

Music and Translocation in South Asia: Two Case Studies

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A great deal of anthropological and humanistic research has explored the significance of place and space in human artistic, religious, and economic endeavors. My aim in this presentation is to explore some of the ways in which cultural actors forge connections between places—locations definable on physical or mental maps—using sound. What sonic qualities, if any, do they draw upon? What is the significance of direction and magnitude in the connecting of places?

One of the most prominent ways, cross culturally, to think about music as a way to connect places is to present a melody or song as a “path” of some kind. Many presentations of music as a “path” have little or nothing to do with connecting places. For instance, in South India, the idea of a classical music school or style, which is passed down through disciples and family members from one generation, is called *pāṇi* (<U. *bāṇi*) (Wolf 1991). Notable Karnatak musicians have defined *pāṇi* as way or path (T. *vaḷi*, S. *mārga*), indicating, perhaps, both the moral aspects of undertaking music-making (a “way” or “manner”) and the idea that music unfolds in time; there are many ways to navigate through the same piece or *rāga* (see also Allen 1998). It would seem, according to Deborah Wong (2001: 80), that a similar set of notions are attached to the Thai word *thaang*, although the non-musical connotations of *thaang* are stronger than *pāṇi*, which is a loan word from Urdu (*pāṇi*'s other meanings in Tamil derive from different etymological roots). Notable in both these instances is the idea that “style” itself is likened to a path, but the idea of what is connecting to what is nowhere in evidence. One connotation in both is the idea that performers have social ties with those who share, and have shared, the “style.” Thus, although the “path” idea doesn't get at this explicitly, style connects people with one another more than it does any existing or notional places.

In other musical traditions, music links places via the people and spirits who inhabit those places. Take the Temiar in Malaysia, for instance, who, according to Marina Roseman, sing and dance with trancers among them: “as spirits sing, they link dancers and trancers with the spirit's home: a Perah fruit tree, a bend in the river, peoples and places otherwise distant in time or space. These physical entities are now felt to be immediate to experience, indeed, within the singers and dancers” (2000: 38). In short, ritual performances draw in the spirits of different places and make them felt. In drawing in distant spirits, Temiar practice is superficially similar to shamanistic practices in which the shaman undertakes a journey to contact powerful healing forces. The journey is often arduous, as among the Sibe of Xinjiang, where *samans* would have to cross a (real) “knife ladder,” while drumming, to reach the spirit world (Harris 2004: 132 ff)

The key word pertaining to shamanistic journeys in the Turkmen tradition is *yol* (Žerańska-Kominek 1998), whose older meanings include “a holy place,” “a road leading to god,” and “a shaman's journey” (1998: 265). The musician as shaman in several Turkic societies is the *bagsy*; in some places, such as Iran, the *baxsi* (in Persian) is a singer of epic tales. The range of overlap between the shaman and epic singer in west, central, and inner Asia has been noted by a number of authors (Reichl 1992; Žerańska-Kominek 1998; Levin 2006: 171 ff; Pegg 2001: 138 ff); the main similarity, for our purposes, is the idea that epic singers guide the listener on a journey, often involving superhuman figures and drawing on images from shamanistic visions (Žerańska-Kominek 1998: 269);

moreover, the guttural, raspy vocal techniques characteristic of many shamanistic practices (which often evoke the other-worldly) are also associated with epic singing in the Turkic regions (where the heroes may be powerful mystic figures, and the assuming of different voices on the part of the singer also serves to bring the voices of the narrative to life).

The Kotas of south India present a similar overlap in the connection between the, now defunct, practices of female spirit mediums (*pēnpacōl*)—who would narrate their travel to the land of the dead to seek counsel from the spirits of the dead (lit. “residents of that land” *ānātōr*)—and the genre of *ātī*, which are usually songs of mourning that often tell stories. The singing of the *pēnpacōl* is said to reproduce the style of singing of the souls of the dead themselves, and is supposed to have been one of the models for the *ātī* genre that Kotas sing now. The same song form, which often describes the journey of a man or woman from place to place, often to his or her death, may have also grown out of a ballad or story-song tradition that has parallels in nearby communities (Wolf 1997a, 371).

The journey itself (whether it be to the land of the dead, to another spirit world, or to the realm of the divine), the connection of one place to another, may or may not be marked explicitly in the form of sound, other than through signals that the performance or ritual has begun (e.g. Harris 2004, 134-35), or reached a climax, or by virtue of having names of places uttered in the text (cf. Wolf 1997b, 245). Turkmen musical theory is of interest in that it explicitly connects the ascent in musical range with the progression of the “magic journey”; this is accomplished through slight raising of pitch in the tuning of the *duṭār* and/or through development of musical ideas in a higher range within one tuning (Žerańska-Kominek 1998, 271). This explicit linking of musical ascent with non-musical journeying is not always present in the wide swath of musical traditions across the Asian continent in which musical development proceeds in stages (sometimes called *maqāms*) upwards to a climax point and then descends. Although terms for compound musical forms, such as the Maghribi Jewish *treq* (Seroussi 2001), and the *sayr* (Racy 2001), a theoretical model (in Mashriq sources) for the unfolding of a *maqām*, are translated literally as “path,” they do not necessarily point outside themselves to an extramusical journey.

The notion of musical and spiritual ascent is often linked with the notion of ascent in Sufism, itself modeled on the prophet’s ascent through the seven heavens on his spiritual visit to god (the *mirāj*). In common Sufi discourse (in Pakistan at least), it is not so much the music or uttered “remembrances” (*zīkr*) that are pathlike; rather it is the human subject, who may be, according to the modest and pious, “on the Sufi path” and not a Sufi per se—the Sufis being distant, hidden, or even unaware of their own identity. Music, such as the rhythmic groove of *dhamāl* and the associated dance (see Wolf 2006), are means to foster mystic union between a devotee and the “saint” (and through that mediation, god) at a specific event such as an ‘urs (celebration of a saint’s death anniversary, literally “wedding” of the soul of the saint to god). Unlike the musical development that is evident in the rising musical contour of *baxsi* performances as well as *maqām*-related traditions described above, the performance of *dhamāl* is superficially static—increasing in intensity, but not necessarily developing (or, more importantly, not locally theorized as developing) in a musical sense; nevertheless, volume and complexity could contribute to a buildup of intensity and would constitute kinds of development appropriate to this genre. More important than linear development, however, is the cyclic repetition, which (as a form of what is called *zīkr* in Sufism—repetitive formulae, oftentimes mentioning god or the prophet) feeds the dancer’s own subjective transcendence, feeling of proximity to the saint.

The case of dancing *dhamāl* at Sufi shrines in Pakistan raises one of the dimensions of music and “connecting places” that I’d like to emphasize, which has perhaps been underemphasized until now, and that is the question of directionality. What are the vectors of connection between places? To what extent does music (and movement) support the direction and intensity connection—more than connection per se? In this case, the *dhamāl* dancer should, ideally, be facing the shrine of the saint when he or she dances. Doing this is partly a matter of respect, but it also underscores the idea that the saint’s presence is physically in the shrine, and so for the devotee

to properly enhance his or her "attachment" (*lagan*), it is appropriate to face the shrine. The direction of dancing is important. The musicians have to negotiate a position respectful to the shrine and the dancer simultaneously (Wolf 2006)

Paul Greene draws attention to directionality in his study of flute pilgrimages associated with the *Gunla* festival in Bhaktapur Nepal. Bhaktapur's Newari processional activities have attracted a great deal of attention, in part because of their remarkable mappings of sacred geography (Wegner, Widdess, others); the town has been likened by a number of authors, and apparently by residents themselves, to a *mandala*. Greene describes the special sounds of the flute (*bānsuri*) as "draw[ing] attention toward pilgrimage destinations" (218). This directionality can be superimposed on a physical map of the landscape, but Greene presents participants' maps of the pilgrimage as a "grand clockwise circle" that conceptually encloses the home community and temples and creates a barrier from external danger (see also Wolf 1997b; Mines 2005: 37; and Sax 1991: 202, who calls processions "reflexive and metasocial"). In this view, the procession and the music link places together concretely through action, and through intellection, in a particular order in which the endpoint is the same as the starting point. One question to ask is whether the order is reversible, or to what extent other combinations of places may be joined together using other means or contexts of connection.

A more general version of this question underlies Anne Feldhaus's book *Connected Places* (Feldhaus 2003). She refers to sets of places brought together through different kinds of actions as "regions"; these can be multiply constituted and overlapping. Some places are considered parts of numbered sets; others fit together as mapped onto a human body; some are related as places of goddesses who are sisters (sharing a natal home); some are related as places in the life histories of deities. One of the compelling geographical means for relation is the river, which physically connects places and is itself a holy entity that lends its qualities to the places through which it passes. A river is in a way like a religious procession (with devotional music) in that both physically move and phenomenologically iterate relationships between places, while being considered, in different ways, objects of holiness themselves (inherent numinosity in the case of the river, a created aura of devotionalism and possibly a physical or sonic image of god in the case of the procession).

Obviously a real river can travel in only one direction and this means that a region conceptualized in terms of river connections has vectors, implicitly. Like the flexible "path" metaphor, the "river" metaphor is commonly used for musical processes, but does not necessarily provide information on the places the river connects. In the case of the Himalayan flute pilgrimages described by Greene, the sounds of the flutes are compared to a river because of the way they overlap with a "continuous quality of collective melody-making. Beginners and experts alike join the river as tributaries" (2003: 214). Greene's informants do not apparently link their notions of a pilgrimage as a circuit-connecting places to their idea of the sound as a kind of "river," which could physically connect places along a river's path (likely in this case because the river does not connect the pilgrimage destinations!). Indeed, as Greene puts it, these pilgrims conceptualize flute pilgrimages in ways that contradict physical geography "A melodic river must often flow uphill" (2003: 210).

It shouldn't be surprising that in situations where music, recitation, drumming, and so forth accompany processions to dispose of a corpse, or to commemorate similar acts, the musical procession emphasizes movement in one direction: toward the final goal. In the case of Kota funerals, a sequence of melodies is played during the rituals leading up the cremation and along the path to the funeral ground. After the "pyre lighting tune" is played and the pyre lit, the men return to the village in respectful silence. Similarly, in Muharram processions, when participants carry tomb replicas called *tā'ziyahs* to a local destination called a "Karbala" for burial, burning, dismantling, or submerging, a sequence of drum rhythms or chants often accompanies the procession; frequently a special piece is reserved for the final acts, and no further music is performed afterward. In both these cases, it is not as if all ritual activity ceases after the climax of reaching the destination; activities are structured whereby participants return to everyday life, or prepare for the next set of rituals in a multiday ceremony. But the use of music on the way to a

major destination, and the restraint from playing afterward, iterate a bond between a house or neighborhood and a destination that is one-way and structurally complete as a segment.

Vectors are defined also by magnitude, which may be understood in this case as intensity of affective relationship between a person in one place and the object in another, or, in the case of music, as amplitude. Given that one cannot easily control the direction the sound of music travels (although see Lee 1999: 91), the main variable to be considered is volume itself. Kotas, for instance, place great emphasis on the volume they can produce with their instruments in the initial invocatory blast of “one sound” (*ōmayn*) at the beginning of their annual “god ceremony” (*devr*). Their belief that in earlier times Kota men were more powerful and could make their sound project longer distances is an extension of their understanding of the present as a period of weakness and decay. That is to say, they value the ability of sound to connect distant places, whereby Kotas from one village could turn and pray upon hearing the blast of sound from another.

A more general value of volume with respect to sound extension derives from the very common function of music and sound to announce to others that something is going on—an elaborate festival, a funeral, and so forth. In south India, in the 1980s and 90s at least, it was not uncommon for villages to compete with the size/power of their loudspeakers and try to outdo one another in volume. The coming of a procession is also announced in advance by its sound, usually by drums or brass bands at its front. In the case of Muharram, many participants, both Shii and Sunni, explain that such sounds have been part of a larger spectacle that originally served to attract locals to the faith. Many Shiahs now opt for less ostentatious processions, lest the proceedings be viewed as too festive (see Wolf 2001).

In a way, sound is an extension or translation of sight, which—as is well-known in south Asia—provides Hindus and practitioners of some local south Asian religions access to the power of divinities through visual interaction (Eck 1998; Babb 1981). In the Kota rain ceremony, Kotas ceremonialize the everyday practice of worshipping at *kubīṭ kandyś*, points where one or more spot of divinity (temple, mountain, geographical feature) are visible. During the ceremony, Kotas sit and perform selections from their suite of twelve “god tunes” (*devr kolś*) while at, or in view of, such spots of divinity. In such cases the offering of music is one-way (hopefully loud enough to reach its destination), but the visual interaction is reciprocal, and the benefit, hopefully, accrues inward, toward the community.

The rain ceremony also provides an example of the larger distinction one might be able to draw between processional pieces that are for whatever reason used during movement, and those that are used at stationary points along the way. In the Kota case, and there are several other examples as well, musical pieces that are performed while men walk relatively long distances, up hills, and so forth, are sometimes very short. This was explained to be a matter of convenience. In one case, where the tune is not short (the “channel clearing tune”), the musicians have an especially difficult time staying together, repeating the correct sections, and so forth.

In Muharram processions as well, if special drum rhythms are played, they are often differentiated according to function; the difference between being stationary and moving is often musically marked. For instance, in the tradition associated with the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, also practiced by migrants in Karachi, Pakistan, a rhythm called *sawāri* (lit. “ride”) is performed when the *ta’ziyeh* tomb-replica is lifted; this is meant to draw attention to the function of the procession as a royal cavalcade in honor of the Prophet’s grandson, Husain, who was martyred in the battle of Karbala. As the procession moves, two other patterns are supposed to be performed. At various points, when the procession halts and a crowd gather, a slow-paced, grave pattern called *dhima* is played. In both the Kota and the Muharram (multicommunity) instances, the process of moving toward a goal, and the temporary stopping points along the way, are musically differentiated. This pattern is more widespread and should be taken into account in our thinking about how local actors use music to “connect” places.

I have already spoken about the use of music by shamans and so forth to effect virtual journeys. Another way in which music performed in a focused context in one local can create a relationship with another locale is

through virtual travel; mental or ideational travel is often accompanied by sentiments of longing. Here I'll just mention the well-known process in Hinduism and Buddhism in south Asia whereby distant localities are made local. Richard Widdess's dāphā drum teacher expressed a sentiment that is fairly widespread regarding such localization: "ideally one would worship all these deities by personally visiting their shrines, but it's difficult for busy farmers to leave their fields for a lengthy pilgrimage. Singing songs in praise of a distant deity is the next best thing to physically travelling there, and enables a variety of gods of different locations to be worshipped in each daily session." (Widdess 2008) Indeed, as Ann Gold describes in Rajasthan, the notion of an "inner pilgrimage" is foundational to the outer, or physical pilgrimage to shrines or sites such as the Ganges river (Gold 1989: 264, 296ff); such sentiments are often expressed through pilgrimage songs, thereby cementing the relationship between inner attitude and outward action.

Virtual pilgrimage is also central to Muharram rituals, where, as I mentioned earlier, the destination of tā'ziya processions is called a Karbala, after the place in Iraq where the commemorated battle took place. Shiihs also carry tomb replicas and other reminders of items associated with the battle. Some of these are called "ziyarat," a term which means visitation or pilgrimage, but in the Muharram context, refers to the object that reminds the viewer of the site in Iraq or elsewhere. The reason why distant locales need to be localized is sometimes given in local south Asian Muslim lore, much in accord with what Richard Widdess's Buddhist informant told him. According to one story, Timurlane (Timur the lame), the Turkic-Mongol conqueror whom some erroneously believe brought some kinds of public Muharram observances to India, is said to have had a dream in which Husain (martyred grandson of the prophet and the center of attention during Muharram) appeared and said, "it is not necessary that you visit my mausoleum," because Timur had a badly damaged leg. "Instead, make a replica of my mausoleum and visit that." This story could be seen as a charter for the appropriateness of all ziyārats, of all replicas brought on procession and meant to evoke Karbala; "replicas" or *shabihs* of this sort solicit meritorious journeys through a kind of spiritual contemplation.

When I asked the recounter how this story relates to the *dhol* and *tāsha* drums used in Muharram processions, which he had also ascribed to Timur, he said, in the dream, Timur heard the voice "Husain, Husain, Husain." "We don't have that," the recounter remarked, but we do have the drums that give the voice, or *sadā*, of Husain. The drums, like the *ta'ziyah*, provided a way, in this story, to bring Husain to Timur and to all those who share this understanding. Timur's lameness fits into a larger theme in Shiism whereby the devotee adopts the persona of one who could not participate in the Karbala battle at the time, or who can not, in the present, visit Karbala in person. The longing this induces motivates many families to create shrines in their own homes. So, drumming implicates the relationship between people and travel in this story through propogating sounds that indicate a virtual form of travel has been accomplished, and by stoking emotions of longing for having actually been at Karbala in 680 CE.

In this presentation I have attempted to survey some of the ways in which the study of "place" through music can be refined by considering the dynamics of relationship *between* places. I showed that music is implicated in notions of paths or rivers which may or may not specify places as endpoints, but nevertheless imply actual or metaphorical journeys. I have discussed a variety of ways in which music feeds into the connection between spiritual journeys, stories that involve travel (such as epics), pilgrimages, and processions. And finally, I have suggested that in addition to suggesting mere connection between places, the study of music and musical processes can also be used to contemplate directionality, magnitude, and emotion as individual actors become involved in the creation of links between one place and another.

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