

Music in Seasonal and Life-Cycle Rituals

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Life-Cycle Rituals

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Father, older brother, younger brother, listen!
 Don't sleep in the ceremonial tent! . . .
 Dance and chant [the holy words] "Öly Öly" . . .
 Don't sit there like senseless people!
 Father God and Mother Goddess are listening
 Let us celebrate that WE ARE THE KOTAS.

—Song of the South Indian Kota tribe, sung at the annual Devr festival

Throughout the Indian subcontinent, music is used to accompany, punctuate, describe, announce, and give definition to rituals. This article discusses the music of calendrical rituals and rites of passage. Ritual music is almost always classified according to its context rather than its style; for this reason, there is a conspicuous focus here on the contexts and meanings of music, rather than on sound qualities. Still, it may be noted that musics of a particular ritual type (such as the wedding) in different regions of South Asia tend to share some sonic features. For example, joyful rites may occasion the performance of dancing and drumming—often at brisk tempos (figure 1). Occasions of sadness might inspire melodically stylized crying; the tempo of music at sad events is likely to be slow; dancing at such sad events (in the rare cases where it is sanctioned) will also probably be slow. Ceremonies relating to the vicissitudes of personal or communal fortune, such as healing rituals or rainmaking ceremonies, may make use of short repetitive pieces to induce spirit possession. These features of performance are not specific to South Asia and thus do not reveal significant information about the character of South Asian ritual musics. To move beyond these generalizations, we must examine individual ceremonial musics in each South Asian subculture.

Although we might attempt to construct a comprehensive list of South Asian ritual types and their associated musics, such a list may not help us to understand what the musics actually mean in these contexts. The first part of this article presents not a comprehensive list but rather a representative sample of ritual music types. The second part attempts to cut across specific traditions and discover some of the common functions and meanings in South Asian life-cycle and seasonal ritual musics.

FIGURE 1 Men and women dance together to the rhythms of the *dhol* at an elite Punjabi Muslim wedding in Lahore, 1997. Photo by Richard Wolf.



Ideas about how music “functions” in particular contexts may vary among different sectors of a population, and these functions may change over time (see Tingey 1994, for example). Nevertheless, it may be recognized that a common range of functions and meanings are ascribed to music in life-cycle and seasonal ceremonies in South Asia, whether by scholars studying the region or by participants interpreting their own musical cultures.

The performers of music in South Asian rituals comprise both hired professionals and nonspecialist singers and instrumentalists. Although the men of a musical community may be more frequently hired as musicians, there are many examples of men and women participating together as professional musicians, such as among the *Mīrāsīs* of the Pakistani Punjab, the *Manganihārs* of Sindh and Rajasthan, and the *Damāīs* of Nepal. But whether professional or amateur, women tend to be singers rather than instrumentalists; their most salient musical contributions to life-cycle rituals are wedding songs and funeral dirges.

LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS

Among the more controversial uses of music in life-cycle ceremonies is its connection with funerals. Many Hindus and Muslims feel that music (whether singing or playing instruments) is by definition happy or enjoyable and therefore should not be performed during a funeral. High-caste Hindus in South India tend to frown on the use of music at funerals; however, drums, double-reed aerophones, and band instruments are commonly used at funerals of lower caste members. Throughout South Asia it is common for music to be performed at the funeral of a very old person. Reflecting the idea that such funerals are considered to be like weddings, often the same bands play for both occasions (Parry 1994). Laments are commonly sung in honor of the deceased, often by women, and sometimes bhajans are sung to the “departed soul” (Patel 1974). Laments are also sung during segments of dramas and dramatic rituals depicting mourning.

At the other end of the life-cycle spectrum, most South Asian communities celebrate the birth of a child. A male child may be welcomed by singing, rejoicing, and the sound of the *sahnāī* ‘double-reed pipe’ played by professional musicians, indicating the value both Hindus and Muslims place on male offspring—whereas the birth of a female may be greeted with less enthusiasm, or even mourned. A variety of rituals follow in the days, months, and years after childbirth, and these may call for

singing or instrumental music: circumcision for Muslim boys; first application of charcoal (*kājal*) on the eyelids; piercing of the ears; naming of the child; and head shaving (Tewari 1974). Lullabies, which frequently employ repetitive meaningless syllables (in South India, for instance, "*rā rā re*," "*tā le lo*," or "*jō jō*"), are common in the subcontinent but are not associated with rituals as such. However, lullabies are sometimes incorporated into dramatic rituals depicting a baby being lulled to sleep, as in the *raja yakuma* rituals of Sri Lanka (Sarachchandra 1966).

After childhood a youth may encounter a number of other rites of passage in the journey to adulthood. For male members of thread-wearing Hindu castes, special musics sometimes accompany ceremonies for installing the sacred thread (Tewari 1974). Puberty rites for a girl's menarche may be the occasion for music making, as for instance among Telugu Brahmins, who sing *Gauri kalyāṇam* 'Marriage of the goddess Gauri' at an auspicious time of day. This song is part of the purification rites performed four days after the onset of menstruation (Kapadia 1995).

Before marriage it is common for girls and women to engage in a variety of activities believed to improve their marriage prospects. In some families, girls are encouraged to study classical music and dance; the performance of these arts is often discontinued after marriage. There are also series of prayers and fasts, sometimes incorporated into other seasonal festivals, that are specifically intended to aid in securing a favorable mate. These rites sometimes feature the singing of particular song genres such as the *khāṇḍana* of southern Gujarat (Patel 1974) or the *tiruppāvai* and *tiruvempāvai* of Tamil Nadu.

Marriage

The details of marriage ceremonies vary widely throughout the subcontinent according to religion, caste, and socioeconomic status. Still, in most communities music is not only desirable but virtually mandatory at weddings (figure 2). Moreover, the positioning of musical pieces in the sequence of rituals is analogous.

The following example of musical practices associated with Tamil Brahmin marriages provides some insight into the role music plays in South Asian marriage ceremonies generally.

Among Tamil Brahmins, marriage songs frequently concern the wedding of Sita or Andal (the female Vaishnavite saint). In Tamil Nadu, as in much of South Asia,

FIGURE 2 *Sahnāī* players performing for a wedding on the ghats (steps) of the Ganges River in Banaras. This picture was taken during wedding season (in this case December 1997), when many such weddings were occurring every day along the river. Photo by Richard Wolf.



marriage rituals have come to be abbreviated in recent times, and few women are preserving the tradition of singing marriage songs. Still, old-fashioned, musically elaborate weddings are still conducted in some Tamil villages.

In the betrothal ceremony, the bridegroom pretends to set out for the holy city of Kasi, where he vows he will remain a celibate and religious man for the rest of his life. The father of the bride stops him and offers the hand of his daughter. The maternal uncles of the bride and groom then provide garlands for the couple to exchange. The song associated with this action is called *mālai mārriṇa pāṭṭu* 'garland exchanging song'. The melody of this song is usually played on the *nāgasvaram* 'double-reed pipe', but it may also be sung. In a later ritual, women surround the bride and groom, who sit on a swing and sing swing songs such as *ūñcal*, set to a slow tempo, and *lāli*, a slightly faster lilting tune in ^{seuple} ~~seuple~~ ^{Punjabi} time and in *rāga kuranji*. The *nāgasvaram* plays the same melody.

The wedding proper occurs during a one-and-a-half-hour auspicious period called the *muhurtam*. The bride and groom sit on a plank while the song "Lakṣmi kalyāṇam" 'Lakshmi's wedding' is played or sung. Then at the moment of tying the *tālī*, a necklace signifying marriage, the song is played again and all the instruments (usually *tavil* 'double-headed drums' and *nāgasvaram*) perform together rapidly and loudly—a practice called *kēṭṭi mēlam* 'loud, thick, robust ensemble' that draws attention to the moment and drowns out inauspicious sounds. The *kēṭṭi mēlam* is also performed on the most important day of drama productions, and at high points of temple worship, when the deity is in direct communication with the devotees.

In the evening, the couple sings songs and performs the *nalunku*—a custom that allows the bride and groom to interact informally with one another before the wedding night. The bride and groom paint each other's feet with red turmeric paste and calcium hydroxide, joke and play with one another, and sing. This practice is similar to Muslim and North Indian Hindu ceremonies in which red stain made from *menhdī* 'myrtle' leaves is applied to the palms and feet, and for which there are also special songs. A ritual called the *pattiyam* follows the *nalunku*: the bride sings of all her wishes and desires, gives the bridegroom betel leaves and areca nuts (*verrillaip-pāṅku*) and performs *namaskāram* (prostrates in the manner of praying).

After the *nalunku*, all those present perform *ārati* (clockwise, vertical circling of a flame before an image of the deity) and sing an auspicious concluding song (*mangalam*) such as "Śrī Rāmacandranukku jeyamangalam," a song in *madhyamāvatī rāga* composed for the *Rāma nāṭakam* (a Tamil music-dance-drama about the god Rama) by Arunachala Kavirayar. After the wedding, there are also *campanti* songs, in which the family of the groom makes fun of the bride's family and vice versa; this is similar to the *gālī* songs of North India. Although they are intended to be in good fun, these songs sometimes result in arguments between the new in-laws. The last ritual is associated with the couple's first night together (*śānti muhurtam*); this too was once performed with a set of songs. Perhaps not too long after, when the new bride becomes pregnant for the first time, a "morning sickness" song (*macakkaippāṭṭu*) will be sung.

One of the emotional components of North Indian weddings that is less pronounced in the south is the sadness that accompanies the departure of the bride from her natal home. In South India, cross-cousin marriage is prevalent; a consequence of this form of marriage preference is that brides remain in close contact with their natal families. North Indian Hindus, in contrast, do not offer their daughters in marriage to close relatives; in a village setting, this often means the bride moves far away from her natal village. The departure of the bride from the natal home in North India is the occasion for the demonstration of significant grief. Departure songs (*bidāi gīt*) are sung at this time. In Pakistan, among Muslims, the departure of the bride from the home is also considered sad, and one Punjabi player of the *dhol* 'barrel drum' suggest-

Holī celebrates the defeat of the mythical ruler Hiranyakasipu by the man-lion incarnation of the god Vishnu. North Indian Hindus commemorate the original celebration of this defeat by building a bonfire and throwing colored powder and water at one another.

ed that the six-beat *dādrā tāl* played for the departure of the bride (*rukhsat*) is in this context a “sad beat.”

SEASONAL AND CALENDRIAL RITUALS

Although one may distinguish life-cycle rituals analytically from seasonal rituals, it must be noted that not all of the former are scheduled solely on the basis of biological circumstances. Funerals cannot be planned at all because they must be held almost immediately after a death, but marriages and other auspicious rites are planned: they must be held during auspicious months and at auspicious times. Sometimes the season determines auspiciousness: the rainy season is considered inauspicious in Nepal, therefore marriages and sacred-thread ceremonies are not scheduled during these months (Tingey 1994). Furthermore, calendrical religious festivals and life-cycle ceremonies are sometimes interdependent, as, for example, when a sudden death might render family members or even an entire village ritually unfit to conduct auspicious religious ceremonies.

Not all celebrations that occur annually during particular seasons are necessarily connected with that season. The birthday of Krishna (Kṛṣṇā Janmāṣṭamī in the north or Śrī Jayantī in the south, during August–September) is one such example. Other rituals ostensibly commemorate mythological events, but have come to be associated with seasons. Holī, for instance, celebrates the defeat of the mythical ruler Hiranyakasipu by the man-lion incarnation of the god Vishnu. North Indian Hindus commemorate the original celebration of this defeat by building a bonfire and throwing colored powder and water at one another. Lewd songs sung at this time reflect the temporary loosening of social mores during the festival (Tewari 1991). The philosophical basis for Holī activities is that all bad feelings and jealousy should be dissolved in a bonfire so that life can begin afresh at the new year. Holī has come to be understood as a heralding of spring, but Basant is more directly concerned with the agricultural season of spring.

Solar calendars, lunar calendars, and the seasons

Three major calendars are followed in South Asia: the Gregorian calendar, the Hindu (*Vikram samvat*) calendar, and the Muslim (*Hijri*) calendar. Although the Hindu calendar is based on the lunar year, it periodically corrects so as to be in phase with the solar year.

The Muslim calendar remains continually out of phase with the solar year, and therefore there is no Muslim calendrical festival that is also seasonal. Some Muslim occasions, including some ‘urs ‘death anniversary celebrations for saints’, are seasonal in that they are scheduled during particular solar months (de Tassy 1995). Others are seasonal in spirit if not in actual performance time: the ‘urs of Madholal Husain of Lahore, for example, is considered to be a spring festival even though it is celebrated in different seasons according to the Muslim calendar. Similarly, Shias know that the

Muharram festival attains its greatest impact during the summer months, when the heat makes the pious mystically identify with the thirsty participants in the memorialized battle of Karbala. The Shias devote significant religious sentiments, expressed through melodically rendered poetry (*marṣiya* and *nauḥa*), to mourning the death of Husain, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, who was killed on the orders of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid in this battle of A.D. 680.

Muslim marriages in Pakistan are scheduled according to seasonal convenience. In the Punjab, the months from September through December are considered favorable. This scheduling is tempered, however, by the calendrical observance of mourning (Muharram) and fasting (Ramadan), and the period between 'Īdu'l-fiṭr 'breaking of the fast after Ramadan' and 'Īd-ḥ-azḥā 'the commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice', during which weddings are prohibited.

Music itself may be seasonal without necessarily being attached to a seasonal ritual as such, and thus in itself constitutes a type of seasonal ritual. Some songs, for example, are sung during particular months. The themes of these songs are connected with the seasons. The love song genre *caitī* of Uttar Pradesh, or the openly erotic *keśyā* of Rajasthan, for example, are sung in the spring (Raheja and Gold 1994); the *bārahmāsā* can be sung anytime, but it is particularly associated with the rainy season and depicts the separation of husband and wife (Tewari 1974).

Common seasonal and calendrical festivals

During the months of April and May in Tamil Nadu, the fields are bare after the harvest. This is the time for the staging of village dramas such as the *Rāma nāṭakam* or *Ariccantiran nāṭakam* (about the Hindu god Rama or the mythological figure Harishchandra). A stage is set up in the paddy fields; if a Mariyamman (goddess) temple is nearby, the festival for the goddess will incorporate the drama. Characters speak as well as sing their parts.

Mariyamman festivals in Tamil Nadu are scheduled differently according to sub-region, but are usually between the months of February and July. Special genres of music and dance are performed during this time, such as *kummi* and *karakam* [see TAMIL NADU]. The analogous goddess in North India is Sitala; her festival is celebrated during the month of Māgh (January–February) (Stutley and Stutley 1984). Special songs are dedicated to this goddess, but multicontextual genres such as *keśyā* are also sung to please her. Women sing these songs in conjunction with worship "both to ward off childhood diseases and to improve community fertility" (Raheja and Gold 1994).

During Āśvin (September–October), Hindus of North and South India celebrate Navrātrī 'nine nights', a festival dedicated to the three goddesses Lakshmi, Parvati, and Sarasvati. The festival starts after the new-moon day. In Tamil Nadu, Brahmin women construct dioramas with dolls (*bommaṭi*) of gods, goddesses, and people. Children are dressed in costumes and sent out to invite neighbors, who come, view the exhibit, sing devotional songs, and consume sweets. The ninth day is *sarasvatī pūjā*. All the books, musical instruments, and instruments of one's trade are put in front of an image of Sarasvati, goddess of learning and music, to be blessed. This festival is also celebrated in cities with concert series of classical music. In Gujarat, Navrātrī is an occasion for the *garbā* and *garbī* dances, performed around a clay pot by women and men respectively. This is the end of the rainy season, when crops are becoming ready for harvest.

The festival of lights, Dīpāvalī, is celebrated during Kārtik (October–November). As with Navrātrī, there are no special songs for this festival, but the ritual contexts for devotional singing are diverse. Sometimes children perform the central ritual activities. Tamil Brahmin children aged five to twelve, for example, celebrate by

commissioning a local potter to sculpt a clay cow and calf, sowing seeds of nine grains in a clay pot, and taking the figures and pot to dissolve in the river. They sing devotional songs while walking in procession, and afterward young girls dance *kum-mi*. This ritual is said to ensure bountiful rainfall.

There are many kinds of rituals in South Asia designed to bring rainfall, and inasmuch as rainfall is closely connected with the seasons these too should not be overlooked. The Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills play a sacred repertoire of "god tunes" (*devr ko!*) on their drums and reed instruments as they encircle the village, making a procession to sites of divine significance around the village (see "Ritual order" below). Rain is said to fall within the boundaries of the village immediately following the ritual (Wolf 1997b). In Gujarat, women go on a procession carrying a clay image of the Vedic god Indra and singing songs to this deity requesting rain.

Muslims celebrate the birthday (*mīlād*) of the Prophet Muhammad with a variety of poetic forms; these are recited tunefully but are not considered "songs" because of Muslim injunctions against "music." In the weeks leading up to the birth date, gatherings of men or women recite *n'at* 'poems of praise in honor of the Prophet' and *qaṣīda* 'poems in praise of the family of the Prophet'. In Sindh, men sing a genre called *maulūd*: a leader begins a text line and is joined by a chorus in unison; sometimes a question-and-answer form is adopted. The pace of the singing increases as the men sing into the night. The style is sometimes characterized by insistent vocal pulsations. Each Sindhi village has a *maulūd* group that practices throughout the year.

FUNCTIONS OF MUSIC IN SEASONAL AND LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS

Ritual contexts for music in South Asia are diverse, and some widely acknowledged reasons for performing music cut across these contextual divisions.

Announcing an event

Music frequently serves to announce an occasion or an event. There are at least three aspects to the function of announcement: (1) invitation/prohibition, (2) display of status, and (3) demarcation of time.

Invitation and prohibition

Music is often used to invoke or invite deities to an occasion of worship or healing. Sometimes malevolent forces or demons are also summoned, as in Sri Lanka, where a priest invites demons by name to partake of food while his attendants play the drums and chant (Sarachchandra 1966). Demonic forces are called on not to do harm, as in black magic, but to cease their affliction of a sick person. In both North and South India, spirits of the dead—believed responsible for certain illnesses—are similarly implored to leave a sick patient alone.

Equally common is the use of music to invite people to a ceremony. At the beginning of a festival, a loud horn blast, a cascade of drumming, or even rifle shots often announce to neighboring villages and towns that the festivities have begun. Among the Kotas of South India, the sound of all musical instruments playing at once (*ōmayn*) and the performance of a particular dance melody (*kālgūc āṭ*) on the drums and double-reeds (*koḷvar*) announce to the neighboring Baḍaga people that their annual god festival (*Devr*) has commenced. The Baḍagas know from this first sound that they should not enter the nearby Kota village at night for a prescribed number of days; following this, they are invited to an intercommunity day of worship and dance. Similarly, a Kota funeral is announced with a drum beat on a kettle-drum (*ērtabaṭk*), followed by a blast on pairs of brass horns (*kob*). Traditionally, neighboring Baḍagas would know that they must attend and provide certain materi-

als (chief among which are sacrificial buffaloes) for the funerals of those Kotas with whom they have established past ritual and economic relations.

The rapid, loud sounding of all instruments at once (*kēṭṭi mēlam*) also signifies the high point of a ritual or a marriage in South India; during the multiday performance of village dramas such as the *Rāmā nāṭakam*, such use of music marks the moment of crowning the god Rama as king. The event is called *paṭṭāpiṣēkam* (coronation) and occurs on the last day at about 3:00 or 4:00 A.M. Even if people missed other parts of the drama they want to be present at this time, for it signifies a moment of divine vision (*darśan*): spectators worship the actors as embodiments of the gods they are portraying.

Display of status

Patrons commonly employ musicians at festivals and weddings for the purpose of displaying or enhancing their status. In South India, villages compete by attempting to surround their festival premises with a large number of loudspeakers, and also by playing recorded music at the loudest possible volume. At least in the 1980s and early 1990s sheer volume was the criterion, not choice of repertoire, quality of recordings, or quality of loudspeaker system. At weddings in South India, status is measured in part by the fame of the classical musician who plays at the wedding concert. In Nepal, status is sometimes measured by the number of musicians playing at a wedding (Tingey 1994).

Demarcation of time

Another kind of announcement serves to mark off time periods. The most important kind of ensemble in South Asia for performing this function is the *naubat khānā*. The term literally means a building where drums are sounded, but it also refers to the ensemble itself, which usually comprises kettledrums such as *naqqārā* or *tāshā*, cymbals, and sometimes double-reed instruments with conical bores.

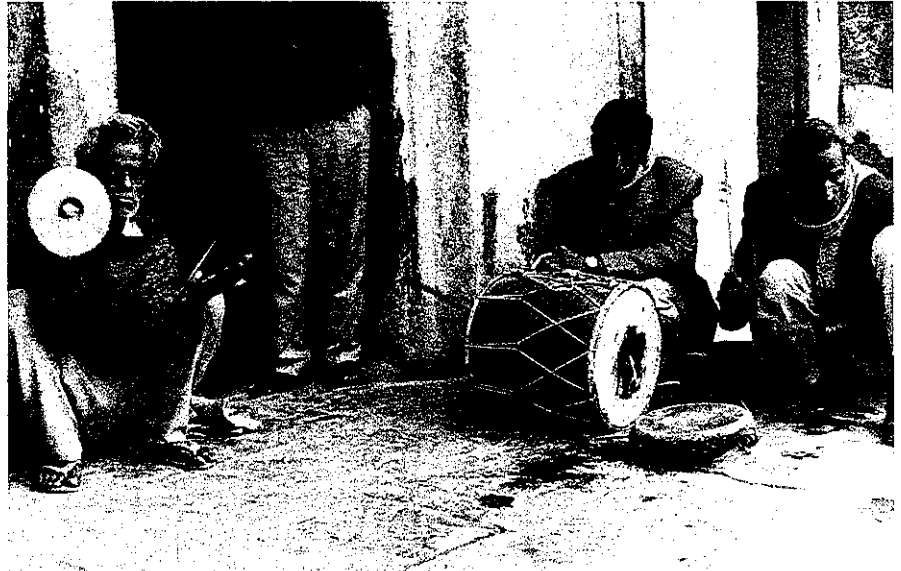
In Lucknow, a *naubat khānā* sits across from the *choṭā imāmbārā*, a building in which services are held commemorating the martyrdom of Husain and his family (figure 3). The ensemble that plays here consists of a *dhol*, a *tāshā*, and a *jhāñjh* 'pair of cymbals' (figure 4). The Shia performers in the ensemble hail from military families and play five times a day: at 6:00 A.M. to announce the first prayer time, then at

FIGURE 3 The *naubat khānā* building across from the *choṭā imāmbārā* in Lucknow. Photo by Richard Wolf, 1997.



Hindus normally begin any sequence of musical pieces, whether the context is framed as a ritual or as entertainment, with an item devoted to the elephant-headed god Ganesh, also called Vinayak, the “remover of obstacles.”

FIGURE 4 *Jhāñjh* (left), *ḍhol* (center), and *tāshā* (right) players keeping the hours playing “*sain imām ḥusain*” in the *naubat khānā* building in Lucknow, 1997. Photo by Richard Wolf.



jh	jh	jh	jh(r)
	d	d	d
	t	t	t

/	/	/
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sain i- mām ḥu- sain ḥaidar

1.. 2.. 3.. 4..

jh = single strike of *jhāñjh* cymbals together; (r) indicates prolongation of sound by allowing the rim of one cymbal to touch the face of the other.

d = *ḍhol* stroke

t = *tāshā* stroke

/ = A beat of the hand on the chest in the performance of *mātām* (self-flagellation)

1.. = Numbers indicate beats; dots show a triple subdivision of each beat.

FIGURE 5 The beat of the *naubat khānā* of Lucknow and the verbal text that players understand the beat to mean. Shias beat their breasts to this rhythm and chant the text during the Muharram festival.

9:00 A.M., 12:00 P.M., 3 P.M., and 6:00 P.M. The performers consciously encode a religious significance into their simple drum beat: the beats stand for the words “*sain imām ḥusain ḥaidar*” ‘Religious leader, Husain, Lion’ (an epithet for ‘Alī, Husain’s father) (figure 5).

Turko-Afghan Muslims from Central Asia had already introduced the instruments and the concept of the *naubat khānā* to the subcontinent by the twelfth century, and by the fourteenth century it had been adopted by Jains (Tingey 1994) and presumably by North Indian Hindus as well. Now it is firmly established within Hindu traditions. In the *havelī* ‘house’ (in this case, of worship) of Shri Nathji in Nathdvara, Rajasthan, for instance, the *naubat khānā* music “summons the worshipers, generates excitement, and focuses attention on the temple and its celebrants” (Gaston 1997). The musicians who play in this ensemble are called *ḍholīs* (a term that generically refers to *ḍhol* players in other parts of South Asia) and are not allowed to enter the *havelī* most days, probably due to their low-caste rank. They perform on the *ṣahnāī*, *ḍhol*, *naqqārā*, and *dhūmsā* ‘double-headed drum’. Music in this *havelī* calls devotees for daily worship at 10:30–11:30 A.M. and 6:30–7:30 P.M. In addition to the diurnal announcement of prayer, each festival occasions the performance of *naubat khānā* music at certain times of the day. The more music, the more important the occasion (Gaston 1997).

In Nepal, the *naubat khānā* is called *pāncāī bājā* and is performed by Damāī musicians who are also tailors by profession [see NEPAL]. The ensemble employs a variety of kettledrums, the double-reed *ṣahnāī*, cymbals, and natural horns, and plays for calendrical cycles of both agricultural and religious festivals and for all Hindu rites

of passage. The music is said to be for "divine rather than human consumption" (Tingey 1994).

Not all music performed for the keeping of hours is so sacredly invested or divinely appreciated. In Islam, independent of the shrine or mosque context, drumming may still serve a timekeeping function. For example, *dhhol* players in Lahore drum every day during Ramadan, the month of fasting, to announce the time when people may break the fast. At the end of the month, the drummers go around and collect money from each neighborhood home, hoping that their services have been appreciated.

Identifying an event

Music may be used not only to announce a particular occasion, but also to delineate more specifically the identity of an event or its constituent parts—to articulate a ritual order, provide distinction between events and between communities, convey contextual specificity and generality, reinforce or create hierarchy, and provide expression for gender distinctions in ritual.

Ritual order

There are at least two ways in which music can articulate the order of a ritual. In one case, particular musical pieces may accompany more primary nonmusical ritual activities that must occur in a specific order. In the other case, a serial performance of musical pieces may itself be the focus of ritual activity.

Both ways of musically articulating a ritual order are found among the Kotas of South India. During funerals, the Kotas perform a number of conventionalized actions such as announcing the demise of the deceased, dressing the corpse within the house, moving the corpse from the house to a bier in the yard, washing and dancing around the corpse, carrying the corpse to the cremation ground, and lighting the pyre. Each of these activities is accompanied by one or more musical pieces, some specifically prescribed, others elective.

During *Devr*, the annual ceremony paying homage to the Kota gods, a similar set of melodies is performed on special days at particular times to coincide with other activities such as opening the temple, mixing rice offerings, and collecting materials for a symbolic rethatching of the temple (which is now made of concrete). But there is also a special time set aside on a few of the evenings when twelve special melodies (*devr kol* literally 'god tunes') are played, more or less in a fixed order. This is a special time during which the villagers gather and listen to music for music's sake—there are no words to these melodies, and no other activities occur at this time. The Kotas believe their gods appreciate these melodies, which are said to be of divine origin, and some of the melodies help them recall miraculous stories of the gods (Wolf 1997a, 1997b).

Within any sequence of ritual musical pieces, it is common for a particular piece or type of piece to precede all others because of its auspiciousness or because it honors a personage or deity who is supposed to be formally recognized at the beginning of any undertaking. Hindus, for instance, normally begin any sequence of musical pieces, whether the context is framed as a ritual or as entertainment, with an item devoted to the elephant-headed god Ganesh, also called Vinayak, the "remover of obstacles." Manganihār *dhhol* players in the Sindh province of Pakistan begin their playing at virtually any festival or ritual with a percussion rhythm called *dhamāl* (figure 6). Although *dhamāl* appears in many contexts, the form of the rhythm used at the beginning of a performance is intended to honor the thirteenth-century Sufi "Saint of Saints" (*pīrān-e-pīr*), Sheikh 'Abdul Qadir Jilani (1088–1166), whose tomb in Baghdad is a popular place of pilgrimage for Indo-Pakistani Muslims.

FIGURE 6 Male visitors (except for close family members) are received outside the village at a rural Muslim wedding near Thatta, in south-western Sindh, Pakistan, 1997. All male dancing takes place accompanied by a Manganihār performer on the *dhol*. Photo by Richard Wolf.



Sometimes song texts are chosen according to the order of a particular ritual. In the Shia observance of Muharram in India and Pakistan, for instance, the texts of *soz* chants are supposed to be chosen according to the day of observance: each day memorializes a particular set of events connected with the battle of Karbala. Sermons (*hadīth*) and *soz* texts tell the stories of the events of each particular day. *Soz* are always mournful in character, recited tunefully—sometimes in classical ragas—and accompanied by a unison chorus or a vocal drone, never with musical instruments (Qureshi 1981). They may be sung by men or by women, but never in ensembles of mixed gender (figure 7).

The narrative order of a story often structures the order of a musical performance in ritual reenactments of epics such as the Ramayana (Blackburn 1997; Lutgendorf 1991). Unlike Muharram, which can be understood as a discrete, dispersed set of ritual events loosely organized around the historical theme of a given day, the reenactment of a Hindu epic often consists of a single ceremony performed over the course of days or weeks. The narration or singing of the story forms the organizing core of the ritual, and may be combined in varying degrees with drama or puppetry. In most South Asian narrative traditions, a few fixed melodies or sequences of pitches are employed for an entire performance; the narrative thus structures the choice of text within the framework of a larger ritual performance, but not necessarily the melody or the rhythm.

Distinction between events

Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most obvious, semiotic function of music in South Asia is to distinguish between culturally opposed types of events: happy and sad, auspicious and inauspicious, or pure and impure. Wedding music is therefore assiduously avoided during a funeral and vice versa (except in the case of the death of a very old person, which is considered auspicious). Sad ragas associated with mourning or death, especially *mukhāri*, should not be played during weddings, either in the ritual music accompanying the ceremony itself or in any concert of classical music that might be staged as part of the reception. Likewise, the music of funeral bands does not include auspicious ragas such as *kalyāṇi*. A drum rhythm rather than a melody usually signifies a funeral in South India; the only nonfunereal context in which such a rhythm is performed is Tamil drama—when a funeral is being depicted.

FIGURE 7 Sikander Johan (center), a noted *soz khvān* (performer of *soz*) in Lucknow, sings with a female chorus, 1997. Photo by Richard Wolf.



Music during funerals is somewhat uncommon in modern-day South Asian Islam, but in northern areas of Pakistan, among the Burusho people, a distinct type of music is still performed, played by a double-reed and drum ensemble known as *harīp*. The special funeral piece is called *toghorā*. This piece is never played during a wedding. Remarkably, however, performers claim the piece is not sad, but celebrates the deceased.



FIGURE 8 Muhammad Baksh Multani, a Mīrāsī musician from Multan, Punjab (Pakistan), used to play the *tāshā* for Hindu weddings before partition. Here he demonstrates a *tāshā*; the drum shown is about ninety years old. Photo by Richard Wolf, 1997.

Ethnic and geographical differences

Performers also articulate differences between communities musically. In the days before the partition of India and Pakistan, for example, Mīrāsī hereditary musicians in Multan (in Pakistani Punjab) used to perform different rhythms for the weddings of ordinary Muslims, Sayyids (family of the Prophet Muhammad), and Hindus. Patron families and those within earshot of a wedding would be familiar with this rhythmic code and could distinguish, by the drum beats and the types of drums, what kind of wedding was taking place. A distinguishing feature of Hindu weddings was the use of the *tāshā* drum 'shallow kettledrum'; *tāshā* playing has virtually been abandoned in Punjab since the departure of the Hindus (figure 8).

Kotas too play different types of musical pieces according to their patrons and the origin of the gods they honor with music. They use a percussion pattern for deities of Hindu origin that is distinct from the three types of pattern they use to honor Kota indigenous deities. In the days when Kotas were patronized by Baḍaga and Toda families, they maintained separate repertoires of melodies for the funerals of each community.

Performers use music not only to reinforce the identity of patron communities but also to create a sense of place. Professional performers on the *dhol* and *sahnāī* in Pakistan know (albeit often in reduced form) rhythms and melodies associated with other parts of Pakistan and name musical pieces after their respective places of origin. At weddings, connoisseurs from Lahore might ask a Punjabi drummer to play a rhythm from Peshawar, or perhaps from a city in Punjab such as Sialkot. Drum rhythms played in local ritual contexts come to articulate a musical map of Pakistan as filtered through the performance idiom of a particular local musical subtradition. Some musicians, especially those who live at the geographical border of two or more linguistic and cultural regions, also maintain repertoires of more than one musical subtradition because they play for patrons of more than one community.

The mere presence or absence of music at an occasion cannot reveal to an outsider whether or not the occasion is of great importance within a culture. It is necessary to know how music is valued in the culture, and also exactly what is considered "music."

Music can articulate not only ethnic and geographical differences between communities, but also similarities. Close association between communities is sometimes paralleled by similar musical traditions at festivals. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh "songs sung during life-cycle ceremonies among Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaisya families are identical, as there is a reciprocal association between these caste groups" (Tewari 1991). In the Nilgiris, the interaction among Kotas, Badagas, Iruḷas, and Kurumbas at festival times may also account for some of the similarities in their dance styles and musical traditions. Then again, the musical styles of two communities who do not have a great deal of reciprocal association, such as the Nāyakkars and Aiyankārs of Tamil Nadu, are often markedly different, even if they inhabit the same village and perform the same genres. The *kummi* song style of the Nāyakkars is very different from that of the Aiyankārs.

Specificity versus generality

Repertoires and styles not only differentiate one occasion from another and one patron group from another, they also cut across contexts in complex ways. Some types of music can be used in a variety of public situations; others must be extremely restricted.

The musicologist Carol Tingey (1994) describes three kinds of repertoires among the Damāi musicians of Nepal: a popular repertoire that is not ritually significant but may be used in ritual settings such as processions; context-related pieces that are or were associated with rituals or seasonal activities, but are only loosely connected with these activities in their actual performance today; and a ritual repertoire indispensable for particular ritual activities, and which cannot be played elsewhere.

Folk-dance repertoires tend to be multipurpose: for weddings, for childbirth or circumcision, for welcoming a great personage, for public display on a national holiday, or for performances on television.

Devotional songs are generally appropriate for a variety of occasions and may be sung in various kinds of temples; however, differences exist in the repertoires of specific sects or among Shaivites and Vaishnavites. Hindu devotional songs of a relatively casual nature such as bhajans are also sung outside the temple context, often for social entertainment. Such is not generally the case with laments.

In Muslim South Asia, the praise poem *qaṣīda* is sung in many contexts: at poetry readings (*mushāīra*), weddings, social celebrations (such as the retirement of a respected man), death anniversaries of saints (*urs*) and (principally in Punjab) mourning sessions (*majlis*) during Muharram. In contrast, other genres such as *soz* are performed only in the *majlis*. A probable explanation for the different contextual appropriateness of these two genres lies in their nature: the praise of important personages in the *qaṣīda* is suitable for both happy and sad situations, whereas the evocation of sadness in the *soz* is not appropriate for ritual celebrations.

Hierarchy

The presence or absence of music during ritual ceremonies in South Asia may indicate the importance of an occasion. The ubiquity of and necessity for marriage music among Hindus, for example, highlights the emphasis Hindus place on marriage as a final and binding ritual. The Kotas, in contrast, view marriage as a responsibility, not as an end in itself; Kota marriages are simple, and divorce, remarriage, polygamy, and widow remarriage are common. Kotas have developed no special repertoire of wedding pieces and generally abstain from performing music at their own weddings. Although Kotas certainly consider marriage to be important, it is not ranked as highly in their hierarchical scheme as funerals and the annual Devr celebrations. The absence of music is part of a more general cultural pattern in which marriage is not culturally elaborated.

In a different cultural context, the absence of music can signify that one ritual occasion is more profound or more valued than others. Such is the case with the Muharram festival, at which "music" is supposedly banned. In Lahore, any instrumental sounds that can be remotely construed as musical are banned, but in Sindh, drums and *śahnāī* are traditionally used in the Muharram rituals (figure 9). Sindhis refrain from playing music for public entertainment during Muharram, but the status of ritual music is somewhat ambiguous. They all acknowledge that drumming and *śahnāī* playing are forms of "music," but even some of the musicians say that one should not speak of these things as music (*mūsīqī*) *per se*.

The previous examples indicate that the mere presence or absence of music at an occasion cannot reveal to an outsider whether or not the occasion is of great importance within a culture. It is necessary to know how music is valued in the culture, and also exactly what is considered "music."

Sometimes a hierarchy of rituals can be more subtle than implied by the simple presence-versus-absence model. In the highly elaborate ritual system of the Kotas, the types of pieces performed during the most holy days of the "god ceremony" differ from those performed on previous days. At night on each of the four days preceding the opening of the temple, men and women dance in a peripheral area of the village, where houses are located. This location, in contrast to the central temple area, is a relatively ordinary space in the Kota scheme of things. Only short, relatively simple, unornamented melodies are performed in these ordinary spaces. In the temple area,

FIGURE 9 *Tāshā* players in Hyderabad, Sindh, heat drum skins to tighten them before a performance. These drummers perform only during Muharram. All belong to Sunni families who migrated from India at partition and are members of the Shaikh Siddiqi community. Photo by Richard Wolf, 1997.





FIGURE 10 Men dancing at a rural Muslim wedding near Thatta, in southwestern Sindh, Pakistan, 1997. Photo by Richard Wolf.

after the temple is opened, longer and more elaborate dance pieces are performed, as are the highly esteemed twelve god tunes. Music is but one of a number of elements articulating the hierarchy of the central space and the period of solemn devotion with which it is associated.

Gender

As in South Asian musical culture generally, music and dance function to articulate gender divisions in ritual contexts (figure 10). Examples include the musical celebration of male versus female children in Hindu families (mentioned previously), the different repertoires of wedding songs sung by the bride's and groom's families, and the distinction of male instrumentalists and female lamenters in funerals. However, the same genres may be rendered by either men or women in gender-segregated settings, especially in Muslim contexts such as the *majlis*.

Accomplishing a goal

Music is present in rituals for a variety of reasons; it is often perceived as accomplishing something in support of the goals of the ritual. Such accomplishments include creating auspiciousness, removing evil, inducing trance, promoting healing, and securing a suitable mate.

To create auspiciousness

In many rituals, music is used to create an atmosphere of auspiciousness. This is accomplished in at least two ways: by drowning out inauspicious sounds, and by playing auspicious musical pieces on a set of instruments considered auspicious. An example of the first process is the loud outdoor music of the *tavil* and *nāgasvaram* at South Indian weddings, and particularly the *kēṭṭi mēlam* discussed above. An example of the second process is the auspicious *pāñcai bājā* ensemble of Nepal, whose music is said to "generate an aura of well-being and to confer specific blessings at ritually significant times" (Tingey 1994).

It should be mentioned that the auspiciousness of a musical style or repertoire in a Hindu context may be unrelated to whether or not the musicians themselves are considered to be pure or impure. However, inauspicious music played at Hindu funerals is never performed by musicians of high or "pure" ritual status.

To drive away demons or remove evil

In many cases, certain classes of musicians are called on to drive away evil spirits from the body of an individual or from the premises of a festival. When musicians are thus employed as exorcists, the individual afflicted by possession of a demon or spirit of the dead is usually a woman. In Tamil Nadu, one type of musician who acts as an exorcist is the player of the *pampai* drum, a double cylindrical drum (Nabokov 1995). In Sindh, the player of the *alghozah* 'double duct flute' sometimes acts as an exorcist; when he plays a piece called *lehrā*, an afflicted woman spontaneously dances and the infecting spirit is supposed to be chased from her body.

In Nepal, Damāi drummers of the far western and eastern regions of Nepal play music for funerals and during eclipses to protect against forces of evil that may be particularly dangerous at those times. According to Tingey (1994), they create an "auspicious sound barrier" by producing "as much noise as possible." Explanations given for drumming and other loud music at funerals and during ceremonies requiring blood offerings frequently center around discussions of spirits and demons, who are said to be attracted to blood and death.

To induce trance

Short repetitive melodies or drum beats are commonly used to induce trance in certain ritual settings [see MUSIC AND TRANCE]. Possession may be induced not only to drive away spirits, but also to attract spirits or deities whose counsel may be required. Villagers may ask local deities why rain has not come, or why animals have become sick. In ecstatic traditions such as the *teyyam* of Kerala, dancers wear elaborate make-up and dress in the costume of a particular deity; they become possessed by listening to special songs (*uraccal tōrram*) consisting of descriptions of the deity's family and birth, physical appearance, and shrines, and by staring into the mirror at their own cosmetic metamorphosis (Freeman 1991).

To promote healing

Music is used in healing rituals, which may or may not involve trance or driving away evil spirits. The tribal groups Beṭṭa Kurumba and Kāṭṭu Nāyakka of the Nilgiris, for example, have special repertoires of antiphonal healing songs. Suspicious of allopathic cures, some members still prefer these traditional cures in cases of serious illnesses.

Music may also perform a prophylactic function. In village circumcision rituals in Sindh, women sing continuously until the wound is healed.

To secure a suitable mate

Hindu women commonly sing devotional songs when performing rituals to ensure the acquisition of a good husband or a male child, or to secure the health and well-being of their families. In some Muslim traditions in northern Pakistan and Brahmin traditions in South India, special songs, music, or chants are reported to accompany the formal consummation of a marriage in order that a boy child will result from the union.

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