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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**Melodies for Drums: Creativity and Emotion in
South Asian *Thekā* Drumming**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

MUSIC

by

Michael P. Lindsey

September 2020

The Dissertation of Michael Lindsey
is approved:

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Notes on Transliteration

In this dissertation I reference vocabularies from numerous South Asian languages, including Persian (Farsi), Pashto, Urdu, and Hindi. I have Romanized the spellings of these vocabularies as per the recommendations of the American Library Association and Library of Congress, except where noted.

Persian and Urdu Transliteration Scheme

ا = a	د = d	ظ = ẓ	و = w
آ = ā	ذ = ẓ	ع = '	ھ = h
ب = b	ر = r	غ = gh	ی = y
پ = p	ز = z	ف = f	
ت = t	ژ = zh	ق = q	
ث = ṯ	س = s	ک / ک = k	
ج = j	ش = sh	گ = g	
چ = ch	ص = ṣ	ل = l	
ح = ḥ	ض = ẓ	م = m	
خ = ḫ	ط = ṭ	ن = n	

Hindi Transliteration Scheme

अ = a	औ = au	ठ = ṭh	ब = b
आ = ā	क = k	ड = ḍ	भ = bh
इ = i	ख = kh	ढ = ḍh	म = m
ई = ī	ग = g	त = t	य = y
उ = u	घ = gh	थ = th	र = r
ऊ = ū	च = ch	द = d	ल = l
ऋ = ri	छ = chh	ध = dh	व = v
ए = e	ज = j	न = n	श = sh
ऐ = ē	झ = jh	प = p	स = s
ओ = o	ट = ṭ	फ = ph	ह = h

Modifications:

1. All instances of nasalization are transliterated as "ñ."
2. The Pashto letter, ځ, is transliterated as dz, not ẓ.

Abstract

Melodies for Drums: Creativity and Emotion in South Asian *Thekā* Drumming

By Michael P. Lindsey

This dissertation is a study of popular, devotional, and folk drumming in South Asia. In specific, my focus is on *ṭhekās*, drumming patterns played throughout the region as a form of rhythmic accompaniment for music. Referencing multi-site ethnographic fieldwork conducted among professional drummers in northern and western India, Afghanistan, and the San Francisco Bay area from 2014-2020, I work to demonstrate an alternative history of South Asian rhythm that positions the folk drumming practices of the region as an important influencer of later classical and popular rhythmic traditions. I do this through ethnography and musical analysis of *ṭhekās* across prominent folk music genres of the region, including Sufi *qawwālī*, Sindhi *kāfī*, Afghan *maḥali* (traditional), and Pashtun music. Previous scholarship on the rhythmic practices of South Asia have been singular in their perspectives, often focusing on a single instrument (the tabla), a single genre (predominantly classical) and single lineage and/or site/region. In my project I have sought to expand this conversation by providing a cross-regional and cross-genre analysis of rhythmic performance practices across numerous folk-devotional and instrument traditions. Through this more expansive and inclusive study of *ṭhekā* and drumming, my arguments speak directly to several key musicological debates regarding the

rhythmic structures found in classical Hindustani rhythm. The arguments detailed in my musical analysis contest established histories of Hindustani (North Indian) rhythmic traditions, in particular the Hindustani tabla, a musical instrument whose history has been intimately linked to the musical history of *ṭhekā*.

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Introduction

A Home Movie Night in Fremont, California

On a cool April night in 2014, I sat with my music teacher, Toryalai Hashimi, in a small studio behind his house in Fremont, California. Toryalai, or Tor Jan,¹ had just returned from a brief trip to his hometown, Kabul, where many of his family still live. An acclaimed percussionist, Tor Jan's tabla playing is highly sought among musicians and musical circles in Afghanistan, as well as in Afghan communities in California, Virginia, and Texas. He had concertized throughout much of his three months stay and I was eager to hear about his travels as I had not been to Afghanistan at the time. "Here [in California] there is very little work for me," he told me. "But in Afghanistan I play programs every day and every night; weddings, *mehfils* (private gatherings), student initiation ceremonies. When I go to Afghanistan everybody wants me to play tabla with them. This trip I was invited to play with one of the leading vocalists in Herat."

After our lesson on the tabla, a set of hand drums played extensively throughout South Asia, Tor Jan invited me to stay and watch videos of performances he had filmed during his recent trip. For several hours we watched the homemade

¹ "Jan" is an honorific title in Persian meaning "dear" and is used to show respect between friends and close acquaintances.

recordings; a private gathering at a patron's house in Kabul, a new music student's initiation ceremony in the western city of Herat, and private performances with his friends at his house in the musician's neighborhood in Kabul. As we watched, Tor Jan captioned the Afghan folk tunes, known as *maḥali* music (see Chapter 4) for me, and drummed along with each song on his tabla. Listening and following along, I quickly became entranced by the repeating rhythmic patterns he played. The patterns, known as *ṭhekās*, had a magnetic quality as Tor moved through them over and over, with a single *ṭhekā* sometimes taking only a few seconds to play through. His playing did not remain static; as he continued drumming along, Tor at times shifted points of accent heard in each rhythmic pattern, which produced a dramatic aural effect. During some repetitions he accented the pattern's downbeats, while at other times he placed the accent to the off-beats. He shifted this rhythmic accent through the use of the tabla's bass drum, the *bāyāñ*, which produced an engaging and enthralling musical experience. The drumming connected intimately with the music, propelling it to a new level of musical affect I had not previously felt. Noticing my fascination, Tory looked at me and asked, "Delightful (*kayf*), isn't it?" I nodded enthusiastically.

I was familiar with such drumming patterns, having learned and practiced them (at the time) for nearly eight years as a student of Hindustani music, known also as North Indian or Hindustani classical music. In Hindustani music, *ṭhekās* are one of a variety of compositions played primarily on the tabla. They represent the rhythmic structures in which Hindustani music is set, and are the first compositions

taught to new tabla students; myself included. In my early tabla lessons, playing *ṭhekā* was often an exercise for establishing a consistent rhythmic pulse in my playing—a crucial skill for being a tabla player. Later, as my playing progressed, playing *ṭhekā* occupied the space between practicing the instrument's solo repertoire, which was the central focus of my classical tabla lessons. This solo repertoire included various types of compositional forms, many involving the use of improvisation in a theme-and-variation style context and others being "fixed" and not entailing the use of improvisation.² While solo tabla playing has become its own performance genre with a niche audience (Hindustani music aficionados and other tabla players, mostly), playing *ṭhekā* remains the central component of classical tabla playing. As I listened to the Afghan *maḥali* style of drumming, I found it remarkably similar to the theme-and-variation style compositions that had been the focus of many of my lessons in classical solo tabla. Much like these compositions, Tor's drumming style took a theme—a *ṭhekā*—and improvised upon it, making variations while keeping familiar aspects of the original composition. However, this was not a solo tabla composition; this was drumming meant for accompaniment.

What caught my attention most while observing Tor Jan's playing was the extent of his improvisations and its sensitivity to the music. The Afghan *maḥali* songs that he played were three to four minutes long—short when compared to

² See Gottlieb 1993.

performances of Hindustani classical music—but within that time he cycled through numerous variations of the same *ṭhekā*. Sometimes the change between consecutive patterns was slight, while other times he changed the pattern completely. As he played along on his tabla, I tried my best to follow along with Tor Jan and imitate on my own drums the patterns he played. Oftentimes I figured out the pattern correctly just in time for him to change to a different one. I enjoyed very much our game of follow the leader *à la* tabla, and I expressed to Tor my amazement at the number of *ṭhekās* he knew how to play. He laughed hearteningly, and told me that he knew over fifty different ways to play the particular rhythmic cycle that we had just been playing. "In Afghanistan there are so many styles of music, and you must know and play the correct type of *ṭhekā* for each: *Klāsik* (classical), *ghazal*, *maḥali* (folk), Sufi (devotional Islam), Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Irani, Balochi, and others," he added.

To prove his point, Tor Jan paused the video and began to play through different variations of the rhythmic cycle we had just played, a six-beat cycle called *dādrā*. One after the other, he played variations of the *dādrā ṭhekā* for several minutes while calling out what style of music in which they were played, punctuating each transition to a new pattern with a short composition called a *tihāī*. Tor Jan eventually stopped himself after a while, laughed, and reiterated to me that there were so many ways to play this particular *ṭhekā* (my recording from the evening revealed he had played over twenty different variations). I shook my head in

agreement (and admiration), and Tor Jan relaxed back into the cushions on the floor, starting the video once again.

This evening with my teacher, Tor Jan, sticks out in my mind as a moment of inception for this dissertation project, for it was then that my conceptualization of *ṭhekā* changed. I no longer understood *ṭhekās* to be solely an accompanying rhythmic pattern to other music-making. Rather, I viewed them as compositional form that could be embellished and elaborated extensively to the lengths that I observed such improvisation occurring in classical solo tabla playing.



Figure 0.1. Afghan musicians perform at a private house concert in Fremont, California. October 2017. Photo taken by author.

Focus and Scope of Dissertation

This dissertation is a study of improvisation in accompaniment drumming styles performed in South Asia, which include the present-day countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India,³ and Bangladesh.⁴ Specifically, this focus centers on *ṭhekās* from a selection of popular, devotional, and folk genres, including Sufi *qawwālī*, Sindhi *kāfī*, Afghan *maḥali*⁵ (folk/traditional) music, Pashtun music, and is also informed by fieldwork conducted among classical tabla musicians. Throughout this dissertation I refer to the collective performance practices of drumming accompaniment for these music genres as *ṭhekā* playing or *ṭhekā* drumming. As a style of drumming meant for musical accompaniment, *ṭhekās* entail the use of improvisation. This improvisation, I argue, is connected to and directly influences the evocation of heightened emotional responses in these musical styles. While this statement can be true also for art music (Hindustani classical music), the extent of improvisation in playing *ṭhekā* I observed in popular, devotional, and folk music genres in South Asia is unparalleled. Scholarship has increasingly challenged the classical and non-classical music binaries found in South Asian music musical discourses (Allen 1998, Babiracki 1991, Neuman 1981, Deva 1974). My dissertation

³ The music of South India (Karnatak music) maintains a different rhythmic system and nomenclature from that of North Indian music and does not play *ṭhekā*-s. For a detailed discussion of rhythm and drumming in Karnatak music see Sankaran 1994.

⁴ Though the musical vocabulary of Bangladesh includes such rhythmic compositions, I do not include a discussion of the drumming of Bangladesh in this dissertation.

⁵ While *maḥali* (lit. "of the *muhalla* [place]) is used to mean Afghan folk music, the term indicates a specific locality or region (*maḥal*).

adds to this conversation, and applies pressure on the classical and folk music binary as implying qualities of musical complexity and simplicity, respectively.

My discussion of *thekā* involves a discussion of how a rhythmic pattern played on a drum can be embellished to evoke an emotional response. Rhythm in music persists as a multifaceted concept; one that bears a plethora of interpretations and values across musical cultures. In an extensive new edited volume on musical rhythm, *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm*, scholars have considered the relationship between theoretical representations of rhythm in across different cultures, and its performance in each respective musical context. While rhythm is commonly understood in Western European and American art music (classical music) to "rely on the listeners inference of repeating units differentiated by strong and weak beats," the volume's authors work to interrogate and frustrate this one-dimensional interpretation.⁶ Rhythm, for example, can emerge from the multidimensional interaction of multiple performers, such as in the Agbadza musical traditions of West Africa where call and response drumming produces a rich polyrhythmic texture to which dance movements are coordinated (Locke 2019). Conversely, rhythm can exist outside of a quantitatively-defined paradigm, being instead experienced qualitatively as a "flow" connected to certain values of meaning (Hasty 2019).

⁶ Wolf, Blum, and Hasty 2019: 4.

Throughout my discussion of drumming, rhythmic patterns, and improvisation, I assume certain understandings of the meaning of "rhythm." I accept the commonly held definition of rhythm to mean an organization of musical events through time. While "having rhythm" does not necessarily imply a state of regular occurring articulation, the drumming patterns discussed in this dissertation do. Rhythm, in the context of the music genres detailed in this dissertation, is formed from the multilayered interactions of the constituent performers; *ṭhekā* is but one part of these processes. Furthermore, the extents and limits of these musical interactions are subject to the social relations of the performers, more so than in reference to theoretical systems.⁷ During my research, it became clear to me that drumming accompaniment was not *just* a time-keeping mechanism for the music⁸; it was one of many vital parts of the music-making and listening processes. Though it is a part of the rhythm making processes, I do not abridge *ṭhekā* as "a rhythm," as the word's English usage can be understood to mean a thematic pattern played on instruments; drums, in particular.

Richard K. Wolf's work on functional drumming traditions in South and Central Asia has problematized the relationship between rhythm and melody, suggesting the two are inseparable.⁹ He argues that rhythmic patterns are

⁷ Wolf, Blum, and Hasty 2019: 15.

⁸ The common bias of tabla players and *ṭhekās* as being "autonomous timekeepers" is made clear in Neuman 1985: 108.

⁹ Wolf 2014: 8.

themselves a form of timbre-based melody (though he does not mention *ṭhekās*). In his writings, Wolf distinguishes between tone-melodies and stroke-melodies, the former being voiced through tone (musical pitch) and the latter through aspects of timbre and articulation (drum strokes).¹⁰ I employ Wolf's terminology, stroke-melody, in my musical analysis as a means of identifying patterns of the same rhythmic duration, but different timbral character and/or rhythmic cadence. In the music genres I discuss in this dissertation, numerous stroke-melodies can be played for the same rhythmic cycle. My musical analysis looks at how drummers manipulate aspects of these rhythmic patterns in order to produce change in the quality of a rhythmic texture, thus prompting an emotional response from the music's listeners.

This dissertation also considers the experience of being a professional folk drummer in contemporary South Asia. Looking at the lives of musicians, I argue, is key to understanding the compositional processes behind performance practices, i.e., *ṭhekā*. In each chapter, I address particular aspects of the cultural and historical contexts of the musical traditions discussed herein. Despite my field sites (see Figure 0.2) being located within unique geo-political contexts, common threads of experience—intense competition and rivalry, overcoming stigmas surrounding music and musical practice, and extensive daily music making—emerged between my interlocutors. I bring to the fore of my discussion these experiences through

¹⁰ Wolf 2019: 316.

ethnographic vignettes of case studies from my fieldwork. Each case study, while being located within a specific socio-musical context, is representative of trends I observed among all the musical communities involved in my study. While my case studies focus on singular subjects, they reflect a larger experience of being a professional drummer in South Asia in so far as I was able to observe them. The conditions of this livelihood—extensive daily music making, in particular—I argue, have informed directly the performance practice of *ṭhekās*. Ultimately, the extent of improvisation, embellishment, and variety found in *ṭhekā* drumming ties directly to this experience of drumming as a lifestyle.



Figure 0.2. Primary field sites in South Asia. Map data © 2020 Google.

Creativity, Emotion, and Drumming

This dissertation informs ethnomusicological discourses regarding the use of improvisation and musical creativity within folk drumming practices of South Asia. Furthermore, the stakes of this creative musical expression are the evocation of heightened emotional states in its listening body. Creativity in music, as music educator and scholar on creativity Pamela Burnard has asserted, is expressed in "a myriad of different ways" by musicians "at both ends of the high-art and grassroots spectrum."¹¹ Improvisation has indeed been discussed by scholars in an array of musical and cultural contexts. The stakes and parameters of musical improvisation are socially constructed, and must be situated within the performed music's respective social and musical contexts. Looking at musical creativity from a cross-cultural perspective, ethnomusicologist Juniper Hill's research has shown how creativity in music is both enabled and inhibited by its socio-cultural context. Hill's research among musicians of different musical idioms—western European and American art music, jazz, and folk/traditional music genres—illustrates the capacity to which social pressures "restrict individuals' development of creative skill sets, engagement in creative activities, and willingness to take creative risks."¹²

The scope of creativity in the drumming traditions discussed in this dissertation does not necessarily entail innovation and originality, as scholarship

¹¹ Burnard 2012: 6.

¹² Hill 2018: 2.

tends to emphasize (Boden 2004, Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Such novelty in music performance may not always be socially acceptable or desirable, which, as Hill notes, can be the case in musical cultures that emphasize historical authenticity and preservation.¹³ Yet, within the limits of such traditions musical creativity can still flourish. Musical creativity in *ṭhekā* drumming is often theme-and-variation based, a common form of elaboration found in South Asian music traditions. In the case of drumming, a theme—a *ṭhekā*—is played, with subsequent variations bearing particular aspects of the original. In large, creating variations involves changing only what one of the hands is doing; other times it involves changing to playing another pattern all together. The musical cultures of the devotional categories of music discussed in this dissertation, Sufi *qawwālī* and Sindhi *kāfī*, underscore their connections to their pre-modern musical histories, while at the same time they incorporate contemporary musical practices. Furthermore, these musical forms maintain their traditional ritual functions as expressions of religious devotion, which are enacted and interpreted through the social lens of their performing and listening bodies. Improvisation and musical creativity, in regards to drumming, play a key role in these ritual processes, which aim ultimately to evoke extra-musical emotions in their listeners.

¹³ Hill 2018: 6.

Gilbert Rouget's seminal work, *Music and Trance*, investigated the relationship between music-making and emotional effect cross-culturally. States of trance or ecstasy are most commonly associated with musical performance, and not unlike musical creativity, the parameters of what constitutes this emotional state are socially constructed.¹⁴ Music, Rouget argues, socializes trance more often than causes it.¹⁵ In particular, Rouget gives emphasis to the Arab and Sufi music traditions for their close association of music and trance.¹⁶ Ali Jihad Racy's research on Arab *tarab* music built on Rouget's, and illustrated the connection between music making and emotional affect in traditional urban Arab music. While *tarab* can refer broadly to a music genre, specifically it describes the heightened emotional state the music evokes.¹⁷ Referencing his experiences as both a performer of *tarab* music and a researcher, Racy provides valuable insights into the elements of the performance of *tarab* that contribute to this process of emotional excitement: its heterophonic musical texture, a sensitive accompaniment, the use of ornamentation and improvisation, and the use of particular melodic and rhythmic frameworks. Furthermore, the form and content of *tarab* music is shaped by the emotive considerations of a performance.¹⁸

¹⁴ Rouget 1985: xvii.

¹⁵ Rouget 1985: xviii.

¹⁶ Rouget 1985: 255.

¹⁷ Racy 2003: 5-6.

¹⁸ Racy 2003: 7.

A key component in inspiring ecstasy in *tarab* music is the elevation of its performers to a heightened state of emotional and musical inspiration, known as *salṭānah*.¹⁹ Being in such a subliminal state is intimately linked to the creative music processes of *tarab* music, which "prepares the artist to improvise with feeling or to interpret or modify precomposed works in highly affective ways."²⁰ Hill likens the state of *salṭānah* to being in a state of flow, or "the feeling when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness."²¹ I observed the importance of such similar states of flow during performances I attended throughout my fieldwork. When I asked musicians with whom I conducted my research about such states of flow, they likened playing their drums in such contexts to various forms of devotional-inspired intoxication. Abra Ali, a *qawwālī* drummer from New Delhi said, "I am one with God when I play. I feel (spiritually) intoxicated (*mast*)."

Regula Qureshi's research on Sufi *qawwālī*, devotional Islamic poetry, presented an ethnographic analysis of *qawwālī* musical performance, highlighting in particular its function "to arouse mystical emotion in an assembly of listeners with spiritual needs that are both diverse and changing."²² Emotional arousal in *qawwālī* is provoked through its acoustic presentation and the clarification of a sung text,

¹⁹ Racy 2003: 120.

²⁰ Racy 2003: 121.

²¹ Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 110.

²² Qureshi 1986: 59.

which can be adjusted in performance settings to meet the demands of its listeners.²³ While the poetry maintains the chief priority of the performance, other musical features such as a "strong rhythmic framework" and stress patterns provided through clapping or drumming remain essential component in *qawwālī* performance.²⁴ Such rhythmic accentuations help further clarify and emphasize the poetry's meter and form, which are articulated also within its musical setting. Because a *qawwālī* performance can be abridged, extended, or altered in a number of other musical manners, so, too, must its drummers be adaptable and creative in their drumming. During the many *qawwālī* performances I attended, moments of ecstatic music making most often involved improvisatory drumming. Improvisation, in the form of adding accent or emphasis, was one of the primary ways that drummers could help elevate the performance to ecstatic levels. This style of creative drumming was not unique to devotional genres, but is found in numerous folk and popular music genres across South Asia, as well.

Folk and other non-classical drumming traditions of South Asian have become a burgeoning subject for ethnomusicological scholarship. Throughout much of South Asia, folk music is a paradox in that, while being a celebrated cultural expression, it is performed by some of the lowest members of society. Folk drummers, in particular, carry additional stigma on account that they (among other

²³ Qureshi 1986: 60-65.

²⁴ Qureshi 1986: 60.

things) touch animal skins, are associated with death and funeral rites, and often maintain other manual occupations such as tailors and barbers. This low social status regularly underscores ethnographies of drummers and drumming communities. Scholars have illustrated the ingenuities of such musicians in overcoming or adapting to such stigmas, while also dedicating extensive effort to analyzing the myriad of drum patterns played by these musicians outside of art music and highlighting their extra-musical effects.

Richard K. Wolf's research among vernacular drumming traditions throughout South Asia has masterfully interconnected musical practices across social and cultural divides. One key analytical points of Wolf's work in the region's folk drumming is how rhythmic time can be reckoned when it does not adhere to grid-like rhythmic frameworks, which are found often in South Asian art music forms like Hindustani music. In his book, *The Voice in the Drum*, Wolf shows how instrumental playing patterns can be used to reiterate features of abstract textual models, such as the Islamic *zīkr* (*dhikr* in Arabic),²⁵ and how instruments such as drums maintain the ability to be voice-like and carry textual messages.²⁶ Wolf's book predominantly deals with Muslim drummers who play functional music, specifically the ritual drumming played on the *ḍhol* and *tāshā* during the Islamic holy month, *Muḥarram*. His musical analysis shows how rhythmic patterns can imitate the

²⁵ *Zikrs* are short words or phrases said in repetition as a form of Islamic devotion; most often associated to Sufism.

²⁶ Wolf 2014: 17-19.

human voice by reinforcing the implied rhythm of a given text, while they can also sonically index certain rituals, given the use of particular drum patterns for rituals such as funeral observances.²⁷

Stefan Fiol's research among folk drummers in Uttarakhand highlights the dynamics of low-class hereditary musicians in the Himalayan state bordering Nepal and Tibet, and the alienation they face on account of their social status. Fiol's work on Uttarakhandi music looks at the folkloricization and commodification of the region's folk music, the resulting effects on its music, and the disenfranchisement of its practitioners. Once the birthright of low-class hereditary musicians (*shilpkar*), Uttarakhandi folk music has become its own marketable brand since the 1980's, being manufactured of carefully selected performance elements that, while grounded in village practices, have been adapted to cosmopolitan media through modernist reform.²⁸ In generating a consumable form of folk music, the music industry has idealized the sonic aspects of folk music while negating hereditary artists and disregarding them as polluting and primitive.²⁹ As such, folk drummers have become reluctant to work in this industry, in which they are subject to financial exploitation, class discrimination, and further stigma by industry workers on account of their unfamiliarity with recording studios and the different systems of musical

²⁷ Wolf 2014: 18, 68-74.

²⁸ Fiol 2016: 103.

²⁹ Fiol 2016: 105-106.

values used in commercial recording.³⁰ Furthermore, their stigma of pollution has extended to the bodies and sounds of their drums, influencing music producers to replace the traditional *dhol* and *damaun* with other percussion such as tabla, *dholak*, and octopad.³¹ Hereditary folk drummers thus find themselves becoming increasingly irrelevant in a capitalist market that favors musical values to which they themselves are considered an anathema.

In South India, folk drummers and their instruments have become an important symbol in the liberation movements for socially marginalized peoples. Zoe Sherinian's writing on folk drumming in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu has shown how folk music has been reimagined and recreated as a means of social and psychological transformation for low-caste and *Dalit* (untouchable) communities of Tamil Christians. Spearheaded by the efforts of Rev. Dr. James Theophilus Appavoo (1940-2005), Tamil folk music has become a key medium for transmitting liturgical and theological change within the contemporary reform movements of the Protestant Church of South India, despite such music being denigrated and devalued as polluting by upper castes and missionaries.³² Sherinian's research highlights Christian *paraiyar* drummers, a community of *Dalits* who play the *parai*, a South Indian frame drum considered to be polluted because of its use in folk music, and as

³⁰ Fiol 2016: 119.

³¹ Fiol 2016: 122.

³² Sherinian 2014: xi-xiii.

a necessary accompaniment in upper-caste death rituals.³³ Through the indigenization of Christian music into Tamil folk music practices, *paraiyars* have transformed the degraded meaning of their instruments from pollution to one of liberation from caste- and gender-based oppressions.³⁴ *Parai* players have furthermore become a symbol of empowerment and Dalit cultural liberation within both Christian and secular Dalit movements.³⁵

Outside of the Indian subcontinent, Veronica Doubleday and Razia Sultanova have provided invaluable research into musical and drumming traditions performed by women throughout parts of Islamic Central Asia. Together, the works of these authors give valuable insights into issues regarding gender and music practice, and challenge the gender-bias of male performed music in Islamic Central Asian cultures. Veronica Doubleday's work on the frame drum has detailed the extensive history of the instrument and its long, close association to women performers and musicians. Doubleday's research traces the association and use of the *daf*³⁶ or *dāireh/doira*, names of frame drums common to parts of West Asia, to women since at least the third millennium BCE, most often in relation to devotional dancing, singing, and rites of passage rituals.³⁷ Performing spaces and opportunities for women frame drum players were greatly curtailed during the advent and spread of Islam, which

³³ Sherinian 2017: 64-66, and Sherinian 2014: 46. See also Sherinian 2011.

³⁴ Sherinian 2017: 71-72.

³⁵ Sherinian 2014: 119.

³⁶ *Daf* can also be spelled *def* or *daff*.

³⁷ Doubleday 1999: 105-110.

prompted social changes regarding the status and respectability of the instrument and its practitioners throughout the region.³⁸ In Afghanistan, where musical practice is heavily segregated on account of gender and male-dominated, the frame drum has become an instrument played by women in folk and popular music, largely as a part of wedding rituals and music.³⁹ Because of its association to women and women's sexuality (on account of it being played for dance), the *dāireh* has been downgraded to a non-professional instrument by male professional musicians. In doing so, male musicians assert their ascendancy and control over the music profession, as well as women and the instruments they play.⁴⁰ Doubleday's research has also looked at the use of tabla by female wedding bands in Afghanistan.⁴¹

Sultanova's work references women's musical traditions associated to Shaman and Sufi practices in the Ferghana Valley region (eastern Uzbekistan, northern Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan) and its neighboring environs. Shamanism, ritualized healing by occupational specialists, is a widely common practice that is today dominated by women in the region.⁴² Musical instruments—drums, in particular—have been used widely in correlation of Shamanic or Sufi rituals, often involving dance or singing, to heal on account of their attribution of extra-

³⁸ Doubleday 1999: 111-113.

³⁹ Doubleday 1999: 114-115.

⁴⁰ Doubleday 1999: 123-125.

⁴¹ See Doubleday 1988: 157-171.

⁴² Sultanova 2011: 18, 21.

musical powers related to Sufi spirits.⁴³ The *daf/doira* has maintained a central role in these rituals in providing *usul* (rhythm), and thus crescendo-ing the affective emotional power of the music.⁴⁴

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of accompaniment drumming in South Asian popular, devotional, and folk music genres. I employ a cross-regional perspective to illustrate a shared approach of improvisation utilized in these music genres, and, in doing so, connect the performance practices of different drumming traditions across social and cultural divides in South Asia. These shared approaches to musical creativity are utilized within both functional (devotional) music such as Sufi *qawwālī* and Sindhi *kāfī*, and non-functional music genres such as Afghan *maḥali* and Pashtun music, as a means of facilitating and evoking an emotional response in its listeners. This emotional response differs from genre to genre, and I discuss the parameters and stakes of improvisation for each musical style in relation to its social and musical setting.

My musical analysis is underscored by the livelihoods of the musicians who play them. All of the drummers with whom I studied and interacted during my fieldwork were lower class Muslim men or male children of hereditary musical backgrounds. Their ages ranged from early teens to upwards of seventy-five, and they maintained differing levels of literacy and formal education. In each chapter I

⁴³ Sultanova 2011: 103-104, 115-116.

⁴⁴ Sultanova 2011: 104-106.

include narratives and biographical vignettes of drummers who highlight the various hardships that such communities of musicians face insofar as I observed. By doing so, I draw a correlation between the lifestyle of folk drummers and the performance practices of accompaniment drumming; marginality leads musicians to be more creative (Lipsitz 1986). My aim is not to draw universal conclusions regarding being a drummer in this region, but rather to add additional conversations to an already diverse discourse about musicians who are celebrated for their art but denigrated for their descent.

Ṭhekā and Tāl

A large body of scholarship has been written with regards to *ṭhekās* and the rhythmic cycles they articulate, known as *tāl* or *tāla* (Chaudhary 1998; Clayton 2000; Gottlieb 1977; 1993; Kippen 2001; 2006; Lybarger 2003; Manuel 1983; 1990; Stewart 1974, Wegner 2004). Overwhelmingly, these discussions pertain to the rhythmic models and patterns found in Hindustani classical music genres, such as *dhrupad* and *ḳhyāl*, and are articulated through the rhythmic language of the primary drums played in *ḳhyāl*: the tabla. For ethnomusicologists, studying the classical traditions of tabla has been a popular and useful instrument through which to articulate and debate the contemporary rhythmic systems and practices of Hindustani music. Authors such as Robert Gottlieb, James Kippen, Lowell Lybarger,

Frances Shepherd, Rebecca Stewart, and Gert-Matthias Wegner have contributed a great wealth of knowledge regarding *tāl* and *ṭhekās* through studying the tabla.

This project, in contrast, is a study of drums—tabla included—and *ṭhekās* that are played in prominent South Asian popular, devotional, and folk music genres. The impetus behind adopting this perspective is a series of long-running debates among ethnomusicologists regarding how and which folk drumming traditions have influenced classical music structures. Central to these claims by ethnomusicologists is the notion that folk drumming traditions are the foundations for the rhythmic structures of Hindustani classical music (Kippen 2006; 2001, Stewart 1974).

Specifically, the tabla has been pinpointed by scholars as being the historical link between folk drumming and classical (or art music) drumming.⁴⁵ Rebecca Stewart, a highly-noted scholar of the tabla and *tāl*, correlates a fundamental change in the rhythmic structures of Hindustani classical music with the rise in usage of the tabla in *ḵhyāl* music, which began in the second half of the eighteenth century. Prior to the tabla, the drum that accompanied classical music was the *pakhāwaj*, a barrel-shaped drum played in *dhrupad* and *dhamār* music.⁴⁶ *Dhrupad*, a genre of Hindustani music focusing on the interpretation and melodic elaboration of Sanskrit poetry, maintains its own repertory of rhythmic cycles, which are constructed in

⁴⁵ The tabla has played such a central role in the development of this latter, modern rhythmic system that these patterns, known as *ṭhekā*, are also known as tabla *ṭhekās*. See Kippen 2001.

⁴⁶ For more on *dhrupad* and *dhamār* see Sanyal and Widdess 2004.

relation to Sanskrit prosody and distinct from those in *ḥhyāl*.⁴⁷ In contrast, drumming patterns in *ḥhyāl* music articulate rhythm through grid-like patterns of repeating accents.⁴⁸ These accents form a hierarchy of beats within their respective rhythmic patterns and structures. Stewart broadly proposes a West Asian origin for this style of drumming, suggesting strongly that their source lies in (unidentified) Islamic musical practices.⁴⁹ Furthermore, she underscores the possible influences from local Indian folk music practices on this "new" rhythmic system. However, answering such questions was outside of the scope of Stewart's already wide-ranging study of the tabla.

James Kippen, an ethnomusicologist who has contributed significantly to the discourses of *tāl*, *ṭhekā*, and the history of the tabla, also points to folk drumming practices as the influence for Hindustani classical rhythmic structures. Kippen's work regarding the tabla and rhythm in Hindustani music represents one of the most comprehensive bodies of ethnomusicological scholarship on the subject. His research regarding *tāl* and *ṭhekās* have explained some of the incongruencies regarding modern rhythmic cycles.⁵⁰ In Kippen's arguments, many of the modern *tāl*

⁴⁷ Stewart 1974: 93-4.

⁴⁸ Stewart 1974: 94.

⁴⁹ Stewart 1974: 94-100. Stewart's categorization of two contrasting rhythmic systems in India underscores a long running discourse regarding the dichotomy of Hindu and Islamic musical practices in South Asia. While a discussion of the civilizational crossings of this region is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, musicologists have acknowledged the presence and influence of Islamic culture on musical practice in the Indian subcontinent since at least the thirteenth century. Trivedi 2010: 65-67. See also Brihaspati 1974.

⁵⁰ Some of the questions that Kippen has addressed are regarding the occurrence of the stroke "*Dha*" on the beginning of *ḥhālī* in *tīntāl*, the subdivisions of the twelve-beat rhythmic cycle, *ektāl*, and the

structures are likely based on folk drumming patterns that have been superimposed onto previously existing rhythmic frameworks found in *dhrupad*.⁵¹ Specifically, Kippen cites drumming used for dance and "light music" in Mughal courtesan culture as the likely influence for modern *tāls* and *ṭhekās*.⁵² Gert-Matthias Wegner, another ethnomusicologist whose research has focused on classical tabla playing, has pushed back on Kippen's arguments, encouraging a wider perspective of possible influences including classical and folk traditions of the *pakhāwaj*, other folk drums of the region, and the creativity of the musicians themselves.⁵³ Kippen acknowledges the need for more research into the folk traditions of the *pakhāwaj* in a later publication, suggesting that the "answers" to the folk influences of tabla *tāls* and *ṭhekās* lie in the musical traditions northwest of the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁴ One further connection Kippen makes between the *pakhāwaj* and tabla occurs in his writings on the history of the tabla. Regarding the tabla's early history and development, Kippen places the *pakhāwaj* as an important predecessor and link to the instrument's development in the early- to mid-eighteenth century.⁵⁵ My dissertation is a partial (and by no means exhaustive) attempt at identifying which folk drumming traditions from the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent

seven-beat *rupak tāl* beginning with *khāli*, which I address in Chapter Five. See Kippen 2001 and Kippen 2006.

⁵¹ Kippen 2006: 90-91.

⁵² Kippen 2000 and Kippen 2001.

⁵³ Wegner 2004: 26.

⁵⁴ Kippen 2006: 91.

⁵⁵ Kippen 2010: 460-463.

may have influenced Hindustani music more broadly. I problematize this organological link between the tabla and *pakhāwaj* in Chapter Four, and propose an alternative reading on the early history of the tabla that is instead in proximity to Pashtun *dohol*⁵⁶ drumming. Building on this argument, in Chapter Five I demonstrate how this relationship can explain the development of the modern seven beat Hindustani rhythmic cycles, *Pashto tāl* and *rupak tāl*.

Gibb Schreffler's research has looked at the use of the *dohol*, or *ḍhol* as it is spelled in Indic languages, in *Bhangrā*, a form of dance performed in the Punjab region of North India.⁵⁷ Contained in Schreffler's Master's thesis is a wealth of information—with detailed notations—on the plethora of rhythmic patterns played in Punjabi music, which he refers to as "grooves."⁵⁸ However, Schreffler points out in his analysis of notated *ḍhol* "grooves" that few similarities can be seen between *Bhangrā* drumming on the *ḍhol* and classical Hindustani *tāls* and *ṭhekās*.

Kippen calls out the potential pitfalls when attempting to draw such conclusions about historical performance practices, listing three in particular. First, he questions the continued performance of drumming patterns, positing that it's uncertain whether the "grooves" played today are the same as those played 150 to 200 years ago. Secondly, he argues we cannot infer the transformation processes (if

⁵⁶ The *dohol* (Pashto) is a two-sided barrel drum that is played with sticks, but can also be played with the hands.

⁵⁷ Schreffler 2002.

⁵⁸ This term was first used by Kippen to describe repeating rhythmic patterns that were based on dance movement. See Kippen 2001.

any) that performance practices have underwent. Finally, he raises the possibility of folk traditions themselves being reflexively influenced from the mainstream classical traditions.⁵⁹ Despite these caveats, Kippen still contends the folk origins of these rhythmic structures, though within specific frameworks. Keeping these cautions in mind, I engage with the discourses regarding the influences of modern Hindustani *ṭhekās*, and, in doing so, propose new perspectives on some of the debated incongruencies of tabla *tāls* and *ṭhekās*.

One limit of this dissertation is its scope as an ethnography of the present. The hypotheses and arguments I make regarding historical performance practices are informed through ethnographic and historical research. I acknowledge the tendency of ethno-histories to treat the present as a fossilized look into the past.⁶⁰ I seek to avoid this pitfall by not framing the events, interactions, and observations from my fieldwork as being preserved frozen in time and outside of their cultural contexts. Rather, I view them as events contingent on the social and political systems that continue to influence their development.

This dissertation positions *ṭhekā* drumming within a variety of cultural contexts, and among different communities of hereditary musicians. A considerable amount of scholarship has been produced regarding the hereditary music-making communities found in northwestern India.⁶¹ Daniel Neuman's groundbreaking work

⁵⁹ Kippen 2006: 91.

⁶⁰ Dirks 1987: xiv-xv, 10-11.

⁶¹ Bor 1986-87; Kippen 2006; Neuman 1980; Neuman 2015.

on the social organization of North Indian music has continued to prove foundational for ethnographic scholarship focusing on the complex milieu of Hindustani musical culture.⁶² My project draws a strong influence from Neuman's scholarship on hereditary music communities and looks at how the musical practices within familial-based troupes inform the performance practices of *ṭhekā* playing (Chapters Two, Three, and Four).

I enter these dialogues on *ṭhekā* as a classically-trained tabla player, and having studied a number of popular, devotional, and drumming styles on the tabla as well as numerous other drums played in South Asia. By looking at drumming traditions across music genres, this dissertation seeks to add a unique, cross-regional and cross-genre perspective to the conversation of *ṭhekā* that is otherwise limited to singular genres and regions.

Research Methodology

My research methods for this project consisted of participant-observation in order to study the performance practices of multiple musical instruments played in multiple music genres in South Asia. I accomplished this primarily through entering apprenticeships with my musical interlocutors, during which I participated in musical instructional sessions, practice sessions, as well as public performances in a variety

⁶² Neuman 1980; Neuman 1985.

of different field sites and musical contexts. The instruments that inform my arguments regarding *ṭhekā* include drums such as the tabla, *ḍholak*, *dohol* (*ḍhol*), and *zerbaghali*, which I studied in northern and western India, Afghanistan, and in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to musical instruction, I attended a variety of public and private music performances; conducted open-ended interviews with musical performers and connoisseurs about drumming; and performed with my interlocutors in various musical contexts. My instruction in percussion and drumming during my time as a doctoral student (2013-2020) totals over two hundred thirty individual music instruction sessions split among over a dozen musicians. My teachers and years of instruction include on tabla: Ustad Akram Khan (2016-2020), Babar Latif Khan (2016-2017), Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri (2016), Toryalai Hashimi (2014-2020), Fraidoon Miazada (2018), and Nazir Latif (2018); on *ḍholak*: Mohammad Faqir Langa (2017-2020), Sarfaraz Hasan (2017-2020), and Abra Ali Nizami (2016-2020); on *rubāb* Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi, Ustad Ramin Saqizadah (2018-2020), Ustad Aashish Khan (2014-2016), and Idris Siddiqi (2016). Each of my primary field locations entailed unique considerations given their respective social, political, and musical dynamics, which I elaborate upon below. I also attended numerous performances of classical Hindustani music (*dhrupad* and *ḳhyāl*), Hindu devotional *bhajan* performances at temples, and dance programs (*Kathak*, *Odissi*, and *Bharatanāṭyam*) about which I do not discuss in this

dissertation. Additionally, during my research in Kabul I studied classical and traditional performance practices of the *rubāb*, an Afghan lute.

Informing my arguments on *ṭhekā* are over fourteen years' experience learning, practicing, and performing South Asian percussion and music. I came into my doctoral studies with a professional background in musical performance and instruction, as well as with a strong familiarity with Indian percussion traditions, particularly regarding Hindustani classical tabla playing. I graduated with a Bachelor's of Music in Percussion Performance from DePauw University in 2008. While at DePauw I developed a keen interest in the tabla after observing it being played at a music festival in Bloomington, Indiana, and began studying the instrument during an independent research trip I took to Chennai during my second year. After graduation, I returned to Chennai to teach music and work as a studio musician in the South Indian film music industry from 2008-2011. During this time, I continued my study of the tabla, in addition to learning South Indian (Karnatik) percussion instruments such as the *mridangam*, *kanjira*, and *morsing*. In 2011, I enrolled in graduate studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz and graduated with a Master's of Arts in Ethnomusicology in 2013 before enrolling in the PhD program in September 2013. The initial stages of my doctoral research included interacting and studying with musicians and tabla players in the San Francisco Bay Area, including several members of the Afghan diaspora living in the Fremont/Hayward/Union City areas. Prior to my fieldwork in North India (October

2016-August 2017) I maintained a strong familiarity of the different stylistic schools of tabla playing (*gharānās*) and the drumming styles of different musical genres in which it is played. These skills helped me significantly throughout the course of my research in India and Afghanistan.

When it came to musical instruction (*ta'lim*) in popular, devotional, and folk drumming in India, the methods through which I learned repertoire—*ṭhekā*—were not how I had initially expected them to be. I found that, among the musicians with whom I worked who practiced these genres, an emphasis was placed on practicing music in a group setting, with multiple participants filling out the different roles of various performing ensembles, i.e. vocalist, harmonium player, *dholak* player, etc. This is an entirely different model of instruction (*ta'lim*) and practice (*riyāz*) than takes place in the classical traditions. In the classical system, instruction is conceptually linked to but separated from practice: a teacher instructs by teaching technique, compositions, correcting mistakes; a student practices often alone (within earshot of one's teacher but often by oneself). By contrast, among the multiple musical traditions I conducted fieldwork, instruction and practice were integrated and done in a group setting. A majority of my fieldwork was therefore spent practicing with the various ensembles in which my interlocutors performed. Actual formal "instruction" was minimal in these situations, as each respective musical genre I discuss in this dissertation maintains a small repertoire of *ṭhekās*. Once I had these rhythmic patterns under my hands the task was then to adapt

them to the musical forms that were being played by the other musicians. Since I was conducting research among hereditary musical families, this often meant I practiced with the younger generations of (male) offspring within the family. These practice sessions would often span several hours throughout the day (and night) and covered a wide array of repertoire and song forms that were relevant to each respective family's musical traditions. This contrasted greatly with my instruction on classical tabla, which often focused on a small amount of repertoire that I was encouraged to practice individually without other instrumentation, the exception being a *lehrā* as played on an instrument (harmonium or *sārangī*) or electronic device such as a smartphone.⁶³

For my research in India I relied heavily on my prior knowledge of Hindi and Urdu, which was spoken colloquially by my interlocutors in New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Kachchh. I also relied on my fluency in Hindi and Urdu during my initial time in Afghanistan, since all of my musical interlocutors in Kabul had spent a significant amount of time—often several years—living in Pakistan as a refugee during their lives and had developed varying levels of fluency in Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. Before my trip to Afghanistan in 2018 I had taken private language coaching in the Iranian dialect of Farsi with a tutor at the San Jose Learning Center in San Jose, California. This foundation in Iranian Farsi helped my own efforts of

⁶³ A *lehrā* (or *nāghma*) is a fixed melody of a set number of beats that is often played as an accompaniment for *tabla* solos or dance. Its purpose is to outline the rhythmic duration of a respective rhythmic cycle. See Wolf 2014: 9.

learning the Afghan dialect of the language, which I did using two resources: a Dari-English and English-Dari dictionary, and an independently published teach yourself-style Dari textbook.⁶⁴ As my fieldwork in Kabul progressed, my conversations with musicians, friends, taxi drivers, store owners, etc. helped build my fluency in Farsi, which allowed me to rely less on speaking Hindi and Urdu. My *rubāb* teacher in Kabul, Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi, was of particular help in expanding my vocabulary in Farsi on account of our regular musical lessons and conversations.

Fieldwork in New Delhi and the Nizamuddin *Dargah*

While in New Delhi I rented a flat in Jangpura, a neighborhood adjacent to Nizamuddin where the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* (shrine) is located. I chose this location because of its proximity to the Nizamuddin *dargah*, in addition to its being close to the Violet Line of the Delhi metro system, which was my primary means of getting around New Delhi. My research schedule depended largely on the schedules and availability of the musicians with whom I interacted. During the week I would schedule lessons and meetings with musicians during the day hours, and attend concerts and other musical programs during the evenings. I regularly attended the classical music concerts and festivals that were held during the week and weekend,

⁶⁴ Iranian and Afghan Farsi are largely mutually intelligible, but are differentiated at times by differing vocabularies. While Afghan Farsi is often referred to as Dari, meaning "of the court (*darbār*)," I observed it referred to as "Farsi" among Persian-speakers with whom I interacted.

the exception being Thursday nights (*jumme rāth*), when I would walk to the Nizamuddin *dargah* for the *qawwālī* performances that were held. On Friday evenings I attended the *qawwālī* performances at the Hazrat Inayat Khan *dargah*, a smaller shrine located just down the street from the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*. During festival times (*'urs*) I would be at the Nizamuddin Auliya or Hazrat Inayat Khan *dargah* from the late evening (around 8:00pm or so) until the program concluded (usually around 3:00-4:00am). The *'urs* festivals at the different *dargah*-s provided valuable opportunities during which I was able to meet and interact with musicians outside of each respective *dargah*'s local network.

The *qawwāls* in Nizamuddin were very amicable and open to meeting me and talking with me about music. My apartment provided a useful space in which to conduct interviews and musical lessons in New Delhi. Because of its proximity to the Nizamuddin *dargah*, I was able to host the drummers and other musicians from the *dargah* network. Initially I had tried to engage in conversation with drummers and musicians within the space of the *dargah*, but I found this near impossible amid the bustling crowd that was usually at the *dargah*, and on account of the interferences that arose from other *dargah* musicians who competed for my attention. Meeting musicians one-on-one at my private residence provided a platform for more focused and uninterrupted musical conversations and exchanges. In addition to working with *dargah* musicians, I also attended classes on tabla with Ustad Akram Khan, which

were held at Triveni Kala Sangam, an arts complex and education center located near Bengali Market in central New Delhi.

Of great coincidence regarding my residence in Jangpura was my proximity to Bhogal, a neighborhood in New Delhi that is known for its large population of Afghan refugees.⁶⁵ The first day after moving into my flat in Jangpura I went walking in search of a cup of chai and, when I turned down one of the first roads that I came to, I was delightfully surprised to see a street lined with Afghan restaurants and numerous store fronts with signs in Farsi. Over the course of the ten months I lived in Jangpura I interacted with several Afghans, most of whom were former soldiers who had completed their military service and, as part of their enlistment, had been guaranteed asylum to either Europe or the United States and were waiting for their visas to be issued. These positive conversations I had helped inform my ultimate decision to continue my research in Afghanistan the following year. To try and make connections through music, on Friday afternoons I would take my *rubāb* and go play it in Kashmiri Park, a rectangular-shaped park near the Bhogal market in which many Afghans would typically meet and socialize. At the time, my repertoire on the *rubāb* consisted mainly of a few famous classical and folk compositions, but it was enough to attract the attention of a few older generation men who would come and listen to me play the same songs week after week. Many of the individuals that approached

⁶⁵ Lajpat Nagar, another neighborhood in New Delhi famous for its large population of Afghan refugees, was also located just south of Jangpura across a railroad line.

me in Kashmiri Park were surprised by my interest in Afghan music and admitted to knowing my music teachers from Afghanistan who were currently living in the United States. While our conversations were often limited because of linguistic barriers, their enthusiasm for my efforts in playing Afghan music was made clear through their immense kindness and admiration.

Fieldwork at the Baba Salim Chishti *Dargah* in Fatehpur Sikri

My fieldwork in Fatehpur Sikri was conducted over four individual trips in 2017 and 2020, with each trip lasting roughly a week. Much of the time I spent in Fatehpur Sikri I spent sitting on the white marble flooring in front of the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* with a family of *qawwāl* musicians with whom I conducted my research. Starting between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, I would spend roughly six to eight hours sitting with the musicians as they performed *qawwālī* for the *dargah* visitors, after which I would have a short instructional session with one of the musicians in my hotel room. On days during which the family did not perform in front of the *dargah* I had more musical lessons in my hotel room and accompanied members of the family on various music and non-music related errands inside and outside of Fatehpur Sikri. These errands included meeting various family members and town figures, including various personnel of the *dargah*'s administration, local spiritual leaders, musical teachers, family friends and relatives of the *qawwāl* family, as well as attending recording sessions the musicians had at

All India Radio (AIR), Agra. Or, sometimes we would go and sit at the *dargah* and watch the other family of *qawwāls* perform.

Due to the relatively small size of the *dargah* network at Fatehpur Sikri, I became a well-known figure among its administrators and personnel throughout my continued visits. Furthermore, their perception of my sincerity in learning *qawwālī* drumming, as well as my advanced competence as a tabla and *ḍholak* player, helped solidify a strong personal relationship with the family of performing musicians in Fatehpur Sikri. My familiarity among key *dargah* administrators, alongside this close connection to the *qawwāl* community, afforded me access to privileged musical spaces and performance opportunities, in particular regarding the events entailed during the *dargah*'s 'urs celebration as well as performing in front of the *dargah* itself. During my initial trips my position as a researcher and *not* a performer was enforced by the musicians, who prohibited me from performing in any fashion with them at the *dargah*.⁶⁶ However, on the fourth individual trip to Fatehpur Sikri in February 2020, I was invited for the first time to perform with the *qawwāl*-s in front of the *dargah* for the duration of the day; a permission granted typically only to members of the local *qawwāl* kinship network (Figure 0.3).

⁶⁶ This included not being permitted to clap along with them nor sing along with the poetry.



Figure 0.3. *Qawwāls* at the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* in Fatehpur Sikri, with the author playing tabla. February 2020.

Fieldwork in Kachchh

I visited Kachchh twice over the course of my fieldwork; for a week in the summer of 2017 and again for a week in the spring of 2020. To reach Kachchh from my base in New Delhi, which was over twelve hundred kilometers to the northeast, required extensive traveling—either on a day-long train journey, or the sole flight in and out of Bhuj's single-terminal municipal airport. My initial arrival into Bhuj in 2017 coincided with the arrival of the summer monsoon rains. I had brought a *dholak* with me and, through the help of a friend and colleague, was introduced to Mohammad Faqir, a prominent drummer of the area. Our introductions were facilitated by our mutual contact, and took place in my hotel room the afternoon of my arrival amid the downpour of monsoon rain that would end up falling

throughout the majority of my visit.⁶⁷ When I informed Faqir Ustad of my desire to learn the Sindhi style of *ḍholak* he took my drum and played for a me various Sindhi *ṭhekās* and styles. Afterwards, he asked me to play something so that he could judge my familiarity and competence on the instrument. When I took the drum and played back a composition (*tīhāi*) that he had just played, his eyes opened with surprise and delight, and the formalities of the occasion were immediately dropped. He invited me back to his house, where I met his family and began learning and practicing Sindhi music with him and his sons.⁶⁸ Similar to my experience in Fatehpur Sikri, my perceived sincerity and adeptness of the music was of crucial importance in establishing a close relationship with my interlocutors, which afforded me access to the playing repertoires, *ṭhekā-s*, about which I was conducting research.

During my first visit to Kachchh, a majority of my time was spent practicing and playing music at the family's house. Since it was the monsoon and the family were not playing many programs, I would go over to their house between ten and eleven o'clock to sit and practice along with the family's four sons. The four sons, who were between the ages of five and seventeen at the time, were adept at the various instruments that the family had—*ḍholak*, *tabla*, *harmonium*, and a dulcimer-like instrument called a *benjo*. We sat on the floor of the house's only bedroom and

⁶⁷ I am very thankful for Dr. Brian Bond in facilitating my introduction to Mohammad Faqir Ustad. Otherwise, my immersion into the hereditary musical community in Bhuj would likely have taken much longer.

⁶⁸ Mohammad Faqir was able to introduce me to all the members of his family, women included, on account of the family's loose practice of gender segregation, known as *purdah*.

practiced for several hours throughout each day, breaking only for the *azān* (call to prayer) and meals and snacks. Our practice sessions involved one or more of the sons playing a melody instrument, the *harmonium* or *benjo*, and the others, myself included, accompanying along on either *tabla* or *dholak*. As I was shown how to play the various Sindhi style *ṭhekās* (and to practice them), someone would play the melody of a song and the rest would follow along. Since I was unfamiliar with Sindhi music at the time (my knowledge consisted of only a few recorded performances that had been shared with me) much of my initial efforts were aimed at following and imitating someone else who was also drumming along. Throughout the day we frequently rotated instruments and through different music genres and rhythmic cycles, which made song retention difficult and was mentally (and physically) exhausting. Also, during my trip to Bhuj I was fortunate to travel with a group of musicians to Dhordo, a village on the edge of the white sand Rann of Kachchh, for an informal musical gathering.

The itinerary of my trip to Bhuj in March 2020 was much the same as the first. However, while I again spent time practicing at the family's house, I also accompanied various members of the family to programs at which they performed. In actuality, I assumed the role of the family's driver during my stay, and drove them to programs, on errands around Bhuj, and to and from Dhordo, which was a spectacular multiple-hour drive through breath-taking arid desert landscapes. The programs I attended included devotional *bhajan* programs held at Hindu temples,

which lasted from eleven at night until three or four the next morning. The classical tradition of Hindustani music has long been celebrated as a syncretic tradition that transcends religious differences, where Muslim hereditary performers sing in Hindu temples and sing song-texts with *bhakti* themes of Hindu gods, epics, and scripture. More recent scholarship has problematized these claims by introducing the communal tension within the modern history of Hindustani music, but the larger presence of syncretic performances across devotional communities remains. Here I note a similar pattern taking place not among classical musicians in elite circles, but with folk musicians (who are Muslim) in popular and devotional circles in a political environment that has become less politically secular and more politically and culturally separated and contentious among “communal” lines. While the politics of communalism are present in every context, I do not directly address them in every situation, though elements of how it is present will manifest itself through my ethnography.

I also attended a private Sindhi *kāfī* performance at a private resort just outside of Bhuj. Through attending these programs (as well as driving the musicians) I met several musicians from within and outside of the *langā* community. During this trip I also became aware of the importance of social media among Sindhi music aficionados in Kachchh after an attendee at a *bhajan* program recognized me from a video that had been posted to Facebook a day before of me performing on *ḍholak* alongside my interlocutors. When I was recognized among the audiences and

performers of the programs I attended, I was regularly asked to play a few minutes of solo tabla, which I was told was rarely performed in public concerts in Kachchh.

Working with Muslim Musicians in North India

On December 11, 2019 the Indian government, controlled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), signed into law the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The law amended the previous Citizenship Act of 1955, which established a path to Indian citizenship for certain migrants who had entered India from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The amendments state:

Provided that any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31st day of December, 2014 and who has been exempted by the Central Government by or under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 or any rule or order made thereunder, shall not be treated as illegal migrant for the purposes of this Act;⁶⁹

The lack of mention of Muslim migrants in these amendments is a major cause of concern, especially given that the countries specified in the amendment—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan—are Muslim-majority countries. As soon as the legislation was enacted it sparked protests from groups and communities of all faiths in India, the capital, New Delhi, in particular.⁷⁰ Months of demonstrations

⁶⁹ *Gazette of India* 2019: 2.

⁷⁰ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/22/narendra-modi-defends-contentious-citizenship-law-as-clashes-continue-india>.

against the CAA came to a head in late-February when a series of violent riots erupted in parts of Delhi, which coincided with my fieldwork trip I took to New Delhi during February and March 2020. On Sunday, February 24, a group of peaceful protestors demonstrating against the CAA in northwest Delhi were attacked by a violent Hindu mob who had been fueled by the rhetoric of local BJP officials to attack the protestors.⁷¹ The resulting altercation sparked violence in the capital that left several dead and put certain neighborhoods of Delhi under curfew and on police lockdown.

At the time, I was staying in Nizamuddin West, a predominantly Muslim neighborhood in which the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* is located. Prior to this outbreak of violence I had observed organized peaceful anti-CAA demonstrations taking place nearby to one of the *dargah*'s entrances. After February 24, large armored police vehicles were stationed near the rally site in order to protect the protestors, and there was a noticeable rise in police presence throughout the neighborhood (and indeed New Delhi) during the remainder of my visit. Despite this, I continued to visit the *dargah* and its surrounding alleyways and shops on a daily basis. "Do not worry. God will protect you here," I was told by Mohammad Ibrahim, a store owner whose store I kept my shoes while I was inside the *dargah*. While I observed and heard of no incidents of outright violence in Nizamuddin, the CAA is

⁷¹ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/26/delhi-protests-death-toll-climbs-amid-worst-religious-violence-for-decades>.

but one of a number of controversial laws passed by the BJP in recent years that has affected and provoked communal outrage from Indian's Muslim communities.⁷²

When asked, the musicians with whom I worked denied being personally affected by the new laws passed by the BJP. It was clear, however, that the larger communities of which they were a part were being impacted by such legislations. Many of my field sites were located in and around Muslim shrines that depend on tourist traffic, especially from Muslim travelers who come from inside and outside of India. These shrines maintain their own micro-economies of restaurants, shops, and other services that are run by Muslims and patronized by visitors. With the enacting of the CAA and other laws, such shrines and their associated communities are becoming increasingly threatened and vulnerable. Sarfaraz Hasan, a *qawwāl* in Fatehpur Sikri, expressed his worry to me that after the CAA was passed, visiting *dargahs* such as the one in Fatehpur Sikri may be compromised for Muslim peoples: "If they [Muslim visitors] cannot come to Fatehpur Sikri and visit the *dargah*, how will we survive?" Statements such as Sarfaraz's underscore the increasing communal tensions and anxieties of Muslim communities in India that have arisen on account of the BJP's controversial legislations.

⁷² Another controversial law targeting India's meat butchering industry, which is largely Muslim run, was passed by the BJP during my 2016-2017 fieldwork. See <https://www.reuters.com/article/meat-abattoirs-bjp-modi-politics/bjps-crackdown-on-abattoirs-spreads-stoking-muslim-unease-idUSKBN1700ZZ>.

Fieldwork in the Afghan Diaspora in California and in Kabul, Afghanistan

In the beginning of 2014, my professor, Tanya Merchant, gave me the phone number of an amateur Afghan tabla player living in the San Francisco Bay Area whom she had met during a previous arrangement. Not knowing anything about Afghan music I called the number, and ended up having a nearly hour-long conversation with the contact, whose name was Ahsad, over our shared passion for music and specifically the tabla. He claimed that he was only an amateur tabla player and did not teach, but he gave me the number of a professional tabla player that was from the old musician's neighborhood of Kabul, the *kucheh kharābāt*. I called the number that was given to me and arranged a meeting with Toryalai Hashemi, a renown *ghazal*-style tabla player from Afghanistan who was living in Fremont. After an initial introduction and audition, I began taking classical tabla lessons with Toryalai's son, Eman, who was just finishing high school and already a skilled tabla player. From March 2014 to the summer of 2016 I made the hour and fifteen-minute drive from Santa Cruz to Fremont every week for a tabla lesson, which was held in a small shed behind the Hashemi's house that had been furnished to be used as a room for music lessons, rehearsals, practice, etc. On a number of occasions, I was invited to stay after my lesson had concluded to socialize with Toryalai and other musicians and friends of his who were visiting. Some of my favorite times with Toryalai were the late nights I spent with him in the music room watching recorded performances of his from Kabul, and various home movies of he

and his family before they had left Afghanistan back in the mid-1990's. In addition to my relationship with the Hashemi family in Fremont, I also met several other amateur Afghan musicians in the San Francisco Bay Area, some of whom I still occasionally meet for informal musical sessions. I also attended a number of private concerts and fundraising events in the Fremont and Hayward area that featured Afghan music performances.

In the beginning of 2018 I traveled to Kabul, Afghanistan to continue my dissertation research on a grant from the Asian Cultural Council. Due to the ongoing military campaigns within Afghanistan at the time of research, entering into the musical networks of Kabul was significantly more challenging compared to the other field sites involved in this project. I was only able to attend a handful of public and private events in which there was music performed during my six months in Kabul; not because musicians were not performing music, but rather because access to musical spaces was extremely limited and often a security risk. The majority of my fieldwork in Kabul was therefore done through private musical instruction on the *tabla*, *ḏholak*, *zerbaghali*, and *rubāb*, which happened at my place of residence or at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music.

My involvement at Afghanistan National Institute of Music during the beginning of my stay was a useful opportunity to meet musicians in Kabul. For the first two months of my stay in Kabul, I volunteered as the percussion instructor for the institute's winter music academy, which taught students music lessons in

European and American art music, Hindustani art music, and Afghan folk and art music genres. For four days each week I took a taxi across Kabul to the institute to teach percussion lessons, as well as interact with the other music teachers. Among the other instructors for the winter academy were several percussionists from Kabul, including Fraidoon Miazada, the younger brother of my contact, Toryalai Hashemi, in Fremont. I was able to make further musical contacts through the help of a colleague, Waheed Sagar, whom I met at Kabul University. I conducted research at the library of the American Center at Kabul University throughout the holy month of Ramadan (mid-May to mid-June), during which my teachers were fasting and did not wish to exert themselves teaching or playing.

The majority of my musical instruction occurred at the house in which I lived, located in an area of Kabul called Taimani. The house was built in the 1930's by Abdul Ghafoor Breshna (1907-1974), a famous artist, architect, and music composer of Afghanistan. At the time, the house was being rented by a PhD student from Yale, who in turn rented out its many rooms long-term or short-term to journalists, travelers, videographers, and other PhD students. In the backyard of the house was a sprawling garden that was full of various fruit trees, including mulberry, fig, almond, and apricot. During the winter months, my lessons and interactions with musicians were held inside the house, but from mid-March onwards, when the weather in Kabul was warm and the trees began to bloom, these shifted outside to

the garden. I frequently invited my musical contacts over to the house, and our interactions often lasted several hours throughout the day and night.

Conducting Research Among Musicians in India and Afghanistan

My identification as a white, cisgender, heterosexual man provided many openings while foreclosing others during my research with musicians in India, Afghanistan, and their respective diasporas in the San Francisco Bay Area. The musicians with whom I interacted were predominantly Muslim men, many of whom were between the ages of twenty and fifty. Most were married and had families, many with whom I became familiar during my extended visits. My interaction with women differed from field site to field site, but in general was limited due to cultural regulations of *purdah* (See Sultanova 2001 and Doubleday 1988). There were three notable exceptions to this. First, in Fatehpur Sikri I interacted on occasion with the female siblings of the family of *qawwāls* with whom I studied. This was likely permitted on account of the family having met previously my partner during a visit to Fatehpur Sikri, as well as the extensive familiarity by which the family came to know me through my successive visits. These circumstances granted a normative social standing among the family, which facilitated my interactions with female family members. The brief conversations I had with female family members were extremely insightful into giving me a glimpse of the often-un-acknowledged involvement and contributions of women in South Asian musical practice. The

female siblings of the family were all self-taught in Arabic and actively assisted their father, the lead performer of the family's performing ensemble, in selecting new poetry for the group to sing. They also could sing certain *rāgs* as well as play the harmonium, though they only did this inside the house.

Second, during a trip to Fatehpur Sikri in June 2017 I visited a small institute that taught a variety of free classes in English, music, and dance to male and female students over a wide range of ages. At the time of my visit (of which I was admittedly unaware until my interlocutor informed me we were heading there while out riding on his bike through town one afternoon) I was led into a classroom of nearly twenty female students between the ages of ten and eighteen who were learning to play the *ḍholak*. When I talked to the students, they expressed gratitude that the institute was available to them free of cost. They all had an interest (*shauq*) in music, but social, economic, or religious factors made it difficult for them to pursue music as a hobby. At the institute they learned a few basic *ṭhekās* on the *ḍholak*, which some students said they would play for various purposes (apart from routine practice) at home.

Third, during my time as a volunteer percussion teacher at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, I regularly taught and interacted with female students between the ages of twelve and eighteen. One of the school's missions is to support

the most disadvantaged children of Afghanistan, including female children.⁷³ I taught several female percussion students while at the music institute, all of whom were from towns and villages located outside of Kabul. Their involvement in music often jeopardized their relationships with their families, who were typically conservative and viewed music unfavorably. Yet, learning music was one of the few ways in which they had access to an education that would otherwise not be available to them in their home communities.

Because of the exclusion from women's social space throughout my field sites, this dissertation focuses on male performance and practice spaces.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter One defines *ṭhekā*. My primary musical argument in this dissertation is that *ṭhekās*, as a compositional form, can be deconstructed and reconstituted as a means of improvisation. Playing *ṭhekā* involves an extensive amount of variation, improvisation, and embellishment, which I argue has been a practice of accompaniment drumming since at least the early eighteenth century. I position *ṭhekās* against the other predominant form of drumming accompaniment played in Hindustani art music on the *pakhāwaj*, *paran*. I detail further the three primary categories of *ṭhekās* used in popular, devotional and folk music that appear in the

⁷³ See <https://www.anim-music.org/mission-statement>.

musical analysis sections of subsequent chapters. I also include and discuss the key to the notation system that I developed for use in my musical analyses in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five.

After Chapter One, each additional chapter will be divided into two sections: one ethnographic where I present a case-study highlighting the experience of being a professional folk drummer in South Asia, and a second musicological analysis section. In both sections I take a more singular case-study or musical recording which I judge to be representative. The ethnographic sections have some similar themes across regions: intense competition and rivalry, daily extensive drumming and music-making, and some themes that were specific to the region or community I studied, such as negotiating social structures and overcoming the stigma of being a professional musician. In the musical examples, I work to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the different folk drumming traditions of focus in this dissertation, and to show how some of them suggest an influence on the classical rhythmic patterns and structures of Hindustani music. I do this by correlating the structures of the drums in relation to their technical demands of physical strain and dexterity, and the cultural requirements of long-hours for not just practice but performance.

Chapter Two looks at *ṭhekā* drumming in the context of devotional Sufi *qawwālī* music. In Part One of the chapter, I describe the ethnographic setting of *qawwālī* performance and introduce the communities of hereditary practitioners

with whom I conducted my research. I highlight two individual case studies from each of my *qawwālī*-focused field sites. In the ethnographic vignettes of these musicians, I bring to the fore issues of social and musical politics that I observed regularly throughout my research. I position each case study as representative of large-scale trends among hereditary drummers that I observed during my fieldwork. The issues I shed light on in this chapter include intense competition among rivals and family members, and the careful navigation of social politics. In Part Two, I analyze the drumming in a recording of *qawwālī*, showing how and how often improvisation occurs in *ṭhekā* drumming in *qawwālī*. Beforehand, I discuss the manner of improvisation in this style of drumming and highlight a selection of key stroke-melodies played in *qawwālī*.

Chapter Three discusses the *ṭhekās* and drumming of Sindhi *kāfī* music, a genre of devotional music performed in Kachchh, an area of western India on the border with Pakistan. In Part One I introduce the hereditary musicians of Kachchh and my primary interlocutors, the *langā* community. In the ethnographic vignette of this chapter, I bring to the fore aspects of the culture surrounding musician practice habits, known as *rīyāz*. I detail the use of *rīyāz* narratives in Hindustani classical music culture, and offer my own insights from being a student of the tabla for over a decade. My time spent practicing and music-making among the *langā*-s in Kachchh was representative of the daily rigorous practice that I observed among musical communities who perform popular, devotional, and folk music. Based on my

experiences with these communities, I offer a counter-argument to current scholarly counter-arguments regarding the validity of such stories regarding musicians' practice habits. In Part Two of the chapter, I discuss improvisation in Sindhi drumming, and detail and notate the primary stroke-melodies played in Sindhi music. Afterwards, I analyze the drumming in a representative recording of Sindhi *kāfī* music to illustrate the use of improvisation in its drumming accompaniment.

Chapter Four looks at drumming in Afghan *maḥali* music, highlighting specifically the history and usage of the tabla. The tabla's use in Afghanistan has largely been overlooked by scholars of the instrument. In Part One of this chapter I push back against pre-existing narratives regarding the tabla's origins and early development. Based on a re-interpretation of previously known sources, as well as my ethnographic research on different tabla traditions in Afghanistan, I place the development of the instrument in proximity to Pashtun culture. I detail further the history of tabla traditions in Afghanistan, and highlight prominent figures who helped shaped its performance practices during the twentieth century. The musical analysis in Part Two begins by discussing improvisation in Afghan *maḥali* drumming and identifying the key stroke-melodies played. I follow this with an analysis of the drumming from a recording of an Afghan *maḥali* song. My analysis traces the frequency and methods of improvisation used in this recording, which is representative of the style of playing I observed among Afghan drummers.

Chapter Five takes a look into Pashtun musical influences on Hindustani music. Specifically, I consider the influence of Pashtun drumming on the structure of *rupak tāl*, a common seven-beat rhythmic cycle used in Hindustani music. I begin with articulating the peculiarities of *rupak tāl* in comparison to the other common *tāls* of Hindustani music. Through a musicological analysis of seven-beat rhythmic patterns, I show how the peculiar performance practices of such seven-beat *ṭhekās* may be derived from the performance practices of the *dohol*, the primary drum used in Pashtun music.

Conclusion

This dissertation argues for the centralization of folk traditions in the history of South Asian musical traditions: not just from a unidirectional movement from “great” classical traditions to locally reconfigured folk and popular traditions, but as informing and constituting classical and popular sounds more broadly in South Asia. By calling attention to these drumming attentions, which often go overlooked in ethnomusicological scholarship, new insights into the history of drumming can be gleaned. In making these claims, this dissertation pushes back on pre-established discourses and histories regarding South Asian drumming and instrumental traditions. The result, I argue, is a more inclusive narrative regarding the complexity of musical influences that have contributed to the performance practices of contemporary Hindustani classical music.

Chapter One

What is a *ṭhekā*?

On the surface, a *ṭhekā* is a repeating rhythmic pattern of a fixed, determined duration. It can be recited through the use of *bol*s (verbalized drum strokes), or played on a drum. They are the primary signifier of the rhythmic cycles, *tāl*, played in Hindustani music, as well as in the musical traditions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. *Ṭhekās*⁷⁴ are also an accompaniment to something; they are not generally appreciated in and of themselves. Yet, they are remarkable in their capacity to invoke a variety of psychosomatic effects in listeners through the rhythmic forces they conjure.

A *ṭhekā*, which translates as "support," serves to facilitate and/or accentuate the processes—musical or non-music related—of which it is a part. They "support" through their unwavering repetition and the sense of rhythmic propulsion their repetition helps create. *Ṭhekās* are played across music genres in South Asia and maintain a wide array of regional variations and approaches in their performance.⁷⁵ They accompany singing, dancing, instrumental music, processions of various sorts,

⁷⁴ The plural of *ṭhekā* is also *ṭhekā*. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion throughout this dissertation I will use "*ṭhekās*" for the plural form of *ṭhekā*.

⁷⁵ One of the few musical genres in which *ṭhekā* are not played is *dhrupad*, which I discuss later in this chapter.

rituals, and a wide array of poetry. In this chapter, I break down the core components of *ṭhekās* as I observed them played in the popular, devotional, and folk music genres of focus in this dissertation, and discuss their approaches to composition and improvisation.

Ṭhekās as Improvisational Structures

Whether it is a *gīt* (song), *qawwālī*, *bhajan*, *ghazal*, *thumri*, *ḵhyāl*, *dhrupad*, et al., music in South Asia has long expressed itself through short, fixed compositions, sometimes associated with lyrics, and sometimes associated with non-lyrical *bols* (articulations). At times these compositions are springboards for "improvisation" (Jairazbhoy 1971). At other times the compositions come after a long section, called *ālāp*, which is absent discernable pulses and, dating back to the classical treatises, is defined in negation to the composition, as that which is without fixed form, a regular rhythmic pulse, and lyrics.⁷⁶ Beyond the compositions, there are also pre-composed phrases that are learned—*pakars*, *chalans*, *tāns*, *bol* patterns, etc. These phrases can be combined, recombined and disarticulated as a process of learning how to improvise.⁷⁷ Similarly, *varṇams* in Karnatik music are compositions containing a

⁷⁶ Rowell 1992: 238. See also Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 143.

⁷⁷ See Neuman (forthcoming): 254-272. For more on improvisation in solo tabla playing see Gottlieb 1993: 42-48.

diversity of melodic and rhythmic possibilities that performers reference when they improvise.⁷⁸

Ṭhekās, in practice, are first learned as fixed compositions—signifiers of a rhythmic duration of defined length—that are linked to the compositions (*bandish*, *chīz*, *gat*, *qā'ida*, etc.) they support. Like the other compositional forms, *ṭhekā* "are practiced until their commonplace gestures are no longer thought about, but felt."⁷⁹ It is at such point of familiarity that *ṭhekās* become a model for improvisation, in which their internal phrasings and articulations can be modified and embellished easily amid repetition. The extent of elaboration during playing *ṭhekā* varies widely depending on music genre, the performance context, and the socio-musical dynamics between performers (Wolf, Blum, and Hasty 2019: 15). I illustrate by musical analysis in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five that, from a performance practice standpoint, improvisation can be subtle or it can be substantial.

To better demonstrate how this improvisation occurs, it is helpful to imagine the processes of *ṭhekā* drumming as being split among a player's hands (as is done in my musical notation). Most drums on which *ṭhekās* are played involve a set of two drums, or a single drum with two playing sides. Each drum or each side of the drum is played by a single hand. Striking these drums or their sides produces tones and timbres that articulate two different musical registers: bass or low-pitch tones, and

⁷⁸ Wolf 2009: 240.

⁷⁹ Wolf 2009: 243.

treble or high-pitch tones. Drum strokes are played with unison (hands together) and non-unison (one hand at a time) strokes in any given *ṭhekā*.

As mentioned above, keeping an established and regularly recurring rhythmic pulse is fundamental to *ṭhekā* drumming; it must not stop except for when a song is concluded or the drummer is signaled otherwise. If the music calls or allows for rhythmic elaboration, drummers must preserve this sense of rhythmic continuity while they improvise. Most often, drummers ground this rhythmic continuity in the high-pitched drum or side of the drum, even when not improvising. A drummer may need to re-tune their drum(s), wipe the sweat of their brow, receive money from a patron, or any number of other things during a performance, which is done typically by the hand that plays the bass drum: the left. The importance of sustaining a rhythmic pulse in the treble drum, often played with a person's right hand, is underscored by the strong associations of pollution and contamination to a person's left hand in South Asia. Numerous times I saw drummers accept monetary offerings mid-performance with their left hand, with no offense taken by their patrons, while their right hand continued to play.

What becomes improvised while playing *ṭhekā* is a particular quality of rhythmic accent, which many of the musicians—not just drummers—with whom I interacted referred to as *wazn*, meaning "weight." *Wazn*, also spelled *vazn*, as its definition suggests, is a quality of "weight" or accent that is commonly used to describe the rhythmic cadence and pattern of a poem. Regula Qureshi notes that

qawwāls will consider the *wazn* of a respective poem in order to select an appropriate musical setting.⁸⁰ In respect to drumming, *wazn* indicates points of relative structural importance within a rhythmic pattern, which form a qualitative and accentual hierarchy of internal beats.⁸¹ *Wazn* in *ṭhekās* is most audibly articulated on the lower-pitch drum or side of the drum, which maintains a greater acoustic capacity to produce musical accent and stress than the corresponding high-pitched drum or side of the drum. The use of weighted accents and stresses to articulate rhythm are a defining feature of *ṭhekās* in comparison to other drumming accompaniments discussed below.⁸² *Wazn* is a central part of *ṭhekā* playing, and it is also a key concept in the improvisation that characterizes *ṭhekā* drumming. In summary, a *ṭhekā* is a compositional model for rhythmic elaboration, built upon and in relation to individualized musical traits and characteristics, that provides musical and non-musical accompaniment through its unwavering repetition.

Historical References to *Ṭhekā*-Style Drumming

A defining characteristic of playing *ṭhekās* in popular, devotional, and folk genres of music is their profuse variation within performance.⁸³ This style of

⁸⁰ Qureshi 1986: 61.

⁸¹ Clayton 2000: 53-54. *Wazn* is also often equated with the Hindustani concept of *lāy*, translated broadly as tempo or rhythmic cadence. See Kippen 2019: 258 and Wolf 2019: 317-327.

⁸² This was stated by Rebecca Stewart in her description of tabla *tāls* and *ṭhekās* as being divisive and pitch-oriented. Stewart 1974: 93-101.

⁸³ The variation and elaboration of *ṭhekās* is a practice for drummers in Hindustani art music genres, as well. However, this occurs at a much greater extent in popular, devotional, and folk genres of

drumming, I argue, is not specific to contemporary playing, but is one that has likely existed since at least the first half of the eighteenth century. Accounts of drummers exist as early as the reign of the great Mughal Emperor, Akbar (r. 1556-1605), but descriptions of *what* drummers played are scarce.⁸⁴ The earliest account I could find of non-classical drumming dates from the early eighteenth century, over fifty years prior to the first mention of "*ṭhekā*" in literary accounts.⁸⁵ Between 1737 and 1741, Dargah Quli Khan (1719-1766), an official in the principality of Hyderabad, came to the Mughal capital of Delhi as a member of the entourage of the Nizam ul-Mulk, Asaf Jah I (r. 1724-1748), the viceroy of the Deccan peninsula and founder of the Nizam ruling dynasty in Hyderabad.⁸⁶ During his stay, Khan engaged with the social and cultural life of the city, and his exuberant descriptions of events and persons are detailed in his personal writings, of which excerpts were published in 1926 as the *Muraqqa'-i Dehlī* (An Album of Delhi).⁸⁷ This album, written originally in Persian, provides an ethnography of the musical culture in Delhi during the early eighteenth century, a time by which the art music genre, *ḵhyāl*, had become a prominent music genre that was performed primarily by the *qawwāls* of the city.⁸⁸ Khan's interests in

music because of the laxity regarding form and structures in non-classical music practices. See Manuel 1984: 7.

⁸⁴ See Al-Fazl 1873, 1891, and 1894 and Faqirullah 1996.

⁸⁵ The earliest known mention of *ṭhekā* is in an anonymous and undated commentary on a (now lost) treatise on the tabla dating to the early years of the nineteenth century. Kippen 2019: 262-3.

⁸⁶ At the time of Dargah Quli Khan's stay, the Mughal capital was known as Shahjahanabad, named for the Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658) who moved the capital to Delhi from Agra. Today Shahjahanabad is known as Old Delhi.

⁸⁷ Dargah Quli Khan 1989: xviii.

⁸⁸ Schofield 2010: 168-174, 189-190.

the arts led him to attend a variety of musical events at the Nizamuddin Auliya shrine as well as at other *mehfils* (private, intimate musical gatherings) around Delhi. His descriptions of percussionists, in particular, provide valuable information regarding aspects of drumming and rhythmic accompaniment during this important time.

Of particular mention is Khan's description regarding Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz, who was "one of the inimitable prodigies amongst his contemporaries [in his skill of playing the *ḍholak*]."⁸⁹ Dargah Quli Khan's description continues:

"He proudly claims in *mehfils* that his repertoire of *rāgs* on the *ḍholak* would not exhaust even if he were to play continuously for six months. The people present confirm his statement... When he switches a *gat* unintentionally, yet subtly, the listeners remain unaware of it, unless and until they lend their ears to it with complete concentration."⁹⁰

Contained in this description about Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz, translated by Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy, are two terminologies that, initially, appear as "errors" to readers familiar with Hindustani musical nomenclature. These two terms are the author's use of "*rāg*" and "*gat*," which he uses to describe aspects of Hussain Khan's drumming style.⁹¹ Most will know *rāg* (or the Sanskritized, "*rāga*") as the melodic structures of Hindustani music and *gat* as a fixed instrumental composition, these musical forms are not typically associated to the *ḍholak*.⁹²

⁸⁹ Dargah Quli Khan 1989: 93.

⁹⁰ Dargah Quli Khan 1989: 93.

⁹¹ The terms *rāg* and *gat* both appear in the original Farsi version of the *Muraqqa'-i Delhī*. Dargah Quli Khan 1982: 90.

⁹² See Miner 1993.

However, Dargah Quli Khan's usage of *rāg* (which can be translated as "melody" or "melody-type") in this context refers to drumming repertoire, i.e., rhythmic patterns. While we cannot know the true motivations behind this taxonomy, the use of such melodic-oriented language adds weight to the notion of drumming patterns being viewed as forms of stroke-*melodies*.⁹³ Thus, these patterns are "melodies for *ḍholak*," or more broadly stated, "melodies for drums."

While there is no recorded use of the word "*ṭhekā*" prior to the time of Dargah Quli Khan's visit to Delhi, his descriptions of Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz's playing resonate strongly with the rhythmic practices of what we now consider to be *ṭhekā* drumming.⁹⁴ His so-called "*rāgs* on the *ḍholak*" evince the same multiplicity of repertoire that contemporary players in similar musical stations to his maintain. Dargah Quli Khan does not specify which musical genres that Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz performed, but his position as a *ḍholak* player meant that he likely performed across several. Given the association of the *ḍholak* with popular, devotional, and folk music, these genres probably included (but were not limited to) Sufi *qawwālī*, *ḵhyāl* (which would have been present in early eighteenth-century

⁹³ Wolf notes the use of other melodic-based terms in referring to drumming patterns, such as *dhun*, meaning "tune" in Hindi. Wolf 2014: 8.

⁹⁴ The earliest known appearance of "*ṭhekā*" is from the early nineteenth century, so Dargah Quli Khan would not have used such a word to describe the Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz's playing. While the term *paran* is documented to have been used to describe the rhythmic patterns playing on the *pakhāwaj* in the art music genre, *dhruḍpad*, it is not clear how percussionists referred to the rhythmic patterns outside of this type of music. This error was not likely made on account of Dargah Quli Khan's ignorance regarding musical practice, as it is accepted that he was familiar with the fundamentals of Hindustani music and numerous genres of the time (Dargah Quli Khan 1989: xxxi.).

Delhi), and music styles associated to with regional or folk traditions.⁹⁵ Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz's exposure to and involvement performing in multiple music genres help explain some of the weighty claims in his profile regarding his playing repertoire.

One possible explanation behind the author's choice of nomenclature could be an attempt to make a connection between particular rhythmic accompaniment patterns to the performance of specific *rāgs*. I find this highly unlikely, since such a musical pairing would effectively limit an individual *rāg* to a single *tāl*.⁹⁶ Furthermore, I do not believe such parameters of correlating *rāg* and *tāl* would be placed upon the *ḍholak*, on account of the instrument being most associated to non-classical music practices, which maintain looser approaches to the theoretical structures and practices found in classical music.⁹⁷ Most probably, Dargah Quli Khan is attempting to describe the chief repertoire performed on the *ḍholak*: rhythmic patterns of various durations, structures, and performance practice.

The use of *gat* in Khan's account also does not align directly with common designations of the term, which refers to a fixed, instrumental composition.⁹⁸ In a

⁹⁵ Playing across different music genres was commonplace for drummers such as Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz who, despite being of low social and musical status, came to perform in the elite spaces of the Mughal courts. See Schofield (Brown) 2003: 154-175.

⁹⁶ That is to say that all compositions and performances of a particular *rāg* would be in the same rhythmic cycle.

⁹⁷ Manuel 1983: 7. The *ḍholak* was used in classical music at the time, but it was rendered an anathema among connoisseurs on account of its social station and that of its players. See Schofield (Brown) 2003: 134, 155-168.

⁹⁸ By "fixed" I mean that the composition does not entail improvisation.

footnote, the translators clarify that Dargah Quli Khan's usage of *gat* refers to drum strokes that are played on the *dholak*. Given the context of the usage of "*gat*", it seems that a proper contemporary analog would be *bol*; in this case one articulated on the *dholak*. A *gat*, as a compositional form for instruments (mostly stringed lutes), is defined by a strumming pattern, known also as *bol*, that is used to articulate the melody.⁹⁹ By using *gat* to refer to drum strokes on the *dholak*, Dargah Quli Khan could be correlating a pattern of drum strokes (*bol*) to the *bol* strumming pattern (i.e., rhythm) of an instrumental composition. In such a model, the rhythmic pattern played on the *dholak* would imitate and follow the rhythm that is articulated by the *bol* on the melodic instrument. I find this also unlikely, given the *dholak* player's boasts of playing endlessly for six months and the limited number of *gats* played in instrumental music.¹⁰⁰ The sensitivity in which Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz "switches a *gat*" suggests strongly that he is referring to individual *bol* on the *dholak*, which can be done through the slightest adjustment to one's playing.

Despite this ambiguous language, several key points about drumming from this time can be ascertained from Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz's insightful biography. First, it is clear that a multiplicity of repertoire (whatever they may be) was a key component of drumming during Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz's time. His boast of a

⁹⁹ Miner 1993: 93. *Gats* are also part of the repertoire of contemporary solo tabla performance, in which they refer to an array of composition forms influenced by dance and instrumental music. Stewart 1974: 200.

¹⁰⁰ For more on the different styles of *gats* as they are played on the *sitār* and *sarod*, see Miner 1993: 180-232.

playing repertory so extensive that he can play different "*rāgs*" for six months and not repeat himself is indicative of the central component in playing contemporary *ṭhekās*: extensive variation. While the use of variation in this repertoire is not explicitly mentioned, it is heavily implied when Dargah Quli Khan says the drummer "*switches a gat...*" This parallels my own findings among drummers, who often did not refer to embellishments of a respective *ṭhekā* as individually conceived variations that could be isolated from the "original" composition, but rather considered them to be simply a part of playing *ṭhekā*. Though certain claims may be saturated with hyperbole, the description of the *dholak* player speaks to the same value of rich repertoire that can unfurl over long periods of time that I encountered in the drumming styles upon which my research focused. Without a doubt, this extensive repertory can be explained by his position as a *dholak* player who performed across numerous music genres.

Second, Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz's extensive repertoire is underscored by his notion of being capable of playing for an exceedingly long duration. Having such a mindset mirrors my own observations of non-classical drummers, whose occupations also regularly required long durations (several hours and more) of continuous playing. Playing *ṭhekā* in popular, devotional, and folk genres is a task that regularly requires immense stamina, as programs involving playing *ṭhekās* as rhythmic accompaniment can range from spanning several hours over the course of a single night, to events that entail several consecutive days of long performances

(but not nearly six months). One primary factor regarding the composition of a *ṭhekā* is the intended speed at which it is to be played (see below). *Ṭhekās* meant to be played at medium to fast tempos (120 beats per minute (bpm) and above, roughly) utilize drumming performance practices that favor physical economies of playing, which facilitate drummers playing them ceaselessly and for very long durations.¹⁰¹ I highlight the physical economies of *ṭhekās* and their stroke-melodies before each musical analysis in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five.

Lastly, while the nomenclature Dargah Quli Khan uses to describe elements of the Dholak Nawaz's playing do not correspond to contemporary terminology, Dargah Quli Khan's use of melodic-related terms—*rāg* and *gat*—to describe aspects of drumming offer a possible cypher into how these concepts were imagined. Little is known about drumming nomenclature and what drummers actually played before writers in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to document their practices (Khan 1875 and Imam 1925 being two of the more well-known and studied examples). Given Dargah Quli Khan's familiarity with Hindustani musical practice at the time, one can assume these terms to be analogs to the rhythmic concepts he was trying to describe. Reading them as such, Dargah Quli Khan's usage of *rāg* and *gat* attributes *ipso facto* numerous possible compositional and improvisational

¹⁰¹ This point is exacerbated by the physicality required to play the *dholak*.

practices for drumming patterns and styles such as those of Hussain Khan Dholak Nawaz.

Notation key for *ḍholak*, *dohol*, and tabla

In the following sections and chapters I refer to rhythmic patterns through a system of graphic notation that I developed for this dissertation. While South Asian music has largely remained an oral tradition, various notation systems have been in development since at least the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰² Early written notation systems were influenced by colonial writers of Indian music, who considered notation as one of three central prerequisites for it to be a "classical" tradition (the other two requirements being religiosity and a positioning as a "national" music).¹⁰³ Notation has since become a widely used and adaptable practice among musicians and scholars for representing melody and rhythm in South Asian music.

To notate *ṭhekās* as they are played on the tabla, *ḍholak*, as well as the *dohol*, I use a form of notation adapted from Gibb Schreffler's *ḍhol* notation, which is based on a time unit box system. I have added and modified symbols from Schreffler's notation system to fit better the performance practices of these

¹⁰² By "notation systems" I mean attempts at clarifying representations of melodic and rhythmic to include more detail and accuracy through the use of graphic and phonic devices. *Sargam* syllables and *bols* for drums have been written for much longer. A thorough overview of notation—and especially drumming notation—can be found in Kippen 2006: 51-74.

¹⁰³ Bakhle 2005: 52.

instruments. I have also referenced Rebecca Stewart's classification of *ḍholak* drum strokes to assist the reader.

While I recognize there is no "objective" hearing in musical transcription (Jairazbhoy 1977), the goal of my notation is to express musical events—drum strokes—as they occur relatively in musical time. Qualified assessments of some of the drum strokes, such as those on the *bāyān* with various types of inflection (𑂔 and 𑂕, for example) I make based on my familiarity with each player's playing styles. Furthermore, for the examples in Chapters 2 and 3 my notations are informed from video footage I have of these performances. All of these transcriptions are informed by my own extensive immersion into the social and musical life of the musical contacts with whom I associated; my time spent among them included several hours of practice on the rhythmic patterns that I notate. Specifically, I show how *wazn* operates within specific rhythmic patterns, and how this weighted accent is established and subsequently altered by musicians to accentuate the other music-making processes.

It became apparent to me through my experiences learning folk drumming that the labor of clarifying a *ṭhekā*'s rhythmic duration is split between a drummer's hands, which correspond to either different drums (such as on the *tabla*) or the playing surfaces on opposing sides of a barrel-shaped drum (such as on the *ḍholak* and *dohol*). In the performance practice of these instruments, each drum maintains

a higher-pitched side or drum and a lower-pitched side or drum.¹⁰⁴ The higher-pitch drum or side of the drum is known as *dāyān* among Hindi and Urdu speaking musicians.¹⁰⁵ *Dāyān* translates to "right" in the directional sense, which is a reference to being played with a person's dominant hand (more often the right hand). Among Farsi and Pashto speaking drummers this side of the drum or drums is known as *dzīr*, which actually translates as "lower" or "under."¹⁰⁶ The bass drum or bass side is called *bāyān* (meaning "left") among Hindi and Urdu speaking musicians, while among Farsi and Pashto speaking drummers it is called *bam*, meaning "roof" or ceiling."

The notation I use contains three lines of musical information aligned vertically: the upper line of boxes represents strokes as they are played on the *dāyān* on the *ḍholak* or the *dzīr* on the *dohol*, while the middle line of boxes represents strokes as they are played on the lower pitched drum head, the *bāyān* or *bam*. The lower line references aspects of each *ṭhekā*'s standardized notation, in

¹⁰⁴ In drums with a single drum skin, like the *zerbaghali* (a goblet-shaped drum played in Afghan music) and *daf*, the two different registers of pitch can be created by playing closer to the center of the skin's surface (to create lower pitches) or by playing closer to the edge of the skin's surface (to create higher pitches).

¹⁰⁵ In context of the *tabla*, this drum is also called the *tabla* (Hindi/Urdu) or *kāṭhī* (Pashto).

¹⁰⁶ One possible explanation for this particular usage "lower" comes from string instruments, where the higher-pitched string is situated on the bottom in its playing position. As well, on the *dohol*, the *dzīr* side is positioned downwards in relation to the *bam* side, which also accounts for the translation of *bam*. Additionally, it was common for drummers in Afghanistan to use the Hindi/Urdu nomenclature for the *tabla*, given that many of them had lived in Pakistan for several years while in exile and were fluent in Urdu.

particular the start (*sam*) and its subsequent rhythmic subdivisions. At times I include spoken syllables associated with these patterns.

Dāyān/dzīr strokes



⊙ = A stroke played by cupping the hand (fingers together) and striking the playing surface of the drum in the center of the drum skin. See Figure 1.1 (Similar to "Tak" or Cc in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)

Figure 1.1. "Tak".



⊖ = A stroke played with the middle, ring, and pinky fingers on the edge of the drum skin, while turning the wrist in an inward (clockwise) motion, towards the playing surface of the drum. See Figure 1.2. ("Tā" or Ao/Bo in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)

Figure 1.2. "Tā".

⊖ = On the *ḍholak*, this stroke is played with the index finger on the edge of the drum skin, while turning the wrist in an outward (counter clockwise) motion, away from the playing surface of the drum. See Figure 1.3. (Similar to "Nā" or Ao in Rebecca Stewart's notation.) On the *tabla*, this stroke is played in a similar fashion, but the tip of the ring finger is placed on the edge of the *syāhī*. See Figure 1.4. (Also similar to "Nā" or Ao in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)



Figure 1.3. "Na" (left).



Figure 1.4. "Na" (above).



Figure 1.5. "Ti".

⊙ = A stroke played with the middle, ring, and pinky fingers and leaving them on the drum skin, while turning the wrist in an inward (clockwise) motion, towards the playing surface of the drum. See Figure 1.5. ("Ti" or Dc in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)



☉ = A stroke played by striking the index finger and leaving it on the drum skin, while turning the wrist in an outward (counter clockwise) motion, away from the playing surface of the drum. See Figure 1.6. ("Ṭa" or Dc in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)

Figure 1.6. "Ṭa".



☉ = A stroke played by knocking the wooden shell of the *dholak* with one's thumb (often while wearing a metal ring) by turning the wrist in an outward (counter clockwise) motion, away from the playing surface of the drum. See Figure 1.7.

Figure 1.7. (Unnamed *bol*).

Tabla-specific *dāyān bols*

⁵⁴³² = A stroke played by brushing the fingers of the *dāyān*-playing hand against the drum skin's surface in quick succession, starting with the pinky finger and ending with the index finger. The first half of the common tabla *bol*, "Treke." See Figures 1.14 and 1.15.



Figure 1.8. "Tre" (before).



Figure 1.9. "Tre" (after).



Figure 1.10. "Tin".

⊙ = A stroke played by striking the *lav* (area between the *kinār* and *syāhī*) of the drum skin with the index finger, while resting the tip of ring finger on the edge of the *syāhī*. See Figure 1.10. ("Ti[n] or Bo in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)



Figure 1.11. "Tūn".

○ = A stroke played by striking the edge of the *syāhī* of the *dāyān* with the index finger while leaving no fingers resting on the drum skin's surface. See Figure 1.11. ("Dīn", "Tū[n]", or Co in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)

Bāyān/Bam Bol-s



Figure 1.12. "Ge".

⊗ = A stroke of full intensity. Within the duration of a *ṭhekā*, this stroke represents the point of primary rhythmic articulation, which often (but not necessarily always) coincides with the downbeat of the rhythmic cycle. This stroke can be played by striking the drum skin using an open-palm, or it can be played while resting the base of one's palm against the drum skin surface and playing with the fingertips. See Figure 1.12. (Similar to "Ge" or Bo in Rebecca Stewart's notation, illus. 16-17.)



↻ = A stroke of waning intensity. This stroke is played by striking the *bāyāñ* side of the drum, and through the lessening of pressure applied to the drum skin by one's wrist. See Figure 1.13. (Similar to "Ga" or Bc in Rebecca Stewart's notation, illus. 18-19.)

Figure 1.13. "Ga".



↻ = A stroke of increasing intensity. Similar to full intensity strokes, this stroke is also played by striking the drum skin using an open-palm or while resting the base of one's palm against the drum skin surface and playing with the fingertips. What differentiates the articulation of a stroke of building intensity is less wrist pressure applied to the drum skin in relation to those in a full intensity stroke. See Figure 1.14.

Figure 1.14. "Ge".

(Similar to "Ge" or Bo in Rebecca Stewart's notation, illus. 15.)



● = A stroke that is played with one's palm pressed against the drum skin but without applying pressure as to raise the pitch of the drum. See Figure 1.15.

(Similar to "Ga" or Bc in Rebecca Stewart's notation, illus. 18-19.)

Figure 1.15. "Ga".

● = A *bol* played on the *bāyāñ* using an open-palm slap against the drum skin's surface, after which the fingers of the hand are removed from the head, allowing it to reverberate sound. See Figure 1.12. (Similar to "Ge" or Bo in Rebecca Stewart's notation, not pictured.)



X = A non-resonant stroke. This stroke is played by contacting the drum skin with the entirety of one's open palm and leaving the hand in contact with the skin. See Figure 1.16. (Similar to "Ka" or Dc in Rebecca Stewart's notation.)

Figure 1.16. "Ka".

x = A non-resonant stroke of lesser intensity. This stroke is played by gently contacting the drum skin with the fingertips and leaving them in contact with the skin. See Figure 1.16.

Quantifying and Qualifying Popular, Devotional, and Folk *ṭhekās*

In their role as a rhythmic accompaniment, *ṭhekās* articulate a recognizable rhythmic duration amid unrelenting repetition. In her work on rhythm on Indian music, Subhadra Chaudhary acknowledges elements of performance practice that are central to the composition of *ṭhekās*:

...in *avanaddha* (percussion instruments covered with a skin), taking into consideration the *need for clarity* in each recurrence of a fixed time span, the *convenience and the special nature of playing*, it is necessary that the strokes (of the drum) should be related to a sequence of specific syllables. The organisation of the specific strokes and the specific syllables in the framework of the *tāla mātrās* (rhythmic cycles) is the modern '*ṭhekā*'.¹⁰⁷ [emphasis added]

The various names applied to *ṭhekā* playing drums (see above) refer to a binary that, in some cases (and in some other cases), infer to a high and low frequency: upper and lower (albeit reversed) in Pashto and Farsi, left-hand and right-hand (Hindi/Urdu), male and female (Panjabi)¹⁰⁸. Put differently, what all these naming conventions reference is the pitch register in the two sides of the drum or the drums themselves: low and high. *ṭhekā* is a type of composition that utilizes an

¹⁰⁷ Chaudhary 1998: 148.

¹⁰⁸ Gibb Schreffler, personal communication, November 16, 2018.

oscillation between low and high pitch, which, in the case of the double-sided or paired drums, is always named as such.¹⁰⁹ As a *ṭhekā* is being played, the two articulations produced by each individual drum/sides of the drum—low and high—act independently of each other, and maintain their own individual functions within the larger process of articulating a rhythmic duration. To explain this dichotomy of rhythmic roles in *ṭhekā* playing I will analyze a series of *ṭhekās* I learned during my fieldwork among *qawwālī* musicians. These rhythmic patterns were the first I learned during my research on non-classical drumming, and they were identified by my teachers to be the most basic and un-embellished manners of playing these *ṭhekās*.

Quantifying Rhythm Pulse in a *Ṭhekā*: the *Dāyān* or *Dzīr*

Ṭhekās are articulated through two voices: an "upper" and a "lower." These voices serve specific purposes in quantifying and qualifying rhythm. By "quantifying rhythm," I refer to the articulation of a fixed quantitative duration of beats that, when repeated, forms a rhythmic cycle. In the case of the non-classical music genres of focus in this dissertation, this is six, seven, or eight beats. Quantifying rhythm in a *ṭhekā* is articulated through a recurring pattern on the *dāyān/dzīr* side of the drum.

¹⁰⁹ This oscillation is thought to be an influence from the *naqqāra*, a pair of kettle drums played with sticks. Stewart 1974: 22-73.

For "qualifying rhythm," I refer to the musical accents—a rhythmic pattern's *vazn*—played on the *bāyān/bam* drum that index a particular music style or aesthetic.

The patterns played on the *dāyān/dzīr* help establish the primary rhythmic subdivision for a given *ṭhekā*, which is either based in multiples of two, three, or a combination of both (as in the case of seven beat patterns). This is accomplished by playing short, repeating patterns on the *dāyān/dzīr* that are typically one-half of a *ṭhekā*'s full metric duration.¹¹⁰ Therefore, in an eight-beat *ṭhekā*, the *dāyān/dzīr* patterns will consist of four beats. Within the duration of the rhythmic cycle this pattern will be played twice to total eight beats. In a six beat *ṭhekā*, these patterns consist of three beats, which are again played twice in the cycle's entirety. An example of a common eight-beat *ṭhekā* (called *keherwā*) as it is played on the *ḍholak* is as follows:¹¹¹

Keherwā

⊙	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊙	⊖	⊖	⊖
⊗		↻	x			↻	
(X)				(0)			

Figure 1.17. *Keherwā ṭhekā* for *ḍholak*.

In the above *keherwā ṭhekā* (and in all other notations), the upper line represents the drum strokes of the *dāyān/dzīr*; the bottom line indicates the *bāyān/bam* (discussed in the next section). Its playing pattern begins with a stroke played with the whole hand in the middle of the drum skin, ⊙, and is followed by

¹¹⁰ The exception to this is with seven beat *ṭhekās*, which are discussed in Chapter Five.

¹¹¹ A complete guide to the notation system used in this dissertation see below.

three strokes played on the edge of the drum skin with the index finger, ⊖. This group of four strokes is repeated twice within the duration of this *ṭhekā*, which strongly implies a sense of duple (based in multiples of two) subdivision.

Furthermore, this sense of duple-based rhythmic subdivision is amplified because of the timbres of these drum strokes. The initial stroke of this pattern, ⊕, maintains a greater acoustic accent than compared to the three strokes that follow it, further implying *keherwā*'s duple-based feel.

A similar type of compositional approach in the *dāyān/dzīr* occurs in the context of *dādrā*, a common six-beat folk *ṭhekā*:

Dādrā

⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊖
⊗	↻			↻	
(X)			(0)		

Figure 1.18. *Dādrā ṭhekā* for *ḍholak*.

In the above *dādrā ṭhekā*, the playing pattern of the *dāyān/dzīr* consists of a repeated pattern of three drum strokes. Similar to the *keherwā ṭhekā* in Figure 1.17, this repeated pattern of three strokes begins with a stroke in the middle of the drum skin, ⊕. In *dādrā*, this stroke is followed by only two strokes, which are again played on the edge of the drum skin, ⊖. When this grouping of three is repeated twice, it produces a sense of triple (based in multiples of three) subdivision, in contrast to *keherwā*'s duple subdivision. The timbres of the drum strokes again aid to galvanize the triple-based feel characteristic of *dādrā*.

Qualifying Rhythm in a *Ṭhekā*: the *Bāyān* or *Bam*

Qualifying rhythm—producing the articulations of *wazn* that form the hierarchies of emphasis and accent of a *ṭhekā*—is done by the *bāyān/bam* side of the drum. In duple- and triple-based *ṭhekās* like *keherwā* and *dādrā*, these articulations are centered around the starting point of the *ṭhekā*: it's *sam*, or beginning.

Bāyān/bam voicings effectively anticipate, articulate, and resolve the downbeat of the rhythmic cycle. When compared to the *dāyān/dzīr*, the *bāyān/bam* side maintains a greater acoustic capacity for creating contrast in volume in performance, including the use of glissandi (called *gamak* or *gissa*), which can be used to articulate more clearly a *ṭhekā*'s implied structure.¹¹² Revisiting the *keherwā ṭhekā* from above, this orientation around the *sam* by *bāyān/bam* strokes can be seen:

Keherwā

⊙	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊙	⊖	⊖	⊖
⊗		↻	x			↻	
(X)				(0)			

Figure 1.17. *Keherwā ṭhekā* for *ḍholak*.

The first beat of the rhythmic cycle is articulated with a stroke of full intensity (read volume) on the *bāyān/bam*, ⊗. The intensity of this stroke—both its volume and pitch—is resolved by a subsequent stroke on the third beat, ↻, during which a drummer will relax the pressure they are applying to the drum skin's surface with

¹¹² This is on account of the *bāyān/bam* drum skin surface being larger in diameter than the *dāyān/dzīr* skin surface as well as it being kept less taugth and treated with more tuning paste.

their palm (the downward arrow implies this lowering of pitch). The sound from this resolution stroke is effectively muted on the fourth beat, x. Finally, in anticipation of the subsequent repetition of the cycle, a stroke is played on the *bāyāñ/bam* on the seventh beat that serves to anticipate the ensuing starting beat, $\hat{\text{A}}$.¹¹³ The location of these strokes on the *bāyāñ/bam* within the context of the rhythmic cycle helps reify further the feeling of duple subdivision characteristic of *keherwā*.

In the above example of *dādrā* this same pattern of anticipation, articulation, and resolution of a *ṭhekā*'s start is also present:

Dādrā

⊙	⊖	⊖	⊙	⊖	⊖
⊗	$\hat{\text{A}}$			$\hat{\text{A}}$	
(X)			(0)		

Figure 1.18. *Dādrā ṭhekā* for *dholak*.

The first beat of this rhythmic pattern is again articulated with a stroke of full intensity on the *bāyāñ/bam*, ⊗, which is immediately resolved on the second beat of the *ṭhekā*. Afterwards, the ensuing repeat of this *ṭhekā* is anticipated by another stroke on the *bāyāñ/bam* on the fifth beat, $\hat{\text{A}}$.

¹¹³ Peter Manuel has identified this anticipatory stroke on the *bāyāñ/bam* as a key feature in *ṭhekās* played in the light-classical genre, *ṭhumrī*. See Manuel 1986:

Music Without *Ṭhekā*: *Dhrupad*, the *Pakhāwaj*, and *Paran*

While *ṭhekā* playing dominates the performance practices of rhythmic accompaniment in Hindustani music genres, it is not as dominant in South Asian drumming. Richard Wolf's research has discussed a variety of non-*ṭhekā* rhythmic patterns that do not fit the metric structures of *tāl* and how these come to be named. Patterns such as *vājā* (Saraiki) and *bājā* (Hindu/Urdu), are cognates for "musical instrument," and, while indexing other performing instruments or ensemble members, may implicate the drumming patterns, melodies, and contexts of a particular pattern's performance.¹¹⁴ Other patterns reference physical movement and motion, such as *cāl* (from *calnā*, Hindi meaning "to walk"), which implies the movement and cadence of the human body.¹¹⁵ The South Indian *mēlam* (from Sanskrit *mil* meaning "join, assemble") can reference one or more drums, and to a larger ensemble of numerous instruments in which an ensemble plays a composite pattern based off a rhythmic figure established by a lead player.¹¹⁶ In Hindustani classical music, one of the most common genres in which *ṭhekā* are not played is *dhrupad*.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Wolf 2014: 66.

¹¹⁵ Wolf 2014: 66. See also Neuman (forthcoming): 265-272. *Cāl* is also used in Panjabi drumming to refer to drum variations played between transitions of a dance, or to the actions of dancers as they progress from movement to movement. Schreffler 2002: 87.

¹¹⁶ Wolf 2014: 68-74. See also Lindsey 2013.

¹¹⁷ *Ṭhekā* are also not played in, among other South Asian genres, Karnatik music. See also Richard Widdess's discussion of heterometric music practices in South Asia in Widdess 2019.

Rhythm in *dhrupad* is expressed in two ways. Primarily, it is shown through gesture: clapping and waving. Secondly, rhythm is articulated on the *pakhāwaj*, a barrel-shaped drum, upon which a drummer plays a rhythmic pattern called a *paran*.¹¹⁸ In contrast to *ṭhekās*, *parans* do not articulate rhythm through the repetition of rhythmic emphasis and accent, *wazn*. Rather, a *paran* is a rhythmic pattern that aims to imitate the improvisations of the vocal or instrumental soloist.¹¹⁹ Ergo, the orientation of the *paran* is the poetry of the performance and the performance practices of the vocalist; not to outline the structure of a respective *tāl*.¹²⁰ While they are not fixed compositional forms, *parans* are built of a repertoire of patterns particular to the performance practices of the *pakhāwaj*.¹²¹ Indeed, it is unlikely that any two rhythmic cycles of a *dhrupad* performance are played the same on the *pakhāwaj*.

The rhythmic cycles of *dhrupad* are structured fundamentally different than the *tāls* and *ṭhekās* of focus in this dissertation. *Dhrupad* rhythmic cycles are thought to be related to Sanskrit-derived poetry and, depending on their orientation, are additive (pertaining to length and duration) or quantitative (composition-

¹¹⁸ Barrel-shaped drums such as the *pakhāwaj* are among the oldest instrument types in India. Though there are visual representations of similar drums dating from the first century BCE, the name, *pakhāwaj*, as well as the instrument's current construction are from the fifteenth century onwards. Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 23-24 and Kippen 2006: 8.

¹¹⁹ Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 9.

¹²⁰ Stewart 1974: 87.

¹²¹ While there are codified *ṭhekās* for *dhrupad tāls*, these particular patterns are only occasionally referenced during a performance. Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 9. For more on the performance practices of the *pakhāwaj* see Mistry 1999: 42-152.

oriented).¹²² These rhythmic systems are formed by long (L) and short (S) syllables, with long syllables being twice the duration of the short syllables.¹²³ These orientations give many *dhrupad tāls* an asymmetrical quality, which is marked by their agogic accents.¹²⁴ Kippen's notation of *dhrupad tāls* illustrates this point succinctly.¹²⁵

Sūltāl (ten counts)

L				S		L			
X		0		2		3		0	
Dhā	Dhā	Din	Tā	KiṬa	Dhā	TiṬe	KaTā	GaDī	GeNa

Cautāl (twelve counts)

L				L				S		S	
X		0		2		0		3		4	
Dhā	Dhā	Din	Tā	KiṬa	Dhā	Din	Tā	TiṬe	KaTā	GaDī	GeNa

Tīvrā (seven counts)

L		S	L		L	
X			2		3	
Dhā	Din	Tā	TiṬe	KaTā	GaDī	GeNa

(Horī-) Dhammār (fourteen counts)¹²⁶

Kat	Dhit	Ṭa	Dhit	Ṭa	Dhā	–	Kat	Tit	Ṭa	Tit	Ṭa	Tā	–
X					2		0			3			

Figure 1.19. Comparison of the structures of *sūltāl*, *cautāl*, *tīvrā*, and *dhammār*. (from Kippen 2001: 3)

¹²² Stewart 1974: 93-94

¹²³ The use of "syllables" here refers to the agogic organization of Sanskrit prosody, about which *pakhāwaj tāls* are believed to be based. Kippen 2001: 4.

¹²⁴ Clayton 2000: 52.

¹²⁵ Kippen 2001: 3.

¹²⁶ Kippen, in his article, gives *dhammār* another clapping pattern that shows a more symmetrical division of counts within the *tāl*. I have omitted adding this additional clapping pattern to avoid confusion and on account of the given pattern being the accepted contemporary performance practice. Kippen 2001: 3.

In the above *bol* patterns, defining characteristics about *dhrupad tāls* can be seen. First, their asymmetrical organization of counts distinguish them from the rhythmic structures of tabla *tāls*, which maintain degrees of symmetry regarding the groupings of beats as per their organization. This symmetry can be observed between the structures of *sūltāl* and *jhaptāl*, the ten beat rhythmic cycles of *dhrupad* and *ḳhyāl*, respectively (Figure 1.20).

Sūltāl

Dhā	Dhā	Din	Tā	Kiṭa	Dhā	Tiṭe	KaTā	GaDī	GeNa
X		0		2		3		0	

Jhaptāl

Dhin	Na	Dhin	Dhin	Na	Thin	Na	Dhin	Dhin	Na
X		2			0		3		

Figure 1.20. Comparison of *sūltāl* and *jhaptāl bol* patterns.

In contrast to *sūltāl*, *jhaptāl*'s rhythmic structure is implied from the stresses and emphases (*wazn*) its respective *ṭhekā* implies. These points of stress and emphasis divide the *jhaptāl ṭhekā* on two primary levels of division: the first being beat six—the exact middle point in the cycle's rhythmic duration, marked on the second line by "0" (known as *ḳhālī*, to be discussed later)—and the other being beats three, six, and eight, which produce the two-three-two-three subdivision of *jhaptāl*.¹²⁷

As scholars have shown,¹²⁸ this hierarchical rhythmic structure is characteristic among other classical (non-*dhrupad*), light-classical, popular,

¹²⁷ Martin Clayton diagrams the hierarchies of stress and emphasis for *jhaptāl* on Clayton 2000: 47.

¹²⁸ Kippen 2001: 8-12, Stewart 1974: 94-101, Clayton 2000: and Manuel 1983.

devotional, and folk music genres *tāls*, whose counts are regularly grouped in equal or proportional amounts.¹²⁹ This symmetry, I believe, is derived from a cohesiveness of rhythmic patterns that drummers play to facilitate the faster performance speeds (approximately 120bpm and greater) associated with non-classical music, though including *ḳhyāl*. In contrast, *dhrupad* compositions are more often performed in slow tempos (varies, but generally slower than 100bpm). Since *dhrupad tāls* are not based on a fixed structure articulated by an internal hierarchy of beats (as tabla *tāls* are), their rhythmic accompaniment exhibits a degree of independence from the rhythmic structure that is not present in *ṭhekā* drumming. This independence allows for drummers in *dhrupad* to improvise and fashion *paran* in close relation to the melodic movements and improvisations of the soloist. As Sanyal and Widdess write, it is because of the primary organization of rhythm through hand gesture in *dhrupad* that allows the "rhythmic freedom of the *pakhāwaj* from the constraints of *ṭhekā*."¹³⁰ I would agree that a *ṭhekā* can be considered a form of "constraint," for amid all the variations that drummers play, the musical duration of a *ṭhekā* provides only a finite space for improvisation and elaboration.

Other distinguishing aspects of *dhrupad* rhythmic cycles include the additive quality of their agogic organization. The *bol* patterns of *sūltāl*, *cautāl*, and *tīvrā* notated above have been deliberately positioned and aligned to show that *cautāl*'s

¹²⁹ This symmetry typically only applies to *tāls* of even number counts, as odd number *tāls* maintain a variety of approaches regarding their subdivisions.

¹³⁰ Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 10.

bol pattern is essentially that of *sūltāl*, but with an added two counts (counts seven and eight), and that *tīvrā* mirrors the final seven counts of *cautāl*.¹³¹ *Dhammār* maintains an organization and structure unique from the other *tāls* and is distinguished by groups of counts all disproportionate from each other. Its fourteen counts are divided into of four groups, all of which are a different number of counts: five-two-three-four. Furthermore, the *bol* patterns for *sūltāl*, *cautāl*, and *tīvrā*¹³² all conclude with the *bol*, Tiṭe KaTā GaDī GeNa, a standard cadential *bol* played on the *pakhāwaj*.¹³³ While the use of cadential *bol* patterns is not unique to *dhrupad*, these patterns—whether a single *bol* such as Tiṭe KaTā GaDī GeNa or a more complex compositions such as a *tīhāi*—maintain an extra importance in *dhrupad* performance. Such cadential *bol* patterns and compositions are one of the few (if not the only) times in which drumming in *dhrupad* is oriented directly in relation to the *tāl* structure. The majority of the time during a performance a drummer fashions their rhythmic patterns around the soloist. Cadential figures are used to coincide with and articulate the first beat of the rhythmic cycle, *sam*, on account of this critical musical marker not being identifiable through hierarchies of stress and accent implied by a repeating pattern such as a *ṭhekā*.

¹³¹ Or conversely, *cautāl* and *sūltāl* can be seen as extensions of the *tīvrā bol* pattern.

¹³² The concept for these *dhrupad* "*ṭhekās*" for the *pakhāwaj* has been borrowed in recent times. The *bol* patterns for the notated *dhrupad tāls* are adaptations of a short *paran* that have become fixed, most likely through habit and the increasing use of written notation. Kippen 2001: 2-3.

¹³³ The *bol* patterns for these *dhrupad tāls* are largely symbolic and are not what drummers actually play. Kippen 2006: 80.

Classification of Popular and Devotional *Ṭhekās*

The *ṭhekās* that I observed and learned during my fieldwork in North and West India and Afghanistan can be grouped into three categories: duple-based, triple-based, and combination *ṭhekās*. I base these categories on the manner in which a *ṭhekā*'s organization is implied and enforced through its particular hierarchies of stress and accent. Below is an overview of these categories of *ṭhekā*, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five.

Duple-Based *Ṭhekās*

Duple-based *ṭhekās* include those in which rhythmic counts are organized into groups of four or eight. The most common duple-based *ṭhekā* I encountered in my fieldwork in North and West India was referred to as *keherwā*. The *ṭhekā* for *keherwā* (notated below in the top of figure 1.21) first appears in the *Sarmāyā-i 'Ishrat*, written in 1869 by Sadiq Ali Khan.¹³⁴ *Keherwā* likely takes its name from a dance of the same name, which was a common feature for dance performances in *mehfils* during the aristocratic Mughal era. In Afghanistan, drummers with whom I interacted mentioned playing *keherwā* in light-classical and popular music genres, namely *ghazal* and Hindi film music. Additionally, two other regional-specific *ṭhekās*

¹³⁴ Khan 1875: 140.

are used in Pashtun and Afghan *maḥali* music: *giddhā*¹³⁵, an eight beat *tāl*, and *qataghani* (also spelled *katakhani*), a four beat *tāl*. The relative hierarchies of stress and emphasis in duple-based *ṭhekās* such as *keherwā* are:¹³⁶

Keherwā

Dha	Ge	Na	Ti	Na	Ka	Dhi	Na
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
●		●		●		●	
●				●			
●							

Figure 1.21. Hierarchies of stress and emphasis for *keherwā*.

Triple-Based *Ṭhekās*

Triple-based *ṭhekās* are those that contain six rhythmic counts. The most common triple-based *ṭhekā* that I encountered while doing fieldwork in northern India was *dādrā*. *Dādrā* (also called *dādrā tāl*) takes its name from a genre of vocal performance similar to, but "lighter" than the light-classical genre, *ṭhumrī*.¹³⁷ Its *ṭhekā* was first notated in Wajid Ali Shah's *Saut al-Mubarak*, written in 1852-3.¹³⁸

While the pattern that Wajid Ali Shah notates bears some semblance to how the *tāl* is known in contemporary playing, the *bol* pattern that we identify today as the

¹³⁵ In the eastern Punjab region of Malwa, *giddhā* is a style of unorganized dance accompanying renderings of folk poetry. Schreffler 2002: 133-143.

¹³⁶ To show the relative hierarchies of stress and emphasis in *tāl* I utilize Lerdahl and Jackendoff's system of metric notation, which was used by Martin Clayton in his comprehensive work on *tāl* (Clayton 2000). In this system, two or more simultaneous levels of rhythmic pulsation interact with each other to produce relatively strong and weak beats. Points of the *ṭhekā* that maintain numerous levels of pulsation, represented in the above diagrams by a dot, are structurally stronger than those with fewer dots. "Strong" in this sense referring to structural importance, not necessarily a difference in volume at which they are played. See Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983.

¹³⁷ Manuel 1989: 153-159.

¹³⁸ James Kippen, personal communication. January 2020.

dādrā ṭhekā (top of Figure 1.22) appears almost two decades later in the *Sarmāyā-i 'Ishrat*.¹³⁹ *Dādrā* is also played extensively in the traditional music of Afghanistan, and includes a variety of regional variants of the *tāl*, including *aushāri*, a six-beat rhythmic pattern played in Herati music, and *tingla*, a style played in Pashtun music. For *dādrā*, the hierarchies of stress and emphasis are:

Dādrā

Dha	Dhin	Na	Dha	Thin	Na
●	●	●	●	●	●
●			●		
●					

Figure 1.22. Hierarchies of stress and emphasis for *dādrā*.

Combination *ṭhekās*

Combination *ṭhekās* are structured from groups of both duple- and triple-quantities. For the purposes of this dissertation, combination *ṭhekās* include the seven-beat *tāls*, *mughali* and *Pashto tāl*. *Mughali* remains a regionally specific *tāl* used in Afghan and Pashtun traditional music, while *Pashto tāl* is used commonly in *ghazal* music. Both of these rhythmic cycles are comprised of groupings of both two and three beats. Their subdivisions, as implied by the hierarchies of stress and accent from their respective *ṭhekās*, articulate periods of both duple value (two or four counts) and triple value (three counts). Rhythmic hierarchies in combination *ṭhekās* are generally specific on a case-by-case basis, given that most combination *ṭhekās* are odd-number duration *tāls*, which do not divide evenly as do even-number

¹³⁹ Khan 1875: 133.

tāls like *keherwā* and *dādrā*. Rather, as I show in Chapter Five, the manner of playing particular seven beat drumming patterns in Pashtun music has implications for the performance practice of contemporary seven beat *tāls* found in Hindustani music.

Tempo Considerations in *ṭhekā* Composition

A primary concern factored into a *ṭhekā*'s composition is the speed at which it is to be played. In Hindustani music, three relative speed classifications are recognized. These classifications are slow speed (*vilambit*, <80bpm), medium-fast speed (*madhya*, 80-160bpm), and fast speed (*drut* as well as *ati-drut*, which are faster than 160bpm).¹⁴⁰ Such different levels of playing tempo were identified by all of my interlocutors, and was a major consideration in how they explained the concept of *ṭhekā* to me. When taking performance speed into account, the graphs of hierarchies of stress and emphasis above for duple- and triple-based *ṭhekās* (Figures 1.21 and 1.22, respectively) show that different rates of rhythmic pulse are realized in relation to the speeds at which they are played. In faster tempos, the pulse rate of these *ṭhekās* becomes more apparent at those points in the *ṭhekā* that have the most dots under a given *bol*. For slower tempos, the rate of rhythmic pulse extends to those *bol*s under which there are fewer (one) dot. The majority of the *ṭhekās* that

¹⁴⁰ These three classifications of speed are commonplace among both writers and practitioners of Hindustani music, though their exact terminologies may differ. The range of speeds given is an approximation.

I analyze in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five are played in medium-fast tempos, or *madhya lāy* (speed).

Clarification of Rhythmic Musical Terms Used in Analysis

Analyzing and discussing *ṭhekās* as they are played in popular, devotional, and folk music genres present several complications related to musical nomenclature. The contemporary Hindustani rhythmic language (*bol*) has become particular to the tabla and does not extend itself directly to the performance practices of other drums upon which *ṭhekā* are played. Also, as I observed throughout my fieldwork studying with various music making communities and families, musical terms can assume a wide array of meanings across drummers of different genres and regions. One term in particular that maintained a variety of definitions was *bol*, which I discuss in the following section.

Bol Notation, Recitation, and Articulation

The use of *bols* in musical training is a regular practice in contemporary Hindustani music.¹⁴¹ My instruction on the tabla, whether it was in South India, North India, Afghanistan, or the San Francisco Bay Area, was conducted through the use of *bols*. *Bol*, which comes from the Hindi/Urdu "*bolnā*" meaning "to speak", is a

¹⁴¹ The recitation of *bols* also occurs in some performance contexts, such as solo tabla performances.

technique of musical instruction modelled originally on the human voice, but has been adapted across musical genres and instruments in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In solo instrumental traditions, such as the sitar and sarod, *bol* phrases represent the strumming and plucking patterns used in each instrument's performance practice.¹⁴²

In respects to the tabla, the term *bol* is used to refer to the array of drum strokes that can be produced on the instrument. Students of the tabla are taught to represent *bols* through two primary means: reciting them orally and articulating them through the actions of their hands (i.e., playing). A tabla *bol*, on its most fundamental level, refers to a single unit of musical information: an individual drum stroke, which can be recited orally or articulated on the drums.¹⁴³ When spoken, tabla *bols* are "quasi-onomatopoeic" to their associated drum stroke.¹⁴⁴ The term can be used to refer to a sequence of drum strokes that belong to a cohesive compositional unit. Thus, the individual drum stroke "*Dhā*", as well as the phrase "*DhāTreKeDheTeTeGeNāDhāTiGeNā*" can be referred to as a *bol*. My usage of *bol* (and tabla *bol*) in this dissertation includes both associations.

In my lessons with classical tabla players, the application of spoken musical information, *bol*, to the instrument was directly translated vis-à-vis the established performance practices of a particular style of playing the instrument. That is to say,

¹⁴² See Miner 1993.

¹⁴³ This drum stroke can be articulated using one or both of the two drums that comprise the tabla.

¹⁴⁴ Kippen 2001: 2.

the *bol* that I spoke aloud directly paralleled the performance practice of said *bol* as I had been taught to play it.¹⁴⁵ For example, if I spoke aloud the *bol*, "*Dhā*", it corresponded to playing "*Dhā*" on the tabla in a manner that reflected a respective style of performance practice of tabla, referred to as *gharānā* (from Hindu, *ghar*, "house"). Given that my teachers were from different schools of playing, the *bols* that each taught me were in relation to the performance practices that were established within their own particular lineages of tabla playing. Any departure from these established performance practices would render both the compositions as well as the techniques in which they are played incorrect. However, from my collective training in South Asian drumming, which covers numerous musical genres and instruments, I noticed that this direct correlation of recited *bol* to articulated *bol* only existed in classical solo tabla instruction and performance.

My training in non-classical drumming in South Asia, regardless of the instrument or style of music I was learning, was all conducted through the same music language: tabla *bols*.¹⁴⁶ Throughout my lessons, I observed a fundamental difference regarding the translation of musical information, *bol*, as compared to my instruction in classical tabla playing. As mentioned above, *bols* in solo tabla playing

¹⁴⁵ For a comprehensive list and explanation of *bol* and *bol nuclei* as played on the tabla see Stewart 1974: 22-73.

¹⁴⁶ Because of the tabla's position as the predominant drum in Hindustani music, its rhythmic language has been incorporated into several South Asian musical cultures of which the tabla has become a part. It should also be noted that *ṭhekās* in general are represented by *bols* as they are played on the tabla. The rhythmic cycles used in *ḳhyāl* are also known as tabla *tāls* on account of the heavy influence of the tabla in the development of Hindustani rhythmic practices. See Kippen 2001.

are translated through the performance practices of recognized (and unrecognized) *gharānās* of tabla.¹⁴⁷ While these *gharānās* are distinguished by varying nuances in performance practice, there is a substantial amount of overlap regarding the instrument's primary drum strokes.¹⁴⁸ Put another way, solo tabla playing maintains a high level of *bol* integrity between styles (i.e., most *bols* are articulated on the drums in a consistent manner throughout all solo tabla *gharānās*). This level of *bol* integrity was not practiced by the non-classical drummers with whom I studied, likely on account of them holding different views and understandings of rhythmic representation than those in classical music.¹⁴⁹

When located outside of the context of classical solo tabla instruction, tabla *bols* continue to maintain their onomatopoeic quality, though the drum strokes can be articulated differently. My teachers all maintained degrees of overlap and individuality regarding the recitation and interpretation of *bols*, which they used to teach me individual *ṭhekās*. As I show through analyzing numerous folk *ṭhekās*, the interpretation of folk *ṭhekā bols* is regulated in respects to both the performance practices of the instruments being played as well as the aesthetic qualities of the music styles in which they are played.

¹⁴⁷ Here and throughout the rest of my dissertation I use "tabla *gharānā*" to refer to classical tabla playing styles.

¹⁴⁸ See Wegner 2004, Lybarger 2003, Gottlieb 1993, and Kippen 1988.

¹⁴⁹ That is not to say that my interlocutors who performed in these genres did not have a functioning knowledge of *bol* notation, for indeed, they did.

Ṭhekās: Notated vs. Played

As mentioned above, musicologists and musicians in India began to develop advanced notation systems in the mid-nineteenth century and onwards. This included notation for drums such as the *pakhāwaj* and tabla. While the impetus at the time for developing a standardized musical notation was a part of a larger effort to galvanize Indian music as a classical tradition, written notation was a means of fundamentally expanding access to musical information to new and unfamiliar audiences.¹⁵⁰ Printed notation has also proved to be a useful tool for musicians and musicologists alike to define and critique the rhythmic structures of Hindustani musical practice, but remains a secondary method for musical instruction.

For the tabla, notation entailed the instrument's musical language, *bol*s, being written and supplemented with additional graphics and symbols to more accurately represent the instrument's performance practices.¹⁵¹ With their level of specificity, tabla *bol* notation systems act as prescriptive representations of musical information that largely do not allow for individual interpretation. However, the "correct" interpretation of tabla *bol* notation is grounded largely in the context and performance practices of the instrument as it is played in classical Hindustani music. The development of an instrument-specific notational system was generally not

¹⁵⁰ A codified and written form of music was a primary component of the reforms that Hindustani music underwent from the second half of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. See Bakhle 2005 and Kippen 2006: 51-74.

¹⁵¹ See Kippen 2007.

extended to drums such as those used in non-classical genres, like the *ḍholak* or *dohol*, though their players have adapted these systems into their own musical practices (Schreffler 2002).

The majority of my musical analysis in this dissertation deals with *ṭhekās*. As mentioned, regardless of the musical genre in which they are played, *ṭhekās* have been notated vis-à-vis the musical language of the tabla: *bol*s. When notating *ṭhekās*, *bol*s continue to be its core musical element. But, unlike in notated classical tabla repertoire, *ṭhekās* are generally not notated with the graphics and symbols used to specify performance practices of the drum.¹⁵² Rather, these performance practices are assumed because of the overarching fidelity of *bol*s in classical tabla playing. This fidelity of such *bol* recitation (ergo *bol* notation, as well) to representing performance practice can be observed through the overarching consistency through which common *ḵhyāl ṭhekās*, such as *tīntāl*, *jhaptāl*, *ektāl*, and *rupak tāl* to name a few, are played among tabla players of different *gharānās*. Discrepancies arise, however, with the *bol*s of non-classical *ṭhekās* when reconciling the manner in which rhythmic patterns are played versus how they are recited and notated.

Folk *tāls* can exhibit a variety of different styles and characteristics, illustrated by my instruction of over twenty different ways of playing what my teachers identified as "*keherwā*." And yet, when notated in tabla *bol*s, *keherwā* has

¹⁵² This is not true of early notated *ṭhekās*, which did contain graphics and symbols to specify particular drum strokes. However, this use of graphic notation for writing *ṭhekās* has largely faded out in contemporary writing.

but a single *bol* (notated above in Figure 1.5). As such, the conventional systems of tabla *bol* notation lack the appropriate mechanisms to show the multifarious character of non-classical *tāl thekās*. In particular, conventional tabla *bol* notation obfuscates the hand-to-hand interdependence that I argue is central to popular, devotional, and folk drumming performance practices. The notation system I use in the subsequent musical analysis sections uses a graphic notation to bring to the fore the specific roles of each hand in articulating a folk *thekā*. At the same time, my notations of folk *tāl thekās* reference the conventional system of tabla *bol* notation to draw conclusions regarding the application of classical musical structures and concepts onto the practices of folk music and drumming.

The lessons I received on the *ḍholak* introduced me to a new manner in which to conceptualize rhythmic information that was a departure and, indeed, a contradiction to the conventional usage of *bol*-s-spoken, articulated, and written-of tabla playing. Given the *ḍholak*'s position as one of the primary drums used in popular, devotional, and folk music in South Asia, it does not maintain a standardized vocabulary of drum strokes as the tabla.¹⁵³ Despite this, scholars such as Stewart have correlated the performance practices of the *ḍholak* to analog techniques and *bols* of the tabla.¹⁵⁴ Yet, as I found during my instruction on the *ḍholak*, this correlation is not always so straightforward. On *ḍholak*, I was taught-

¹⁵³ Stewart 1974: 31.

¹⁵⁴ Stewart 1974: 31-36.

still through oral methods—in a manner that placed individual attention on the actions of each hand independent from the other, before I played with both hands together.¹⁵⁵ Because of this unique manner of teaching, my notation of *ṭhekās* represents the *bol*s of respective instruments in a bi-manual format. While this manner of notation is fundamentally a departure from traditional tabla *bol* notation, I believe it to be a more appropriate method of representing aspects of rhythm in non-classical *ṭhekās*, given the division of labor between hands (i.e., the two opposing sonic registers articulated by drums such as the tabla and *ḍholak*) in qualifying and quantifying rhythmic.

¹⁵⁵ This method of teaching each hand independent from the other contradicted the methods of oral transmission through which I was instructed classical solo tabla.

Chapter Two

Studying *Qawwālī* Drumming in North India: Introduction

My study of drumming in Sufi *qawwālī* took place among two different communities of musicians, known as *qawwāls*: the *qawwāl bachche* ("children of the *qawwāls*") of the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* in Nizamuddin, Delhi, and among the *qawwāls* of the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* in Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh. *Qawwālī* is a song-based form of Sufi devotional poetry that is performed at Sufi *dargahs* and *ḵhānaqāhs*, where it serves as a form of devotion embodied within musical performance.¹⁵⁶ Shrines of more popular saints—such as (among others) the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* in Delhi, the Moinuddin Chishti *dargah* in Ajmer, and the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* in Fatehpur Sikri—maintain their own affiliated communities of musicians. *Qawwālī* has traditionally been a hereditary practice, with some communities and families tracing their musical ancestry back several centuries.¹⁵⁷

While living in New Delhi for my fieldwork, I was based just south of Nizamuddin, which made it easy to frequent the *dargah* and meet with the

¹⁵⁶ A *dargah* is a shrine built around the tomb of a Sufi saint. *Ḵhānaqāhs* are buildings at which Sufi congregations occur.

¹⁵⁷ Katherine Butler Schofield's research on the early history of *ḵhyāl* has argued that *qawwāls* were some of the central figures in the music's early development. See Schofield 2010: 168-191.

musicians.¹⁵⁸ I chose to start my research on *qawwālī* drumming among the *qawwāl bachche* on account of their reputation and musical heritage. Furthermore, my introduction to one of the central families had been facilitated early on by a mutual contact of ours. Throughout the ten months that I lived in New Delhi I came to know several of the families of *qawwāls* who collectively comprise the *qawwāl bachche*. Among the dozens of *qawwāls* whom I met, I came to know closely four *ḍholak* players who performed regularly at the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*. While being related through kinship and pedagogical lineages, these musicians were ultimately competitors with each other; each vying over the others to get more playing time at the *dargah*, for which they could bring in more earnings. In addition to meeting the *qawwāls* in Nizamuddin, I also spent over a month learning *qawwālī* drumming in Fatehpur Sikri over multiple trips. My primary contact in Fatehpur Sikri was a musician whom I called Raja. I also interacted and had conversations with the other *ḍholak* players who played at Fatehpur Sikri *dargah*. In addition to these drummers, I also spoke and interacted with over a dozen other *qawwālī* drummers from Achhnera, Rampur, Jaipur, Agra, Ghaziabad, Gangapur, Lucknow, Delhi, and Patiala.

The focus of this chapter is drumming in *qawwālī* music: a look at the livelihoods of the musicians with whom I worked, and an analysis of how improvisation is used in *qawwālī* drumming, and how this improvisation is

¹⁵⁸ Nizamuddin is the name of the neighborhood in which the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* is located.

connected to evoking emotional response in listeners. In Part One of this chapter, I provide vignettes into the lives of two drummers who regularly performed at the *dargahs* at which I conducted my research: Abra Ali Nizami of the *qawwāl bachche* of Nizamuddin and Shakir Mohammad of Fatehpur Sikri. I present brief narratives regarding the livelihoods of these two musicians to illustrate defining characteristics of being a *qawwālī* drummer I observed during my fieldwork: intense competition and rivalry, and extensive, daily music-making. While these case-studies are unique to themselves, they are representative of the livelihoods I noticed across the musicians involved in this dissertation. Such livelihoods, I argue, fundamentally inform the performance practices of *ṭhekā*.

In Part Two of this chapter, I look closely at drumming in *qawwālī* music, specifically its rhythmic accompaniment: *ṭhekā*.¹⁵⁹ To preface my analysis, I introduce some of the key stroke-melodies played in *qawwālī*, and discuss how this drumming helps articulate musical rhythm and structure in *qawwālī* songs. To illustrate how improvisation is used in *qawwālī ṭhekā* drumming, I analyze a performance of a famous *qawwālī* song, *Allah hu*, as played on the *ḍholak* by Sibtain Nizami of the *qawwāl bachche*. One of my central arguments in this dissertation is that *ṭhekās*, being pre-composed rhythmic forms, operate as improvisational frameworks. My analysis traces the numerous variations of *ṭhekā* that the drummer

¹⁵⁹ I analyze *ṭhekās* as they are played on the *ḍholak*, the primary drum used in *qawwālī* music.

plays throughout this performance, and looks at how this improvisation is used to support the music-making of the ensemble. A drummer's playing is indicative of the ebb and flow of musical vigor created by the rest of the performing ensemble. Drummers respond to the fluctuations in musical intensity by altering and embellishing the rhythmic weighted accents, *wazn*, of the rhythmic patterns they play. My aim in this chapter is not to make universal claims about how *qawwālī* drummers improvise. Rather, I aim to show how drumming techniques can be used to elevate the music making experience, which in the context of *qawwālī* music, aims to evoke feelings of ecstasy in its listeners.

Part One

Playing *Dholak* in a *Qawwālī* Ensemble

Within *qawwālī* ensembles, the *dholak* player has a critically important responsibility that is variously valued and recognized.¹⁶⁰ They occupy a key role in how rhythmic time is kept and maintained by the ensemble, and are highly exposed

¹⁶⁰ Among the two communities of *qawwāls* with whom I conducted fieldwork research, *dholak* players were often from the younger generations and from hereditary musical backgrounds. However, during large gatherings at the Nizamuddin *dargah*, such as during *'urs* or *jumme rāth*, seniority would be prioritized by members of the *qawwāl bachche*. In Fatehpur Sikri, a village of roughly 33,000 people that was founded but abandoned by Emperor Akbar as the capital of his empire, drummers are fewer in number than in urban Delhi, and non-kinship affiliated personnel were often recruited to fill out *qawwālī* ensembles.

on account of the instrument's relative playing volume.¹⁶¹ When approaching a *qawwālī* gathering, called *samā'-e qawwālī* or *mehfil-e samā'*, the first musical sounds that one can hear from afar are the cutting sounds of the *ḍholak*. Within close proximity of the group, one can feel the sound from the drum—the bass side, in particular—reverberate through their body.¹⁶² The heightened aural exposure created by the acoustics of the instrument require unrelenting consistency on the behalf of the performer.¹⁶³ Drummers whom I met at Nizamuddin and Fatehpur Sikri *dargahs* almost always stressed to me the importance of unwavering rhythmic continuity when drumming in *qawwālī*; the integrity of a performance depended on it.¹⁶⁴ If a drummer fluctuates in tempo, drops or adds a beat, or the pattern they are playing is not appropriate for the song, the performance becomes compromised and the lead vocalist(s) often help to re-establish the rhythmic state of the music.

¹⁶¹ The other method of time keeping in *qawwālī* is through clapping, which can be done by members of the ensemble who are not playing instruments.

¹⁶² The *dargahs* that I visited were often situated within a confined walled-structure that surrounded the primary shrine. The acoustics of these spaces effectively amplified the playing of the *ḍholak*, making its articulation even more pronounced.

¹⁶³ Because of the instrument's volume, the *ḍholak* is a preferable drum accompaniment for *qawwālī* during outside performances. For indoor performances, or ones in which microphone amplification is used, the *tabla* is also commonly played.

¹⁶⁴ The *tabla* and *ḍholak* are the two most commonly drums played in *qawwālī*, though some groups will sometimes use electronic drum pads, as well.



Figure 2.1. *Qawwāls* perform in front of the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah*, Fatehpur Sikri, India. December 2016. Photo taken by author.

Playing *ḍholak* in *qawwālī* is not a lead position within the ensemble; rather, it is one of accompanying and following. Moreover, *ḍholak* players are often expected to sing along during performances, which requires the use of multiple musical skill sets. Among the several *qawwālī* drummers whom I met in North India, an overwhelming majority were proficient as singers as well as on instruments other than *ḍholak*. From my conversations with them, I found that most had learned their many skillsets from multiple teachers: usually from a close family member at first, then from other relatives or members of their community, which often necessitated drummers moving away from their homes for an extended time. Raja, a *ḍholak* player from Fatehpur Sikri, told me about how he had learned to play growing up: "When I was young I first learned how to play *ḍholak* from my father (who is a

vocalist). He was able to show me a few basic *ṭhekās* so that I could play for him at the [Baba Salim Chishti] *dargah*. When I had learned all my father knew I went to stay with my *Cha-Cha Ji* (uncle) in Jhansi (a town approximately eleven hours by train from Fatehpur Sikri) for three months. He taught me new *ṭhekās* and different *tāls* that we did not play in Fatehpur Sikri." Sibtain Nizami, a *ḍholak* player from Nizamuddin, had a similar story: "My father [Ustad Meraj Ahmad, see Qureshi 1986] showed me how to play *ḍholak* when I was young. He died, then I went to study with my uncles in Lahore [Pakistan]. There they taught me *ṭhekās* that we did not play in Nizamuddin." Both of the accounts above illustrate that gaining access to new musical information for drummers required them to travel outside of their local milieu, which was the case for an overwhelming majority of *qawwālī* drummers whom I met.

As I learned *qawwālī* drumming, my teachers placed a firm emphasis on my abilities of observation and imitation. They commended my abilities to catch (*pakarṇā*) musical information throughout our lessons, as well as when I began to experiment (*karnā*, lit. "to do", which in a musical context means "to develop" or "to experiment") with adding embellishments to my playing. My primary task during most of my instruction was to accompany on a drum while my teachers sang. They repeated verses of songs, often changing aspects of the verse's length frequently and suddenly. I was to follow along and adapt to what they sang. Sometimes this exercise was likened to a playful game, in which my teacher would insert extra

"breaks" in the music we were playing, pause for an over-extended amount of time (while still keeping rhythm internally), then start again in tempo. It was my task to internalize the beat, and resume playing immediately as my instructor did. Such exercises, I assessed, help hone a sense of hyper awareness among the many musician-to-musician interactions that occur in *qawwālī* performance. Maintaining a keen awareness of a song's musical form, and being sensitive to the sudden modifications made by the lead vocalists are key aspects of being a proficient *qawwālī* drummer.

Furthermore, my drumming teachers stressed the importance of practicing together with other musicians. *Qawwālī* is an ensemble performance medium; not a solo one. While hosting a senior *ḍholak* player from the Nizamuddin *dargah* and one of his students at my house, he explained to me the importance of both individual and group practice: "Yes, practicing alone is good, but practicing with your *khāndān* (family, in this context implying a lineage of musicians) is more important. This is how you learn to play *qawwālī*: as a group (*sāth ke sāth*, "together"). The other musicians [vocalists] will do anything and you have to follow them. When they change, you change. And you must sing, too!" *Qawwālī* songs are based on pre-composed poetic and melodic forms, but their "formal" structures are loosely followed by musicians in performance.¹⁶⁵ Performers will regularly repeat, omit,

¹⁶⁵ See Qureshi 1986: 143-186 for an ethnographic analysis of a *qawwālī* performance at the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*.

amplify, lengthen, or shorten phrases, which is made possible by *qawwālī*'s flexible music structure.¹⁶⁶ Drummers are expected to follow these changes in a song instantaneously and without hesitation, which Azhar Hayat Nizami stressed to me could not be learned from practicing individually. Rather, it is important to practice with one's *khāndān*, a term used to describe a common hereditary lineage.¹⁶⁷ Azhar had grown up in a large musical family, and learned music along with his two other male siblings. "Playing as a group was more enjoyable," he added, "And this is how I teach." Rehearsing as a group puts the interpersonal dynamics of a *qawwālī* performance out in the open for students at various levels to learn. It is an invaluable sort of experience for *qawwālī* drummers (and indeed other drummers discussed in this dissertation who accompany poetry-based musical forms) that one cannot be rehearsed alone.

Regula Qureshi has outlined the three functional components of *qawwālī*: to generate spiritual arousal, convey mystical poetry, and serve listeners of diverse and changing spiritual requirements.¹⁶⁸ While in attendance at various events in which *qawwālī* was performed, I witnessed different types of spiritual arousal, or *wajd*, among audience members.¹⁶⁹ In many of these instances, expressive response were

¹⁶⁶ Qureshi 1986: 63-65.

¹⁶⁷ Neuman 1980: 96-99.

¹⁶⁸ Qureshi 1986: 60.

¹⁶⁹ In Sufi traditions music has assumed a central position as a conduit for spiritual transcendence. Music and dance have been used to generate such religious ecstasy for nearly a thousand years. Racy 2003: 4.

what Qureshi labels "standard manifestations of strong [spiritual] arousal" (Qureshi 1986: 121): uncontrollable crying, vigorous shaking of the head, dancing in various manners, or collapsing to the ground. Such instances of ecstatic listening I observed occurred typically during an apex within a performance's musical intensity and volume. The drumming during these instances was rapturous with force. "A strong rhythmic framework and an emphatic stress pattern... are considered essential for the soul to become moved."¹⁷⁰ From these experiences, I found it clear that the acoustics of the *ḍholak*—the cutting timbre of the drum's high-pitched side, coupled with the reverberating punchiness of its bass side—maintain a central importance in arousing spiritual ecstasy in listeners during *qawwālī* performances.

The physical stamina required for drummers to sustain this level of intensity is considerable. *Qawwālī* musicians regularly play for extensively long durations; upwards of six to ten hours a day. In Fatehpur Sikri, *qawwāls* perform in front of the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* from morning (around 9:00AM) until the shrine closes in the early evening (sunset), which averages out to seven to eight hours of performing daily. Short breaks are taken throughout the day every few hours, during which musicians will have snacks and chai (or cooler refreshments during the hot summer), while taking a longer break at midday for lunch. At the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*, the attending *qawwāls* follow a similar routine of performing from the morning

¹⁷⁰ Qureshi 1986: 60.

hours until the shrine closes after evening prayers (usually between 10:00-10:30PM on days other than Thursday or special events).¹⁷¹ Daily and extensive music-making—sometimes from the time one wakes up until the time one goes to sleep—was the lifestyle of the musicians with whom I studied. This lifestyle of playing, I argue, has directly influenced the performance practices of *ṭhekās*. My musical analyses in this dissertation discusses how *ṭhekā* drumming involves drum strokes with degrees of physical economy when played to facilitate long-duration playing. The techniques of long-term playing, I believe, point to a life of constant music making, during which drummers created a sustainable form of drum accompaniment that could be played for hours upon hours.

¹⁷¹ The entirety of the *qawwāl bachche* community is not present during these daytime *qawwālī* sessions. Rather, it is often a single-family unit playing.



Figure 2.2. Members of the *qawwāl bachche* perform at the 'urs of Nizamuddin Auliya, Nizamuddin, Delhi. January 2017. Photo taken by author.

Qawwālī at the Nizamuddin Auliya *Dargah*, Nizamuddin, Delhi

At both of the *dargahs* at which I conducted my research, the respective performing communities were intimate social networks throughout which gossip traveled quickly. Indeed, the musicians I came to know were not shy at holding back gossip regarding their competitors. During my time at each site I observed several fractures within and among the families comprising the performing community; rifts that had formed because of the competition their work entailed. As I bring to light through the following biographical vignettes of my interlocutors, the contested

space of inter-communal rivalry affords non-familial or low-social ranking musicians opportunities at upward economic as well as musical mobility.

Abra Ali Nizami Qawwāl

Abra Ali Nizami was my initial contact among the *qawwāl bachche* in Nizamuddin. Abra Ali, also known as "Ramzan" Ali, was forty during the time of my 2016 fieldwork and, in addition to playing the *ḍholak*, played the harmonium, tabla, and was proficient at singing and maintained a large repertoire of Sufi poetry. Abra Ali was one of the senior drummers at the Nizamuddin *dargah*, and frequently performed there. He was regularly the drummer for *jumme rāth* performances, during which several families from the *qawwāl bachche* would come to perform. On other days, Abra Ali often led smaller groups of *qawwāls* by playing the harmonium and singing. He maintained a busy performance schedule at the Nizamuddin *dargah* and other *dargah* networks beyond the local, and had performed internationally with different Sufi music ensembles. Abra Ali was also a teacher, teaching singing and Sufi poetry to young children (Afghan refugees, in particular) in the neighborhoods nearby to Nizamuddin.



Figure 2.3. Abra Ali Nizami plays for an 'urs event held at the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*, Nizamuddin, India. Azhar Hayat sits in the foreground to his left. December 2016. Picture taken by author.

The attention brought about by the *ḍholak* has proven a successful strategy for *dargah* performers in attracting listeners, which are the primary source of patronage for most *qawwāls*. "So many people who visit the *dargah* come up to me every day and ask me about *ḍholak*. They want to know how to play and when I show them they will give me some money," said Raja, the *ḍholak* player from Fatehpur Sikri. *Dargahs* are lively locations, often with an accompanying *bazaar* filled with various offerings and souvenirs one can buy. Before one even reaches the main *dargah* itself they are able to hear the reverberating sound of the *ḍholak*. In Nizamuddin, Abra Ali's vibrant personality and playing style attracted regular attention from the audiences and other people that visited the *dargah*. He would

frequently shout out during performances when the energy level of the composition reached an apex, and his vocalizing was often accompanied by a variety of grimaces he made with his mouth and eyes. These spirited behaviors helped Abra Ali distinguish himself from the other *qawwāls* and drummers at the *dargah*, most of whom who were his direct competitors. Abra Ali maintained a very approachable aura about himself, and tourists and visitors of the *dargah* would commonly approach him after the conclusion of nightly *qawwālī* performances to show their respect and give him *nazrānā*.¹⁷²

Negotiating Social and Musical Politics Among the *Qawwāl Bachche*

The *qawwal bachche* of Nizamuddin is a sprawling network of individual musical families who are related by kinship or marriage. Given that these individual families vie against each other directly as competitors, politics of kinship play an important part in establishing a family's station within the *qawwāl bachche* network. As a performing body, the *qawwāl bachche* only meet and perform together within the space of the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*. Many of the more prominent families have formed their own *qawwālī* ensembles and perform both public and private programs outside of the *dargah*. I observed that the families of the highest social

¹⁷² While the majority of *nazrānā* earned from a performance was split among the entire performing group, it was not uncommon for patrons to approach individual *qawwāls* (usually drummers or the lead singer of the group) after the conclusion of performances. See Qureshi 1986: 122-125 for more details about other forms of *nazrānā*.

and musical prestige are those who are closely related to a central family and lineage of performers, who maintain a prerogative for performing at *dargah* events.¹⁷³ Additionally, families can accumulate other sources of musical authority and prestige among the *qawwal bachche* network by aligning themselves with a *gharānā* (schools of playing in elite music genre performance practice) through formal discipleship.

Abra Ali is affiliated to the *qawwāl bachche* through his marriage to a member of one of the community's prominent musical families. Because of the nature of his affiliation, Abra Ali bears a stigma among the other drummers for not being born into the primary kinship network. The other *dargah* drummers were all born into prominent musical families aligned closely with the core network of the *qawwal bachche*. Furthermore, each of them was one of several male siblings who took up the family's musical trade. As young musicians they formed the accompaniment ensemble for the older generation of musicians in their family, most often their father and/or uncles. Compared to the other drummers, Abra Ali is at a fundamental disadvantage for two reasons. First, his marrying into a prominent family within the *qawwāl bachche* does not carry as much social capital as being born into the familial network. I observed much ridicule at Abra Ali by other *qawwals* because of his social station within the community, and he was thus given

¹⁷³ During my fieldwork in Nizamuddin, the "core" family were those claiming descent from Ustad Tanras Khan, the Delhi court musician during the reign of the final Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (r. 1837-1857). Such musicians are also referred to as *ḍāsnewālā*. See Qureshi 1986: 99.

an inferior position of seniority for performance opportunities at the *dargah*.¹⁷⁴

Second, his lack of male siblings and close relatives also involved in *qawwālī* forces Abra Ali to seek out other ensembles with which to perform. In essence, Abra Ali's starting position as a professional *qawwālī* drummer is far behind that of his competitors born to a higher social station, thus placing a greater emphasis on his musical abilities in order to establish himself.¹⁷⁵

Drummers such as Abra Ali have the ability to capitalize on social (and musical) splits within their respective performing communities to elevate themselves to a higher musical role with higher economic earning potential. In the next section I introduce Shakir Mohammad, a young drummer I met in Fatehpur Sikri, and relate his efforts of attaining a higher position within his performing community. As I gathered from my interactions with Shakir Mohammad, *qawwālī* drummers can manipulate their social and musical status by establishing (and consequentially breaking) affiliations with musical groups within their respective performing communities. To preface this narrative, I discuss the methods of earning and distributing the offerings given to *qawwālī* performers, known as *nazrānā*.

¹⁷⁴ At private *dargah* events performance seniority was often granted to high ranking members of the *qāsnewālā*, of which Abra Ali was not a direct member. For public events at the *dargah*, such as those throughout the week, on Thursday nights, and 'urs celebrations, the criteria of admittance for participation for *qawwāls* was less stringent.

¹⁷⁵ For more on the politics of kinship alliances among Indian musicians see Neuman 1980.

Qawwālī at the Baba Salim Chishti *Dargah*, Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh

Payment in *Qawwālī*: *Nazrānā*

Performers of *qawwālī* earn a majority of their living through *nazrānā*, the monetary donations of their patrons, known also as *nazr* (Figure 2.4). When *qawwālī* is performed, whether inside a *dargah* or at any other venue,¹⁷⁶ audience members will place (or sometimes throw) money at the performers, which accumulates in front of the leading ensemble members. The entirety of a night's earnings is pooled until the end of the performance, when the group's leaders divvy up the money among the performers. I found three common methods through which performing groups dispersed a night's earnings that largely depended on the relationships of the performers:

- Method 1: An overwhelming majority of performances involved groups comprised of members of a single-family. In this case, the ensemble's leader, often the patriarch of the family, collected the money from *dargah* visitors, or if the performance took place outside the *dargah*, collected it from the head patron on behalf of the entire ensemble.

¹⁷⁶ While *qawwālī* is foremost a form of Sufi Islam devotion, it has also become incorporated into Bollywood and popular music. Private functions and parties featuring *qawwālī* as entertainment have become common practice and make up a major source of income for prominent *qawwālī* performing groups.

- Method 2: If ensembles included non-immediate family members, these performers were paid at the discretion of the group's leaders. The rates for non-family members were often calculated in relation to the group's total earnings, as well as the performance quality of the hired musician. For hired drummers, this rate was consistently less than the paid rate of hired vocalists.
- Method 3: At the Nizamuddin *dargah*, where Thursday night performing groups are composed of a heterogeneous population of musicians representing several families, money is portioned with the leading musicians—vocalists—receiving double the share to the younger musicians and drummers. I gathered from my conversations with musicians at other *dargahs* in North India that a drummer's labor in a *qawwālī* ensemble is consistently valued less to the other musical labor of the ensemble.



Figure 2.4. *Qawwāls* collect and divide up ten rupee notes given as offering during an 'urs event at the Nizamuddin *dargah*, June 2016. Photo taken by author.

For *qawwālī* performers in small towns such as Fatehpur Sikri, the pool of performance labor is significantly less than it is at major urban centers like Nizamuddin in Delhi. In Fatehpur Sikri, a town almost forty kilometers west of the city of Agra, there is one primary family of *qawwāls* who perform at the *dargah*. The *dargah* attracts pilgrims—Muslim and Hindu—from across India, as well as a significant national and international tourist crowd given its location nearby to the famous imperial monuments of Fatehpur Sikri. *Qawwāls* perform daily for the visitors of the *dargah* in a similar fashion to at Nizamuddin, and collect offerings

from its many visitors. While staying in Fatehpur Sikri I came to know two performing groups of *qawwāls* who performed at the *dargah*. The groups played on alternating days, and each was led by one of two brothers, whose male children had learned music and made up the remaining ensembles of each respective patriarch. In 2017, these two families did not perform together (except on special occasions) on account of competition and jealousy having caused a rift between them. During my time spent in Fatehpur Sikri I was informed that for ensembles to perform in front of the *dargah* they must contain at least four members.¹⁷⁷ In neither of the brothers' families were there three male sons. Nor did they have any nearby male cousins, meaning that each performing ensemble regularly had to enlist performers outside of their immediate family to fill their quota. Extra vocalists were recruited from the neighboring villages, while drummers were based more locally. These non-kinship performers often maintained another vocation apart from music, such as tailor, barber, or other trades. The drummers who were recruited were from hereditary musical families and extended themselves to a variety of other non-*qawwālī* musical practices in and around Fatehpur Sikri.

¹⁷⁷ During a conversation with Sarfaraz Hassan, a *qawwal* from the performing family at the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah*, he informed me that the caretakers of the *dargah* (i.e., the upper administration of the *dargah*) would not let groups numbering fewer than four persons perform.

Shakir Mohammad *Qawwāl*

I met Shakir Mohammad "Shakir *bhai*" (brother), during the '*urs*'¹⁷⁸ celebrations at the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* in June 2017. He was twenty years old at the time; his arms were skinny yet strong, his hands rough with callouses, and his teeth stained a deep red from excessive chewing of betel nut. Shakir *bhai* had been recruited to play during the '*urs* festivities by the *qawwālī* ensemble with whom I was conducting research. As part of '*urs*, *qawwālī* is performed over the course of several nights, with programs lasting from late evening (9:00PM-10:00PM) until dawn the next day (4:30AM). At the time, Shakir *bhai* was filling in for the drummer of the ensemble, who was unable to play because of an acute case of appendicitis.

One afternoon during a break from playing, I had a chance to sit down and ask Shakir *bhai* about his musical background. "I learned from my father, who was a good *ḍholak* player. He also taught me how to sing a little, but I did not practice. Instead I wanted to be a *ḍholak* player. I was asked to come play at the [Baba Salim Chishti] *dargah* a few years ago, and when I came I had to learn how to play their style. But I learned quickly and they liked my *ḍholak* playing, so they keep calling me to play with them even though I cannot sing well. I was going to Agra when they called me to play *ḍholak* for '*urs*, but I came back. "

¹⁷⁸ The '*urs* is the celebration of the death of a Sufi saint for whom a *dargah* is named.



Figure 2.5. Mohammad Shakir playing *dholak* during an '*urs* near Fatehpur Sikri, India. June 2017. Picture taken by the author.

Shakir *bhai*'s recruitment by this particular ensemble was the result of his careful navigation of the dense social and musical politics present among the *qawwāl* community in Fatehpur Sikri. Leading up to '*urs*, Shakir *bhai* had been a regular fill-in drummer for the elder brother's ensemble. His skills on the *dholak* were known by the local *qawwāl* community, and they had caught the attention of the younger brother, whose ensemble was of more renown in the area and was more economically successful than the elder brother's. Stakes run high during '*urs* celebrations for performing groups, when audiences are comprised of wealthy patrons and senior members of the *dargah*'s administration who give offerings during individual performances. The younger *qawwāl* brother in Fatehpur Sikri had

hired Shakir *bhai* to play on account of his competence and stamina performing the *dholak* in order to maximize his potential earnings during *'urs* events. By joining this group, Shakir *bhai* abandoned his previous position with one faction of the Fatehpur Sikri *qawwāl* community to propel himself to a higher economically earning position in the other.

The results of his jockeying for higher musical station built new bridges while burning old ones for Shakir *bhai*. His relationship with the elder brother (of whose ensemble he was occasionally a part) was severely tarnished on account of him playing with the younger brother. Shakir *bhai* was still asked to play for the elder brother's group, but the act of playing with his direct competitor did much to sully the elder brother's personal opinion and sense of trust in him. Nor was Shakir *bhai*'s position in the higher economically earning group a sustainable arrangement for him. His membership in the group was contingent upon the health status of the ensemble's usual *dholak* player, who was the leader's eldest son. When the son was well enough to play again, Shakir *bhai*'s labor as a rhythmic accompanist was no longer needed. Furthermore, the *qawwāls* at the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* placed a heavy stigma on Shakir *bhai*, saying that he was a "village" musician because he did not have similar musical credentials to them. "He is only a performer; he cannot teach because he does not know any theory. He can only *play keherwā*; he does not know that it is 'DhaGeNaThiNaKaDhiNa,'" claimed the *dholak* player for whom Shakir *bhai* was covering.

The drummer's reference above to "village" (*gāñv*) musician brings to the fore a social class divide between the professional *qawwālī* practitioners associated to Sufi shrines, and the drummers whom they hired from outside their local community to perform with them. The differences between these two classes of musicians produced a tension that became apparent during my interactions with both together. The *qawwāls* I met at the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* in Fatehpur Sikri, for example, strove to maintain a monopoly of musical authority over drummers who were not a part of their lineage/*khāndān*—musicians they referred to as "village musicians."

One of the earliest instances in which I noticed the tensions produced by these social hierarchies came during my first trip to Fatehpur Sikri. My musical instruction occurred within the intimate quarters of my hotel room, after the *qawwāls* had finished performing at the *dargah* for the day. At the end of my first day in Fatehpur Sikri, I was joined in my hotel room by two of the *qawwāls* from the *dargah*, Sarfaraz Hasan and his younger brother, Suhail, and Mohammad Ashu, a musician from outside of Fatehpur Sikri who had been brought in for the day to help fill out the required number of personnel for the performing group. Mohammad Ashu was a tailor by profession, having followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He learned to sing *qawwālī* and play *ḍholak* from his grandfather, who sang in addition to playing the *ḍholak* and tabla. Along with his father, Mohammad

Aslam, Mohammad Ashu was regularly asked by the *qawwāls* at the Baba Salim Chishti *dargah* to perform with them.

Between the four of us there was a set of tabla (which I had brought with me) and the *ḍholak* that the group had played at the *dargah* that day. For an hour or so we illustrated our proficiencies on each instrument, passing them between one another and playing various compositions and rhythmic patterns. However, as I began to ask them questions about what they played, the *qawwāls* proceeded to dominate the conversation, effectively silencing Mohammad Ashu. When I asked questions specifically to Mohammad Ashu about rhythm or the *ḍholak*, the *qawwāls* tried to discredit Mohammad Ashu's answers by challenging his understandings of music and rhythm. The *qawwāls* would interrogate him, "How do you know this? Who taught you this? And who was their Ustad?" at which point Ashu would shy away from the conversation. While the *qawwāls* acknowledged Mohammad Ashu's skills as a performer and asked him to accompany their group periodically, his station as a musician outside of their community muted his voice's musical authority, despite the fact that some of what Ashu knew he had learned from these very *qawwāls*, themselves.

The "village" drummers whom I met were also given a stigma by the *qawwāls* on account of what types of programs and music they played. I met a number of drummers who were called in from the outside villages to play at the Fatehpur Sikri *dargah*. Upon meeting them, I had a list of stock questions that I asked them about

their biography and playing history: from whom they had learned, what instruments they performed, and what sorts of music they played. During one encounter with a drummer who had come from outside Fatehpur Sikri, when I asked him what types of music he played the other *qawwāls* present immediately laughed and snickered. Noticeably embarrassed, he mentioned types of music and programs I had heard numerous times from my interviews with other "village" drummers: (in addition to *qawwālī*) wedding music, which included procession and dance music, and music for ritual functions associated to life events (birth, engagement, death, etc.) that are commonly celebrated in the villages. All the while, the *qawwāls* continued to laugh and made hushed comments that I could not understand. Later in my hotel room during a *ḍholak* lesson with one of the musicians who had been present, I asked him what the *qawwāls* had been saying and why they were laughing. In a voice with noticeable undertones of personal discomfort, he explained to me that the *qawwāls* had been laughing because the drummer who I had been interviewing played in programs involving *hijrās*, marginalized members of the LGBTQ community in South Asia who play a traditional role in blessing life events such as weddings and childbirth through music and dance. The drummer had not divulged this information during our interview, and the heckling and laughter from the *qawwāls* were their attempts to "tease" it out of him.

Collectively, the reactions and attitudes of the *qawwāls* and other musicians regarding *hijrās* point towards the social marginalization and discrimination that this

group faces on account of their non-normative gender presentation. *Hijrās*, who identify as trans-women, are both respected and stigmatized on account of their ambiguous sexuality, which grants them the power to confer fertility to newborns and newlyweds (Reddy 2005).¹⁷⁹ For many young men in India, regardless of their religion, *hijrās* cause an uneasiness on account of their sexuality not aligning to normative ideals of masculinity and gender. This uneasiness manifests itself in various forms. From my own experiences traveling throughout India I encountered several *hijrās*, many of whom were traveling between town on trains and asking people for money. While I observed many people simply ignore *hijrās* as they clapped in their face and asked for money, I witnessed an alarming number of discriminatory responses directed at them, mostly from young groups of men. These responses included name-calling, chastisement, taunting, spitting at, and other various forms of verbal and physical harassment. The discomfort with which the *qawwāls* and "village" musicians approached the topic with me was likely caused by the friction that *hijrās* caused to their normative, homo-social life as young Muslim men. This friction was made evident later by one of the musicians referring to *hijrās* as "*chakka*," a derogatory name for them. By playing programs with *hijrās*, the drummer whom I interviewed was *ipso facto* stigmatized by the *qawwāls*, who only

¹⁷⁹ For more on *hijrās* and music see Roy 2017.

performed *qawwālī* at *dargahs* and at other private functions—never with *hijrās*. This stigma was manifest observably through blatant teasing and harassment.

Shakir *bhai*, however, was not stigmatized for playing with *hijrās*—he only played *qawwālī*. A few months after the conclusion of *'urs*, I came to find out that he had moved to Agra, a much larger city and one abound with more performing opportunities than Fatehpur Sikri. "I have a new Ustad," he told me over a video chat we had late one night after my return from fieldwork in India. "He also likes my *ḍholak* playing and he teaches me singing. Now I play harmonium and sing in programs, but I still play *ḍholak* sometimes." Since *'urs*, Shakir *bhai* had become a member and student of a prominent *qawwāl* in Agra after they had observed his playing during *'urs* in Fatehpur Sikri. As a member of this group, Shakir *bhai* has begun to learn other performing roles in the *qawwālī* ensemble and no longer solely plays the *ḍholak*. Instead, he is now one of the ensemble's supporting singers and occasionally plays the harmonium, which has elevated his economic earning potential as a non-family member of the ensemble.



Figure 2.6. The *dargah* of Baba Salim Chishti decorated for 'urs, Fatehpur Sikri, India. June 2017. Photo taken by author.

During my visit to Fatehpur Sikri in February 2020 I found that much had changed regarding the social dynamics of the *qawwāl* community. The feud that had existed between the two brothers and their respective families had ended after the elder brother had medical issues that resulted in him not being able to sing on a regular basis. Both families said a "compromise" had been made to work together, rather than work against each other as competitors. On the first day of my visit I met Shakir *bhai*, who was playing the *ḍholak* at the *dargah* for the day. He was living in

Fatehpur Sikri again and had gotten married a year before, and was occasionally playing with the *qawwāls* at the *dargah* while continuing his own vocal training in Agra. He told me over a cup of chai, "I go to Agra every week to see my Ustad, but when he is not there or he is busy I come to play at the [Fatehpur Sikri] *dargah*. I am practicing singing now, and I sing more in programs than I used to. Someday I want to have my own *qawwālī* group." Since the two families had made amends, and on account of his improved singing abilities, Shakir *bhai* had found consistent and lucrative work performing with the Fatehpur Sikri *qawwāls* at the *dargah* and at other private and public functions at which they perform.

Conclusion: Being a *Qawwālī* Drummer

Being a *qawwālī* drummer is a physically demanding job. It entails numerous hours of daily drumming on an instrument that requires a substantial physical effort to play. It also necessitates an innate flexibility in one's playing, so that one can adapt their playing to the sudden changes in form and intensity done by the lead vocalist(s). Finally, it requires the application of multiple musical skill sets, as drummers are often expected to sing along while they play. One of the most important of these skill sets is the need for extensive duration playing; achieving devotional fervor in *qawwālī* takes time. The hand-to-hand coordination involved in playing *qawwālī ṭhekās* utilizes economies of movement that facilitate drummers playing them ceaselessly and seamlessly for extended durations, while at the same

time allowing drummers to sing along and alter the intensity of their playing. These processes become more apparent in the subsequent musical analysis in Part Two of this chapter. Through the personal narratives of Abra Ali of the *qawwāl bachche* and Shakir Mohammad of Fatehpur Sikri I have provided two brief glimpses into the lifestyle of hereditary *qawwālī* drummers. By doing so, I have tried to show that, despite being located in their own unique social and musical circumstances, the livelihoods of Abra Ali and Shakir Mohammad share key experiences of their occupation: intense competition, various forms of stigmatization, and a vigorous life of music-making. These collective experiences, I believe, speak to the lives of such hereditary communities of lower social class musicians (*qawwālī* drummers, for instance) that have been present in South Asia for centuries.¹⁸⁰

Part Two: Musical Analysis

Improvising in *Qawwālī* Music

To look at improvisation in *qawwālī* music, I analyze the drumming in a performance of Allah hu, a *qawwālī* song made popular by the late Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (1948-1997). I heard Allah hu frequently during my fieldwork throughout northern and western India. It was regularly the first song that the

¹⁸⁰ While *qawwāls* were the some of the first singers of *ḳhyāl*, a Hindustani art music genre, their instrumental accompanists were low-class *dhādhī* musicians. Schofield 2003: 169-172.

qawwāl bachche began with on *jumme rāth* in Nizamuddin, and was also a song that was known by the musicians I met in Kachchh. This fact represents both the simultaneous link and distinction between folk and popular music in twenty-first century South Asia. Both are socio-musical practices by and for the *lok*, “the people.” The audience is not (just) the elite and the aristocratic and the musical form is not the outcome of a mass manufactured type of music (Manuel 1993). However, folk traditions are linked to practices of listening that are based on devotional spaces and/or ritual practices, while popular traditions are linked to commodified forms of consumption (tickets to concerts, the purchase of tapes, CD’s, download). And yet, one cannot say that folk traditions exist outside capital flows: as we see here, a devotional practice is drawing on a popular song not through long hereditary lines of oral tradition, but through the commoditized circulation of a song composed and made famous by the standing, influence, and charisma of a global superstar, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. In a *dargah* setting, its ritual and devotional implications is what contribute a great deal of social and cultural value (Appadurai 1986) to *qawwālī* performances. This value becomes expressed through the responses of its listeners; either through the gift of monetary offerings (*nazrānā*), or through cultural-based non-monetary responses such as experiencing an emotional response to the music.

The recording used in my analysis I took at the Hazrat Inayat Khan *dargah*, located nearby to the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* in the same neighborhood. Every Friday evening, a prominent family from the *qawwāl bachche* performs inside the

shrine at the Hazrat Inayat Khan *dargah*. These gatherings are often much smaller and intimate than those *qawwālī* performances that take place at the main Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*. The performers in the recording are known as the *Nizami Bandhu*, or "Nizami Brothers." Playing the *ḍholak* in the performance is Sibtain Nizami, one of the main drummers in Nizamuddin.

In my analysis of *Allah hu*, I focus on the instances and manners in which the *ḍholak* player embellishes the *ṭhekā* that he plays. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main form of improvisation in playing *ṭhekā* involves altering the points and durations of accentual weight, *wazn*, of a rhythmic pattern. On the *ḍholak* this accent is articulated on the side of the drum lower in pitch: the *bāyāñ*. I connect the points at which the drummer begins to improvise to the other music making occurring, giving attention to the text being sung, in particular. In doing so, I do not attempt to presume the thought processes of the drummer, but rather, to draw conclusions as to how these instances are facilitating and informing the functional components of the music performance.

Before my analysis of *Allah hu*, I discuss briefly the musical form of *qawwālī* music, as well as how drum accompaniment helps support and articulate its structure. Furthermore, I identify some of the primary stroke-melodies that are used in *qawwālī* music, including those that are played in the performance of *Allah hu*.

Rhythmic Approach in *Qawwālī*

The primary focus in *qawwālī* is the poetic composition. Different repertoires of songs are performed by contemporary musicians, but most perform a collection of older standard poetry with newer popular compositions.¹⁸¹ Melodically, *qawwālī* is represented in the vocabulary of Hindustani music—*rāg*. Songs are strophic, and are composed using one or two primary melodies known as the *sthāyī* (melody of the refrain) and *antarā* (verse melody) that are played frequently during a song. *Qawwālī* songs are composed in a variety of folk *tāls*, most common of which are six-beat *dādrā*, seven-beat *Pashto tāl*, and eight-beat *keherwā*. Drummers will play a *ṭhekā* throughout the course of the verses and refrains of a song, and play other compositions such as *tīhāis* in order to help articulate different sections within the respective song's form.¹⁸²

Qawwālī songs regularly involve shifts in rhythmic density, which is most often initiated by the drummer directly through the *ṭhekās* they play. In performances, the rhythmic density of a song is regularly increased exponentially by two from the rate at which it starts. That is, if song begins with a slow tempo *ṭhekā*, it is common for drummers to double the rhythmic density by switching to a medium-fast tempo *ṭhekā*. Sometimes this doubling can occur twice, depending on

¹⁸¹ Qureshi 1986: 19.

¹⁸² A *tīhāi* is a composition that involve the repetition of a rhythmic phrase three times arranged so that the final note or beat of the third repetition coincides with a structurally important beat, most often the downbeat of a rhythmic cycle, known as *sam*.

the song and performer. In the recording of *Allah hu*, the change in rhythmic density occurs only within the drumming accompaniment; the rate at which the singers sing does not change irrespective of the drum accompaniment. In agreement with Qureshi, a key method of evoking musical ecstasy in *qawwālī* comes from a flexible and adaptable music form.¹⁸³ These distinctions of rhythmic density were described in relational terms by the drummers from whom I learned, who referenced them either in relation to the speed at which they were played (*vilambit* for slow, *madhya* for medium-fast, and *drut* for fast) or reciprocally to themselves (*sīdhā* meaning "straight" [original], double, and double *ka* double [quadruple; *ka* being Hindi for "of"]). Drummers play distinct types of *ṭhekās* for each of these distinctions of rhythmic density/speed, which I detail in the following section.

Stroke-Melodies of *Qawwālī* Music

Contemporary *qawwālī* music is heavily influenced by the musical traditions of the Panjab, and my interlocutors identified their drumming as being of the Panjabi *ang*, or style. Of the rhythmic cycles that I observed and learned in *qawwālī* music, eight-beat *keherwā* was most common. *Qawwālī* stroke-melodies utilize particular motor movements in the *dāyān* hand that favor an economy of movement in a players' hands and arms. Each individual drum stroke in these patterns create

¹⁸³ Qureshi 1986: 63-65.

various potential energies through the motions and positioning of a player's hand and arm. These potential energies are then utilized in the subsequent drum stroke: i.e., the execution of one drum stroke is the preparation for the following one, and so on. These particular techniques enable drummers to play these stroke-melodies for the extended durations their programs require of them—several hours and beyond.

As the analysis shows, a drummer will improvise frequently during a performance, which involves only one of their playing hands: the one playing the lower-pitched drum. Meanwhile, the hand playing the higher-pitched drum will continue to play the same respective pattern uninterrupted. The versions of the *ṭhekās* that I have notated in this section are in their most basic structures, and my teachers considered them void of rhythmic embellishment. While I learned dozens of *ṭhekās* in numerous *tāls* that are performed in *qawwālī*, I notate and discuss only a handful of examples that are frequently played and/or are central to my musical analysis. I discuss them in order of their relative tempos, starting with slow tempo *ṭhekās* and moving to faster tempo patterns.

In the musical example, *Allah hu*, begins with a slow tempo *ṭhekā* (around 100bpm) that is characteristic to the song:

⊖ ⊙	⊙ ⊖	— ⊖	⊖	⊖ ⊙	⊙ ⊖	— ⊖	⊖
● —	— ●	— —	●	— —	— —	— —	—
(X)				(0)			

Figure 2.7. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

The *dāyān* part of this *ṭhekā* is comprised of a four-beat pattern, [⊖ ● ● ⊖ – ⊕ ⊕ –], repeated twice.¹⁸⁴ Within this short pattern, the articulations of the resonant *dāyān* stroke, ⊖, accent a three-three-two grouping of its drum strokes, which gives this *ṭhekā* its distinguishing rhythmic cadence. During the first four beats, these accents are given a weighted accent from the articulations of the *bāyān*, ●. In the second half of the pattern, the *bāyān* is not articulated, leaving it absent of the rhythmic weight and accent found in the initial four beats. The contrast between the two repetitions of this pattern—one having the weighted accent from the *bāyān* and the other without—is drastic, and it is through such an alternation of opposing music qualities, weighted and un-weighted, that rhythm is articulated in *ṭhekā*.¹⁸⁵

The *ṭhekā* in Figure 2.7 is played only at a slow tempo; a point at which considerations of physical economy of drumming are less than at medium-fast and fast tempos.¹⁸⁶ As shown in the following notated medium-fast *ṭhekās*, the

¹⁸⁴ This pattern is built from a *bol* that is common to players of the tabla and is spoken as "DhaTe teDha –Na Dha–."

¹⁸⁵ This alternation of weighted accent (*bharī*, "full") and un-weighted accent (*khālī*) is one of the fundamental phenomena that drive rhythm in Hindustani music. See Kippen's discussion of *khālī* in Kippen 2019: 256-262.

¹⁸⁶ Regardless, the *dāyān* part of this *ṭhekā* utilizes motor movements of the hand and fingers that still favor physical economy. Its strokes are played through slight oscillations of the respective hand along its radial-ulnar axis. The first three strokes, ⊖ ● ●, alternate between being played with the index finger (radial side of the hand) and the simultaneous use of the pinky, ring, and middle fingers (ulnar side of hand). ⊖ is played with the index finger, ● is played with the pinky, ring, and middle fingers, and ● is played with the index finger. Strokes in beats three and four, ⊕ and ⊕, are similar, being played with the ulnar side of the hand then radial side, respectively.

positioning of the drummer's hand while playing respective drum strokes is a key consideration in a medium-fast tempo stroke-melody's composition. *Ṭhekā* composition involves the negotiation of musical and rhythmic aesthetics, along with the physical abilities of the players and their instruments. In order for a *ṭhekā* to be musically viable, I argue, it must successfully juggle both musical and physiological parameters.

A majority of the *qawwālī* songs I observed and learned during my fieldwork were played in medium-fast *keherwā*. One of the most common medium-fast tempo (around 300bpm) stroke-melodies that I observed was:

⊙	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊙	⊖	⊖	⊖
↻	—	↻	x	—	—	●	—
(X)				(0)			

Figure 2.8. *Thāpīyā keherwā ṭhekā*.

My drum teachers referred to the above type of *ṭhekā* as *thāpīyā*, from the onomatopoeia of its initial stroke, *Thap*, ⊙.¹⁸⁷ *Thap* is played by cupping the *dāyāñ*-playing hand and striking the very center of the drum skin. The sound produced is sharp and cutting: THAP. It is also one of the loudest strokes that is played on the *dāyāñ* side of the drum. In the Figure 2.8 *ṭhekā*, these drum strokes are played on beats one and five, which accent a four-four grouping of the pattern's eight beats. Following these *Thap* strokes are resonant strokes played by the index finger on the

¹⁸⁷ Rebecca Stewart identifies *thāpīyā* as the *bol* patterns given to the rhythmic structures of *dhrupad*. Stewart 1974: 86-87.

edge of the drum skin, ⊖. The alternation between these two *dāyān* strokes, ⊙ and ⊖, utilizes a potential energy created in the motor movements of the drummer's wrist. *Thap*, ⊙, is played through twisting the *dāyān*-playing hand clockwise in order to strike the drum. The subsequent strokes, ⊖, are played through twisting the same hand in the opposite direction, counter-clockwise, in order to strike the drum. This contrary motion in the twisting of the *dāyān* hand creates a loop of potential energies that maintain a high level of physical economy for drummers. The frequency in which I observed this *ṭhekā* being played speaks to this high-level of physical economy—drummers only play rhythmic patterns that they can sustain for the durations of their songs and programs.

The *bāyān* articulations in the Figure 2.8 *ṭhekā* add rhythmic weight to the important beats within the rhythmic pattern. Structurally, these important beats are the down beat of the cycle, which is articulated with a stroke with a slight upward inflection, ↗, and the articulation on beat seven, ●. Since these patterns are cyclical, the *bāyān* articulation on the seventh beat serves as an anticipation to the approaching first beat of the subsequent repeated pattern.¹⁸⁸ The slight upward inflection of the *bāyān* stroke adds accent to beat one, which is then resolved in the *bāyān* stroke on beat three, ↘. The non-resonant stroke on beat four, x, effectively dampens the sound of the *bāyān* from being played on beat three.

¹⁸⁸ Peter Manuel has noted the importance of this iambic "heartbeat" rhythm in the folk music of North India. Manuel 1989: 146-147.

Performances of *qawwālī* songs can continue to increase in rhythmic density until their final ecstatic conclusion. During such elevated musical moments, drummers will play appropriate *ṭhekās* that continue to support and reinforce the music and its intensity level. The most common stroke-melody I observed played for medium-fast and fast tempos (>300bpm) in *qawwālī* was:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
↺	–	↻	x	–	–	●	–
(X)				(0)			

Figure 2.9. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

This *ṭhekā* I observed played most during the apex of musical intensity during a *qawwālī* performance, which was usually during the refrain or at the end of the song. At peak intensity, the *ṭhekā* notated in Figure 2.9 is played with a great deal of physical force and power. Again, the *dāyān* part is comprised of a four-beat pattern that is repeated twice. In order to play with the necessary force, this *ṭhekā* utilizes strokes that create power through the motions of the hands. The initial "stroke" played on the *dāyān*, ◌̇, does not involve striking the drum's playing skin; it is means of positioning the *dāyān* hand so that it can strike the next drum stroke, ⊙, directly and forcefully. Rather than hitting the drum's skin, ◌̇ involves the drummer wearing a metal ring on their thumb and striking the wooden shell of the drum.¹⁸⁹ This is done by turning the wrist of the *dāyān*-playing hand counter-clockwise, which

¹⁸⁹ This stroke can also be played while not wearing a ring and striking the knuckle of the thumb on the shell of the drum.

extends the pinky, ring, and middle fingers away from the drum. The position creates a potential energy by preparing the hand to play the next two drum strokes, ☉ and ☊. These two strokes utilize this potential energy by turning the *dāyān* hand in the contrary direction (clockwise). The last stroke, ☋, in turn, positions the hand to play the next drum stroke, ☌. Collectively, the potential energies created and used in playing this stroke-melody give it a high level of physical economy, which is underscored again by its frequent use during points of high rhythmic intensity in *qawwālī* music. Similar to the above examples, the *bāyān* strokes in this *ṭhekā* center around the first beat: they anticipate (beat seven), ●, articulate (beat one), ↗, and resolve (beat three), ↘.

Recording of *Allah Hu*, Hazrat Inayat Khan *Dargah*, Nizamuddin, Delhi, January 10, 2017

Below I analyze a recording of *Allah hu* that I recorded at the Hazrat Inayat Khan *dargah*, located in the Nizamuddin neighborhood of Delhi, nearby to the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*. The song is performed by the Nizami Bandhu (Nizami brothers), who are the sons of the late Ustad Meraj Ahmad Nizami (1927-2015), a former prominent *qawwāl* at the Nizamuddin *dargah*.¹⁹⁰ Leading the performance on vocals and harmonium is the eldest brother of the family, Husnain Nizami, who is

¹⁹⁰ The title "Nizami Bandhu" is used by many families associated to the *qawwāl bachche* who maintain their own performing groups.

accompanied by his brothers, Saqlain, Sibtain, Jhalaluddin, and Shahnawaz. Sibtain, the drummer, in addition to playing the *dholak*, also sings. The performance took place on a Friday after the evening *azān* (Muslim call to prayer) among a small audience inside the *dargah* of Hazrat Inayat Khan.

Allah hu is sung in *rāg mishra khammaj* in the eight-beat rhythmic cycle, *keherwā*. The song begins with an instrumental prelude, known as *naghmā*, and continues with an introductory verse by the chorus. The main melody is sung during the refrain of the song, "*Allah hu*," which is a *zīkr*, a short, rhythmic repetition of God's name. Throughout the song the refrain is repeated numerous times. In the following performance of *Allah hu* there are three verses sung, between which either a refrain or inserted verse is sung.

***Allah hu* - Musical Example 2.1 AllahHu.mp3**

	Start	End	Number of Cycles
Prelude (<i>naghmā</i>)	0:00	2:15	46
Introductory verse	2:16	4:00	–
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	4:00	4:30	11
Inserted verse	4:31	4:47	7
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	4:47	6:22	78
Verse 1	6:23	7:02	36
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	7:02	7:10	8
Verse 2	7:11	8:04	47
Inserted verse	8:05	8:37	30
Verse 3	8:38	9:12	32
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	9:12	9:26	12

Table 2.1. *Allah hu* performance itinerary.

Moments of Improvisation in *Allah Hu*

My analysis of *Allah hu* considers the moments and frequency with which Sibtain Nizami changes from an "unornamented" *ṭhekā*, to one with different points of rhythmic weight and accent. While most of the rhythmic patterns he plays are one cycle in duration, some—as implied by their articulations of *wazn*—he extends to the duration of two cycles. I have notated these "pairs" of variations as "a" and "b." *Ṭhekās* that are one cycle in duration are marked by counting numbers.

The recording of *Allah hu* begins with a prelude on the harmonium, after which Sibtain enters playing at 0:53. He begins by playing the characteristic slow tempo *ṭhekā* of the song:

⊖	●	●	⊖	—	⊖	⊖	●	●	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
●	—	—	↗	—	—	↗	—	—	—	—	—	—
(X)												(0)

Figure 2.10. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

Most performances of *Allah hu* that I observed at the Nizamuddin *dargah* started with the drummer playing a similar type of slow tempo *ṭhekā*. This *ṭhekā* is a similar version to the one notated above in Figure 2.7, the only difference being Sibtain adding some stylistic upwards inflections on the *bāyān* articulations, ↗. These inflections help give an accent to the three-three-two grouping of the inner rhythmic subdivisions articulated by the resonant *dāyān* drum strokes, ⊖. Though this division of inner beats remains articulated by the *dāyān* in the second half of the *ṭhekā*, it lacks the rhythmic weight that is present in the first half of the pattern.

As the instrumental prelude continues, Sibtain doubles the rhythmic density of his playing, and at 1:43 switches to playing a medium-fast tempo *ṭhekā*.

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
–	●	●	●	–	●	●	●

(X) (0)

Figure 2.11. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

By switching to this *ṭhekā*, Sibtain doubles the rhythmic density of the song: two of the patterns notated in Figure 2.11 are played in the duration of a single *ṭhekā* notated in Figure 2.10. The other performers echo this change in rhythmic density, and change to clapping at double their previous rate.¹⁹¹ A significant amount of accent and *wazn* is voiced on the off beats of the pattern from the open-hand drum strokes Sibtain plays on the *bāyān*, ●. These strokes accent every beat except those on the primary duple subdivision: beats one and five. As Sibtain had instructed me, this pattern serves as a useful transition pattern with many functions, including to help establish a change in rhythmic density. In *qawwālī*, transitions within musical form and density are often met with heightened musical intensity, heard especially in the drumming. Sibtain plays this transitional pattern for two cycles, then proceeds to play another variation on the same stroke-melody at 1:46:

¹⁹¹ The clapping doubles again in density for a brief moment during this transition to a medium-fast rhythmic density, before returning to being heard on beats one and five.

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
●	↗	–	–	–	●	●	–

(X)

(0)

Figure 2.12. *Keherwā thekā*.

In this *thekā* (and a majority of the remaining ones discussed), Sibtain places articulations on the *bāyān* oriented around the first beat of each pattern. More often, he anticipates this articulation with another played on the *bāyān* on beat seven. Sibtain gives an accent to this anticipation by adding a similar drum stroke just before on beat six, as in Figure 2.12. He resolves this rise in rhythmic anticipation on beat one, ●, and stylistically resolves this weighted accent with a stroke with an upward inflection, ↗, on beat two.

After playing the Figure 2.12 *thekā* for only a few repetitions, the Sibtain switches to playing another *thekā* variation at 1:50:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
↗	–	–	–	–	–	●	–

(X)

(0)

Figure 2.13. *Keherwā thekā*.

In this *thekā*, Sibtain plays limited strokes on the *bāyān*, focusing the pattern's rhythmic accentuation on the anticipation, ●, and arrival of the first beat. Such *wazn* centers the rhythmic weight of the pattern on the passing and articulation of each successive rhythmic cycle. Before the conclusion of the introductory prelude, Sibtain changes briefly to another *thekā*:

–	–	⊙	⊖	–	–	⊙	⊖
↻	–	–	–	–	–	●	–

(X)

(0)

Figure 2.14. *Keherwā thekā*.

Acoustically, the *thekā* variation notated in Figure 2.14 is nearly identical to the *thekā* in Figure 2.13. The only difference is in the *dāyāñ* pattern on beats four and eight, ⊖, which are played with the index finger.¹⁹² To play this pattern involves two twists of the wrist: the strokes on beats three and seven, ⊙, involve a clockwise turn of the wrist to strike the center of the drum's skin with the pinky, ring, and middle fingers. This motion prepares the drummer's hand for the subsequent stroke, ⊖, which is played by turning the wrist in a contrary motion counter-clockwise. Because the *dāyāñ* pattern is played with only these two movements, the preparatory stroke used in the other *thekā* variations, ⊙, is not necessary. Sibtain plays the same minimalist *bāyāñ* pattern as the variation in Figure 2.13 that articulates the first beat, ↻, and anticipates it, ●. He plays this variation for the rest of the prelude, and concludes with a short *tīhāi*.

Throughout the introductory prelude, Sibtain switches to a new variation of *thekā* roughly every four rhythmic cycles. In the verses and refrains following the introductory verse (2:16-4:00) this rate of change is much less. As a member of the performing ensemble, part of Sibtain's musical responsibilities include singing as a

¹⁹² In other variations of this *thekā*, the stroke on the fourth and eight beats is played with the middle, ring, and pinky fingers, ⊙.

member of the chorus. In *qawwālī*, the chorus echoes the lead singer during the singing of the verse, which includes the drummer who is required to do this while continuing to play the *ṭhekā*. Sibtain regularly plays only one version of a *ṭhekā* for much of the parts during which he also sings, likely for sake of streamlining his musical tasks.

After the introductory verse, during which the drummer sits out playing, the vocalists begin singing *Allah hu* to the song's primary melody (4:00). Sibtain enters shortly afterwards and plays the slow tempo *ṭhekā* (Figure 2.10) he began playing at the song's beginning. He continues to play this *ṭhekā* while the lead singers repeat the melody and the phrase, *Allah hu*, and during an inserted verse that is sung from 4:31 to 4:47. Following the conclusion of the inserted verse, the main melody is sung and Sibtain once again doubles the rhythmic density of the song by switching to a medium-fast tempo *ṭhekā*:

⊖	–	⊙	⊖	⊖	–	⊙	⊖
↻	–	↻	x	–	–	●	–
(X)				(0)			

Figure 2.15. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

This *ṭhekā* variation is identical to the one notated in Figure 2.9. Similar to when Sibtain doubled the rhythmic density during the opening prelude, the rate of clapping by the chorus also switches to follow the drummer's playing in this transition. To reinforce this rhythmic shift, Sibtain briefly plays another variation of the *ṭhekā* to help reinforce the change in rhythmic density:

⊖	–	⊙	⊖	⊖	–	⊙	⊖
x	–	–	●	–	●	●	–

(X) (0)

Figure 2.16. *Keherwā thekā*.

By playing with open-hand strokes on the *bāyān*, ●, Sibtain places strong weighted accents on the off-beats of this pattern, similar to the *thekā* variation notated in Figure 2.11. The placement of these open-hand strokes on the off-beats juxtaposes directly with the other *thekās*, in which rhythmic accent is centered around beat one: "on the beat." As before, such juxtaposition of rhythmic accent is used as a means of strengthening a transition to a new rhythmic density.

As the main melody is repeated (4:56), Sibtain plays the *thekā* notated in Figure 2.12. Immediately following the melody, one of the lead singers begins singing and improvising on the phrase, "Allah hu," during which Sibtain plays the *thekā* variations in Figure 2.15 and Figure 2.13. The main melody is sung again, after which at 5:35 the lead vocalists begin a sequential pattern while singing, "Allah hu." While the sequence crescendos, Sibtain plays an alternating pair of *thekā* variations:

a:

⊖	–	⊙	⊖	⊖	–	⊙	⊖
●	–	–	↗	–	–	↗	–

(X) (0)

b:

⊖	–	⊙	⊖	⊖	–	⊙	⊖
●	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

(X) (0)

Figures 2.17a-b. *Keherwā thekās*.

In the first of the above *ṭhekā* variations, 2.17a, the pattern Sibtain plays on the *bāyān* articulates a three-three-two subdivision of beats. This particular grouping, three-three-two, replicates the rhythmic accents of the slow tempo *ṭhekā* he played at the song's beginning (Figure 2.10). The second variation, 2.17b, has only one articulation on the *bāyān*, ●, which he plays on the first beat; the rest of the pattern is played without rhythmic accent. As mentioned above, the contrast between rhythmic patterns having weighted accent from the *bāyān* and others without this accent is drastic. The alternation of these opposing music qualities, weighted and un-weighted, is one of the primary methods through which rhythm is articulated in *ṭhekās*.¹⁹³ In the variations in Figures 2.17a-b, Sibtain expands the oscillation of weighted and un-weighted over the duration of two rhythmic cycles, whereas in all the previous cycles this was done in one cycle—eight beats. Aurally, these rhythmic accents manipulate the implied duration of the rhythmic framework. Before, those variations a single cycle in duration firmly established an eight-beat rhythmic framework. Based on their rhythmic accents, the variations in Figures 2.17a-b imply an expanded rhythmic framework of sixteen beats; twice that of the previous variations.

As Sibtain plays these *ṭhekā* variations, the other vocalists sing a sequence of the *zīkr*, "Allah hu," while gradually increasing the volume at which they sing to an

¹⁹³ Kippen 2019: 256-262.

apex of musical intensity throughout the performance. Qureshi has noted the repeat and amplification of song text as a primary technique in *qawwālī* to meet the spiritual demands of its listeners in evoking emotional responses.¹⁹⁴ Sibtain adds to this build in musical intensity through crescendo-ing in unison with the ensemble, particularly through playing consecutively stronger strokes on the *bāyāñ*. Furthermore, he echoes and matches the wane in intensity at the resolution of this zenith (5:54) with the vocalists, at which time they begin to descend melodically while using another melodic sequence singing, "Allah hu." For this diminishing sequence, Sibtain returns to playing a *ṭhekā* variation with rhythmic accent implying a single rhythmic cycle of eight beats in length:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
●	–	–	↗	–	–	–	–
(X)				(0)			

Figure 2.18. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

Sibtain plays rhythmic accent only in the first four beats of this variation. In contrast to the other medium-fast tempo *ṭhekā* variations he has played up to this point, he does not articulate an anticipatory stroke on the *bāyāñ* on beat seven. Without this pickup, this *ṭhekā* variation lacks the pull in rhythmic accent that comes in other variations from the anticipatory *bāyāñ* stroke on beat seven. At the end of the melodic sequence, the vocalists repeat a different melodic figure beginning at

¹⁹⁴ Qureshi 1986: 63-65.

6:03, during which Sibtain switches to playing a variation of *ṭhekās* that resemble ones he played immediately earlier:

a:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
●	–	–	↗	–	–	↗	–
(X)				(0)			

b:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
●	↗	–	–	–	–	–	–
(X)				(0)			

Figures 2.19a-b. *Keherwā ṭhekās*.

The *ṭhekās* notated in Figures 2.19a-b are similar to those notated in Figures 2.17a-b. What distinguishes these variations are Sibtain's initial open-hand *bāyān* articulations, ●, in 2.19a, and his adding of a drum stroke with a stylistic upward inflection, ↗, on beat two of 2.19b. By playing an open-hand stroke, ●, at the onset, Sibtain places a strong accent at the start of this alternating pattern. His *bāyān* articulation on beat two of Figure 2.19b, ↗, also provides a feeling of a stylistic resolution for beat one, similar to his *ṭhekā* variation in Figure 2.12. By playing this pair of variations, Sibtain again manipulates the implied duration of the rhythmic framework of the song. With the use of weighted accent throughout the first pattern, 2.19a, and the general lack of this accent in the second pattern, 2.19b, the playing of these patterns evokes a sixteen-beat rhythmic framework. As the extended refrain section draws to a close, the vocalists shorten and embellish heavily the sequential figures they sing at 6:09 (another method identified by

Qureshi to evoke emotion in listeners, Qureshi 1986: 63-65), and Sibtain likewise

"shortens" the *ṭhekā* variation he plays:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
●	–	–	↗	–	–	↗	–

(X) (0)

Figure 2.20. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

Sibtain restores the sense of an eight-beat with this *ṭhekā*. Being played so immediately following the variations in Figures 2.19a-b, the juxtaposition of these patterns evoking sixteen then eight beats produces the aural effect of the song's rhythmic density doubling. This doubling of rhythmic density only relates to the articulation of *wazn* by the *bāyān*; all the meanwhile the *dāyān* pattern Sibtain plays remains at the same rate as they had been. The *ṭhekā* in Figure 2.20 is the same as notated in Figure 2.19a, in which Sibtain accents a three-three-two grouping with his *bāyān*. The density of *bāyān* strokes Sibtain plays in each cycle helps him reinforce this build in musical intensity. This crescendo builds to another singing of the main melody (6:13), during which time Sibtain plays the *ṭhekās* notated in Figure 2.13 and Figure 2.11.

Immediately following this repeat in the main melody, the first verse begins at 6:23. Throughout most of the verses Sibtain plays the *ṭhekā* notated in Figure 2.13, in addition to singing along with the chorus. On occasion, in order to provide a stronger sense of *wazn* on the structurally important beats of the rhythmic patterns he plays a final variation:

◌̇	–	⊙	⊖	◌̇	–	⊙	⊖
●	–	–	–	–	–	●	–
(X)				(0)			

Figure 2.21. *Keherwā ṭhekā*.

The open-hand *bāyān* strokes, ●, played in the Figure 2.21 *ṭhekā* help give weight to both the articulation of the first beat of the pattern and its anticipation on beat seven. While this is the last new *ṭhekā* variation that Sibtain plays in this performance, throughout the remainder of the song he continues to cycle through the variations he has already played. Towards the end of the first verse the vocalists build in intensity and volume while repeating and expanding the final line in the verse, "*Tab na thā kuch hī yahān thā magar tu hī tu*" ("When there was nothing, still there was you [God]"). Sibtain adds weight and accent to this crescendo and musical apex by playing the *ṭhekā* variation notated in Figure 2.11, which uses lots of open-hand *bāyān* strokes, ●. Afterwards, when the main melody is sung again at 7:02, he plays the *ṭhekās* notated in Figures 2.21 and 2.11. As the vocalists begin the second verse, Sibtain plays the *ṭhekās* of Figures 2.15, 2.13, 2.17a-b, and 2.21.

Concluding the second verse is an inserted verse (8:05-8:37), the *kalmah*, "Lā il-lāha illa'l-lāh" ("There is no God but God"), which represents one of the highest zeniths of musical intensity throughout the entire performance. The vocalists repeat and ornament this phrase, whose implied poetic rhythm itself has been found to be echoed within certain types of rhythmic patterns (Wolf 2014). During this point of peak intensity, Sibtain again plays patterns that utilize the thundering, open-hand

strokes of the *bāyān*: Figures 2.21, 2.11, and 2.13. The singers repeat the *kalmah* again at 8:28. For the remaining sections of the song—a final verse and one last singing of the main melody—Sibtain plays the *ṭhekās* notated in Figures 2.13 and 2.21, while occasionally playing Figure 2.16 to add accent and weight to the ends of musical phrases. The song concludes with a final singing of the main melody and a short *tīhāi*.

Throughout this performance of *Allah hu*, Sibtain plays fourteen different *ṭhekā* variations of the three different stroke-melodies he plays. What distinguishes these variations are the points and durations which he articulates *wazn* via the playing of the *bāyān*. Sibtain strategically plays patterns with heavy and regular *bāyān* articulations during the apexes in musical intensity that occur during this performance, such as points at which the vocalists repeat and amplify key phrases of the text, such as the *zīkr*, "Allah hu," and the inserted *kalmah*. Below are the fourteen variations of *ṭhekā* that Sibtain plays during the song. They have been organized according to their respective *dāyān* patterns and in order of appearance within the recording. Their points or durations of *wazn* have been outlined in a red box.

Figure 2.10:

\ominus	\ominus	\ominus	\ominus	-	\ominus	\ominus	\ominus	\ominus	\ominus	-	\ominus	\ominus	\ominus	-	\ominus	\ominus	\ominus
\bullet	-	-	∇	-	-	∇	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.11:

\circ	-	\odot	\ominus	\circ	-	\odot	\ominus
-	\bullet	\bullet	\bullet	-	\bullet	\bullet	\bullet

(X) (0)

Figure 2.12:

\circ	-	\odot	\ominus	\circ	-	\odot	\ominus
\bullet	∇	-	-	-	\bullet	\bullet	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.13:

\circ	-	\odot	\ominus	\circ	-	\odot	\ominus
∇	-	-	-	-	-	\bullet	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.14:

-	-	\odot	\ominus	-	-	\odot	\ominus
∇	-	-	-	-	-	\bullet	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.15:

\circ	-	\odot	\ominus	\circ	-	\odot	\ominus
∇	-	∇	x	-	-	\bullet	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.16:

\circ	-	\odot	\ominus	\circ	-	\odot	\ominus
x	-	-	\bullet	-	\bullet	\bullet	-

(X) (0)

Figures 2.17a-b:

a:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	-	-	↗	-	-	↗	-

(X) (0)

b:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.18:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	-	-	↗	-	-	-	-

(X) (0)

Figures 2.19a-b:

a:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	-	-	↗	-	-	↗	-

(X) (0)

b:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	↗	-	-	-	-	-	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.20:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	-	-	↗	-	-	↗	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.21:

ò	-	⊙	⊖	ò	-	⊙	⊖
●	-	-	-	-	-	●	-

(X) (0)

Figure 2.22. Points of rhythmic weight and accent in *Allah hu ðhekā* variations.

The *ṭhekās* notated above demonstrate a variety of frameworks and points of rhythmic accent and weight as played by Sibtain Nizami. Many of these *ṭhekās*, such as Figures 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 2.15, and 2.21 center rhythmic weight and accent on the first beat of the rhythmic pattern as well as its anticipation on beat seven. Other variations, like those notated in Figures 2.11, 2.16, and 2.18 maintain periods of *wazn* centered on particular beat durations within the rhythmic pattern. Additionally, the variations in Figures 2.10, 2.17a-b, 2.19a-b, and 2.20 articulate numerous individual points of rhythmic accent within their patterns. During parts of the song when Sibtain is not singing, he shuffles through these variations regularly. The different frameworks of *wazn* and accent sounded from playing these *ṭhekās* provides for a rousing and absorbing rhythmic accompaniment for the song. In the chart below, I have summarized the different *ṭhekā* variations the drummer plays within each section of the song, listed in order of their performance.

	Number of Cycles	Variations played (Figure #'s)
Prelude (<i>naghmā</i>)	46	2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14
Introductory verse	–	–
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	11	2.10
Inserted verse	7	2.10
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	78	2.15, 2.16, 2.12, 2.13, 2.17a-b, 2.18, 2.19a-b, 2.20
Verse 1	36	2.13, 2.21, 2.11
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	8	2.21, 2.11
Verse 2	47	2.15, 2.13, 2.17a-b, 2.21
Inserted verse	30	2.21, 2.11, 2.13
Verse 3	32	2.13, 2.21, 2.16
Refrain (<i>Allah hu</i>)	12	2.13, 2.21, 2.16

Table 2.2. *Allah hu ṭhekā* distribution.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed drumming in *qawwālī* devotional music. I began with ethnographic narratives of the drummers with whom I interacted and learned in Nizamuddin and Fatehpur Sikri. Being a *qawwālī* drummer involves intense competition, as well as a life of continually playing one's instrument. Indeed, I believe the narratives detailed in each case-study are representative of the experiences that I noticed among professional folk drummers in South Asia in so far as I observed during my fieldwork. I believe further that such livelihoods have directly impacted the performance practices of the music they make, drumming included, which I then correlated in my musical analysis.

In Part Two of this chapter, I looked at the rhythmic approach to drumming accompaniment in *qawwālī* performance and discussed how improvisation is used while playing *ṭhekā*. My analysis looked at the drumming in a recording of the famous *qawwālī* song, *Allah hu*, as played by the Nizami Bandhu of the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah*. Throughout the recording of *Allah hu*, Sibtain Nizami drummer plays fourteen variations of *ṭhekās*. To trace his improvisation, I looked at the different frameworks and articulations of *wazn* within each of these *ṭhekā* variations, and considered their implications in relation to the other musical interactions and processes taking place. Ultimately, I showed that, through improvisation on the *bāyān* side of the instrument, drummers can alter and change the rhythmic accent of the rhythmic patterns they play to support better the musical performance. As

Table 2.2 shows, a drummer can change the *ṭhekā* they are playing several times within the same musical sectional. Furthermore, I argued for the importance of physical economies in the drum strokes for playing *ṭhekā*, and illustrated through notation how these economies aid drummers in sustaining their playing for long durations.

The extensive use of variation and elaboration in playing *ṭhekā* I illustrated in my analysis is prevalent throughout South Asian popular, folk, and devotional music genres. *Qawwālī* represents but one of these genres, albeit one of the more widely practiced and performed. The manner in which *ṭhekā* is played in *qawwālī* supports my notion that these compositions (*ṭhekā*) as being a model for rhythmic-based improvisation. In the context of a performance, this improvisation facilitates the devotional functions of *qawwālī* music to evoke emotional responses in listeners. These processes take considerable time, however, and require drummers to sustain themselves throughout their playing. Physical economies of *ṭhekā* drumming are thus a central component of accompaniment drumming in this regard, which I detail further in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three

Studying Sindhi Drumming in Bhuj: Introduction

In the summer of 2017, my interest in popular, devotional, and folk drumming took me to Bhuj, a town located in Kachchh (also spelled Kutch), a district in western Gujarat, India. Through the help of a colleague¹⁹⁵ who was also conducting doctoral fieldwork in India during the time, I was introduced to a group of hereditary musicians who perform Sindhi *kāfī* music.¹⁹⁶ *Kāfī* is a genre of vernacular Sufi poetry that is set to a variety of musical styles in the greater Indus Valley region.¹⁹⁷ Similar to *qawwālī*, *kāfī* is performed as a means of devotion. In contemporary Kachchh, public performances of *kāfī* occur mainly during *'urs* events held at Sufi *dargahs*. *Kāfī* was also once a prominent feature at weddings in the region, but this has become less common in recent times on due to changes in local Islamic teachings.¹⁹⁸ Nowadays, only *langā* weddings contain performances of, among other music genres, *kāfī*.

¹⁹⁵ I am grateful for Brian Bond for introducing me to the musicians with whom he conducted his doctoral fieldwork in Kachchh.

¹⁹⁶ Sindhi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in western India and the Sindh and Baluchistan regions of Pakistan.

¹⁹⁷ Bond 2020: 216.

¹⁹⁸ Brian Bond discusses these processes in length in Chapter 6 of his dissertation. See Bond 2020: 291-348.

The primary drummer I met in Kachchh was Mohammad Faqir, a renowned Sindhi *dholak* and tabla player from Bhuj. During my two research trips to Kachchh (July 2017 and March 2020), I spent a significant portion of my time with Mohammad Faqir, known also as Faqir Ustad, and other male members of his family, all of whom were musicians or involved in music in some fashion.¹⁹⁹ Both of my trips being each just over a week long, and during this time I came to develop a close relationship with Faqir Ustad and his extended family through our musical interactions. While in Bhuj, I spent numerous hours each day at the family's house practicing and making music with them. On occasions in which they performed, I accompanied them to their musical programs, which took place within and outside the city. Of Faqir Ustad's family members with whom I spent time practicing and talking about music, I interacted the most with his twin sons, Fezan and Sarfraz, his brother, referred to as "Mamolo Ustad," and an uncle of the family's, Jhandiya Ustad. I also met several other *langā* musicians from my frequent trips to Faqir Ustad's neighborhood, and other musicians from various villages while traveling around Kachchh who were helpful to my research on Sindhi drumming.

The focus of this chapter is Sindhi music: its practitioners in Kachchh, India, as well as the rhythmic approach of its drumming. In Part One of this chapter, I reference my time spent practicing and making music with Faqir Ustad and the other

¹⁹⁹ Most of the relatives of Faqir Ustad's with whom I met were practicing musicians, though one made and repaired instruments.

male members of his family. One aspect that defined my fieldwork experience in Kachchh was practice. Hours and hours of practice. I relate these experiences to the manners in which Hindustani classical music discourses have positioned such extensive practice, known as *riyāz*. My findings about *riyāz* are somewhat different from those made by Daniel Neuman and James Kippen about *riyāz* in Hindustani music. Daniel Neuman identifies *riyāz* as a cultural concept of significance not because musicians practiced long hours, but because musicians would explain the greatness of other musicians through their *riyāz* habits. "Riaz is the measure and the mark of the role of the individual in becoming a musician. The way one does (or is said to do) riaz expresses symbolically the way one is as a musician."²⁰⁰ From this perspective, the long hours of practice are not just a cause of technical competence or virtuosity but a sign that the musician has a certain inner-substance that is required to become a great musician.²⁰¹ Kippen takes issue with the facticity of *riyāz* claims, suggesting they are exaggerated and romanticized as he never observed such long hours of practice among his interlocutors. While being mindful of such glorified tales of dedicated and extensive *riyāz* from his own research, Kippen argues that he observed little firsthand evidence of musicians actually going to the lengths of practice, which in classical music is a solo experience, as entailed in their stories.²⁰² Kippen's counter-narrative cites the commonness of musicians having to take up

²⁰⁰ Neuman 1980: 30.

²⁰¹ Neuman 1980: 30-43.

²⁰² Kippen 1988: 128.

full-time employment to supplement their livelihoods, leaving less available time for *riyāz*.

In the non-classical drumming traditions in which I participated, *riyāz* appeared as a lifestyle for hereditary musician, built into the quotidian to such an extent that the practice provoked very little mention, let alone celebration. Unlike Kippen, however, I not only observed, but participated in many lengthy *riyāz* sessions. This is so, I argue, because practicing for such great lengths of time prepares musicians for the physical demand of the programs they play, which are far longer than the celebrated classical concerts. As I mentioned in the previous chapter on *qawwālī*, the experiences of the musicians I met in Kachchh speak to a broader narrative of being a hereditary, non-classical drummer in contemporary India—conditions I argue fundamentally inform the performance practices of *ṭhekā*. This connection appears most clear in the physical economies of the *ṭhekās* played in Sindhi *kāfī* music, which I illustrate in musical analysis.

Part Two of this chapter presents a musical analysis of *ṭhekā* drumming in Sindhi *kāfī* music. Specifically, I look at the rhythmic approaches to its *ṭhekā* drumming, and highlight the use and context of improvisation and embellishment.²⁰³ I begin with a brief discussion of the rhythmic accompaniment approaches and musical form of Sindhi *kāfī*, and identify its primary stroke-melodies. In the analysis

²⁰³ I analyze Sindhi *ṭhekās* in respect to how they are played on the *ḍholak*, one of the primary drums performed in *kāfī* music.

that follows, I trace the elaboration and variations of a *ṭhekā* through a performance of Sindhi *kāfi* that I recorded during my 2020 trip to Kachchh, which is performed by Faqir Ustad. As the analysis shows, variation occurs frequently and spontaneously throughout the performance, underscores the flexibility and adaptability of its drummer. Similar to my observations among *qawwālī* drummers, I believe these skills to be resulting from a lifetime of practice and music-making.

Part One

Hereditary *Langā* Musicians in Kachchh

A majority of the musicians with whom I interacted in Kachchh were *langās*, a community of hereditary musicians who dominate musical practice in the region.²⁰⁴ In Kachchh, *langās*—who identify predominantly as Muslim—perform across musical genres in a variety of contexts for Hindu, Muslim, and Jain communities.²⁰⁵ Additionally, most *langās* are multi-instrumentalists; the ones whom I met during my fieldwork played a variety of instruments that include (but are not limited to)

²⁰⁴ The most recent work containing information regarding the *langās* of Kachchh is Brian Bond's 2020 dissertation, while more in-depth studies have been written about the *langhā* communities of Rajasthan. See Jhairazbhoy 1977 and Neuman, Kothari, and Chaudhuri 2006. Also, for more on the diversity of musical communities in western India see Thompson 1987: 258-293.

²⁰⁵ Bond 2020: 245.

drums and percussion such as *ḍhol*, *ḍholak*, *manjīrā*,²⁰⁶ *naqqārā*,²⁰⁷ and tabla, and melodic instruments such as *shehnā'ī*, a double-reed aerophone,²⁰⁸ *benjo*, and harmonium. Nazir Jairazbhoy and Amy Catlin's documentary on the instruments of Kachchh has detailed the use of these instruments (and others) in a variety of music styles across the diversity of communities in this region (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 1999). While contemporary musical practice among *langās* is dominated by men, in previous times *langā* women performed songs (*gīt*) at weddings, though only for the female attendees.²⁰⁹ In villages, women also play the *ḍhol* and sing, as can be seen and heard in Jairazbhoy's and Catlin's documentary. In general, *langā* men only play instruments in the position of an accompanist; it is uncommon for them to sing in public.²¹⁰

In Kachchh, *langās* are experts at ferrying between musical genres and audiences that are heavily marked by difference of religion and language. Their extensive knowledge of inter-regional musical repertoire makes them indispensable

²⁰⁶ *Manjīrā* are pairs of small cymbals that are most often played in Hindu *bhakti* music in Kachchh.

²⁰⁷ Musicians with whom I interacted referred to *naqqārā* also as *naubat*.

²⁰⁸ *Shehnā'ī* is also called *soṇā'in* in the Kachchhi language.

²⁰⁹ Bond 2020: 246. The gender-segregated music practices of weddings in Afghanistan and other regions of Central Asia are discussed in Doubleday 1988 and Sultanova 2011.

²¹⁰ Despite not singing in public programs, it was clear from my time spent with Faqir Ustad and his family members that they could sing, and maintained a significant repertoire of songs and melodies. It was not uncommon for Faqir Ustad or his family members to reference a particular *kāfī* melody by singing during our practice sessions at home. Prior to a performance I attended, I observed Faqir Ustad debating with a *kāfī* singer over the singer's melodic rendition of a song's melody. Faqir Ustad had instructed the singer to alter slightly the manner in which he sang a particular item of the text, at which the singer accepted Faqir Ustad's critique and admitted to not being knowledgeable about the phrase in question. The *kāfī* singers whom I met in Kachchh were not *langās*, but belonged to an agricultural community known as *jats*.

for the musical practices of several communities throughout Kachchh. The *langā* musicians with whom I interacted were adept at numerous musical instruments and genres, and extended their talents to a wide array of musical programs. Their collective knowledge included Sindhi *kāfī* music, devotional Hindu *bhakti/bhajan* music, classical and "light-classical" genres of Hindustani music, and various types of traditional music and percussion to be performed in rituals, weddings and other regional folk events and traditions. At the time of research and writing, Faqir Ustad was one of the most sought after *ḍholak* players by *kāfī* singers in Kachchh, in addition to being a preferred tabla player for Hindu *bhajan* programs. Additionally, his twin sons were already veteran performers themselves and showed great promise as young musicians.

Faqir Ustad

I first came to know of Faqir Ustad in May 2017 after I was sent a video of him performing Sindhi *kāfī* music at a *melā* (festival) in Kachchh by our mutual contact, Brian Bond.²¹¹ At the time, I was completely unfamiliar with Sindhi music and this video served as my introduction to the music genre. Though I could not understand the Sindhi poetry that was being sung, this did not prevent me from thoroughly enjoying the performance—especially the musical pyrotechnics of the

²¹¹ This video can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=de_L2KrB2G4.

dholak player. Not only was the Sindhi style of drumming rhythmically engaging, but through following along with it, I was able to discern a basic implied structure for the song simply based on what the drummer was doing. Drumming can play a key role in articulating the form of musical settings of poetry such as, to name a few, *kāfī*, *qawwālī*, *ghazal*, *ṭhumrī*, and *dādrā*. Percussionists who play these genres use various compositional forms to articulate a composition's structure. In particular, the use of *tīhāis* play a crucial role in articulating the different sections of a composition. *Tīhāis* effectively delineate the sequential sections of a song. They maintain a bifurcated role in such contexts in that, while they conclude one section or verse, they also articulate the beginning of a subsequent section or verse.²¹² While listening to and watching the video of Faqir Ustad's performance, despite being unfamiliar with Sindhi *kāfī* (let alone the Sindhi language), I was able to discern the divisions of the song on account of the rhythmic patterns and compositions that he played, which were made all the more enjoyable by his bombastic style of *dholak* playing.

²¹² The delineation of a composition's verses is further articulated by the insertion of instrumental interludes between subsequent verses.



Figure 3.1. Mohammad Faqir (left) plays *ḍholak* with Mazhar Mutva on harmonium during a *mehfil* in Dhordo, Kachchh. Picture taken by the author, March 2020.

When I met him in the summer of 2017, Faqir Ustad was in his mid-40's.

While being a renowned Sindhi *ḍholak* player, Faqir Ustad is a multi-instrumentalist who performs on a variety of drums including *ḍholak*, *ḍhol*, tabla, and *naqqārā*. Like many of the hereditary musicians I met during my fieldwork, Faqir Ustad learned music from different members of his community, which included his father and another *ḍholak* player from Pakistan, Ustad Hashim Kachi. He, in turn, was also teaching his four sons to continue the family's traditional occupation of music.

What immediately drew me to Faqir Ustad's playing was the power with which he plays the *ḍholak*, and how seemingly effortless and yet animated his playing is. He took great pride and joy from this style of playing, "This is *pūrā* ("complete", but also meaning real or true) Sindhi-style," he would say when playing with his characteristic vigor. His accompaniment style in *kāfī* music is representative

of a style that was popularized in the 1950's by Ustad Mithoo Kachi and his family, which includes his older brother, Ustad Hashim Kachi, one of Faqir Ustad's teachers.²¹³ With his long, slender fingers, Faqir Ustad regularly plays compositions and rhythmic patterns during *kāfī* performances that utilized fast sequential *bols* (e.g., *DhāSGiDa NaGaTeRe KiTaTaKa TeReKeTa*, etc.), which he plays with absolute precision and clarity. The use of these compositions, called *daur* in the Kachchhi language (*relā* in Hindi/Urdu), in the context of rhythmic accompaniment I found strikingly virtuosic, especially compared to rhythmic approaches in *qawwālī* music. In *qawwālī*, accompaniment drumming rarely involves using such fast *bols* extensively; such fast playing is often limited to "solo" drumming sections, which do not commonly occur in performances (Wolf 2014: 16).²¹⁴ In Sindhi *kāfī* music, *daur* (*relā*) compositions are a regular part of the drumming accompaniment, and add an engaging and rhythmically driven character to the music.²¹⁵

Faqir Ustad is foremost a performing musician, and apart from his own family and others in his community he does not often teach outside students. He had granted an exception for me to come and learn *ḡholak* with him on account of my

²¹³ Bond 2020: 219; 244-245.

²¹⁴ It is extremely uncommon for drummers to play "solo" at *dargah* events. During my many nights spent at the Nizamuddin *dargah* in Delhi I observed only one instance in which drummers played "solo." However, this was immediately put to a stop by one of the *dargah's* *ḡhadīm-s* (care-takers). In private programs, however, drummers will sometimes play solo to raise the energy of the performance.

²¹⁵ Bond writes that at 'urs performances in Kachchh, the "rhythmically dense *ḡholak* style" of *kāfī* provides interest for many of the rural attendees who do not understand the poetry being sung. Bond 2020: 146.

association to Brian. In actuality, my "learning" was done by practicing and playing music with the family. After our initial introductions in my hotel room in Bhuj, Faqir Ustad welcomed me into his family's residence where I spent several hours of each day practicing, mostly with his sons, Fezan and Sarfraj. The dedicated and extensive practice, which they referred to as *riyāz*, I observed among Faqir Ustad's family members I found striking. Lengthy and devoted practice habits are lauded among Hindustani classical music circles as a marker of greatness and an ideal to strive. This ideal of practice is illustrated succinctly in the quasi-apocryphal stories of the *riyāz* habits of prior great musicians that abound. Whether to motivate students or to explain greatness in musicians, *riyāz* narratives often celebrate extraordinary practice habits. Among the *langās* in Bhuj, I observed and participated in such dedication to *riyāz*, yet it was not celebrated as extraordinary or recounted in narrative descriptions of greatness. Rather, I found it to be an activity central to the lifestyle of my musical interlocutors. I believe that such *riyāz* is a necessary undertaking to fulfill the requirements of being a multi-instrumentalist and multi-music genre performer.

Practice: *Riyāz*

" The... technicalities [of *ṭhekā*-like drumming patterns] ... are so exquisitely formed... that to become an excellent drummer would require a life-long practice."²¹⁶

Riyāz *n.* 1. Hard work; toil; labour [sic]; exertion, 2. Regular and constant practice to learn something, 3. Practice or exercise in music.²¹⁷

The concept of *riyāz* is deeply entrenched in Hindustani classical music culture. Perhaps that is why in its entry in the Oxford Urdu-English dictionary, music is specifically mentioned in one of its definitions. *Riyāz* may translate to "practice" in the sense of working to attain a level of mastery for any given skill, but it maintains much deeper connotations for Hindustani musicians. *Riyāz* is not just about dutiful practice. While it is a practice that one does throughout one's lifetime it is an especially pronounced discipline in years of discipleship: one receives instruction (*ta'līm*) and one practices (*riyāz*). And indeed, Hindustani musicians talk extensively about their *riyāz* as well as the habits of others. A rich oral history recounting the *riyāz* habits of past great musicians exists among contemporary Hindustani classical music circles. These stories detail the extensive hours and, at times, unorthodox manners in which celebrated artists of former times did their *riyāz*. Moreover, these

²¹⁶ Pingle 1964: 72.

²¹⁷ Parekh, et. al. 2010: 663.

narratives portray great personal sacrifice that goes into such dedicated *riyāz*, which at times can stretch the bounds of humanity.²¹⁸

One such *riyāz* story, which I heard from a *guru-bhāi* (another student of one of my teachers), illustrates the cruel tone that can sometimes underscore these ideals of musical practice. The story involves Ustad Zakir Hussain, arguably one of the most famous living representatives of tabla, during the early years of instruction (*ta'līm*) with his father and teacher, Ustad Allah Rakha. I have summarized the story below as it was relayed to me by my *guru-bhāi*:

"During the early years of his *ta'līm*, Zakir Hussain was woken up every day in the early mornings (before the sun would rise) by his father to begin his *riyāz*. However, because it was so early, Zakir was not permitted to play on his drums, so as not to disturb the other members of the household or the surrounding neighborhood. Therefore, Ustad Allah Rakha instructed Zakir to go outside and practice playing on a concrete wall that surrounded the family's residence, pretending the rock-hard surface was a tabla. Zakir did this for several hours each morning, and by doing so, built up an incredible strength and hardness in his fingers, while also not being a disturbance to others in his surroundings." -Tushar R.

The above story involving Ustad Zakir Hussain details two common themes found in *riyāz* narratives: (1) an unquestioning dedication to the rigors of extensive practice (waking up well before all others to start one's practice) and (2) a glorification of unorthodox means to attain a musical ideal (drumming with one's fingers on a literal rock wall in order to acquire one's callouses). It was only when I

²¹⁸ Such stories can be found in Shankar 1968, Neuman 1980: 33-43, and Kippen 1988: 76-78.

began working with devotional and popular music genre musicians that I came to observe and participate in such dedicated and extensive *riyāz*.

***Riyāz* Sessions in Bhuj, Kachchh**

During my two trips to Kachchh, a significant portion of my time was spent practicing, mostly with male members of Faqir Ustad's extended family. The itinerary of my research any given day depended largely on whether or not the family had a program at which to play that night. If there was a program, I was instructed a day before to sleep in as long as possible the following morning (till noon, at least) so that I could stay up that night for the entirety of the program, which would last from 10:00PM until 3:00AM or 4:00AM the next morning. If there was not a program, I was invited to come to the family's house at my leisure, usually in the morning between 11:00AM and 12:00PM, to do *riyāz* together with various members the family.

On days during which we practiced, our cumulative time playing would regularly amount to between six to ten hours. One of the most vivid and palpable experiences I remember from my time in Kachchh was how much *riyāz* I did with Faqir Ustad and his family, and the physical toll that it took on my body. At the end of each day, I was rendered mentally and physically exhausted by the extent of rhythmic patterns, music styles, and instruments we had practiced. To Faqir Ustad's sons, this extensive *riyāz* was nondescript. Fezan, one of Faqir Ustad's twin sons,

described his daily practice habits to me one day: "If we do not have a program to play in evenings, we [he and his brothers] practice for about six to seven hours a day. We take breaks to eat when we are hungry, and when we hear the call to prayer. If we have a program at night we will only practice a few hours, then play for several hours during the program." The dedication to this daily practice was so great that the younger sons of the family often skipped going to school so that they could do their *riyāz*. "Why should I go to school?" The youngest son, aged 10 or so, told me one day when I asked him why he skipped school to practice, "They cannot teach me how to play music in school. They (pointing towards his elder brothers) are my teachers."

Riyāz was not self-congratulatory or romanticized in Kachchh as I often observed it to be among Hindustani classical music narratives, such as the story of the great tabla player Ustad Ahmad Jan Thirakwa practicing late at night while sitting circumscribed by scorpions and other biting insects so as to help him stay awake so that he could practice.²¹⁹ Rather, it was simply one of the many components of the household's daily routine and activities. When I asked Faqir Ustad's sons what they did on their free time they responded by saying, "*riyāz*." For them, *riyāz* was not a practice to elaborate on in narrative; it was a lifestyle of learning and playing music *together*.

²¹⁹ Neuman 1980: 33.

Faqir Ustad had four sons, Fezan, Sarfraj, Adil, and Mahim,²²⁰ whose ages ranged from ten to twenty at the time of writing. Music had been instilled in them from an early age; their "toys" growing up, they said, were smaller versions of instruments—*ḍholaks*, in particular. All were skilled multi-instrumentalists and multi-musical genre performers, and all but one was already performing programs. Our *riyāz* took place in a small, window-less concrete room that was attached to the backside of Faqir Ustad's house. Built into one side of the wall were shelves lined with instruments the family played—*ḍholak*, *ḍhol*, tabla, harmonium, *shehnā'ī*, and *benjo*.²²¹ The floor was just big enough for four of us to sit in a circle, facing each other with our instruments on our laps or in front of us on the floor.

Our *riyāz* was done as a group; very different form of practice than is found in the Hindustani classical world, in which it is often done alone. More often there would be three or four of us practicing together, as this number of performers filled the roles necessary to play the various genres of Sindhi music we practiced. One or two of the sons would play a melodic instrument, the harmonium or *benjo*, while another and I played the *ḍholak*. Our practice throughout the day spanned several music genres the family played, and we only paused for meals, snacks, chai, and during the *azān*.²²² Practice was loosely organized; most often those playing melodic

²²⁰ Adil and Mahim are pseudonyms for Faqir Ustad's youngest two sons who I do not name because of their age.

²²¹ The *benjo*, or *bulbul tarāng*, is a plucked chordophone played in regional and popular genres of music in northern and western India as well as Pakistan. It can also be spelled *benjū*.

²²² In my observations, Muslim musicians do not sing or play their instruments during the *azān*.

instruments would start playing a particular song and the others would follow along. At other times, someone with a drum would choose a particular *tāl*, and the rest of the group would follow. My knowledge and skills of solo tabla playing intrigued Faqir Ustad and his family members, on account of solo tabla performances being uncommon in Kachchh. Occasionally I would be asked to play a specific type of composition or *tāl* on the tabla, or to create a composition, usually a *tīhāī*, for the others to learn. I was also asked to play a few compositions on tabla for guests and relatives that visited the household during the day, after which our *riyāz* would resume.

The amount of musical ground we covered during a single day of practice was staggering to me. In contrast, during my lessons with classical tabla players, only a small amount of repertoire—one composition or item—was divulged to students per session. In Kachchh, our *riyāz* covered multiple music genres and multiple *tāls*, rhythmic cycles. It was also not uncommon for people to switch musical instruments throughout the course of practice. Much of the focus of practice was on playing through the standard repertoire the family performed, in particular various Sindhi *kāfī* songs. In order to keep up with all the musical material to which I was being exposed, I recorded many of our practice sessions. At night in my hotel I reviewed the recordings I had made, and played along with them by drumming on my knees while I sat cross-legged on my bed. The mental and physical strain these *riyāz* sessions took on me was palpable. After a few days of this intensive practice

regimen, my energy was so low that I barely had any strength to walk to the other end of the road on which my hotel was, let alone practice.

My own fatigue was put into perspective when the family suddenly was called to play an all-night Hindu *bhajan* program, which they performed, while I sat out attending because of my exhaustion from playing that day. From this moment, I realized the extended *riyāz* sessions we did were not only for practicing and honing one's musical skills, but they also prepared these musicians for the extensive durations and demanding physicality of their musical programs. I came to observe the extent of these physical demands at the all-night musical programs I attended with Faqir Ustad and his family during my trip to Kachchh in 2020.

During this trip I was able to attend two all-night devotional *bhajan* programs in which Faqir Ustad and/or members of his family played. These took place at Hindu temples in and around Bhuj, with programs starting around 10:00PM in the evening and ending by 3:00AM or 4:00AM the following morning. *Bhajan* drumming is played on tabla, and involves two players performing simultaneously. In *bhajan* accompaniment, each drummer plays a different pre-composed pattern (*ṭhekā*) that, when the two are played together, form an interlocking chain of repeated strokes on the higher pitched drum, the *dāyāñ*. This style of drumming is most common in *bhajans* in eight-beat rhythmic cycles, known as *kalvārā* in the Kachchhi language.

Tabla *bhajan thekā*, player 1

– ⊖	⊖ –	– ⊖	⊖ –	– ⊖	⊖ –	– ⊖	⊖ –
● –	– –	↻ –	– –	x –	– –	● –	– –
(X)				(0)			

Tabla *bhajan thekā*, player 2

⊖ –	– ⊖	⊖ –	– ⊖	⊖ –	– ⊖	⊖ –	– ⊖
● –	– –	↻ –	– –	x –	– –	● –	– –
(X)				(0)			

When both *thekās* are played simultaneously, the articulated pattern is:

⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖	⊖ ⊖
● –	– –	↻ –	– –	x –	– –	● –	– –
(X)				(0)			

Figure 3.2. Kachchhi *bhajan thekās*.

The musical effect of these inter-locking patterns is rhythmically overwhelmingly, especially combined with the tinny sound of the constant *manjīrā* (finger cymbal) playing. For drummers, the physical demand of *bhajan* drumming is extensive and requires immense playing stamina. Players are required to repeat the above patterns at medium-fast speeds (>250bpm) for several hours during the course of the program. The sheer physical toll of playing such a program became apparent to me when I accompanied Faqir Ustad's family to a post-performance meal at a late-night food cart in Bhuj. Since it was nearly 4:30AM, there was only one food cart open in Bhuj, and it was where many of the *langā* musicians went after their programs ended. The musicians with whom I went ordered *papada jalebi*, a savory concoction comprised of fried flatbread pieces covered in a mixture of honey-covered sweets (which were also fried), chickpeas, chopped onions, and a

hefty amount of garlic chutney. Famished from the energy they burned during the program, the musicians devoured the sizable pile of greasy, highly caloric food in just a few minutes.

Fatty food aside, the physical demands of drumming in such musical programs requires an immense amount of playing endurance to keep up. This sort of stamina is built up over time through extensive and dedicated practice, and speaks to a lifestyle where a focus on one's family craft is instilled from an early age. All four of Faqir Ustad's sons did not need elaborate narratives to inspire them to practice; their motivation to practice was engrained in them through growing up amid the music making of their community. Such devoted *riyāz* physically conditions musicians to be able to play for hours at fast tempos and at high energy levels, as is required of them in playing particular musical genres. As I show in the subsequent musical analysis, the rhythmic patterns they play occupy a special role in this conditioning in that their techniques utilize physical economies of movement that help drummers play over long durations.



Figure 3.3. Faqir Ustad (light blue shirt) plays tabla with his son, Sarfraj (yellow shirt), at a *bhajan* program in Bhuj, March 2020. Photo taken by author.

Part two: Musical Analysis

Improvising in Sindhi Music

The following musical analysis looks at how improvisation occurs within the rhythmic accompaniment in Sindhi music. To illustrate the manners in which this is done, I analyze a live performance of Sindhi *kāfi* as performed by my primary teacher in Kachchh, Faqir Ustad, a renown Sindhi-style *ḍholak* player. I made this recording at a private, informal musical gathering among members of Faqir Ustad's family and other musicians in March 2020. My analysis focuses on the duple-based

rhythmic cycle *kalvārā* (*keherwā*). I observed *kalvārā* being played frequently in performances of Sindhi music, including *kāfī*, and much of my time spent practicing at Faqir Ustad's residence with his sons was doing so in this rhythmic cycle.²²³

Before my musical analysis I discuss briefly the musical form of Sindhi *kāfī* music, and detail how drum accompaniment supports and articulates its structure.²²⁴ I also identify the three main stroke-melodies of the rhythmic cycle, *kalvārā*, that are played in Sindhi music.

Musical Form in Sindhi *Kāfī*

Musical form in *kāfī* is based around the poetic composition, also referred to as *kalām* (poetry). *Kāfī* is sung in *surs*, melody types that fall somewhere between a fixed folk song, in which deviations of pitch and rhythm rarely change, and a *rāg*, which acts as a model for improvisation.²²⁵ Performances of *kāfī* start with a brief melodic exposition in free rhythm (*ālāp*). The start of a regular rhythmic pulse does not enter the performance until the beginning of the composition, at which point the drummer enters by playing *ṭhekā* (also called *ṭhekō* in the Kachchhi language). *Ṭhekā* is the primary rhythmic support throughout the entirety of the song, and is

²²³ The other rhythmic cycles that I observed performed less frequently than *kalvārā* include the six-beat cycle, *dādrā*, and a seven-beat rhythmic cycle referred to as *mughalai* (not to be confused with *mughali*, which is played in music in Afghanistan).

²²⁴ For the example *kāfī* performance I have not included the lyrics to the poetry, largely because Sindhi *Kāfī* is an oral tradition and I do not maintain a knowledge of the Sindhi language.

²²⁵ Qureshi 1988: 49.

played during the verses of the *kalām* and instrumental interludes. Other rhythmic compositions, such as *tīhāis* (called *toḍā* or *torā* in the Kachchhi language), are played to articulate the ends of verses of the poetry or other sections of the song. *Kāfi* are strophic poetic forms and, depending on their performance context, maintain different musical components.²²⁶ The first example, which was recorded at an informal music gathering at a resort near Dhordo, Kachchh, is an example of *lassī kāfi*, "plain *kāfi*," that consists of a short melodic exposition, *ālāp*, after which an introductory verse (*bait*) is sung, followed by the composition. Separating each refrain of the *kalām* is an instrumental interlude that reiterates the original melody.

Stroke-Melodies of Sindhi Music

As mentioned above, the primary rhythmic cycle I have observed performed in Sindhi *kāfi* is the eight-beat *kalvārā*, of which there are three primary stroke-melodies. Eight-beat Sindhi *kalvārā* patterns follow similar compositional frameworks to those played in *qawwālī*, in which the *dāyān* pattern is made by repeating a fixed pattern of four drum strokes twice. These *dāyān* patterns similarly utilize motor movements that favor an economy of movement, while articulations of the *bāyān* give the patterns a sense of rhythmic weight and accent. The versions of the *ṭhekās* that I have notated below are in their most basic structures. "This *ṭhekā* is

²²⁶ See Bond 2020: 216-220.

halkā (Hindi: "light" [adj.], here meaning plain)," or "This is how you play the *ṭhekā* *sīddha* (Hindi: "straight")," drummers would say to me when I asked for the basic, unelaborated forms of *ṭhekās*. These particular versions I also observed played usually at the beginnings of *kāfī* performances, before drummers began to embellish and improvise the *ṭhekā*.

Of the three *kalvārā ṭhekā*-s played in Sindhi music, the most common one I observed was:

☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉	☉
●	-	-	↻	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	●
(X)								(0)			

Figure 3.4. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

Drummers in Kachchh identified this pattern as a particularly important Sindhi *ṭhekā*. This was made apparent also by the frequency in which I observed it played in programs, recordings, practice sessions, and interactions with other Sindhi-style drummers. The *dāyāñ* pattern is played by using an oscillating rotation of the hand along its radial-ulnar axis, with the index finger (radial side of hand) and ring finger (ulnar side of hand) being the alternating points of contact on the drum skin. The first stroke, ☉, is played by rotating the *dāyāñ* hand in a counter-clockwise motion, striking the drum skin with the radial-side of the hand (the index finger), and leaving the finger touching the drum skin. In turn, this movement rotates the ulnar side of the hand—the middle, ring, and pinky fingers—outwards from the drum skin's surface and creates a potential energy in the hand that is utilized in the next stroke.

The second drum stroke of the pattern, ☉, uses the potential energy created in the preceding stroke by twisting the *dāyān* hand clockwise (the opposite direction from the first stroke) and striking the drum skin with the ring finger, again leaving the finger in contact with the drum skin. The movement created by the second stroke creates another potential energy through the positioning of the hand that is utilized in the subsequent drum stroke of the pattern. In effect, the articulation of each individual drum stroke in this pattern prepares the player's hand to play the subsequent drum stroke, giving it a high level of physical economy for playing for extended durations. The oscillating motion of the wrist created by playing the first two drum strokes is replicated in the final two strokes of the pattern, ☉, and ☊. A slight accent is placed on the third stroke, ☉, causing an elongation of the stroke's duration in relation to the other remaining three drum strokes, which gives the *ṭhekā* its characteristic lilt. The final stroke, ☊, utilizes the same motion of the *dāyān* hand for ☉, but it is played by striking the drum skin slightly closer to the edge, producing a resonant drum tone. This pattern of four drum strokes is repeated four times to span the eight-beat duration of *kalvārā*.

In addition to the above example, I observed two other *kalvārā ṭhekās* played in Sindhi *kāfī* music.

⊖	⊖	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊕
●	↻	—	●	●	●	●	●

(X) (0)

Figure 3.5. Sindhi *kalvārā thekā*.

The *dāyān* pattern in this *thekā* begins with the same oscillating movement of the wrist along its radial-ulnar axis as in the previous rhythmic pattern. Its first two strokes, ⊖ and ⊖, again create potential energies in the positioning of the player's wrists that prepare for each respective subsequent drum stroke. The third stroke, ⊕, is played by leaving the ulnar-side of the hand on the surface of the drum skin from the previous stroke, and rotating the hand in a counter-clockwise motion to strike the drum with the index finger. The fourth stroke, ⊕, is identical to the third and is played by carefully ricocheting the index finger on the surface of the drum skin.

The third *kalvārā thekā* that I observed played in Sindhi *kāfī* music was:

⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕
●	↻	—	●	●	●	●	●

(X) (0)

Figure 3.6. Sindhi *kalvārā thekā*.

Of the three Sindhi *thekā* listed above, this *thekā* I heard played the least, especially on *ḍholak*. More often, I observed this pattern played on the tabla in concert and studio recordings of Sindhi music.²²⁷ In terms of the movement of the

²²⁷ Stefan Fiol has noted a similar approach by music producers replacing traditional percussion instruments in regional Garhwali music with tabla in studio recordings. Fiol 2016: 122.

dāyān hand, this stroke-melody is similar to the pattern in Figure 3.5, the difference being the first drum stroke, ⊕. In comparison to the other two Sindhi *ṭhekās*, this pattern relies primarily on the controlled ricocheting of the index finger on the drum skin's surface in order to produce the three subsequent ⊕ drum strokes. The reliance on this type of ricochet drum stroke in this *ṭhekā* may explain the prevalence with which I observed it being played on the tabla. Such successive ricochet-type drum strokes are facilitated by the tabla's horizontal playing orientation, which allows for players to use more easily the fall of their hand to play these ricochet strokes in contrast to the vertical orientation of the *ḍholak*'s playing surfaces. This ricocheting is prepared by the movement of the wrist produced by the second stroke of the *ṭhekā*, ⊖.

Recording of Sindhi *Kāfī* in *Rāg Bhairavi*, Dhordo, Kachchh, March 4, 2020

The musical example in my analysis is from a performance I recorded at an informal musical gathering in the village of Dhordo, located on the edge of Kachchh's popular white desert, the Rann of Kachchh. I traveled to Dhordo with Faqir Ustad, his twin sons, and an uncle of theirs to meet a friend of theirs who was an amateur singer of Sindhi music. During the two days I stayed in Dhordo, the group—myself included—practiced and played various types of music, sometimes recording our performances and broadcasting them on various social media platforms. The

performers of the recording used in the following musical analysis include Mazhar Mutva, the owner of the resort singing and playing harmonium, Faqir Ustad playing *dholak*, and his son, Fezan, playing the *benjo*.

The musical example is a Sindhi *kāfī* sung in *rāg bhairavi* in the rhythmic cycle of *kalvārā*. Specifically, this performance is an example of *lassī kāfī* (plain *kāfī*), with the composition containing five verses. Unfortunately, I was unable to acquire a copy of the poetry on account of it being an oral tradition and because I do not know the Sindhi language. Not having access to the poetry presents challenges in drawing connections between the musical processes and interactions happening. Therefore, I focus my attentions on the musical interludes, played by the *benjo* and harmonium, that reiterate the main melody between each singing of the verse, as well as the changes in the musical textures. The song in this performance contains six verses in total, and its itinerary is represented in the table below.

Sindhi *kāfī* in *rāg bhairavi* - **Musical Example 3.1 SindhiKafi.mp3**

	Start	End	Number of Cycles
<i>Ālāp</i>	0:00	1:09	–
Verse 1	1:09	1:46	13
Instrumental Interlude	1:46	2:02	7
Verse 2	2:02	2:13	4
Instrumental Interlude	2:13	2:23	4
Verse 3	2:23	3:04	17
Instrumental Interlude	3:04	3:21	7
Verse 4	3:21	3:40	8
Instrumental Interlude	3:40	3:50	4
Verse 5	3:50	4:30	17
Instrumental Interlude	4:30	4:44	6
Verse 6	4:44	5:46	25

Table 3.1. Sindhi *kāfī* in *rāg bhairavi* performance itinerary.

In this performance, the *ḍholak* begins playing *ṭhekā* at 1:14, shortly after the vocalist begins singing the composition following a short *ālāp* at the beginning. The *ṭhekā* that is played is based off of the first Sindhi *ṭhekā* listed above in Figure 3.4:

●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○
●	-	-	↗	-	●	●	●	↗	-	-	-	-	-
(X)							(0)						

Figure 3.7. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

When paired with the characteristic lilt of the above rhythmic pattern, the articulations on the *bāyāñ*, specifically the succession of strokes played in beats three, four, and five, give this *ṭhekā* a strong, rhythmic drive. The grouping of *bāyāñ* articulations within the first half five beats of the pattern places a rhythmic accent on the first five beats of the *ṭhekā*. Faqir Ustad establishes a particular rhythmic character of the song with this stroke-melody, and it is from this basic model that he elaborates and embellishes his drumming style.

Improvisation in Sindhi *Kāfī Ṭhekā* Playing: Faqir Ustad

Throughout the duration of this song (5:47), Faqir Ustad plays six different variations of the original *ṭhekā*. Instances during which he changes the *ṭhekā* he is playing regularly coincide with changes in the song's musical texture, such as when the vocalist improvises or the song transitions to a different musical section. The preliminary variation of the above *ṭhekā* comes during the first instrumental

interlude (1:46-2:02), which begins thirty-three seconds after the entrance of the *dholak* and *ṭhekā*. What is different in the first variation from the original rhythmic pattern is the absence of a *bāyān* articulation on the start of the rhythmic cycle:

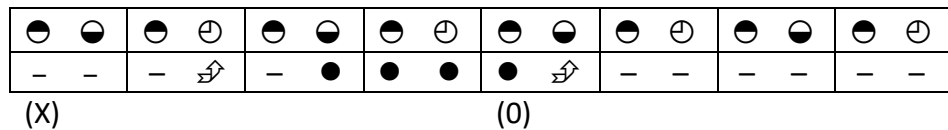


Figure 3.8. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

The absence of a *bāyān* articulation on the downbeat of this *ṭhekā* removes the weighted accent from the pattern's commencement. In the model *kalvārā ṭhekā* (Figure 3.7), the articulations of *bāyān* Faqir Ustad plays provides a sense of weight and accent to the first five beats of the rhythmic cycle. The structural accent at the onset of the rhythmic pattern gives a clear aural indication of the start of each successive rhythmic cycle. When Faqir Ustad omits the initial stroke on the *bāyān* in the above variation, the placement of musical emphasis shifts away from being placed squarely over the first half of the rhythmic cycle. Instead, in this variation the rhythmic accent shifts to the pattern's interior—beats three, four, and five—which places the point of rhythmic weight and accent within the middle of the pattern. Faqir Ustad concludes the instrumental interlude with a short *tīhāi* that articulates the end of the instrumental section and the beginning of the subsequent verse.

Faqir Ustad returns to playing the original *ṭhekā* (Figure 3.7) during the second verse (2:02-2:13), effectively re-establishing the rhythmic character and

weighted accent of the initial *ṭhekā*.²²⁸ Towards the end of this section (2:10) as the musical intensity builds to the ensuing instrumental interlude, he switches to playing a variation similar to Figure 3.8. The primary difference between these two variations is Faqir Ustad's use of open-palm *bāyāñ* drum strokes:

●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖
-	-	-	●	-	●	●	●	●	-	-	↗	-	-	-	-

(X)

(0)

Figure 3.9. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

By not playing the *bāyāñ* on the first beat of this rhythmic pattern, Faqir Ustad shifts the rhythmic weighting of the *ṭhekā* to its interior beats. His addition of a stroke of increasing intensity, ↗, on beat six establishes further the placement of rhythmic weight and accent within the middle of the pattern. The weighted accents within the middle of this variation are audibly heard and felt from the forceful, open-palm strokes on the *bāyāñ*, ●, Faqir Ustad plays. He quickly transitions from this *ṭhekā* to yet another variation in the subsequent instrumental interlude.

During the second instrumental interlude (2:13-2:23), Faqir Ustad again matches the change in musical texture with a different variation of the original model *ṭhekā*.

²²⁸ The type of oscillation between playing the original *ṭhekā* in the first and second verse and variations in the first and second instrumental interlude I noticed frequently in my observations of Sindhi-style *ḍholak* playing. Indeed, I found it highly uncommon for drummers to use the *exact* rhythmic pattern in consecutive sections of a song. Rather, it was more common for drummers to change these patterns in each successive verse or interlude of a song and play a *tīhāi* to articulate and delineate the beginnings and ends of different sections.

●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖
●	-	-	↗	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	●	-	●	●	●
(X)								(0)							

Figure 3.10. Sindhi *kalvārā thekā*.

This particular *thekā* variation is similar to Figure 3.4 above; the only difference being Faqir Ustad's use of open-hand *bāyāñ* strokes, ●, in Figure 3.10. Again, the *bāyāñ* articulations Faqir Ustad plays in this particular *thekā* distribute the placement of musical accent and weight differently than that of the original *thekā* (Figure 3.7). The rhythmic accent within the *thekā* in Figure 3.10 is voiced at the beginning and end of the rhythmic pattern's eight-beat duration: between beats one and two, and beats six and eight. Given that rhythmic patterns continually repeat themselves during a performance, this period of rhythmic accent extends across successive rhythmic cycles, beginning at the end of one and concluding after the start of the next. The distribution of such accent creates a lull in rhythmic weight within the inner beats of the rhythmic pattern. In contrast to other *thekā* variations, the *bāyāñ* articulations that Faqir Ustad plays at the end of the cycle, particularly the consecutive drum strokes in beats seven and eight, create a strong, driving rhythmic momentum that propels the rhythmic pattern from one cycle to the next. To transition to the ensuing verse, Ustad once more plays a *tihāi* to conclude the instrumental interlude section.

During the beginning of the third verse, Faqir Ustad again plays the *ṭhekā* variation notated in Figure 3.10. As the vocalist repeats the verse of the poetry at 2:34, Faqir Ustad changes to another *ṭhekā* variation:

●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	⊖
●	↗	-	●	●	↗	-	●	●	↗	-	●	●	↗

(X) (0)

Figure 3.11. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

The frequency and regularity at which Faqir Ustad plays the *bāyān* in the above *ṭhekā* affect drastically its rhythmic weight and accent. Up this point of the performance, Faqir Ustad has played *ṭhekās* and variations whose rhythmic weight and accent has spanned subsequent beats of varying durations within the respective pattern; either four (Figure 3.8) or five beats (Figures 3.9 and 3.10). In contrast, the variation he plays notated in Figure 3.11 implies multiple, individual points of weighted accent on beats one, three, five, and seven. These articulations position rhythmic weight along the primary duple subdivision of the rhythmic cycle, which are further emphasized by their preceding strokes, ●, and the stroke of increasing intensity, ↗, that immediately follows. This distribution of rhythmic accent creates the impression that the cadence of the rhythmic accompaniment pattern has shortened from eight to two beats. Faqir Ustad transitions from this *ṭhekā* to playing a *tīhāi* to articulate the end of the musical phrase in correlation with the vocalist. The vocalist sings another repeat of the same verse, during which Faqir Ustad

returns to playing the *ṭhekā* variation in Figure 3.10, followed by another *tīhāi* that signals the end of the verse and the beginning of the next instrumental interlude.

During the third instrumental interlude (3:04-3:21), Faqir Ustad's playing is exemplary of the prolific use of variation characteristic to *ṭhekā* playing. In the first rhythmic cycle he plays the original *ṭhekā* notated in Figure 3.7. Immediately succeeding this cycle, he switches to playing the variation in Figure 3.9, which he then follows with the variation in Figure 3.11. This instrumental interlude ends with a long *tīhāi* that leads to the subsequent verse.

The fourth verse begins with an extended note sung by the vocalist. The exposure of this elongated note evokes a sudden change in the music's texture, which Faqir Ustad echoes in the *ṭhekā* variation he plays at the onset of the verse (3:21):

●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	⊖
●	-	-	↗	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	●	-	●
(X)								(0)					

Figure 3.12. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

Faqir Ustad's articulation of rhythmic accent in Figure 3.12 comes at the beginning and end of the rhythmic pattern, similar to Figure 3.10. However, because he plays the *bāyāñ* while leaving his palm resting on the drum skin's surface, ●, the volume and intensity of the *ṭhekā* overall is more subdued, allowing space for the vocalist to improvise. When the vocalist resumes singing the poetry (3:31), Faqir Ustad returns to playing the original *ṭhekā* (Figure 3.7). Afterwards, another

instrumental interlude follows at 3:40, during which he plays the *ṭhekās* from both Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.7.

During the song's penultimate verse (4:02), Faqir Ustad plays a final identifiable variation of the original *ṭhekā*:

●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖	●	●	●	⊖
●	↗	-	-	●	●	-	-	●	↗	-	-	●	●	-	-

(X) (0)

Figure 3.13. Sindhi *kalvārā ṭhekā*.

The rhythmic accent Faqir Ustad plays in the above *ṭhekā* is distributed along the primary duple subdivision of the pattern: beats one, three, five, and seven. This is much the same as in Figure 3.11, with the differences of this variation being no *bāyān* articulations preceding beats three, five, seven, and one, and the repeating ● strokes in the third and seventh beats. Because of these repeating ● strokes on beats three and seven, beats one and five maintain a heavier rhythmic accent on account of the ↗ stroke that follows the initial *bāyān* articulation. This staggering of rhythmic accent that Faqir Ustad plays creates an impression that the cadence of the rhythmic accompaniment pattern has shortened from eight to four. Shortly after playing this *ṭhekā*, Faqir Ustad switches to playing the Figure 3.11 *ṭhekā*, before playing a *tīhāi* to conclude the musical phrase.

For the remainder of the song Faqir Ustad continues to switch through the different variations of *ṭhekās* notated above. Before the end of the penultimate verse section Faqir Ustad again plays the *ṭhekā* from Figure 3.9. He plays the *ṭhekā* in

Figure 3.12 during the final instrumental section as well as during the final verse. In the build towards the conclusion of the song Faqir Ustad plays *ṭhekā*-s from Figures 3.11 and 3.13. The song concludes with an extensive and dramatically conclusive *tīhāi*.

Throughout this performance, Faqir Ustad plays seven variations of a *ṭhekā* (including the "original"). He switches between these variations approximately twenty-two times throughout the entire performance. Distinguishing these variations are the periods or points of rhythmic weight and accent, played by Faqir Ustad on the *bāyān*. Below are the seven variations of *ṭhekā* he plays, listed in sequential order from their appearance within the performance, with their respective periods or points of rhythmic accent encompassed within a red box.

Figure 3.7:

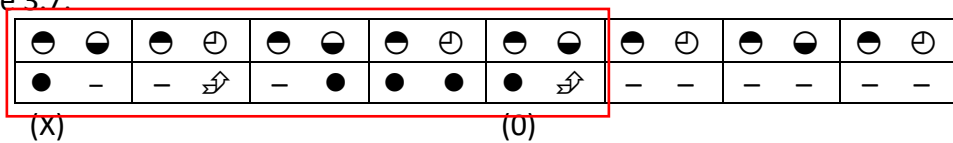


Figure 3.8:

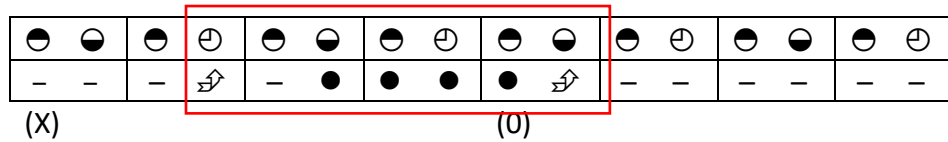


Figure 3.9:

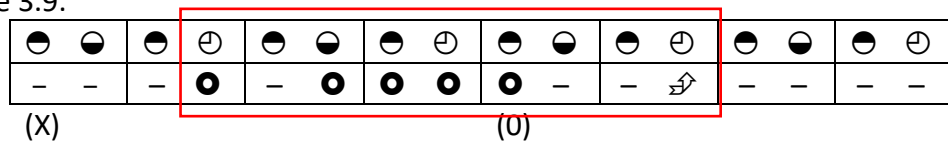


Figure 3.10:

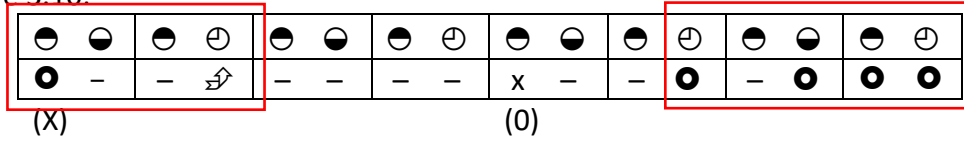


Figure 3.11:

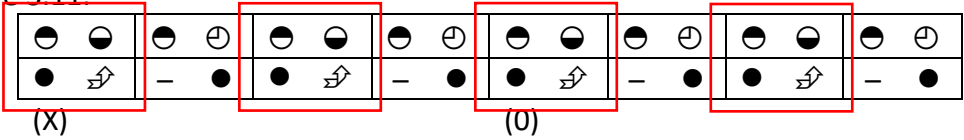


Figure 3.12:

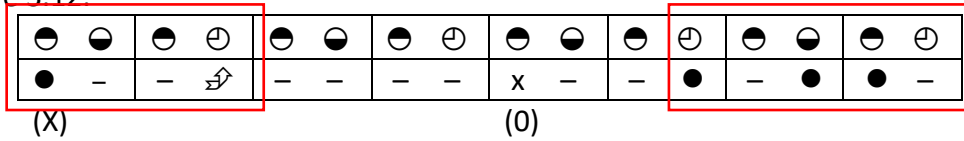


Figure 3.13:

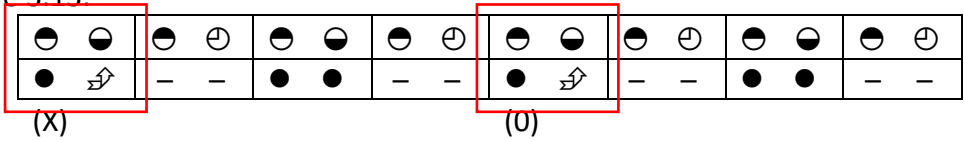


Figure 3.14. Points of rhythmic weight and accent in Sindhi *kalvārā thekā* variations.

The notated examples above illustrate a variety of different frameworks and placements of musical accent and weight played by Faqir Ustad. In some variations, rhythmic accent is placed contrary to how it is in others, such as when comparing Figures 3.8 and 3.9 to Figures 3.10 and 3.12. Figures 3.8 and 3.9 maintain their points of rhythmic accent within the interior beats of the *thekā*, between beats two and six (five in the case of Figure 3.8). In direct contrast, Figures 3.10 and 3.12 have their rhythmic accent placed at each end of the pattern, on beats one to two and beats six to eight. Other variations, such as 3.11 and 3.13, are markedly unique in that their patterns create an impression of a rhythmic modulation, from longer patterns of eight notes to shorter and much punchier patterns of two and four

beats, respectively. Without a knowledge of the text being sung it is difficult to ascertain the connection between the poetry and musical processes. However, if we consider the methods through which musicians adapted *qawwālī* poetry—repeating, amplifying, and shortening phrase, for example—we see parallels in this performance of Sindhi *kāfī*. Faqir Ustad's drumming emphasizes and accents the points at which the vocalist isolates aspects of the poetry in this manner, notably during a repeat of a verse at 2:34, during the vocalist's improvisations starting at 3:22, and during a repeat of another verse at 4:00.

Faqir Ustad frequently shuffles between the variations of *ṭhekā* that he plays, which provides for an exciting and engaging rhythmic accompaniment for the song. Summarized below are the different sections of the performance and the variations of *ṭhekā* (listed in order of their performance) Faqir Ustad plays in their duration.

	Number of Cycles	Variations Played (Figure #'s)
<i>Ālāp</i>	–	–
Verse 1	13	3.7
Instrumental Interlude	7	3.8
Verse 2	4	3.7, 3.9
Instrumental Interlude	4	3.10
Verse 3	17	3.10, 3.11, 3.9
Instrumental Interlude	7	3.7, 3.9, 3.11
Verse 4	8	3.12, 3.7
Instrumental Interlude	4	3.12, 3.7
Verse 5	17	3.12, 3.13, 3.11, 3.9
Instrumental Interlude	6	3.12
Verse 6	25	3.12, 3.13, 3.11

Table 3.2. Sindhi *kāfī ṭhekā* variations distribution in *rāg bhairavi*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the lifestyle of daily extensive music-making physically conditions hereditary non-classical musicians such as *langās* for the requirements of their musical performances. I related my experiences of extensive daily *riyāz* among *langā* musicians in Kachchh to the manners in which *riyāz* has been positioned in Hindustani classical music discourses. My findings of *riyāz* being built into the quotidian differed from these discourses. In addition to conditioning musicians for their musical programs, I argued this lifestyle has also informed the performance practice of *ṭhekās* in developing rhythmic patterns that utilize physical economies of movement in one's hands.

My analysis illustrated the improvisation in *ṭhekā* drumming of a recording of Sindhi *Kāfī* music. This recording, in particular, demonstrates the great extent to which elaboration can occur in drumming accompaniment. The drummer in the recording, Faqir Ustad, is one of the highest demanded accompanists in Kachchh and the skills he exhibited in this recording can attest to this demand. In the *kāfī* in *rāg bhairavi* performance, the drummer plays seven variations of *ṭhekā* throughout the composition's six verses. These improvisations in the *ṭhekā* regularly coincide with specific types of changes in the music's texture and form, as well as during musical embellishments by the vocalist. My analysis identified these seven different *ṭhekā* variations and compared and contrasted their differing points of rhythmic weighting. The diversity of these patterns, as well as the frequency with which they are played

(Table 3.2), support my underlying thesis that change and variation are key aspects of playing *ṭhekā*.

When one adopts a lifestyle of daily music-making the boundaries between practice and performance can become blurred. In the case of the drummers I met in Kachchh—and indeed the other non-classical drummers I encountered throughout my research—such skills are acquired from a lifetime of practice and music-making, which I detailed in Part One of this chapter. Through being immersed in such daily and extensive music-making, drummers become equipped with specialized skill sets that facilitate the strenuous performance requirements of the various musical styles they play.

Chapter Four

Studying Afghan Drumming in Kabul, Afghanistan, and in the Afghan Diaspora in the San Francisco Bay Area: Introduction

In this chapter, I bring into my discussion of *ṭhekā* aspects of the history of the tabla, as well as its history and use in Afghanistan. Broadly speaking, such topics wildly exceed the scope and length restrictions of this dissertation. However, in this chapter, I discuss some of my more significant insights and findings from my research in Afghanistan.

For Part One, I begin with a dialogue about the two common constructions of tabla, differentiating between versions of the instrument used in classical Hindustani music, and other types of tabla played in regional traditions found in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This discussion brings to the fore the Pashto *tabla*, a set of hand drums played in Pashto-language music. Ethnomusicological scholarship has long privileged the classical Hindustani styles of tabla, which I argue has in turn influenced the assumptions as well as theories regarding the instrument's origins. Scholars and musicians still contest the origin of the tabla for various musical and political reasons. Through a reinterpretation of known sources, I offer a possible new interpretation of the origins of the tabla. My proposition pushes back against pre-existing narratives of the instrument's early history, specifically that the instrument

was developed in the vicinity to traditions of the *pakhāwaj* (Kippen 2010: 460-463, Kippen 2006: 90-91, Wegner 2004: 26, Kippen 2001: 8). Rather, my interpretation places the instruments in proximity to Pashtun musical culture. This hypothesis I base on a reinterpretation of early paintings of the tabla and its players, nineteenth-century primary sources on tabla players at the time, and the oral histories of the musicians whom I met in Kabul. I detail further the documented history of tabla traditions in Afghanistan, and discuss prominent players and teachers who have helped shaped the instrument's performance practices.

In Part Two, I look at the drumming style of Afghan *maḥali* music as it is played on the tabla. I analyze the drumming in a recording of an Afghan *maḥali* song, *Safā Safā Mīāid*, a famous traditional song from the Panjshir region of Afghanistan, just north of Kabul. The performance I analyze features the late Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu (d. 2017) playing the tabla. This particular recording was made by my *rubāb* teacher in Kabul, Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi, while he was living as a refugee in Quetta, Pakistan, during the political control of Afghanistan by the Taliban (1994-2001). Before my analysis I detail the approaches to form and rhythmic accompaniment in Afghan drumming, and illustrate some of the important stroke-melodies that are played in *maḥali* music. The subsequent analysis identifies the many variations of *ṭhekā* that Ustad Fazlu plays throughout the song.

My research on Afghan drumming took place in two locations: in the Afghan diaspora in the San Francisco Bay Area, and in Kabul, Afghanistan. I began my study

of Afghan music—both classical and traditional styles—in Fremont, California, with Ustad Toryalai Hashemi and his son, Eman Essa. Both were members of a family of professional musicians from Kabul, Afghanistan who, while being acclaimed tabla players, also played several other drums used in traditional Afghan music, such as the *zerbaghali*, *dohol*, and *dholak*. Following my 2016-2017 fieldwork in India, I conducted six months of research in Kabul, Afghanistan. While in Kabul, I met and studied with the younger brother of my contact in Fremont, Ustad Fraidoon Miazada, who himself is a renown Kabuli *ghazal* and *maḥali* style tabla player. Additionally, I studied the Pashto-style of tabla with Ustad Nazir Latif, another prominent *ghazal* and Pashto-style tabla player. During my research I was also connected with several Afghan tabla players and drummers through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. While I have not met several of these musicians in person, they have provided valuable information for my research through various communication platforms.

Part One

What *ARE* Tabla?

Telling the history of the tabla involves defining specifically what instruments qualify as tabla. Tabla, coming from the Arabic *ṭabl*, meaning drum, consist of two drums that are played with the hands and fingers. While tabla come in different shapes and sizes, the instrument appears most commonly in one of two common forms, which are categorized by the shape of the pair's lower-pitched bass drum. For most listeners of South Asian music, tabla refers to the drums that are played in Hindustani classical music. This particular instrument is comprised of two individual drums: a tapered, cylindrical drum made of wood that is higher in pitch, called the *dāyān*, and a wide-mouthed, hemispherical metal (sometimes made of clay) drum that is lower in pitch, called the *bāyān* or *dugga* (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi (left) plays the tabla with the author on *rubāb*, Kabul, Afghanistan. May 2018. Photo by Iason Athanasiadis.

Drums of similar construction to those in Figure 4.1 are played widely throughout South Asia. They are found most commonly in India, where they are played in virtually every genre of music.²²⁹ In Pakistan and Afghanistan, these drums are used by drummers who perform Hindustani genres, such as *ḵhyāl* and *ghazal*. However, tabla of markedly different construction are played in a variety of regional music styles in parts of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. This other form of the

²²⁹ The tabla has even been applied to certain genres of Karnatik music, or South Indian classical music, as well. Lindsey 2013.

instrument involves a paired set of drums with a tall, cylindrical-shaped bass drum (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2. Pashto tabla set, with its characteristic tall, cylindrical bass drum, called *bam*.

Depending on the region, this cylindrical bass drum goes by a variety of names. In the Panjab region the drum is known as *ḡhamā*.²³⁰ *ḡhamā* are often made of wood, and are played in devotional music genres such as Sikh *kirtan* and Sufi *qawwālī*.²³¹ Drums of similar shape but made of metal (usually copper) are played in Pashtun music, where it is referred to as *bam*.²³² The set of drums pictured in Figure

²³⁰ Kippen 2010: 461.

²³¹ In the Panjab this set of tabla is known as *ḡorī* ("pair" or "couple").

²³² Because I discuss the drum's usage in Pashtun music in this and the next chapter I refer to it as *bam*, not *ḡhamā*.

4.2 are used in Pashtun music, and are referred to colloquially as Pashto tabla.²³³ In addition to differing in shape from the Hindustani classical tabla (Figure 4.1), the other major difference of the *bam* is the lack of black tuning paste (*syāhī*) applied to the outer surface of the drum's skin.²³⁴ In parts of the Panjab, players apply wet wheat flour paste (*āṭā*) to the drum to help lower its pitch. The Pashto tabla players whom I met in Afghanistan also used *āṭā* to prepare their drums, but more often applied a sap-like paste, called *lār* (or *lor*), on the inside of the drum head to lower its pitch.²³⁵

The playing techniques between Hindustani classical and Pashto-style tabla overlap significantly. Both techniques involve striking one's fingers and at times hands on particular areas of the drum skins to produce sounds of distinctive timbre and tone. However, two specific drum strokes distinguish Pashto-style tabla playing from Hindustani classical playing. The first of these techniques is an open-handed resonant stroke played on the bass drum, *bam*. Playing with an open-hand on the drum has a forceful and thunderous articulation, which is produced by the cylindrical shape of the instrument and the preparation of *lār* on its drum skin. On the Hindustani tabla, drummers rest the palm of their *bāyān*-playing hand on the drum

²³³ Lowell Lybarger calls this set of instruments *dukkaṛ* tabla. Lybarger 2003: 103-104, 399.

²³⁴ The application of *sīyāhi* lowers the pitch of the bass drum.

²³⁵ The application of *lār* to the drum's skin is a convenient, semi-permanent fix compared to having to prepare and maintain the required dampness of *āṭā* while playing. Such a method of applying a thick, tar-like substance to the inside of the drum head to lower its pitch is also done to the bass sides of the *dhol* and *ḡholak*.

skin while they play, which muffles the timbre of the drum. Playing with open-hand *bāyān* strokes in Hindustani classical music is extremely uncommon. Second, Pashto-style tabla playing utilizes a drum stroke on the higher-pitched drum, called *kāṭhī* in Pashto, played with the pinky finger. This stroke, referred to as *Thap*, involves striking the entirety of the pinky on the top of the *kāṭhī*, and contacting the edge of the *syāhī* with the tip of the finger (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3. *Thap* stroke on contact.

The sound produced through playing *Thap* is significantly brighter in timbre compared to other resonant *kāṭhī* drum strokes. Primary resonant strokes on the *kāṭhī*—*Tha*, *Na*, *Thin*, etc.—are played by striking the drum while resting the ring finger on the edge of the *syāhī*, which muffles some of the drum's sound, as well as some of the overtones produced by the drum's *syāhī*. *Thap*, on the other hand, is played relatively forcefully, and within its tone sounds a harmonic partial of the

drum's pitch. In Pashtun *ṭhekās*, *Thap* is an integral drum stroke, especially for dance music. The drum stroke is used rarely in Hindustani classical tabla playing.

The *Pakhāwaj*-Tabla Connection

The history of the tabla is exceedingly complex. As scholars have shown (Stewart 1974, Shepherd 1976, Kippen 2019, Kippen 2010, Kippen 2006, Kippen 1988, Lybarger 2003, Gottlieb 1998), the instrument's history entwines the accounts and playing traditions of numerous South Asian musical communities and percussion instruments. Rebecca Stewart's 1974 dissertation detailed the connection of the tabla—its techniques and repertoire—to a trio of prominent drum traditions in North India: the *ḍholak*, *pakhāwaj*, and *naqqārā*.²³⁶ In particular, the *pakhāwaj* has been considered by musicians and scholars alike to be of primary importance regarding the origin, construction, and playing styles of the early tabla. Among the stories of the tabla's origins, three are commonly heard among Hindustani musical circles—two of them involve a direct link to the *pakhāwaj* (seen in Figure 4.4).

²³⁶ Stewart 1974: 22-54. See also Kippen 2006: 10.

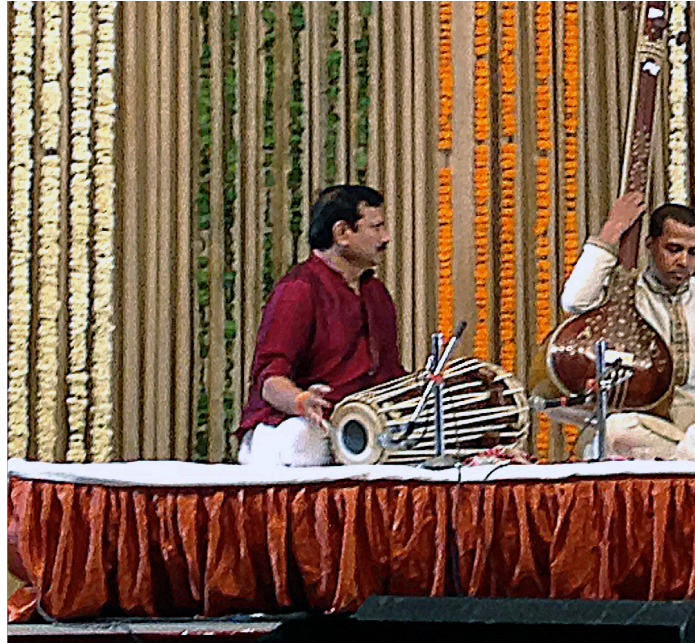


Figure 4.4. Akhilesh Gundecha playing *pakhāwaj* during a *dhrupad* performance at the Saptak Music Festival in Ahmedabad, India. January 2017. Photo taken by author.

According to the oral histories of many musicians, the tabla was invented by the fourteenth-century court poet and musician, Amir Khusro.²³⁷ This notion, however, has largely been dismissed by scholars, in part because Khusro's own published writings on music do not mention the instrument. Two other familiar theories regarding the creation of the tabla involve cutting or splitting a *pakhāwaj* into two at its middle point, thus creating the two drums of the tabla. However, these accounts have also been deemed as fictitious on account of their supposed timelines or lack of verifiable evidence.²³⁸ Despite these origin stories being called

²³⁷ Stewart 1974: 1.

²³⁸ One such story involves a *pakhāwaj* player during the reign of emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) named Sudhar Khan dropping his instrument after losing a drumming competition. However, genealogical records suggest that Sudhar Khan (or Siddhar Khan) lived nearly one hundred and fifty years later than when this story places him. See Kippen 2010: 460.

into question, it is not far-fetched from organological standpoint to see why the tabla is so often linked historically to the *pakhāwaj*. A visual comparison of the two instruments highlights many key similarities. Construction-wise, the materials from which both instruments are made are alike: both are made of hollowed-out wood, have drum skins made of multiple layers of prepared animal hide, and are laced together with straps made also of animal hide. Moreover, both drums apply *syāhī* (tuning paste) in a similar fashion on the *dāyān*, and use wooden-tuning pegs to adjust the fine-tuning of the instrument. On the *bāyān* of the *pakhāwaj*, *āṭā* is applied to the drum skin to lower the pitch. This method of preparing the bass drum is done only to cylindrical-shaped tabla such as *ḍhamā* and Pashto tabla; *not* Hindustani tabla.

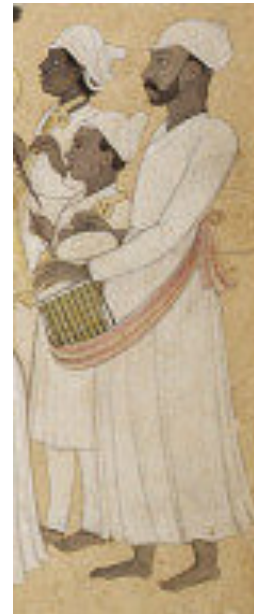
Ultimately, the details surrounding the development of the tabla remain a mystery. Rebecca Stewart identifies the first image of instruments resembling tabla in a miniature Mughal painting from the court of Jasrota, c. 1745 (Figure 4.5).²³⁹

²³⁹ Stewart 1974: 7.



Figure 4.5. Raja Balwant Singh watching a dance performance, Jasrota. Victoria Albert Museum, IS 24-1974. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O96492/raja-balwant-singh-painting-nainsukh/>.

This Mughal miniature painting depicts a courtly dance performance, known as *nautch* (from Hindi/Urdu *nāchnā*, "to dance"), at the court of Jasrota, located in the foothills of the Himalayas near present-day Jammu in India. On the left sits a *huqqa*-smoking Raja Balwant Singh (1724-1763), a lesser-known prince, while on the right stand a troupe of musicians accompanying a dancer.²⁴⁰ Among the musicians is a drummer playing a set of hand drums that



²⁴⁰ Neville mistakenly labels the dancer as a *kathak* dancer, as the painting predates the earliest known written accounts of *Kathak* dance traditions and practitioners (Neville 2009: 40). *Kathak* dance, as we know it today, developed from an amalgamation of dance forms and communities during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Walker 2014: 1-8.

resemble tabla (picture detail on right). The drums pictured are cylindrical, much like the Pashto-style of tabla pictured in Figure 4.2. James Kippen, one of the foremost scholars of the tabla, writes of these instruments that, "This pair [of drums] clearly owes its inspiration to the *pakhāwaj*."²⁴¹ Likely, this statement is based on a visual analysis of the painting, as we have no knowledge of what such *nautch* drummers actually played. It should be noted further that Kippen draws a connection between these two drums on account of the style of tabla he has studied, the Lucknow *gharānā*, incorporating *pakhāwaj* drumming sequences into important compositional forms of Lucknow tabla playing, such as *gat-paran*.²⁴²

However, I believe Kippen's argument to be a product of an "elite bias", which is to say a model of cultural transmission flowing unidirectionally from the "great" to "little" traditions (Redfield 1954). If we do not assume, for example, that the *pakhāwaj* was the historical antecedent to the tabla, we can speculate that it might have been other prominent folk drums, such as the *ḍholak* and *ḍhol* (*dohol* in Pashto), that were of influence, as they are roughly the same size and shape of a *pakhāwaj* and could certainly qualify as a suitable "inspiration" for the tabla depicted in the painting. When I learned the open-handed style of Pashto tabla playing, I found very little influence from *pakhāwaj* drumming. Furthermore, my teachers expressed that these techniques were not from the *pakhāwaj* when I asked

²⁴¹ Kippen 2010: 461.

²⁴² Kippen 2010: 466.

them. Instead, they suggested these playing styles were from the primary drum used in Pashtun music, the *dhol* (I discuss this further in Chapter five).

There are good reasons for musicians and scholars to argue a connection between the *pakhāwaj* and tabla. The *pakhāwaj* is associated primarily with Hindustani classical music, namely *dhrupad*, which is viewed by musicians and musicologists as the predecessor to and more authoritative version of the more contemporary *ḵhyāl*.²⁴³ As seen in the painting above, the tabla started as an instrument accompanying court dancers and female music practitioners, *tawāifs* (Kippen 2001: 7). However, female musicians and dancers, in contrast to their male counterparts, became increasingly viewed as indecent and inappropriate on account of the influence of the British colonial project, which tied songstresses to courtesan culture and prostitution (Morcom 2013 and Soneji 2012). The accompanists to this music, as well as their instruments, were also branded with a harsh negative stigma on account of their association to courtesans—a stigma that persists still in some parts of India.²⁴⁴ Considering the tabla to be a product of the *pakhāwaj* positions the instrument favorably in historical narratives as one having an art music pedigree. Indeed, scholarship has done its part to situate the discourses of the tabla as a classical music instrument. A majority, if not all, ethnomusicological studies of tabla (Stewart 1974, Shepherd 1976, Kippen 1988, Lybarger 2003, Gottlieb 1998, Wegner

²⁴³ In the instrument's most ancient form, the *mrdang*, the drum was primarily played in Hindu temples. See Mistry 1999.

²⁴⁴ Kippen 1988: 23-24, 42-45.

2004, et al.) have focused on the instrument as it is played in Hindustani classical music. Very rarely do folk and regional styles of tabla (such as the open-hand style of tabla playing in Pashtun music I discuss here) receive discussion in these studies.²⁴⁵ Based on my research on tabla in Afghanistan and in Pashtun musical traditions, I believe it is important to consider the possibilities of other histories of the tabla besides being the classical descendant of the *pakhāwaj*. Instead, I argue we should look at and investigate the regional types of tabla playing that still proliferate in Pakistan and Afghanistan. I propose one such possibility in this chapter—Pashtun drumming. In the following section I offer a new perspective on the early history of the tabla through a re-reading of available data and insights I gained from my research on the Pashtun style of open handed tabla playing.

The Early History of the Tabla: A New Reading

The early practitioners of tabla were professional folk musicians from the region spanning from the Panjab through Gujarat, India known as *dhāḍhīs*²⁴⁶ or *dhārīs*.²⁴⁷ While *dhāḍhī* became by the late-nineteenth century²⁴⁸ a blanket term for musical occupational specialists of low social class, this community was a

²⁴⁵ In Rebecca Stewart's dissertation, she claims that the *dukkaṛ* tabla, or Pashto tabla, are "seen in decreasing numbers," which, while maybe true in India, is categorically false in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Stewart 1974: 9-10.

²⁴⁶ The *mirāsīs*, another community of folk musicians who were associated with early tabla playing, are discussed in the following chapter.

²⁴⁷ Kippen 2010: 460.

²⁴⁸ Bor 1986/87: 62.

heterogeneous network comprising peoples of different languages, religions, and cultures.²⁴⁹ Included among these professional folk musicians were undoubtedly Pashtun musicians. Pashtun migration to the Indian subcontinent has been documented since at least the eleventh century, and communities of Pashtuns (or Pathans as they are called in Indo-historical narratives) are found throughout the Panjab and northern India.²⁵⁰ It seems probable that there were Pashtun *dhādhī*-s given that *dhādhīs* specialized in "singing war songs and heroic ballads... with the accompaniment of *dhadh* and *kingra*."²⁵¹ War ballads and epics are common within Pashtun musical culture, while the *dhadh*, a small type of *dohol*, and the *kingra*, a type of *sarinda*, are instruments used in traditional Pashtun music.²⁵² Furthermore, it is noted that some *dhādhīs* also played the *rubāb*, a Pashtun instrument that is considered the antecedent of the Hindustani *sarod* (McNeil 2004).

My reinterpretation of the history of the tabla begins with a closer examination of the first visual representation of the instrument. Bonnie Wade, in her work *Imaging Sound*, looks at Mughal miniature paintings (similar to Figure 4.5) in order to trace music-making through the Mughal Empire (1526-1857). Wade argues that when read through the correct cultural and historical lens, such

²⁴⁹ The heterogeneity of the *dhādhī* community becomes apparent when looking at the diversity of musical genres and instruments *dhādhīs* are recorded as having played in Faqirullah 1996 and Imam 1869.

²⁵⁰ The conquests of Mahmud of Ghazni (970-1030CE) brought large populations of Pashtuns to areas of North India. Pashtun immigration continued throughout the Muslim dynasties of the Indian subcontinent, which spans from roughly 1200-1800CE. Quddus 1987: 31-32.

²⁵¹ Boer 1986: 62.

²⁵² Quddus 1987: 93.

paintings reveal meaningful perspectives about Mughal culture.²⁵³ Returning to the painting in Figure 4.5, of particular note is the headwear worn by the tabla player. A variety of turbans can be seen in the painting, with different ornaments and stylings.²⁵⁴ The turban tied by the drummer, with its lip coming forward over the forehead and covering of the backside of the head, resembles closely a *patkay*, a particular style of turban worn by Pashtuns living in the Qasur region of the Panjab. A similar type of turban is pictured in the *Tashrih al-aqvam*, an album of paintings commissioned by James Skinner, a famous Anglo-Indian writer and mercenary (Figure 4.6).

²⁵³ Wade 1998: I.

²⁵⁴ Musicians are nearly always portrayed wearing turbans and head coverings of various sorts in Mughal-era paintings. See Neville 2009.



Figure 4.6. 'Qasuri' (An Afghan of Qasur), from the *Tashrih al-aqvam*. British Library, BL Add. 27255. <http://sites.asiasociety.org/princesandpainters/tashrih-al-aqvam-album/>.

In culturally diverse areas such as the Panjab, various types of headwear can be indicators of affiliation to a particular cultural group. Wearing a *patkay* is a cultural identifier for *Qasuri* (also spelled *Kasuri*) Pathans. The style of turban worn by the tabla player in Figure 4.5 resembles closely the *patkay* pictured in Figure 4.6, with its characteristic front lip extending down over the forehead. *Patkay* contrast greatly with the Sikh turban, the *dastār* (lit. "Hand of God"), which crosses upwards over one's ears and temples coming to an upwards point, leaving the forehead largely exposed. Other musicians in the ensemble also wear turbans resembling

patkay, some orange in color. Indeed, the ensemble's makeup—one dancer, three singers, two bowed instruments (possibly *sārangī* or *sarinda*), and a tabla player—fits the model of Pashtun court music traditions.²⁵⁵ If the musicians' turbans are Pashtun *patkay*, and the tabla player is indeed Pashtun, the first known appearance of the instrument among Pashtun musicians is indeed significant. This connection would undermine significantly the connection of *pakhāwaj* to the early tabla, as *pakhāwaj* is not played in Pashtun music; the *dohol* is.

In particular, this connection to the *dohol* has implications for the performance practice of this particular design of tabla drum. I show in Chapter Five how the performance practices of the *dohol* have influenced the technique and rhythmic patterns of open-hand Pashtun style tabla, and how this influence manifests itself in a particular method of playing seven beat rhythmic patterns. Musicians in Kabul refer to this open-hand technique as the "old style" of tabla playing, which is still very much played, particularly in Pashtun music. Among the oral histories of tabla players I gathered in Kabul during my fieldwork, two distinct branches of music history were detailed by musicians regarding the tabla. One was that of the classical Hindustani tabla players, who had come from India as early as the late eighteenth century; the other was of tabla players who were from parts of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan and played this "old style" of open-hand tabla.

²⁵⁵ Sarmast 2004: 193-196.

Many of the early tabla players in Kabul were famous for playing this style; a style about which, I believe, is mentioned in an important musical document from the mid-nineteenth century, Mohammad Karam Imam's *Ma'dan al-Mūsīqī*.

The "Old Style" of Tabla Playing

Mohammad Karam Imam Khan was a courtier in Lucknow during the reign of the last *nawāb* of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah (r. 1847-56). Imam's *Ma'dan al-Mūsīqī*, written in the late 1850's, is a valuable source depicting the musical life of India during the mid-nineteenth century. His discussion includes mentions of drummers from the current time as well as of previous generations. Regarding one tabla player named Makkhu of Delhi, Imam describes him as "an able exponent of the old *bāj* (style) of tabla."²⁵⁶ Makkhu Khan has been identified as a court musician of Lucknow during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Regarding the "old *bāj*" he was said to have played, only speculations exist as to what this technique was like. Kippen suggests this "old style" concentrated on playing *dāyān* strokes more on the *kinār*, the rim of the instrument.²⁵⁷ I believe this "old style" of playing refers to the open-hand style of playing tabla, similar to the techniques found in Pashtun style tabla.

²⁵⁶ Imam 1959: 25.

²⁵⁷ Kippen 2010: 467.

The technique of tabla playing that musicians in Kabul referred to as the "old style" involved an open-hand technique, which they frequently conveyed by imitating with their hands the slap-like motions this technique entailed. In contemporary playing this style is largely limited to folk and dance music, Pashtun in particular, and played on the instruments pictured in Figures 4.2 and 4.5.²⁵⁸ The techniques used in this style of playing involve open-hand playing on the bass drum, *bam*, and frequent use of the drum stroke *Thap* on the *kāṭhī*. In the Hindustani traditions of tabla these strokes have become obsolete, probably on account of their timbres not being suitable accompaniment for art music genres. This type of lively playing was more suitable for dance performances, as are shown in the earliest depictions of the tabla (Figure 4.5). These open-hand tabla techniques might be the "old style" of playing mentioned by Mohammad Karam Imam, which would have become largely obsolete in the court city Lucknow at the time of his writing.

In learning the playing style of Pashto tabla, I was surprised to observe its influence to *dohol* playing, particularly because the *dohol* is played with sticks while the tabla is played with the fingers and hands. However, the *dohol* can also be played with hands, in which case the instrument is played in a similar fashion to hand drums such as *ḍholak* and *pakhāwaj*. In learning the Pashtun style of tabla I discovered an unspoken truth about hand drumming throughout South Asia: the

²⁵⁸ Mark Slobin notes that the tabla is "most indispensable in the Logar Valley [near to Kabul] style of dance music." Slobin 1976: 56. Veronica Doubleday has also highlighted the instrument's use in women's wedding music in Afghanistan. Doubleday 1988: 157-171.

same techniques are applicable to most drums that have two playing surfaces or drums, such as the *ḍholak*, *dohol*, *pakhāwaj*, tabla, and even the South Indian *mridangam*. The constructions and components (drum skins) of these instruments are similar enough that techniques from one particular drum can be applied onto another drum to achieve a relatively similar quality and timbre of sound.²⁵⁹

Many of the *ṭhekās* that I learned on Pashto tabla were played with the same vocabulary of drum strokes (*bol*s) that I had learned as a student of the classical Hindustani tabla. The biggest adjustment to playing in the Pashtun style, I found, was re-orienting my *dāyān*-playing hand to frequently playing *Thap*, as well as using the open-hand (flat palm) technique on the bass drum. These two techniques I had observed and picked up from my Hindustani teachers before, but I never was instructed to play them directly. Ergo I did not practice them. In learning Pashtun *ṭhekās*, I came to play these techniques frequently. As I practiced, I found the hand-to-hand synchronization between strokes was oddly different compared to the multitude of other *ṭhekās* I learned during my research. The unique choreography in my hands, I came to discern, was on account of a technique of the *dohol*. What I was learning was a pattern that had been originally played on *dohol*, and adapted to the tabla.

²⁵⁹ This is not to say, however, that all of these drums are played in the same manner. Certain drum strokes and techniques are played on particular drums on account of their articulation being more clearly audible than when played on other drums. See Roda 2013 for more on the construction of South Asian drum heads.

Most of the tabla players whom I met in Kabul were adept at both styles of playing: Hindustani classical and open-hand style. They used these respective techniques (and instruments) when playing each respective music genre. In the remainder of Part One of this chapter, I wish to bring into my discussion the histories of tabla in Afghanistan, for it has largely been overlooked in scholarship about the instrument. Finally, I detail some of the more influential players that helped shaped tabla performance practices in Afghanistan during the twentieth century.

History of Tabla in Afghanistan

Little has been written about the tabla's nearly two hundred and fifty-year history in Afghanistan. Strong evidence suggests that Hindustani musicians (including tabla players) were first brought to Afghanistan from India c. 1775 by the order of Timur Shah Durrani (r. 1772-1793), the second ruler of the Durrani Empire.²⁶⁰ Early tabla players were members of dancing troops (as seen above in Figure 4.4) who served as entertainers for the aristocracy in Afghanistan.²⁶¹ It was most likely through these dance troops within the Durrani courts that tabla spread in usage throughout Afghanistan. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, the tabla was being played in dance at the courts of Herat, located in western

²⁶⁰ Sarmast 2004: 173

²⁶¹ Mountstuart Elphinstone, an official of the British East India Company, describes one such dance routine performed by Indian performers at a court banquet of Timur Shah's. Elphinstone 1842: 364. See also Ahmad Sarmast's analysis of Elphinstone's account in Sarmast 2004: 169-173.

Afghanistan close to the present-day border with Iran.²⁶² Accounts of various dance troupes with tabla players at Afghan courts continue throughout the nineteenth century, especially in the last quarter.²⁶³

Many tabla players I met in Kabul traced their musical heritages to a group of Hindustani musicians that came to Afghanistan in the late nineteenth century during the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan (r. 1869-1879). Sher Ali was purported to have developed such a great interest in music after seeing it performed at a conference in the Panjab that he invited several Hindustani musicians to Kabul to entertain as well as teach select members of the royal family.²⁶⁴ Of these musicians that came from North India, five were tabla players: Bar Pur, Gamu, Taleh-mand, Karim Bakhsh, and Khuda Bakhsh.²⁶⁵ One of the more prominent family of tabla players in Kabul today trace their ancestry to Gamu, or Gamuddin Khan. This family, known as the Chishti brothers, claim a kinship to Gamu, and attest further that their family have been tabla players since the time of the Afghan king, Timur Shah.²⁶⁶

Few details are known regarding the biographies of the earliest generations of tabla players in Afghanistan, apart from their association to one of the two

²⁶² The tabla is documented as being played as part of a dance ensemble at a banquet in the court of Haji Firozuddin, appointed governor of Herat in 1808. Other Hindustani instruments mentioned in this account include the sitar and *mrdang*. Nayyir 1984: 58. Sarmast 2004: 174.

²⁶³ Based on these accounts, the initial use of the tabla in Afghanistan was linked specifically to dance music; *not* Hindustani art music or other light-classical genres. Sarmast 2004: 176.

²⁶⁴ Sarmast 2004: 179. Baily 2015: 16.

²⁶⁵ The remaining musicians include three *sarāngī* players, one *rubāb* player, three male singers, two female singers, three female dancers, and one female *daf* player. Sarmast 2004: 180, 183.

²⁶⁶ Sarmast details the genealogy of the Chishti brothers in his dissertation. Sarmast 2004: 181.

dominant styles of playing the instrument: classical or "old style." Of the earliest known players of the "old style" (open-hand technique) of tabla are Ustad Ghazi, known as Baba Ghazi, and Ustad Fateh Mohammad, known as Cha Cha (uncle) Fateh. While the exact dates of their birth and death are not known, based on the accounts of my musical interlocutors in Afghanistan, these musicians likely lived from the end of the nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century.²⁶⁷ Musicians in Kabul claimed Baba Ghazi was the most acclaimed tabla player in Afghanistan prior to Ustad Mohammad Hashem Chishti (1938-1994). He was noted for his playing of the "old style" of tabla, and his father is said to have also been a prominent tabla player, as well.

More information is available regarding Cha Cha Fateh, a contemporary of Baba Ghazi. Cha Cha Fateh was born in Kabul sometime around 1900, and his family were originally from Pakistan. His father was a famous tabla player, and Fateh was said to be one of the most long-lived musicians in the country.²⁶⁸ He was regarded as a famous performer as well as an important teacher of tabla. Cha Cha Fateh had three sons: Pir Mohammad, Saleh Mohammad, and Faqir Mohammad, all of whom were tabla players. Additionally, Cha Cha Fateh was the cousin of Ustad Mahmud, the father of the tabla-playing Chishti brothers. "Cha Cha Fateh was a great player of the 'old style' of tabla" I was told by my *rubāb* teacher, Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi.

²⁶⁷ The Afghan musicologist Abdul Wahab Madadi acknowledges in his biography of Cha Cha Fateh that the dates of his life are not known. Madadi 1375/1996: 317.

²⁶⁸ Madadi 1375/1996: 317.

"He would often come to play at a Sufi shrine near to the *ḵharābāt* [musician's neighborhood]."

Ustad Mahmud, known as Cha Cha Mahmud, was one of the first tabla players employed by Radio Afghanistan, the country's national radio station.²⁶⁹ His three sons, Mohammad Hashem Chishti (dec.), Mohammad Arif Chishti, and Mohammad Asif Chishti, were all prominent tabla players in Afghanistan during the latter half of the twentieth century.²⁷⁰ Mohammad Hashem Chishti (1934-1990), known as Ustad Hashem, was a well-known multi-instrumentalist and composer in Afghanistan. While performing mainly on the tabla, he was also proficient at the harmonium, sitar, *rubāb*, *tanbur*, sarod, *sārangī*, *dilrubā*, *dāireh*, *dohol*, and *zerbaghali*.²⁷¹ Ustad Hashem learned tabla from Ustad Miya Qadir Bakhsh of the Panjab *gharānā*.²⁷² Being a prolific teacher as well as performer, Ustad Hashem helped solidify the Panjab *gharānā* as the dominant style of classical tabla performed in Afghanistan.

²⁶⁹ Sarmast 2004: 315-6. A photograph containing Cha Cha Mahmud and the radio station's orchestra can be seen in Madadi 1375/1996: 427.

²⁷⁰ John Baily provides a brief profile of Ustad Mohammad Asif Chishti in Baily 2015: 133-136.

²⁷¹ Madadi 1375/1996: 318.

²⁷² Mia Qadir Bakhsh was the teacher of other prominent Panjab *gharānā* tabla artists such as Ustad Allah Rakha (1919-2000), Ustad Shaukat Hussain Khan (1930-1996), and Ustad Altaf Hussain "Tafo" Khan (b. 1945).

Conclusion

In this section I have proposed a new perspective on the early development of the tabla, which I base on my research into the open-hand style of Pashto tabla playing. With a reinterpretation of previously known resources, my interpretation of the early history of the tabla pushes back on previously established theories of the instrument's development and place its beginnings in proximity to Pashtun musical culture. I also discussed the history of the tabla in Afghanistan, though sparsely documented, and introduced important players who have shaped the instrument's performance practice. In Part Two, I look at some of these performance practices, specifically the drumming played in traditional Afghan music.

Part Two: Musical Analysis

Improvising in Afghan *Maḥali* Music

My musical analysis in this chapter focuses on the use of improvisation in accompanying traditional Afghan folk songs, or *maḥali* songs. In particular, I analyze a recording of *Safā Safā Mīāid*, a popular *maḥali* song from the Panjshir region to the north of Kabul. This particular arrangement of the song is an instrumental version, played on the *rubāb* by Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi. Ustad Fazal Ahmad

Fazlu plays the tabla and *dāireh*. Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi gave me this recording during my lessons with him. He had recorded the song with Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu while both were living as refugees in Quetta, Pakistan during the 1990's. I chose this particular recording for my analysis because I consider it representative of the style of drumming that I learned and observed during my fieldwork in Afghanistan. This analysis focuses on the rhythmic cycle *dādrā*, a six-beat rhythmic cycle that I observed used considerably among the repertoire of Afghan *maḥali* songs. In Afghanistan, numerous and distinct types of *dādrā thekās* exist among the many regional styles of music played throughout the country. Drummers will play several of these different styles of *thekās* in Afghan *maḥali* music, as can be heard throughout the selected recording.

Much to the same end as in the previous two chapters, the goal of my musical analysis here is to show how *thekā* is embellished during a musical performance. However, in contrast to the previous examples the musical analysis below examines how these *thekās* are played on the tabla, not the *ḍholak*. Before my analysis I briefly discuss the form and rhythmic accompaniment approach of Afghan *maḥali* music. I also notate and describe some of the different primary stroke-melodies of *dādrā* that are played in *maḥali* music.

Musical Form in Afghan *Maḥali* Music

Maḥali songs follow various musical forms. The musical example used in my analysis is a standardized song form that was influenced heavily by Hindustani-trained musicians at Radio Afghanistan, the country's national radio station. Such arrangements of *maḥali* songs were part of an effort to create music suitable for radio broadcast during the middle of the twentieth century (Baily 2010: 157, Baily 1988: 24-36, 81-83). These efforts, John Baily has argued, were highly influential in giving the various ethnic groups of Afghanistan's population a sense of a national, *pan*-Afghan identity (Baily 1994). Many of the *maḥali* songs that I heard performed as well as learned were based on these types of songs that had been adapted previously for radio performances. In these arrangements, songs are composed from a selection of "lighter" melodic modes (*rāgs*) and set to a handful of folk *tāls*.²⁷³ These folk *tāls* include four-beat *katakḥani* (also spelled *qataghani*), six-beat *dādrā* and its many varieties, seven-beat *mughali*, and eight-beat patterns *keherwā* and *gideh*.

In *maḥali* arrangements, most often a song will be based on two pre-composed melodies, the *āsthāi* and the *antarā*, which are repeated several times throughout the song.²⁷⁴ A song can have one or several minor melodies that

²⁷³ Of the *maḥali* songs I heard and learned during my fieldwork, *bairami* (Hindustani music's *bhairavi*), *kestori*, and *pāri* (Hindustani's *pahari*; meaning "of the hills") were the most frequently performed. Baily 1981a: 10-11, 14-19.

²⁷⁴ In Hindustani classical music, these two melodies are known as *sthāyī* (*asthāi*) and *antrā*. Jairazbhoy 1971: 30.

musicians called *pesh*, which are played between repetitions of the *āsthāi* and *antarā*. In contemporary practice it is also not uncommon for *maḥali* performances to utilize aspects of Afghan *ghazal* music, specifically the fast-tempo musical interludes (called *dhuni*) performed between verses of the poetry.²⁷⁵ These musical interludes are primarily for instrumentalists—percussions especially—to show off their musical chops.

Stroke Melodies of Afghan *Maḥali* Music

Dādrā is comprised of six beats that are rhythmically accented as two groups of three beats. In Afghan *maḥali* drumming, most of *dādrā*'s *dāyān* patterns (see below) do not maintain the symmetrical three-three grouping as found in six-beat *qawwālī* and *kāfi ṭhekās*. Rather, these *dāyān* patterns follow different groupings that sometimes, as shown in the *aushāri ṭhekā* below, both articulate and aggravate the triple-based rhythmic character of *dādrā*. Similar to other *ṭhekās* notated in this dissertation, the *bāyān* articulates points of weighted accent to specific points of the rhythmic pattern. In previous chapters, I have argued that economies of movement, which are formed by the positioning of one's hands throughout playing a pattern, are central to the composition of *ṭhekās*. These economies of movement facilitate the extended playing of *ṭhekās* on particular drums, i.e., the *ḍholak*, that require a

²⁷⁵ These musical interludes resemble those discussed in Sindhi *kāfi* in the previous chapter.

considerable physical effort to play. In this chapter, my analysis looks at how Afghan *maḥali ṭhekās* are played on the tabla, which maintains a different set of performance practices and techniques than the *ḍholak*. While a discussion regarding the differences and similarities of these two instruments is well-beyond the scope of this dissertation, some key distinctions in their technique are worthy of mention.²⁷⁶ In general, tabla playing does not require the heightened physicality that playing the *ḍholak* can entail. Playing tabla relies heavily on the motor movements of the fingers, hands, and forearms; not so much one's entire arm—upper arm, forearm, hands, and fingers—as in *ḍholak* playing.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, a substantial amount of tabla playing is done by using only the index finger, especially when playing *ṭhekā*. Even so, economies of movement in the wrists and fingers still play a central role in the stroke-melodies of *ṭhekās* as they are played on the tabla. I elaborate upon the importance of such hand movements in the following notated rhythmic patterns.

In Afghanistan, *dādrā* is played in a variety of styles and is referred to by different names. Throughout my research I observed three primary styles of *dādrā ṭhekās* played in *maḥali* music: *dādrā* (also called *Kabuli dādrā*), *aushāri*, and *tingla*. The extent of elaboration and embellishment of these *ṭhekās* I came across in my

²⁷⁶ Rebecca Stewart illuminates more of the differences and similarities of these instruments in her dissertation. See Stewart 1974: 22-54.

²⁷⁷ Having studied both the tabla and *ḍholak* extensively, I found a fundamental factor in contributing to the lessened physicality of tabla playing was because of the horizontal-orientation of the its playing surfaces, compared to the vertical-orientation of the drum skins when playing the *ḍholak*.

research on Afghan music was indeed staggering. I have notated below what my teachers identified as the most basic and unembellished forms of these *ṭhekās*.

⊖	⊙	⊙	⊖	⊙	⊙
●				●	
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.7. *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekā*.

The above *dādrā ṭhekā* is an extremely common way of playing *dādrā* in light-classical, devotional, and popular genres in South Asia. Throughout my fieldwork I observed the pattern in Figure 4.7 played in *ṭhumrī*,²⁷⁸ *maḥali*, *qawwālī* music, and *ghazal* genres of music, on both the tabla, and in the case of *qawwālī*, the *ḍholak*. The *dāyān* pattern in this *ṭhekā* involves two groups of three that are articulated initially by a drum stroke played with the index finger on the *kinār* (rim) of the *dāyān*, ⊖. This stroke is followed by two identical strokes, which are played also by the index finger but on the inner ring of the *dāyān*, called the *sūr* or *lav*, ⊙. While playing this group of three drum strokes, the position of the *dāyān*-playing hand moves very little. The principal hand movement comes on the first stroke, ⊖, which utilizes a quick counter-clockwise turn of the wrist to strike the drum skin's edge. Because of the placement of the ring finger on the edge of the *syāhī*, the *dāyān* hand remains in the proper playing position for the two subsequent strokes, ⊙. In faster tempos, these ⊙ strokes can be played by ricocheting the index finger

²⁷⁸ *Ṭhumri* is a light-classical genre of poetry sung to music.

on the drum skin's surface after the initial articulation, ⊖.²⁷⁹ Using such ricochet strokes can facilitate playing this pattern for extensive durations. The contrast in timbre between the initial drum stroke, ⊖, and the subsequent two strokes, ⊙, help further emphasize the triple-based character produced by this *ṭhekā*. *Bāyāñ* articulations, ●, are limited to the start of the rhythmic pattern on beat one, and another on beat five, which serves as an anticipation stroke for the subsequent repeat of the rhythmic cycle and pattern.

A second type of *dādrā ṭhekā* that is played in Afghan *maḥali* music is called *tingla*. *Tingla* is a style of *dādrā* that is traditionally played in Pashtun music. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I encountered an extensive variety of *tingla ṭhekā*-s; one of my teachers in Kabul taught me fifteen different variations. One of the first of these styles of *tingla* I learned was:

⊖	⊙	○	⊖	○	—
●	—	●	●	●	
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.8. *Tingla ṭhekā*

"The name *tingla* comes from the first three *bol*s of the *ṭhekā*: spoken Dhi Ga Dha." Ustad Nazir Latif, my Pashto tabla teacher told me when I asked about the rhythmic pattern's name. "When you say the *bol* quickly it becomes '*ting-ga-la*', or

²⁷⁹ By "ricochet," I mean to utilize the natural rebound of one's finger after it strikes the drum skin's surface.

'tingla.' He said.²⁸⁰ The *dāyāñ* pattern of *tingla* is based off an oscillating pattern between two *bol*-s of different timbral quality: ⊕ and ○. The movement between these two drum strokes is slight; to play ○ after ⊕ involves raising slightly the *dāyāñ*-playing hand to remove the ring finger from the surface of the drum skin, and striking the drum skin closer to the drum's center (on the upper edge of the *syāhī*). On the second beat, a non-resonant preparatory stroke, ⊖, played by lifting and striking the ulnar-side of the hand (pinky, ring, and middle fingers) on the drum skin's surface, prepares the *dāyāñ* hand for the drum stroke on beat three, ○. The position of the hand after playing ⊖ creates a potential energy in the orientation of the wrist, which is utilized in playing the subsequent stroke, ○. This oscillation between ⊕ and ○ drum strokes occurs twice in this *ṭhekā*. Within the first half of the pattern, this alternation occurs over the duration of three beats, the non-resonant ⊖ stroke separating the two resonant drum strokes; in the second half it is played within two beats. The immediate playing of ⊕ and ○ on beats four and five create a sense of rhythmic asymmetry when compared to how this oscillating pattern is played in first half of the rhythmic pattern. Abstracted, the articulation of ⊕ strokes throughout the entire pattern occur on the primary triple-based rhythmic

²⁸⁰ The *bol*-s of *tingla* are spoken as:

Dhi	Ga	Dha		Dhi	Dha	–
(X)				(O)		

subdivision—beats one and four. The other *dāyān* strokes, ○, occur on beats three and five, which emphasize a double-based rhythmic subdivision (beats one, three, and five). This overlapping of rhythmic accent gives *tingla* a slightly disjointed rhythmic cadence that, at times, can seemingly oscillate between a duple-based and triple-based cadence.

The third type of six-beat stroke-melody I observed performed in Afghan *maḥali* drumming was *auṣhāri*, a style of playing *dādrā* associated with the music of Herat in the west of Afghanistan:

—	—	⁵⁴³² ○	—	⊖	—
x	—		●	—	—
(X)			(O)		

Figure 4.9. *Auṣhāri ṭhekā*.

The *auṣhāri ṭhekā* is similar in character to *tingla* in that it articulates two different rhythmic accentuations: duple-based and triple-based. First, the characteristic triple-based rhythmic character of *dādrā* is felt in *auṣhāri* from the articulations of the *bāyān*: the non-resonant stroke on the first beat (x), and the resonant stroke on the fourth beat (●). Contrary to this, the pattern played in the *dāyān* hand, being played on the third and fifth beats, emphasize a duple-based rhythmic subdivision: three groups of two beats (instead of two groups of three beats). The drum stroke played on beat three, ⁵⁴³²○, is played by sweeping the *dāyān*-playing hand away from the player's body and over the drum skin's surface, striking first with the pinky, then ring, middle, and finally index finger. When the

index finger strikes the drum skin it produces a resonant tone on the *dāyān*, ○. This stroke's articulation, ⁵⁴³²○, along with the resonant *dāyān* stroke played on the fifth beat, ⊕, add a rhythmic accent on the points of duple subdivision in the cycle: beats one, three, and five. Together, both duple- and triple-based rhythm can be heard within *auṣhāri ṭhekās*, which adds a delightful sense of ambiguity regarding the rhythmic character of the song. This rhythmic ambiguity is a defining aspect of *auṣhāri ṭhekās*.

Recording of *Safā Safā Mīāid*

The musical example for my analysis of Afghan *maḥali* drumming is *Safā Safā Mīāid* ("Come to me slowly"), a famous traditional song from the Panjshir region of Afghanistan. It was originally recorded on cassette tape in Quetta, Pakistan during the 1990's by Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi (*rubāb*) and Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu (tabla and *dāireh*). Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi defined the song's melodic framework as a "mixed" *rāg*, using elements of different folk *rāgs* such as *kestori* and *pāri*.²⁸¹ Its rhythmic cycle is six-beat *dādrā*, and the form of the song consists largely of alternations between two melodies, the *āsthāi* and *antarā*, with a single secondary melody (*pesh*) played once at the beginning of the song. The song's musical itinerary is given below:

²⁸¹ See Baily 1981.

Safā Safā Mīāid - Musical Example 4.1 Safa Safa Miaid.mp3

	Start	End	Number of Cycles
<i>Thekā</i> (intro)	0:00	0:03	4
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	0:03	0:12	8
<i>Antara</i> (x2)	0:12	0:26	13
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x3)	0:26	0:38	12
<i>Pesh</i> (x2)	0:38	0:58	18
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	0:58	1:06	8
<i>Antara</i> (x2)	1:07	1:20	13
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	1:21	1:46	26
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	1:46	1:56	8
<i>Antara</i> (x2)	1:56	2:09	13
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x5)	2:10	2:31	20

Table 4.1. *Safā Safā Mīāid* performance itinerary.

Improvisation in Afghan *Maḥali Thekā* Playing: Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu

Unfortunately, Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu passed away before my fieldwork in Kabul and I was unable to meet him. Nonetheless, my *rubāb* teacher, Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi, spoke highly of him as both a skilled classical and *maḥali*-style tabla player with whom he had performed often throughout his career. In the following musical analysis, I look at Ustad Fazlu's improvisation of *thekā* in Afghan *maḥali* music. In Chapters 2 and 3, I examined how variations in accentuation occurred within the context of a single stroke-melody. In Afghan *maḥali* music (songs in *dādrā tāl*, especially), by contrast, drummers will cycle through a variety of stroke-melodies, while also embellishing articulations of *wazn* as they do so. The three examples notated above are common types of *dādrā* played in Afghan *maḥali* music, and appear in the following musical analysis.

Because of the placement of their rhythmic accentuation, cycles of medium-fast tempo *dādrā* go by fast from the perspective of the player. One important aspect of the rhythmic accent in *dādrā* is a stroke played on the *bāyān* on the penultimate beat of the pattern. This stroke sounds as an anticipation of beat one of the next rhythmic cycle, which often articulated with another, stronger stroke on the *bāyān*. These two bass drum articulations form the rhythmic cadence and drive that propels *dādrā thekās*. As shown in the analysis below, some drummers will shift these points of weighted accent in order to manipulate the rhythmic cadence of a song. In the recording of *Safā Safā Mīāid*, Ustad Fazlu regularly "doubles" the implied length of the rhythmic patterns he plays through manipulating the *wazn* of his drumming, making *thekās* sound twelve beats in length rather than six. He does this by playing sequential pairs of rhythmic patterns that apply the typical *wazn* structure of a regular six beat *dādrā thekā*, to a twelve-beat framework. In the first pattern he plays resonant (●, ↗, and ●) strokes on the *bāyān*, and in the subsequent pattern he plays non-resonant (X, x) strokes on the *bāyān*. At the end of this second pattern Ustad Fazlu plays the *bāyān*, often on beat five, which imitates the anticipation stroke heard in six-beat *dādrā* patterns. The pairs of these *thekās* form an antecedent-consequent relationship that Ustad Fazlu repeats often throughout the song. Because of their connection, I have notated such pairs of antecedent-consequent *thekās* as "a" and "b". In these instances, Ustad Fazlu rotates between respective a and b variations, while sometimes repeating one.

Patterns in my analysis that are one cycle in duration are again marked with counting numbers.

In the 2:31 of this performance, Ustad Fazlu plays the three types of stroke-melodies notated above, in addition to subsequent variations of them. While some arrangements of *maḥali* songs begin with a short melodic exposition, *ālāp*, others begin with the drummer entering and immediately playing the *ṭhekā*. This particular recording of *Safā Safā Mīāid* begins with Ustad Fazlu playing *ṭhekā*, specifically a medium-fast *tingla ṭhekā* to which he returns frequently throughout the song. Ustad Fazlu begins by alternating two variations of *tingla*, first by playing without a *bāyān* part (Figure 4.10), and then with *bāyān* articulations (Figure 4.11).

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
x	–	–	x	–	–
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.10. *Tingla ṭhekā* variation.

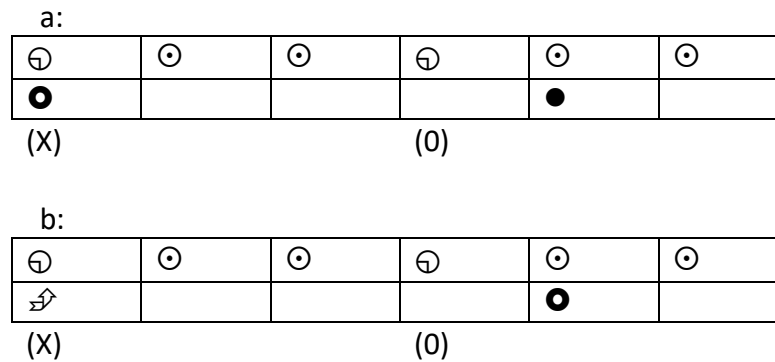
⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
●	●	–	↗	–	–
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.11. *Tingla ṭhekā* variation.

These two styles of *tingla* Ustad Fazlu plays utilize the stroke-melody notated above in Figure 4.8 with different *bāyān* articulations. The pattern in Figure 4.10 is played without any *bāyān*, whereas in Figure 4.11 the *bāyān* adds a rhythmic accent to the first four beats of the rhythmic pattern. The *bāyān* stroke with the upward inflection, ↗, on beat four helps articulate a stylistically conclusive end to this

rhythmic accentuation. The difference in musical texture between Figures 4.10 and 4.11 is significant, as *bāyān* articulations add an important feeling of rhythmic weighting and cadence for *dādrā thekās*.

Ustad Fazlu continues to alternate these two *tingla* variations during the first two repeats of the main melody, the *āsthāi* (0:03-0:12). Afterwards, he switches stroke-melodies in concurrence with the change in musical texture that comes with the *antarā* (0:12-0:26). In the *antarā*, Ustad Fazlu plays a sequential pairing of a *Kabuli dādrā* style *ṭhekās*:



Figures 4.12a-b. *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekā* variations.

The *ṭhekā* variations notated in Figures 4.12a-b are based on the *Kabuli dādrā* stroke-melody notated in Figure 4.7; the only differences being the manner in which the *bāyān* is articulated. Initially, the first variation begins with an open-hand stroke on the *bāyān*, ●. Afterwards, the *bāyān* articulation on the pattern's penultimate beat, ●, acts as an anticipation—a preparatory stroke for the subsequent variation in Figure 4.12b. The upward inflection on the *bāyān* stroke at the onset of this pattern, ↗, adds a sense of resolution to the anticipation created

by the ● stroke. On the fifth beat of the Figure 4.12b variation, Ustad Fazlu plays an open-hand *bāyān* stroke, ●, that sounds as an anticipation for the repeat of the entire cycle. The open-hand *bāyān* stroke he plays on the first beat of Figure 4.12a serves as an appropriate resolution for the stroke that preceded it in the Figure 4.12b *ṭhekā*. Based on their timbres of articulations of *wazn*, these two variations aurally form an antecedent-consequent relationship. Though both Figures 4.12a and 4.12b maintain the same points of rhythmic accent, Ustad Fazlu's use of *bāyān* strokes of different timbres between each adds different qualities of rhythmic accentuation to the patterns. The *ṭhekā* variation in Figure 4.12a maintains a heavier sense of rhythmic accent on the start of the rhythmic pattern on account of it being played with open-hand drum strokes, ●. In the Figure 4.12b variation, this rhythmic weight is still present during the anticipation and resolution to the pattern's start, but is less pronounced on account of the strokes being played, ● and ↗, respectively. Open-hand drum strokes, ●, are significantly louder and "punchier" than *bāyān* strokes during which the player's palm is in contact with the drum skin, ● and ↗. This difference in volume and timbre adds more rhythmic accent and weight in the anticipation and resolution of the start of this pair of *ṭhekās*.

At the end of the first *antarā* section the song transitions back into playing the primary melody, the *āsthāi*, which repeats three times (0:26-0:38). During the return of the *āsthāi* melody, Ustad Fazlu begins with playing a pair of *aushāri ṭhekās*

that are repeated in sequence and exhibit another antecedent-consequent relationship:

a:

—	—	5432 ○	—	⊖	—
●	—	—	—	X	—
(X)			(0)		

b:

—	—	5432 ○	—	⊖	—
X	—	—	●	●	—
(X)			(0)		

Figures 4.13a-b. *Aushāri thekā* variations.

This pair of variations is based on the *aushāri* stroke-melody notated in Figure 4.9, with Ustad Fazlu playing different articulations on the *bāyāñ*. Similar to the previous *thekā* variation in Figure 4.12a, the first pattern notated in Figure 4.13a begins with an open-hand stroke on the *bāyāñ*, ●. The remaining *bāyāñ* articulation of the pattern is a forceful, non-resonant stroke, X, on beat five that aurally serves two key roles: it anticipates the downbeat of the variation in Figure 4.13b, as well as emphasizes the duple-based subdivisions that are accented by *aushāri*'s stroke-melody (beats one, three, and five). In the subsequent Figure 4.13b variation, the non-resonant *bāyāñ* stroke, X, Ustad Fazlu plays on beat one resolves the anticipation from a similar stroke on beat five of the previous pattern. Afterwards, on beats four and five in Figure 4.13b, he plays with open-hand strokes, ●. At this particular position within the pattern, these *bāyāñ* strokes again add substantial

weighted accent to the duple-based rhythmic cadence of *auṣhāri*.²⁸² Furthermore, they are also an anticipation of the repeat of the pair of *ṭhekās* in Figures 4.13a-b. By playing an open-hand *bāyān* stroke on beat one in Figure 4.13a, Ustad Fazlu resolves the anticipation he created at the end of Figure 4.13b through the similar open-handed *bāyān* stroke. Until this section of the song, the *ṭhekās* Ustad Fazlu has played have emphasized and established a triple-based rhythmic cadence for the song. His playing of these *auṣhāri ṭhekā* variations, which articulate a comparatively shorter, duple-based rhythmic cadence, substantially alters this established rhythmic cadence of the song.²⁸³ Ustad Fazlu re-establishes the original, triple-based rhythmic cadence at 0:32 by playing the *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekās* notated in Figures 4.12a-b.

A secondary melody, called *pesh*, is played at 0:38, and to accommodate the change in musical texture Ustad Fazlu switches the stroke-melody he is playing to *tingla*. He rotates between another pair of *ṭhekās* that sound an antecedent-consequent relationship through their weighted accent:

²⁸² The *bāyān* stroke on beat four of this pattern serves as a preparatory stroke for the articulation on beat five.

²⁸³ In Hindustani classical parlance this same rhythmic affect can be constituted as a shift in *lāy*, meaning relative tempo and rhythmic density. Clayton 2000: 75-92.

a:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
●	–	↗	–	X	–
(X)			(0)		

b:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
X	–	–	●	●	–
(X)			(0)		

Figures 4.14a-b. *Tingla thekā* variations.

As in the previous two pairs of *thekā* variations, the first *tingla* pattern in Figure 4.14a Ustad Fazlu plays an open-hand stroke on the *bāyān* to articulate the first beat. Ustad Fazlu plays a subsequent *bāyān* stroke on beat three with an upward inflection, ↗, that stylistically resolves the stroke on beat one (and, as it will turn out, the chain of *bāyān* strokes he plays from the end of the variation notated in Figure 4.14b). The final strong, non-resonant *bāyān* stroke, X, he plays on beat five sounds an anticipation for the next pattern in Figure 4.14b. Collectively, these three *bāyān* articulations in Figure 4.14a occur on the points of duple-beat emphasis within the rhythmic pattern: beats one, three, and five. *Tingla* stroke-melodies can emphasize both duple- and triple-based groupings of beats (beats one and four). Through the particular points of rhythmic weight and accent *via* the *bāyān* with which he plays in Figures 4.14a-b, Ustad Fazlu complicates the rhythmic cadence of the song by creating a poly-rhythmic pattern that emphasizes both a duple-beat and triple-beat subdivision, similar to in the *aushāri thekā*. Ustad Fazlu continues playing this poly-rhythmic drumming style in the second variation in Figure 4.14b; the non-

resonant *bāyān* stroke on beat one, X, along with the open-hand strokes, ●, on beats four and five emphasizing a duple-beat grouping for the pattern.²⁸⁴ In addition, these strokes—X and ●—serve an aural function to resolve the preceding patterns and anticipate the proceeding patterns, respectively.

Ustad Fazlu returns to playing the *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekā* (Figures 4.12a-b) during the transition to the next section (0:51), and continues through the return of the melody (*āsthāi*). At 1:01 he plays a new variation of the *Kabuli dādrā*:

⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
●	↗	—	↗	—	—
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.15. *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekā*.

The particular *bāyān* strokes Ustad Fazlu plays in this variation, ↗, add an extra sense of rhythmic weighting on account of their upward inflections. Of particular note regarding the *ṭhekā* notated in Figure 4.15 is that it is the first variation that is not part of a rotating pair of patterns. As it repeats, the re-articulation of its weighted accent in succession gives a steady, driving cadence that is distinctly audible. As well, the points of emphasis in this pattern clearly articulate a triple-beat grouping: beats one and four. In the subsequent *antarā* section, Ustad Fazlu plays a new variation of the *aushāri ṭhekā* (1:07) that keeps playing these *bāyān* articulations on beats one and four:

²⁸⁴ The *bāyān* stroke on beat four of this pattern serves as a preparatory stroke for the articulation on beat five.

—	—	5432 ○	—	⊖	—
↗	—	—	●	—	—
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.16. *Aushāri ṭhekā* variation.

In the Figure 4.16 variation of the *aushāri ṭhekā*, the articulations of the *bāyān*, ↗ and ●, Ustad Fazlu plays complicate the duple-beat accentuation that is characteristic of the *aushāri* stroke-melody. Much like in the variations notated in Figures 4.14a-b, the combined articulations of the stroke-melody and *bāyān* in Figure 4.16 create a poly-rhythmic feel for this *ṭhekā*. Similar to Figure 4.15, this variation only involves a single pattern of six beats, and the *bāyān* strokes, ↗ and ●, add a more weighted and driving cadence to the rhythm cadence that is heard less in the paired *ṭhekā* variations. Ustad Fazlu plays this variation for half of the respective *antarā* section, and plays the variations of *aushāri* notated in Figures 4.13a-b through to the beginning of the next *āsthāi* section.

During the next *āsthāi* section, Ustad Fazlu plays another variation of the *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekā*-s at 1:25. This variation comes as a response to the *rubāb* player plucking the uppermost sympathetic string on the *rubāb*, the *bajgi*:

⊖	⊙	⊙	⊖	⊙	⊙
↗				●	
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.17. *Kabuli dādrā ṭhekā* variation.

Ustad Fazlu plays this variation briefly, while the *rubāb* player plucks the uppermost sympathetic string on beat four. The penultimate *bāyān* stroke he plays

in this pattern, ●, establishes a strong anticipation for the repeated pattern, which has a subsequent resolution on beat one, ↗. On account of this variation comprising a single pattern of six beats, this strong sense of rhythmic anticipation and resolution adds a further drive to the musical character and cadence of the song. After playing this variation briefly, Ustad Fazlu returns to playing previous variations of the *Kabul dādrā* variations notated in Figures 4.12a-b.

In the melodic transition leading to the next musical section (a repeat of the *āsthāi*), Ustad Fazlu plays another variation of the *tingla thekā* at 1:36:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
–	–	–	–	●	–
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.18. *Tingla thekā* variation.

This *tingla* variation maintains only one point of rhythmic weight as articulated by the *bāyāñ*—on the penultimate beat, ●. The scarcity of rhythmic accent in this *thekā* stands out against the other variations, especially given its placement at the end of the pattern and not at its beginning. In contrast to previous variations, the *bāyāñ* stroke on the fifth beat, ●, does not anticipate another *bāyāñ* stroke in the following cycle; it exists independently. The direction and cadence of the rhythmic accent is contextually ambiguous—perhaps that is why it is played in a transitional segment of the song. Ustad Fazlu briefly plays the Figure 4.18 *thekā* variation, then switches to a pair of *tingla thekā*s that he plays for the rest of the section:

a:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
●	–	↗	–	X	–
(X)			(0)		

b:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	–
X	–	–	●	●	–
(X)			(0)		

Figures 4.19a-b. *Tingla thekā* variations.

These *tingla* variations are similar to the patterns in Figures 4.14a-b, except that in Figures 4.19a-b Ustad Fazlu plays the *bāyān* while pressing his wrist against the surface of the drum skin, ●, *not* with an open-hand stroke as in Figures 4.14a-b. Such *bāyān* strokes played by pressing the wrist against the drum skin are less hard-hitting and boisterous than open-hand strokes.

After this transition section the main melody repeats again, during which Ustad Fazlu plays the *Kabuli dādrā* variations notated in Figures 4.17, and 4.12a and 4.12b. He continues playing the *thekā* variations from Figures 4.12a-b during the last *antarā* section, but switches to playing the *aushāri thekā* in Figure 4.16 just before the end of the section. In the final *āsthāi* melody, which involves a slight acceleration in tempo, Ustad Fazlu plays *Kabuli dādrā thekā* variations from Figures 4.12a-b and 4.17. Just before the conclusion of the song, he changes the stroke-melody of the *Kabuli dādrā* within these repeating patterns. In doing so, he raises the rhythmic density of the patterns, which crescendos until the song's end:

a:

⊖	○	⊙	⊖	○	⊙
●				●	
(X)			(0)		

b:

⊖	○	⊙	⊖	○	⊙
↗				●	
(X)			(0)		

Figures 4.20a-b. *Kabuli dādrā thekā* variations.

⊖	○	⊙	⊖	○	⊙
↗				●	
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.21. *Kabuli dādrā thekā* variation.

Throughout this performance, Ustad Fazlu plays seventeen variations of the three styles of stroke-melodies played in Afghan *maḥali* music. In doing so, he changes the *thekā* he is playing approximately thirty-seven times. Listed below are the seventeen variations of *thekā* Ustad Fazlu plays in this recording. They have been separated by stroke-melody type and their points or durations of *wazn* have been outlined by a red box.

Tingla

Figure 4.10:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
x	-	-	x	-	-
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.11:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
●	●	-	↗	-	-
(X)			(0)		

Figures 4.14a-b:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
●	-	↗	-	x	-
(X)			(0)		

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
x	-	-	●	●	-
(X)			(0)		

Figure 4.18:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
-	-	-	-	●	-
(X)			(0)		

Figures 4.19a-b:

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
●	-	↗	-	x	-
(X)			(0)		

⊖	●	○	⊖	○	-
x	-	-	●	●	-
(X)			(0)		

Kabuli Dādrā

Figures 4.12a-b:

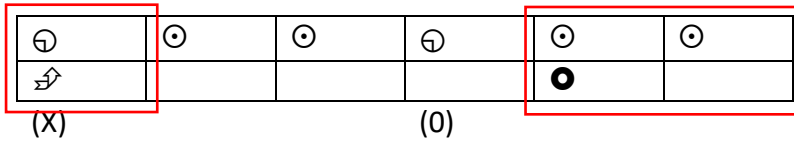
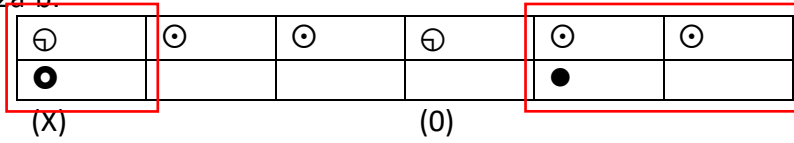


Figure 4.15:

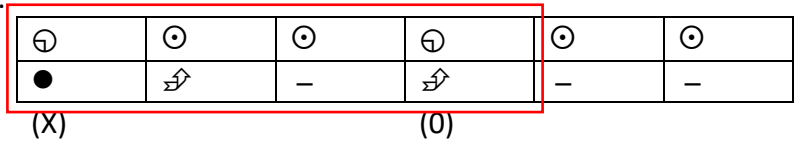
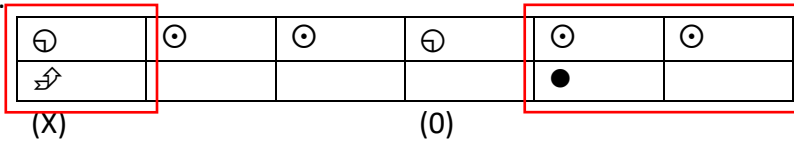


Figure 4.17:



Figures 4.20a-b:

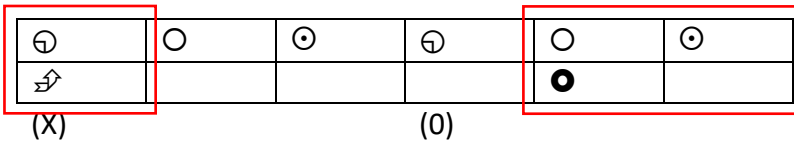
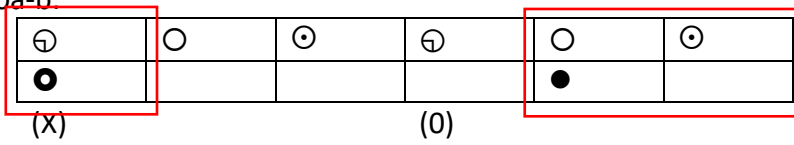
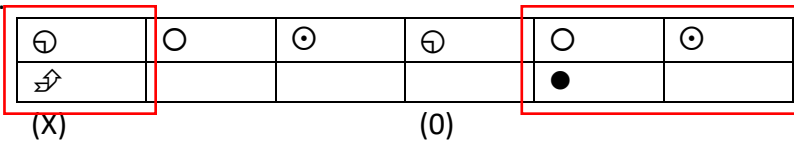


Figure 4.21:



Aushāri

Figures 4.13a-b:

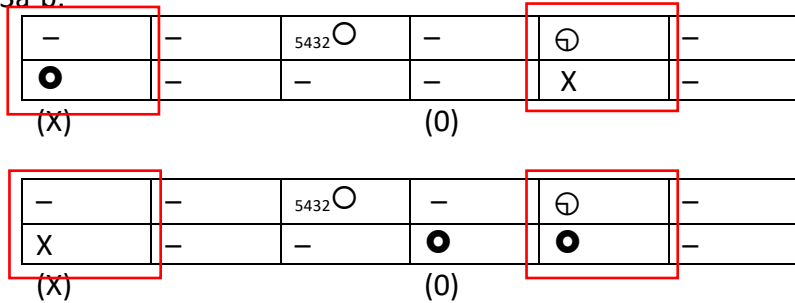


Figure 4.16:

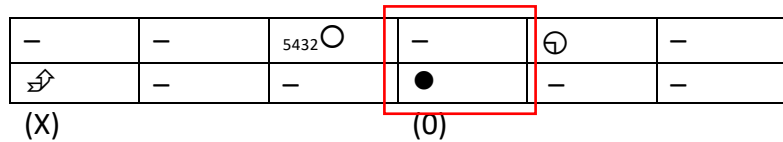


Figure 4.22. Points of rhythmic weight and accent in Afghan *maḥali dādrā thekā* variations.

The *thekā* variations notated above exhibit a variety of different articulations of rhythmic accent as played by Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu. Among these *thekās*, commonalities arise among them regarding the manner in which these periods of rhythmic weight and accent occur. Periods and articulations occur as fixed durations within the rhythmic pattern, as in Figures 4.11 and 4.15, or serve to emphasize the transition from one pattern to the next, as in Figures 4.12a-b, 4.14a-b, 4.17, 4.20a-b, and 4.21. Patterns such as Figures 4.10 and 4.16 add weight to the triple-based subdivisions (beats one and four) of the cycle while others such as Figures 4.13a-b and 4.19a-b emphasize the duple-based subdivisions (beats one, three, and five). Summarized below are the different sections of this performance of *Safā Safā Mīāid* and the variations of the *thekās* (listed in their performance order) Ustad Fazlu plays during each respective section.

	Number of Cycles	Variations Played (Figure #'s)
<i>Thekā</i> (intro)	4	4.10, 4.11
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	8	4.10, 4.11
<i>Antara</i> (x2)	13	4.12a, 4.12b
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x3)	12	4.13a, 4.13b, 4.12a, 4.12b
<i>Pesh</i> (x2)	18	4.14a, 4.14b, 4.12a, 4.12b
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	8	4.12a, 4.12b, 4.15
<i>Antara</i> (x2)	13	4.16, 4.13a, 4.13b
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	26	4.13a, 4.13b, 4.17, 4.12a, 4.12b, 4.18, 4.19a, 4.19b
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x2)	8	4.17, 4.12a, 4.12b
<i>Antara</i> (x2)	13	4.12a, 4.12b, 4.16
<i>Āsthāi</i> (x5)	20	4.12a, 4.12b, 4.20, 4.21

Table 4.2. *Maḥali dādrā thekā* variations distribution.

Conclusion

One of the aspects of Afghan *maḥali* music that initially entranced me was the drumming. The extensive amount of improvisation and variation I observed played by drummers in Afghanistan and its diaspora was captivating and hypnotic. The performance of *Safā Safā Mīāid* analyzed above is an archetype of the extent to which improvisation can occur in Afghan *maḥali* drumming, even if only in the duration of two and a half minutes. In this performance, the drummer, Ustad Fazal Ahmad Fazlu, plays seventeen variations of three different styles of *thekās*. These patterns exhibit a diversity of rhythmic cadences that extend themselves to the song's performance. Such extensive variation and embellishment, as I have shown in my musical analyses so far, is characteristic of *thekā* drumming across musical genres in South Asia. The drumming found in Afghan *maḥali* music is representative of this style of improvisatory accompaniment drumming. As my analysis illustrated, improvisation in Afghan *maḥali* drumming involves the use of several different

stroke-melodies, which reflects the musical diversity of the country. Additionally, artists improvise the articulations of rhythmic accent within individual stroke-melodies, as was shown in *qawwālī* and Sindhi *kāfī* drumming.

In this chapter, I discussed and analyzed drumming traditions of Afghanistan and Pashtun culture, and argued their significance in the discourses of South Asian music. First, I contested the history of the tabla, a key drum in the discourses regarding *ṭhekā* and rhythm in South Asia and an important historical link between Afghan and Hindustani music. Second, I proposed a different history of the tabla based on my interpretation of previously known historical resources, and suggested a closer historical connection between the tabla and Pashtun musical culture. Lastly, my analysis of Afghan *maḥali* drumming informs directly my argument regarding *ṭhekā* as an improvisation musical form. Afghan *maḥali* drumming, with its many different rhythmic patterns, is representative, if not exemplary, of a drumming style that is based on extensive improvisation.

Chapter Five

This chapter reconciles rhythmic structures of Hindustani music with popular instrumental performance practices. Specifically, I look at what happens when the techniques of one drum (*dohol*) are transferred to another (tabla). As I mentioned in the last chapter, the *dohol* is a drum associated closely with Pashtun musical practices. The tabla rose to prominence in South Asia from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, and drummers across the region adopted the instrument and adapted previous musical repertoires, rhythmic patterns, and playing techniques from former drums onto the tabla.²⁸⁵

When this transition occurred within Pashtun musical cultures, the adjustments produced patterns with unique voicings because of the performance practices of the primary drum played in Pashtun music, the *dohol*. My focus in this chapter looks at the adaptation of seven-beat patterns in particular. This adaption, I argue, explains the unique rhythmic structuring of contemporary *rupak tāl*, the primary seven beat rhythmic cycle in Hindustani *ḵhyāl* music, in which the two typically differentiated markers in the cycle, *ḵhālī* and *sam*, are recognized to fall on the same beat. *Dohol* players could adapt the rhythmic patterns they played on the *dohol* to playing them on tabla only to the extent that certain musical characteristics

²⁸⁵ Miner 1993: 75-100. Kippen 2010: 463.

and functions central to South Asian drumming were still present and recognizable between instruments. Through a musical analysis of seven-beat drumming patterns played in Pashtun musical styles, I propose in this chapter manners through which Pashtun drumming patterns may have influenced the peculiarities of *rupak tāl*.

Pride and Nuance in Pashtun Style Drumming

When I began studying Pashtun music, specifically its drumming traditions, my admittance into the respective musical circles was met regularly with a crucial test. Drummers and teachers would present me with a challenge: they would play a *ṭhekā* used in Pashtun music on a drum (usually a set of Pashto tabla) and it was my task to decide whether the rhythmic pattern that they played was in six, seven, or eight beats.²⁸⁶ I struggled initially with this seemingly easy task, much to the enjoyment of my teachers and contacts. The nuances between the different rhythmic patterns played in Pashtun music were so slight that even I, as a trained musician, could confuse patterns of six, seven, or eight beats. Musicians whom I met in Kabul as well as the Afghan diaspora in the San Francisco Bay Area recounted with great pride anecdotes regarding the difficult nature of rhythm and drumming patterns in Pashtun music. The most common story involved a young Ustad Zakir

²⁸⁶ In this chapter my usage of both "Pashto" and "Pashtun" is deliberate. While "Pashto" normally refers to the Indo-Iranian language, my interlocutors used "Pashto" to describe the style of tabla. I have adopted this usage throughout the chapter.

Hussain, the renowned Indian tabla virtuoso, in a performance that has become legendary.

This particular story occurs in 1974 when Ustad Mohammad Omar (1905-1980), a virtuoso of the Afghan *rubāb*, was a Fulbright-Hayes fellow at the University of Washington. In November of that year, Mohammad Omar played a concert at the university—his only performance in the United States—and accompanying him on the tabla was Ustad Zakir Hussain.²⁸⁷ The programming for the concert included several *ḵhyāl* compositions, a tabla solo by Zakir Hussain, and ended with a traditional Pashtun folk song.

Throughout my fieldwork in Afghanistan, I heard many narratives from musicians regarding Ustad Mohammad Omar's concert with Ustad Zakir Hussain. The most thorough account of this story I heard from my *rubāb* teacher, Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi. Here, I summarize his lengthy story:

Prior to the concert Ustad Mohammad Omar felt concerned about playing with a tabla player with whom he had not previously met. In particular, his anxieties were regarding the drummer being able to play traditional Afghan and Pashtun music, which involve their own unique styles of drumming that are typically known only by players in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. At the time, Zakir Hussain was twenty-four and already an accomplished tabla player (as can be heard in the recording). Regardless, Ustad Mohammad Omar's anxieties remained up to his introduction to Zakir Hussain a few hours before the start of the concert.

Prior to their performance, the two musicians were able to rehearse a little with one another. During this session, Mohammad Omar played a Pashtun song in *gideh*, an eight-beat rhythmic cycle

²⁸⁷ The concert was recorded and later distributed in 2002 by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings under the title "Mohammad Omar: Virtuoso from Afghanistan."

played in Pashtun music, and asked the young tabla player to play along.²⁸⁸ According to Din Mohammad Saqi, Zakir Hussain was unfamiliar with Pashtun music and the peculiarities of its song structures, and as Mohammad Omar played the melody for him on *rubāb* he could not ascertain the rhythmic cycle that was being played. After three repetitions of the melody Zakir Hussain was still unable to identify neither the rhythmic cycle that Ustad was playing, nor the starting point of the melody where he was supposed to enter on the tabla. Ultimately, Mohammad Omar amicably helped Zakir Hussain with the correct rhythmic pattern. – Ustad Din Mohammad Saqi

While such a story about Zakir Hussain may seem apocryphal, when listening to the recording of the concert, subtle aural cues support particular events of Din Mohammad Saqi's (and others') narratives.

For the entirety of the concert's recording, Mohammad Omar's voice can be heard only a few times; all appear to be vocalizations aimed at Zakir Hussain during their performance.²⁸⁹ Ustad Mohammad Omar's voice can be heard first during the end of the tabla solo, when Zakir Hussain begins to showcase his tabla skills by playing rhythmically difficult compositions and *tīhāis*.²⁹⁰ The other vocalizations occur at the very beginning of the final composition of the concert, a *kiliwāli*, or popular Pashtun folk song.²⁹¹ Mohammad Omar begins this song with a short melodic exposition (*shakl*), before beginning the melody, which is set in eight-beat

²⁸⁸ In certain versions of the story the Pashtun song is in *mughali*, a seven-beat rhythmic cycle.

²⁸⁹ Zahir Hussain can likewise be heard on occasion commenting on Ustad Mohammad Omar's playing, saying praises such as, "*kyā bāt hai*" and "*Mashallah*."

²⁹⁰ These occur at 5:16, 5:19, and 6:20.

²⁹¹ The term "*kiliwāli*" is used broadly to describe the many regional genres and varieties of Afghan songs that were adapted for radio broadcast. The basis of this musical style can be found in urban Pashtun music. See Baily 1988: 81-100.

gideh. As Zakir Hussain gradually enters on the tabla, Mohammad Omar can again be heard vocalizing to the tabla player.²⁹² At the time this occurs, the music is just beginning and will eventually go on to build in complexity and volume; nothing technically "difficult" is happening. Given the account from musicians in Kabul that the first time Mohammad Omar and Zakir Hussain played with each other he (Zakir Hussain) was unable to discern correctly the rhythm, Ustad's voice in the beginning of this song may indicate him signaling to his accompanist that he had successfully entered with the correct tempo and rhythmic pattern for the song.

Slight adjustments by both musicians continue throughout the song, in particular during *dhuni* or *laggi* sections.²⁹³ These instrumental interludes are a repeat of the song's main melody, but played at twice the rhythmic density as the original.²⁹⁴ They are a prominent feature of Afghan *ghazal* singing and occur after verses of the poetry are sung. Having a knowledge of the poetry (or the melodies set to the poetry's respective verses) informs a tabla player when to play in the *dhuni* style, as well as when to play the *tīhāi* to conclude the section; the correct timing is key.²⁹⁵ In the Mohammad Omar performance, the musicians play *dhuni* sections

²⁹² This occurs at 1:05

²⁹³ *Duni* and *laggi* sections are a feature of Afghan *ghazal* music as it is performed by the hereditary art musicians from the *kucheh kharābāt*, the musician's neighborhood. See Baily 1988: 60-66.

²⁹⁴ In performance practice, *duni* sections are marked in *rubāb* playing by striking the strings (often forcefully) in an alternating (up and down) fashion. During *duni* sections *tabla* players will play short rhythmic patterns (*laggi*) that maintain a higher rhythmic density than that of the original rhythmic accompaniment pattern (*thekā*).

²⁹⁵ According to John Baily, these "heavily emphasized rhythmic cadences" are "one of the dominating characteristics about Pashtun music." Baily 1988: 82.

during repeats of the primary melody, which occur in between other secondary melodies within the composition. It is clear from the performance that Zakir Hussain was familiar with *ghazal*-style drumming, but from the stories of musicians I heard in Kabul he is assumed to be unfamiliar with the melody and the original poetry upon which the song is based. From this perspective, Zakir Hussain likely followed closely Mohammad Omar's playing to pick up musical cues—such as playing volume and intensity—to know when to play *dhuni*.²⁹⁶

The first time this occurs it appears to be a false start.²⁹⁷ When Mohammad Omar first repeats the main melody, he plays it at a much louder volume than the previous iteration of the same melody. Based on the recording, Zakir Hussain interprets this as a cue for a *dhuni* section and doubles the tempo. Ustad adjusts as Zakir Hussain takes off at speed by increasing the frequency with which he plucks the melody, which is the aural signifier of playing the *rubāb* in *dhuni* sections.²⁹⁸ The section ends awkwardly and inconclusively compared to subsequent instances, suggesting further that a *dhuni* section had not been intended.²⁹⁹

One last timing issue arises as the performance comes to its conclusion. Instead of playing the customary *tīhāi* to conclude the song, which requires an acute

²⁹⁶ Not to mention, Mohammad Omar also likely used physical cues during the performance that cannot be observed through the audio recording.

²⁹⁷ This occurs at 1:31-1:39.

²⁹⁸ The remaining *duni* sections of the performance are played in this fashion.

²⁹⁹ The conclusion of *duni* sections—especially during *ghazal* singing—maintains a sense of musical finality, as the interlude often serves to "punctuate" the poetry being sung. These passages tend to end dramatically with a concluding *tīhāi*.

sense of timing in relation to the melody, Zakir Hussain picks up again on aural cues provided in Ustad's playing. They end together—though rather suddenly—with a stumbling rhythmic passage, immediately after which erupts tumultuous applause from the audience. Regardless of these hiccups, the concert was a success and the resulting album is lauded among Afghan music aficionados as a prime example of Afghan *klasik* (classical) music.³⁰⁰ For my Afghan musical contacts (who play Pashtun music, among other styles) however, the real source of pride from the concert was that the rhythmic peculiarities of their musical style had flummoxed the great Zakir Hussain.

The drummers whom I met and worked with in Afghanistan as well as the Afghan diaspora in California maintained a great sense of musical pride in the "Pashto style" of tabla and drumming, regardless of the fact that none of them identified as Pashtun. For drummers, mastery of this unique style of playing was coveted for both economic and socio-cultural reasons. For one, most of my interlocutors' patrons are wealthy Pashtuns who request Pashtun music during the private musical soirees (*mehfil*) they host. From my conversations with musical patrons and performers, drumming was an important signifier of Pashtun music. By catering closer to the musical tastes of their patrons, musicians increase their chances at earning greater incomes from audiences. Second, Pashto-style tabla

³⁰⁰ In Afghan music *khyāl* is often referred to as *klasik* music or *musiqi klasik*. Baily 1988: 60-80.

represented an area of knowledge and drumming style that distinguished the Afghan tabla players I encountered from their counterparts in India. Tabla players in Kabul trace their musical heritages to Hindustani musicians who were brought from India during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The tabla players I met in Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora expressed great admiration for the tabla lineages (*gharānās*) developed in North India,³⁰¹ and ascribed an aura of musical primacy to them and their practitioners.³⁰² Pashto style of tabla playing exists as a regionally distinct and instrument-specific set of performance practices, or *bāj*, that is unknown by tabla players outside of Pashtun musical networks. The esteem in which my musical contacts held Pashto style of tabla playing was derived from an identity of difference; difference in both playing technique and the instrument itself. As I argued in the previous chapter, I believe the Pashto style of tabla to be a playing style indicative of the early techniques of the instrument. Furthermore, I argue in this chapter that this style of drumming has had a direct influence on the rhythmic practices of Hindustani art music, *ḵhyāl* specifically. In doing so, I build on

³⁰¹ The use of the term *gharānā*, meaning "of the house", to describe lineages of tabla performance practice is debated in Neuman (1980) and Kippen (1988). Neuman argues that the term *gharānā* is only applicable to lineages of soloist musicians, with the terms *bāj*, meaning "style" and *birādarī*, "brotherhood", being used for identifying a tabla player's stylistic and social associations, respectively. Kippen strongly disagrees with this point, arguing instead that the use of *gharānā* to describe tabla lineages and playing styles is accepted by soloists and accompanists alike. Through an ethnography of North Indian tabla players representing numerous *gharānā*-s, Kippen reconciles Neuman's claims regarding the usage of *gharānā*, *bāj*, and *birādarī* with how these terms are used among practicing tabla players. See Neuman 1980: 145-167 and Kippen 1988: 63-85.

³⁰² My interlocutors spoke of tabla players from Pakistan, as well, but Indian tabla styles and players maintained an unmatched musical authority in their narratives.

hypotheses set out by previous scholars of the tabla and *tāl*, James Kippen and Rebecca Stewart, by using evidence from my experiences learning with Afghan musicians.

Organizing Rhythmic Information: Clapping, Waving, and their Associations to Musical Texture

The *ṭhekā* is the primary sonic realization of *tāl* in Hindustani music as it is played on a drum. *Tāl* can be expressed additionally as a series of claps and waves of the hands, though based on my research on folk and popular genres this practice is primarily used in pedagogic contexts more so than in performance settings.³⁰³ Initial lessons for beginning tabla students include instructions on how to represent the passage of rhythm time by clapping and waving their hands, before students even touch the instrument.³⁰⁴ These beginning lessons most often involve *tīntāl*, a sixteen beat rhythmic cycle that is one of the (if not *the*) most common rhythmic cycles played in contemporary Hindustani music. *Tīntāl*, which translates as "three claps," is divided into four groups (*vibhāg*) containing four beats (*mātrā*), all of which are

³⁰³ James Kippen has argued that these gestures of expressing time—clapping and waving—are less common on account of them being held over practices from *dhrupad* and the *pakhāwaj* that are largely incongruent with contemporary tabla-specific performance practices. See Kippen 2001.

³⁰⁴ It is against this framework of claps and waves that compositions on the instrument are taught orally; first students speak aloud the *bol*, followed then by playing the drum.

initiated by either a clap or wave of the hand.³⁰⁵ The pattern of clapping and waving for *tīntāl* is as follows:

(clap) 1	2	3	4
(clap) 5	6	7	8
(wave) 9	10	11	12
(clap) 13	14	15	16

Figure 5.1. *Tīntāl* expressed as a pattern of claps and waves.

It is only after this pattern (clap, clap, wave, clap) is repeated uninterruptedly without error by the student that their teacher will introduce the *ṭhekā*.³⁰⁶ For *tīntāl*, the *ṭhekā* is built from four individual drum strokes on the tabla: Dha, Dhin, Tha, and Thin, as shown in Figure 5.2.³⁰⁷

Dha	Dhin	Dhin	Dha
X			
Dha	Dhin	Dhin	Dha
2			
Dha	Thin	Thin	Tha
0			
Tha	Dhin	Dhin	Dha
3			

Figure 5.2 *Tīntāl ṭhekā*.

³⁰⁵ From lessons in which I have partaken and observed, clapping is taught in a very specific fashion for indicating *tāl*. This entails placing one's hands horizontally in front of one's self, with the dominant hand on top of the non-dominant hand. Clapping is done with the hands horizontal in front of the body, while waving involves lifting and turning the dominant hand away from the longitudinal axis of the body, resulting in the palm facing upwards or slightly inwards toward the longitudinal axis.

³⁰⁶ In addition to clapping, students will say aloud the *bol* of the *tīntāl ṭhekā* (Figure 2) or count to sixteen.

³⁰⁷ In standardized tabla notation, which utilizes aspects of several notation systems developed from the mid-nineteenth century onward, claps are expressed with the capital letter X, which marks the downbeat of the rhythmic cycle, with subsequent claps being represented with increasing whole numbers (2, 3, 4, etc.). Claps are represented with 0 regardless of how many there are in one rhythmic cycle. Kippen 2006: 51-71.

When this particular *ṭhekā* is played, a fundamental concept of tabla playing and *tāl* arises: the correlation between rhythmic structure and the sound texture of the instrument. The differences in the pitch and timbres of the two individual drums comprising the tabla are significant. In particular, the bass drum of the tabla, the *bāyān*, maintains the unique ability to drastically alter both the pitch *and* the volume of itself in comparison to the higher pitched drum. It is perhaps for these reasons that the sonic presence (or lack thereof) of the bass drum is a crucial element that expresses and articulates the cadence of Hindustani *ṭhekās*.³⁰⁸ The drumming pattern of most tabla *tāls* alternates between periods in which the bass drum is voiced and periods where it is unvoiced.³⁰⁹ In *tīntāl*, the first, second, and fourth groups of four beats are played with drum strokes in which the bass drum is voiced; during the third group the *bāyān* is played with non-resonant strokes from which unvoiced. In Hindustani parlance, these different musical textures gain the names *tālī* (or *bharī*), meaning "full," and *ḵhālī*, meaning "empty," respectively.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Scholars have long identified the importance of the articulations and inflections of the bass drum of the tabla (or the corresponding bass side of the *ḍholak*) as a key identifier of the passage of rhythmic cycles in Hindustani music. Clayton 2000: 41-56, Manuel 1989: 145-6, Manuel 1983: 7-14, and Stewart 1974: 76-102.

³⁰⁹ While a discussion of the techniques and styles of tabla playing is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the many *bol*s of the instrument can be placed in one of two categories: voiced and unvoiced drum strokes. Voiced *bol*s resonate a pitch (*sūr*), and are created by striking the drum with one's hand or finger and immediately removing it from the playing surface. Unvoiced strokes do not resonate a sounding pitch, and are created by striking the drum's playing surface and leaving the hand or finger(s) on top the playing surface.

³¹⁰ In *ṭhekās*, sections of *bharī* involve playing drum strokes that utilize voiced strokes on the bass drum of the tabla, giving an aural sense of weighted accent to the drum accompaniment. In contrast, during *ḵhālī* sections the *bāyān* is unvoiced. The term *tālī*, which refers to the action of clapping at the initiation of *ṭhekā* segments, is used synonymously to refer to *bharī* sections. James Kippen

The relationship between these oscillating musical textures is ingrained in tabla players from the beginning of their tutelage; the association of *ḡhālī* to periods during which the *bāyān* is unvoiced being a particularly important concept. A majority of rhythmic cycles maintain several *tālī* sections and a single *ḡhālī* section, which begins at the metrical middle point within a *ṡhekā*.³¹¹ As such, *ḡhālī* sections provide an aural cue for the location and progression of a rhythmic cycle. *Tālī* cycles

brilliantly traces the emergence of *ḡhālī* through historical Indian musicological works in Kippen 2019: 253-272.

³¹¹ A majority of the prominent even-numbered rhythmic cycles used in contemporary *ḡhyāl* music follow this pattern of having *ḡhālī* starting at the metrical middle point of the rhythmic cycle, including 16-beat *tīntāl* (notated above), 12-beat *ektāl*, 10-beat *jhaptāl*, and both 14-beat *tāl*-s, *dīpchandī tāl* and *jhumra tāl*. The notated *ṡhekā*-s for *ektāl*, *jhaptāl*, *dīpchandī tāl*, and *jhumra tāl* are notated as follows:

Ektāl

Dhin	Dhin	DhaGe		Tirkī	Thu	Na		Kat	Tha	DhaGe		Tirkī	Dhin	Na
X				2				0				3		
<i>Tālī</i>				<i>Tālī</i>				<i>ḡhālī</i>				<i>Tālī</i>		

Jhaptāl

Dhin	Na		Dhin	Dhin	Na		Thin	Na		Dhin	Dhin	Na
X			2				0			3		
<i>Tālī</i>			<i>Tālī</i>				<i>ḡhālī</i>			<i>Tālī</i>		

Dīpchandī tāl

Dha	Dhin	-		Dha	Dha	Dhin	-		Tha	Thin	-		Dha	Dha	Dhin	-
X				2					0				3			
<i>Tālī</i>				<i>Tālī</i>					<i>ḡhālī</i>				<i>Tālī</i>			

Jhumra tāl

Dhin	-Dha	Tirkī		Dhin	Dhin	DhaGe	Tirkī		Thin	-Tha	Tirkī		Dhin	Dhin	DhaGe	Tirkī
X				2					0				3			
<i>Tālī</i>				<i>Tālī</i>					<i>ḡhālī</i>				<i>Tālī</i>			

In *tālī* cycles that contain an odd number of beats this pattern of rhythmic structuring is not commonly played. However, that is not to say that drummers have not created *ṡhekās* for odd numbered *tāls* that have placed a *ḡhālī* section that begins at the metrical middle point of the cycle. Ustad Akram Khan taught me a *ṡhekā* for the eleven-beat cycle *chārtāl ki sawārī* that was structured to have *ḡhālī* begin at the metrical halfway point of the cycle, which occurred between beats five and six.

used in *ḵhyāl* can be analyzed as a series of alternating *tālī* and *ḵhālī* sections, with every *tāl* cycle in the gamut starting with a *tālī* section.

The exception to this is the seven-beat rhythmic cycle, *rupak tāl*, whereby, as mentioned, *ḵhālī* occurs at the start of the rhythmic cycle. Yet, Kippen's research has shown that arrangements of *ṭhekās*, as they have been represented in historical writings on Hindustani music, have not always been oriented in regards to where these rhythmic patterns "start." His 2019 publication highlighting "the search for *ḵhālī*" has analyzed the methods through which native writers began to account for these periods without weighted accents in rhythmic patterns. From Kippen's masterful interpretation of important eighteenth and nineteenth century manuscripts on Hindustani rhythmic theory, we can see that rhythmic cycles have not always been imagined as starting from the *sam*.³¹² Kippen raised a similar instance of tabla players orienting and counting rhythmic cycles (*tīntāl*, in particular) from other beats besides the *sam* in an article from 2001.³¹³ Thus, we can see that orienting rhythmic cycles from their *sam* is a relatively modern practice. My correlation of Pashtun drumming patterns to Hindustani seven-beat rhythmic cycles attempts to show how particular performance practices of the *dohol* are responsible for the contemporary orientation of seven-beat rhythmic patterns such as *rupak tāl*.

³¹² Kippen 2019: 256-262.

³¹³ Kippen 2001: 11.

The Peculiarities of *Rupak Tāl*

Wave				Clap			Clap	
Thin	Thin	Na		Dhin	Na		Dhin	Na
0				2			3	

Figure 5.3. *Rupak tāl thekā* and clapping pattern.

Rupak tāl is a seven-beat rhythmic cycle that is performed in *ḵhyāl* music.

When compared to other rhythmic cycles used in *ḵhyāl*, as well as rhythmic cycles of seven-beats used in preceding Hindustani art music genres (i.e., *dhrupad*), irregularities in its performance practice and notation arise. One major question that has been debated by scholars with regards to *rupak tāl* is why does the rhythmic cycle begin with a *ḵhālī* section (a wave) when all others begin with *tālī* (a clap)? To address this question, Ethnomusicologists James Kippen and Rebecca Stewart have drawn parallels between the notation of *rupak tāl* to *Pashto tāl*, a seven-beat folk *tāl* that is used in light classical Hindustani music genres, *ghazal* in particular.

Pashto tāl (as notated in Kippen 2001)

Tin	–	tirakiṭa	Dhin	–	nā	nā
0			1		(2)	

Figure 5.4. *Pashto tāl thekā*.

In a similar fashion to *rupak tāl*, the notation of *Pashto tāl* (Figure 5.4) begins with *ḵhālī*, as symbolized by the "0" below the initial *bol*. This quality of *ḵhālī* is on account of the *bol*, Thin, which start both the *rupak tāl* and *Pashto tāl thekā*. Lastly, both rhythmic patterns imply a similar rhythmic division—three, two, two—suggesting further a correlation between the two, though, this is a lesser point as this particular

arrangement (3+2+2 or 3+4) of seven-beat patterns is common throughout South Asian music, such as in Karnatik music where it is known as *tāla misra chapu*. In her 1974 dissertation, a seminal work on modern Hindustani *tāl*, Rebecca Stewart hypothesizes (but does not develop) that *rupak tāl* "evolved" from *Pashto tāl*.³¹⁴ Stewart provides her own *ṭhekā* for *Pashto tāl*, which bears similar structural characteristics to the *ṭhekā* notated later by Kippen:

Pashto tāl (as notated in Stewart 1974)

Tin	–	TaKa		Dhin	–		Dha	Dha
0				2			3	

Figure 5.5 *Pashto tāl ṭhekā*.

Stewart's notation of *Pashto tāl* begins with the same *bol*, Tin, and maintains the same three, two, and two organization of beats as found in other notations of the *ṭhekā*.³¹⁵ Her labeling of the two *tālī* sections with a "2" and "3" imitates that of the notation of *rupak tāl ṭhekā*, which has been argued by Kippen (2001) to be the superimposed structure of *tīvrā tāl*, a seven-beat rhythmic cycle used in *dhrupad* music (see next paragraph). In her discussion, Stewart describes *Pashto tāl* as a qualitative (accent-based) *tāl* played on the *ḍholak*, *naqqārā*, and tabla in folk and popular music genres found in the Pathan (Pashtun) inhabited areas of northwestern India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan.³¹⁶ Her analysis of *Pashto tāl* does not connect or relate its performance to the *dohol*.

³¹⁴ Stewart 1974: 96.

³¹⁵ Interestingly, Stewart contradicts her notation of *Pashto tāl* by saying that the *tāl* is organized three plus four, NOT three, two, and two. Stewart 1974: 98-99.

³¹⁶ Stewart 1974: 96-99.

James Kippen suggests that *rupak tāl* may be a hybrid of *Pashto tāl* and *tīvrā tāl* (Figure 5.6), a seven-beat rhythmic cycle used in *dhrupad*.³¹⁷ He points out that the notation of *rupak tāl*, specifically the symbols detailing its pattern of *tālī* and *khālī*, is the *Pashto tāl thekā* superimposed over the structural framework of *tīvrā tāl*.³¹⁸

Tīvrā tāl

Dha	Dhin	Tha	Tete	KatTa	GaDi	GeNa
X			2		3	

Figure 5.6. *Tīvrā tāl thekā*.

Both Stewart's and Kippen's research suggests strongly that *rupak tāl* is somehow related to *Pashto tāl*. Yet, investigating such a question was well beyond the scope of each scholar's research. Acknowledging the need for more research in regard to *rupak tāl*'s origins, Kippen hints towards Pashtun music without explicitly identifying it. He writes, "...in the folk music of the northwest of the Indian subcontinent there lies a much richer vein of information that still needs to be tapped to ascertain just how folk rhythms—grooves—transmuted into the peculiar *thekā* structures of Hindustani "classical" music we know today."³¹⁹ Kippen further suggests that in particular more research is warranted on the folk-style of playing the *pakhāwaj*, a drum typically played in *dhrupad* music. I pushed back on this assertion in Chapter Four, and at the end of this chapter I follow up on Kippen's

³¹⁷ Kippen 2006: 91.

³¹⁸ Kippen 2001: 12.

³¹⁹ Kippen 2006: 91.

work and propose an answer as to why *rupak tāl* begins with *khālī*. My research suggests a connection between *rupak tāl*, *Pashto tāl*, and the rhythmic practices of Pashtun music (which also inform the performance practice of *Pashto tāl*) that stems from the performance practices of the primary drum used in Pashtun music, the *dhol*; not the *pakhāwaj*.

Pashtun Musical Influence in Hindustani Music

The musical practices of Pashtuns have had a strong influence on the art music practices of Hindustani music. Pashtuns, who are referred to by the moniker "Pathan" in Indo-historical narratives, have maintained a presence in northern India since at least the eleventh century.³²⁰ Waves of Pashtuns migrated to the Indian subcontinent, largely employed as mercenaries, and Pashtun musicians are said to have accompanied these soldiers on horseback playing the *rubāb*, a plucked lute, and the *dhol*.³²¹ Communities of Pashtun migrants developed around major court cities in Mughal India (1526-1857) including Shahjahanpur, Rampur, and Lucknow.³²² The exchanges between Pashtun musicians and court musicians in these prominent cities produced new solo instrumental lineages that have risen to high acclaim in the

³²⁰ The conquests of Mahmud of Ghazni (970-1030) brought large populations of Pashtuns to areas of North India. Pashtun immigration continued throughout the Muslim dynasties of the Indian subcontinent, which spans from roughly 1200-1800CE. See Quddus 1987: 31-32.

³²¹ Katz 2017: 49.

³²² McNeil 2004: 40-44.

twentieth century,³²³ and a new musical instrument, the sarod.³²⁴ I argue that the influence of Pashtun musical culture on Hindustani music extends further to include rhythmic practices, as well.

While it is accepted that Pashtun *rubāb* players were involved in the Mughal courts, records of Pashtun drummers are virtually non-existent. Yet, it is almost certain that they were there. The strongest case of a connection between Pashtun rhythmic practices and Hindustani rhythmic practices, I argue, appears among a particular fashion of playing seven-beat rhythmic cycles. Among the gamut of rhythmic cycles used in Hindustani music, *Pashto tāl*, also called *Pashtu tāl* or *Ghazal tāl*, is a seven-beat rhythmic cycle that, like *rupak tāl*, has been codified to have a concurrence of *sam* and *ḳhālī*.

Pashto tāl is one of a handful of regional and folk *tāls* that reference a cultural group. The placement of this cultural-linguistic identifier on a rhythmic cycle suggests a connection between its use in Pashto language musical practices. Indeed, the deliberate use of the linguistic marker, "*Pashto*", (in lieu of the cultural identifier, *Pashtun*) in this rhythmic cycle's name parallels contemporary musicians' usage, which points to a usage in Pashto-language musical practices (e.g., *Pashto tabla*).

³²³ Sarod virtuoso Ustad Amjad Ali Khan is a member of the Bangash clan, a Pashtun clan, whose ancestors settled in the region east of Delhi. See McNeil 2004. Additionally, the ancestors of the prestigious Lucknow *gharānā* were Pashtun immigrants that had shifted to the court of Lucknow in northern India near the end of the eighteenth century. Katz 2017: 50.

³²⁴ It is largely agreed by scholars of Hindustani music that the sarod, a fretless plucked lute that has become a primary instrument of contemporary *ḳhyāl* music, developed from the *rubāb*, an instrument associated closely with Afghanistan and Pashtuns. See Sarmast 2004: 135, Sakata 1983: 197, McNeil 2004: 22-23, and Trasoff 1999: 210-11.

Pashto tāl is common to light classical genres (such as *ghazal*; a poetic form adapted to Pashto language commonly set to music) and has been noted for its similarities to *rupak tāl*, the seven-beat rhythmic cycle performed in Hindustani art music genres.³²⁵

Most likely, *Pashto tāl* is an adaptation of a rhythmic pattern (or a common variety thereof) that was originally played by Pashtun drummers on the *dohol*, the primary drum of Pashtun music, and transferred on to the tabla. It is clear from nineteenth century sources that there were differing versions of this particular *ṭhekā*, and probably many more that were not recorded. One of the earliest mentions of "*Pashto tāl*" appears in a treatise on *tāl* written in the early nineteenth century, the *Asl ul-Usul*, by Qazi Muhammad Nasir Muhammad, written in c. 1813.³²⁶ The author, a student of Miyan Himmat Khan (d. c. 1845), a chief musician to the last two Mughal emperors and great nephew of the famous Hindustani figure Sadarang, mentions that *Pashto tāl* "belongs to the Afghans."³²⁷ Unfortunately, no notation for *Pashto tāl ṭhekā* is given. The earliest notation of *Pashto tāl* appears in the 1869 *Sarmāya-i 'Ishrat*, a music treatise written by Sadiq Ali Khan. However, it is difficult to reconstruct the *tāl*'s structure or even its *ṭhekā* given the obscurity of the author's

³²⁵ Kippen 2006, 91, 127.

³²⁶ I am grateful to James Kippen on sharing his insights regarding the history and documentation of seven-beat rhythmic cycles and *ṭhekās* with me. Personal communication, January 2020.

³²⁷ Qazi Muhammad Nasir Muhammadi 1813: 4b.

notation. The author does, however, mention importantly that *Pashto tāl* is said to be for light-classical *ghazal* music, a significant connection for this particular *tāl*.³²⁸

A slightly more legible version of the *Pashto tāl thekā* appears in Mohammad Karam Imam's *Ma'dan al-Mūsīqī*, also written in the mid-nineteenth century. Imam states that musical forms such as *Naqsh-o-Gul*, *Ruba'i* are sung in *Pashto tāl* and its *thekā* is of six letters: Dhan Dhag Tah Na NaKe.³²⁹ Based on the information given in the text, as well as the knowledge that representations of *thekās* from this time were not always oriented from their *sam*, one possible reconstruction of Imam's *Pashto tāl thekā* is:

Tah	Na	NaKe	Dhan	–	Dha	G(e)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)

Figure 5.7 Reconstructed *Pashto tāl thekā* in Imam (1869).

It cannot be certain that this is the proper ordering for the rhythmic pattern to which Imam was referring, given that his notation system is ambiguous in regards to ordering and the durational value of *bol*s. Regardless, certain key relationship between this rhythmic pattern (whatever it may *actually* be) to rhythmic characteristics of the contemporary *Pashto tāl thekā* are visible: it being of seven beats (no matter their order) and, given the ordering and numbers of *bol*s Imam gives, two potential *tālī* phrases, suggested by the *bol*-s "Dhan Dhag", and one potential *khālī* phrase of three beats, suggested by "Tah Na NaKe".

³²⁸ Khan 1869: 133.

³²⁹ Imam 1869: 194.

In the 1888 *Tal Paddhatī*, a Gujarati text on rhythmic theory and drumming, a notation for a *Ghazal tāl* appears that shows a clear connection to the contemporary *Pashto tāl thekā*.³³⁰

17. *Gazalno theko vilambakāl mātre 7*

[Slow tempo *gazal thekā*, 7 counts; the metric structure is given as 4+3, *sam / khālī*.]









 ● dhī ○	 —	 ○ ndhā ○	 ○ dhā ○
 ● tī	 —	  ○ ○ nta ka ×	

Figure 5.8. *Ghazal Thekā* as notated in Kippen 2007.

In this notation, the ordering of the *thekā* is four and three, the inverse of how we know seven-beat *tāls* such as *Rupak tāl* and *Pashto tāl* to currently be. The *bols* of the *thekā*, when reimagined as three and four, resemble closely the *bols* of the contemporary *Pashto thekā*. The notation of the author suggests that this *thekā* is to be played in slow tempos, which is further characteristic of the performance of *ghazal* music.

Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927) used the *Tāl Paddhatī* as a main source for his information on *tāl* in his *Minqār-i Mūsiqār*, a book on music theory and practice in India published in 1912.³³¹ In his list of contemporary *tāls*, Khan lists *Pashto tāl*, comprised of seven beats that are divided three, two, two. Although there is no

³³⁰ Kippen 2007: 195.

³³¹ Miner 2016: xxvii.

ṭhekā given for *Pashto tāl*, its structure is provided and is marked as starting with a *ḵhālī* section, followed by two *tālī* sections.³³² Later, in a chapter on tabla playing Khan provides a list of tabla *ṭhekās* for "common *tāls*," though his notations are riddled with inconsistencies and key rhythmic details are missing. Of the nineteen *ṭhekās* he lists, Khan notates a *ghazal tāl* that is comprised of seven beats. The *ṭhekā* that he notates, however, spans fourteen beats.

Dhin – – Dhā – Dhā – | Tin – – – – – TāKā
 Figure 5.9. *Ghazal Ṭhekā* notated in Khan (Miner 2016).

As Miner points out, the *bol*s of this *ṭhekā* are identical to those in the *Tāl Paddhatī*. She comments further that because of the *ṭhekā* being notated with fourteen *mātrās* (beats) that it is equivalent to a slow speed seven.³³³ However, I find this interpretation unlikely. If this *ṭhekā* was to be played as a slow speed, seven-beat rhythmic pattern—the beats of which would be subdivided (presumably) in half to create fourteen divisions—the articulation of *bol*s as they are notated would accent the second half of beats or off beats, rather than articulating the actual beats themselves (see below).

Dhin – – Dhā – Dhā – | Tin – – – – – TāKā
 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7)

Figure 5.10. *Ghazal Ṭhekā* with beats labeled.

³³² Miner 2016: 89.

³³³ Miner suggests this in a footnote regarding the notation. Miner 2016: 347.

In slow tempo playing, such as *ghazal* playing, the articulation of the beats remains paramount for rhythmic accompanists such as tabla players. Taking this into consideration, the above *ṭhekā* seems unlikely to be a slow speed, seven-beat rhythmic pattern. Rather, I argue it is to be understood as two cycles of seven, which, based on the grouping of the first "cycle" of *bols*, would be divided three, two, two, three, two, two.³³⁴ Given the inconsistency of this notation (and the others in the *Minqār-i Mūsiqār*), it was likely the result of a misinterpretation of the notation for *ghazal tāl* as notated in the *Tāl Paddhatī*. It would appear that Hazrat Inayat Khan took each line of the *Tāl Paddhatī*'s notation of *ghazal tāl* (Dhin, Dha, Dha, and Tin, TāKā, respectively) and fit those *bols* each to its own arrangement of seven beats.

What is clear from the information regarding *Pashto tāl* written during the nineteenth century is that there were multiple ways of playing rhythmic patterns, which accompanied *ghazal* music and were referred to as *Pashto tāl*. However, one style, which utilized a voicing of three plus four (or three plus two plus two) that involved having a *ḵhālī* section (i.e., played without using the bass drum) on the group of three became prominent and eventually codified as *Pashto tāl*. My concern here is *not* regarding the subdivided structure or orientation of this pattern, but rather the particular *voicing* of one of these internal groups, namely the group of

³³⁴ The line in the notation separating the first seven beat markers from the last seven suggest this subdivision, as well.

three beats, which I argue is on account of performance practices tied to the *dohol* that were adapted to the tabla. Furthermore, given the similarities between *Pashto tāl* and *rupak tāl*, I believe that *rupak tāl* is itself an adaptation of a rhythmic pattern played on the *dohol* that has been adjusted to fit the performance practices of the tabla.

Pashtun Musical Practices

While an in-depth discussion regarding Pashtun musical culture is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will discuss briefly aspects of the musical forms and styles prevalent among Pashto speaking communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Contemporary Pashtun musical culture is regionally differentiated within both Afghanistan and Pakistan, with major differences arising between urban and rural practices.³³⁵ A variety of poetic forms are set in Pashtun music, including *tappā*, *ghazal*, *chahārbeita*, *loba*, *ruba'i*, and *dastān*.³³⁶ Perhaps most noted among Pashtun cultural practices are the many forms of dance, *attan*, which can include the use of weaponry or displays of martial artistry by their practitioners.³³⁷ The *attan* (also spelled *atan*) is a genre of dance that is practiced widely throughout Pashtun

³³⁵ Baily 1988: 81-83.

³³⁶ See Baily 1988: 82 and Quddus 1987: 53-56.

³³⁷ The dances of the *Katthak* and *Mahsud* tribes involve participants wielding swords and guns, respectively, while dancing. See Schreffler 2002: 188-190 and Quddus 1987: 73-74.

communities in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.³³⁸ The *attan* is danced to musical accompaniment—provided by the *dohol* and *sorna*³³⁹—and is most often danced with its practitioners circumscribing the musicians within a circle. The *attan* begins in a slow tempo and proceeds to a fast, ecstatic climax and entails simultaneous clapping, loud shouts, and lateral spinning by its dancers, who drop out one-by-one.³⁴⁰

One of the central characteristics of the *atan*'s music is the use of forceful and unrelenting drumming played on the *dohol*.³⁴¹ The tempo of the dance starts slow (<100bpm) and speeds up throughout its performance (upwards of 300bpm), which is coordinated through the drumming patterns played on the *dohol*. When discussed in reference to the *dohol* these patterns are simply called *attan*, from the Pashto meaning "to dance."³⁴² However, in reference to the tabla, drummers referred to these patterns were differentiated by their rhythmic duration: for six-beat patterns they were called *tingla* (for Pashtun music) or *aushāri* (in respect to Herati music/songs); seven-beat were called *mughali*, and eight-beat *gideh*. As the

³³⁸ While held to be originally a Pashtun cultural practice, the *attan* has been adopted by numerous cultural groups in Afghanistan and is considered the country's national dance. Sakata 2013: 115.

³³⁹ This particular musical pairing—*sorna* and *dohol*—is a common accompaniment ensemble for dance and ceremonial music throughout West, Central, South, and East Asia. See Sakata 2013: 40-41.

³⁴⁰ Sarmast 2004: 208-210.

³⁴¹ The *dohol* (Pashto; in India and parts of Pakistan it is referred to as *dhol*) is a barrel-shaped drum that is played extensively throughout Pakistan, northern India, and Afghanistan. It is played with sticks (or hands) and has long been associated with numerous regional music cultures in this area, including Panjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, and Pashtun music. Schreffler 2002: 33-72.

³⁴² Wolf notes the convention of naming drum patterns after various forms of movement, including dance. Wolf 2014: 62-67.

tempo of the *attan* quickens during a performance so, too, does the musical meter change.³⁴³ My discussion and analysis of seven beat *rupak tāl* involves *attan* patterns played on the *dohol*, and a hypothesis of how these patterns would have been adapted to the open-hand style of drumming found in Pashtun music.

The *Dohol*

The *dohol* is a barrel-shaped drum that is played primarily with sticks, but can sometimes be played with the hands.³⁴⁴ In general, when drums are played with sticks, certain techniques are used that are not used when drums are played with one's fingers, as is done on the *ḡholak* and tabla. In one aspect, this pertains to how drummers play faster, shorter rhythms. For drums played with sticks, faster playing is done by alternating one stick (hand) after the other, much like how a drum roll is played on a snare drum through alternating strokes by each stick.³⁴⁵ Such technique *can* be used on the tabla and *ḡholak*, but other, more economic techniques utilizing numerous fingers between each respective hand are more common, for instance the *bol* "TeReKeTaTaKaTeReKeTaTaKa."

³⁴³ John Baily provides a brief description of an *attan* danced during the wedding of one of his interlocutors that began in eight beat *ḡideh*, transitioned to seven beat *mughali*, and ended in six beat *dādrā/aushārī*. See Baily 1988: 128.

³⁴⁴ For more on the playing techniques of the *dohol/ḡhol* see Schreffler 2002: 45-52.

³⁴⁵ Stewart notes a similar technique characteristic to the *naqqāra*, which in turn has influenced particular *dāyān* playing patterns on the tabla. Stewart 1974: 65.

This particular technique of alternating sticks was used extensively in *dohol* drumming patterns that I observed and learned in Afghanistan, in particular *attan* patterns. The seven beat *attan* rhythmic pattern, as it is played on the *dohol*, is as follows.³⁴⁶

Attan

○	–	●	○	–	●	–
(x)	x	–	○	–	–	–
(0)			(1)		(2)	

Figure 5.11. *Attan* pattern.

Regarding the above notation: the upper line of boxes represents strokes as they are played on the higher pitched drum head of the *dohol*, the *dzīr*, while the lower line of boxes represents strokes as they are played on the lower pitched drum head, the *bam*. *Dzīr* strokes are played resonantly and fall roughly within three levels of intensity: ○ "full sound"; ● "de-emphasized"; ◆ "lightly played." The same three symbols can be applied to playing strokes on the *bam*, in addition to two closed, non-resonant strokes: ʘ for normal emphasis and x for de-emphasized.³⁴⁷ The numbers in parentheses at the bottom represent structural aspects of *rupak tāl* that are not particular to *dohol* playing, necessarily, but remain relevant to the subsequent musical analysis. It should be noted, further, that Hindustani rhythmic structures and nomenclature (i.e., *tālī*, *khālī*) do not apply to the rhythmic practices

³⁴⁶ While I observed a variety of seven-beat *attan* patterns played in Afghanistan and among its diaspora, this noted example was the most common and basic form of the rhythmic pattern that I encountered.

³⁴⁷ This notation system for the *dhol* was developed by Gibb Schreffler in his Master's thesis. See Schreffler 2002: 61-63.

of the *dohol* as it is performed in Pashtun music. Therefore, the development of *rupak tāl* from Pashtun *attan* rhythms did not occur as a result of transferred theoretical concepts, but rather, I argue, that it was through an adaptation of trained muscle memories from one instrument, *dohol*, to another of significantly different construction and performance practices: the tabla. Thus, the goal of my musical analysis in this chapter is to show how the performance practices of this particular rhythmic pattern as it is played on the *dohol* may have been adapted to form a rhythmic pattern akin to *rupak tāl* as it is played today on the tabla. In doing so, I hypothesize a possible solution to solve the long-running debate regarding why *sam* and *ḵhālī* coincide in *rupak tāl*.

In the case of the seven-beat *attan* pattern in Figure 5.11, points of structural division are suggested strongly by the two instances at which both sides of the *dohol* are struck in unison; beats one and four. In particular, beat four maintains the heaviest musical accent throughout the entirety of the rhythmic pattern on account of both sides of the drum being struck with a full sound ("○"). In contrast, beat one is played with a full sound stroke on the *dzīr* ("○") and a non-resonant, de-emphasized stroke on the *bam*, "x" that involves leaving the stick touching the drum skin's surface after it is struck. This particular stroke, (x), is notated in parentheses on account of this pattern being commonly played both with and without this stroke. It is also not uncommon for dancers to clap at these same points of the rhythmic pattern, which gives further weight to the implied divisions of the pattern.

The rhythmic momentum of this *attan* pattern is created by the anacrusis to the point of highest musical accent that occurs on the fourth beat. In the performance of this seven-beat *attan* pattern, the first three beats sound as an anticipation to the heavy, weighted accent on beat four. The rhythmic motion contained in this anacrusis is formed by a hand to hand sequence of alternating drum strokes, which conclude with the accented unison drum stroke following immediately on beat four. The remaining drum stroke on the *dzīr*, played on beat six, sounds as a resolution for the primary rhythmic accent on beat four. It is from the rhythmic movement provided by the anacrusis played during beats one, two, and three, followed by the strong accent on beat four and subsequent resolution on beat six that this *attan* pattern gets its characteristic swing.

Pashtun *Attan* Patterns

Kippen has warned rightfully against the task that I am trying to do in this chapter, stating "we cannot know if the grooves played nowadays are the same grooves that were played 150 to 200 years ago" and that "musicologically we cannot infer what process of transformation took place, nor even if there was a single kind of transformation," and finally that "it is impossible to determine the degree to which the mainstream 'classical' tradition may have reflexively influenced the folk

tradition."³⁴⁸ Being aware of these potential theoretical and methodological pitfalls, I still believe that the correlation of drumming patterns I bring into discussion merit a serious consideration.

We may not be able to know exactly how long a respective rhythmic pattern has been played, but the extent and variety to which the particular rhythm in Figure 5.11 (and ones similar to it) is played in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan deserves attention. The *attan* is regarded as the national dance form for Afghanistan (Sakata 2013: 115), which, in a way, has made this particular *attan* pattern a sort of *ipso facto* national rhythmic pattern, on account of its pervasiveness. While celebrating *Nau Ruz*, the Persian New Year, with my friends at a restaurant near Qargah, a lake located just outside the limits of Kabul, I heard and watched a small circle of men surrounding a *dohol* player dance the *attan* on the lake's shore. I heard the same patterns played for a larger group of young male dancers in Panjshir, a valley extending up north of Kabul, during the beginning of spring. Again, I heard the same pattern being played on the *dohol*. Most often I heard these rhythms outside of my own residence in Taimani, which was located very near to Hotel Shahr-e Nau (New City Hotel), a flashy and upscale wedding hall. Several times I saw and heard a parade of dancers and drummers going down the street to the same drum patterns. Other times it was not uncommon for people to dance to a drummer in the hall's

³⁴⁸ Kippen 2006: 91.

parking lot. Drummers in Kabul also showed me videos they had taken in Jalalabad, 150km east of Kabul, and in Kandahar, 500km southwest of Kabul, of *attan* dancers dancing to this particular rhythmic pattern. In 2015 while in Fremont, my teacher, Tor Jan, had shown me a home video of his from when they family was living in Peshawar, Pakistan in the late 1990's, and in one scene was the *attan* being danced to the same rhythmic pattern.

The *attan* pattern in Figure 5.11 and ones similar are ubiquitous to *attan* dancing in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan and should not be understood lightly. It is used by Pashtuns across tribal boundaries, which itself is significant given that "there is no single Pashtun folk music" on account of Pashtuns being "extraordinarily fragmented along lineage, tribal, and confederation lines, which shift over the years."³⁴⁹ These patterns are also used by other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, as well, adding to their prominence. I believe that the great extent to which such *attan* patterns are played throughout this area suggest a long-running history that undeniably pre-dates the codification of the rhythmic pattern we know as *rupak tāl*, which, from available written sources, dates from sometime in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁵⁰ This hypothesis is given some credibility on account of a *Pashto tāl* appearing in literature some fifty years prior to *rupak tāl*, indicating that Pashtun music and musicians were prominent enough at the time to be recognized by native

³⁴⁹ Slobin 1976: 89.

³⁵⁰ A *ṭhekā* for *rupak tāl* is notated in Imam's *Ma'dan al-Mūsīqī* (c. 1857), but is not mentioned in the *Sarmāya-i 'Ishrat* (1869).

writers. Whatever patterns these drummers were playing, they eventually came to be standardized as the current *Pashto tāl thekā*, most likely of a composite of common techniques Pashtun drummers were familiar with, i.e. *dohol*. That the *Pashto thekā* closely resembles aspects of *rupak tāl* suggests further that such techniques from which they are both likely to have developed (techniques of playing the *attan* pattern in Figure 5.11) were already present and in use before these *thekās* became standardized through notation.³⁵¹

The transferal of *dohol* performance practices to the tabla, which I detail below, was explained to me by Ustad Nazir Latif, my Pashto tabla teacher, after I struggled initially with playing these patterns during my lessons. He clarified to me: "These patterns are taken from *dohol* playing, that it was they are unfamiliar to your hands." Upon being informed this, aspects of the rhythmic pattern's hand-to-hand movements became clear to me, in particular the frequent use of alternating hand patterns. These particular movements my hands made in relation to each other were on account of them being an important *dohol* technique; *not* a tabla technique. The more Pashtun-specific rhythmic patterns I learned on the tabla, the more this connection became clear.

Finally, when considering Kippen's final statement regarding the reflexivity of classical drumming traditions influencing folk traditions, such influences are most

³⁵¹ Kippen argues that printing, notation, and pedagogical texts were important factors in the standardization of Hindustani *thekās*. Kippen 2019: 271.

commonly seen with regards to rhythmic structure and nomenclature; not instrument playing technique so much.³⁵² The structuring for the *rupak tāl thekā* itself has been influenced by the classical traditions—*tīvrā tāl*—which predicated a particular grouping of beats: three, two, two (Kippen 2001). Had it not been for this pre-existing rhythmic model, *rupak tāl* and *Pashto tāl* as well may have become standardized by some other orientation as implied by their rhythmic accents, such as two, two, three. My argument is not so much why *rupak tāl* has been oriented as three, two, two, but rather why the particular timbres of the *rupak tāl thekā* are played among its respective rhythmic groupings.

I did notice a "backflow" of classical information influencing the structures of seven-beat rhythmic patterns, but this dealt with doubling a respective pattern to fourteen beats where the original pattern was essentially repeated twice, but the *bāyān* pattern was changed to following the *tālī-tālī-ḵhālī-tālī* structure that is common in modern *ḵhyāl thekā*s.³⁵³ The techniques I observed and learned for Pashtun *attan* patterns do not resemble common techniques associated with contemporary tabla playing. Rather, they imply strongly a unidirectional path from the performance practices of the *dohol*.

³⁵² Schreffler notes similar adopted practices by *dhol* players in his Master's thesis. Schreffler 2002: 11, 66.

³⁵³ Stewart 1974: 76-102, Clayton 2000: 57-74, and Kippen 2006: 75-90.

Transferring *Dhol* Muscle Memories to the Tabla

To see how the performance practices of the above seven-beat *attan* rhythmic pattern as it is played on the *dhol* could have been adapted to become akin to *rupak tāl* as it is played on the tabla involves a translation of muscle memories from one instrument (*dhol*) to another (tabla). The performance practices of the *dhol* and the tabla may appear remarkably different, especially considering that the *dhol* is played with sticks, while the tabla is played exclusively with the hands and fingers. In actuality, the techniques of these instruments overlap considerably. As mentioned earlier, in addition to being played with sticks, the *dhol* can also be played with the hands.³⁵⁴ When played with the hands, drummers will use similar techniques of striking the instrument to preserve the sonic fidelity of the instrument's drum strokes as when it is played with sticks.³⁵⁵ When paired drums resembling what we know today as the tabla began to be played in courts of North India and Pakistan in the early- to mid-eighteenth century, their playing technique was probably an amalgamation of drum playing techniques that were already in practice, such as (but not limited to) the *pakhāwaj*, *naqqārā*, *dholak*, *daf*, and *dhol*.³⁵⁶ As such, the capable performance practices of this new instrument (the

³⁵⁴ Players of the *dhol* will be familiar with both hand- and stick-playing techniques.

³⁵⁵ That is to say, if a stroke involved striking the drum and leaving the stick on the skin surface the same stroke played with the hand would involve striking the skin and leaving the hand in contact with the skin. The same applies to where a player would strike the drum's skin; if a stroke involved striking the edge of the drum skin the same area would be struck by the player's hand or finger(s).

³⁵⁶ A comprehensive discussion of the drum strokes adopted by the tabla from other drums of the time can be found in Stewart 1974: 22-53.

tabla) were only what could be imagined through the perceptions and learned muscle memories of those individuals who wielded it and were familiar with the acoustic capabilities of South Asian drums.

It is impossible to know how exactly Pashtun *dohol* players (or other drummers who were familiar with this style of playing) came to play the tabla. Much remains a mystery about the early development of the tabla, especially whence it came and exactly when it began to be used. As discussed in the previous chapter, various theories exist regarding the history of the tabla. My own arguments pushed back on some of these established theories and placed the early history of the tabla in proximity to Pashtun musical culture in the location of the Panjab. Regardless, based on the collective literary and visual evidence, it is reasonable to believe that by the end of the eighteenth century, the tabla was a popular enough instrument that it would have been played widespread among musicians and music genres.³⁵⁷ This certainly includes Pashtun musicians who were a part of communities around the major sites of musical patronage in North India mentioned above: Shahjahanpur, Lucknow, and Rampur, in addition to other places in present-day Pakistan.

The development of *rupak*-like patterns (i.e., contemporary patterns in which *sam* and *ḡhālī* coincide with one another) likely came as Pashtun drummers—who would have been considered *mirāsī* musicians—found a livelihood in the musical

³⁵⁷ Sarmast 2005: 173; Hardgrave, Jr. and Slawek 1997: 79-81; and Nevile 1996.

scenes of the major urban centers of Shahjahanpur, Lucknow, and Rampur.³⁵⁸ Being low class immigrant musicians, the most accessible means for making a living for Pashtun *mirāsī* drummers was performing with courtesans—particularly in early nineteenth century Lucknow.³⁵⁹ At the same time, the light-classical *ghazal* was becoming an exceedingly popular music genre—its primary exponents being courtesans.³⁶⁰ *Ghazal* performance would have been an accessible performing genre familiar to most Pashtun musicians, given the prominence of the poetic genre in the Pashto language.³⁶¹

The appearance of a *Pashto tāl* in literature from this time is also of no coincidence. Written accounts from the late-nineteenth century connect *Pashto tāl* to the performance of *ghazal* music (Imam 1925, Khan 1875), and in some instances the rhythmic pattern (as we recognize it now) is named as *Ghazal tāl* (Kippen 2007). Given the information presently available, *Pashto tāl* seems to have been a variety of rhythmic patterns developed and proliferated by Pashtun drummers starting before the turn of the nineteenth century to accompany light classical *ghazal* music. While it is certain that a variety of these patterns existed, one manner of drumming

³⁵⁸ While players of the Afghan/Pashtun *rubāb* were known as *rubābīs* or *sarodīs*, Pashtun drummers would have been referred to as *mirāsīs*, a generic term for a hereditary occupational music specialist used in the nineteenth century. McNeil 2004: 15-30.

³⁵⁹ McNeil 2004: 67-85.

³⁶⁰ Manuel 1989: 96-97.

³⁶¹ The *ghazal* has been used by Pashto language poets since at least the sixteenth century. A noted early writer of *ghazal* in Pashto language was Khushal Khan Khatak, a famed Pashtun poet and chief of the *Khatak* tribe during the mid-seventeenth century who advocated for inter-tribal union among Pashtuns through his poetry. Caroe 1965: 221-246.

in particular, which I argue was developed from techniques of the seven-beat *dohol* pattern above, became prolific enough to become eventually codified as *Pashto tāl*. I argue that it is through the same adaptation of musical information that *rupak tāl* also came to be.

Enter the Tabla

Ghazal music was performed in the domain of the *mehfil*, an elite male-dominated space that was, among other things, a stage for musical performances during the Mughal era. To gain access to this elite musical space necessitated adaptive strategies by *mirāsī* musicians, such as Pashtun drummers, who were excluded from entering such spaces on account of not only *their* low social status, but the associations of their instrument, the *dohol*, to low class musicians and other licentious performers, as well.³⁶² However, as several writers on Hindustani music have shown (Neuman 2010, Brown 2003, Bor 1986/7), low-class musicians such as *mirāsīs* (and their predecessors, the *dhādhīs*) were able to subvert their stigmas of low prestige and enter elite music performance spaces through creative and adaptive musical strategies.³⁶³ Perhaps the most evident strategy by Pashtun

³⁶² Schofield 2003: 167-168. Katherine Butler Schofield's (Brown) dissertation on music during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) provides a valuable translation of parts of the British Library's copy of the *Mīrzānāma* (lit. "letters for princes"), a code of ethics for Mughal princes and male elites composed in c. 1660, that detail the parameters surrounding *mehfil* performances.

³⁶³ The adaptation of low-class musicians to the elite practices and musical spaces of Hindustani music have been detailed at length by authors. See Neuman 2010: 251-265, Brown 2003: 154-175, Bor 1986/1987: 113-118.

drummers was the adoption of playing the tabla on account of the *dohol*, the primary drum used in Pashtun music, being explicitly forbidden in *mehfil* settings.³⁶⁴ By taking up the tabla and performing with courtesans, Pashtun *mirāsī* drummers could find themselves performing *ghazal* music within the elite musical space of the princely *mehfil*.³⁶⁵ The codification of a "Pashto" rhythmic cycle tied to such music genre suggests that this occurrence was commonplace throughout the nineteenth century.

The *ṭhekā* for *Pashto tāl*, it can be reasoned, was based off of a pre-existing rhythmic pattern (likely similar to Figure 5. 11) that was performed on the *dohol* first and then transferred to the tabla. Two primary factors have led me to this conclusion. First, the structural ordering of *Pashto tāl* (as well as that of *rupak tāl*) is a significant departure from the dominant *sam-tālī-ḵhālī-tālī* format of contemporary *tabla ṭhekā-s*.³⁶⁶ This particular ordering of musical timbres via drum articulations is characteristic of classical rhythmic structures patterns, which are not found in Pashtun *dohol* drumming patterns. Second, I find it highly unlikely that the creation of new drumming patterns by Pashtun drummers for playing *ghazal* music would be necessary, given the already close association of *ghazal* to Pashtun musical practices. Rather, it would have been more economical for drummers to take pre-existing patterns and adapt them to a new instrument, tabla.

³⁶⁴ Brown 2003: 167-168.

³⁶⁵ Kippen 2001: 7.

³⁶⁶ See Stewart 1974: 76-102, Clayton 2000: 57-74, and Kippen 2006: 75-90.

As Pashtun drummers would have begun to incorporate the tabla into their playing, they likely transferred sound relationships and muscle memories from already familiar drumming patterns to the new instrument. A picture of musicians and dancers taken c. 1879-1880 in Kabul by John Burke, a photographer with the British army during the Second Afghan War (1878-1880), presents credible evidence that supports that Pashtun drummers manipulated the tabla in a way fashioned from their performance practices of the *dohol*.



Figure 5.12. Nautch girls of Kabul. Photograph by John Burke, Afghanistan c. 1879-1880. British Library, IOL Photo 430/3 (59).

The above photograph, which was taken during the British occupation of Kabul, shows three professional women dancers (center), accompanied by three male musicians posing with their instruments. No biographical information is given regarding the group of performers, but based on the combination of instruments

within the ensemble it is likely that they were Pashtun musicians.³⁶⁷ Seated around the dancers are an Afghan *rubāb* player (right), a *sārangī* player (left), and a tabla player (right of *sārangī* player). The orientation of the tabla drums—the higher-pitched drum on the player's left and the bass drum on his right—is peculiar. In Hindustani tabla playing, this placement of drums is reversed. The naming of the drums in Hindi/Urdu as *bāyān* (left) and *dāyān* (right) speak to an orientation of tabla players positioning the high pitched *dāyān* on their right side and the bass drum *bāyān* on their left side. Playing the higher-pitched drum (or side of the drum) with the right hand—which is statistically speaking, most likely to be a player's dominant hand—is common throughout most drums played in South Asia.

The exception to this is the *dohol*, which is orientated so that its player strikes the bass side of the drum, *bam*, with their right (dominant) hand and the higher-pitched side, *dzīr*, with their left hand.³⁶⁸ Players of Pashto tabla also orient their drums to play in a similar fashion, having the *bam* on the side of their dominant hand and the *dzīr* with their non-dominant. While it is impossible to know the dominant hand of the tabla player in the picture, it is statistically likely that he is right-hand dominant. His positioning of the tabla as they are—bass drum on his right

³⁶⁷ Sarmast 2005: 194-197.

³⁶⁸ Schreffler 2002: 45-52.

and treble drum on his left—reflects the orientation of the *dohol* as it is still played in Pashtun culture.³⁶⁹

To play tabla in the "Pashto style" is to play *khula*—"open" style. This technique of tabla entails playing with lots of full-hand drum strokes with both hands, which contrasts with the techniques of classical tabla playing that mostly utilizes the fingers and, at times, the entire hand. The most notable muscle memory that have likely carried over from *dohol* playing to Pashto tabla playing is the alternating hand-to-hand sequence discussed above. Other drum strokes, in particular the *dzīr* pattern, maintain degrees of timbral fidelity within their tabla counterparts.

Returning to the *attan* pattern notated in Figure 5.11, there are two types of drum strokes played on the *dzīr*—strokes of full intensity ○ and ones of less intensity ●. To keep the sonic integrity of these two strokes, adapting them to the tabla necessitates a need to differentiate these two strokes by of differing intensities or timbre.³⁷⁰ When considering *how* and *where* these strokes are played on the *dohol*'s drum skin, if they were to be played in the same fashion on the tabla, full intensity strokes ○ and strokes of less intensity ●, would find their analog drum strokes on

³⁶⁹ Based on how the other instrumentalists are holding their instruments in the picture, it would seem they, too, are right-hand dominant.

³⁷⁰ The contrast of *bol*s of different intensities or timbres on the tabla's *dāyāñ*, e.g., "Thin" and "Tha", is a critical aspect regarding the rhythmic character of *ṭhekās*. See Stewart 1974: 94-100.

the *dāyān* of the tabla as "Tak" and "Na", respectively. So, if we consider what was being played on the *dzīr* of the *dohol* in the original *attan* pattern...

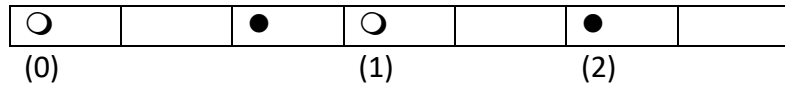


Figure 5.13. *Dzīr* part of *attan*.

...it could be played on the tabla as...³⁷¹

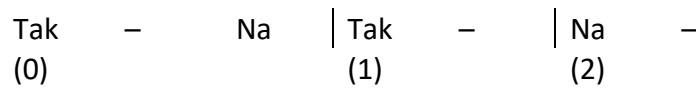


Figure 5.14. *Dzīr* part translated to *dāyān bols*.

However, as Rebecca Stewart has pointed out, in relation to the *dāyān*, the construction of standard *ṭhekās* is limited to resonant strokes: Nā, Tā, or Thin.³⁷²

"Tak" is a non-resonant stroke that is played with the entirety of the hand striking the center of the *dāyān* and, according to Stewart, is ineligible to be considered in the composition of a standard *tabla ṭhekā*. It is possible that in lieu of the *tabla bol* "Tak", drummers would substitute the *bol* "Thin" because of the same relative positioning of the hand when playing each of the two strokes. If this is applied to the above *tabla dāyān* pattern, the outcome is:

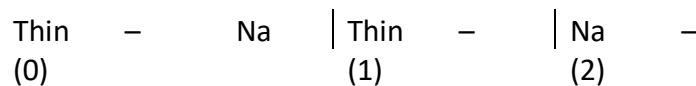


Figure 5.15. *Tabla dāyān* part with substituted *bols*.

³⁷¹ For this notation and the remainder in this chapter I include in parentheses the symbols indicating the rhythmic subdivision of the respective *Pashto tāl* and *rupak tāl ṭhekās* for the sake of clarification for the reader.

³⁷² When factoring in the use of the *bāyān* this series of *bol*-s is extended to include "Dha" and "Dhin." Stewart 1974: 98.

When translating the *bam* part to being played on the tabla *bāyān*, the muscle memories that were available for reference for Pashtun drummers were playing resonantly and allowing the drum skin to resonate, or playing non-resonantly and effectively muting the sound from the skin. Translated to tabla *bols*, the *bam* part becomes:

(Ka)	Ka	–		Ge	–		–	–
(0)				(1)			(2)	

Figure 5.16. *Bam* part adapted to *bāyān bols*.

Combined with the "translated" *dāyān* part, this yields ultimately the following rhythmic pattern:

Thin	(Ka)	Na		Dhin	–		Na	–
(0)				(1)			(2)	

Figure 5.17a. *Attan* pattern adapted to tabla *bols*.

At this point, the rhythmic pattern above, which is the result of the original *dohol attan* pattern adapted *a lá* tabla, exhibits strong similarities to the *Pashto tāl thekā*. The initial non-resonant stroke played on the *bāyān*, Ka, does not affect the voicing of the *bol*, "Thin." Rather, this manner of playing a non-resonant *bāyān bol* along with "Thin" has come to be a common performance practice for playing *Pashto tāl* and *rupak tāl* to emphasize the *khālī* character in which each *thekā* starts.³⁷³ The *bol* in the second beat, (Ka), has been placed in parenthesis on account

³⁷³ As mentioned earlier, the tabla *bol*, "Thin", is an aural marker in *thekā* performance that symbolizes *khālī* sections.

of it not being a *bol* commonly used in the construction of standard *ṭhekās*, as per Stewart's argument.³⁷⁴ If this *bol* is omitted, the pattern becomes:

Thin	–	Na		Dhin	–		Na	–
(0)				(1)			(2)	

Figure 5.17b. *Attan* pattern adapted to tabla *bols*.

This rhythmic pattern bears even more similarity to the *bols* and character of *Pashto tāl* as detailed by nineteenth century writers such as Imam (1925) and Khan (Kippen 2007), and contemporary writers such as Stewart (1974) and Kippen (2001). It could even be considered a sort of "proto" *Pashto tāl ṭhekā*, which could serve as a skeletal framework for elaboration and improvisation. The primary differences that arise between the *ṭhekās* notated by the previous authors and the pattern notated above—the use of "NaKe" (Imam 1925), "TaKa" (Kippen 2007 and Stewart 1974), or "tirakita" (Kippen 2001) instead of the *bol*, "Na", on the third beat—are familiar and common manners by which *ṭhekās* are been elaborated when played in slow to medium tempos.³⁷⁵ The pattern as it is notated above is more appropriate in faster tempos, and it can be heard in a recording of a tabla solo performed in *Pashto tāl*, recorded by famous tabla virtuoso, Ustad Zakir Hussain (Zakir Hussain 2007).

³⁷⁴ Stewart 1974: 98.

³⁷⁵ As suggested in the notation of *Ghazal tāl* in Khan 1888, *ghazals* were commonly played in slow tempos. In her analysis of *ṭhekās*, Stewart illustrates the methods through which *ṭhekās* are commonly elaborated. These methods often involve repetitions or anticipations of primary *bols*, while maintaining the structural integrity of the rhythmic cycle. For more on the elaboration of *ṭhekās* in various tempos see Stewart 1974: 103-129.

If treated as a rhythmic framework upon which elaboration occurs—as I argue *ṭhekās* to be—to fashion the *ṭhekā* of *rupak tāl* as it is known today from the "proto" *Pashto tāl ṭhekā* above can be done through the process of duplication of *bol*s already used in the pattern. One distinct aspect of the *Pashto tāl ṭhekā* is its use of empty space—beats during which a drum stroke is not played—within the duration of the rhythmic pattern. While this is common among light classical *tāls* (*dīpchandī tāl* and *sitārkhānī*, for example) it is not so typical among classical *tāls* (*tīntāl*, *jhaptāl*, *ektāl*, etc.) in which all beats are articulated by a *bol*. Referring back to Stewart's analysis of *ṭhekā* elaboration in her dissertation, when elaborating *ṭhekās* by adding drum strokes it is often done through repeating *bol*s or alternating between two corresponding *bol*s (such as "Thin" and "Tha").³⁷⁶ The vacancy on beat two can be filled by repeating the *bol* that is played on beat one: the initial *bol*, "Thin."³⁷⁷ If the same manner of repeating the preceding *bol* is done for the vacancies on beats five and seven, the resulting *ṭhekā* is:

Thin	Thin	Na		Dhin	Dhin		Na	Na
(0)				(2)			(3)	

Figure 5.18. Adapted *atan* pattern with duplicated *bol*s.

This method of duplication very nearly produces the *rupak tāl ṭhekā*; all that differs are the final four *bol*s. A similar type of ending to the one above is played in *mughali*, a seven-beat *ṭhekā* played in Pashtun and Afghan *ghazal* music (the

³⁷⁶ Stewart 1974: 106.

³⁷⁷ One also sees this particular grouping of three beats (as played on the *dāyān*) "Thin Thin Na" in the *jhaptāl ṭhekā*.

numbers of beats have been given underneath on account that the first three beats *bols* do not align evenly to the divisions of the beat):

Mughali (*ghazal* style)

Thin	Na	Dhin	Dhin	Dha	Dha
(0)		(1)		(2)	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
			(7)		

Figure 5.19. *Mughali thekā*, with beats labeled at bottom.

The above *mughali thekā* is played in Pashtun *ghazal* music and maintains some of the same structural elements seen in *rupak tāl* and *Pashto tāl*: it begins with the *bol* "Thin," which indexes a *khālī* quality, and the pattern's accents and *bols* imply a three, two, two division. When comparing the last two beats of this pattern to those in the Figure 5.18 pattern, the last two *bols* of *mughali* are played with resonant voicings on the *bāyāñ*, making the *bol* "Dha" instead of Na.

However, for one reason or other this particular rhythmic pattern was not standardized in *rupak tāl*, though perhaps some drummers played a pattern similar. We cannot be sure. What did become standardized in the last four beats of *rupak tāl* came from a duplication of the alternating strokes—"Dhin" and "Na"—that make up the final four *bols* of the "proto" *Pashto tāl thekā* in Figure 5.17b. Thus, when these *bols* are repeated in beats four and five, and six and seven, it produces the *rupak tāl thekā*:

Thin	Thin	Na	Dhin	Na	Dhin	Na
(0)			(2)		(3)	

Figure 5.22. *Rupak tāl thekā*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have put forth a proposition regarding the influence of Pashtun musical practices on the rhythmic practices of Hindustani classical music, focusing specifically in regards to its seven-beat drumming traditions. This influence would have come from the participation of Pashtun *mirāsī* drummers within light-classical music genres of Hindustani music—*ghazal*, in particular—during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My musical analysis attempted to illustrate how the *ṭhekās* of contemporary *Pashto tāl* and *rupak tāl* came to begin with a particular timbre of drum stroke—one that would eventually be tied to the Hindustani concept of *ḵhālī*. The influence behind this particular timbre came from a performance practice of the *dohol*. Pashtun drummers transferred these patterns and techniques to the tabla, which ultimately became standardized through developments in printing and notation.

Conclusion

While sitting and talking with a classical tabla player during the beginning of my fieldwork in New Delhi, he raised an eyebrow when I mentioned that I had also come to India to conduct research on other non-classical drumming styles apart from the tabla. "Oh?" He enquired. "And what do you want to learn about them? You can just listen to the music and imitate what they are playing. It's simple; you do not need to find a teacher." He told me. At the time I did not have a good answer for him, or at least one that would satisfy him. Not wanting to seem naïve, I told him that I wanted to look at more than just the drumming itself—I wanted to see how drumming could *affect* people, and how drummers could make that process happen.

To do this I immersed myself in numerous social and musical environments, and met dozens of musicians who provided me with various glimpses of what it is like to be a professional, non-classical drummer in South Asia. From this cross-cultural and cross-music genre approach, I found a direct connection between the cultural requirements entailed in such lifestyles and the technical musical aspects of their respective drumming traditions. Involved in this connection were techniques tied to drumming and emotion, as well as drumming and physical economy; both of which were linked by the thread of musical creativity and improvisation. In wanting to acknowledge and give credit to the creativity and mastery of the drummers

whom I met during this project, I have highlighted representative players of each style and genre of music around which I have drawn conclusion in this dissertation. In contrast to what the tabla player had suggested, I certainly could not have ascertained the information present in this dissertation by simply listening to recordings or attending performances.

And what can we learn from *ṭhekā* patterns themselves? My musical analysis of *ṭhekās* across South Asian popular, devotional, and folk drumming traditions has shown how these rhythmic patterns, like numerous other South Asian compositional forms, are models for improvisation. Improvisation in *ṭhekā* drumming comes in a variety of different approaches across the numerous music genres in which these rhythmic patterns are played. In my analysis I tied the use of improvisation in non-classical drumming to the concept of *wazn*, articulations or durations of weighted accent that are a defining characteristic of *ṭhekās*. In Chapters Two and Three I linked the use of this improvisation to the evocation of emotions in listeners in *qawwālī* and Sindhi *kāfī* music, respectively. I showed how drummers use improvisation to support the other musical process involved to elevate the emotional intensity of the music making as a means of religious devotion.

In Chapters Four and Five I put forth hypotheses proposing how we can potentially trace organological histories of *ṭhekās* through their aspects of their performance practices. My discussion involved an open-hand style of tabla playing that is practiced in Afghanistan as well as parts of Pakistan among Pashtun

musicians. Some of the more valuable insights of this dissertation, I believe, are my propositions regarding the musical influences of Pashtun drumming traditions, about which little has been written. My ethnographic and historical research into the drumming of this region suggests a close proximity between Pashtun *dohol* drumming and the early techniques of the tabla. I detailed key techniques of this drumming style in Chapter Four, and linked it to both written historical records and oral histories of eighteenth and nineteenth century tabla players. Lastly, emerging from this proposed musical connection I suggested an explanation for the incongruencies of seven-beat rhythmic structures used in Hindustani classical music. This correlation involved a ubiquitous style of dance drumming played on the *dohol* that had been adapted to the open-hand style of tabla playing discussed in the previous chapter.

Throughout this dissertation, I have worked to demonstrate an alternative history that positions South Asian folk drumming as an important influencer of later classical and popular rhythmic traditions. I did so based on the relationship between the structures of the drums in respect to the technical demands of physical strain and dexterity, and cultural requirements of long-hours for not just practice but performance. The arguments and hypotheses I have put forth in this dissertation push back on pre-established discourses regarding key components of modern Hindustani rhythm and instruments, specifically regarding the tabla. Specifically, I have looked to these non-classical drumming traditions for insights into the

inconsistencies of contemporary Hindustani rhythmic cycles and patterns that have been raised by previous ethnomusicologists. My results, I believe, point to interesting new perspectives regarding the relationship of folk drumming traditions and the drumming of Hindustani classical music.

To inform my musicological arguments and analyses of *ṭhekā* drumming, I presented case-studies highlighting the experience of being a professional non-classical drummer in South Asia. I selected and presented each case study because they were representative of the specific socio-musical world of the musical communities I observed. Through providing ethnographic vignettes of my drumming teachers, I illustrated some of the hardships and challenges that low class hereditary Muslim musicians experience throughout parts of South Asia. These adversities have become even more pressing issues in light of the continuing rise of Hindu nationalist politics in India. Common conditions of this livelihood—extensive daily music making, intense competition, and playing across music genres—I argued, have inform directly the performance practice of *ṭhekās*. Most important in this consideration is cultural requirement of being able to play for extended duration programs. Such long duration playing is underscored by the varying degrees of physical economies involved in playing *ṭhekā* patterns. Drummers gain the experiences and training required for this style of playing through a lifestyle of music-making, which can include practicing and learning music with others, learning multiple musical

instruments, and playing one's instrument from before the sun rises until long after the sun sets.

Looking forward, I believe still that there is more work to be done in looking at rhythmic patterns (not just pertaining to drums) and looking at how they connect to other musical and non-musical practices found throughout South Asia. Richard K. Wolf has masterfully connected rhythmic patterns and practices across a variety of musical and instrumental traditions throughout this region in his work, and is a particular influence of mine for future research and writing. While writing this dissertation I regularly kept thinking back to the many plucking patterns that I learned on the Afghan *rubāb*, on account of how these patterns resembled and mirrored some of the qualities of the drumming patterns about which I was writing. Classical *rubāb* playing relies heavily on techniques of rhythmic elaboration, which is done through pre-arranged patterns of plucking the instrument. These plucking patterns, too, exhibit methodical aspects regarding rhythmic elaboration that both parallel and contrast the approaches of embellishment discussed in this dissertation. In wanting to keep my focus centered in the drumming traditions with which I was familiar, I shelved these *rubāb* techniques and patterns initially, hoping to return to them in later work. Undoubtedly, such instrumental rhythmic patterns have much to tell us about how rhythm has been imagined and represented in this region.

Furthermore, one shortcoming of this dissertation (which I intend to improve upon in later work) has been a lack of correlation between drumming patterns and

the poetic forms they accompany. Many of the poetic music genres that I encountered during this study were oral traditions, which at times made attaining access to them difficult for me, especially in instances where the language being sung was not familiar to me, i.e. Pashto and Sindhi. Just as well, the musicians with whom I did my research (who were not professional singers) also did not regularly have a knowledge of the poetry that was being performed; getting my hands on these oral traditions would have added another significant amount of labor to my already intensive research project. Having access to these poetic forms and genres could have been helpful in correlating how drumming patterns emphasize and bring out poetic meters through performance.

The research I conducted for this dissertation, I believe, touches but the surface of musical information contained within folk drumming traditions that have been long overshadowed by the classical traditions of the region. My focus here has pertained to the more prominent folk drumming traditions in each of my respective field sites. Indeed, there are many others that were overlooked or omitted in my discussion. A recently growing interest of mine are percussion traditions that have developed on common everyday objects, such as the *mangai*, a percussion instrument consisting of an over-turned metal pan and a clay vessel covered with a cloth that is played with the hands and used in Pashtun music traditions in western Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. Instruments like the *mangai* prompt a number of questions regarding rhythmic thought and representation on account of the

instrument's utilitarian construction. When instruments are made from household objects, such as pots and pans, do their social and functional connotations carry into the rhythmic practices they create? If so, how do these embodied attributes manifest themselves in the playing of the instrument as well as how rhythm is imagined and represented on them? Lastly, to what extent do these techniques and rhythmic representations resonate in other musical styles and practices? Studying instruments such as the *mangai* can provide valuable insights not only on the links between objects and abstract musical concepts, but also how rhythm is imagined in a much broader context outside of the classical traditions.

That is not to say that such classical traditions of the region should not also be of musicological focus and study, as well. Towards the end of my fieldwork in Afghanistan I became increasingly aware of the extensive genealogies of some of the musical families in Kabul, especially tabla players. Some of the musicians with whom I interacted claimed their musical lineages extended back to the mid-eighteenth century; the same time as the earliest recognized tabla players in India.

The tabla's use in Afghan classical music (which is essentially Hindustani music) has been largely overlooked by scholars, and I believe there is much more to be unearthed regarding this history and the techniques of the instrument as it is played in Afghanistan. Indeed, this musical history is a topic that I hope to continue to delve into in future research.

My interest in the history of tabla and drumming in Afghanistan is not so much an attempt to locate an origin for the instrument, but rather to look for conduits through which rhythmic information and practices may have been influenced or transmitted. One important connection that I believe worthy of further consideration is between Sufi practices and drumming in Afghanistan. While in Kabul I met a colleague, Annika Schmeding, who was conducting her dissertation research on Sufism in Afghanistan, and how particular practices and organizations had sustained themselves during the time of the Taliban.³⁷⁸ Just before I left Kabul she shared a video with me that she had recorded in Herat of musicians performing at a Sufi gathering. The drummer, a *dāireh* player, and another instrumentalist playing the *dutār*, a two-stringed lute, accompanied a singer who sang poetry by the acclaimed Persian poet, Mawlana Rumi (1207-1273). Due to the recording quality of the video the sung poetry is hard to discern, but what are evident are the emphases and musical accents provided by the musicians on their instruments that bring out the cadence and form of the poetry being sung. Listening to these musical interactions now, I cannot help but ponder what associations can be revealed by relating abstract textual forms to the instrumental patterns and techniques that musicians play to accompany them.

³⁷⁸ See Schmeding 2020.

Musicians with whom I spoke in Kabul had talked of the prominence of Sufi practices and traditions in Afghanistan prior to the rise of the Taliban. Many had played at similar Sufi gatherings at a shrine in the musician's neighborhood in Kabul. These gatherings and performances had largely ceased or went underground during the rise of the Taliban, which labeled such practices as sacrilegious. The impact of Sufi practices on music—especially rhythmic practices—in Afghanistan is a field that deserves much more attention, especially considering the association of several key Sufi sites and figures within Afghanistan.

In this dissertation I have shown how drumming patterns can be used to support and facilitate the musical and non-musical processes to which they are an accompaniment. Furthermore, I correlated the use of improvisation across multiple styles of non-classical drumming to the elicitation of various emotional responses in listeners. These styles of drumming, while being located in distinct socio-musical environments, are connected through similar instrumental performance practices: *ṭhekā* drumming. My future work aims to dig deeper into how such representations of rhythm can be informed by the processes and abstract performance models to which they are associated. In particular, I hope to investigate further the relationship between abstract textual models to rhythmic patterns—not just those played on drums—given the wealth of poetry and poetic forms present throughout South and Central Asia. It is my hopes that comparing and contrasting these instruments' patterns to the cadences and structures of such poetry may provide insight into how

rhythmic structures like *ṭhekās* came to prominence as a rhythmic accompaniment style in South Asian music.

Glossary of Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, Pashto, and Sindhi Terms

<i>bam</i>	The lower-pitched drum in a set of Pashto tabla
<i>bāyān</i>	The lower-pitched drum in a set of Hindustani tabla
<i>dādrā</i>	A six-beat rhythmic cycle commonly used in popular, folk, and devotional music genres in South Asia.
<i>dāyān</i>	The higher-pitched drum in a set of Hindustani tabla, or the higher pitched side of the <i>ḍholak</i> .
<i>dohol</i>	Also spelled <i>ḍhol</i> , a barrel-shaped drum often played with sticks.
<i>ḍholak</i>	A barrel-shaped drum played with the hands and fingers.
<i>dhrupad</i>	An older and more authoritative genre of Hindustani classical music.
<i>dzīr</i>	The higher-pitched side of a <i>dohol</i> .
<i>gharānā</i>	Schools of performance practice in Hindustani music.
<i>ghazal</i>	An Arabic form of poetry commonly set to music in parts of South Asia.
<i>Hindustani music</i>	North Indian classical music.
<i>kāfi</i>	A genre of devotional poetry common to the area of Sindh.
<i>kāṭhī</i>	The higher-pitched drum in a set of Pashto tabla.
<i>keherwā</i>	An eight-beat rhythmic cycle commonly used in popular, folk, and devotional music genres in South Asia.
<i>kalvārā</i>	An eight-beat rhythmic cycle played in Sindhi music.
<i>ḵhyāl</i>	A genre of Hindustani art that emerged during the mid- to late-seventeenth century.

<i>maḥali</i>	Traditional Afghan music.
<i>nazrānā</i>	Monetary offerings given to music performers.
<i>pakhāwaj</i>	A barrel-shaped drum played with the hands and fingers most commonly associated to <i>dhrupad</i> music.
<i>qawwāl</i>	A performer of <i>qawwālī</i> .
<i>qawwālī</i>	Sufi devotional music.
<i>tāl</i>	Also spelled <i>tāla</i> , the rhythmic cycles of Hindustani music.
<i>ṭhekā</i>	The rhythmic patterns played in South Asian music.
<i>tihāī</i>	A composition that involves the repetition of a fixed phrase three times, played so that the final beat of the third repetition coincides with a particular beat of the rhythmic cycle (most commonly the first).
<i>'urs</i>	The celebration of the death of a Sufi saint.
<i>zerbaghali</i>	A goblet-shaped drum played in traditional Afghan music.

List of Supplemental Files

Musical Example 2.1 Allah Hu.mp3

Musical Example 3.1 Sindhi Kafi.mp3

Musical Example 4.1 Safa Safa Miaid.mp3

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