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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The fly-by-night ustad: Problems of music education in North India, 1863–1915

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Abstract

In the middle of the nineteenth century in cities and towns across North India a popular craze for the sitar drove untold numbers of amateur enthusiasts to seek instruction in Hindustani raga music from the only available source: the Muslim hereditary professional performers known as ustads. A long record of statements excoriating the ustads has generally been dismissed by contemporary scholars as colonially inspired propaganda that served a Hindu identitarian vision of music reform and institution-building for the incipient nation. This article accesses a collection of Urdu-language music instruction texts produced between 1863 and 1915 to offer a contrasting interpretation: the depiction of ustads as ignorant, ill-mannered, and addicted is propounded first and foremost by Muslim authors unconcerned with nationalism, but invested in opening the Hindustani music tradition to the uninitiated amateur. Close readings of narrative anecdotes from these texts alongside the 1910 and 1914 Marathi-language works of famed scholar and music reformer Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936) reveal a continuity of concerns across language, region, and religious community. Bhatkhande and the earlier Urdu authors share not only their frustration with the half-trained and ill-behaved 'fly-by-night' ustad, but also their reverence for the masterful ustads whose reputations were threatened by the unchecked presence of charlatans in their midst.

Keywords: Hindustani music; sitar; Urdu; ustad; Bhatkhande

Introduction

In his first autobiography, famed Indian musician Ravi Shankar identifies early 1966 as the beginning of 'the great sitar explosion', a sudden infatuation with the instrument among young Westerners ignited by its featured appearance in hit records by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.[1] But those driven to learn to play the sitar—including Shankar's famous pupil George Harrison—soon suffered a rude awakening: the instrument proved very difficult to learn.

[1]Ravi Shankar, *My Music, My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 92–93.

A century earlier in cities and towns throughout North India the first wave of amateur sitar enthusiasts had already made the same discovery.[2] Like Harrison and his cohort, the lawyers, schoolteachers, and civil servants[3] who drove the first sitar explosion in the nineteenth century were outsiders seeking entry to the Hindustani rāga tradition,[4] since the seventeenth century the preserve of Muslim hereditary professional performers and their feudal patrons.[5] Yet as obscure and intimidating as the raga system might have appeared to the new sitar acolytes of San Francisco, New York, or London in the 1960s, the available pathways to knowledge were in fact paved and illuminated by decades of activism, research, publication, and institution-building. The infrastructure of North Indian raga pedagogy by the middle of the twentieth century included a sophisticated system of notation, a uniform curriculum, accessible practical texts, graded syllabi, and even schools geared to Westerners. By contrast, when the sitar first rose to popular consciousness in India, eager amateurs trod a dim

[2]A long-necked, plucked lute with tied frets, the sitar was maturing in design in the middle of the nineteenth century. Reports of its antiquity are greatly exaggerated; its earliest textual mention dates to 1739 and its earliest visual representation to 1790. See Allyn Miner, *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997 [1993]), p. 32. The sitar did not come into its own as a solo instrument until the early decades of the nineteenth century. Miner, *Sitar and Sarod*, p. 41.

[3]The Urdu music instruction books accessed in this article offer little evidence as to the actual occupations of the amateurs, but they were presumably members of the new 'print public sphere' who consumed a burgeoning tidal wave of popular Urdu publications starting in the middle of the nineteenth century. See Jennifer Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018). Among the readers whose letters appeared in the Urdu newspaper *Āvadh Aḵhbār* in 1879, Dubrow lists 'judges, lawyers, schoolteachers, and doctors'. Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams*, p. 92. The amateur sitarists who authored texts considered in this article include a revenue officer, a Mughal courtier, and a civil servant to the British. See also Allyn Miner, 'Enthusiasts and Ustāds: Early Urdu Instructional Books', unpublished conference paper, 2015, pp. 3, 9, 12.

[4]It is outside of the scope of this article to review the nuts and bolts of Hindustani musical theory and practice, which include an extensive repertoire of not only melodic but rhythmic and metrical techniques. See Harold Powers, 'An Historical and Comparative Approach to the Classification of Rāgas (with an appendix on ancient tunings)', *Selected Reports of the Institute of Ethnomusicology, UCLA*, vol. 1, 1970, pp. 1–78; Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, *The Rāgs of North Indian Music: Their Structure and Evolution* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995 [1971]); Bonnie Wade, *Khyāl: Creativity within North India's Classical Music Tradition* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997 [1984]); James Kippen, *The Tabla of Lucknow: A Cultural Analysis of a Musical Tradition* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005 [1988]); Stephen Slawek, *Sitar Technique in Nibaddh Forms* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000 [1987]); Mark Levy, *Intonation in North Indian Music: A Select Comparison of Theories with Contemporary Practice* (New Delhi: Biblia Impex, 1982); Joep Bor et al., *The Rāga Guide: A Survey of 74 Hindustani Rāgas* (The Netherlands: Nimbus Records, 1999); Martin Clayton, *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rāg Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ritwik Sanyal and Richard Widdess, *Dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Dard Neuman, 'Pedagogy, Practice, and Embodied Creativity in Hindustani Music', *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2012, pp. 426–449; Nicolas Magriel and Lalita Du Perron, *The Songs of Khayāl*, 2 vols (New Delhi: Manohar, 2013); Matthew Rahaim, *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

[5]For the transliteration of words from Urdu texts I follow the system prescribed by the *Journal of Urdu Studies*. For words originating in Devanagari script (Hindi and Marathi), I follow the system prescribed by the ALA-LC (American Library Association-Library of Congress). For quotations I replicate authors' transliterations.

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and unmarked trail. The only hope for an aspiring sitar student of Delhi, Lucknow, or Lahore in the 1860s was to acquire a willing and able teacher: an ustād.[6]

Since independence in 1947 modern institutions of music education—along with the informed listeners and moderately skilled performers they produce—have proliferated throughout India.[7] Nevertheless, contemporary scholars tend to prioritize (and lionize) the oral and embodied traditions of hereditary professional performers—ustads—as 'the true knowledge base for Hindustani music'.[8] In the literature today, the ustad is thus an ennobled figure whose practice and pedagogy are synonymous with rigour, discipline, and integrity. And yet, in an early and important scholarly treatment of the social and cultural dimensions of 'becoming an ustād', Brian Silver acknowledges that by the late nineteenth century the title 'ustad' was imbued with a distinctly negative meaning alongside its reference to a master, teacher, or craftsman: 'A sharper; a clever rogue; tactician; old stager; a sharp blade; a consummate knave'.[9]

These latter meanings of 'ustad' suffuse a variety of texts on Hindustani music published in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[10] Captain Augustus

[6]The first public school of music was the Bengal Music School, established in Calcutta in 1871. Others followed in Bombay (1874), Dacca (1876), Poona (1879), and Baroda (1886). See Michael D. Rosse, 'The Movement for the Revitalization of "Hindu" Music in Northern India, 1860–1930: The Role of Associations and Institutions', PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1995. Nineteenth-century sitar enthusiasts throughout North India, from Lahore to Lucknow, would have had little access to these small-scale and relatively exclusive institutions.

[7]Independent schools of music began proliferating in the 1920s and 1930s, but even up to the 1950s many Indian universities did not offer music as a subject. See Max Katz, *Lineage of Loss: Counternarratives of North Indian Music* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), pp. 113–116.

[8]Daniel Neuman, 'A Tale of Two Sensibilities: Hindustani Music and its Histories', in *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, (eds) Jonathan McCollum and David G. Hebert (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 279–308. See also Brian Silver and R. Arnold Burghardt, 'On Becoming an Ustād: Six Life Sketches in the Evolution of a Gharānā', *Asian Music*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1976, pp. 27–58; Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990 [1980]); Wim Van der Meer, *Hindustani Music in the Twentieth Century* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980); Naomi Owens, 'The Dagar Gharānā (with special reference to Ustād Nasir Aminuddin Dagar): A Case Study of Performing Artists', *Asian Music*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1987, pp. 158–195; Wade, *Khyāl*; Slawek, *Sitar Technique*; Kippen, *The Tabla of Lucknow*; Regula Qureshi, 'Whose Music? Sources and Contexts in Indic Musicology', in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, (eds) Bruno Nettl and Phillip V. Bohlman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 152–168; Clayton, *Time in Indian Music*; Dard Neuman, 'A House of Music: The Hindustani Musician and the Crafting of Traditions', PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2004; Sanyal and Widdess, *Dhrupad*; Regula Qureshi, *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007); Katz, *Lineage*; Rahaim, *Musicking Bodies*; Matthew Rahaim, *Ways of Voice: Vocal Striving and Moral Contestation in North India and Beyond* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2021). But see Katherine Butler Schofield, *Music and Musicians in Late Mughal India: Histories of the Ephemeral, 1748–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

[9]S. W. Fallon, *A new Hindustani-English dictionary, with illustrations from Hindustani literature and folk-lore* (Banaras: Medical Hall Press, 1879), p. 84, cited in Silver and Burghardt, 'On Becoming', p. 27.

[10]For example, N. Augustus Willard, *A Treatise on the Music of Hindoostan* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1834); Krishnadhan Bandopadhyay, *Gītasūtrasāra* [Bengali] (Coochbehar: Coochbehar State Press, 1885); Babu Nanak Prasad, *Indian Music: Scientific and Practical* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 2003 [1906]); Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I (Bombay: Shri Ganesh Printing Press, 1910); Rai Umanath Bali, 'Foreword', in *Report of the Fourth All-India Music Conference* (Lucknow: Taluqdar Press, *circa* 1925), pp. 1–5.

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Willard, for instance, warns in his 1834 book that 'most native performers of this noble science are the most immoral set of men on earth',[11] Loknath Ghosh in his 1873 book accuses them of 'committing the most atrocious crimes in this country',[12] Babu Nanak Prasad in his 1906 book decries their 'cunning, treachery, and hypocrisy',[13] and Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande famously casts the ustads in a 1916 speech as 'hopelessly illiterate and ignorant'.[14] Such representations, however, strike scholars today as distinctly unreliable, little more than colonial ideology adopted in the service of identitarian nationalism.

This is largely because academic authors from the 1990s to the present have convincingly argued that the worlds of North and South Indian art music were reshaped in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by a reform movement buoyed at the confluence of colonial and nationalist thought.[15] Drawing on the insights of post-colonial theory, scholars of Indian music generally position the movement within colonial modernity, a contradictory condition wherein

[11]Willard, *A Treatise*, p.15.

[12]Quoted in Lakshmi Subramanian, 'The Master, Muse and the Nation: The New Cultural Project and the Reification of Colonial Modernity in India', *South Asia*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2000, p. 15. See also Richard David Williams, *The Scattered Court: Hindustani Music in Colonial Bengal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023), p. 168.

[13]Prasad, *Indian Music*, p.94.

[14]Bhatkhande, *A Short Historical Survey of the Music of Upper India (a Reproduction of a Speech Delivered by Pandit V. N. Bhatkhande at the First All-India Music Conference, Baroda in 1916)* (Bombay: Karnatak Printing Press, 1934), p. 3.

[15]Qureshi, 'Whose Music?'; David Lelyveld, 'Upon the Subdominant: Administering Music on All-India Radio', *Social Text*, vol. 39, 1994, pp. 111–127; Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Matthew Harp Allen, 'Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance', *The Drama Review*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1997, pp. 63–100; Lakshmi Subramanian, 'The Master, Muse and the Nation: The New Cultural Project and the Reification of Colonial Modernity in India', *South Asia*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2000, pp. 1–32; Lakshmi Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007 [2006]); Indira Viswanathan Peterson and Davesh Soneji (eds), *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008); Charles Capwell, 'Representing "Hindu" Music to the Colonial and Native Elite of Calcutta', in *Hindustani Music, Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, (eds) Joep Bor, Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Jane Harvey and Emmie te Nijenhuis (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010), pp. 285–312; Sharmadip Basu, 'Tuning Modernity: Musical Knowledge and Subjectivities in Colonial India, c.1780s—c.1900', PhD thesis, Syracuse University, 2011; Max Katz, 'Institutional Communalism in North Indian Classical Music', *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2012, pp. 279–298; Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadāsīs, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Anna Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Margaret Walker, *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Isabel Huacuja Alonso, 'Radio, Citizenship, and the "Sound Standards" of a Newly Independent India', *Public Culture*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2019, pp. 117–144; Rashna Darius Nicholson, 'A Christy Minstrel, a Harlequin, or an Ancient Persian?: Opera, Hindustani Classical Music, and the Origins of the Popular South Asian "Musical"', *Theatre Survey*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2020, pp. 331–350; Anurima Banerji, 'The Laws of Movement: The Natyashastra as Archive for Indian Classical Dance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 31, no. 1–2, 2021, pp. 132–152; Bob Van der Linden, 'Rhythms of the Raj: Music in Colonial South Asia', in *Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia*, (eds) Harald Fischer-Tiné and Maria Framke (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 373–385.

native elites struggled for national independence on terms adopted from their colonizers.[16] In this view, it is pivotal that the British framed their subjugation of the subcontinent within a narrative of Indian cultural degeneracy: the ancient arts and sciences of a putative Hindu Golden Age had deteriorated, they claimed, during centuries of Muslim rule.[17] For many nineteenth-century writers and activists, this decline was epitomized by the 'illiterate ustad' and his confederate, the licentious 'dancing girl'.[18] Scholars today thus generally maintain that the English-educated Brahmin leaders of the music reform movement endorsed the colonial misrepresentation of Muslim ustads in a campaign to supplant them with a textual and institutional foundation for the high art music of the nation.[19]

Reading the derogation of the ustad as an artefact of colonialism—and as a weapon of Hindu nationalism—is valid and valuable, but it is not the only suitable interpretation. In this article, I propose that nationalist-era representations of ustads as obstacles to music education may be grasped within another genealogy as well. Focusing on a collection of Urdu-language music instruction texts produced between 1863 and 1915 and placing these alongside the epochal Marathi-language works of V. N. Bhatkhande (especially 1910 and 1914), I will make the case that the representation of the ustad as a problem—specifically, ignorant, ill-mannered, and addicted—was shared throughout this period across languages, regions, and religious communities. Such depictions were grounded, I argue, not only in colonial, class, or communal prejudice, but—at least in part—on the accurate personal observations of authors participating in a grassroots effort to include everyday Indians within the fold of the Hindustani music tradition.

Significantly, the vision of public music education in these texts was pioneered by disparate Muslim writers—including professional musicians themselves—with no discernible nationalist intent and little evident inspiration from British values. I suggest that their texts answered a new, popular demand for music education driven in the first instance by the amateur enthusiasts of the first sitar explosion that was subsequently harnessed and propelled by nationalist-era music reformers such as V. N. Bhatkhande. My central objective in this regard is to demonstrate that Bhatkhande's own vivid narrative anecdotes of the misdoings of fraudulent ustads resonate harmoniously with the humorous and scornful depictions of ustads in the earlier Urdu works.[20] Concomitantly, I will argue that all of the texts considered here shower praise

[16]See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000]).

[17]See also Martin Clayton, 'Musical Renaissance and its Margins in England and India, 1874–1914', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s: Portrayal of the East*, (eds) Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 84.

[18]Williams documents British efforts to cast 'dancing girls as prostitutes' as early as 1837. Richard David Williams, 'Songs between Cities: Listening to Courtesans in Colonial North India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2017, pp. 591–610, p. 594. See also Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*; Morcom, *Illicit Worlds*; Walker, *India's Kathak Dance*.

[19]See Katherine Butler Schofield, 'Reviving the Golden Age Again: "Classicization," Hindustani Music, and the Mughals', *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2010, pp. 487–489 for a rich and evocative summary of this argument in terms of 'classicization'.

[20]This article discusses a set of texts published in Urdu by newly established printing presses in Lucknow (Naval Kishore, 1863, 1871; Hindustani Press, 1925), Delhi (Maṭbaʿ-e Faiẓ-e ʿĀm, 1869), and Lahore

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on the authentic ustad, and none go to greater lengths to differentiate the charlatan from the master than Bhatkhande himself.

The fly-by-night ustad

Ustads were newly available to teach aspiring music students in the mid-nineteenth century due in part to the social upheavals that rocked the subcontinent in the wake of the anticolonial rebellion of 1857 and 1858. Those deemed complicit by the British—princes and civilians alike—were summarily executed, colonial urban centres rose as new sites of patronage, and surviving performing artists scattered in search of livelihoods.[21] The sitarists among them helped to disseminate a new and popular performance style developed by Ghulam Raza, a musician who scandalized the royal court of Lucknow from 1847 until his banishment in 1850 for an ongoing affair with the king's 'chief wife'.[22] Though the musical elite derided Ghulam Raza's 'unsystematic' new sitar style,[23] it nevertheless spread rapidly throughout North India and its informality must have contributed to the new public demand for access to the instrument and its music.[24]

But if the new sounds of the sitar were inspiring and accessible, the ustads apparently were not; it seems many students struggled to find a qualified teacher. The most prestigious professional musicians were trained from childhood within a family-based guild system of oral education, an essentially esoteric, face-to-face method known as taʿlīm. Such ustads were reluctant to accept students from outside their world in part because discipleship demanded an onerous investment of time by both student and teacher.

Amateur sitarist Mirza Rahim Beg discusses the matter in his 1876 sitar instruction book:

> It should be clear that teaching sitar is a big headache, and thus ustads generally don't teach, thinking, 'why should I take on this headache?' And in this matter,

(Victoria Press, 1876; Maṭbaʿ-e Muṣṭafā, 1876). Miner notes that many of these books came out in multiple editions, suggesting an eager audience: *Ġhunchah-e Rāg* (1863 and 1879); *Sarmāyah-e ʿIshrat maʿrūf Qānūn-e Mūsīqī* (1869, 1874–1875, 1884), *Qānūn-e Sitār* (1871 and 1873); *Naġhmah-e Sitār* (1876 and 1894). Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 1.

[21]See Miner, *Sitar and Sarod*; Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, trans. by Amlan Das Gupta and Urmila Bhirdikar (Calcutta: Thema, 2000); Bakhle, *Two Men*; Williams, *The Scattered Court*; Schofield, *Music and Musicians*.

[22]W. H. Sleeman (1858), cited in Miner, *Sitar and Sarod*, p. 115. See also Williams, *The Scattered Court*, p. 79.

[23]Imam, who personally heard Ghulam Raza in the court of Lucknow, writes *circa* 1858, 'This style follows no tradition and is unsystematic ...The followers of this style are quite mad over it ... [but] Ustads are averse to this style, and the connoisseurs are ashamed of it.' Hakim Mohammad Karam Imam, 'Melody through the Centuries', (trans.) Govind Vidyarthi, *Sangeet Natak Akademi Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 12, 1959, p. 23, brackets added; Schofield, *Music and Musicians*, p. 222.

[24]The initial surge of interest in Hindustani music among amateurs may have preceded Ghulam Raza. As Willard writes in 1834: 'The Sitar is very much admired, is used both by professional men and amateurs, and is really a very pleasing-toned instrument in the hands of an expert performer'. Willard, *A Treatise*, p. 84.

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> if the ustad is rich, it is extremely difficult to learn from him. And if he's poor, he also avoids the headache and doesn't teach.[25]

Beyond the potential waste of time and effort entailed in taking on a new and untested student, established ustads preferred to pass their hereditary knowledge to their own kin, or to royal patrons capable of lavish largesse. Beg continues: 'those people who are famous and celebrated teach only their own sons open-heartedly and no one else. Or they will teach a nawab well.'[26]

In fact, Beg asserts that the only students capable of hiring a qualified ustad are the royal patrons themselves:[27]

> Except for the wealthiest rajas and nawabs, no one can obtain a qualified ustad.[28] Ustads such as Miyan Amritsen Sahab, Qutabudullah Bahadur, the Late Ustad Ghulam Muhammad Khan, Miyan Rahim Sen Sahab, or Miyan Nasir Ahmad Sahab cannot even be obtained by those who make a salary of two to four thousand rupees.[29]

But if even the most well-heeled of amateurs could not afford a qualified ustad, what was a student of humble means to do? Beg addresses this question directly:

> ... sitar playing is achieved with great difficulty for this reason: those people who are poor, if they get the passion for sitar, now who will they learn from? Lacking money, they will not get a qualified ustad ... And someone earning a salary of one hundred to two hundred rupees won't get a qualified ustad either. The reason is that he will only be able to afford to pay ten rupees per month, or at most thirty rupees to some ustad, and even such people will only get a mediocre ustad, and because of this such people—I mean the rich—will still only be able to play a little sitar, commensurate with the ability of the ustad. But these ustads who fall at your feet to teach sitar for such a salary are not the qualified ustads.[30]

Who, then, were these ustads ready to 'fall at your feet'?

The primary focus of this article is the le-bhāgū or 'fly-by-night' ustad, a disreputable figure who haunts the music instruction texts considered here. Beg characterizes such musicians as charlatans who 'indenture themselves to a few great ustads,

[25]Mirza Rahim Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār* (Lahore: Maṭbaʿ-e Vikṭoriyah Press, 1876), p. 179. In 1876 Beg's book was printed in two editions (with only slight discrepancies between them) by two presses in Lahore. I reference the edition published by Maṭbaʿ-e Vikṭoriyah Press (Victoria Press).

[26]Ibid., p. 180.

[27]For documented examples of royal patrons who became expert performers, see Williams, *The Scattered Court*, pp. 82–83.

[28]Beg's phrase is 'ustād-e kāmil'.

[29]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 175.

[30]Ibid. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 20. Note that Bhatkhande makes a similar claim in a speech more than 40 years later: 'Why, our experience at the present day is that the number of really first class experts is exceedingly small, and the services of even these men are not normally available to all interested in the subject.' *Second All-India Music Conference: Held at Delhi, December 14th to 17th, 1918* (Delhi: Laxmi Press, *circa* 1918), p. 9.

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learn a little, and run off' in pursuit of gullible students and untutored patrons.[31] Such musicians most likely took advantage of the chaos of 1857 and 1858 to remake and market themselves as ustads even when they might have lacked fundamental knowledge and performing ability. Unfortunately, despite the manifest mastery of the celebrated musicians of the era, the le-bhāgūs threatened the reputation of professional musicians as a whole. Thus, in my reading, the ubiquity and disrepute of the 'fly-by-night' ustad led the authors of the Urdu texts (in asides and vignettes sprinkled throughout their work) to characterize ustads generally with such language as 'demented half-wits',[32] 'completely uneducated',[33] 'imbeciles',[34] 'degenerate and low-natured',[35] 'contemptible',[36] and 'without morals'.[37] In these Urdu texts, ustads are upbraided for their 'carelessness, egotism, and avarice',[38] their 'illiteracy, barbarism, pride, and ill manner',[39] and no less for their 'predilection toward intoxicants'.[40] Beg announces categorically that 'the ustads of this art are usually drug addicts'.[41]

Such statements may surely be read as the authors' assertions of their own social superiority over the ustads; indeed, the efforts of amateur musicians to maintain their hierarchical position above professionals is a phenomenon that may be observed in many parts of the world.[42] However, in this article, I attempt to take our authors at their word and accept their representations as necessarily flawed, but nonetheless grounded depictions of the world as they knew it. (See Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.)

Bhatkhande's intervention

Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936), the theorist and activist most central to the establishment of a uniform, textual curriculum for North Indian raga music, became part of the first sitar craze while attending college in Bombay in the 1880s. Bhatkhande's intellectual interest in the theoretical underpinnings of raga practice led

[31]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 175. The phrase Beg uses is 'le bhāge hue' or 'having grabbed and run'. In his 1914 text, Bhatkhande uses the term 'le-bhāgū' repeatedly. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III (Poona: Arya-Bhushan Press, 1914). In his 1863 text, Mardan ʿAli Khan uses 'le-bhāgū' in reference to courtesans (ṭawāʾifs) who acquire incomplete knowledge from professional dancers in Lucknow (kathaks). Muhammad Mardan ʿAli Khan, *Ġhunchah-e Rāg* (Lucknow: Maṭbaʿ-e Munshī Naval Kishore, 1863), p. 124. See also Williams, 'Songs between Cities', p. 598.

[32]Muhammad Karam Imam Khan, *Maʿdan al-Mūsīqī* (Lucknow: Hindustani Press, 1925 [*circa* 1858]), p. 116: 'maḳhbūṭī-pesh nā-tajrubah-kārān'.

[33]Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan, *Qānūn-e Sitār* (Lucknow: Maṭbaʿ-e Munshī Naval Kishore, 1873 [1871]), p. 6: 'be-ʿilm maḥẓ'.

[34]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 14: 'ajhal'.

[35]Inayat Khan, *Minqār-e Mūsīqār* (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1912), p. 91: 'mubtażal aur danīuṭṭabaʿ'.

[36]Khan, *Ġhunchah-e Rāg*, p. 3: 'raẓīl'.

[37]Asadullah Khan Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, Calcutta, unpublished manuscript, property of Irfan Khan, 1915, p. 114: 'aḳhlāq se maḥrūm'.

[38]Khan, *Maʿdan al-Mūsīqī*, p. 116: 'be-aḥtiyāṭī va nafsānīyat va ṭamaʿ'.

[39]Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, p. 119: 'kam-ʿilmī, jahālat, ġhurūr, bad-aṭwarī'.

[40]Ibid., p. 120: 'manshiāt kā shauq'.

[41]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, pp. 13–14: '... is fan ke ustād akśar nashe-bāz ... hote hain'.

[42]See Jonathan Glasser, 'Musical Jews: Listening for Hierarchy in Colonial Algeria and Beyond', *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 1, 2017, pp. 139–166.

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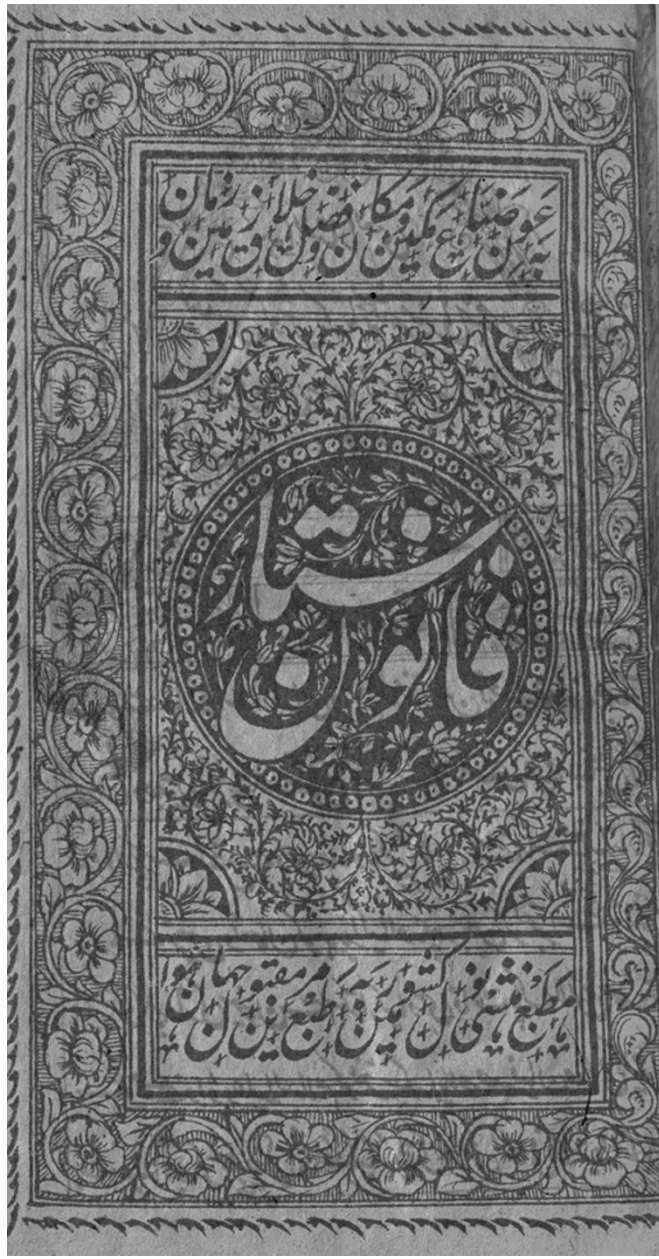

Figure 1. Title page of Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan's *Qānūn-e Sitār*, 2nd edition (Lucknow: Maṭbaʿ-e Munshī Naval Kishore, 1873 [1871]).

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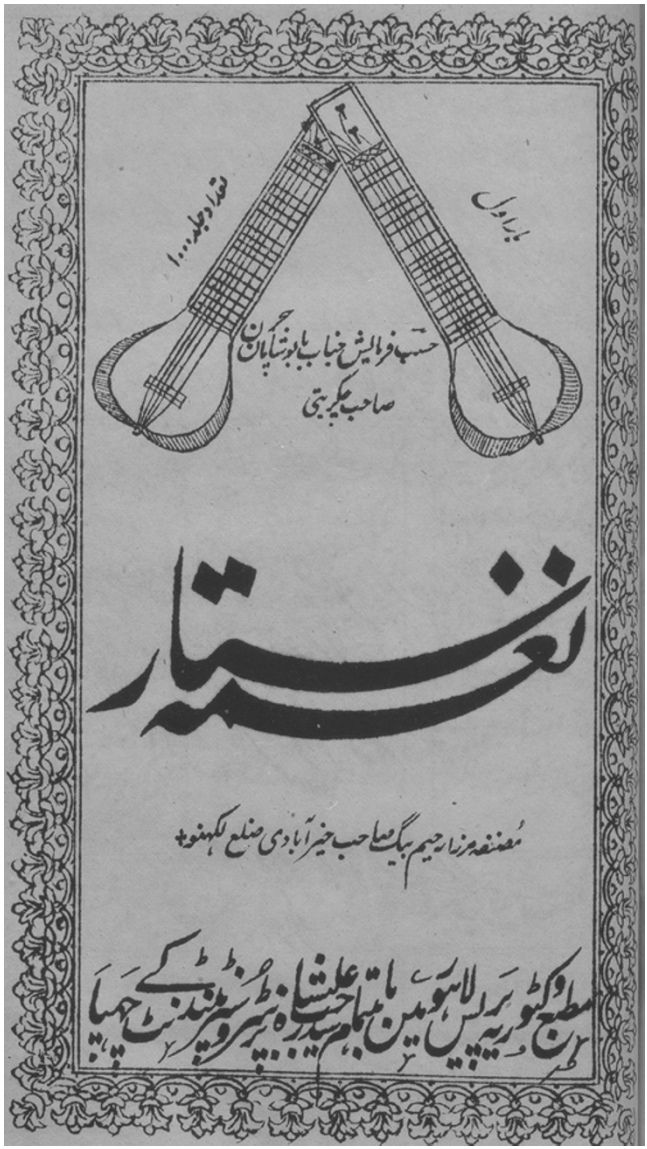

Figure 2. Title page of Mirza Rahim Beg's *Naġhmah-e Sitār* (Lahore: Maṭbaʿ-e Vikṭoriyah Press, 1876). Note the author's name appears here as Mirza Rahim Beg Sahab Khairabadi zila [district] Lucknow.

him to study every treatise of music theory he could find in 'Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi' and to consult as many authoritative musicians as were available.[43] Though a sitarist himself, Bhatkhande embraced the priority of the voice in the Sanskritic

[43] Srikrishna Narayan Ratanjankar, *Pandit Bhatkhande* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1967), p. 8.

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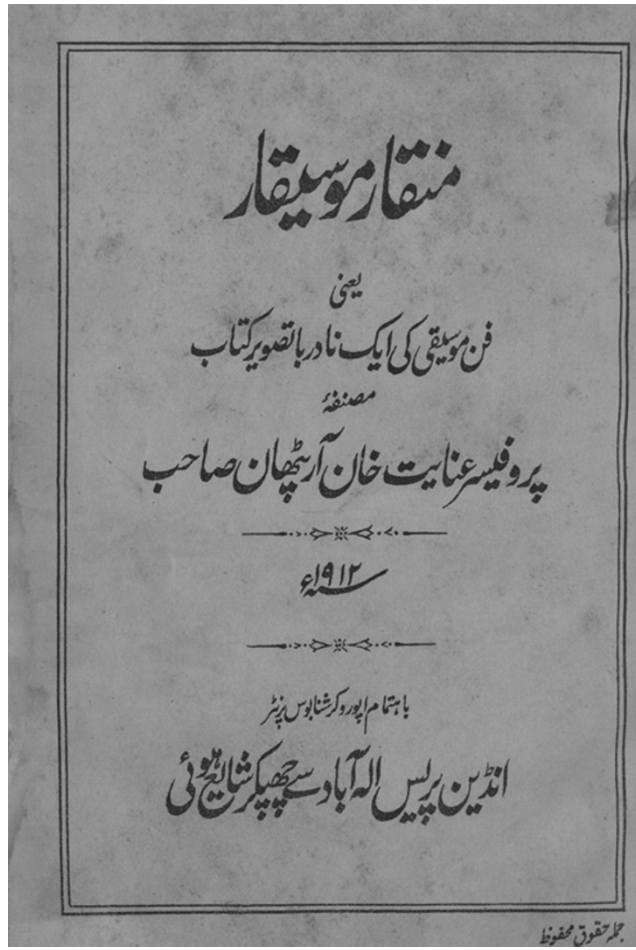
منتار موسیقار

یعنی

فن موسیقی کی ایک نادر باتصویر کتاب

مصنفہ

پروفیسر عنایت خان آر پٹھان صاحب

سنہ ۱۹۱۲ء

باہتمام اپورو کرشنا بوس پرنٹر

انڈین پریس الہ آباد سے چھپکر شائع ہوئی

جملہ حقوق محفوظ

Figure 3. Title page of Inayat Khan's *Minqār-e Mūsīqār* (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1912). Note the author's name appears here as Professor Inayat Khan R. Pathan Sahab.

textual canon and thus framed contemporary Hindustani raga study as primarily the pursuit of vocal music.[44]

Bhatkhande's vernacular publications began in earnest in 1910 with the first volume of his Marathi-language *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, a four-volume series

[44]Ḳhayāl, the dominant form of Hindustani vocal music since the early eighteenth century, flourished in Maharashtra by the late nineteenth century (through disciples of the Gwalior Gharana), so it may also be the case that Bhatkhande was responding to a local preference for vocal music over the sitar. Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], 'The Origins and Early Development of Khayal', in *Hindustani Music*, (eds) Bor et al., pp. 159–194; Wade, *Khyāl*, pp. 41–43. See also Tejaswini Niranjana, *Musicophilia in Mumbai: Performing Subjects and the Metropolitan Unconscious* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

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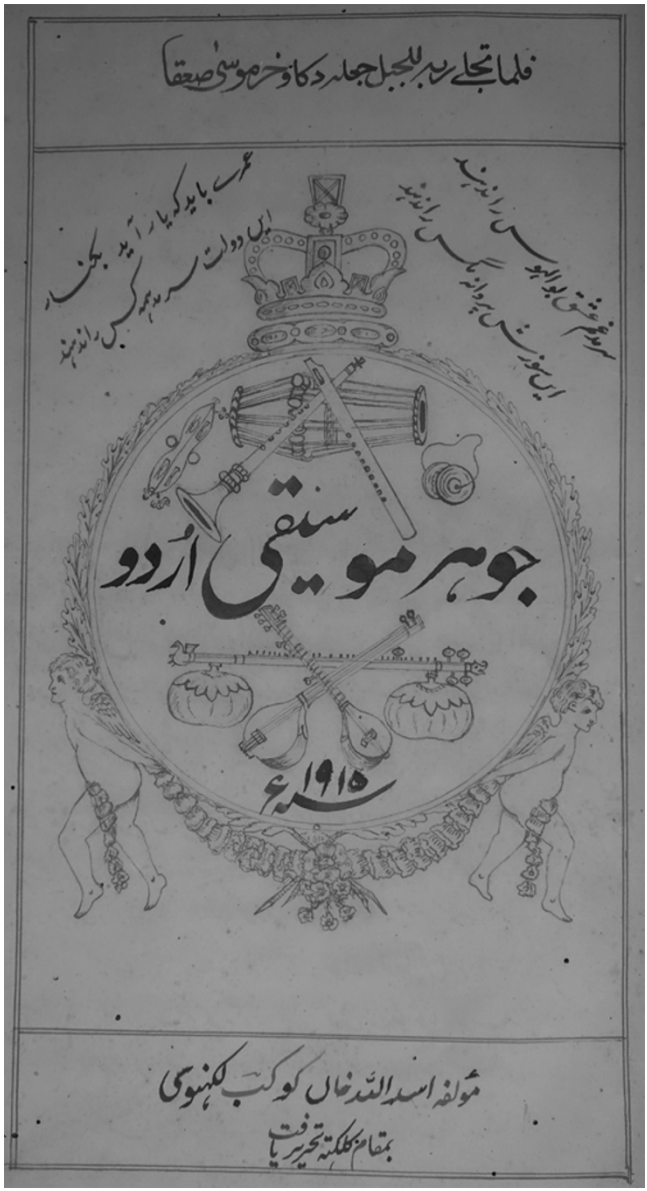

Figure 4. Title page of Asadullah Khan Kaukab's *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, dated 1915, an unpublished and unfinished manuscript in the possession of his descendant, Irfan Khan. Note the author's name appears here as Asadullah Khan 'Kaukab' Lucknowi. A further note reads: Written at Calcutta.

completed in 1932, and published in Hindi translation from 1951 to 1957. Running to more than 2,500 pages, the *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati* constitutes a monumental endeavour that codified, theorized, and textualized the entire raga system for

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हिंदुस्थानी संगीतपद्धति

हा ग्रंथ

पं० विष्णुशर्मा यांनीं लिहिला

तो

श्री गणेश प्रिंटिंग प्रेसमध्यें छापून प्रसिद्ध झाला.

भाग पहिला

सन १९१०

[सर्व हक्क स्वाधीन ठेविले आहेत.]

Figure 5. Title page of V. N. Bhatkhande's *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I (Bombay: Shri Ganesh Printing Press, 1910). Note the author's name appears here pseudonymously as Pandit Vishnusharma.

contemporary North Indian music.[45] Writing for the benefit of educated lay students in Maharashtra (his region of western India), Bhatkhande produced his texts in

[45]Bhatkhande's texts define a canon of nearly 200 ragas.

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Marathi, interspersed with untranslated Sanskrit and English. Parallel to this series, Bhatkhande also published a six-volume compendium, the *Kramik Pustak Mālikā*, comprising upwards of 1,800 vocal compositions notated in a solfege method of his own invention that has since become the accepted standard. The series was published in Marathi from 1920 to 1937 and in Hindi translation from 1953 to 1958. Together these two mammoth works—the *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati* and the *Kramik Pustak Mālikā*—have become the common basis for the raga curriculum that predominates within North India's myriad institutions of music education even today.

In the opening lines of his first Marathi volume (1910), Bhatkhande situates his project as an answer to the problem of the ignorant ustad. Engaging a fictive student in Platonic dialogue, Bhatkhande commences Volume 1 of the *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati* with the plain statement of an upsetting fact: 'You will be surprised to hear that even among our professional musicians you find many who are insufficiently informed[46] regarding the swaras [pitch entities] and ragas [modal entities].'[47] The complaint is not merely that the ustads excel in practice but lack theoretical insight. Rather, Bhatkhande insists they are 'insufficiently informed' of the normative requirements for the correct performance of the canonical ragas themselves.

Later in the same volume, Bhatkhande returns to the theme of professional musicians' inadequate knowledge, offering a historical rationale:

> Some people say that this only occurred because our music was taken into the hands of the Muslims … It is not surprising that Muslim singers would have received more honor and support under Muslim rule. Who would have taught the Sanskrit texts and their sophisticated methods to these singers? Due to religious pride, these people were not able to learn the śāstras [canonical texts] peacefully from the Hindu Sanskrit pandits.[48]

On the surface this would seem a concise statement of the binary opposition between the incurious, obstinate *Muslim* practitioner and the scholarly, peaceful *Hindu* theorist. Such a reading would certainly resonate with long-standing suspicions among critical scholars that ustads were targeted for exclusion in music reform discourse due primarily to their religion.

However, in a ground-breaking 2010 article, Katherine Schofield convincingly resituates this dichotomy as mistrust of professional musicians by knowledgeable elites established foremost by Muslim noblemen writing in the seventeenth-century Mughal court. For instance, Schofield translates Qazi Hasan (1664), who laments that 'today's singers do not perform music as it is [set out] in the treatises … many rāgas are sung

[46]Bhatkhande's phrase is 'yathāyogya māhitī nasle'.

[47]Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati* (Bombay: Shri Ganesh Printing Press, 1910), vol. I, p. 2. See also Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. I, (trans) Vishvambharnath Bhatt and Sudamaprasad Dube (Hathras: Saṅgīta Kāryālaya, 1956 [1951]), p. 1.

[48]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, p. 22, brackets added. Bhatkhande's phrase is 'te lok kā̃hī̃ pramāṇānē swadharmābhimānī asalyāmuḷē, hindu sanskṛtapaṇḍitāmpāsūn hĕśāstra śāntapaṇĩśikaṇyācā sambhav navhatā'. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. I, p. 15; Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, *Hindustānī Saṅgīta Paddhati: The System of Hindustānī Music*, Vol. I, translated and commentary by Ramesh Gangolli (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2022), p. 37; Bakhle, *Two Men*, pp. 120–121.

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in a topsy-turvy fashion and their [correct] times are unknown. God's blessings have therefore fled [the perpetrators'] households!'[49] Schofield observes that 'Such things could have been said about Hindustani musicians almost verbatim at the turn of the twentieth century by the pioneering Indian modernizer V. N. Bhatkhande.'[50] The comparison supports Schofield's larger case that the 'classicization' of Hindustani music in the nationalist era had already been undertaken centuries earlier by the Mughals. But the tone of Bhatkhande's invective constitutes a significant departure from the language of the Mughal examples. In his English public speeches he describes ustads as 'narrow-minded',[51] and in his published Marathi writings as 'illiterate' and 'imbecilic'.[52] In this regard, the intensity of opprobrium in the later period might appear to be born precisely of the colonial misrepresentation Schofield's argument seeks to decentre from the historiography.

Indeed, Bhatkhande flaunted his colonial genealogy. He prominently and approvingly references numerous English works and incudes significant sections of English-language quotations in his earliest Marathi publications. In the first volume of the *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Bhatkhande quotes at length from Jones (1792),[53] Willard (1834),[54] Day (1891),[55] and S. M. Tagore (1896).[56] In a striking performance of intertextuality, Bhatkhande reproduces the first four paragraphs of Chapter 5 from Day (1891), wherein Day cites and reproduces text from Willard (1834), which elsewhere references—and criticizes—Jones (1792). The same quotation in Bhatkhande also includes Day's own thoughts on the unfortunate centrality of 'elaborate and tedious artistic skill' in contemporary raga music: 'To a great extent this must be attributed to the art falling into the hands of illiterate *virtuosi*.'[57] Bhatkhande's sympathies with colonial evaluations of professional Hindustani musicians are undeniable.

Furthermore, Bhatkhande is remembered by his devotees as a hero of the nation. For instance, on the first page of a biography written by his primary disciple, S. N. Ratanjankar, Bhatkhande is classed alongside nationalist leaders and anticolonial freedom fighters Bal Gangadhar Tilak 'Lokmanya', 'Lala' Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Surendranath Banerjee 'Rashtraguru', Pherozeshah Mehta, and 'Mahatma' Mohandas Gandhi; Ratanjankar explicitly deems Bhatkhande 'one of these nation builders'.[58] It stands to reason, therefore, that Bhatkhande's works should reflect both colonial ideology and its mirror image, ethno-nationalism.

[49]Schofield, 'Reviving', p. 496, brackets in original.

[50]Ibid., p. 497.

[51]*The Third All-India Music Conference, Benares, December 19th to 22nd, 1919* (Benares: n.p., 1920), p. 155.

[52]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, p. 360: 'nirakshar' and 'jaḍbuddhī'.

[53]Ibid., pp. 82–83, 102, 173.

[54]Ibid., pp. 15–17, 50, 52–53, 77, 79, 81–82, 89, 90–91, 92–93.

[55]Ibid., pp. 319–320, 321, 334.

[56]Ibid., pp. 84–87. Other English texts cited by Bhatkhande in his first volume include William Chappell, *The History of Music* (London: Chappell, 1874); Frédéric Louis Ritter, *The Student's History of Music* (New York: C. H. Ditson and Co., 1884); Hermann von Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, (trans) Alexander J. Ellis (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895 [1875]); Pietro Blaserna, *The Theory of Sound in its Relation to Music* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1892 [1876]).

[57]Charles Russell Day, *The Music and Musical Instruments of Southern India and the Deccan* (London: Novello, Ewer and Co, 1891), p. 58, cited in Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, pp. 319–320.

[58]Ratanjankar, *Pandit Bhatkhande*, p. 1.

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And yet, despite his colonial intellectual moorings and his all-India activist imagination, Bhatkhande makes clear in several extended narrative anecdotes in his 1910 and 1914 volumes that the real target of his ire was not Muslims—and not ustads in general—but a certain subcategory of musician who pollutes the atmosphere for audiences, students, and professional performers alike: the fly-by-night ustad.

Testimony from a concerned ustad

In his first Marathi volume, Bhatkhande provides colourful detail on the problem of the fly-by-night ustad through an ostensible quotation from a respected (though unnamed) Muslim musician, 'a friend who was himself a famous singer of Hindustan'.[59] As represented by Bhatkhande, the righteous ustad says:

> Paṇḍit-jī,[60] I myself am a singer, and though I don't know how to read or write much, nevertheless from my long experience with learned elders, I can discern what is good and what is bad. Honestly, I don't want to criticize our singers, but I will present to you my humble opinion: a few of our singers have done a lot of damage to authentic saṅgīt [music]. I accept that even today there remain illustrious, respected singers. But they are not easy to find ... Today we see that whoever so chooses can go and start singing. Listen, peons who would tend our hookahs and dust our tamburas [drone instruments]—whom we may or may not have taught five or ten compositions—collect bits and pieces from here and there and claim to be Khan Sahabs now! As if that weren't enough, they are so busy teaching students they don't have even the spare time to eat! I'm not speaking about all the singers. There are some who are good, and their fame is widespread. But there are also many others who have only vocal technique. Sometimes I can't even recognize my own compositions when rendered by such singers! ... But blessed be the listeners! The poor saps are so awestruck by the singers' tānbāzī [melody-play] and theatrics, they keep saying 'Subhānāllah, Māshāllah' ['praise God'] etcetera ...Pandit-ji, to acquire vocal technique is one thing; to imbue your voice with ilm [science/knowledge][61] is entirely another. The listeners are not at fault; they haven't had many opportunities to hear high-level singing, so how should they know its rigours?[62]

Bhatkhande acknowledges, through the voice of his 'friend' the 'famous singer', that fly-by-night ustads may have mastered the ability to sing with speed, and thus attract uninitiated listeners and students, but because they lack the knowledge of ragas, they fail to maintain their vital melodic distinctions. As the 'famous singer' reportedly conveys to Bhatkhande: 'See that these singers can fit the same "firat" (tānbāzī)

[59]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, p. 361.

[60]A respectful term of address for a Hindu scholar or musician.

[61]The Arabic words transliterated here from the Marathi would be rendered in Urdu transliteration as subḥāna'llāh, māshā'allāh, and ʿilm.

[62]Ibid., pp. 362–363, brackets added. See also Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, pp. 437–438.

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[melody-play] into any raga! If you listen closely, you might recognize the swaras [pitch entities] and a few niyams [modal grammatical rules], but eventually you will have to wonder: what raga do they belong to?'[63]

Bhatkhande terms the careless display of vocal dexterity 'galebāzī' (throat-play) or 'tānbāzī' (melody-play), declaring in his own voice, 'the devils of tānbāzī have done a lot of damage by infiltrating our music'.[64] He reassures his fictive student, however, that the situation is untenable and unsustainable: 'our educated classes are discontent to remain at the mercy' of such musicians: 'Mere "musical gymnastics" do not thrill us anymore.'[65] Significantly, Bhatkhande makes common cause with the ustads by emphasizing the congruence of concerns shared among 'our educated classes' and traditional Muslim musicians alike. In Bhatkhande's telling, the fly-by-night singer vexes even those established hereditary professional performers who themselves possess only oral musical knowledge.

Falling prey to throat-play

In the third volume of the *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Bhatkhande continues to develop the theme of the fly-by-night ustad with an extended narrative section titled 'One student's experience of falling prey to mere throat-play'.[66] Bhatkhande claims to present the narrative 'exactly as told' to him by a friend,[67] identified only as Rao Sahab, who, transfixed by the false glory of galebāzī,[68] learns the hard way the dangers of falling in with a le-bhāgū singer.[69] Below I summarize the story at some length.[70]

Rao Sahab was a well-to-do amateur with a good singing voice who loved music but was allergic to rigour. Encouraged by the appreciation of his circle of friends, he undertakes a discipleship with a 'simple, decent, learned householder' named only as Buwa.[71] But Rao Sahab is crestfallen when Buwa—having listened patiently to his entire repertoire for one week—instructs him to 'set your personal singing aside for a while'[72] and begin systematic study of the ragas according to the śāstras, or canonical texts of Indian music. What's more, Buwa requires Rao Sahab to take detailed transcriptions of all the concepts and compositions in a notebook.

Burdened and bored by Buwa's orthodoxy, Rao Sahab is intrigued to learn of the recent arrival from the North of a professional singer, named only as Khan Sahab, who

[63]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, p. 363.

[64]Ibid., Vol. I, p. 360. In a 1930 article, Ratanjankar defines galebāzī as 'an unwarranted exhibition of practical dexterity ... out of all proportion and even at the sacrifice of the purity of the Raga and emotion expressed in the song'. Srikrishna Narayan Ratanjankar, 'Hindustani Music in the Making', *Sangeeta: A Quarterly Journal of Hindustani Music*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1930, pp. 6–7.

[65]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. I, p. 360.

[66]Ibid., Vol. III, p. 3.

[67]Ibid., p. 238.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid., p. 247.

[70]See Bakhle, *Two Men*, p. 125 for a brief summary of this episode.

[71]Ibid., p. 239. 'Buwā' is 'a term of respectful address or mention for an elderly person'. James Thomas Molesworth, *A Dictionary, Marathi and English*, 2nd edn, revised and enlarged (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1857), p. 587.

[72]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 239.

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was performing for free at his guesthouse nightly, accumulating students, and sowing panic among the established singers of the town.[73] After work one evening, Rao Sahab joins the crowd at the guesthouse where the new singer stuns all present with breathtaking vocal acrobatics and dazzling showmanship. As relayed by Bhatkhande, Rao Sahab attests,

> I had never heard such tāns [fast melodic runs] in my whole life. At times he bellowed so forcefully that the listeners seated near him had to put their fingers in their ears and say, 'My God!' A couple of times he was so filled with fire that he rose to his knees while singing! In the end [usurping his accompanist] he powerfully slammed the tabla [drums] with both hands and then for a good half-minute sat biting his lip, gazing imperiously at the audience. The people seated in front started wiping his sweat, fanning him, and opening his jacket while exclaiming, 'Ahahaha! Oh ho ho ho! This is singing. Māshāllah [God save you], Khan Sahab, you are as good as the praise we heard. Today you have outdone yourself.'[74]

Overcome by the performance, Rao Sahab immediately determines to abandon Buwa and to appoint Khan Sahab as his new guru. On the first day of lessons, Rao Sahab is relieved to learn that Khan Sahab teaches only by ear; in fact, he instructs Rao Sahab to put aside all his notated transcriptions and analytic apparatus: 'Throw all this garbage away.'[75] Rao Sahab believes he will now dive directly into the visceral excitement of tānbāzī, but instead finds that his new teacher wants him only to sit quietly and listen. When Rao Sahab requests that Khan Sahab teach him a tān, Khan Sahab replies philosophically: 'a tān is like the wind; it just comes and goes. Can anyone stop it? Even I myself don't know what I sang yesterday! This is all *Allah ke bhed, Allah hī jāne* [the mysteries of God are known only by Him]; Man's intellect will not work here.'[76]

Rao Sahab finally realizes his grave mistake in chasing only the gratification of galebāzī when a knowledgeable friend visits during one of his lessons and promptly interrogates Khan Sahab on the grammatical rules of the very ragas he was then singing. When challenged to recite the sargam (solfege) of a composition from his own repertoire, Khan Sahab embarrasses himself, naming *'Ga* in the place of *Pa,* and *Dha* in the place of *Ma*'.[77]Defeated, Khan Sahab confesses that he did not have sufficient knowledge of the swaras and hadn't learned the rules of the ragas. Khan Sahab is thus exposed as a charlatan: 'he was one of those who shouts loudly and hurls as-you-like tāns in ten or twenty popular ragas'.[78] Returning to his own voice, Bhatkhande explains to his student that the le-bhāgūs obtain minimal training and then drift from

[73]Ibid., p. 241. See also Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, trans. Lakshmi Narayan Garg (Hathras: Saṅgīta Kāryālaya, 1956), p. 170.

[74]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, pp. 241–242, brackets added.

[75]Ibid., p. 242. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 171.

[76]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 243, brackets added. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 172.

[77]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 245. This would be equivalent to misnaming sol as mi, and fa as la. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 173.

[78]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 245: "'Uḍvūn" gaḷā "phiraviṇāre" va dahāvīs prasiddha rāgānt manaḥapūt tānā "phaiṅkaṇāre"—ca ek hote'. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 173.

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place to place trying to make ends meet: 'today Madras, tomorrow Calcutta, the next day Punjab, the day after Kathiawar; like this the poor fellows keep roaming'.[79] In this telling, the fly-by-night ustad is the equivalent of a travelling snake-oil salesman, always on the move, presumably leaving a trail of dissatisfied customers in his wake.

Thus far I have emphasized the dimension of Bhatkhande's parable that depicts lebhāgūs as musically inept. Another prominent theme in the story illuminates Khan Sahab's insolence, avarice, and vice. For instance, after the first month of discipleship, in which Rao Sahab is made to sit quietly and listen, Khan Sahab begins arriving daily with his own 'two or three' companions, 'call them students or friends'.[80] Rao Sahab soon learns that, as their host, he is expected to provide for their addictions, maintaining a constant supply of pānsupārī (betel nut) and bīḍīs (cigarettes) for all of them.[81] But the ustad's habits seem to include more harmful substances as well:

> Eventually, Khan Sahab started arriving a bit intoxicated.[82] At times his speech was so incoherent and obscene that even the children of the house would laugh. Everyday half the time was wasted in aimless chit-chat. Then he started scheming for me to loan him some money, even though, beyond his salary, I had already gifted him two pairs of shoes, one warm suit of clothes, a one-rupee watch to keep track of the time, a walking stick, and a zarī [elaborately embroidered] cap.[83]

Despite their fraying relationship, Khan Sahab continues to occupy Rao Sahab's house daily where he 'gossips, gives tālīm [training][84] to his disciples, eats pānsupārī, smokes bīḍīs, and spits wherever he likes'.[85] In the midst of this misbehaviour, Khan Sahab also finds time to ridicule and insult Rao Sahab regularly.[86] In his own final statement on the episode, Bhatkhande jests with his student: the fly-by-nights 'have no proper knowledge ... they can't teach and they can't learn. But addictions they have aplenty!'[87]

The trio of defects sketched in the narrative—ignorance, ill manner, and addiction—was frequently ascribed to ustads by social and musical reformers. G. H. Deshmukh, for instance, identifies the presumption by Brahmins that professional musicians 'are stupid, have bad habits and are users of *bhāng* [cannabis]' in an 1849 Marathi article.[88] In his 1917 memoirs famed nationalist and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore recalls 'a singer of some repute retained in our establishment' who, when 'the worse for liquor', would 'rail' at a poor servant of the house.[89] Ultimately, the singer's

[79]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 247.

[80]Ibid., p. 243.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Bhatkhande's phrase is 'thoḍebhut raṅgūnahī'.

[83]Ibid., pp. 243–244, brackets added.

[84]Transliterated from the Marathi; in Urdu it would be rendered taʿlīm.

[85]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 244.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 247: 'āṇī vyasanā̃chī mātra samṛddhi!'. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 174.

[88]Michael D. Rosse, 'Music Schools and Societies in Bombay c.1864–1937', in *Hindustani Music*, (eds) Bor et al., p. 313, brackets added.

[89]Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, (trans) Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan and Company, 1917), p. 53.

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'incorrigible rudeness brought about his dismissal'.[90] Musicologist and pedagogue Balkrishna Raghunath Deodhar, writing in Marathi in the mid-twentieth century, likewise acknowledges with some regret that, among Brahmins, 'Muslim singers are generally considered uneducated. We treat them with scant courtesy because they are believed to be addicted to vices.'[91]

Such statements carry a distasteful implication of communal bigotry when wielded by Brahmin reformers against Muslim musicians. However, in the ensuing sections of this article I will endeavour to establish that these same failings—ignorance, ill manner, and addiction—were noted and decried by Muslim authors writing in Urdu beginning decades before Bhatkhande. Like Bhatkhande, they too were intent to make space in the world of Hindustani music for the uninitiated amateur.[92]

Ignorance

The argument presented repeatedly in the Urdu texts surveyed here is that a withdrawal of the elite class from musical patronage hastened a loss of quality control whereby uncultured and unrefined professional performers could claim authority. Amateur musician Mardan ʿAli Khan opens his 1863 book with an acknowledgement that, despite its noble history and towering sophistication, the art of music had been repudiated by the respectable classes that once nurtured it. He continues:

> In the hands of the contemptible classes,[93] the art became defective and wretched;[94] its scientific principles vanished to such an extent that ordinary singers should fill me—their student—with misconceptions and errors, contradicted by my own research.[95]

Another amateur musician, Sadiq ʿAli Khan (1869), proudly names and characterizes each of more than two dozen reputable ustads whom he had consulted in the course

[90]Ibid., pp. 53–54.

[91]B. R. Deodhar, *Pillars of Hindustani Music*, (trans.) Ram Deshmukh (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1993 [*circa* 1947]), p. 244.

[92]Bhatkhande freely admits his inability to read Persian or Urdu. Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 74. However, he was interested in works in these languages, and obtained some translations from friends and colleagues. Ibid., pp. 1–2. Likewise, according to V. S. Nigam (a student at the Marris College in the 1930s and 1940s), Ratanjankar took a keen interest in Imam's *Maʿdan al-Mūsīqī*. Unable to read Urdu himself, Ratanjankar used to call Nigam 'to his room once in a week to read out to him certain topics ... and he would take down his own notes. This lasted for a couple of months.' V. S. Nigam, 'Anecdotes of Dr. S.N. Ratanjankar', in *Ācārya Śrīkṛshṇa Rātanjankara 'Sujāna': Jīvanī tathā Smṛtisancaya*, (ed.) Srirang Sangoram (Bombay: Viśvasta Maṇḍala, 1993), p. 327. Nevertheless, I have seen scant evidence that Bhatkhande was inspired or influenced in any way by the earlier Urdu works.

[93]Khan's phrase is 'aqvām-e raẕīl'.

[94]Khan's phrase is 'maʿyūb aur ẏalīl'.

[95]Khan, *Ġhunchah-e Rāg*, p. 3. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 5.

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of his research.[96] Nevertheless he adds: 'I have taken no guidance from any ignoramuses.'[97] He does not go into detail, but the implication is that there was plenty of such guidance available. In the introduction to his 1871 sitar handbook, amateur musician Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan recounts that, after long interest in music, he felt compelled to pursue a discipleship, only to find that 'respectable people see the art as disgraceful[98] and have completely disavowed it'.[99] In his view, the professional musicians 'first of all, are completely uneducated,[100] and secondly, due to avarice[101] or some other reason, are guarded and stingy,[102] leaving students in confusion'.[103]

Hazrat Inayat Khan, a professional musician famous in the West for his tours of the United States in the early twentieth century and for his writings on Sufism in English, repeatedly criticizes the ustads in his 1912 Urdu treatise. He asserts that the emergence of family-based musical traditions—gharānās—undermined any universally accepted principles of 'excellence and accomplishment', instead brewing rivalries and disagreements.[104] Thus, 'people who call themselves *ustāds* in this art are revealed upon critical examination to be incompetent'.[105] Inayat Khan portrays such self-proclaimed ustads as 'cheap and low-natured',[106] lamenting that 'if anything at all is learned from them it is simply the genealogy of their ancestors or the story of their lineage'.[107]

Another professional performing artist, Asadullah Khan 'Kaukab', proffers the now-familiar narrative in his unfinished Urdu manuscript of 1915:

> Jettisoned by polite society,[108] music has been denigrated and insulted[109] for centuries. The capacity for research and investigation is completely absent among this group [i.e. contemporary professional musicians]. The saying goes, 'everyone is a lord at the wedding of a barber'.[110]

[96] See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 10.

[97] Sadiq ʿAli Khan, *Sarmāyah-e ʿIshrat maʿrūf Qānūn-e Mūsīqī* (Delhi: Maṭbaʿ-e Faiẓ-e ʿĀm, 1869), p. 3. Khan's term is 'be-ʿilm'.

[98] Khan's phrase is '"ār samajhne lage'.

[99] Khan, *Qānūn-e Sitār*, p. 6.

[100] See note 33.

[101] Khan's phrase is 'ṭamaʿ-e zar'.

[102] Khan's phrase is 'pahlū-tihī aur buḳhl'.

[103] Khan, *Qānūn-e Sitār*, p. 6. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 13.

[104] Inayat Khan, *The Minqar-i Musiqar: Hazrat Inayat Khan's Classic 1912 Work on Indian Musical Theory and Practice*, translated with introduction by Allyn Miner with Pir Zia Inayat-Khan (New Lebanon: Sulūk Press, 2016), p. 129.

[105] Allyn Miner, 'Indian Music in 1907: The *Minqār-i Musiqār* of Hazrat Inayat Khan', in *Musiktheoretisches Denken und Kultureller Kontext*, (ed.) Dörte Schmidt (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2005), p. 177, translating Inayat Khan.

[106] Khan, *Minqār-e Mūsīqār*, p. 9: 'sastī aur pastī'.

[107] Khan, *The Minqar*, p. 28.

[108] Kaukab's phrase is 'shāyistah guroh'.

[109] Kaukab's phrase is 'subuk aur żalīl'.

[110] Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, p. 167. In the final sentence, Kaukab adduces the folk saying, 'Nāʾī kī barāt meṅ sab ṭhākur hī ṭhākur', which plays on the double meaning of 'ṭhākur', a title used both by noblemen and low-caste barbers. See S. W. Fallon, *A New Hindustani-English Dictionary, with Illustrations from Hindustani Literature and Folk-lore* (Banaras: Medical Hall Press, 1879), p. 450. Here the implication is that the ustads enjoyed a level playing field of shared ignorance.

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In his treatise, Kaukab develops an account of musical decline that began centuries in the past, but was temporarily reversed in the sixteenth-century Mughal court of Akbar the Great. In this vision, it is Tan Sen, Emperor Akbar's legendary court singer, who reforms and resuscitates the corpus of ragas, constructing a canon of compositions for '360 rāginīs'.[111] Kaukab contends, however, that since the Mughal era, this effort at conservation has failed. The ustads of the art today may profess to have preserved a handful of ragas, but in fact, according to Kaukab, their standards cannot be trusted:

> ... these days the best of ustads are limited to only one hundred ragas. And even these are in name only, as they only practice a small number. Would that even those were correct! But unfortunately they have no standards, and neither do they have any authority. They continue to fight and feud among themselves. The saying 'to toot your own horn' is apt for the ustads of this art.[112]

Kaukab continues, elaborating upon the problem of maintaining standards of excellence in the absence of any authoritative body or textual grounding. Taking the example of the raga Shuddha Kalyan, Kaukab offers a thought experiment concerning the scale of the raga. He employs terminology propounded in the foundational theoretical text, the *Saṅgītaratnākara* (*circa* 1250), to explore the question of how to classify the raga as sampūrn (heptatonic), khāḍav (hexatonic), or auḍav (pentatonic).[113] Much like Bhatkhande, Kaukab regrets that there is not even agreement among the ustads on fundamental matters such as the type of scale used for a given raga:

> Imagine that one [ustad] says Shuddha Kalyan is sampūrn. And a second says, no, it is khāḍav, only nikhād [the seventh scale degree] is excluded. And a third ustad, in a heavy-eyed stupor, cries auḍav. This gentleman casts off both nikhād and madham [the fourth scale degree]. These three ustads each have constituencies now in an entrenched standoff. The outcome is zilch.[114]

In Kaukab's view, such ustads required only a sufficient number of willing students to sustain their authority, which was, in fact, rooted in nothing substantial or verifiable.

III manner

Beyond musical incompetence, Kaukab faults ustads for their 'heedlessness of refinement and etiquette'.[115] Kaukab includes a footnote to qualify this point, specifying

[111]Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, p. 166. 'Rāginī' is an archaic term for female-coded ragas.

[112]Ibid. In the final sentence above, Khan adduces the folk saying, 'apnī apnī ḍaflī aur apnā apnā rāg'.

[113]Sarangadeva, *Saṅgītaratnākara of Śāraṅgadeva: Sanskrit Text and English Translation with Comments and Notes, Chapters II–IV*, Vol. I, (eds) R. K. Shringy and Prem Lata Sharma (Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), p. 296. I have transliterated the Sanskrit terms from the Urdu.

[114]Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, 166–167.

[115]Ibid., p. 120: Kaukab's phrase is 'tahżīb aur adab'.

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that such professionals 'will be incapable of conversing with elites and nobles'.[116] Technically this should be irrelevant to their musical capacity or knowledge; it seems rather to be a social evaluation that puts them beyond the pale of polite society. Kaukab argues in this vein that Indian music is

> day by day falling into degeneracy.[117] The innovators of this art, who are no more, took the art of music—which is a purely rational science[118] and thus revolves entirely around one's comprehension—to the peak of perfection. After them, now in the hands of the professionals, it was obliterated by *illiteracy, barbarism, pride, and ill manner*.[119]

Kaukab thus suggests a correlation (if not a causation) connecting ignorance to ill manner among ustads who discredit the glorious science of raga music.

Likewise, and some 34 years in advance of Bhatkhande, Beg advises the aspiring sitar student that 'the ustads of this art ... are very unknowledgeable[120] and ill-mannered;[121] none are respectable'.[122] In the opening lines of his first chapter, before even mentioning that the ideal ustad should be 'complete in the art of sitar', Beg insists that the student should seek a 'respectable ustad'.[123] In particular, the ustad should be 'noble by birth'.[124] In a subsequent section titled 'In Praise of the Ustad', Beg again asserts that the beginner should find an ustad who is both well trained and 'well bred'.[125]

The introduction to the second part of Inayat Khan's book, 'The Practice of Music', returns to the theme of unworthy ustads: 'It's true that ill-bred people frequently misrepresent the art.'[126] He rues 'the ugly stain that despicable and ill-mannered[127] people have given to music', and advises that 'People who are well-educated and courteous will be engaged in the genteel arts to a higher degree.'[128] Inayat Khan contrasts his depiction of professional musicians with amateur musicians who are, in Allyn Miner's translation, 'well-educated and courteous', but could also be rendered as 'highly-educated and well-bred'.[129] Also note that here the adjectives modify the noun 'qaum', which is a complex word, but may be read as caste, tribe, or race.[130]

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[116]Ibid., p. 120n1: 'Rūʾasā va umarāʾ se ham-kalām hone ke nā-qābil'.
[117]Ibid., p. 119: Kaukab's phrase is 'din bar din pastī meṅ girtā jātā hai'.
[118]Ibid.: Kaukab's phrase is '"ilm-e 'aqlīah'.
[119]Ibid. See note 39.
[120]Beg's term is 'be-'ilm'.
[121]Beg's term is 'bad-salīqah'.
[122]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 14.
[123]Ibid., p. 4. Beg's phrase is 'sharīf ustād'. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 19.
[124]Ibid. Beg's phrase is 'qaum se sharīf'.
[125]Ibid., p. 14. Beg's phrase is 'qaum se bhī sharīfzādah'.
[126]Khan, *Minqār-e Mūsīqār*, p. 91: 'Yeh ṣaḥīḥ hai ki akṡar bad-waẓ' log inkī naqlen karte hain'.
[127]Ibid. See note 35.
[128]Khan, *The Minqar*, pp. 126–127.
[129]*Minqār-e Mūsīqār*, p. 91: Khan's phrase is 'ziyādah ta'līm-yāftah aur shāyistah'. See John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2004 [1884]), pp. 1015–720.
[130]See Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu*, p. 796.

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These statements from Kaukab, Beg, and Inayat Khan certainly suggest a form of class—if not caste or communal—chauvinism. Beyond characterizing the ustads as musically incompetent, here the authors additionally emphasize the lowly social origins and consequent inelegance of hereditary musicians as a whole. But does it stand to reason that social friction between the uncouth ustad and the refined elite should so exercise these writers? Does a lack of social grace really confer an 'ugly stain' upon the entire musical tradition? I will return to the hypothesis of elite bias in due course, but for now it seems some authors may have used oblique language to address a more pressing problem: drug addiction.

Addiction

Ravi Shankar identifies the problem of drug addiction as an insurmountable obstacle to learning music. Encountering a number of American aspiring sitar students who were regular users of 'marijuana' as well as 'LSD, methedrine, and heroin', Shankar 'tried to be sympathetic and explained to them that first they had to get rid of these habits before [he] could consider teaching them'.[131] During the first sitar explosion of the nineteenth century, however, it seems the problem was more often the reverse.

Beg repeatedly warns the novice sitar student that ustads are likely to be addicts and that associating with them is therefore treacherous. In an early section titled 'Statement on the Spoilage of Beginning Sitar', Beg advises his readers: 'if initially the novice comes under the control of some cannabis-house sitar player,[132] undoubtedly his own sitar playing will be spoiled'.[133] Some such musicians are excellent players, and it is possible to learn from them, Beg allows, but one must be sure to 'avoid their habits', as they are—again—'usually addicted to intoxicants, and from them you may even get hooked, and spoil your mind as well. God save you from such company.'[134] Beg prominently and pointedly lists the drugs of choice of such ustads, noting in the first line of a subsequent section that 'the ustads of this art are usually drug addicts,[135] which certainly includes opium-eaters and madak- and chanḍū-smokers'.[136]

Madak and chanḍū (also spelled chāndū) were specific forms of smokable opium preparations associated with the lower classes of society.[137] Chanḍū in particular was known to be consumed in opium dens and was thus especially disreputable.[138] In the famed 1899 Urdu novel *Umrā'o Jān Adā*, the same drug is associated with courtesans and ustads. In one scene, the titular courtesan thanks God for protecting her from chanḍū,

[131]Shankar, *My Music*, p. 95, brackets added.

[132]Beg's phrase is 'kisī bhangeṛḳhāne sitār-bāz'. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 19.

[133]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 4.

[134]Ibid., p. 6.

[135]See note 41.

[136]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, pp. 13–14.

[137]See John F. Richards, 'Opium and the British Indian Empire: The Royal Commission of 1895', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2002, pp. 375–420.

[138]See Archibald Constable, *Cartoons from the Oudh Punch* (Lucknow: Oudh Punch Office, 1881); Mushirul Hasan, *Wit and Humour in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2007), p. 153.

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even while admitting that she regularly takes edible forms of opium on the advice of a doctor.[139]

Kaukab contributes a philosophical discourse on the problem of drug addiction among ustads. He writes,

> Pay heed that such people can be the most dangerous of enemies to a noble art. As spoken by a wise sage, 'from association there is influence'. Since these people's like-minded companions are usually opium-eaters, madak- and chāṇḍū-smokers, drunkards, and rogues, to what extent can the science of music—which is purely auditory and which revolves around the mind—remain healthy? If his own mind is disordered, his own soul endangered, well then what will be the effect of his music on another's soul? Music practically mesmerizes. If the conjurer is himself stupefied, how will he enchant his listeners?[140]

Here Kaukab proposes that the problem of drug addiction is not merely a social ill, but is directly detrimental to the musical capacity of the addict. Significantly, Kaukab's list of drugs is nearly identical to those named by Beg, suggesting a shared sense across time (1876 to 1915) and space (Lahore to Calcutta, nearly 3,000 miles by road) of the scourge of the drug-addicted ustad.[141]

After noting the great likelihood of encountering such an ustad, Beg counsels his readers:

> Now I say to the beginners, if you should meet an ustad such as your humble servant has just defined, it will be necessary and appropriate to tolerate his ignorance[142] as far as possible. But if you see that this person is an incorrigible addict and imbecile,[143] and once you have tried your best to reform him, then close your house to him for ten to fifteen days and cease your own sitar practice, and if that ustad complains, it will be necessary to put him off with some excuse. And better yet, you should not learn sitar from one such as him because from such company perhaps your mind, too, could become disordered; indeed, the habit of drinking liquor or taking any other intoxicant should certainly be avoided. If one does not avoid it, then beyond the harms your humble servant has already defined, one will achieve nothing, but will incur many additional injuries: once addiction has set in, one will certainly become indecent,[144] and, on the one hand, feel ashamed[145] before everyone in the community, and, on the other hand, suffer the

[139]Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa, *Umrāʾo Jān Adā* (Lucknow: Munshi Gulab Singh and Sons Press, 1899), p. 27.

[140]Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, p. 120.

[141]Miner notes that Beg resided in both Lahore and 'Bans Bareli, between Delhi and Lucknow'. Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 16. It is possible Kaukab based his comments on Beg's writings, but I have not seen evidence sufficient to suggest this hypothesis.

[142]Beg's term is 'jahālat'.

[143]Beg's phrase is 'nihāyat hī nashe-bāz aur ajhal'.

[144]Beg's term is 'be-ḥayā'.

[145]Beg's term is 'nādim'.

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> loss of reputation and wealth, and finally endure excessive worldly humiliation. It is suggested to avoid an ustad who himself is ruined.[146]

Beg offers a further fictive anecdote to dramatize the problem of the addicted ustad:

> Some ustad got a new shāgird [student] and started going [to the student's home] to teach him. On the first day, when the time came to teach and the shāgird was seated before him holding a sitar, when he recognized that this student wanted to learn his compositions, then he said, 'Son, I'm not sufficiently intoxicated at the moment, so I'm not feeling well. Get me a little high'.[147] He said what he wanted was for the shāgird to bring him a little opium. He brought him one ānnā [1/16 of a rupee] of opium, which the ustad dissolved [in water] and drank. Next, he said, 'Son, there is a bad taste in my mouth. I would like some sweets as well'.[148] He brought him one ānnā of sweets. Next, he requested roṭī [bread]. After eating the roṭī, he felt better and said, 'So now learn', and taking a sitar in his hands, recited the syllables: 'ḍiraḍā, ḍiraḍā, rā[149]—play it just like me'. The shāgird made his best guess and slapped haphazardly at the frets. The ustad again said, 'ḍiraḍā, ḍiraḍā, rā—follow how my finger moves and play it just like that'. When an hour or two passed, the shāgird said, 'Ustad, it's not coming the way you played it'. So, the ustad said again, 'play it just like me'.[150]

Here Beg cautions his readers that if an addicted ustad is unwilling to teach prior to his fix, he is still unlikely to be able to teach even having satisfied his craving for the drug. This conundrum is dramatized by the humorous image of the ustad (after numerous petty demands) merely repeating the same instruction—telling the student to copy his fingering and recitation of the right-hand strokes—oblivious to the student's complete failure to grasp the lesson.

In praise of the ustad

Even as the authors cited in this article reject the false claims to authority of half-trained, ill-mannered, and addicted fly-by-nights, their texts nevertheless venerate the authentic ustad. Writing in Urdu around 1858, courtier and scholar Muhammad Karam Imam Khan declares that he is 'yet to see a musician who is not greedy and selfish'.[151] But his respect for the qualified master is evident as he scoffs at the 'demented

[146]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 14.

[147]Beg's phrase is 'thoṛā nashah pilāʾo'.

[148]In his 1881 book on the cartoons of a popular satirical magazine published in Lucknow, Scottish writer Archibald Constable notes that 'habitual users of opium always, if they can afford it, eat something sweet after they have partaken of the drug, so that its peculiar sickly taste may leave their palate, and they may thus derive the greatest amount of pleasure from the noxious habit which has enslaved them, in most cases, for ever'. Constable, *Cartoons*, p. 6.

[149]A standard right-hand plucking pattern played on the sitar: *in-out-in—in-out-in—out* (♫ ♩ ♫ ♩ ♩).

[150]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 7.

[151]Hakim Mohammad Karam Imam, 'Melody Through the Centuries', (trans.) Govind Vidyarthi, *Sangeet Natak Akademi Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 12, 1959, p. 13. This author is better known (due to the 1959 translations of parts of his work) as Hakim Mohammad Karam Imam. I will refer to him as Imam.

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half-wits' who arrogate to themselves the title of 'ustad'.[152] Similarly, Beg proclaims: 'It should be clear that many people train their hands a little, learn some laydārī [rhythm], and somehow feel they know sitar. When five or ten ignoramuses,[153] who know nothing of this art, praise [such an individual] to the skies, he begins to claim he is an ustad.'[154] Despite his thoroughgoing condemnation of professional Hindustani musicians, Hazrat Inayat Khan, too, evinces abiding respect for the title of 'ustad'. With the collapse of a textual basis for Hindustani music, he writes, 'whosoever managed to produce high and low notes began to consider themselves *ustād*s'.[155] Even Kaukab bemoans that 'everyone thinks himself an ustad; they all try to be the Tan Sen of their time—the Bārbad and Nagīsa[156] of their era—and they take it as an insult to follow anyone's instruction'.[157]

Beyond an implied respect for the archetypal master musician, the authors in this article make explicit reference to past and present ustads by name. Likewise, while the earliest known complaints levelled against professional musicians in India are found in the treatises of Mughal courtiers, these same sources venerate the master performers of their time. For instance, an officer in the court of Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), Nawab Saif Khan 'Faqirullah', in his 1666 treatise contends that musicians of his day have so neglected the rules and regulations established in the canonical texts that the ragas no longer achieved their intended effects.[158] Yet he casts no blame for this decline on the ustads themselves; instead Faqirullah reserves the term 'ustad' for 'one who is not only a master of the profession but also of the art'.[159] Faqirullah furthermore celebrates dozens of named performers as ʿaṭṭāʾīs. Whereas this term came to mean 'amateur' or 'nonhereditary', in Faqirullah's time it instead denoted a musician who lacked theoretical knowledge (ʿilm) but excelled in practice (ʿamal).[160] Far from an insult, even Tan Sen was an ʿaṭṭāʾī—not an ustad—in Faqirullah's estimation.[161]

Even colonial writers praised the expert ustads in their midst. Sir William Jones has been criticized for establishing an enduring fascination with archaic Sanskrit texts on music and for devaluing the contributions of Muslim performing artists, yet he acknowledges in his 1792 treatise that 'oriental musick' (read: raga music) in his own time was 'known and practised … not by mercenary performers only, but even by *Muselmans* and *Hindus* of eminent rank and learning'.[162] Augustus Willard (usually the second Great Man in the history of modern scholarship on Indian music) characterizes

[152]See note 32.

[153]Beg's term is 'jāhil'.

[154]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, pp. 16–17.

[155]Khan, *The Minqar*, p. 129.

[156]Barbad and Nagisa were celebrated sixth-century Persian court musicians.

[157]Kaukab, *Jauhar-e Mūsīqī*, p. 167.

[158]Nawab Saif Khan Faqirullah, *Tarjuma-i-Mānakutūhala & Risāla-i-Rāg Darpan*, translated and edited, with a commentary by Shahab Sarmadee (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), pp. 78–79. See also Schofield, 'Reviving', p. 496; Aziz Ahmad, 'The British Museum Mīrzānāma and the seventeenth century Mīrzā in India', *Iran*, vol. 13, 1975, pp. 101–107.

[159]Faqirullah, *Tarjuma*, p. 264n18.

[160]Ibid., pp. 182–185.

[161]Ibid.

[162]William Jones, 'On the Musical Modes of the Hindoos', *Asiatick Researches*, vol. 3, 1792, p. 62.

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Hindustani music 'professors' as uniformly illiterate in his 1834 book, but in his view—as in Bhatkhande's—illiteracy alone does not invalidate an ustad's claim to mastery.[163] For instance, Willard writes that the bīn (a plucked, fretted zither) 'in the hands of an expert performer is perhaps little inferior to a fine-toned piano'.[164] In the concluding lines of his book, Willard reflects that 'several practical musicians of both sexes are even now to be met with, who, although ignorant of the theory of music, may for extent, sweetness, pliability, and perfect command of the voice, rival some of the first-rate minstrels of Europe'.[165] In particular Willard names 'Mohummud Khan and Serho Baee, amongst others whom I have heard' as 'living examples of superior vocal powers', and 'Khoosh-hal Khan and Oomrao Khan' among the masters of 'instrumental execution'.[166] Thus, while bemoaning their ignorance of theory, Willard nevertheless credits a number of ustads—significantly, by name—as expert musicians of a high calibre.

Introducing his own teachers, Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan lavishes supreme praise upon his primary preceptor, Biba Jan Sahiba, a female courtesan and sitarist:

> What colour and power in her hand! Her ascents and descents transformed her audience into a picture of astonishment, conjuring both the sweetness of the monsoon season and the atmosphere of the most rarified courtly recital.[167]

Invoking two patron saints of North Indian music, Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan continued: 'It is a pity that Tan Sen is no more; he would have kissed her hand. And if Baiju had heard her, he would have lost himself.'[168] Far from a narrative of decline, here the amateur disciple classes his own teacher—significantly, a courtesan—among the legendary forefathers of the Hindustani tradition.

Imam cites Faqirullah extensively, replicates much of his text regarding prominent musicians of the past, and also follows the practice of introducing the well-known musicians of his own day, extolling numerous 'great Ustads' he encountered in the nineteenth-century royal court of Lucknow and elsewhere.[169] Imam celebrates even imperfect ustads who demonstrate integrity and character. For example, he discusses an ustad named Murad Khan, noting that beyond his musical skill, 'As a person also

[163]Jairazbhoy notes the scholarly consequences of 'all the scurrilous attacks on Muslim musicians by Captain Willard and others'. Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, 'What Happened to Indian Music Theory? Indo-Occidentalism?', *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2008, p. 353. However, as Scarimbolo has shown, while Willard pilloried Muslim *'rulers* and *princes*' and attacked 'illiterate performers', he 'never identified the practitioners he was critical of as Muslim'. Justin Scarimbolo, 'Brahmans beyond Nationalism, Muslims beyond Dominance: A Hidden History of North Indian Classical Music's Hinduization', PhD thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2014, pp. 319–320, emphasis in original.

[164]Willard, *A Treatise*, p. 85.

[165]Ibid., p. 108.

[166]Ibid.

[167]Khan, *Qānūn-e Sitār*, p. 7. See also Miner, *Sitar and Sarod*, p. 103; Miner, 'Enthusiasts', pp. 13–14.

[168]Khan, *Qānūn-e Sitār*, p. 8.

[169]Imam, 'Melody', p. 18.

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he is very good'.[170] Imam highlights the decency of Murad Khan through an anecdote wherein Imam himself offers a correction when the ustad misnames a note while singing in solfege before a small assembly. The ustad responds reasonably and humbly to Imam's rebuke: 'I'm only human.'[171] Imam applauds the greatness of this ustad in spite of the error: 'This misstep does not detract at all from his mastery [ustādī].'[172] In fact, the purpose of the story was precisely to establish that Murad Khan was not only a qualified musician, but a virtuous human being.

Bhatkhande and the venerable ustad

To conclude the theme of praise of the masterful musician, I will return to the writings of V. N. Bhatkhande, whose efforts to distinguish the fly-by-night ustad from the venerable ustad exceed all other authors considered here, and have been, I believe, underappreciated in the scholarly record. Along the same lines as Imam's story of Murad Khan above, Bhatkhande includes in his third Marathi volume (1914) a narrative anecdote concerning 'a famous Muslim singer' who auditioned before the Gayan Uttejak Mandali committee for permission to hold a 'mujra' (performance) at their institution in Bombay.[173]

Bhatkhande was present on the committee, and recalls that the singer first presented Raga Purvi, 'and he sang beautifully'.[174] But when he began his second piece, confusion erupted. The ustad was apparently attempting to sing Raga Jaitshri, but 'did not have refined knowledge of the rules of Jaitshri'.[175] When the ustad noticed the committee murmuring and conferring during his performance, he stopped short, laid down his tanpura, and angrily questioned the committee: 'What raga did I sing? Can any of you recognize it? Any old singer cannot sing this raga.'[176]

At this point Bhatkhande's fictive student interrupts the narrative in shock: 'How dare[177] he ask such a rude[178] question.'[179] Perhaps Bhatkhande believed his readers might assume the worst of a Muslim ustad. But in the dialogue he immediately corrects the student: 'His words did not make any of us angry, for how was it his fault? He sang

[170]Ibid., p. 20.

[171]Khan, *Maʿdan al-Mūsīqī*, p. 36.

[172]Ibid.

[173]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 234. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 166. Ratanjankar notes that Bhatkhande joined the Gayan Uttejak Mandali at the age of about 24 in 1884. The organization held concerts of 'all great Ustads, resident in Bombay or coming from outside'. Ratanjankar, *Pandit Bhatkhande*, p. 8.

[174]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 234. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 166.

[175]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 234. Note that Bhatkhande spells the name of this raga 'Jetśrī'. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 167.

[176]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 235. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 167.

[177]Bhatkhande's term is 'dhairya'.

[178]Bhatkhande's term is 'uddhaṭa'.

[179]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 235. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 167.

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as he was taught. His guru may not have taught him according to our standards; so, what was his crime?'[180]

Back in the narrative frame of the story, an erudite committee member engages the ustad in a forensic modal analysis that leads the singer to realize that his presentation did not conform to the theoretical structure of any existing raga, that it was in fact a distorted rendition of Jaitshri. The fictive student (again, perhaps a surrogate for Bhatkhande's readers) assumes the ustad must have been flummoxed, perhaps infuriated, by the cerebral nature of the analytic enquiry, but Bhatkhande contradicts him yet again:

> He was a very experienced and open-minded individual, and thus did not get angry at all. He took our friend's hands in his and said: 'Sāhab! [Good sir!] I was verily singing Jaitshri. Now who will explain to us the standards and rules of this raga in the systematic manner that you have done? We sing that which has come down to us through the paramparā [tradition]. If someone has introduced an error along the way, how should we know about it?'[181]

In the story the ustad is sufficiently intelligent to acknowledge his error, he is prepared to accept and honour a systematic rationale, and he regrets that his own knowledge, being only oral, does not include any system for verification outside of his own tradition. Bhatkhande anticipates the reader's assumption (through the rhetorical device of the student) that a hereditary ustad would not be amenable to conceptual discursive analysis of his own performance, but insists, to the contrary, that this ustad was impressed and convinced by the methods of modern music theory. Bhatkhande seals his positive impression of the ustad by concluding the story as follows: 'That singer held his mujra in the Mandali, and it was well received.'[182] One can only conclude that Bhatkhande was capable of honouring even an uneducated ustad.

Significantly, in the parable of falling prey to throat-play, Bhatkhande emphasizes the fly-by-night ustad's very lack of hereditary enculturation. Having discovered the ustad's musical incompetence, Rao Sahab's prosecutorial friend enquires as to Khan Sahab's 'gharana and his gurus'.[183] Though the answer is left unstated, Rao Sahab realizes that 'this ustad was absolutely not of a high tradition'.[184] Thus, the fly-by-night ustad is distinguished from knowledgeable ustads who descend from established musical families. In Bhatkhande's analysis the fly-by-nights 'do not have proper knowledge,

[180]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 235. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 167.

[181]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 237. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 168.

[182]Ibid.

[183]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 245. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 173.

[184]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 245. Bhatkhande's phrase is 'he ustād uttam sampradāyāce muḷīñc nasūn'. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 173.

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gharana [recognized socio-musical identity], paramparā [continuity of tradition], or tālīm [rigorous training]'.[185]

Bhatkhande sneers at the le-bhāgūs' makeshift musical education: 'for them, tālīm means learning somewhere for a month, then somewhere else for two months, and then somewhere else for six months. What variety they have!'[186] The sarcasm underlines Bhatkhande's respect for the hereditary tradition: a budding ustad from an established gharana would have acquired all the knowledge he needed at home.[187] Risking redundancy, Bhatkhande continues: 'I'm not talking about the great gharānedārs.[188] Their fame is vouchsafed from birth and they are employed in the grandest royal courts.'[189] His admiration is palpable: 'the talent of accomplished singers[190] speaks for itself. Wherever they go they are respected.'[191]

A possible objection that could be raised here is that Bhatkhande's parable of Rao Sahab and the fly-by-night ustad—named only 'Khan Sahab'—conceals an anti-Muslim element. It is notable that throughout the narrative, Khan Sahab's quotations are rendered not in Marathi, but in Urdu-inflected Hindi. The vices of chewing pān, smoking, and spitting are all foreign to Rao Sahab, and indeed Khan Sahab is a novelty in the town—presumably in Maharashtra—precisely because he is an ustad 'from North India'.[192] These elements mark Khan Sahab as 'other' and could reasonably be subsumed under the label 'Muslim'. On the other hand, at the conclusion of the narrative, Bhatkhande pointedly illustrates that competence has nothing to do with religious community, offering as an example his own guru, Muhammad ʿAli Khan: 'I revered and loved him tremendously.'[193] Bhatkhande immediately juxtaposes another of his gurus, identified not by name but only as 'a Hindu dhrupadiya', acknowledging that he had great respect for him, too.[194] Here Bhatkhande seems to emphasize the greater magnitude and significance of his bond with his named Muslim teacher, as against an unnamed but still valued Hindu.

At the Second All-India Music Conference in 1918, Bhatkhande reiterates the dysfunction introduced to Hindustani music by 'illiterate professionals',[195] but in the same breath duly acknowledges that 'the Music of Northern India passed through considerable changes during the time of the Mahomedan rule in India ... It is rightly claimed that our Indian music reached its high water mark in those happy times.'[196]

[185]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 247. See also Bhatkhande, *Bhātkhaṇḍe Saṅgīta-Śāstra*, Vol. III, p. 174.

[186]Ibid.

[187]Williams notes that scholars have overemphasized the insularity of the gharana system, but Bhatkhande prized the purity and authenticity of knowledge and style concentrated in exclusive lineages. Williams, *The Scattered Court*, p. 11.

[188]Inheritors of a gharana tradition.

[189]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 247.

[190]Bhatkhande's phrase is 'uttam gāyak'.

[191]Bhatkhande, *Hindusthānī Saṅgītapaddhati*, Vol. III, p. 246.

[192]Ibid., p. 241.

[193]Ibid.

[194]Ibid.

[195]*Second All-India Music Conference*, p. 9.

[196]Ibid., p. 8.

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Even in the hands of 'illiterate professionals … So long as these custodians were competent men, the art did not suffer very much.'[197] Here we find a straightforward statement of Bhatkhande's priorities: the problem with professional musicians was not their religion, nor even their lack of formal education, but simply their incompetence, their inability to maintain a high standard. Bhatkhande is ready to embrace even explicitly 'illiterate' musicians so long as they maintain his exacting requirements.

Counterarguments

Before concluding, I will address a few further potential objections. First, why should we read the texts collected here as faithful documents of eye-witness testimony? Bhatkhande's allegations of ustads' incompetence and intransigence are generally dismissed in the scholarship today as the emanations of an incipient Hindu nationalism. In this view, representations of ustads as a detriment to the national music served Bhatkhande's political purposes and should thus be read as a rhetorical strategy and not as documentary evidence.

As Schofield reveals, the ill-informed ustad was also a character type in Persian treatises of the Mughal court as early as the mid-seventeenth century.[198] In the early nineteenth century Willard contributes significant colour to the vocabulary of invective—'the most immoral set of men on earth', etc.—but the possibility remains that his figuration of the ustad reflects not only his own experiences among musicians but his literary continuity with earlier Mughal writers on music as well.[199] Imam had read the same Persian texts and, in addition to detailing musical life in Lucknow as he knew it, his book propounds canonical tropes of the śāstric treatises, including the narrative of musical decline developed by the Mughal writers. The subsequent Urdu authors may have propagated these same folkloric tropes of the illegitimate ustad and also responded to a new incentive of their own: book sales. They were after all presenting their own published texts as the only viable alternative to the vexation of obtaining knowledge from professional musicians. Such authors were thus hardly impartial on the shortcomings of the ustads. In these works, then, we might posit the transformation of Mughal narrative tropes into a marketing strategy. Bhatkhande's own anti-ustadi writings may thus be read as a twentieth-century nationalist extension of a Mughal literary motif already instrumentalized in the nineteenth century as a bogeyman in the service of popular authors.

Furthermore, as anthropologist Jonathan Glasser reveals through his work on Andalusi music traditions of North Africa, the embodied master necessarily presents a 'conundrum' to the science-minded enthusiast.[200] The term 'shaykh' in Andalusi music, much like 'ustad' in Hindustani music, denotes both an honorific and an

[197]Ibid., p. 9.

[198]Schofield, 'Reviving', pp. 496–497.

[199]See Joep Bor, 'Three Important Essays on Hindustani Music', *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society*, vol. 36, 2006, p. 9; Schofield, 'Reviving', p. 508.

[200]Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusi Music in Urban North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 200.

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occupation;[201] the shaykh is thus 'an ambiguous figure'[202] 'associated with authority but also backwardness'.[203] The possession of esoteric knowledge by the shaykh—the very reason he is attractive to the student—leads to imputations of 'avarice and secrecy' and leaves him often 'held in reproach by those around him'.[204] Thus, 'the embodied authority of the *shaykh* is double-edged: in order to save the repertoire, the person saving it requires the cooperation of the *shaykh*; at the same time, the repertoire must be saved precisely from the *shaykh*'.[205] In this view, accounts of ustads as ignorant and venal may be read as reflections on the very nature of genealogically transmitted knowledge. Given all these caveats, and accepting the presence of long-established literary tropes, why should we credit my claim that narratives of the fly-by-night ustad may also be grasped as accurate depictions of observed behaviour?

It is true that the texts accessed here do not provide names, locations, and biographical details concerning the alleged charlatans, and we thus lack any primary historical evidence to adjudicate the charge in any particular case. But there is intuitive logic in the notion that numerous authors over many decades in various languages and disparate regions produced similar narratives because in fact they encountered undertrained, uncouth ustads. Many musicians in the Mughal courts did not read Sanskrit and pursued their training in the absence of textual authority. After the final collapse of the Mughal empire in 1858, peripatetic musicians of various levels of expertise most likely claimed mastery they could not substantiate in search of livelihoods. The explosion in popularity of the sitar in the middle of the nineteenth century drove a spike in demand for music instruction and thereby created a vacuum that was conceivably filled in part by underprepared ustads. Some must have been addicts. None among our authors pretends that such defects characterized *all ustads*. Each author recognizes and celebrates the mastery of specific ustads, living and dead.

Yet even if we accept that many professional musicians were perceived contemporaneously as charlatans, why should we credit those judgements? Recognizing significant discrepancies among gharana traditions, couldn't one man's fly-by-night ustad be another's master musician? The conventional critique of Bhatkhande is that his project produced the effect of 'ignorance' by overlaying the expectation of a single coherent tradition on diverse, distinct lineages of professional musicians. If the measure of merit in Hindustani music rests on insular, family-based traditions, how can we embrace as 'objective' any evaluation originating outside of that system? In this view, there never was a singular raga tradition available to individual amateurs in the nineteenth century; they encountered instead incommensurable claims—each correct in its own context—and misread the dissonance as a sign of ignorance and illegitimacy.

But again, even rudimentary errors in raga knowledge—misnaming notes, inconsistent grammar—do not necessarily alarm our authors. Both Imam and Bhatkhande offer respectful vignettes of humble, honest—even illiterate—ustads who admit their own weaknesses. In any case, it is unnecessary to posit that the texts depict ill-mannered,

[201] Ibid., p. 71.
[202] Ibid., p. 56.
[203] Ibid., p. 200.
[204] Ibid., p. 76.
[205] Ibid., p. 142.

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incompetent, self-proclaimed ustads as a majority, or even a sizeable minority, among musicians; given the shortage in qualified ustads available to amateurs, it seems likely that our authors and their readers might have suffered under one or two such instructors in the course of their music education. Even on the margins, the capacity of the fly-by-night ustad to flourish within the world of North Indian art music must have been maddening both for the aspiring student and for the visionary nationalist.

Another important consideration concerns the matter of caste prejudice. Among the terms used to address and categorize professional musicians, several of our authors use 'mīrāśī', a controversial and polysemic epithet generally referring to a low-status caste of Muslim hereditary musicians—players of the tabla and sarangi—who specialized in the subordinate musical role of accompaniment. Several scholars have argued persuasively that the discounting of mīrāśīs' musical knowledge may reflect caste bigotry more than aesthetic values.[206] But in the sources examined here, it is not clear that the fly-by-night ustad is necessarily a mīrāśī.

In fact, these texts complicate our understanding of the term: Mardan ʿAli Khan notes in passing in his 1863 book that 'mīrāsīs, ṭawāʾifs, and kalāwants share the custom of touching their ears upon the name of Tan Sen'.[207] 'Ṭawāʾif' refers to prestigious female professional courtesans, while 'kalāwant' designates pedigreed vocal soloists of the highest order. Despite the vital distinctions among these categories—indeed mīrāśī and kalāwant are understood today as the low and high poles of a sociomusical hierarchy—the formulation here assimilates them as hereditary professionals. Similarly, in his 1871 text, Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan complains that the only available music instructors are 'usually mīrāśīs, kalāwants, etcetera'.[208] As in Mardan ʿAli Khan's text, here Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan uses the term mīrāśī along with kalāwant to reference hereditary professional musicians generally. His use of the word vaġhairah ('etcetera') suggests that his intent is not to distinguish between these communities but to aggregate them. Perhaps by this time so many mīrāśīs had refashioned themselves as kalāwants that some authors no longer bothered to assert the erstwhile dichotomy.

Likewise, in his 1876 book, Beg refers repeatedly to mīrāśīs, yet without great clarity. For instance, Beg notes that 'there are ʿaṭāʾīs [non-hereditary musicians] these days with better knowledge than direct lineage mīrāsīs'.[209] In this formulation, Beg seems to uphold the mīrāśī as paramount among hereditary musicians. However, in another section he addresses sitar makers and repairmen who impersonate teachers, condemning them as 'the distinct enemies of both the sitar ustad and the mīrāsī, too'.[210] The distinction here between 'ustad' and 'mīrāsī' is ambiguous, but since Beg includes non-hereditary musicians in the category of ustad, his use of 'mīrāsī' again perhaps suggests

[206]Neuman, *The Life of Music*; Neuman, 'A House of Music'; Joep Bor, 'The Voice of the Sarangi: An Illustrated History of Bowing in India', *National Centre for the Performing Arts Quarterly Journal*, vol. 15, no. 3–4, 16, no. 1, 1986/1987, pp. 1–183; Suhail Yusuf, 'Bridge Overtones: Lessons from the Sarangi', PhD thesis, Wesleyan University, 2024.

[207]Khan, *Ġhunchah-e Rāg*, p. 132. Note that Khan employs the alternate spelling 'mīrāsī', using Urdu's *sīn* instead of *se*. 'Kalāwant' is rendered as 'kalānont'. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 5.

[208]Khan, *Qānūn-e Sitār*, p. 6. 'Kalāwant' is here rendered as 'kalānot'. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 13.

[209]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 6. Beg's phrase is 'ḳhāṣ jo ḳhāndānī mīrāsī'. See also Miner, 'Enthusiasts', p. 20. Note that Beg uniformly uses the alternate spelling 'mīrāsī'.

[210]Beg, *Naġhmah-e Sitār*, p. 9.

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a blanket term for hereditary professionals. Along these lines, Beg recommends that once a student has identified a suitable ustad, they should pursue a discipleship with him 'whether he is 'aṭā'ī or mīrāsī'.[211] One final example from Beg further complicates the matter. In his discussion of the difficulty of acquiring a capable sitar teacher, he insists from personal experience that once a musician 'has become a mīrāsī', he will certainly never teach a student outside of his own family.[212] In the common usage of the term, one can only be born into a mīrāśī family, not become one out of free choice.

Despite the conflation of 'mīrāśī' with the general category of hereditary professional musicians, or the usage of the term in ways that have since become mysterious, it remains possible that many of the le-bhāgūs were in fact mīrāśīs self-reinvented as ustads of sitar and vocal music. It is true that in their Urdu texts many of our authors imply or outright announce that the aspiring enthusiast should seek a 'well bred' or 'respectable' ustad, and there is little doubt that caste, class, and occupational hierarchies prejudiced their view, but there is no evidence to suggest that they would have disqualified a low born or mīrāśī ustad on the basis of his caste or community alone. Even if in the minds of our authors le-bhāgūs were generally mīrāśīs, this does not mean they believed all mīrāśīs presenting themselves as available ustads were necessarily le-bhāgūs.

Finally, if qualified ustads were conflated in the popular imagination with charlatans and rogues, wouldn't the master musicians themselves have objected? I have already introduced the voices of Hazrat Inayat Khan and Asadullah Khan 'Kaukab', both eminent hereditary professional musicians of their day. Another such activist was Tasadduq Husain Khan, celebrated ustad of the Agra Gharana, who offered a speech in Urdu at Bhatkhande's first conference in 1916. The author of the conference report writes, 'He began by comparing the present condition of Indian Music with that of a man in the throes of death, a man whose death was expected any moment. He expressed satisfaction, however, that attempts like the present Conference were being made to breathe new life into it.'[213] Tasadduq Husain Khan was known as a scholar; in his speech he suggests that certain Persian treatises in his possession may benefit the cause of music reform.[214] While there is no known record of his exact verbiage, it is not outlandish to posit that Tasadduq Husain Khan was personally invested in the vision of a system of gatekeeping that would preserve the honour of his profession.

Likewise, according to Janaki Bakhle, famed vocalist (and known mīrāśī), Abdul Karim Khan announced in a 1910 speech marking the founding of his new music institution that 'music was in a state of decline … because of its association with indolence and vice. He had no quarrels with the attempt to cleanse it and turn it respectable again.'[215] Finally, I will invoke Hamid Husain Khan, hereditary musician of Itawa, hired

[211]Ibid., p. 5.

[212]Ibid., p. 179.

[213]*Report of the First All-India Music Conference: Held in Baroda, March 20th to 25th, 1916* (Baroda: Baroda Printing Works, 1917), p. 56.

[214]Ibid. See also Vilayat Husain Khan, *Saṅgītagyō ke sāsmaraṇ* (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1959), p. 118; N. Jayavanth Rao, *Sajan Piya: A Biography of Ustad Khadim Husain Khan* (Bombay: Sajan Milap, 1981), p. 29.

[215]Bakhle, *Two Men*, p. 234.

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in 1931 as the first sitar instructor at Bhatkhande's college in Lucknow. In the preface to his own sitar instruction book, published in 1932, Hamid Husain Khan writes, 'Today the science once practiced by Tan Sen, whose tāns moved even the mountains and earth, has arrived at its lowest state. Man's distaste for it and the absence of excellent books on it could be the causes of its decline.'[216] It stands to reason that these and many other prominent performing artists embraced the respectability politics of the music reform movement in part because their own reputations were threatened by the unchecked proliferation of ill-trained, ill-mannered, drug-addled rogues calling themselves ustads.

Conclusion

Any text that imputes illegitimacy to the ustads of Hindustani music is likely to be read today as the product of Anglo-Victorian mores adopted by the rising indigenous elite of British India. In this interpretation, Brahmin music reformers fallaciously cast the ustad as an ill-suited usurper of an ancient—and properly Hindu—tradition, in league with 'dancing girls', and thus a stain on the honour of the nation. Such depictions are generally dismissed as misrepresentations fundamentally incongruous with the exacting standards of excellence maintained among India's Muslim hereditary professional musicians. I have tried to establish in this article the evidence for another interpretation: the ambivalent meaning of 'ustad'—both master and menace—was also a consequence of the heterogeneity contained in the category itself. Many ustads were renowned virtuosos and scholars[217] cultivated from birth to perform at the highest levels of integrity and artistry; others were half-trained fly-by-nights exploiting a new public demand for music education that outstripped the available supply of qualified instructors.

The fly-by-night ustad matters in the historiography of Indian music because he reveals an underappreciated continuity connecting the musical worlds illuminated in Mughal treatises, British 'Orientalist' tracts, popular Urdu sitar instruction books, and even the revolutionary works of V. N. Bhatkhande himself. If Bhatkhande and his cohort were animated by the same frustrations documented by Muhammad Karam Imam Khan, Mardan 'Ali Khan, Muhammad Safdar Husain Khan, Mirza Rahim Beg, Hazrat Inayat Khan, Asadullah Khan 'Kaukab', Tasadduq Husain Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, and Hamid Husain Khan, then complaints against ustads once dismissed as mere propaganda may deserve renewed investigation. If we can imagine ourselves in the shoes of a fresh-faced musical hobbyist hungry for the secrets of the raga tradition during the first sitar explosion of the 1860s, we may wonder how we, too, might have responded to the conditions of music education prevailing in North India prior to the thoroughgoing transformations of the twentieth century.

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[216]Hamid Husain Khan, *Aslī tālīm sitār yā israr-e hāmid* (Lucknow: Ramcharan Lal Agrawal, 1984 [1932]), n.p.

[217]See Max Katz, 'The Scholarly Ustad: Hindustani Music's Muslim Hereditary Professionals and their Textual Traditions', *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2024, pp. 195–217.

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