, he answered that the audience, consisting largely of foreigners, would not understand Punjabi, and he thought Urdu was more universally understood. Whenever Nusrat sang in Vancouver, B.C., he sang mainly Punjabi songs for the great number of Sikhs in the audiences. Whenever he spied a number of Afghan fans or sang for a university audience, he made sure to include a song in Persian. Thus, the issue of language took precedence over that of religion.

On a very basic level it is the music of *qawwali*, particularly its rhythm, that attracts international audiences who have no knowledge of the language of the song texts. It is obviously the musical elements that attract the majority of the youthful, world popular music audiences, striking members of the audience in different ways but managing to extract emotional responses from most of them. The performances involve many musicians in addition to the lead singer. *Qawwali* is sung by soloists who are accompanied by a chorus of male singers and clappers and by one or two harmoniums (keyboard instrument) and *tabla* (a pair of single-headed drums). Some ensembles add more melody instruments (such as clarinet or violin) and more rhythmic instruments (such as the double-headed, barrel-shaped *dholak*), but the basic ensemble is kept to simple melodic and rhythmic accompaniment to the songs.

Because of the centrality of the song texts to the performers, many *qawwali* begin in free rhythm with the soloist intoning the text in a particular musical mode. A regular beat and rhythm are established with the entrance of the *tabla* and chorus. The tempo gradually speeds up to a climax before returning to a slower tempo to end the piece. At other times the tempo increases suddenly and the rhythm changes dramatically. The changes in musical modes at strategic points, the repetition of certain words and phrases, and the rhythmic and improvisatory settings of the text all contribute to a musical vehicle that can carry the listeners to a state of high excitement.

In a traditional Sufi context these musical techniques of manipulating tempo, rhythm, melodic mode and song texts help

induce in listeners an ecstatic, trance-like state of mind. The musicians help those affected to maintain the ecstatic state as long as possible, then gradually guide them out of the trance state because a sudden return to reality can be a traumatic experience. For general concert audiences, the music can heighten their excitement level to the point where individual audience members dance in the aisles whenever permitted, while others remain seated, clapping along.

Finally, there is the religious content of the songs. *Qawwali* is recognized as a devotional genre of the Chishtiya Sufis of South Asia, yet it enjoys recognition and popularity outside the context of the Chishtiya order. Although some of the main centers and shrines of the Chishtiya Sufis are found in India, many international audiences associate *qawwali* with Pakistan for two reasons: First, they recognize it as a Muslim devotional genre and easily associate it with Pakistan, an Islamic country. Second, it is Pakistani musicians who have popularized *qawwali* beyond the borders of India and Pakistan, beyond the South Asian Muslim communities, and beyond purely religious contexts.

The *qawwali* repertoire consists of songs and hymns to God, Muhammad, Ali and Sufi saints such as Data Ganj Bakhsh, Mohinuddin Chishtiya, Baba Fariduddin Ganj-e Shakkar and Nizamuddin Auliya.¹⁶ Songs in praise of Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, are extremely popular among the Sufi orders of Pakistan and India, who see Ali as the master of all Sufi orders. Generally, a traditional performance will begin with a sequence comprised of *hamd* (a praise to God), *na't* (a praise to Mohammad) and *manqabat* (a praise to a saint, including Ali). This sequence, therefore, appeals to general Muslim audiences, be they Sunnis or Shias. *Ghazal* poetry is also sung in *qawwali* style, and the romantic verses are open to Sufi interpretation.

Secular Poetry, Songs, and Dance

Indo-Muslim secular art forms and aesthetic expressions have also been brought to North America and help keep immigrant identities alive. In the case of formal poetic recitations (*mushairas*) and musical renditions of poetry (*ghazals* and *geet*), the meaning of the verses is very important. The beauty of these art forms comes from mastery of the Urdu language, although in the latter two cases sound and rhythm are important elements too. Because Urdu has become increasingly (and wrongly) associated with Muslims in South Asia,¹⁷ these performance traditions are

sometimes associated with Muslims or with Islam. However, they, like *kathak* dance, are not connected with religion and serve, instead, as markers of ethnic or South Asian identity in North America.

For the *mushairas* and *ghazal* and *geet* performances, audiences must be able to appreciate the conventions of Urdu poetry, the traditional metaphors and symbols, the wordplay characterizing the recitations and songs. *Mushairas*, in particular, require such specialized knowledge of Urdu and its poetic conventions that audiences and local performers consist overwhelmingly of first-generation immigrants.¹⁸ Because members of the second generation are not proficient in Urdu and know little or nothing of its poetic conventions, both aficionados and scholars worry about the “loss” of Urdu culture in the diasporic sites.¹⁹ Yet these cultural performances seem still to be increasing in number in America as immigrants continue to arrive and support the associations that sponsor them.

A *mushaira*, a formal evening of Urdu poetry, typically features both local and visiting international poets. In these gatherings the featured poets recite their compositions in turn, employing highly personal styles of presentation, including rhythmic chanting and theatrical gestures.²⁰ Voluntary associations in America, such as Urdu Markaz International (Urdu Center), Bazm-i-Urdu (Urdu Society), the Pakistani American Arts Council, or the Federation of Indian Muslims in North America, sponsor these events. Some associations are branches of national or international associations, but local officers show a high level of commitment, and women are prominent among them. Patrons can be private entrepreneurs, like the owners of travel agencies and grocery stores, realtors and software company heads, and other businessmen prominent in the ethnic community. Typical sites for performances are rented spaces, often in South Asian restaurants; mosques never serve as sites or sponsors for poetry recitation and singing.²¹

These Urdu concert and poetry associations can be exclusively Pakistani or Indian, but more often the memberships, poets, and audiences bridge political boundaries back in South Asia. They bring together not only Pakistanis and Indians, but also Afghans, Bangladeshis, and others who may speak and appreciate Urdu. A writer lamenting the 2001 death of Noor Jahan, Pakistan’s best known classical singer (in Urdu and Punjabi), recalled a concert she gave in northern California in the late 1970s:

"Sikh families came from Yuba City, Muslims from Sacramento and beyond and the local Hindu fans from the San Francisco Bay Area, I had no idea. . .there were that many people from South Asia in this entire region."²²

At the end of the twentieth century, evenings of cultural performances had become increasingly eclectic. A local society in the northern California area, Awaan-e-Faiz, commemorated Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the late great Pakistani poet, and at Berkeley in 1994, poems entitled "Flowers of Harlem" and "Ozone Layer" were recited in addition to poems on traditional themes. At this gathering one poet hoped the Urdu poetry could reduce hostility between India and Pakistan. In 2000, an evening of *ghazals* by a young Pakistani poetess, Noshi Gilani, featured Sikh musicians, and in southern California that same year, the Urdu Cultural Society included both Muslim and Hindu performers in a combined *mushaira/ghazal* evening.²³ Communal harmony was the explicit purpose of a *mushaira* in New York in 2000, which included speeches and time for socializing, and an Aligarh Muslim Alumni Association *mushaira* in Chicago in the same year featured visiting poets and chief guests from the U.K., Canada, India, and Pakistan.²⁴ Another event in 2000, hosted by the South Asian Cultural Society in Newark, California (with both Indian and Pakistani members) included both *ghazals* and *geet* along with a dinner and fashion show.²⁵

Featuring several types of performances in a single event is a strategy to broaden the audiences for *mushairas* and *ghazal* evenings. The examples above illustrate this tendency, with evenings variously including *mushaira* recitations, *ghazals*, political speeches, time for discussion and socializing, and even dinners and fashion shows. Such combinations clearly respond to the limitations presented by a strictly formal *mushaira*, since *ghazal* and *geet* performances are lighter, more popular, musical renderings of poetry. The content of *ghazals* is secular and highly romantic, akin to the love songs popularized by Hindi movies for many decades now. These combination evenings attract younger people more readily, and some songs will be in Punjabi or Hindi as well as Urdu.²⁶ There may be a transnational impetus behind such events as well, as socializing and dinner are more often part of an evening when the featured performer is a visitor.

Finally, we will briefly consider *kathak*, *bharatanatyam* and *bhangra*, all South Asian traditional dance forms that have adopted new values and meaning in immigrant communities in North

America. *Bharatanatyam* is a classical dance form rooted in the Hindu temple traditions of South India. In North America, however, the dance is perceived as the quintessential classical dance of India,²⁷ thought to be an appropriate form of cultural education for many young South Asian women. Many of its North American teachers keep close ties to their own dance teachers in India, returning to India for concentrated periods of study and performance. Even students may spend some time in India, and their debut performances, *arangetrams*, in North America have become common events.

Bhangra, a rural Punjabi folk dance associated with the harvest and traditionally danced by men, has been adopted and adapted by urban South Asian diasporic youth as popular dance music. The urban *bhangra* incorporates Punjabi music (often described generally as "Indian music") with elements of hip-hop, reggae, rap and other styles. As a cosmopolitan musical culture that articulates the heterogeneity of expressive cultures in metropolitan cities, *bhangra* has continually absorbed various elements from global musical genres and forms, whilst developing its own distinctive sound. The recent emergence of Asian dance music based on *bhangra* as part of the vibrant Black music cultures of the U.K. is inseparable from the local urban spaces that are crucial to the formation of its sounds.²⁸

Bhangra and *bhangra* clubs have become ubiquitous. A search of the term "bhangra" on the search engine, Google, brought up 23,200 results in 0.07 seconds. Clubs abound on many campuses where intercollegiate *bhangra* competitions are common.²⁹ The traditional *bhangra* has crossed gender and, like *bharatanatyam*, ethnic boundaries. Popular, social *bhangra* is danced by both men and women, and non-Punjabi groups (many on campuses) organize *bhangra* dances. For example, the Bay Area Tamil Manram, an organization to promote Tamil language and culture, sponsored a Bhangra/Social Dance for its young members.³⁰ A fitness class known as "masala bhangra" is offered on the UCLA campus. "The class receives its inspiration from a traditional Indian ritual dance."³¹

There are no Indo-Muslim parallels to the popular, broadly based dance styles like the exuberant Punjabi *bhangra* or the more sedate Gujarati *garba*, dances that are associated with Sikhs and Hindus. But the Indo-Muslim *kathak* style, a form of dance associated with dancing girls and Indo-Muslim court cultures, is taught by South Asian dance schools and performed in America.³²

Kathak too has become part of the “ethnic heritage” dance repertoire. While serving as “a marker of ethnic and feminine identity,” participation in South Asian classical dance in America significantly changes ethnic boundaries: New York students of *bharatanatyam*, for example, include South Asian Christians and Muslims as well as Hindus, and girls from South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Caribbean as well as India, “a veritable collapsing of categories.”³³ In Los Angeles a young Muslim woman from India celebrated her debut as an Indian *bharatanatyam* classical dancer, and other young South Asian women, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliations, are studying this dance as part of their heritage.³⁴

South Asian classical, courtly, and folk dance forms are all being taught and celebrated in North America in ways that inculcate proper South Asian female behavior but also allow displays of adolescent beauty and skill in a coeducational setting. Thus, they offer an opportunity for the public display of eligible daughters, and parents can approve of the performances because they are “ethnic” and “traditional.”³⁵ The dances also figure prominently in beauty contests, popular among South Asian immigrants (as among Indians—several recent winners of Miss World and Miss Universe contests have been from India). South Asian Muslim women also participate in beauty contests. In the film “Miss India Georgia,” a Hyderabad Muslim girl chose to perform a *kathak* dance in a lavish, beautiful costume and secured second place.³⁶

Cultural Fusion and Crossover Art Forms

Beyond the mixture of cultural elements within a production or performance, like the *mushaira* / *ghazal* evenings or the *bharatanatyam* and *kathak* performances in beauty contests, are the genuinely new “fusion” or hybrid cultural productions. Fusion, when applied to music or dance, means that new combinations of instruments, rhythms, styles, accessories, and methods lead to innovative sounds or movements. We use it here rather loosely to talk about the self-conscious combination of cultural elements from different traditions. Often the fusion producers are second-generation immigrants, but not always—they can be first-generation immigrants, or they can be American business people looking to new markets. Crossover art forms may or may not be fusion ones as well, but they have gained new audiences and usually do exhibit changes in some aspects of their performances.

Some examples of fusion come directly from the homelands to immigrant Indo-Muslim audiences and recall the earlier fusions of British colonial days. Thus, the famous Pakistani star of theatre, film, and television, Zia Mohyeddin, presented a program in Los Angeles in 1996, alternating Urdu verses from Ghalib and Faiz with English recitations from Shakespeare. Dance and music are big arenas for fusion, as the new productions attract followers and customers in the U.S. An example of Indo-Muslim fusion music at the "high culture" end would be the experimentation with *ragas* and *ghazals* combining saxophone and voice by northern California's Shafqat Ali Khan (son of the Pakistani vocalist Salamat Ali Khan of the Sham Chaurasi Gharana³⁷). Such experiments and interactions are often truly transnational and not just American. Again, the late *qawwali* singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is the most striking example, doing the soundtracks on such Hollywood films as *Dead Man Walking* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Among the younger popular culture crowd, and taking the lead from the Punjabi British hit singer Apache Indian, *bhangra* rock or reggae has become a transglobal phenomenon. This loud, vibrant dance music combines Punjabi peasant stock with Caribbean reggae, British rock, and Black American rap, and it can have strong Sufi roots.³⁸ Dance parties throb to this music, now adding elements of hip-hop, chutney, and "jungle." In the U.K. *bhangra* is live music, whereas in North America it is still offered mostly by deejays—but it will be home-grown soon and comes live on tours already.

Qawwali is appreciated by young American audiences who find a particular resonance in the musical elements of popularized, mixed versions of *qawwali*. A song about the Sufi saint, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, was popularized when Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan collaborated with Michael Brook to produce a hit album on Real World Records titled "Mustt, Mustt [*sic*]." The title is based on a state of intoxication, *mast*, brought about by divine love. It is said that Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, known as "Mast Qalandar," used to dance and twirl in order to achieve this ecstatic state of intoxication. The performance of this piece often stirs the audience to get up and dance. This association with dance and ecstasy has been promoted by young South Asians who now think of remixed versions of *qawwali* samples as dance music. A dance club popular among youth in Los Angeles is known as "Le Mast Mast."³⁹

When “Mustt, Mustt” hit the charts in the U.K., many South Asian youths, particularly young Pakistanis, proudly identified themselves with their ethnic/religious heritage through the popularity of *qawwali* and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.⁴⁰ Young musicians began to incorporate many of Nusrat’s samples (with his permission) into their own music, and Nusrat himself composed and recorded a number of popular songs that were not necessarily considered *qawwali*.⁴¹ In Pakistan Nusrat was roundly criticized for debasing traditional *qawwali*, but he was keenly aware of the attraction his music had for young Pakistanis and the ability it had to draw listeners closer to God. He continued to fuse popular musical elements with Pakistani traditional elements, working with popular musicians throughout the world.⁴²

Like *bhangra* music, Nusrat’s mixed and remixed songs took on features of hip-hop, a popular predominantly African American genre that includes “cuttin’,” “scratchin’” and “rappin’.” The rhythm and “the beat” are of prime importance in this genre, where rappers rhythmically improvise and syncopate their rhymes over the beat. Many African American musicians identify the roots of rap as coming from Islam where the importance of the word, the rhythm, and the verse is emphasized in the reading of the *Qur’an*. It was therefore not surprising to hear Jawwad Ali, host of the 1994 *qawwali* program for the “Celebration of Muslim Peoples and Cultures” on radio station KPFF in Los Angeles, call Nusrat “the Grand Master of Hip Hop Mix Master.”

The rise in the popularity of *qawwali* was inextricably tied to the rise in popularity of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. For many in North America, there is no distinction between the man and his music. North Americans identify with Nusrat on many different levels: as a Muslim, a Sufi, a Pakistani, a Punjabi, and a great musician. And they think of *qawwali* in many ways: as a Sufi devotional Islamic genre, as more broadly spiritual music, as popular or world music, and as dance music. Like *bharatanatyam* and *bhangra*, *qawwali* has come to represent something larger than the traditional art form. It has adopted new values and meaning for young, international audiences, for American Muslims, and for South Asians around the world.

Other examples of music that display hybrid values and generational differences can be found in the choice of music for Afghan weddings in North America.⁴³ The repertoire and type of music played for engagements and wedding celebrations for five of the six children of a California Afghan family changed

over a period of eight years from 1992 to 2000, determined by the partners chosen, the guest lists, the reception sites, and the banquet menus. The earliest and most "traditional" weddings were of the older children to Afghan Muslim partners from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, weddings celebrated with traditional Kabul-style banquets at Afghan wedding restaurants/halls. The music at these receptions was performed by Afghan musicians playing harmonium, electronic keyboard, and sometimes, a drum set. They sang popular Afghan songs, Urdu/Hindi film songs, and *âhesta buro*, a traditional song for the bride, and both male and female guests danced a Pashtun men's group dance known as *atan*. Although the *atan* is a traditional Pashtun dance, it has been adopted and presented in Afghanistan, and, later, in the United States, as "the national dance of Afghanistan."⁴⁴ The most recent Afghan family wedding was that of the youngest daughter to a non-Afghan, non-Muslim whose parents had immigrated to the United States from Vietnam. The bride's mother explained that the young man had converted to Islam. This wedding was held at a hotel that served the wedding guests a choice of salmon or beef, and young guests danced to recorded Western popular music. At one point a recording of the *atan* was played, but it did not attract the participation of the guests because less than half of the attendees knew the dance or understood its significance.

Indo-Muslim Arts and Identities

Emerging generational and gender differences in South Asian Muslim identities are clearly reflected in the domain of the arts. Not only is there an issue of language, as members of the second and subsequent generations lose competence in the languages of the homelands,⁴⁵ but there are issues of integration in the dominant American culture, of fusion or crossover arts. Older South Asian Muslim immigrants might find inappropriate or even shocking the ways in which young African American rappers include references to Islam in their lyrics,⁴⁶ and the clash here is not only between generations but between national cultural traditions. Gendered identity issues are also clear in the use of both public and private space, use that is heavily influenced by dominant culture practices. Thus, immigrant South Asian Muslim women are often more visible in artistic performances as well as public spaces in North America than in their homelands. Young women may also be more visible, emphasizing

ing ethnicity over religion in the case of those Pakistani and Indian Muslim daughters who want to study South Asian classical dance traditions in North America. Such gendered and generational reinterpretations of “tradition” and constructions of identities reflect some of the tensions within immigrant families in North America.

South Asian aesthetic traditions connected to Muslims in the subcontinent, or Indo-Muslim art and culture, include a wide range of visual and performance arts. In the diaspora *qawwali* performances are more popular than *mushairas*, and this privileges embodied performance over meaning, style over content. Although *qawwali* is a specifically Islamic form of music and poetry, it has succeeded in becoming a cross-over art, while *mushairas* and *geet* and *ghazal* evenings, featuring secular Indo-Muslim music and poetry, have not.

Among South Asian Muslims, members of the first generation retain self concepts, personal identities, and even collective identities rooted in the language of the homeland and expressed through poetic and musical performances, through *mushairas* and *geet* and *ghazal* evenings. These performances provide relatively stable points of identity, although there are changes, as women play larger roles, and several genres may be combined within a single performance. However, these performances are not serving as bridges in the American context to the non-South Asian community or to younger audiences; probably they will not be important referents for second-generation South Asian Muslim identities in North America. These secular performances are bringing together Urdu-speakers, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs from different countries of origin, representing perhaps the polar opposite of the religion-based activities among immigrant South Asian Muslims which narrow significant contacts to other Muslims.

South Indian *bharatanatyam*, Punjabi *bhangra*, and Afghan *atan* are just a few examples of performance genres that transcend traditional value, meaning and practice when transferred from a traditional South Asian context to the new context of South Asian diasporic communities. The resulting transformations are often tied to questions of identity, and it is clear that issues involving gender, religion, politics and “cultural authenticity” have become significant to understanding Indo-Muslim music, dance and poetry in America.

Paradoxically, it is *qawwali* performances—religious in ori-

gin and in diasporic practice—that best transcend the barriers of both content and language to communicate to increasing numbers of young non-South Asians and non-Muslims. Despite the retention of a formal structure, the use of little known languages, and the Sufi content of the programs, *qawwali* is clearly the major example of a crossover Indo-Muslim art form in North America. New and growing audiences feel they can participate in the performances and make them meaningful to their lives.

Notes

1. Arjun Appadurai terms those easily transformed as soft (as opposed to hard) cultural forms. Arjun Appadurai, "Playing with Modernity: the Decolonization of Indian Cricket," in Carol A. Breckenridge, ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 24.
2. Carla Petievich, "Intertwining Religion and Ethnicity: South Asian Cultural Performance in the Diaspora," takes up this question in a slightly different way (in Carla Petievich, ed., *Expanding Landscapes: South Asians in Diaspora* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 153-173), when she asks "what bearing does the Muslim part of the term 'Indo-Muslim culture' have on patronage, consumption and transmission of music and poetry in the diaspora?" (158) and characterizes Islam as practiced by diasporic South Asians as not only highly organized and visible but "reformist, neo-conservative, universalist" and with "little use for secular art" (159-160).
3. For music in South Asian diasporic communities, see Gregory Diethrich, "Desi Music Vibes: the Performance of Indian Youth Culture in Chicago," *Asian Music* 31:1, 35-61, and Alison Arnold, "North America," in "Music and the South Asian Diaspora," *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 5, South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent* (2000), 578-587.
4. *Ghazals* originally emphasized erotic love themes, with each line self-contained and the ten or so lines given unity by the metre and rhyme employed. Musical renditions of *ghazals* added to their enjoyment. *Geet* (song in Hindi) follows the poetic norms of Hindi (*braj bhasha* or *avadhi*). Both genres are sung using classical *ragas* and are considered light classical music, although *geet* may be more popular.
5. Karen Isaksen Leonard, *South Asian Americans* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997).
6. Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, "Spiritual Music and Dance in Pakistan," *Etnofoor: antropologisch tijdschrift* 10:1/2 (1977), 165-173.
7. C.M. Naim, "Ambiguities of Heritage," *Toronto Review* 14:1, 1-5. Samuel Lewis's tomb in New Mexico may be the first Sufi shrine

- in America: Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (New York: Russell Sage, 2003), 119.
8. This was Rasheed Ul Haq's Sheen Travel agency, Torrance, California, 1992.
 9. Sally Howell, "The Art and Artistry of Arab Detroit: Changing Traditions in a New World," Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, eds., *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), and "Cultural Interventions: Arab American Aesthetics Between the Transnational and the Ethnic," *Diaspora* 9:1, 59-82.
 10. *India Today*, December 31, 1994. Khan has held a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship and a 1997 National Endowment for the Arts, National Heritage Fellowship. His 1994 summer *kathak* (North Indian classical dance) concert featured five dancers, all, from their photographs and names, Euro-Americans: *India-West*, August 12, 1994.
 11. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context, and Meaning in Qawwali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
 12. Spencer J. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 195.
 13. John Rockwell, "Qawwali Music Stirs the Audience," *New York Times*, March 5, 1975.
 14. P. S., personal communication, October 19, 1996.
 15. Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, "The Sacred and the Profane: Qawwali Represented in the Performances of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan," *The World of Music* 36:3 (1994), 86-99.
 16. These saints' shrines are variously located, that of Data Ganj Baksh in Lahore, Pakistan, of Mohinuddin Chishtiya in Ajmer, India, of Baba Fariduddin Ganj-e Shakkar in Pakpattan, Pakistan, and Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, India. See Lorraine Sakata, "Devotional Music" in the section on "Pakistan," 751-761, *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 5, South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent* (2000).
 17. Urdu, Pakistan's official national language, is substantially the same as Hindi but is written in Arabic script.
 18. Petievich, "Intertwining Religion and Ethnicity," states that most participants are men (162), but Leonard has noticed many women among association leaders and poets.
 19. Petievich, "Intertwining Religion and Ethnicity," sees a loss of secular Urdu culture in both South Asia and the diaspora (166), but Regula Qureishi sees *mushairas* flourishing in the diaspora: "Mushaira: The Globalization of Urdu Poetry," paper, International Council of Traditional Music, July 2001, Brazil.
 20. Isaac Sequeira gives a lively account of a *mushaira*: "The Mystique

of the Mushaira," 9-18, in Isaac Sequeira, *Popular Culture: East and West* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1991).

21. Hindu temples do sponsor musical and dance performances on their premises, since many such arts from South Asia are essentially Hindu in content and performance traditions.
22. Ras H. Siddiqui, *Pakistan Link*, January 12, 2001.
23. *Pakistan Link*, December 9, 1994; Arakeen-e-Bazm, November 3, 2000, Mughal Restaurant, San Carlos, California; on email; *India-West*, August 25, 2000. The last, a "Jashn-e-Saaz" tribute to Rehman Wagle "Saaz" held on September 9 at the Jhumka Mahal Restaurant, Anaheim, included *mushaira* performers and *ghazal* singers Gopal and Shruti Marathe.
24. The New York social evening, November 11, had Urdu poets from New York and New Jersey and a talk on communalism by Professor K.N. Panikkar of Jawaharlal Nehru University in India: email notice from basawa@egroups.com, November 8, 2000; for the Chicago event, December 15, Syed Zainulabedin, "Mushaira Testifies to Urdu's Popularity," *Pakistan Link*, December 15, 2000.
25. More than 500 people attended this "Sur Sangeet ki Mehfil" at the Chandni Restaurant, although the fashion show was "not presented due to some last minute unforeseen circumstances." Hindu and Muslim performers presented classics made famous by Noor Jehan, Rafi, and Lata. *Pakistan Link*, November 17, 2000.
26. A *geet* and *ghazals* evening hosted by the southern California Pakistani American Arts Council in a college auditorium featured not only Salamat Ali Khan, Pakistan's well known vocalist, but two of his sons, who are based in San Francisco and play some fusion music, along with a noted percussionist from Pakistan, Abdul Satar Tari, then residing in New Jersey but now in southern California. See Peter Manuel, "The Popularization and Transformation of the Light-Classical Urdu Ghazal-Song," in Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom, and Margaret A. Mills, eds., *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 347-361, for the "Hinduization" of the *ghazal* in India today.
27. Rajesh Thakkar, "Transfer of Culture through Arts: the South Asian Experience in North America," in Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle, eds., *Ethnicity, Identity, Migration: The South Asian Context* (Toronto: Center for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1993).
28. Ashwani Sharma, "Sounds Oriental: the (Im)possibility of Theorizing Asian Musical Cultures" in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed Books, 1996), 26.
29. The MIT South Asian American Students (SAAS) sponsor the Boston Bhangra Blast where student teams from MIT, Harvard, the University of Massachusetts, Tufts, Northeastern, Cornell and Boston University compete: *The Tech*, November 2, 1999, 119:55,

- <http://www.tech.mit.edu/V119/N55/bhangrablast.55f.htm>. In 2000, George Washington University held its eighth annual Bhangra Blowout (*Yale Daily News*, March 3, 2000, <http://www.yaledailynews.com/scene/article.asp?AID=4888>), an intercollegiate dance competition in Washington, D.C., touted to be “the largest South Asian student event in North America.” On the West Coast, UCLA’s *The Daily Bruin Online* reported, “Bruins hope to keep 1st place standing against 7 college [bhangra] groups” which include teams from other UC campuses at San Diego, Irvine and Santa Barbara: <http://www.dailybruin.ucla.edu/db/issues/00/04.21/news.bhangra.html>.
30. *Bay Area Tamil Manram Newsletter*, Issue 2, February 1998. <http://www.indsangh.com/tmanram/newsletter/Feb98/bhangra.htm>.
 31. Stella Chu for the *Daily Bruin*, October 27, 2000,.
 32. Not only the *kathak* dance patronized by the Mughals but the slightly less respectable (more erotic) *mujra* dance associated with courtesans and old-style weddings of the nobility is occasionally performed. At the Mughal Darbar restaurant in Anaheim, California, the owners recreated a “Mujra Night,” initially billed as a “men only” night, but protests forced them to invite women as well. Five professional *mujra* dancers came from Lucknow, India, and the redecorated restaurant recalled the dance setting in the classic 1950s Indian movie, *Mughal-e-Azam* (the Great Mughal, or Akbar): *India-West*, November 17, 1995.
 33. Ilana Abramovitch, “Flushing Bharata-Natyam: Indian Dancers in Queens, N.Y.,” paper at 17th annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, November, 1988.
 34. *India-West*, July 25, 1997; Leonard attended another debut in southern California, of sisters from Karachi, in 2004.
 35. Kiren Ghei, “From Bhangra to Kuchipudi: Movement Dimensions of Indian Public Events in Los Angeles,” paper at Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, CSU, Long Beach, October, 1989.
 36. *Miss India Georgia*, directed by Sharon Grimberg and David Friedman, 1998.
 37. For Pakistani musicians of the Sham Chaurasi *gharana*, see Adam Nayyar, “Punjab” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 5, *South Asia: the Indian Subcontinent* (2000), 78; see also Daniel M. Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: the Organization of an Artistic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
 38. Two of *bhangra*’s most popular exponents, Daler Mehndi and Hans Raj Hans from India’s Punjab, draw on Indo-Muslim Sufi and Sikh spiritual heritages: Mehndi trained with a disciple of Bade Gulam Ali Khan, Ustad Rahat Ali Khan of the Patiala *Gharana* (*India-West*, October 27, 2000); for Hans, Namrata Joshi, “Musical Mystic,” *India Today*, March 1, 1999.
 39. The fusion Ali Khan Band, involved in “Le Mast Mast” and “Sufi

Rock" dance evenings in Los Angeles, includes the son and daughter of Salamat Ali Khan.

40. See Sharma, "Sounds Oriental," 28.
41. For example, listen to "Night Song," Real World Records, CAROL 2354-2, 1995.
42. Davey D, "What is Hip Hop?" <http://www.daveyd.com>. Also see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).
43. Afghan music has strong historical ties to Indian music.
44. For traditional Afghan music, Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, *Music in the Mind: the Concept of Music and Musicians in Afghanistan* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).
45. Here, including Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Saraiki, Bengali, Sindhi, Baluchi, Pushtu, and Kashmiri.
46. Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 293-300.