

Saraswati Sings: The Slide-Guitar in India

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the phenomenon of slide-guitar traditions in the classical and popular music of India. Drawing from data gathered between 2014 and 2016 in Jaipur and Kolkata, India, the history, social life, and challenges faced by the slide-guitar community are illuminated with attention to how the instrument has flourished in a climate of modern Hindu nationalism and globalization. Using a theoretical framework that includes ideas about hybridity, nationalism, vernacularization, and cultural capital, the many forms of the slide-guitar in India are analyzed in the context of the cultural reforms of India's late British colonial period through the early twenty-first century. The slide-guitar is analyzed in light of the codification of musical systems and cultural norms in India, with special emphasis on gender issues in the performing arts and in nativist symbolism. This study emphasizes the relationship between musicians and instrument makers in the evolution of an instrument that has migrated conceptually and structurally from a foreign to a traditional instrument within Indian music cultures. Ethnographic work is focused on the role of the luthier in carving a uniquely Indian identity onto the body of the slide-guitar and the social life that has manifested around the customization of slide-guitar instruments. Detailed are the diverse performance techniques and pedagogical systems that transmit slide-guitar repertoire in the genres of Hindustani classical music and Bengali light music genres of *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*.

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This dissertation research has taken many years to accomplish. The many challenges to doing fieldwork in Indian music genres has included learning languages (Hindi, Bengali), becoming adept at musical performance (*sitar*, *tabla*, slide-guitar), and navigating through some of India's most beautiful and complex cities, Delhi, Jaipur, and Kolkata. Only through the support of institutions and individuals have I been able to acquire the skills and social connections that have made this research possible.

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Nataraja Statue in the lobby of the International Center for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Kolkata
Photo by Author 2014

Introduction

Monsoon has come and with it a different seasonal mood, languid in the humidity of heavy rains in arid Rajasthan. Lacking drainage, many streets and intersections have been flooded and power-outages are frequent, making it difficult to navigate Jaipur's wide streets in time for our evening concert. Few classical music concerts occur this time of year, yet India's rainy season is a highly cultivated symbol. It expresses a rich variety of tonal colors and moods in a family of ragas called *malhaar*. A famous story of Hindustani music's most mythical figure, Mia Tansen, tells how his rendition of the monsoon *Mia ki malhaar* raga produced spontaneous rain inside the emperor's palace. Such a mixture of the auspicious and the magical typifies the narratives of great Hindustani classical musicians of the past, where the elements, the passions, and the spirits can be swayed with the power of melody and devotion. The divine origins of creativity, innovation, and invention generate a spiritual aura whose maintenance remains central to the careers of many modern-day performers. While the concert experience described below makes no claim to the supernatural, it does introduce my dissertation theme, the slide-guitar in India, as an unlikely but nevertheless powerful medium through which the aura of divine inspiration and cultural belonging is expressed.

The concert opens with a brief invocation to Lord Shiva. Garlands of small red, white and yellow flowers adorn a bronze *Nataraja* statue. It stands on a white pedestal at one end of a small theatre stage where in the center, three instruments covered with white linen sheets have been carefully arranged over a spacious mattress pad. Small *diya* candles have been lit and wisps of smoke trail from small clusters of incense, standing vertically in clay cups filled with sand. Dressed in modest, but finer quality traditional *kurtas* and *saris*—all drenched at the heel—nearly one hundred people fill the air-conditioned hall. Outstanding members of Jaipur's Indian

classical music community attend, as well as their families, students from the local conservatory, and a small group of my friends from the nearby Hindi language-learning institute. In bold letters, a large banner in *devanagari* script announces the names of the venue, promoter, performers, and the event: “The Sound of Rain.”

The crowd's idle chatter fades when the host approaches a small podium opposite the dancing god. In a deep and formal Hindi register, the host introduces the artists, noting accolades as attendants offer the musicians small bouquets of roses and a gilded certificate from the Jawahar Kala Kendra, one of Jaipur's premier traditional performing-arts venues. After bestowing the gifts, the attendants perform *pranam* by ceremoniously touching the feet of each artist. Humbly, the artists accept the honors and make their way over to their instruments where they sit cross-legged, attending to fine tuning and sound checks. Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt finally takes the microphone and greets the audience. His soft voice names the opening piece in *raag bageshree*, to be played in *alap*, *jor* and *jhala*. To his left sits his son, Salil Bhatt, dressed in a deep red *sherwani*, and to his right sits Ram Kumar Mishra, adjusting the straps on his *tabla*.



Photo by Author, 2010

The event's traditional atmosphere and ritual mirrors any other Hindustani classic music performance, except that Bhatt and his son's instruments share a history barely fifty years

old in a classical genre with ancient origins. In his lap rests an instrument resembling a guitar with raised strings, similar to a lap-steel, dobro or Hawaiian guitar, yet—like other Indian instruments—it contains a course of sympathetic strings (*tarab*) and decorative wood carvings. In the left hand glimmers a metallic, bullet-shaped slide, which deftly glides across steel strings

with a smooth melismatic technique as the first tones of *alap* are enunciated. The warm, humid evening in Jaipur almost accentuates the impressive sustain on this instrument, and large house speakers amplify its rich and full tone. In the daze of our belabored arrival, the hall's reverberating sound comforts us and I sink into my seat, closing my eyes.

It was not raining inside, but that evening did inspire questions that have shaped this dissertation. How, I wondered, did the guitar migrate and evolve structurally and sonically to fully integrate into the Hindustani classical tradition of northern India? How have artists adopted and adapted this instrument and what markers of cultural authenticity have been employed to reinvent the slide-guitar in a traditional Hindustani context? As a student of ethnomusicology sensitive to notions of identity, politics, nationalism and religion, the Hindustani slide-guitar struck me as a unique symbol of modernity, while nevertheless operating comfortably within the parameters of traditional classical music performance.

Considering the historical and political climate since India's 1947 independence, other questions arose: What was the relationship between Indian national identity and the acceptance of these new instruments? Furthermore, given that the rise of the Hindustani slide-guitar coincides with India's early twenty-first century political history, casually known as Hinduism's "golden age," and marked by the rise of the Bharata Janata Party (BJP) and right-wing religious conservatism, does a relationship exist between the recasting of the guitar's identity and the new Hindu nationalism? The political movements promoting a new Indian modernity reflect a highly contentious cultural landscape dominated by Hindu political hegemony. Within this climate, the slide-guitar has been coopted into the Hindustani tradition, achieving considerable renown, and even becoming a new symbol of Indian cultural pride. Understanding how this was achieved is

one of my main research objectives. Given India's contemporaneous political realities, it would be irresponsible to address the slide-guitar in isolation, without examining the tensions between tradition and modernity. In such an environment, how is the appropriate aura of traditionalism encoded onto an undeniably modern instrument?

The slide-guitars in India became the focus of my research because the process of their invention and the stories of the performers who champion these instruments are densely structured symbols of change in India. They represent a long development of cultural aesthetic tastes interacting with a history of colonialism, nationalism, and economic development. Regarded as new technology, mixed with an almost brash traditionalism, these slide-guitars are designed to project an aura that harkens back to a nostalgic cultural imagination. South Asian cultural scholars know well the arguments about tradition and modernity as competing streams of Indian culture, yet these instruments blurs the conventional theoretical dichotomy. Rather than placing the slide-guitar neatly into this divided cultural paradigm, I theorize the instrument as an object that has become vernacularized, into Indian culture, where it expresses modern identities, innovations and ingenuity in a hybrid form, which caters to tradition yet also represents the future of the Indian classical genre.

Theoretically, the value of re-definition is a manipulation of the symbolic cultural capital of an object, which is an important process to understand, and one comparable to other foreign-cum-Indian instruments like the violin and harmonium. While many of these questions involve listening audiences and a broader cultural ethos, I also wondered how artists and luthiers viewed the slide-guitar's evolution. Their perspectives would help us better understand the development and cultural value of these new slide-guitars because they are the on the forefront of creating new forms and techniques that vie for attention in the Indian cultural milieu. No other individuals have the success of the instrument so closely intertwined with their own reputations and

livelihoods.

For performance practices, the slide-guitar inspires generous musicological interest. What techniques and structural developments have allowed the instrument to produce the highly prized aesthetic qualities of Hindustani classical music? In performance, advantages and shortcomings result from choosing the slide-guitar rather than other, more well-known, classical instruments like the *sitar*, *sarod* and *veena*. In exploring these questions I have documented dozens of discussions and personal lessons with slide-guitarists, which allow me to comfortably illustrate the phenomenon on paper and in practice. In presenting this data, I argue that the slide-guitar has first adopted the persona of a mimic in order to legitimize itself, replicating the sonic qualities of the voice, *sitar* and *sarod*. Now in its third generation of pioneers, the Hindustani slide-guitar has developed its own vocabulary of techniques that now move beyond this notion of mimicry. In finding its own voice, the slide-guitar's identity has been fractured by a constant renaming and restructuring, making its incorporation into the broader curriculum of Indian classical music a great challenge. This has led me to explore how the slide-guitar has changed in the face of these challenges and how the newest generation of performers is coping with this apparent identity crisis and lack of standardization.

Previous academic research on the slide-guitar in India occurs only in a few recently published works and dissertations, which are difficult to find. Martin Clayton's (2001:179-208) chapter on the guitar in India describes his interviews the two most prominent performers, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya. Clayton only hints at the larger world of Indian slide-guitar and the research possibilities inherent in the ethnographic narratives of its practitioners. This dissertation follows that path by delving much deeper into the lives of the performers, instrument makers and audiences and their relationship with the slide-guitar. It describes the routes, both physical and theoretical, through which the slide-guitar has become

vernacularized into both classical and popular music in India. By focusing on the parallel development of slide-guitar traditions in Jaipur, Rajasthan and Kolkata, West Bengal, I present the development of structural forms, performance techniques and aesthetics, all of which are evolving at a rapid pace. Understanding these two traditions and their relationship with instrument makers will help answer the question of how this foreign instrument has become a suitable medium for Hindustani classical music and Bengali light music.

My dissertation discusses the above-mentioned issues, and hopefully will inspire further research into the absorption and redefinition of instruments into new cultural contexts. This work seeks to contribute not only to the knowledge about slide-guitar in India and those involved in its unique story, but to how objects traverse conceptual categories to become markers of cultural authenticity. In a post-colonial context, such objects can become representations of cultural identity, nationalism, nativism and even de-colonization as they become widely consumed and incorporated into productions of cultural and political importance. The methodology and questions asked here will hopefully contribute to how others work to understand and analyze the symbolic and structural evolution of instruments.

As an aspiring American ethnomusicologist, I understand that my position in the slide-guitar community has social and political consequences that may affect my data. Surely there are nuances lost in translation and matters of perspective that may challenge my observations. Nevertheless, while subjective, my analysis of my findings will create a structure for debate, which welcomes criticism, refinement or refutation. Highlighting the slide-guitar phenomenon in India is my primary concern; beyond my language skills and musical aptitude, which allowed me to successfully conduct fieldwork in India, my own credentials and story are tangential. Yet my own personal journey into the realm of slide-guitar in India will introduce not only my motivations, but also illustrate many false assumptions I held, which are typical of neophytes.

Personal Background and Research Origins

Identifying the slide-guitar in India as my research subject emerged via a rather circuitous route, beginning as one might imagine, with a long-held interest in guitar music. Growing up in Berkeley, California, I began playing the standard six-string Western guitar after a brief stint with cello at the age of ten. My parents came from American and Chilean backgrounds and enjoyed the sounds of American folk, rock, blues and jazz on one side, and salsa, *bachata*, flamenco and Latin pop on the other. With diverse music surrounding me at home and my growing obsession with guitar playing, I sought out eclectic music and experimented occasionally with slide-guitar after seeing blues and jazz acts in venues around the Bay Area during my teens. My awareness of Indian classical music began during a high school internship at the Ashkenaz music and dance community center in Berkeley. From this vantage point, the local scene of traditional music was easy to navigate. I sought out Indian music performances, often at the University of California at Berkeley, and found festivals where fusion electronica and rock acts incorporated Indian instruments, especially the *tabla*. My interest in guitar remained strong, but in my mind, it was completely unrelated to what was quickly becoming my other passion, Indian classical music.

In Southern California, at Pomona College, I began my interest in ethnomusicology. While pursuing a cognitive science degree, I completed a minor in music and began learning both flamenco guitar and *tabla*. By then, my parents had moved to Marin County in Northern California, close to the Ali Akbar School of Music, the epicenter of the Bay Area's Indian classical music scene. Drawing my interest in school and at home, I decided to pursue music more seriously as an academic career. My mentor at Pomona, Katherine Hagedorn, introduced me to the musicians Kartik Seshadri and Arup Chattopadhyay, and I followed them both down to the University of California at San Diego to study *sitar* and *tabla*, respectively.

The deeper I delved into the Hindustani classical tradition, the more India's culture, religion, history and languages intrigued me. I began a formal ethnomusicology graduate program in 2009 at the University of Washington and started taking Hindi language courses, hoping to use language scholarships to help me pursue research interests in India. In the summer of 2010, the American Institute of Indian Studies (A.I.I.S.) sent me to Jaipur, Rajasthan for an intensive Hindi language course. Six blocks from the A.I.I.S. institute, my new *sitar* teacher Chandra Mohan Bhatt, first introduced me to the Indian slide-guitar.



**Author playing *mohan veena*.
Photo by Grant Gilford**

Bhatt recounted stories of his father, Shashi Mohan Bhatt, and his uncle, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, who toured India as the Bhatt Brothers—two leading exponents of the *senia-maihar* style of instrumental playing. Shashi Mohan Bhatt was a superior *sitar* player and house musician at All-India Radio (A.I.R.), where he met Pandit Ravi Shankar and performed some of his compositions for national broadcasts. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt became a student of Shankar's, but on an instrument of his own design: the *mohan veena*. A modified slide-guitar with extra sympathetic strings, detailed Indic visual aesthetics, and other strategically placed strings for playing *raga* music, the *mohan veena* was my first exposure to any form of guitar playing in the Indian classical genres.

Later that summer Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and his son Salil Bhatt performed at the Jawahar Kala Kendra, as described in the opening paragraphs of this introductory chapter. Salil played on the *satvik veena*, a modification of his father's previous invention. These two artists impressed me with the possibilities of playing slide on my original instrument of choice, the guitar, but also inspired questions about the invention and development of their own seemingly unique

instruments. Both guitars feature an arch-top frame, f-shaped sound holes, and they are highly decorated with traditional carvings and designs like a *sitar* or *sarod*. I had not previously heard of the Concord brand (now Conchord due to copyright issues) from the world of *sitar* or guitar, but the undeniable first impression was one of very high quality and custom design. The instruments resembled a pair of gilded space-ships, the mythical *pushpaka vimana*, Ram's celestial chariot riding waves of sound. In my naiveté, the structural and sonic differences of these two instruments were not as vivid as their illustrious names, *mohan* meaning attractive, *satvik* meaning virtuous, and *veena*, the traditional name of a string instrument considered the predecessor to the *sitar*. These slide-guitars struck me as something unequivocally modern, new in the context of both craft and technique, playing without concessions within an ancient and highly guarded music tradition of Hindustani music. The immediate comparison in the context of Karnatic music is the violin, but I had never seen a violin with such ornamentation and modification to name and form. Intrigued, my seemingly disparate interests in guitar and Hindustani classical music began to coalesce.

The following year, in 2011, I returned to Jaipur for another Hindi program and was fortunate to live at the Bhatt residence. That summer I studied *sitar* diligently, taught Spanish guitar and *tabla* lessons, and continued making contacts elsewhere in Rajasthan, including the cities of Jodhpur, Pushkar, Udaipur, and Jaisalmer. The slide-guitar held my interest but I could not keep up with the superstar Bhatt guitarists well enough to take any lessons. Finding my own slide-guitar instrument also proved difficult, so my project went on the backburner. In the meantime, I interviewed numerous instrument makers, using my emerging Hindi skills.

One day at the *Music and Sports* instrument shop on Chaura Rasta in old city Jaipur, I found an instrument that revived my interest in the Hindustani slide-guitar's creation. It was a violin-shaped instrument but with a total of eighteen strings. The manager called it the *swarlin*,

and spoke about the local luthier who was trying to replicate the *mohan veena* in violin form by adding sympathetic strings. This model appeared to be a failed experiment, no longer able to hold its pitch, as a result of old hardware and excessive string tension. How much was this a novelty? Could the Indian-slide guitar have gone through its own failed stages and designs? It became clear to me that to fully understand the creation and success of India's slide-guitar, I would have to interview the instrument makers—the luthiers—who based on their own creativity or in consultation with an accomplished instrumentalist—have taken the slide-guitar and made it fully Indian.



Swarlin, 2010. Photo by Author

Long discussions with instrument makers became integral to my weekly ritual in Jaipur. I frequented Chandpole Bazar and especially the music shops on Kalyanji ka Rasta. There I met with Mukesh, a *tabla*-maker originally from Jodhpur, who discussed his process, his materials and other parts of his business. I asked him what he thought about invented instruments: new or mixed creations. He spoke blandly about how people are constantly making new instruments, often giving them ridiculous names, and then watching them collect dust, or worse, fall apart from bad design. Amidst our Hindi conversation Mukesh used English phrases like “Indian ingenuity” and “indigenous technology,” referring to the do-it-yourself experimentalism prevalent throughout Indian art, craft and infrastructure. Jerry-rigged electrical wires, buildings propped up with bamboo tied with jute chord, motorcycles modified with platforms to carry extra people, goods and even livestock: all exemplified a well-known resourcefulness, for which many Indians take pride. These inventions are primarily utilitarian and not prized for their aesthetics or high craftsmanship like instruments of a highly-regarded cultural genre of music. The slide-guitars I had seen were meant for serious experimentation, with the goal of re-creating

the guitar as a respected traditional Indian instrument. According to Mukesh, changing the design of a traditional instrument required a combination of ingenuity, marketing and luck. Even then, it was incredibly rare for a new instrument to stand the test of time, be promoted by successful musicians, and join the canon of instruments integral to a musical genre.

The urge to embellish the traditional details of an instrument can be just as strong as the urge to mechanize, electrify and digitize. For example, the automatic *arti* is a completely motorized machine with bells, *nagara* (kettle drums) and a mini gong for religious services. I encountered these machines in ritual settings where they amplified the ecstatic mood of prayer services, filling the temple space with a cacophony of sound. While producing an awesome sound, this invention differs from the Hindustani slide-guitar because even in a ritual context, little attention has been paid to the machine's appropriateness in a traditional setting. Slide-guitars, such as the *mohan veena*, must negotiate their way through a complicated set of cultural, social and political changes in India not only to be accepted, but to cease being considered only a novelty.

I found that the use of machines and electronics in traditional settings has been a controversial issue. Even though amplifying slide-guitars through on-board electronics occurs more frequently than in other Indian classical instruments, this electrification is often hidden from audiences who may harbor negative reactions to these new technologies. The slide-guitar has encountered plenty of resistance from conservatives of various stripes but nevertheless prevailed as a result of an intricate web of promoters, performers and luthiers. Invention and innovation have always been abundant resources in the instrument maker community, but few new ideas like the Hindustani slide-guitar have been championed by well-known artists, especially in traditional music contexts.

Other instrument shopkeepers reacted similarly to Mukesh to my request to see invented

instruments, as they make their money selling manufactured instruments with established popularities. In these encounters, the name Sanjay Rikhiram was repeatedly invoked, due to his famous company in Delhi and his relationship with renowned performers who customize their instruments. As the summer drew to a close, I realized that Jaipur was only a starting point for my search for the story of the slide-guitar. While the role of slide-guitars in Hindustani classical music certainly had roots in Rajasthan, a much less known but larger tradition of slide-guitar playing was based in Kolkata, West Bengal.

Back in Seattle in the fall of 2011, for my University of Washington coursework, I committed myself to cultural studies and language courses in the South Asian Studies program at the Jackson School of International Studies. I remained involved in the Indian classical music scene as well, playing *tabla* with Ravi Albright and taking *sitar* lessons with Debi Prasad Chatterjee. I increasingly recognized that most of my contacts in the Indian classical music scene in the United States were Bengali, or spent much of their time learning music in Kolkata. This, as well as the direction my research was taking, compelled me to switch my language studies at the University of Washington from Hindi to Bengali. The following summer of 2012 I was living in Kolkata, studying Bengali at another A.I.I.S. program, and taking lessons with my gurus Debi Prasad Chatterjee and Arup Chattopadhyay, both of whom share their time between India and the United States.

In Kolkata the slide-guitar became a serious research topic. The prominence of slide-guitar in Kolkata first struck me while walking its downtown streets and searching for records near the Esplanade station. There, along Lenin Sarani and Mirza Ghalib road, scattered shops and street-stands sell old records from a once-thriving LP pressing industry. Hidden amongst varieties of classical music, *ghazal*, Hindi film music, Bengali folk song, and British and American rock, I discovered a wealth of recordings of Indian slide-guitarists playing the music

of Rabindranath Tagore (or *Rabindra sangeet*) and of Kazi Nazrul Islam (or *Nazrul geeti*). These two musical genres are at the heart of Bengali culture, both in West Bengal and in Bangladesh. Finding these monumental poets interpreted instrumentally on the slide-guitar provided another clue about the instrument's importance in Kolkata's bountiful musical history. Furthermore, the slide-guitar seemed to be the only instrument in all the record-*wala's* collections that was fit to convey the melodies linked to the words of these national heroes. As members of my host family claimed, so integral are Tagore and Nazrul to twentieth century Bengali national consciousness that the average Bengali could mouth the missing words from most slide-guitar recordings. The instrument had become fully integrated into Bengali culture by the 1970s, the average Bengali household had a slide-guitar, perhaps broken, dusty or rusted, but still representing its widespread popularity.

Through my *tabla* guru Arup Chattopadhyay, I sought out Kolkata's most internationally known slide-guitarist, Debashish Bhattacharya. Bhattacharya had invented a fleet of slide-guitar instruments and given them names like *chaturangui*, *gandharvi* and *anandi*. A dazzling player, inventor and pillar of the music community, he would be indispensable for understanding the slide-guitar, as a player or researcher. After a few phone conversations, he invited me to meet him for a formal interview and some lessons, promising he would tell me all I needed to know about slide-guitar. In the interim, I sought out the instrument around Kolkata but found no quality instruments for sale. I fooled around with cheap Givson knock-offs of the *mohan veena* in a Lal Bazaar instrument shop, but time was short and I already had a P&Brothers' *sitar* to take back to the United States.

My Kolkata summer ended at an event featuring the charismatic producer and *tabla* player, Bickram Ghosh. Accompanied by my friend, the brilliant young *tabla* player, Surojato Roy, we chatted with Kolkata's musical elite, listening to them amicably discussing the tensions

over the *tabla* player's role as accompaniment versus lead performer. Debashish Bhattacharya arrived and reiterated his offer to show me the world of slide-guitar. A gracious host, Ghosh gifted me his new greatest-hits compilation and his newly produced version of India's national song, "*Vande Mataram*." The latter proved most fruitful for my interests: besides featuring slide-guitarist Vishwa Mohan Bhatt as the most eminent guest star, this patriotic remake also became central to my research. The production of cultural nationalism and gender identities in India had a history connected to the slide-guitar in ways I could not have foreseen. Amongst other things, in the early days of the slide-guitar's popularity it was primarily women who played the instrument as a marker of modernity and adulthood. Accordingly, I dedicate a chapter of this dissertation to this theme of gender politics because it goes hand-in-hand with my framing of Indian modernity and the rise of the Indian slide-guitar.

The fall of 2013 marked the end of my doctoral coursework, the completion of my Master's degree in South Asian studies, and a successful presentation of my "*Vande Mataram*" paper at the national Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Indiana. From there my fieldwork officially began. I gathered resources to return to Delhi to explore the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology (A.R.C.E.) and to Jaipur and Kolkata to conduct interviews, seek out new contacts, and work my way into the slide-guitar culture in India. By summer's end 2014, I returned to Kolkata, again under the auspices of A.I.I.S., enrolled in an advanced Bengali language course, and arranged for a growing set of slide-guitar interviews. Rabindra Bharati University offered their endorsement and my research was off to a good start.

Chance, luck or kismet has brought me to this slide-guitar research. Rather than by a road of performance and dedication to the instrument, I arrived primarily through social circles, building friendships and following my interests in the languages, literature, poetry, film, history and culture of South Asia. My performance background in guitar, *sitar* and *tabla* made the

transition to the Indian slide-guitar relatively quick, but my technical skills are perhaps less developed than my appreciation for the instrument's capabilities and the struggles its practitioners have faced in their efforts to promote themselves and their medium of choice.

Analytical Trajectories, Methodology and Setting

The training and methodological approaches used during my preliminary research and fieldwork reflect ethnomusicology's rich interdisciplinary background. Balancing musicology with historical and anthropological methods, my time at the University of Washington was split between the School of Music and the Jackson School of International Studies—each offering very different methods of approaching research.

The ethnomusicology program offered guidance in academic writing, visual ethnography, sound archiving, conducting interviews, and analyzing music using a variety of traditional and non-traditional forms of theory and notation. International studies promoted an analytical approach taking data, developing theoretical terminology and applying it to varying levels of significance—from a geographical/area studies viewpoint, to a global comparative orientation, to a perspective that bridges disciplinary fields. Drawing from history, political science, and comparative religion, these methodologies emphasize the analysis of common sources of data in historical archives, and the mining of primary material. From this training, I was encouraged to create new structures of understanding, and posit theories and relationships that would open up debate, within a structuralist orientation. I've worked to balance methodology with reflexivity and hope my conclusions will be agreeable to insider perspectives.

Building on my diverse performance background, I embraced the concept of “bi-musicality,” (Hood 1960:55-59) which promotes the study, of different forms of musical

understanding through participant observation. Learning to play instruments of another culture is integral aspect of ethnomusicological work as it places one socially in the community while also developing the skills necessary to understand the intricacies of the music. While not overwhelmingly steeped in the classical Western-tradition, it was nevertheless from this musical background that I drew much of my early experience before coming to Hindustani music in my late teens. By immersing myself in Hindustani classical music, I became much better equipped to discuss matters of performance, technique and theory within the system that undergirds much of the slide-guitar repertoire in India. By showing appreciation for this rich tradition and by pursuing a personal history of sincere and focused study, I interacted with a community that was receptive to a researcher who could appreciate common aesthetic values. As such, my studies of *tabla* and *sitar* became much more valuable to understanding the Hindustani slide-guitar than my knowledge of Western guitar styles and techniques.

The performance of Hindustani classical music in the traditional style typically interacts with the traditional social structures that support the genre. Modern world pressures make it difficult to participate in the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-student tradition) as it is generally conceived because it requires a much more intensive study and cohabitation with one's guru, so that all attention is focused on practice, or *riyaz*. Few relinquish other interests and responsibilities to live in this fashion. Nevertheless, personal lessons and private practice, rather than a conservatory context for music learning, are the primary methods through which I became well-versed in Hindustani classical music. For many months I lived at the Bhatt residence in Jaipur, practicing and learning *sitar* on a daily basis. Most recently, I have studied in the *guru-shishya* style with Debi Prasad Chatterjee, who continues to be my guru and lead advisor on topics of Hindustani classical music, offering me insights into questions that have arisen from my fieldwork experiences.

Chatterjee's unique background and superior teaching credentials are worth mentioning, especially for the emphasis they placed on lineage in the Hindustani tradition. He is one of the only dedicated students of two legendary players, Nikhil Banerjee and Annapurna Devi. Neither ever took on more than half a dozen students in their lifetimes, so it is distinctive to have a teacher who possesses such a rich repertoire of their compositions and techniques. Aside from being the uncle of Anindo Chatterjee, one of the world's most respected *tabla* players, Chatterjee was also the founder of Rabindra Bharati University's instrumental music program, and his references have opened countless doors during my research.

It is important to note how Chatterjee and I communicated about my goals as a player and academic. For the past six years he has continually transmitted the tradition to me as a performer and instructor, focusing on my ability to articulate aspects of the musical tradition. This has produced a curriculum that includes a broader range of *ragas* and compositions, as well as an immersion in the tenets of Indian classical music theory. Chatterjee's guidance has been invaluable for developing my own performance and teaching skills, while simultaneously being my most effective contact in Kolkata's Hindustani classical music community.

Language training has been equal in importance to musical understanding in conducting research in India. In many ways, the study of Hindi and then Bengali in the U.S., and then the pursuit of intensive programs in India, were the starting points for successful research ventures. Language remains the skeleton key that opens doors for this kind of research. When coupled with enthusiasm for literature, history and culture, it provided crucial access to a social world of players, luthiers, critics and academics. Communication skills fostered personal connections, leading me down unforeseen avenues, off to fruitful tangents, and into a community that encouraged my participation and research.

For my fieldwork experience, the quality of my social life made living abroad, far from

home and family, a thriving endeavor. Much of my research was done amidst a busy schedule of morning language courses, visits to instrument workshops, archives and other institutions by afternoon, then music lessons in the evening and concerts at night. I navigated the gauntlet of Kolkata's public transportation daily, armed with a fast approaching fluency in Bengali and a few dozen rupees. Despite a few setbacks, wrong-turns, and respiratory infections, fieldwork remained a fast-paced activity throughout my time in India. While I took extensive notes during interviews, it was either late at night or in the chaos of traffic when I put most of my reflections to paper. Many of the questions presented in this introduction and posted to my interviewees were generated in those daydreams during the Kolkata commute. Kolkata has become my second home and I have lived with families, friends and my gurus in a variety of neighborhoods all over the city.

During my first trip to Kolkata in 2012, my *tabla* guru Arup Chattopadhyay introduced me to Sanjoy Bandopadhyay, Rabindra Bharati University's current director of the instrumental music program. Having developed a research design and proposal focusing on the slide-guitar in India, I was able to acquire an institutional affiliation at Rabindra Bharati. After a few visits, including attending a series of master's performance examinations with my *sitar* guru Debi Prasad Chatterjee as guest judge, I developed several contacts in the local slide-guitar community. This university affiliation helped legitimize my research within the community and at national archives, and with organizations that could offer financial support during my fieldwork experience.

The American Institute of Indian Studies' Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology (A.R.C.E.) also provided valuable support and research material. I spent two weeks there, searching the newly digitized databases for newspaper articles, journals and other commentaries published in India as far back as the nineteenth century. Under the guidance of

Shubha Chaudri, Uma Shankar, and other A.R.C.E staff, I gained access to dozens of cassettes and compact discs, and was able to take pictures of packaging and liner notes to add to a growing catalog of Indian slide-guitar recordings and references. Furthermore, I took it upon myself to digitize and catalog an abundance of newspaper clippings about prominent Indian slide-guitarists and about the traditional instrument making industry.

During this research I recorded audio and video of dozens of performances. With permission from the organizers and artists, I catalogued recordings which were then used in group listening with friends and teachers. Our discussions during these listening sessions produced valuable insights that have helped me to better understand the performance practices and aesthetics of the Hindustani slide-guitar. Many of my interviews were recorded in audio format in order to remember important points in the conversation, some of which required review and translation. I also recorded all of my slide-guitar lessons with Rhitom Sarkar and Anup Das Gupta. Our lessons included extensive commentary and some of the compositions appear later in this dissertation as notated examples of slide-guitar music.

While in Kolkata I spent many months meeting regularly with the luthier, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, who has become central to understanding the slide-guitar's evolution in India. With him, I was able to build an instrument from scratch, discussing each step of the process, including details about the materials and assembly. I documented these steps with pictures and recorded our conversations about the construction of my instrument. Detailed in chapter five, the organology of the Hindustani slide-guitar provides one of the most fascinating parts of this story, illuminating how customized and charged with political and spiritual meaning these instruments have become. Biswas receives one of the longest biographical sections in this dissertation since his is one of the most untold and dramatic stories in the Indian slide-guitar world. We communicated strictly in Bengali, and through him, I was able to reach out to the largest group of

slide-guitar contacts across India, all of whom were his clients. With the instrument he made for me, I was able to take dozens of music lessons and participate in the slide-guitar community of Kolkata.

With this ethnographic data and the slide-guitar's story in India slowly crystallizing into focus, an opportunity to document the social and political climate of the slide-guitar playing community presented itself. In January of 2015, the Indian International Guitar Festival (I.I.G.F.), the first ever festival dedicated to the Indian slide-guitar, was organized by Debashish Bhattacharya. The I.I.G.F., located at the Indian Center for Cultural Relations (I.C.C.R.) in downtown Kolkata, provided a cultural space within which to gather data from the largest-ever congregation of Indian slide-guitar players. This experience helped me examine all of my research questions, and offered me a broad range of opinions that significantly shaped my own conclusions about the spirit of this instrument. During this festival, I recorded every performance and participated in all the workshops during the festival's five-day span. I also observed two competitions, one for a classical repertoire and the other for Bengali light music, or *loghu sangeet*. I spoke with many participants about their backgrounds and experiences preparing for and performing in the competition. The guest judges were pillars of the community for these genres: they offered insightful commentary and fascinating anecdotes about the slide-guitar's history in India. The second Indian International Guitar Festival, which I also attended in January 2016, delivered a marked contrast with the first, revealing further evidence for the complicated web of social relations within the community. By describing the performances, competitions and workshops of the festival, I offer a picture of the current state of slide-guitar performance in India.

Finally, I must briefly discuss the importance of setting for my dissertation fieldwork. While a larger part of my research was conducted in Kolkata, my time in Jaipur was also very

fruitful. These two locations offer very different pictures of the life of the Indian side-guitar. Located in the Western Indian province of Rajasthan, Jaipur's history of classical music is closely associated with the royal courts of the Rajputs. The Bhatt family has lived in Jaipur for many generations: they first arrived there to act as royal court musicians. Hindustani music was supported by royal patronage, creating a circuit where renowned musicians performed for the elite classes of Jaipur, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Udaipur and other powerful kingdoms. Brij Bhushan Kabra was the very first performer of Hindustani classical music on slide-guitar. His family was connected to the Jodhpur royal court just as the Bhatt's was under the patronage of the Jaipur royal court. Within this classical courtly tradition, Hindustani slide-guitar developed in the state of Rajasthan.

In contrast, Kolkata in West Bengal, has a radically different history, where royal courts waned early on during the British colonial period. In this cultural capitol, the slide-guitar developed out of light music associated with Bengali culture. The prominent performers in Kolkata through the late 1970s primarily interpreted the music of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam, and played instruments using techniques drawn directly from the Hawaiian style of slide-guitar. Only in the early 1980s did many of the Kolkata slide-guitarists, inspired by Brij Bhushan Kabra, begin performing in the Hindustani classical style. As such, the two settings of my fieldwork in Bengal and Rajasthan, have radically different contexts in which the traditions have developed.

Each of the forthcoming chapters are dedicated to topics that will illuminate the understanding of the cultural, political, religious, and historical background of the slide-guitar in India. I have placed a discussion of theory in the forefront of this work to define the terminology

that populates the rest of the dissertation. Viewing a historical understanding of Indian music genres as essential to the current social life of the slide-guitar in India, I have also delved into issues of colonialism and nationalism because they still have an impact on contemporary music economies. Additionally, by learning about the important figures in slide-guitar history and the challenges they have faced in championing their instrument of choice, I believe a clearer picture of the state of slide-guitar in India can materialize. Their commentary informs my writing throughout, and their generosity with musical techniques and repertoire are detailed in later chapters that focus on the learning, performance and public consumption of the music.

The first chapter addresses the theoretical arguments about the incorporation of new instruments into traditional genres. I apply Walter Benjamin's concept of the “aura” to analyze the shifting identity of the slide-guitar within the Indian public sphere. Using interview material from my ethnographic work, I discuss the strategies adopted by promoters and performers to re-brand the instrument as uniquely Indian. I frequently invoke Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital since it implies an economy of symbolism that is undeniably employed in advancing the careers of performers.

The second chapter discusses how musicological studies in India responded to the extreme changes that British colonialism imposed on the social and economic organization of musical communities in India, and the types of prejudice Indians faced. By exploring the way Indian theorists responded to the call to create a musical system that represented the nation, I detail the development and codification of the classical genres in India with attention to the cultural and religious dynamics that helped mold this musical genre. In outlining the political and social tensions present in the nineteenth century, I establish a historical and theoretical foundation upon which to assess the relative success or failure of how foreign instruments have been subsumed into the common parlance of the classical system in India. The histories of the

violin and harmonium prove fruitful in understanding the process of vernacularization that occurred with these instruments in their historical time and space: that is, during the end of the colonial period leading up to twentieth century independence. By comparing the slide-guitar to these instruments, I seek to understand the intense pressure of establishing a cultural and national identity, and how crucially these influences shape the instrument's acceptance in Indian culture. Unlike the violin and harmonium which developed their Indian identities during colonialism, the slide-guitar is a decidedly post-colonial development and deeply connected to issues of a modern Indian national identity.

The third chapter focuses on gender issues in Indian nationalism, and by extension, in Indian music cultures. Patriarchal norms have profoundly influenced the opportunities for women to participate in the performing arts. This history and the continuing cultural contentions over gender roles helps explain how women have been accepted or blocked from performing in classical, popular, and folk music genres. As the Hindustani slide-guitar has become prominent, so has the power of conservative Hindu nationalist ideologies in Indian politics, shaping the Indian cultural landscape by challenging liberal perspectives of Western modernity. A case study on the most recent production of the Hindu national song, "*Vande Mataram*," will illustrate the symbolic construction of the Hindu motherland creating parallels between modern conceptions of gender roles and the performance of select instruments meant to represent the spirit of a new Hindu nation—one of them being the Hindustani slide-guitar.

The fourth chapter focuses specifically on the history of the guitar in India—examining the initial migration of the guitar into India. Both the guitar and slide techniques on the instrument have many competing origin stories in South Asian, African and Hawaiian traditions, bolstered by nationalist sentiment. I examine the curiosities of genesis mythos and then provide a backdrop for the many narratives of the rise of the slide-guitar in India. Beginning with the

Hawaiian slide-guitar's surge in popularity in Bengali light music and film music, this section illuminates the many influential performers that adapted and appropriated Hawaiian slide-guitar to fit into Indian music cultures. Closing this section is an examination of the decline of the Hawaiian style in India due to technological, generational and socio-political changes across South Asia.

Chapter five focuses exclusively on the Hindustani slide-guitar, the slide instrument adapted to perform in the context of Hindustani classical music. I highlight the luminary figures who first broke into the classical genres and discuss the organological and conceptual changes that accompanied this transition. This chapter forefronts the biography of Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, the most renowned slide-guitar maker in India. His relationship to the instrument and to performers is integral to the larger narrative and his accomplishments merit much more recognition than he has been given publicly in the slide-guitar community. In this chapter, I also discuss the process of making an instrument, including details about materials, process and the economy of slide-guitar production. The organological perspective is much more important in this work than the average musicological study because the structure and capabilities of the slide-guitar are at the crux of its success in Indian music cultures. After detailing the contentious field of innovators and inventors of new Hindustani slide-guitars I address one of the most pressing issues in the community, the lack of standardization in the names of Hindustani slide-guitars, identified by interviewees as a large reason for the paucity of institutional support for the instrument and a primary reason for a growing social rift between inventors.

Much of the material informing chapter five's analysis of the Hindustani slide-guitar's history, construction and performance practices is drawn from lessons and interviews with members of the community. Appendix A details the repertoire of Hindustani classical and Bengali light music that was taught to me by my slide-guitar gurus. In notating and discussing

these compositions, I provide descriptive clues to the sound and practice of today's slide-guitar musicians in India. I will highlight some of the advantages and disadvantages of the mechanics of slide-guitar playing and offer a new conceptual category, the *slide-guitar ang*, that brings the techniques of the slide-guitar into the common vocabulary of Hindustani classical music performance. I also outline some of the basics of Hindustani classical music to augment the glossary of technical terms that are found throughout this dissertation.

Appendix B presents additional biographical materials in the form of small ethnographic vignettes to describe the challenges some of the more prominent players have faced during the development and gradual acceptance of the slide-guitar in Indian music. Drawn from in-person interviews, these fifteen biographical narratives have profoundly influenced my conclusions about the life of the Indian slide-guitar. By presenting their perspectives, I explore and analyze the complicated social life within the Indian slide-guitar community. By discussing each of my informant's personal histories and accomplishments, I offer extensive ethnographic data with which to support my theoretical arguments and analysis of the current state of slide-guitar in India. Additionally, these biographical accounts provide the context for my discussion of musicological aspects of slide-guitar playing, including technique, musical analysis and tonal aesthetics.

I close by revisiting my theoretical positions and by reiterating the data to support my conclusions. Namely, that the slide-guitar's evolution in India is a highly symbolic development that is indicative of cultural and generation shifts that have established a unique sense of Indian modernity. The forces of colonialism, Hindu nationalism, and gender politics in India have powerfully molded the climate in which the performing arts operates and perpetuates, affecting the communities and individuals that have championed the slide-guitar. Having experienced growing pains and resistance from conservative music critics, the resilience and success of the

slide-guitar and its performers has made them integral to the global consumption of Indian music, especially in light of the recent increased domestic and international visibility of the instrument. I believe this work offers a valuable addition to the understanding of the historical and social life of the slide-guitar in India through the perspectives of key performers and luthiers based in Kolkata and Jaipur. In presenting the historical and social life of this instrument through their experiences, stories, and teachings, I also explore the larger issues of cultural production in colonial and post-colonial India. Without hesitation, I claim the Indian slide-guitar is an important part of the future of Hindustani classical music, yet daunting challenges continue to exist because of social and economic obstacles that threaten the instrument's production and economy. The slide-guitar has emerged prominently during a time of great historical transition for Indian culture and has played an indispensable role in bringing classical music to younger audiences in India, and around the world.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

The Hindustani slide-guitar's development raises significant theoretical issues of interest to for ethnomusicologists, historians and cultural theorists. The various incarnations of the Indian slide-guitar have become prominent only within the last thirty years, but the instrument's development illuminates new notions of modern Indian identity, not articulated in previous research, encoded in the structural and symbolic evolution of the slide-guitar. While riding a great wave of cultural change, the slide-guitar is still a cultural object in the process of development, making it an ideal subject of analysis using theoretical terms like vernacularization, invention, cultural capital, the aura, secularism, nationalism, tradition, modernity, authenticity, and hybridity.

In a political climate of Hindu dominance, the guitar has become vernacularized, or part of the common understanding of Indian instruments, becoming re-invented structurally and conceptually to connect with an idealized Hindu past. Throughout this process, the new Hindustani slide-guitar accrues cultural capital, or symbolic value, in being promoted by famous musicians who have worked to reconstitute an aura, or referential symbolism, of both an ancient tradition and a global modernity within the instrument. Post-colonial Hindu nationalism has shaped the cultural context within which this transformation has taken place, challenging secular notions of the classical genre and promoting a cultural hegemony that affects the communities in which the instrument exists. The individuals I worked with in Kolkata and Jaipur have different aspirations for the future of their instrument, but many have resisted the tide of sanskritization, or Hindu-centric revisionism, and presented alternatives to the symbolic representation of the instrument. While the instrument itself is a hybrid creation that mixes Western and Indian structural designs, a sense of Indian authenticity has been achieved through the tonal qualities

and abilities of the instrument to fully participate in Hindustani classical music and other genres of light music in India. The following sections will expound the utility of each of the above-mentioned theoretical terms and apply them to how the slide-guitar has become subsumed into a broader cultural consciousness.

At the turn of the twenty-first century India experienced dramatic changes in its quest to modernize. With the economic liberalization of the early 1990's, India joined other developed countries as one of the world's fastest growing economic powerhouses. During this period, the *Bharatiya Janata Parishad* (B.J.P.) and other right-wing Hindu political groups also rose to national prominence, resulting in a broader reach for fundamentalist Hindu ideals and powerful spokespeople for Hindu-centric Indian nationalism. Leading up to its current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, this has been a new golden age of Hinduism, both politically and culturally.

The conservative Hindu dominance of political culture has influenced Indian historical consciousness. Revisionist histories have been imposed on the education system and anti-intellectualism has become rampant in public and academic discourse in India (Sen 2005; Thapar 2014; Davies 2005). These revisions, while rhetorically positioned against the epistemological damage done by Western historiographies, do their own work to privilege right-wing Hindu ideologies. One common strategy focuses on the genesis of South Asian cultural objects and ideas. This nationalist stream of historiography has been described as a sanskritization (Srinivas 1952:32) or indigenization (Mahbubani 2008:131).¹ These problematic campaigns claim, for example, that the Indian sub-continent was the birthplace of the Indo-Aryan language and culture, or that Islamic cultures did not contribute positively to the development of arts and culture in South Asia. Even fantastic claims have been heard by public figures, such as ancient

¹ Mahbubani discusses the rise of Asia and the return to "indigenous" forms of knowledge and material production, in essence, the process of decolonization now that Asian countries begin to participate in global power politics.

India pioneered cosmetic surgery (as evidenced by the Ganesha mythos),² or that South Asia had flying machines as far back as 7000 BCE.³

In this sensationalist and nationalist climate, the guitar itself has been assigned Indian origins based on the linguistic construction from Sanskrit, where “*geet*” is translated as “singing” or “song”, and “*tar*” is translated as “string.”⁴ Given the common roots of the Indo-European family of languages, this translation may be accurate, but the guitar’s Indian origins are unsubstantiated. More accurately, the tradition of South Asian slide-instruments, inspired by the possibilities of Western guitar making created the Hindustani slide-guitar, marking its origins in modern India. In many ways, the ideologies that contend the guitar’s origins resonate with questions of the origins of Vedic civilization: do they stem from South Asia or Central Asia?⁵ Western linguistic theories have always placed the Sanskrit language in Central Asia, whereas claims of new archeological and mythological evidence place it on the sub-continent. Just as in this debate of Sanskritic cultural origins (Witzel 2005), nationalist motivations color the way the Hindustani slide-guitar is presented today, as part of a culture-wide movement to accommodate Hindu centric ideologies into a modern Indian identity.

The ubiquity of new media and technologies employed to retell stories from the Hindu epics, including the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, illustrate the development of a new sense of Indian modernity. Hindu ideals have been propagated with the goal of redefining Indian-ness away from the plurality of its past, into a more monolithic sense of religious unity. Such

² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/28/indian-prime-minister-genetic-science-existed-ancient-times> - This article criticizes Modi for claims that cosmetic surgery existed in ancient India.

³ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1155886> - written by Abhaya Srivastava discusses claims that Hindu sages pioneered aviation and algebra.

⁴ <http://worldmusiccentral.org/2005/10/01/the-indian-origin-of-the-guitar/> - by Thakur Chakrapani Singh – claims origins of guitar form and function came from the ancient kacchapi veena. This origins claim is often repeated in the Indian slide-guitar community.

⁵ Dhavalikar, M. K. "ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ARYANS." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 87 (2006): 1-37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41692043>. This article presents the debate clearly as one between linguistics and archeology, coming to a conclusion based off of new archeological evidence that continues to be debated.

consolidation seems anathema to the way Hindu philosophical thought has been presented traditionally as flexible and nominally liberal.⁶ The modern and consolidated idea of big-tent Hinduism now dominates in the Indian cultural landscape, yet it has been a long process that began during the British colonial period (specifically in the nineteenth century) with the rejuvenated interest in India's Sanskritic past. Controversially, colonial historians have depended upon Brahmin authorities to create Indian historiography. This collaboration has propelled India's post-colonial identity towards a conservative Hindu-centric retelling of history, largely through mythology and the erasure of minority voices. Such narratives have been positioned historically against the West and against Hinduism's foil, Islam. These trajectories of consolidation, glorification and modernization, following India's rise in the global economy, have surfaced in all aspects of Indian popular culture, promoting the reconstruction of a Hindu-centric South Asia. Through the lens of the slide-guitar we can better understand this pivotal era in Indian political history because the conceptual and physical evolution of the slide-guitar in India has paralleled these developments.

The Vernacularization of Foreign Instruments

To develop a theory applicable to other contexts, I argue that instead of sanskritization—which perpetuates the notion of Hindu dominance, the slide-guitar has undergone a vernacularization within South Asian cultures, meaning the object has become known across cultural groups irrespective of religious associations. This instrument has become an

⁶ <http://swarajyamag.com/culture/the-logic-of-hinduism> - written by Sanjeev Sanyal – discusses the systemic logic and flexibility of Hindu philosophical thought tracing back to Vedic *smṛiti* and *śruti*, or “remembered” and “heard” scriptures, the latter being canonical and considered divine in origin and unchangeable, the former being human in origin and by that token, malleable. With the fallibility of *smṛiti* at the core of the logic of Hinduism's flexibility, Sanyal argues that the ethos of hard-line Hindu conservatism may be detrimental to its longevity.

indispensable tool for expressing a diverse array of culturally distinct forms of music, yet its identity has been cloaked in language that connects the object to a variety of cultural traditions. Ranging from Bengali popular song in both India and Bangladesh, to becoming an increasingly common instrument for performing Hindustani classical music, the slide-guitar can best be understood by removing it from a Hindu-centric paradigm. By using terminology borrowed from a linguistic paradigm, it will be easier to outline the process of how this instrument has been absorbed into new cultural contexts by virtue of the many names that have been bestowed on the rich variety of modified slide-guitars.

Specifically, I utilize the term vernacularization to describe how foreign concepts or objects become redefined and commonly understood in a given society. For example, the uses of some English words in modern Hindi are so ubiquitous that they are considered part of the vernacular and local speech patterns. Words such as “okay” have traveled around the world, becoming vernacularized in hundreds of languages as an expression of affirmation. Many foods also attain this status, such as the Indian Chinese dishes served across South Asia and in South Asian diasporas, which include *hakka* noodles and *manchurian* sauce. Compared to these two examples of vernacularization, however, many versions of the slide-guitar have been stripped of their foreign identity, acquiring new names and visual ornamentations that place it firmly into traditional musical contexts. While the Hindustani slide-guitar is still traced to origins in Hawaiian music, other narratives have emerged, complicating the lineage and obscuring its identity so as to more effectively enter into mainstream Indian culture.

Adaptation is far too simplistic to encompass the competing and disparate trajectories that the slide-guitar has taken in its evolution through different genres, cultures and identifications. A broader notion of the general recognition of slide-guitars across cultural groups and genres is a more effective view, considering the numerous new identities for the instrument have spread

throughout South Asia. Localization also falls short because the instrument has not only become known in Indian localities, it has been catapulted to global recognition as a Hindustani classical instrument while also appearing in light music, Bengali poetic genres, rock and roll, and fusion genres.

Rather than vernacularization, I also considered the concept of indigenization. But in the context of Indian culture, the genres of music I'm examining are far removed from indigenous music traditions. Classical music, film music, and the Bengali poet genres are all products of modern South Asian history, whereas the term indigenous is more commonly associated with tribal groups, or ethnic cultural roots far predating the modern conception of traditional Indian culture. India's diverse history and multi-layered ethnic, cultural and spiritual demographics make it difficult to claim something as native, especially given the contention over Vedic cultural origins. It has become a common trend to claim the consolidated contemporary Hinduism as indigenous, effectively erasing ethnicities and traditions that don't fit in the big tent. In contrast, the concept of vernacularization allows us to avoid engagement with Hindu ideologues on historical issues and avoid damage to our understanding of minority communities.

In viewing the slide-guitar's vernacularization into Indian music cultures, numerous questions arise, including: What people are involved in the vernacularization of an instrument into the broader cultural understanding? What are the symbolic and conceptual changes that allow an instrument to be accepted into an Indian cultural tradition like Hindustani classical music? How does an instrument's evolution interact with the political climate and what social factors influence the success or failure of an instrument's vernacularization? How does the instrument's image, sound and function contribute to it becoming fully Indian and part of common parlance? While these questions will help us understand the process of vernacularization, they can be asked of any object transitioning from one cultural context to

another.

Furthermore, in laying out the path to acceptance, other issues will inevitably arise. We can ask what role new instruments have in bridging traditional and modern aspects of culture and whether finding a niche that balances the past and future is crucial for success. The performer's role is also important in the process. Fame and notoriety focus a spotlight not only on the performer's qualities and abilities, but also on the instrument of choice. Luthiers play a central role as well in the vernacularization process as they vie for dominance in structural design, style, sonic quality, patrons, and material resources, while also working to appeal to local and global guitar aesthetics. Who, of these individuals, chooses the new name for the instrument also is an important question, leading to controversies about intellectual property that have created clear divisions over the right to construct certain models.

To give structure and process to the theoretical understanding of the vernacularization of a new instrument into a traditional genre I propose three distinct steps. First, regardless of origins, the instrument must be structurally re-invented, even superficially with accentuations of local cultural origin. For this step, we must analyze not only developments in form and function, but the claims on invention and the political repercussions involved in taking ownership of these changes. Second, the instrument's symbolism must be reconstituted. That is, it must be imbued with cultural capital and authenticity by its user. Performers accomplish this by championing an instrument as their chosen medium within traditional music contexts, enough so that it has a chance to be considered legitimate and not just another novelty. For the symbolic qualities of an instrument to be stripped away and reconstituted, it must be visible and functional in the new cultural context. Third, the instrument must undergo social and political interactions with audiences, and analysis by theorists and critics, which allows the instrument's possible acceptance as a viable medium within a traditional genre. The success of this last step can be

observed when the instrument becomes incorporated into nationalist musical productions, into traditional music competitions, and into standardized curriculums in educational institutions.

Novelty, Invention and Innovation

The significance of this study also lies in its contributions to how we understand the value of novelty, invention and innovation, bound up in the drive for creating a modern identity. Qualities of newness emerge in the way slide-guitar performers discuss the instrument's creation and conceptualization. Inventors become part of the modernity narrative by bringing their own talents to bear on cultural products. Beyond self-aggrandizing, which is clearly present in many of these contexts, the traits of ingenuity and innovation mark the careers of the most famous Indian slide-guitarists. Their ability to create a new design for the slide-guitar, rename it, and perform successfully on the instrument is a rare historical circumstance when considering how often new instruments don't survive the first generation. Now multiple generations into the history of the Hindustani slide-guitar, new players continually attempt to recreate the instrument, in essence, participating in a community already founded on innovation.

All Indian classical music performers must confront these notions of newness, based on the musical foundations of the Hindustani classical genre. Specifically, the classical music of North India, especially the genre of *khyal*, which was codified during India's medieval period under Mughal rule, has by and large been structured on improvisational elaborations of very small compositions. In performance, at least ninety percent of a classical concert emerges on the spot, with performers expressing themselves within the tonal and rhythmic framework of *raga* and *tala*. Structured this way, *khyal*—which is loosely translated as “opinion,” relies on innovation, which is paramount to a successful performance. Like musical talent, the creation

and subsequent success of instruments like the slide-guitar is understood through the rubric of newness, with traditional aesthetic taste, in an Indian classical music setting.

Adhering to a lineage and a purity of expression of the aesthetics of one's tradition provides the highest market value in Hindustani classical music. Inspiration derived from devotion and piety also has increased value in Hindu-centric communities that prize a view of Indian tradition as steeped in a Hindu past. These traditional values aren't necessarily attractive to younger generations, however, who don't see innovation or newness in the context of classical music. Indian classical music, much like the Western classical music, faces a crisis of relevance in younger generations. The average Indian middle-class household focuses more on raising children with economically successful futures in the fields of medicine, engineering or legal studies. The arts have waned considerably as a viable career path and younger generations have unfettered access to a global marketplace of digital media. Older traditional music is relegated by youngsters to the tastes of grandparents, and modern genres like rock, hip-hop and electronica are on the rise. The decline of classical music is evidenced materially by decreased patronage, fewer students to pass on the tradition, and an increasing irrelevance in popular culture. Many Indian classical performers lament this generational shift openly, searching outside India for performance opportunities, based on an increased interest in Europe, the Americas, and the South Pacific.⁷ Often this patronage comes from Indian communities in diaspora, who view classical music as essential for remaining connected to their ethnic and cultural roots.⁸ Unfortunately, this drive may not be as strong in the home country, which portends an overall decline in the classical genre within India.

The audiences for popular and classical music genres are growing apart in India, yet the slide-guitar seems to keep a foot in each camp because of its connection to light music, folk

⁷ Personal communication with slide-guitar, *tabla*, and *sitar* players looking for opportunities abroad.

⁸ Personal communication with Indian communities in Seattle, San Diego and the Bay Area.

music, Hawaiian music and the Western tradition of slide-guitar. While many other Hindustani classical musical instruments are more popular, the slide-guitar serves as an appropriate medium for both modern and traditional music, having proven itself viable across genres. By appealing equally to groups seeking out newness or the traditional, the Hindustani slide-guitar is one of the only instruments accepted in classical music that is on the rise because of its newness. The international recognition of the instrument has contributed to this development, especially since the most recent Indian musicians to be recognized at the Grammy awards have been slide-guitarists. Other Indian players have used the instrument to connect with global slide-traditions around the world. Innovation, in the form of new instruments and new techniques, must be considered a relevant factor in keeping Hindustani music alive and well in the twenty-first century.

Cultural Capital and the Slide-Guitar

The development of the slide-guitar in parallel with changes in Indian culture can be better understood through terminology from cultural theory. For example, Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) concept of *cultural capital* helps us recognize how the use of symbolism from an ancient tradition has been promoted to advance the careers of slide-guitarists. Drawn from an economic model, cultural capital refers to social (rather than financial) assets, which promote upward social mobility, and by extension, economic gains. The following elements of cultural capital have been imbued into the slide-guitar by virtue of its visual and sonic aesthetics.

Visually, the slide-guitar has acquired many of the stylistic elements of traditional Indian classical instruments, most noticeably in the decorative carvings that accent the body of the guitar. Specialists, who design patterns on other traditional instruments like the *sitar*, *sarod* and

veena, often craft the slide-guitar's detailed ornamental work. While few slide-guitars have aged more than twenty years, the traditional designs add to what Bourdieu calls *objectified* cultural capital, which is derived from symbolically conveying the value of the instrument. To reference a cosmological connection to the centrality of sound in the Vedic tradition, Indian classical instruments are also often adorned with ancient symbols like the *Ohm* ॐ. Such symbols add value, especially in a tradition that generally regards instruments as sacred, treating them with utmost respect. Since only a few decades ago the slide-guitar resembled a typical Western guitar with raised strings, this sense of visual cultural capital in an Indian context has been a recent addition.

Sonically, the slide-guitar has acquired a new structure with many additional strings that offer a timbral quality reminiscent of other traditional Indian classical instruments. This produces a shimmering sound through sympathetic strings that resonate when striking the main strings. Globally, this sound is recognized as Indian, although in the West it has also associated with “other worldliness” and psychedelia from its early days of popularity in the late 1960s American counterculture. The system of slide-guitar playing, which includes a slide implement and finger picks, allows the player to closely mimic melodic flourishes that reference traditional Indian classical aesthetics.

In Bourdieu's terms, this sonic capital and the vocabulary associated with playing Indian music on the slide-guitar parallels the idea of *linguistic capital*. As a mastery of a medium of communication, linguistic capital constitutes a type of *embodied cultural capital* that accompanies the skills acquired through extensive training and socialization. While a fuller explanation of the traditional pedagogical system appears in Appendix A, the social aspect of training in the Hindustani classical tradition cannot be stressed enough. Analogous to the communicative skills referred to by linguistic capital, I propose the idea of *performative capital*

as terminology more appropriate to the skills involved in music, dance and other public ritual behavior.

Symbolically, the Hindustani slide-guitar represents the intersection of Indian innovation and Indian traditional music standards, obscuring any foreignness by taking on Indic visuals, sonic signatures, and also Sanskritic names. A great variation of names gives a sense that each slide-guitar player is performing on an exclusive instrument, thereby enhancing their own uniqueness. No such competition occurs amongst other instruments in the classical genres. Rather than competing solely on their performance merit, slide-guitarists combine elements of style, playing technique and personality with their conceptions of their customized instrument models. It is a modern way of marketing Indian classical music, which emphasizes individuals who entangle their unique identities with their unique instruments.

Devotees of great slide-guitar personalities have perpetuated some of these custom-designed instrument models, establishing a lineage and creating veritable schools or *gharanas*. By dividing the competitive field into large factions, the senior performers augment their social mobility within and against two broadly divergent communities. A social division has occurred in the slide-guitar community, stemming from the differing skill sets that have developed as a result of radically incompatible playing techniques, devised from different string configurations.

Competition in the Hindustani slide-guitar community can be rather intense. Limited to only two schools, far fewer performance opportunities are available between them compared to other classical instruments. Marketing thus becomes a crucial aspect of maintaining a slide-guitarist's performance career. Renaming slide-guitars to reference traditional rather than modern or foreign identifications is a strategic move to garner more attention, even though the instrument is just a modified slide-guitar. These names include the *mohan veena*, *siddha veena*, *saraswati veena*, *satvik veena*, *anandi*, *chaturangui*, *gandharvi*, *hansa veena* and many others whose

details will emerge in the biographical sketches of their inventors. Comprising only slight variations, their invention, contrary to the divine inspiration claimed by some performers, can actually be traced back to a single luthier in Kolkata, addressed in detail in chapter five. Yet by erasing the maker's influence, especially in the public's understanding of the instrument's origins, performers tap into a spiritual and traditional dimension as a promotional tactic. The renaming of the Hindustani slide-guitar has been extremely beneficial for performers, but perhaps less so for the slide-guitar's acceptance into the mainstream. This is debatable, as one might claim that the reason for the slide-guitar's success is the obfuscation of its foreignness. Nevertheless, at this point in the instrument's history, the slide-guitar's numerous fancy monikers are a barrier to standardization, which is identified as a great problem amongst many of my interviewees.

The image and sound of the Hindustani slide-guitar's numerous forms express a symbolic capital both new and old. The instrument's form simultaneously invokes a Western, modern currency (which has historically held great value as part of the fetishization of the colonizer) and an Indian traditional value through its modifications. Analogously, the instrument's sound has changed, where indigenous musical aesthetics emerge through slide techniques historically present for millennia in other instruments such as the *vichitra veena* and the *gottuvadhyam*. Regardless of origins, contemporary practitioners have contributed most to increasing the Indian slide-guitar's cultural capital, elevating it through performances in genres of traditional South Asian music and international fusion, jazz and world music categories. The *fields* where this capital has value have effectively stretched to global dimensions, overlapping from the local to the international. The cultural capital held by a player typically expands through rather intangible representations, evaluated by consumers based on newness, authenticity, perceived skills, and subjective assessments such as tunefulness and musicality.

Slide-Guitar and the “Aura”

Walter Benjamin’s notion of the *aura* can also help us understand the cultural and symbolic capital relevant to the Indian slide-guitar’s evolution. Aura refers to the value attributed to an object or person derived from a sense of authenticity, modified by the spatial and temporal distance from the perceived origins. Thus, the aura is constituted of subjective qualities that connect with broader notions of tradition or modernity. It can be reconstituted in an object via symbolic associations with a time period or even mythological era, filtered through a contemporary understanding that imagines an idealized past or future. The essence of something that references another time, the aura creates continuity with the present.

To use an example from Indian pop music competitions, consider the efforts contestants make to exactly replicate the range, tonal quality and expression of the legendary Bollywood playback singer Lata Mangeshkar. Across most competitions like *Indian Idol*, *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa*, and *Sing Dil Se*, the ideal vocal style for women has consistently been an emulation of Mangeshkar’s resonant soprano, which has been featured in over twenty-seven thousand recordings since the 1940’s. Her voice is considered a benchmark in Bollywood song and to reference her in one’s own style is tantamount to connecting to an idealized, classical era in playback singing. Singers capable of achieving this ideal, reconstitute the aura of this time in their own performance repertoire. The aura, while explained by Benjamin using visual symbolism, easily transfers to sound production, creating a reference to another time and place, and generating the value of nostalgia.

As in the Lata Mangeshkar example, sound constitutes an aura based on timbres, melodies and rhythms. Timbres that evoke tradition provide powerful sonic cues, appropriate for classical music performance. For example, adding sympathetic strings to a guitar increases tonal

sustain, elevating it from a light music instrument to a classical instrument. Melodies and rhythms can enhance the aura when they're passed down in the form of compositions, which to a knowledgeable audience can reference the past grandeur of great composers and players. Just as mass media and technology can reactivate the aura of mythological stories, each new incarnation of slide-guitar, from the *mohan veena*, the *satvik veena*, the *chaturangi*, to the *hansa veena*, etc. has the power to reactivate the aura of an ancient Indian instrument. The invention of new instruments with characteristically traditional sounds breaks down the temporal distance between tradition and modernity.

The aura concept can be easily applied to the Hindustani slide-guitar where connections to a traditional past have been achieved through the instrument's visual and sonic modifications. Both classical antiquity and a more localized history of film music and Bengali song are referenced through the style and sound of slide-guitar playing. At the same time, the slide-guitar also projects an aura of modern innovation, referencing a globalized world where instruments and musical ideas travel across cultural boundaries. Much like cultural capital, an aura's strength is enhanced through interaction with audiences, which connect the object to the past, the future, or in the case of the Hindustani slide-guitar, both.

The aura can also be applied to performers and their localities, perhaps best described with a topographic metaphor. Here, the development of a performer's personal aura allows them to rise in prominence as a symbolic culture-bearer. This altitude can then be compared geographically to the other epicenters of Indian slide-guitar. For our purposes here, I will limit my analysis to the geographical spread between the two most prominent areas of Indian slide-guitar history, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Adopting the aura as a theoretical device allows the observer to consider the fierce competition between players in broader and often overlapping fields of Indian classical music and popular song. The topographic metaphor creates peaks and

valleys between players and their locales, spatially representing the more prominent players and their particular traditions, while also illustrating the schism it produces in social life. The closer a performer is to either epicenter of slide-guitar, the stronger their aura and sense of lineage can be. Those performers with the strongest aura have crafted their identities interlaced with their guitars, using the instrument and their skills to connect with a broader cultural Indian-ness. With cultural nationalism in India having such high currency in the performing arts world, the adoption of national and religious signifiers contributes to the rise of the slide-guitar's cultural capital, accomplished by reconstituting an aura of Indian tradition that is increasingly mapped onto the instrument.

The aura effectively encapsulates the relationship between history or mythology, and the symbolic power of invention. In his analysis of visual representations, Benjamin (1996), emphasizes the power of images to represent symbolic associations, particularly of modernity. Modernity is understood as part of late-capitalist ideology that promotes consumption of symbols and objects that are seen as novel. An original object's distance from the consumer imbues it with a sense of reverence, or "magic" that is a reflection of an increase in symbolic capital. For example, the older an instrument seems, the more valuable it might seem in the eyes of the consumer. The quality of ancient, yet new, in the realm of Indian slide-guitar replicates itself with each new incarnation, becoming further legitimized by public consumption. The original *mohan veena* becomes more valuable as new generations of players reproduce it and join the lineage. In parallel, performers become more visible and famous when they promote traditional values that are popular in the public sphere. As such, Hindu-centric politics quickly becomes an ally of any performer willing to carry the torch of tradition, despite the actual newness of their medium of expression.

Benjamin's theorizing of the aura also implies that reproductions have an eroded value

because of a lack of authenticity. Yet, as new technology and production standards are used to recreate traditional objects, value can be renewed, leaving originals to keep currency through notions of nostalgia or retro. New reproductions can 'recode' the aura through a union of those magical, spiritual qualities that represent cultural identity, and technology's power to re-interpret and re-represent. This recoding occurs with the slide-guitar as recent modifications to the instrument's structure and sound connect it to traditional Indian aesthetics. Applying the aura's reconstitution function to the highly modern, technological, and deeply spiritual representations in Hindu nationalist media, Sandeep Dasgupta writes that:

The reactivation of the aura of the work of art in mass-mediated society is not the same aura as in antiquity or the classical age. However, this dimension is reinvigorated not by its proximity to a fixed time and place but rather by its relationship to the particular power relations within which it is re-embedded. It is in the reception of an artwork that the aura can be reactivated, as a result of the particular symbolic meanings that accrue to it and that are related to its subject matter and its mode of presentation at a specific historical moment. (Dasgupta 2006:256)

Dasgupta emphasizes the power structures that mediate the reactivation the aura, elevating them in public discourse and giving the object or individual where the aura is reconstituted additional symbolic capital. Analogously, the Hindustani slide-guitar, especially in the form of the *mohan veena*, achieves a similar reactivation by mapping sanskritic symbolism onto the object, resulting in the legitimization by Hindu dominant popular culture and politics. Amongst elites that safeguard the boundaries of the Indian classical genres, the *mohan veena* represents an unbroken continuity with ancient slide-instruments of the past rather than the Western guitar. Additionally, *mohan veena* inventor, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, has had increasing interactions with political elites, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, broadcasting their friendship through photos on social media. Groups in power mediate the promotion and reception of revamped symbolism, establishing a connection to an idealized past that is politically and financially salient in the present. Arbiters of popularity include individuals and institutions that operate local and global

exchanges from word of mouth to satellite television, where different signifiers like the traditional, or the modern, are given different values depending on the field of cultural production. Classical music, as a field of cultural production, rarely experiences innovations because any new medium for the music must contain appropriate structural, sonic and symbolic qualities. Innovations like the Hindustani slide-guitar have been recognized because of successful alterations that references traditional norms, thereby augmenting its economic and spiritual value.

Another function of newness and reinvigoration, of accruing cultural capital and augmenting the aura, can be found in the music's setting and orchestration. Fusion music, within which the Hindustani slide-guitar has received all its global accolades, is an example of how cosmopolitanism, global exchange, or universalism can be imprinted onto sound. In fusion, the mixing of traditional musical ideas becomes a modern endeavor, distinguishing itself from world music labels by suggesting the creation of something new in intercultural exchange. While exchange is inherent in the original conception of world music categories created in the 1990s, much criticism has arisen that charges this genre with reconfiguring traditional music for modern consumption (Taylor 2012). The result is more of an emphasis on consumer trends and folkloricization in world music compared to the purposeful experimentation and collaboration that defines fusion. The fine differences between fusion and world music notwithstanding, these genres provide new settings where the Hindustani slide-guitar has excelled, embodying the sense of global cultural exchange and traditionalism without compromise.

The authenticity imparted on new Hindustani slide-guitars by players, critics and audiences relies in part on how effectively it operates in the classical genre, whose structure is overtly connected to national Indian identity. The rise of the slide-guitar in light music genres is less evident despite its popularity since the 1940s. Light music genres of *Rabindra sangeet* and

Nazrul geeti strongly reflect Bengali cultural identity, evoking a connection to the land, a rich cultural and literary history, and the nationalist movement. The sound of the slide in these genres creates such a strong connection with lyrics for the average middle-aged Bengali that the timbre itself has been referred to as nostalgic. Light music is appreciated, not for its innovation, but for its ability to replicate tunes that connect with a very distinct sense of Bengali identity and historical timeframe.

The various musical genres in which the Indian slide-guitar has appeared connect with different streams of representation and cultural capital. The aura is a helpful term to better understand how and why value fluctuates in each of these contexts. Power, technology, innovation and nostalgia all affect the aura of a sound, object or person. Without losing sight of the slide-guitar's story in this complicated web of theoretical terms, I seek to emphasize the players, the audience, and the instrument makers as all responsible for enhancing the aura, and by extension the value of the slide-guitar in today's classical, fusion/world, and light music genres.

Indian Secularism and the Political Aspects of Spirituality in Music

Symbolic value is dictated by cultural norms, and in India, the current political climate is experiencing a crisis of identity between spiritual and secular forces in modern politics. Through independence-era leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, the secular and socialist ideals promoted by the sovereignty movement pushed Indian politics towards a widespread inclusion of minority religious, ethnic, and tribal groups. Today's shift towards Hindu nationalist dominance of the political sphere is a reaction to these secular policies, as well as a reaction to the corruption of the central government during the end of the twentieth century. As secular politics have been

voted out of office, so have secular policies been rolled back to privilege the Hindu majority. As Romila Thapar recently noted,⁹ censorship and bans on certain foods and clothing by the Hindu right threaten the inclusive social vision of India's revolutionaries. Provoked by hard-line Hindu groups who see secularism as a threat to their cultural and political hegemony, online forums, print and digital media sources overflow with criticism of secular policies and protections for ethnic and religious minority groups. The current dominant political party, the B.J.P., has been criticized for not doing more to condemn Hindu fundamentalist violence, commonly referred to as the "saffron terror," creating a troubling development that has targeted marginalized communities including women, the lower-castes, and adherents of non-Hindu spiritualities in India.

Secularism has given way to majority politics sharpening the conflict between communal identities, yet India's unique secularism doesn't explicitly exclude religion or spirituality from the government. As with Hindustani classical music or with the design of the Indian state, a spiritually positive form of secularism—blending the modern and the traditional—can be considered pro-deist. It is thus, fundamentalist activity that challenges the balance of Indian secularism rather than any expression of personal spirituality amongst government officials. Despite the general sanctioning of spiritual behavior, the perception remains amongst conservative and right wing ideologues, that the government routinely works to disenfranchise their political power.

The construction and development of India's secularization doesn't fit the theoretical mold of the development of the public sphere in capitalist nations. As Charles Taylor (2007) has suggested, changes in belief and unbelief occur in the process of secularization, leading

⁹ <http://scroll.in/article/763263/romila-thapar-before-anyone-can-debate-the-sangh-it-has-to-stop-abusing-its-opponents> - this article explores Thapar's observations of the rising Hindu-centric censorship filtering into popular culture and academia.

inevitably towards rationalism. He focuses on the Protestant-Catholic schism of the 1500s as the impetus for secularizing philosophies that resist the church's central authority. In Latin Christian societies, secularization produced not only a decline of public religious activity but also a shift in religious thought and practice to accommodate scientific rationalism and competing religious practices. Taylor's ideas fall in line with Jürgen Habermas' (2009) linear sense of the modern bourgeois public sphere, which sees a transition from feudalism to modern capitalism through the development of public spaces where ideas are contested and promoted through rigorous debate. The religious and non-religious take on new meanings, and depending on the social and power dynamics within these communities, spirituality finds new places in which to operate.

As the creation of the public sphere and secular culture seems predicated on the fall of a corrupt central power in Taylor's construction, critics have noted that the secularization process does not occur in a vacuum. As Saba Mahmood (2010:283) has observed, secularism's historical trajectory cannot be understood apart from the Western world's interaction with the "other," as Christian ideas were shaped by their positioning against alternative forms of belief. By the same token, we can consider India's secularism as also operating in dialogue with domestic and international influences. Talal Asad (1993) urges us to view religions as engaging in dialectic over competing claims of truth. Indian secularism looks outside of its cultural boundaries into a globalized modernity for this sense of truth, but internally, religion has always been given full public sanction. This may have been a weakness in the design of the Indian state, since democratic politics have given way to Hindu dominance and resistance to secular intentions.

Indian classical and national music have followed suit by emphasizing religion's centrality in Indian culture, although not without controversy. Non-Hindu musicians experienced discrimination and violence when attempting to participate in supposedly secular genres, like Hindustani classical music. Even subtly, the traditional rituals and invocations associated with

classical music performances are Hindu-coded processes, which non-Hindus have had to accept to succeed in their careers.

India's musical presence in a global marketplace is rarely connected to secularism. The marketing strategy of Indian music has always emphasized devotion, spirituality and transcendence. The structure and philosophy behind performing *ragas* are overtly spiritual; it occupies the forefront regardless of the performer's religion. If Hindustani classical music has been secularized to allow all religious persuasions to participate (Bakhle 2008), it nevertheless remains, like the secular Indian state, Hindu normative. In contrast with Taylor's analysis, the conditions of belief present in Indian culture have not waned, but rather are growing, despite the veneer of secular government since independence. Asad's dialectic between religious culture and the government also holds true, as contentions remain, for example, over scientific discoveries in the Indian public sphere which work to contradict Western narratives about culture, religion and ancestry. While making positive strides towards affirming Indian identity, the campaigns of intellectual de-colonization are acted out in the public sphere, sometimes riding the popularity of political opportunism. Alterations to the structure and economy of the performing arts are potentially byproducts of personal goals, justified under the banner of nationalism. Regardless, objects and performances with spiritual connotations continue to exist in public space where their value is subject to judgments of traditionalism, morality and Indian-ness.

Even within the slide-guitar community we find Hindu-normative rituals enshrined in the structure of performance, a fact not lost on the performers I interviewed, who recounted numerous confrontations when interacting with a conservative audience. Understanding the form of conservatism that inspires the criticism of slide-guitarists can be confusing, especially since Indian cultural values and religion are so closely intertwined. Are negative reactions coming from culturally conservative sentiments, or from resistance to non-pious performance practices,

or perhaps from Western influences blamed for the slide-guitar's adoption into classical music? Some reject the slide-guitar as an Indian instrument, yet with its modifications and conceptual vernacularization, the Hindustani slide-guitar could not have existed anywhere but in India.

Compared to the Hindu-normative secularization that occurs within India, the secularization in the global music markets—which influence India's cosmopolitan middle class—allows for a more universalist, *nirguna*, deism to hold a place of high value. *Nirguna* deism expresses the divine as existing without form, rationalizing religious symbols and signifiers as human translations of the same ineffable divinity. The popularity of spiritual bricolage taps into this sense of spiritual universalism, providing a useful marketing tool since culturally specific symbols act as authenticity markers, yet their indiscriminate mixing promotes inclusiveness. In his exploration of Sufi Rock, Peter Manuel (2008) demonstrates how the popularity of universalist theology in music has skyrocketed in the Hindu middle class. Similarly, when slide-guitarists invoke Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and music, it provides them with two forms of symbolic capital: where Hindu symbolism is valued, and where deist markers of piety, reverence and devotion are prized, that is, in the global marketplace. Slide-guitarists must contend with these issues, sometimes explicitly aligning themselves with religious or cultural identifications, and sometimes secularizing their performances and public personas, often both when the situation demands.

Nationalism, Tradition and Modernity

Contemporary Indian nationalism necessarily derives from the colonial experience. To provide a context for examining (in the next chapter) its role in Indian music, it is important to outline some theoretical issues concerning nationalism. Throughout my ethnomusicology

training and studies of South Asian culture, nationalism has been a major theoretical topic. We can understand the creation of national identity as the process of creating boundaries between the self and other. As Edward Said has shown in *Orientalism* (1979), the West has been defined in contrast to the East, and observations about the other generally reflect one's own subjective lens. Thus is the case in examining India, which is why ethnographic data is so important to understanding the local, native, or *emic* perspective.

In *Imaginary Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson argues that national identities emerge from a public imagination of unity according to cultural, geographic or ideological boundaries. Anderson emphasizes the imagined qualities of nationhood, which the media efficiently project and central governing bodies rigorously reinforce. When forming a national identity in response to a colonial encounter, post-colonial nations like India often imagine an idealized time of sovereignty and equitable self-governance. While not necessarily historically true, the pre-colonial past always appears more appealing to groups struggling for self-determination.

Groups with nationalist mentalities can also display internal power dynamics, complicating Anderson's analysis and perhaps making them too simplistic for real-world situations. In response, in his examination of the construction of anti-colonial nationalism, Partha Chatterjee (1993:6) asks: "who is doing the imagining?" Chatterjee describes a bifurcated Indian nationalism, divided into senses of *inner* and *outer*. The *inner* consists of the spiritual, local representations of traditional culture while the *outer* consists of material, global, modern, and technological representations. India's secularization plays a balancing act between these two streams, allowing expressions within the spiritual domain while also projecting globally a modern rationalism and capitalist economy.

Who imagines these representations depends on the internal cultural dynamics and the locus of power, including patriarchal controls, caste and class divisions, and religious and governmental authorities. Chatterjee's bifurcated nationalism emerges often in Indian culture, such as in the education system, where sciences and the humanities privilege modernity and tradition, respectively. As globalization increases and Indian cultures begin projecting their own unique forms of modernity (as in the high-tech recreations of the *Mahabharata* for television audiences), this division between the modern and the traditional seems to be breaking down.

Chatterjee's observations on the divide between spirituality and technology also fail to account for the slide-guitar's development. For example, a figure like *mohan veena* creator, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, may be seen as a modern, international ambassador of Indian culture through his innovations in a world-wide tradition, via the organology of the guitar, considered new to the global marketplace. Bhatt uses new technology to effectively operate in a traditional setting. At the same time, he is revered as a spiritual figure, and his pious and humble personality augments his projection of a deep Hindu faith and sense of spirituality. Even new nationalist productions challenge Chatterjee's dichotomy, such as performances of the Hindu national song "*Vande Mataram*," featuring Bhatt as well as Western rock instruments and flashy videography. The Indian slide-guitar itself joins these examples of criss-crossing representation, since it projects an aura, both visually and sonically, that disrupts dichotomies of Indian nationalism by symbolically suggesting both the traditional and the modern.

Since it still manifests itself in some aspects of Indian culture, Chatterjee's dichotomy cannot be completely dismissed. Slide-guitarists have encountered situations where their medium has been viewed as too modern for classical music. The foreignness has been difficult to strip away, but through experimentation with form and the development of appropriate playing techniques for Hindustani classical music, slide-guitarists have been able to defy a rigid

traditional versus modern dichotomy. Other innovations in Indian classical music have not been so successful, and the charge of foreignness or excessive modernity has kept certain (especially electronic) instruments nominally banned from participation. Even the Indian voice has experienced this divisive cultural construct. While chapter three will examine voice more extensively, especially in its relationship to gender, it is useful to further consider the implications of Chatterjee's theories for other performance genres.

The Voice, Authenticity and Mimicry

As the slide-guitar's primary entrance into South Asian music was through mimicry of the voice, it is interesting to consider how the modernizing cultural ethos seems to have accepted the reproduced voice on slide-guitar as authentically Indian. Studies regarding vocal anthropology view the expression of voice in cultural activities as a marker of authenticity and identity (Feld, Fox, Porcello, Samuels 2004), but do imitations, or reproductions of the voice have the same effect? Does the aura degrade in this context, or does the lack of linguistic meaning give primacy to other semantic markers like timbre? Some of the leading non-Indian performers of the Indian slide-guitar, like Harry Manx, claim the instrument's voice expresses both local and global signatures. He describes his initial encounter with the instrument as hearing a magical sound that was both slide and *sitar*.¹⁰ Manx numbers among a growing generation of Western slide-guitar enthusiasts who view Indian classical music, rather than jazz or Western classical, as the culmination of their guitar repertoire. The authentic voice of the slide-guitar gives it and its practitioners, considerable agency as ambassadors of an Indian tradition, while still being open to participation in fusion, world music and classical genres. But these

¹⁰ Andy Ellis, "Secret World", http://www.premiorguitar.com/articles/The_Secret_World_of_Hindustani_Slide.

perspectives come largely from the outside of India looking in, where there are fewer preconceived notions of how and who should make sound in Indian music contexts.

While foreigners perceive the voice of the Indian slide-guitar as Indian, the instrument has endured extreme modifications and crossed social barriers to be considered Indian by Indians. Yet, where has this transition occurred and how do we conceptualize this space? Does the mimicry entailed in developing more traditional slide-guitar performance practices detract from or add to its authenticity? Perhaps the slide-guitar's early location in Bengali light music genres enabled its gradual transition towards the more strictly guarded classical tradition. These questions will help us think about how cultural values engage with the development of performance practices.

Connecting theories about nationalism with ideas about the Indian voice, Amanda Weidman (2006) notes that in "twentieth-century South India the voice came to be associated with Indian-ness and not Western-ness, [with] originality and not reproduction, humanity and not mechanization, tradition and not modernity." The politics of voice in India represents a difference between East and West, enveloped in all the associations that distinguish the two, including ideas of naturalness and their relationship with femininity. Invoking Chatterjee's dichotomy of nationalism, Weidman distinguishes women vocalists who had their careers molded by gendered conceptions of morality, chastity and traditional behavior, resulting in strict controls over their public appearance. In this context, the female voice is associated with an intimacy that is in stark contrast with modernized ideals about public performance, yet the players that mimic these vocalizations aren't subject to the same scrutiny.

Weidman's discussion of the voice (2011) also addresses the development of new technology that separates the heard voice from the perception of the body that produces it. The development of recording technology, microphones, and later on, playback singing in Bollywood

films, divorce the intimacy of the voice from the corporeal form. These technologies have been a boon to conservatives alarmed by women performing in the public sphere, and a crutch for women performers subject to patriarchal controls. Replicating the voice on instruments does the same conceptual work of separating the voice from the body, eliminating the more visceral visual aspects of performance. Even further, the slide-guitar can be played with extremely subtle and subdued gestures compared to the typical physicality associated with instruments like the *sitar* and *sarod*. With heightened ability to replicate the voice with calm visual aesthetics, the slide-guitar, as has been proven by its history as a medium that can both replicate and conjure the emotional qualities of expressive vocalizations. As I will argue in the next chapter, the post-colonial context of the Hindustani slide-guitar might suggest that the instrument's voice represents a new India, because of its global success. At the same time, the slide-guitar's register, along with other classical instruments (Du Perron 2002), produces a voice that borrows from aesthetics of women vocalists, while not experiencing the negative aspects and controls of projecting femininity in a controlled climate of Indian cultural nationalism.

Not only has the slide-guitar been the most effective instruments in copying the sonic qualities of the voice, it has also developed a repertoire defined by its ability to mimic other instruments. Such techniques, described as *baj* or *ang*, are taught so that the slide-guitar repertoire can be played using techniques that closely match the timbral qualities of more well-known traditional instruments like the *sitar* and *sarod*. Slide-guitarists have experimented with different string configurations and different tools with which to play the instrument. The three plectrums widely seen as standard in slide-guitar playing have at times been substituted for the *jabba* of the *sarod*, or the *misrab* of the *sitar*. Mimicry becomes a means of acquiring an authentic tone from the instrument, bringing it closer to the desired mystique of the traditional Indian sound. The slide-guitar can certainly achieve these replications, but in doing so, have

players also been able to create an authentic voice for the slide-guitar itself? As outlined in Appendix A, I believe they have, but the concept of a *slide-guitar ang* has yet to catch on, since some obstacles remain. The voice of the instrument, for example, must be considered authentic rather than a reproduction. And the slide-guitar's creation and operation in a unique hybrid space (and capability of evoking timbres that relate to both), must be better appreciated. Authenticity is predicated on the subjectivity of the observer. Thus, at some point, mimicry must be abandoned as the foundation of slide-guitar practice in order to develop its own voice. This imperative has been echoed by many slide-guitar players who see the development of a pedagogy and repertoire specific to slide-guitar as one of the most important steps in ensuring the instrument's future as an authentic instrument for traditional music.

Hybridity, Globalization and Post-Colonial Spaces

Not only can the slide-guitar be considered a hybrid physically and sonically; symbolically it also represents a meeting point of Indian and non-Indian signifiers. The new generation of Hindustani classical slide-guitars have appeared at time when Indian culture is reacting to the initial post-colonial drive for independence, revising the secular and socialist leanings of the first decades of self-governance. How the slide-guitar has managed to survive and evolve along with these political currents testifies to its multi-valent identity. Within this shifting cultural milieu the slide-guitar's hybrid identity allows it to be considered foreign and national, traditional and modern, old and new, all at the same time. With such a complicated mix of influences imprinted onto the Hindustani slide-guitar, it is equally instructive to consider the spaces in which the instrument has developed.

Ashish Nandy's (1983) analysis of Indian post-colonial culture describes the colonized as

constructing new senses of identity from the boundaries set forth by the colonizer. The complex development of assimilated versus resistance identities creates a cosmopolitan mixture that thrives in the old colonial capitals of Kolkata and Mumbai. In these settings, musical aesthetics have developed to reference the creation of unique hybrid identities, much like the slide-guitar. The post-colonial space of the contemporary Indian music scene welcomes performances that interact with a sense of modernity and tradition, just like the slide-guitar, which is found equally in conservative classical contexts and cutting edge international collaborations. The boundaries suggested by Nandy, while accurately describing the replication of many of the political and social structures that coalesced in South Asia due to the colonial experience, doesn't account for the synergistic byproducts of modern hybrid spaces like the Hindustani slide-guitar.

In his analysis of identity politics in a post-colonial context, Homi Bhabha (1994) examines the spaces inhabited by the influences of both the colonizer and the colonized. In theorizing these spaces as hybrid, Bhabha is pointing out the multiple dichotomies at play, which synergistically create something new. Besides colonial and post-colonial, the theory of hybrid space also can include the local/global, and modern/traditional. Hybrid spaces, like those in which the Indian slide-guitar have been created, tend to prioritize global over local senses of community. For example, the international slide-guitar community gathered in Kolkata in 2015 to celebrate their instrument at the Indian International Guitar Festival. That festival, while integrating and attracting participants from around India and abroad, excluded many local players in an effort to attract an international audience. As in this case, efforts to represent a performing arts tradition to a global audience can be problematic. Richard Wolf suggests:

Contemporary academia invests transcendence of place with its own kind of capital – for reasons different from those of the international music market. Do the increasing humanistic and social scientific emphases on the so-called forces of globalization, like the market's search for music that transcends context, disguise and undermine the ongoing relevance of local music and local senses of music in the world? (Wolf 2009:6)

Wolf privileges the local as does most of the early anthropological and ethnographic research, which strives to faithfully document and preserve the authentic and traditional. His warning could apply to the slide-guitar, especially if the instrument's local origins in places like Kolkata become subordinate to its glorification as a global phenomenon. While global contexts aren't the only way to understand culture, hyper-connected and technological communities increasingly shape discourses about identity, extracting the slide-guitar from the local traditions like the light music genres of *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*, and placing it in exoticized global markets.

Wolf's argument maintains that understanding musical communities and traditions using a globalized or neoliberal framework of analysis can ignore important aspects of local culture. Yet, as technology becomes more accessible, especially in urban areas, the boundaries put around culture and identity formation are increasingly porous, making it difficult to offer cogent analysis of a traditional music without looking outward. *Glocalization*, which has become a generic reference in disciplines as diverse as marketing and education policy, may best describe the permeable borders between the local and global. The *glocal* (Featherstone, Lash and Robertson 1995) encapsulates the notion of hybridity and also implies overlapping power structures of politics and economics that mediate communication and capital. In analyzing the slide-guitar and the international events that celebrate it, all three categories of cultural space—the local, global and hybrid—will be useful ways to understand the social and economic challenges the slide-guitar community faces.

The effects of a globalized musical marketplace cannot be discounted. Constructions of identity result from multiple flows of transnational cultural economies and creative imaginings of the group and the self. In the migration of objects and aesthetics across cultural borders, new associations are developed and popularized, often by charismatic personalities who contribute a value to certain objects and performance practices. Arjun Appadurai's (1996) sense of *-scapes*,

attached to a variety of prefixes that denote the movement of ideas, wealth, populations etc., is a useful way of understanding the migration of different elements of culture. In the case of the slide-guitar, not only the object, but the symbolic associations and performance practices connected to it have migrated to South Asia. Complicating our understanding of the flow of materials and ideas associated with the side-guitar is how, where and when has the stream been altered through the reinvention of the instrument. Additionally, the diversity of South Asian performance contexts within which the slide-guitar has come to function implies an equal variety of ways performers use the instrument to articulate a sense of authentic “Indian-ness.” Other studies (Ranade 2005; Ganesh 2005; Weidman 2005) have focused on the tensions between authenticity and innovation in Indian music genres, especially with how new musical ideas clash with highly valued qualities of traditional lineage and musical purity in the classical genres. In the age of the Indian slide-guitar, Indian music genres have clearly expanded to incorporate, amongst other non-traditional elements, modern and foreign instruments in a multiplicity of performance contexts. Thus, resolving the apparent conflicts between authenticity and hybridity only becomes necessary when considering the more conservative perspectives on safe-guarding traditional music. The futility of assigning authenticity to hybrid performances offers a clue to how the Hindustani slide-guitar operates so successfully in fusion music. The global attention garnered from this popularity in fusion music has had a major impact on how conservatives of traditional music have loosened their restrictions against the slide-guitar in the past twenty years. Authenticity, while a useful concept to understand the reception of performances, must be considered subjectively, drawn together by the experience of audiences and critics, and subject to personal preferences, social relationships, and the shifting conceptual position of the instrument along the spectrum from local to global.

The continuous expansion of hybrid spaces for music cultures suggests the need to

renegotiate labels of authenticity, modernity and the traditional. The Indian context offers a unique historical background for doing so, where representation has been shaped by various social structures, including the state, whose secularizing policies reflect anti-colonial nationalist movements and whose anti-secularizing impulses have altered ideas about modern Indian identity. Beyond an Indian context, this work will look to show how representations of indigeneity, nationality and cosmopolitanism are often overlapping and contradictory. By using the slide-guitar and its community as a lens, this study will illuminate the functioning of cultural capital with real world repercussions described in ethnographic detail.

The Hindustani slide-guitar exudes an aura of both modernity and spirituality since it has been cast as an alternately foreign, local and national instrument throughout its history in South Asia. Thanks to pioneer maestros, the Indian-slide guitar and its many incarnations now proliferate in both classical music genres and in modern, national Bengali song genres. The players who have elevated the symbolic capital of the instrument's image and sound have garnered accolades from all the doyens of the fiercely guarded genres of Indian music as well as from the global marketplace, making it an ideal subject for the study of socio-cultural representation.

In this chapter I have argued for the instrument to be considered as an object that exemplifies the destabilization of dichotomies like modernity/tradition, religious/secular, and local/global. To effectively apply these theoretical issues raised above, the following chapters will address historical movements of socio-political change in India to give a more complete picture of how the slide-guitar has been accepted into Indian musical genres. At the end of chapter two, two other foreign-cum-indigenized instruments, the violin and harmonium, will be

introduced to highlight, by comparison, the Indian slide-guitar's unique qualities. By contrasting their physical and conceptual evolution, the slide-guitar will manifest a post-colonial and hybrid aesthetic, whose durability and flexibility has made it a worthy object even in the eyes of the most stoic conservatives.

Throughout this introduction of the theoretical dimensions of the Indian slide-guitar, I have left the historical narrative a bit obscure in order to highlight the symbolic and structural transformation of the instrument. By marking the slide-guitar with terms like hybrid and post-colonial I also hope to emphasize the political and social symbolism that has been grafted onto the instrument by its primary practitioners. Since this research ultimately concerns the development and resilience of inventions and inventors, the theoretical frameworks presented here are best employed to reveal how the Indian slide-guitar is an important musical phenomenon that reflects contemporary socio-cultural phenomena in India. The slide-guitar defies polarities and simplistic categorization, inhabiting a heterogeneous conceptual and cultural space that will hopefully pose an enduring challenge to cultural theorists.

Chapter 2: Colonialism and Music Cultures in India

This chapter examines the impact of colonialism and musicological study on the development of religious and national ideologies in India. The British colonial period had a profound effect on the intellectual classes in India, where the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the birth of South Asia-focused orientalist historiography, with foreign scholars collaborating with native informants to produce a body of knowledge that shapes today's understanding of Indian music, history and culture. In the highly nationalistic and reformist atmosphere of India's two-hundred-year British rule, influential pedagogues, performers and administrators of public and state-sponsored music took the opportunity to alter the structure and patronage of Indian music. Broadly, Indian music underwent changes by assimilation, resistance and adaptation to Western musicological theories, aesthetics and pedagogical practices, as well as by the influx of new technologies, economies, and cultural norms. The Hindustani slide-guitar, though not appearing until much more recently, can be better understood in the backdrop of these cultural and ideological changes leading to Indian sovereignty, marking it as a post-colonial development.

In order to explore the cultural setting of the Hindustani slide-guitar's creation, I will detail the early formation of modern Indic musicology and the assumptions made about the origins of Indian music, which conformed to a Hindu-centric ideology. The codification of the North Indian classical genre's theory and performance practices were shaped by political ideologies, religious reforms and social movements, compelling theorists to create a modern systematic structure for a genre with nationalist importance. With systematization came shifts in patronage, the development of public institutions for musical advancement, and the incorporation of foreign instruments into traditional genres. In describing these historical changes in the

cultural climate and economy of music, I show how South-Asian audiences were prepared for the eventual acceptance of the slide-guitar into traditional, classical and national music.

Early Indic Musicology and Orientalist Historiography

The encounter between Indic musicology—an ancient tradition reaching back to the *Sama Veda* (~1700 BCE) and Bharata's *Natyasastra* (~200 BCE-200 CE)—and Western European scholarship on Indian music began in Calcutta (now Kolkata, West Bengal India), which by 1772 had become the colonial headquarters under the British East India Company. Having established a permanent colonial settlement, British officials—in conjunction with local elites—began developing an educational infrastructure. In 1784, Sir William Jones, a philologist and occasional musicologist, founded the Asiatic Society and published one of the earliest works in English on Indian music (Jones 1789) with the help of Brahmin intellectuals. Influenced by his informants, Jones traced Hindustani music's lineage to the ancient Sanskrit texts noted above. Jones' work, as described by P.J. Marshall (1970), was part of the West's "re-discovery of Hinduism," which connected Indian classical music's development to a Hindu-dominant historiography. This bolstered Jones's philological theories of an Indo-European linguistic monogenesis and became pervasive, particularly among sympathetic European scholars¹¹ and Indian musicians and theorists.¹² The former sought to frame Muslim rule in India as a cultural decline, whereas the latter were proud to trace their musical tradition back to a Hindu golden age parallel to the ancient Greece of the West. Numerous early musicologists focus on Indian music sharing

¹¹ Schlesinger, Kathleen. "The Basis of Indian Music." *The Musical Times* 56, no. 868 (1915): 335-39. Amongst many other late 19th and early 20th century musicological texts draw from Jones' work.

¹² Coomaraswamy, Ananda. "Indian Music." *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1917): 163-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738082>. – the Indo-European linguistic connection appears frequently as the part of the logic of Aryan contributions to Indian musicology.

the perception of the music's antiquity, and the sub-continent's then current state of cultural poverty (Fox-Strangeways 1914; Shahinda 1914; Day 1891; Clements 1913). Early Western musicology of India had a particular goal: to catalogue and compare the sub-continent's music, and to rationalize their own biases about Indian backwardness, superstition, and pre-modernity.

In this era, a fiercely communal identity politics arose, along with a historical consciousness that sought to reconcile perceptions of native Indian culture with modern Western systems, technology and ideologies. The historical narratives of competing political groups heralded an idealized past. Often aligned with orientalist Western historiographies, Hindu nationalism during the colonial period often portrayed it as an age of artistic and intellectual decline, for Hindus a *kali yug*, or for European theorists a corruption of South Asian culture by Muslim tyranny. As Lily Strickland observes:

In the pre-Mohammedan era, music was in a high state of development, but its decline began with the Muslim invasion of India in the eleventh century. Classical music became decadent, as the rulers of the day were satisfied with such music as appealed to the senses: *nautes*, or the noisy and pompous music of Durbars. The old art-forms of music have never retained their first ascendancy in India save in areas into which Muslim invaders did not penetrate. (Strickland 1931:334)

Victorian values and racist assumptions about the moral corruption of Islamic peoples worked to frame Indian music as originally having a pure state in antiquity that were bound for a revival by natives seeking to cast off the shackles of Muslim rule. This rhetoric justified British colonialism as the savior of Hindu culture by freeing them from six hundred years of tyranny. Many perspectives voiced by early Western musicology about Indian music illustrate overt biases against the influences of Islamic cultures.

To the contrary, many of the Islamic empires inhabiting South Asia elevated music and patronized music cultures enthusiastically, producing many influential figures, such as Mia Tansen and Amir Khusrao, who remain revered today. Described by Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy

(2008:350), the biases of early musicologists in India were formed from assumptions regarding Sanskrit literacy, which when applied to accomplished Muslim musicians, characterized them as ignorant or pedantic. Clear contributions to style, technique, and philosophy about the role of music by the many hundreds of years of Muslim imperial rule have had to overcome the damage done by prejudiced historiography.

Thus, the work of Sir William Jones and many of his predecessors, contributed to a specifically Hindu sense of Indian classical music since they elevated the Vedic roots of Indian cultural arts while simultaneously divorcing them from positive Muslim influences. Orientalist anthropology reflects Europe's negative relationship with Islam, precipitated by geopolitical maneuvering in the Middle East and its domination for access to trade and raw materials. In India, religion and caste became more rigid identities, partly reinforced by the British legal system and the inauguration of the census in 1871. India's colonial presence shifted the balance of power away from Mughal rulers, and later vilified Islam by scaremongering over orthodox Wahabbism (Stephens 2012).

While glorifying a golden Vedic past, many of the European musicologists also analyzed Indian music using Western theoretical parameters. In his review of early colonial musicology in *The Hindostanni Air*, Ian Woodfield (1994) describes some amusing attempts at harmonizing Indian melodies, as well as derisive accounts of Indian performance practices. According to an early musicologist in India, C.R. Day:

Europeans, as a rule, leave India with the idea that the national music of the country consists only of noise and incessant drumming, varied, perhaps, by nasal drawling – equally repulsive as unmusical. That there is a real musical art – with an employment of various scales, abounding in rhythmical beauty and full of passionate expression, seems to many, almost incredible. (Day 1893:45)

Day makes clear the xenophobic and racist assumptions that most Europeans held during this period, where South Asian music cultures were understood as primitive, repetitive, crass and

unsystematic. Other early European comparative musicologists (Willard 1834; Hornbostel and Abraham 1904) while variously praising or denouncing Indian musical traditions, nevertheless inflamed Indian nationalism by provoking a political and literary backlash from Indians who protested the European misrepresentation. In reaction to the European literati, Indian elites sought self-representation, provoking a redefinition and consolidation, not only of the idea of Indian music, but also Indian nationhood.

Many new class Indian intellectuals received Western-styled educations, which Britain provided early in its occupation of Calcutta. By 1817, the Hindu College was providing an English education to Indians, training civil service workers in particular. The Hindu College became the epicenter for nineteenth century social and political movements, where influential figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy contributed to campaigns to reform of Hinduism, such as the 1829 legislation abolishing *sati* (a ritual of widow-immolation originating within a culture of South Asian warrior aristocracy). The Hindu College's Western structure and ideology also bred figures like Henry Derozio and his radical group, *Young Bengal*, which fully adopted Western ideals and derided traditional Indian culture. As an epicenter for academic Anglophilia, the Hindu College produced a population of Western-educated Indians who launched the intellectual movement, the *Bengali Renaissance*. In this atmosphere, which encompassed urban Calcutta's public sphere, a heated climate of debate and cultural analysis was born. Its proliferation resulted largely from the zeal of a young educated class and the power of the printing press. The dramatic arts flourished during this period as the identity of modern India was crystallizing.

One figure from this time, Sourindro Mohun (S.M.) Tagore (1840-1914), represented the blending of colonial and Hindu ideologies. The elder cousin of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), S.M. Tagore exemplified a strain of modern Hindu nationalism through his musical work (Katz 1988). From the conservative side of the Tagore family, S.M. admired

European culture, which melded with his passion to elevate Indian music. In an 1870 lecture, Tagore highlighted the need to justify and advance the “now decayed, yet once flourishing art of music in India” (Capwell 1991:233) yet also accept improvements from foreign music cultures. He praised Indian music yet complained, “O Mother India!...we still see none of your offspring attempting to improve the national music” (Tagore 1870:30). Tagore's lecture challenged Indians to discover their own nationalism stating, “As in times past with the establishment of various governments, Indians will not try to improve their musical science according to the cultivation of a canon – Is this how we will be mocked and ridiculed by European and other cultivated societies?” (Tagore 1870:66). This was a call, amidst the dense fog of orientalist-inspired nationalism, for Indians to instill the nation's ideals into their own songs and create a canon in which they could take pride.

As inspiration, S.M. Tagore's call accompanied the publication of his guru's treatise on Bengali music, which featured a form of Bengali music notation, very similar to that commonly used today (সা রে গা মা পা ধা নি translated as the diatonic syllables *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni*). While acknowledging the notational strength of Western music, Tagore maintained that, “Every nation that has a music of its own has also its own system of notation for writing it. Whether that system be an advanced one or not, (the music) cannot be correctly expressed in the notation of another nation” (Capwell 1991:237). Tagore used Bengali notation to spread the popularity of native music in Bengal, even within the structure of Western-styled schools. As Charles Capwell has observed, Tagore, as a nationalist, displayed his passion for self-representation and cultural pride. While notation ultimately became the crucial element in the development of Indian music theory, these early commentaries (by Tagore and others) reflect the psychological dilemmas of the cultural hegemony that is inherent to the colonial encounter.

Along with cultural, religious and social values, European colonialism brought a host of

new systems of organization, industry and technology to bear on Indian cultures. The effect on the Indian psyche was a massive cultural shift, simplistically labeled as modernity, which saw the incorporation, imitation, and resistance to European influence. According to Ashish Nandy:

colonialism creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter. It is not an accident that the specific variants of the concepts with which many anti-colonial movements in our times have worked have often been the products of the imperial culture itself and, even in opposition, these movements have paid homage to their respective cultural origins. (Nandy 1983:3)

Nandy's observation applies to various activities within the nationalist movement, including the arts, where the nationalist imperative has adopted modes of expression highly influenced by Western cultural or scientific dominance. Thus, we see in Tagore's scholarship his fervent loyalty to the British monarchy and Hindu conservatism, both of which enhanced the aforementioned anti-Muslim perspective.

As nationalism became a driving influence in maintaining musical genres and theories, the codification of the *classical* in India inevitably focused on a period before both British and Muslim colonialism, a "golden" and imagined past. Despite the tremendous contributions to Hindustani classical music by Muslim musicians, the tendency to Hindu-ise the tone of the nationalist movement has allowed polemicists to leap-frog the influence of Muslim musicians in favor of what has come to be seen as a purer musicological history, rooted in ancient Sanskrit. The partition of India in 1947 split South Asia's population according to religion, and thus presupposes the construction of a history along the same lines, between Hindu and Muslim. Paralleling the erasure of Muslim contributions to music in India, Pakistan purged Hindu ritual and lineages from the histories of Pakistani classical music, unfairly erasing musical contributions in deference to nationalist and religiously sectarian historical narratives (Saeed 2008).

Religion is a central component to understanding nationalist movements in South Asia. It

is also an important issue when looking at the social dynamics of the slide-guitar community, especially as its public image and performance practices have adopted Hindu-overtones. Very few Muslims play the slide-guitar in the classical genre and non-Hindu Indians have faced considerable challenges as performers. Muslim Bangladeshi slide-guitarists are a slowly increasing demographic, yet many of them, especially women, have encountered resistance to public performance.¹³ Religion is at the crux of how and why certain communities have fostered slide-guitar performance. Thus, the slide-guitar's evolution parallels the evolution of modern Hindu nationalism: the latter's ideological prominence is contemporaneous with the instrument's rise after independence. Before the slide-guitar's appearance in the mid-twentieth century, irrevocable changes had to have occurred in the cultural landscape along with developments in music production and consumption in India. The next section details the monumental shift in cultural conceptions, helping frame the development of the Hindustani slide-guitar within changes to the classical music genre, accomplished by influential theorists and pedagogues.

The Canonization of the *Classical* in Indian Music

The concept of the *classical* was developed in nineteenth century Europe to describe a golden age of elite composers who set a precedent for systematic, inspired art music, which migrated from courtly patronage into an elite leisure class, enabled by the industrial revolution and colonialism. As William Weber (1992:2) observes, “the concept of classical music, then, is not incidental to colonialism but part of its economy.” As a result, the *classical* arrived in India contemporaneously, yet without local roots, being a term that was a “marker of cultural status and authenticity whose original referent was not a historical period or particular style, but the

¹³ Personal communication with Susmita Kabir Asha, 2015; Dipon Sarkar, 2016.

West itself” (Weidman 2006:5). A reconstruction of musical theory and performance practices followed, reviving a tradition that sought to cement India's position as a modern nation and cultural powerhouse. The creation of a modern classical genre was ideologically driven, working to reform pedagogical practice and shifting the economy from private patronage to a public and state-sponsored musical culture. To reconcile the unfair hierarchy of the West over the East, Indian theorists articulated their own form of classical in both the north and south of the subcontinent.

In the assertion that the idea of the classical comes from, and is in direct reference to the West, an assumption is made about the lack of genres and hierarchies amongst South Asian musical cultures. Peter Manuel (2015) has detailed five different levels of classification that distinguish themselves according to patronage and theoretical parameters. Nevertheless, in practice, musicians expressed very fixed boundaries between classical music and other forms of “light” music. Reflecting on the idea of classical music in India, Ramesh Gangolli has noted that Sanskrit writings on music dating back to the ninth century, demarcate the distinction between musical genres of “*margi sangeet*” and “*desi sangeet*.”¹⁴ The former, derived from the word *marg* (translated as “the way” or “the path”) represents canonical music, whereas the latter—derived from the word *desha* (translated as “countryside” or “region”) represents local variations, perhaps analogous to folk music. Such a distinction reflects the same divisions between musical style, pedagogy and theory as the Western perspective on the classical versus *folk* or *popular* music, yet the Western classical conception carries with it inherent associations about class, race, gender and culture that aren't so neatly translated when superimposed onto Indian musical genres, which incorporates its own set of social issues. For example, Indian musical culture during the late Western colonial period was heavily stratified according to caste distinctions and

¹⁴ Ramesh Gangolli, personal communication, 2013.

religious differences. These social structures did not parallel those in the West, so the boundaries of access to classical music culture and patronage don't fit neatly onto an Indian model. Because classical music was situated amongst the elite of the colonizing culture, however, the idea of the classical was available for reproduction predominantly in elite Indian musical genres dominated by upper caste Brahmins.

While the boundaries of classical music as understood in India are important, they require a specific understanding of traditional performance practices and systems of musical aesthetics and style, as well as a historical understanding of who has access to these musical forms. The Western idea of the classical manifested in India serves, more than anything, as a marker of legitimacy within an English language medium, adopted widely, yet lacking specific, systematic principles, although some have attempted in hindsight to construct them (Power 1980). Importantly, the adoption of Western classical aesthetics and corresponding Victorian social mores was seen as a way to positively alter India's own musical legacy. Katherine Schofield writes:

Western concepts of the classical were often wholly taken over by colonial-period nationalists and used to bolster a wholesale renovation of certain genres, carefully selected for posterity, along with their associated practices and institutions. By subscribing to the hegemonic values of the colonial powers, so the argument goes, and by remodeling local art forms in their image—in other words, by taking over the sonic symbols of Western power and modernity—nationalist modernizers proved their right to be treated as equals with a proud, distinctive, distinguished cultural heritage like that of the West. (Schofield 2010:485)

While Schofield accurately describes nationalist motivations, the quest to standardize music theory in India may not have always been a competition for cultural legitimacy. Internal debates within Indian musicological circles about the performance of a particular musical form had their own merits, outside of proving anything to the West. In detailing how Indian music theory and performance practices changed during colonialism, it would be more accurate to describe specific practices, pedagogical developments, and the historical canonization that took place

during this historical period, more so than any wholesale notion of the classical being imported into India. As will be discussed in the following two sections, the musical codification and systematization efforts of theorists and the shifting settings from courtly patronage and conservatory institutions, can help us better understand Indian classical music's modernized boundaries.

The Codification of Music Theory in Hindustani Music

The figures that codified the classical genres in India had specific motivations that continue to influence the way the music is performed and transmitted today. By examining the backgrounds of theorists and the cultural climate in which they worked, this section illuminates pivotal changes to South Asian musical understanding in a colonial context. The most well-known figure responsible for codifying Indian classical music theory, Vishnu Narayan Bhatkande (1860-1936), was a Brahmin from Maharashtra and a scholar who toured India, delving into libraries and archives, and interviewing musicians about the theories underlying their performance practices. He was controversial and often criticized for his attitudes and methods, particularly for his rejection of the extreme emphasis placed on ancient Vedic roots of modern Indian music. Bhatkande was more interested in the living tradition and advocated a musical history much younger than the Vedic sources held sacrosanct by most pundits. His text *Music Systems in India* (1984 translation) draws from fifteenth to eighteenth century Sanskrit texts called *granthas*, which Bhatkande designated as the best sources for the codification of musical systems we know today.

In *Two Men and Music*, Janaki Bakhle (2005) challenges Bhatkande, particularly his contentions against Muslim musicians, whose role in developing North Indian music since the

twelfth century Bhatkande seems to have omitted. While Bhatkande's work has broadly secular motivations, some Hindu nationalist undercurrents help to explain his position on the Muslim contributions to the classical canon. Described as "interesting" or "strange alterations" to musical material, Bhatkande observed that there were "great artists in those Mahomedan times," almost as a surprised refutation of the idea that Muslim rule had a negative impact on Indian music (Bhatkande 1984:21, 41, 74). Bhatkande relied on text as historical evidence, and thus his research seems to reject the embodied, or lived experience of the classical tradition by certain groups in which oral transmission dominates the pedagogical style. This may have resulted from personal and social contentions, since details about theory and prized compositions can be highly guarded by musicians who consider themselves as culture-bearers. Additionally, orally-transmitted compositions have been known to be financially valuable, and the knowledge they contain have been stolen or traded in exchange for material goods across kingdoms and *gharanas*. Nevertheless, the orality of the tradition of Hindustani music was an obstacle in its modernization and codification, especially since transmission required face-to-face interaction and memorization.

Considering Bhatkande's methodology, one wonders whether his concerns about the accuracy of oral transmission have been voiced proportionately to both Hindu and Muslim musicians. The primacy of text can privilege the viewpoints of certain communities over others, but it is doubtful it should be considered more accurate than the experiential method of transmitting music theory, which has dominated in the Hindustani pedagogical tradition for centuries. Regardless, one must admit Bhatkande's profound influence and accept his designation of texts as valid sources of musicological definitions of the past. While he worked to prove the classical qualities of Indian music, he showed little interest in comparisons to Western symphonies and other classical genres. Bhatkande sought to derive classical qualities

independent from the West through a musical system personifying a new Indian nationalism as well as a coherent, systematic and all-encompassing music theory.

Most relevant to today's Hindustani music theory, Bhatkande contributed the *thaat* system, which ironed out inconsistencies between his textual sources and created a system of raga categorization that was simple and expansive enough to accommodate most of the music he encountered. He gathered information about the *raag* and *taal* systems from both northern and southern traditions, as well as performance practices such as the structure of presentation, focusing on the *khyal* tradition, and on expression in music, called *rasa*. Bhatkande's terms—like the *thaat* system, and his consolidation of *raga* definitions, serve all over the world as the definitive theory of Indian classical music. Even those who denounce his work cannot help but use the concepts and terminology he codified. Despite his Hindu faith, Bhatkande's dry and technical style secularized the spiritual or religious elements often associated with today's Indian classical music. He documented uniquely Indian forms of musicianship from the basic syllabic melodic system, called *sargam*, to describing all the *ragas* he found across India. While a celebrated pioneer in Indian classical music theory, Bhatkande was not the only influential figure during this time of nationalist codification.

Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931) has been regarded as the father of the modern spiritual Indian music tradition. Also a Brahmin from Maharashtra, Paluskar's approach differed from Bhatkande's, since spirituality was integral to his re-conceptualization of Indian music. First and foremost, Paluskar wanted to mold the regal music of the courts into a more idealized national music that personified Hindu purity. His music schools were open to a growing middle-class of Hindu women and other people generally excluded from musical practice—just as long as they were of the Hindu faith. Paluskar took music out of the courts, where women played the role of courtesan and were stigmatized as prostitutes, and placed it in the center of a modern

Hindu identity. In the process, Paluskar pushed out Islamic elements, even though many Indian musicians and teachers at the time were Muslim. He achieved success through his music academies and contributed compositions to a Hindu centered national consciousness exemplified by *Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram*, which was reportedly Gandhi's favorite *bhajan* (Hindu devotional song). His legacy appears today in the religious dynamics of performance and pedagogy where spiritual reverence and complete devotion to the guru manifests in ritualistic acts that mark the music as uniquely Hindu.

Paluskar's efforts to bring classical music into the household indirectly influence the slide-guitar's emergence in India. His campaign sought to incorporate musical knowledge into the ideal of the modern Hindu woman. During his time at the end of the nineteenth century and into the 1920s, to be considered eligible for marriage—with the proper education and traditional background—the modern Hindu woman had to understand at least the rudimentary aspects of Indian classical music. Many women chose to sing and play *tanpura*, a stringed instrument without frets, meant to be played as a drone accompaniment. Many also chose to practice on traditional melodic instruments, including the *veena*, *sitar*, and *sarod*. As foreign instruments, the guitar and later the slide-guitar were not included on this list. But the ethos of musical competence as essential for the modern Indian household did promote a nationwide adoption of domestic musical practice. Later on in the 1930 to 1940s, the slide-guitar entered the modern Bengali household, as a legitimate substitute for autochthonous Indian instruments and a useful accompaniment to traditional vocal music practice.

Both Bhatkande's and Paluskar's goals aligned with nationalist sentiment since they sought to unify Indian music into a single canon to represent all India. This included the development of a national music theory, system of notation and pedagogy, and a performance etiquette. Accompanying these efforts was a shift in the social understanding of music's role and

reception, particularly its modern expression. The musical arts provided a site of representation of paramount importance in the developing national consciousness, which interacted inherently with values of tradition and modernity. Tradition supplied the storehouse of cultural wealth, including compositions, instruments, performance practices and economies of patronage. With the intervention of Western colonial powers came the drive to clean house and revise traditional practices to conform to modern aesthetics without losing some sense of authenticity. Changes to music theory and practice occurred together with structural and material transitions that created—from technological advances discussed later in this chapter—new media and instruments, both searching for a place in Indian musical arts.

In the politics of the national imagination, many social roles were also codified, including gender roles, caste distinctions, and class differences based on education, all giving form to ideals that we can understand through the lens of music cultures. The following section describes the structural changes to musical patronage and pedagogy, drawing from examples in South India that help illustrate important shifts in musical culture during the Western colonial period.

Changes in Pedagogy: Institutions, Notation and Literacy

Beginning with the transition from an exclusive courtly tradition towards a more widely accessible cultural activity in the nineteenth century, India's classical music was stylized, codified, and textualized by pedagogues and music theorists who yearned to canonize it for modern India. As noted previously, this occurred to unify musical theory and practice across India, but also to position Indian music as a sophisticated response to the Western dominance of musicology. Two opposing streams, one of secular textuality and one of Hindu religious purity, spread across the vast subcontinent. We can examine the structural and economic evolution of

these traditions, beginning with the shift from court patronage to conservatories.

Passed down through the ages orally from teacher to student, Indian elite music constitutes a composite system of regional theoretical and performance practices, influenced by the diverse peoples and cultures inhabiting the subcontinent. Theory, techniques and compositions in Indian classical music have long been propagated by individual teachers, or gurus, who have emphasized the lineage performance schools called *gharanas*. Here, oral traditions are passed down through experiential learning, which as a pedagogical style, was losing its value to modern teaching practices and the drive to codify a Hindu-centric nationalist musicology. These *gharanas* evolve and develop identities within themselves, even though most practitioners excel across schools and share a reverence for the same hagiographies. Eminent figures, both Hindu and Muslim populate these lineages, and often due to political calculations, maintain their fame through their musical descendants.

Daniel Neuman's *Life of Music in North India* (1980), a seminal ethnography of the social life of *gharanas*, describes musician communities, their economy, and the cultural institutions that support them. He explores the influence of radio work and how performers have found success abroad. Integral to the formation of *gharanas* is the pedagogical style it houses, the *guru-shishya parampara*. Traditionally, the student (*shishya*) lives, studies and often meets the needs of the teacher (*guru*). Through this intimate relationship the student absorbs technique, theory and a deep understanding of the music. While highly prized by advocates as a system of musical pedagogy, the *guru-shishya parampara* has been criticized for merely catering to the guru's idiosyncrasies. These concerns compelled various music theorists, teachers and administrators to create a conservatory structure with standardized curricula. The critique of the *guru-shishya* tradition also shows how social life influences the transmission process, where prized compositions and musical knowledge are passed on only within the inner circle of students.

These shifting attitudes on musical pedagogy and the economic tensions amongst the regal classes during the colonial period produced a drastic shift in the support structures of Indian music, especially classical music.

Lakshmi Subramanian's books, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Academy* (2006) and *New Mansions for Music* (2008) describe the economic and nationalist undercurrents that altered the landscape of classical music patronage in South India. Looking at the history of early nineteenth century Tanjore's ruler, Serfoji II, Subramanian reconstructs the atmosphere of this monarch's court, illuminating the musical and artistic culture that he fostered, including the holy trinity of Karnatic composers (Tyagaraja, Dikshitar, and Sastri). She stresses the impact of colonialism, particularly the influence of Western ideas of the classical on the development of authorship, notation, and an elite canon of music. According to Subramanian, the creation of an elaborate mythology and classicist discourse bolstered a nationalist imperative that:

responded to the immediate needs of cultural nationalism that had to compulsively retrieve a heritage that was appropriately antique, authentic, and classical, to the compulsions of modernity that demanded a wider dissemination of the tradition among the middle classes through newly emerging conduits of education, and finally to the imperatives of actual artistic performance in a contemporary setting. (Subramanian 2008:19)

These conditions provoked the consolidation of repertoire, followed by a massive migration of musicians into colonial centers once the power of the courts waned. This dramatic shift also opened the classical tradition, in cosmopolitan cities like Madras, to middle-class audiences who could attend conservatories and view performances without discrimination from upper and regal classes. As participation in classical music became available to the middle-classes, stalwarts of the classical tradition imposed a particularly Western style of instruction methodology and dissemination. Texts that cemented the structures of famous composition became the primary means of transmitting Karnatic music in the new conservatories, making literacy an essential part

of musical proficiency.

During the colonial period, the change in musical theory and practice stemmed primarily from notation systems, which privileged musical literacy as the marker of musical skills. For example, in her examination of the violin in South India, Amanda Weidman emphasizes the role of literacy (2006:192), which allowed Indian classical music to adopt a sense of authorship and authenticity. Music was written down, sometimes in Western notation systems, sometimes in Indian notations systems, and often both. Weidman, however, highlights an important distinction: “while English writing – and thus Western music – is associated with print and stands for permanence, standardization, and legibility, Indian writing – conceived, of course, as handwriting – bears all the traces of orality: idiosyncrasy, illegibility, repetition” (Weidman 2006:243). Thus, Indian notation required translation, where musical terms and (primarily syllabic) notation are transformed to bring them into the musical realm of experience. Prescriptive markers for rhythm, style, tempo and other useful diacritics over pitches often do not appear in Indian notation.

Additionally, compositions—especially in Hindustani music as I have experienced it—comprise only small skeletal frameworks that act only as a guide or melodic consistency to tie together most of the music, which is improvised. Music in this sense defies literacy, as a sublime, ineffable act of imbuing life into the empty framework of notes on a page. Weidman continues, “for the modern musicologist, however, this sense of ineffability is elaborated with reference not only to the divine.... but also to the interiority of the modern listening subject” (Weidman 2006:244). This describes the way improvisation connects divine inspiration, as an interior vision translated into expressive form through musical performance. Sparse compositions allow room for interpretation and improvisation. Many of my Indian classical music interviewees emphasized this interiority, whereby they explore their own world of emotions, images and colors as they see appropriate to the *raga*. As such, the act of notation should not divorce

spirituality and the uniquely Indian interiority from the music, but rather remind us of the basic melodic structures whose design is to confer authorship rather than strict musical prescription.

The contested value and utility of notation in Indian classical music reflects the neo-liberal context of the colonial experience. Specifically, did the adoption of notation reflect a shift from the spiritual to an economic basis for music production and performance? The system of gifts, as described by Nicholas Dirks (1993:197), was a pre-colonial construct of patronage, where musical compositions and performances also played a role as offerings. Sometimes a musician was even paid to *not* sing a particular raga; elsewhere compositions were sold as devotional gift-giving. The reproducibility of notation and recordings profoundly altered this economy as well as the sense of authorship, elevating composers as owners of creative material with deep cultural antecedents. New compositions, particularly those (like Tyagaraja's) deified outside the court system emblemized the nation and its virtues, yet also represented modernity and the future of Indian music. As Subramanian suggests (2006:5), early Indian proponents of a notation economy adapted their art form for the challenges of global capitalism, even before the establishment of British colonial hegemony.

The issues surrounding the language of notation also reflect tensions over institutional controls of script and spoken languages, which dominated nationalist discourse during the colonial period. This remains significant because Indian musical notation assumes syllabic cues, written in scripts appropriate to the language of instruction. The music I learned in Bengal, for example, was notated in Bengali, whereas in Jaipur it was notated in Hindi. The use of certain scripts and languages becomes a socio-cultural issue since it privileges access to music along the lines of caste, class, literacy and linguistic aptitude. Reflecting on the Madras Music Academy, Subramanian shows how the classical music promoted there was performed and written predominantly in Telugu, and sometimes Sanskrit, rather than in the script and language of the

majority population, Tamil. The Tamil language movement influenced radio broadcasts, which required that most music be sung strictly in Tamil. This contributed to an anti-Brahmin movement where classical music was implicated in the exclusion of Tamils from modern musical culture. According to Subramanian:

The construction of a classical music repertoire, the positioning of certain compositions as the core elements in the repertoire, the relegation of Tamil songs and other dance related compositions such as the *javalis*, *padams*, and *tillana*, to a lesser status in the artistic hierarchy on grounds of its sensual content and non-classical resonance, was very much part of the Brahmin sponsored project of recasting the classical tradition and claiming its custodianship. (Subramanian 2006:149)

This shows how the alterations to musical institutions and access to music during the colonial period increased tensions between linguistic and caste groups, revealing the social effects of the power struggle over musical cultures.

The system still used today in the majority of pedagogical contexts in Northern India, uses syllables as a descriptive crutch or shorthand for memorization rather than a prescriptive key to musical performance. New adaptations have attempted to improve Indian notation systems to make them more accessible to Westerners, sometimes placing *sargam* side by side with Western notation (Wade 1979), which I find useful for prescriptive details or to highlight the technical aspects of musical adornments. Precise prescriptive notation has a connotation of mechanical reproduction that is rather unfavorable in an improvised tradition. Unfortunately, in the pedagogy of Indian classical music there has been little emphasis on the use of notation to convey information about improvisation. Largely tethered to oral transmission, knowledge about improvisational expression, or the often dramatized interiority, remains enigmatic to the uninitiated and unskilled.

Throughout my studies of music in India, notation using syllables from South Asian languages were employed to capture the essence of particular ragas or melodies from modern

songs. Described in Appendix A, my slide-guitar teachers taught me using the syllabic method, which was then enhanced by showing me the intricacies of adornment on the instrument. Because technique is far removed from this simplified system of descriptive notation, the economy of face-to-face lessons is integrated into the transmission process. To “sit” together for music learning was not only a social process, but crucial for any in-depth understanding of slide-guitar performance practices. As I wrote down many compositions and recorded our music sessions, I reflected on how this pedagogical system was a culmination of functional transformations in Indian music, drawing from access to new technologies and methods of learning that began in the shift from high-class court settings to middle class institutions.

Technology and Functional Transformations in Indian Music

The movement of Indian music from a courtly context into a publicly accessible, middle-class arena resulted from new technologies that allowed the music to be broadcast through radio, microphones, phonographs and amplification. As Weidman observes (2006:60), the placement of microphones within the Serfoji II’s palace projected the sound outward, fundamentally changing the private character of elite music, instead disseminating it through the power of amplification and reproduction. The broadcasting of the intimate setting of elite court music revolutionized the mediation and control of sound. Soon after, the economy of reproduction fell firmly into bourgeois hands after this transition, and as Weidman notes, “the rise of public concerts and commercial music-making produced new standards of taste, articulated on the one hand in the emerging discipline of music criticism and on the other in the curricula of teaching institutions established to maintain those standards” (Weidman 2006:60). The modernization of the musical economy in India at the beginning of the twentieth century further consolidated perspectives

about the appropriateness of music and performance, creating an almost monolithic canon of customs and aesthetics, firmly under the control of political and cultural elites despite being wrested from its courtly context.

New economies for musical consumption also promoted a transition in performance practices where communal forms of music-making, especially in folk or religious music shifted into more presentational forms. In his work on the functional shifts in *nirguna bhajans* during the twentieth century, Edward Henry notes:

The shift in the functional emphasis of a genre--from a unifying, ritual expression of in-group ideology or a mere ritual requirement to public entertainment-is one of the most common functional transformations to be seen in the study of traditional music change.” (Henry 1991:239)

The distinction between participatory and presentational is well-discussed issue in ethnomusicological literature, and shifts between these modes of expression within a musical genre are often a result of new economies for the performing arts (Turino 2008). What changed in Indian court music was access, where new audiences could listen to music previously reserved for the elite. No doubt presentational forms became more prevalent with this shift in venue and access, especially as the conservatory system developed new testing rubrics, pedagogical methods and norms for public performance.

New technologies, such as the phonograph and microphone, profoundly influenced Indian musical practice. The voice, as a natural expression, had to interact with technologies that changed vocal production significantly. Singers had to develop new vocal techniques, no longer needing to project their sound at high volume, reminiscent of the crooners of American popular music. The voice of M.S. Subbalakshmi was born into this technological atmosphere, and was praised for its delicacy and power, as microphones made subtleties audible. As Weidman reports, microphones also became a marker of modernity, and as a sign of respect many musicians demanded them even for instruments needing little amplification, like the *nagaswaram*, a loud

double-reed wind instrument played in South India for important rituals and celebrations. Using a 1947 political cartoon by Subbashri in the periodical *Kalki*, Weidman observes that “the microphone, as Subbashri's satire revealed, gave music concerts a peculiar kinship with political speeches” (Weidman 2006:93). The raspy tonal qualities of early microphones and amplification gave singing an aura of political authority by timbral association. Projecting the voice using this technology gave implied authority over a sonic space, previously only achieved through the power of one's voice. This kinship with political speech through the microphone suggests another way that changes in classical music's technology was relevant to nationalist discourse. Still today one can hear trucks driving through Indian neighborhoods projecting political slogans at piercing volumes, consuming the spaces through which they travel. This sonic authority over loudspeakers is undoubtedly an ideal in performances where inspiration and musical subtleties can be easily lost due to talkative audiences.

Overall, the advent of microphone and amplification technology, and their predecessor the gramophone, demanded new economies of music production and music-making, fostering different performance techniques and different orientations for music between the performer and audience. Gramophones also introduced a recorded medium into musical culture, with both its limitations and advancements. For example, in the early twentieth century, gramophones couldn't capture the development of a *raag*, or the introductory section, the *alap*, because of its limited recording time. Musicians adjusted by beginning with complex elaborations that showcased their virtuosity rather than setting the mood. Additionally, the recorded medium became a new way to learn music. The *guru-shishya parampara* endured a powerful challenge, as young enthusiasts could purchase records and listen to sounds previously accessible only by engaging with a knowledgeable guru. Claiming that the “*Gurukulavasam is Dead*,” Weidman describes this change: “the repetition of music enabled by gramophone records was seen as a

feature of modernity and science, while the 'rote repetition' associated with the *gurukula* system came to be seen as the opposite of all that was modern and scientific" (Weidman 2006:275). This was a time when the *Gurukula*, a translation of the *guru-shishya parampara*, was under attack by critics who saw the use of technology as superior for transmitting exact reproductions of compositions. By viewing the transmission of compositions as the primary function of a *guru*, knowledge about musical improvisation and expression was devalued in these contexts.

The guru has to struggle against a stigma of intractability and against devotional associations coded as pre-modern. This struggle between traditional pedagogical practices and modern, technological and conservatory-based systems struck at the heart of the Indian musical tradition. The *guru-shishya/gurukul* system was attacked as being old fashioned and repetitious, as relying too heavily on social structures subject to personal relationships. Gurus, it was argued, were subject to stinginess and the withholding of material. Even so, new technology and conservatory pedagogy never proved to be superior in producing high quality musicians. Often too rigid, modern curricula excludes players who present unique approaches, or—as in the case of the slide-guitar—ostracized forms, players, and instruments that don't fit preconceived notions of traditional music practice.¹⁵ Often discussed by my interviewees in the slide-guitar community, standardization and the development of musical curricula are important to the acceptance of the instrument in Indian music genres. Interestingly, the slide-guitar's lack of standards and its multiplicity of techniques and forms are more akin to the pre-codified world of South Asian music, yet its future is unanimously seen as inherently tied to standardization.

Ultimately, new technologies during the late British colonial period bolstered the rise of the conservatory setting, with Western-styled academies, degree requirements, and all the trappings

¹⁵ Maciszewski, Amie. 2010. "Pedagogy of Indian Classical Music: Towards an Inclusive Gurukul." Presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology conference for a symposium on Indian Classical Music in honor of Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy. The concern over ineffective conservatory standards resurfaces periodically at Society for Ethnomusicology conferences, where the decline of musical excellence has been observed.

Western education. This shift was motivated by a modernizing and nationalist drive to improve the status of Indian music, having long-lasting socio-cultural repercussions over issues like religion, language, and traditional pedagogy.

The Introduction of New Instruments into Indian Music

Just as new technologies filtered into South Asia during the British colonial period, so did Western instruments. Before addressing the guitar in chapters four and five, it is instructive to examine the vernacularization of two other instruments into Indian music cultures: the violin and the harmonium. Their experience will illustrate how the absorption of new instruments into musical genres can have dramatically different outcomes. The cultural and historical context matters most. The violin and harmonium entered India around the same time as the guitar, during the early European colonial period around the seventeenth century. Their deliberate integration and adoption into Indian music cultures occurred in the following two hundred years of European colonial rule, rather than in the late twentieth century as with the guitar. Cultural norms and nationalist ideals were much different before Indian independence and the guitar had not made headway into Indian music before it arrived in Kolkata in the form of a Hawaiian slide-guitar in the 1930s. A clear distinction can be made in comparing these instruments, while the violin and harmonium are colonial-era vernacularizations, the slide-guitar is a post-colonial vernacularization.

With a long history in India, the violin now predominates as the accompaniment instrument in Karnatic music of South India. In *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern* (2006), Amanda Weidman examines South Indian violin and vocal traditions, focusing on agency, expression, gender, and the violin's transition from a foreign instrument into one of local

and cultural importance. Weidman identifies the violin's colonial context as pivotal in codifying Indian classical music as a genre which coalesced under nationalist influence. The violin, like the standard guitar, arrived in India during the early European colonial period, appearing in formal and informal contexts as both European classical and folk music. Initially accepted into Indian folk music, the violin was quickly seized from amateurs and elevated by the stalwarts of Indian classical music. Praised for producing the correct tonal properties of Indian music, the violin soon rivaled the *sarangi* as an accompaniment instrument, especially for its ability to mimic the subtleties of vocal music. Its size and construction projected sound more efficiently than indigenous bowed instruments and its association with the West enhanced its popularity. At the time, the violin surpassed any other Western import in producing the appropriate qualities of Indian classical music. As Weidman notes, the revered composer Tyagaraja himself favored the violin, and other musical authorities echoed this preference, dubbing it the "king of instruments" (Weidman 2006:38, 47). The image of the violin, unaltered in the Indian context, projected an aura of the modern, while its sound produced wholly indigenous musical aesthetics. The violin was capable of producing all the *srutis*, or twenty-two notes, within the traditional parsing of the octave, and techniques like *meend*, the smooth sliding between notes—both of which were derived from vocal (*gayaki*) aesthetics (Lelyveld 1995; Subramanyam et al. 1999). Representing the best the West had to offer, while also being fully capable of participating in Indian music traditions, the violin accrued considerable symbolic capital in the ears of conservative musicologists, and in the eyes of performers striving to project the modern.

The violin also changed and arguably enhanced the way vocalists sang. Since vocal music accompaniment generally follows the singer, closely mimicking the melodic flourishes immediately after their enunciation, the violin influenced what vocalists now dared to accomplish in performance. It inspired them to increase tempos beyond that provided by the

traditional accompaniment of the *veena*. The violin's capacity to project sound helped musical recitals migrate from private court settings into large and often chaotic public spaces. Vocalists could then project their sound without worrying about losing the tonal basis of the accompanying instrument. Becoming vernacularized at the same time as new technologies appeared in India, the violin offered the hope that Western imports could contribute positively to Indian classical music.

Also arriving and becoming vernacularized during the colonial period, the harmonium fared much differently than the violin. A keyed instrument that produces a harmonica-like sound via the compression of air pumped by a bellows mechanism, the harmonium is like a small piano, with increased portability. Being a fixed-pitch instrument, the harmonium is more dependable than string instruments for keeping a stable and correct pitch. That tonal center provides an important harmonic backdrop for vocalists and instrumentalists, accomplished traditionally by the *tanpura*, to provide the background tonal coloring of a raga. The harmonium's tone was also considered pleasing, with a mild nasal quality, over which vocalists could easily project. These traits made the instrument quickly popular in domestic and folk music settings (Rahaim 2011). Unfortunately, it also had intractable disadvantages for performing Indian classical music.

Matt Rahaim describes how classical stalwarts vilified the harmonium for its inability to produce notes between the standard twelve-tone, Western musical scale (Rahaim 2011). Many expressive aspects of Indian music glide between notes with fluidity, touching the above-mentioned *srutis*. To correctly express a *raag* like *darbari kannada*, the third scale degree must be produced by adornment from above, touching slightly sharp to evoke the proper tonal coloring. Thus, performers accompanied by the harmonium had to conform to the instrument's tonality to avoid uncomfortable dissonances. In effect, the harmonium ruined the tonal

characteristics of many *ragas* whose *srutis* landed in between the notes, thereby threatening traditional forms of expression. As a result, the government-sponsored All-India Radio (A.I.R.) banned it for almost 30 years. Despite this extreme prohibition, and despite rejection by Indian musicology, the harmonium nevertheless became one of South Asia's most popular instruments.

The harmonium and the violin both acquired symbolic capital in South Asian music cultures because of their Western origins. The violin was adopted without any significant structural modifications besides tuning alterations. While the harmonium was seen by some as incompatible with Indian classical music, it was nevertheless adorned with South Asian visual aesthetics and remains a very common accompaniment instrument, especially in *tabla* solos. The value these instruments accrued during the colonial period mark them as perhaps bumpy, but nevertheless successfully integrated colonial-era imports.

Since they provide the closest comparatives, with similar origins, the violin's and harmonium's experiences can help us understand the history and reception of the slide-guitar in South Asia. Like the harmonium and violin, the slide-guitar entered through folk and light music traditions, then underwent a rigorous evaluation process before being accepted. Besides individual theorists and music-focused institutions, one of the most crucial organizations to the evaluation of foreign instruments is All India Radio. This venue was not only a public medium for the promotion of new instruments, but it was an important arbiter of musical expression in India, contributing to the codification process by further defining what was acceptable as Indian classical music (Neuman 1980). All three of foreign instruments discussed here navigated through public discourse and evolved conceptually, offering three different case studies of the evolution of musical genres in South Asia. The slide-guitar distinguishes itself, however, by how dramatically it has changed form and function, while experiencing integration much later, thus marking it as a post-colonial phenomenon. More crucially, the slide-guitar has ascended amidst

new movements in Hindu nationalism, economic liberalization, and globalization, when different concerns potentially governed Indian musical genres. Indian slide-guitarists, imbued with the cultural capital of lineage, spiritual devotion, undeniable talent, and modern sensibilities, take the slide-guitar and transform its aura, making it more “Indian” than either the violin or the harmonium.

This chapter has explored many musicological issues that emerged from the interaction of Western colonial influences with Indian musical cultures. Explaining the development of colonial orientations towards Indian music and reactions in South Asia, we can better understand the challenges foreign instruments face in becoming vernacularized into South Asian musical genres. The codification of music theory and the evolution of South Asian classical music created dramatic changes in the material, structural and pedagogical frameworks of music making and production. The institutional shifts and alterations in performance practice produced by new technologies resonate with similar tensions today, posing challenges to slide-guitarists similar to those experienced by violinists and harmonium players. The transmission process is integral to the longevity of instrumental traditions, yet they are beholden to social issues and cultural transformations, which while far removed from the technical aspects of performance, have a strong effect on altering performance practices.

Before providing a more focused history of the guitar in South Asia, it is necessary to first address the role of gender in South Asian music cultures. The history of patriarchy and the maintenance of gender roles in South Asia shape how we understand participation in musical performance, especially by women. The social tensions this reveals persist from the colonial period into the modern day.

Chapter 3: Gender, Music and Indian Nationalism

Parallel to my ethnographic work with the slide-guitar in India, an examination of gender issues reveals the incipient cultural orientations delineating the historical and modern-day reality of socially mediated performance boundaries and aesthetics. Today, women slide-guitarists are celebrated in the performance community and in public gatherings of slide-guitarists such as the Indian International Guitar Festival. I observed an equal, if not a higher percentage of women performers of all ages participating in the competitions. Gender egalitarianism has not always been the case in Indian music cultures, and this chapter is dedicated to understanding the shifts in gender roles that took place in modern Indian history. Drawing from historical events, colonial legislation, nationalist rituals, Indian literary figures and productions of nationalist music featuring the slide-guitar, I will show some of the ways that the development of a national identity in India affected gender norms.

The nineteenth century Indian cultural renaissance created new conceptions of the nation, enshrined in literature and music, which contributed to a narrative of revolution, freedom, and sovereignty that remains relevant today. In crafting modern ideals for the new Indian nation, ideologues sought to control how women were represented in the performing arts. Paralleling the codification of classical music genres discussed in the previous chapter, the campaign to end women's roles as temple dancers and musicians in South India illustrates the sanitization of the modern Indian woman. Parallel to my emphasis on the process of vernacularizing the slide-guitar, terminology from performance studies, such as replica, re-population, reconstruction, renaming, re-situating and restoration, offers an effective way to analyze the process through which gender roles inscribed onto performing arts genres. Increased music education for women occurred simultaneously with the adoption of strict restrictions on women's behavior in

performance, emphasizing chastity, subservience and conformity to newly-conceived Indian cultural ideals. Reflecting the scholarship of sub-altern studies, we can see how the resistance to foreign cultural hegemony occurred through the reformation of both Indian femininity and masculinity, reinforcing a dichotomy of traditional and modern.

By criticizing the politicization of the motherland symbolism in India, this chapter shows how the slide-guitar has been implicated in the performance of Hindu nationalism, patriarchy and modern conservatism. The pervasive symbol of the Indian nation as the motherland equates the country's borders with women's bodies. Thus, it is appropriate that my early ethnographic fieldwork experience led me to the Wagah border, where I first encountered the Indian national song "*Vande Mataram*" ("Hail to the Mother"). Understanding the song's literary origins and the recent political contentions over its performance illustrates its present-day interaction with patriarchy and Hindu nationalism. I also encountered "*Vande Mataram*" during my studies of the slide-guitar, since a new and popular production of this song features one of the most prominent slide-guitarists in India, bringing this foreign instrument into the heart of a nationalist composition. In examining "*Vande Mataram*" other relevant threads to the slide-guitar emerge, including commentary from Rabindranath Tagore, whose music is primarily interpreted by slide-guitar players in Bengal.

While this chapter highlights the challenges and assumptions women have faced in the performing arts, patriarchal and nationalistic cultural norms have harmed Indian men as well, reinforcing strong-man stereotypes and misogyny, while damaging the reputation of South Asian culture internationally. The promotion of motherland symbolism has largely exploited women, teaching men that women's bodies are tantamount to conquered terrain. This feminist critique is supported by scholars of conflict zones around the world, but in this chapter I show the negative effects of the nationalist imperative as it directs its gaze on the marginalized and disempowered.

Nationalism has motivated the codification of traditional Indian music styles just as it has shifted women's roles and rights from the colonial period onward. By analyzing the productions of nationalist media like “*Vande Mataram*,” we can better frame our contemporary understanding of the relationship between gender and performance in India, and how it has molded today’s performing arts scene.

Colonial Era Battles Over Gender Roles

The restructuring of performance arts communities in India was the result of social movements that often focused their gaze on women’s roles. Both colonial and Indian efforts to control and protect women resulted in ideological battles that were integral to the nationalist movement to modernize cultural and religious norms. Provoked by European chauvinism, the affronts to Indian culture inspired a nationalist imperative to reevaluate the morality of public behavior, religious ritual, and eventually performance practices. What follows details pivotal affronts to Indian cultural sovereignty, which inspired many acts of resistance, directed externally at the British, and internally at Indian women.

In the early nineteenth century, the British administration in Calcutta established a series of laws, including the 1829 abolition of *sati* (widow-immolation), and the 1856 widow-remarriage act. Feeling that their sacrosanct traditions were under attack, Indian conservatives furthered politically salient nationalist sentiments as a means of resistance to colonial meddling. As Tanika Sarkar notes, “the *sati* was an adored nationalist symbol, her figure representing the moment of climax in expositions of Hindu nationalism” (Sarkar 2001:42). Immolation was held up as a noble sacrifice, a trope that would dominate nationalist literature, anti-colonial action, and political symbolism. The *sati* ideological battle was one of the first organized projects of Hindu

nationalism during the British colonial period and it has been characterized as one of the socio-religious causes of the bloody 1857 rebellion, also regarded as India's first war of independence.

Successful legislative reform campaigns were framed by the British as positive outcomes, even moral victories, of colonial rule. Back in England, *sati* became symbolic of the backwardness of Indian culture, inspiring colonial savior narratives that spread quickly in popular culture. Anand Yang has observed that *sati* laws were, "aimed at entitling the British with the right to proclaim the superiority of their own values, and ultimately, to justify their right to rule" (Yang 2008:16). By promoting a narrative of decline under the already fragmented Mughal Empire, colonial history writers framed South Asian society's moral status in provocative terms. Just as the British were immortalizing the shock of *sati* in colonial art and literature, Indians were re-evaluating their traditions, organizing and pushing for competing reforms.

Directly aimed at Hindu social customs, colonial legislation was also supported by some indigenous elites, who launched campaigns debating the merits of cultural reform. Notable intellectuals from the Bengali Renaissance, such as Ram Mohan Roy (1906), endorsed modernization, promoting their own ideas about culture and provoking a re-evaluation that challenged social and religious norms. In contrast, rural, agricultural, and tribal communities provided some of the most extreme resistance to reforms. Religious conservatives with extensive reach into the countryside did not hesitate to conflate spirituality and nationalist politics, enacting their own reforms as a revival of traditions. As a result of anti-imperialism and populist identity politics, the diverse religious pluralism of India coalesced during this time into larger units. Taken together, this political world circulated opinions through journals, magazines and newspapers in various languages, creating a rich marketplace of ideas dominated by male voices.

Amidst this, modern Hinduism took shape with the appearance of influential figures like

Dayanada Saraswati, who toured India promoting new philosophies about worship and practice (Jordens 1978). New religious communities like the Arya Samaj gained prominence, adopting controversial ideas, such as reconversion back to Hinduism via the *siddha* ritual (Jones 1976). When the Arya Samaj opened their places of worship to create a community structure open to all, including many different castes, it drew the ire of traditionalists. The Arya Samaj and the intellectual inheritors of the Bengali Renaissance are but a few of the modernizing movements that challenged traditional values during the colonial period.

Anti-colonial and Hindu nationalist sentiment inspired many visions of modern India, but it predominantly emphasized the preservation of tradition in the domestic realm where colonial influences had much less control. Nineteenth century social reforms promoted symbolic divisions between genders, theorized in Partha Chatterjee's construction of a bi-furcated sense of *inner* and *outer* expressions of Indian national identity (1993:3). As mentioned previously in the chapter on theory, the *inner* refers to traditional Indian culture, represented and upheld by women's roles in society, whereas the *outer* describes a more modern Indian culture, upheld by men's roles in society. This symbolic dichotomy developed most aggressively with women, who represented an inviolable interiority bounded by domesticity under the control of Indian elites.

Colonial social legislation and Western influences were an affront to South Asian cultural authority, inspiring the *swadeshi* movement—which promoted self-rule and rejected foreign cultural and material imports. As a result, Indian women who pursued Western education or technology during this time were severely ridiculed. As Chatterjee notes, cosmopolitan nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali women were also attacked for adopting Western customs or clothing: “To ridicule the idea of a Bengali woman trying to imitate the ways of a memsaheb... was a sure recipe calculated to evoke raucous laughter and moral condemnation in both male and female audiences” (Chatterjee 1989:625). Cosmopolitan trappings were regarded

as immoral, and the perceived, decadent Western woman was rejected in favor of the chaste Hindu woman. This became a nationalist ideal, even though it actually replicated many Victorian ideas about modesty and proper women's behavior. Women subjected to shaming and abuse by their own community didn't find this irony very amusing.

Patriarchy in South Asia increased as acts of control over the South Asian female body became translated as anti-colonial resistance. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (2001), Tanika Sarkar examines Indian cultural nationalism through a literary and historical lens, showing that when they were faced with colonial oppression at the political, economic and cultural levels, influential religious, social and political conservatives turned inward to the familial domain as the last area where they could exert power. Sarkar writes, "If an alien, imposed modernity was represented as a series of deprivations, then nationalism could situate its emancipatory project only by enclosing a space that was still understood as inviolate, autonomous" (Sarkar 2001:26), namely the domestic realm.

Other scholars such as Lata Mani (1987) have documented the absence of women's agency over Indian cultural practice and national symbols, since Indian male intellectuals and British male administrators instead fought for ideological superiority, as in the 1829 *sati* legislation case. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2010), Gayatri Spivak famously describes how the colonial engagement with *sati* was broadly construed as "white men saving brown women from brown men." These women were ultimately pawns in a struggle between British and South Asian patriarchy. Patriarchal restrictions on gender roles were framed during the colonial period as morally correct expressions of national pride, which subsequently spread throughout popular culture and nationalist ritual. The roles women play in South Asian performing arts today were molded by nineteenth century social movements reflecting the conjugal dynamics born of the colonial encounter with the British.

Patriarchal Reforms in the Performing Arts

Having a direct effect on the performing arts, patriarchal reforms motivated by nineteenth century Indian social movements became central to modernization, promoting a feminine ideal founded on chastity and bodily control. Hegemonic structures subsequently created classical genres from a privileged position, imposing it socially and economically on the less-privileged classes, including performing artists. Through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" and Edward Said's "orientalism," Chakravorty (1998:108) observes how those in power inculcate their ideals into the cultures where they exert influence—in this case—molding performing arts traditions to their vision. This section takes examples from the treatment of *devadasis*, *kathak* dancers, and women performers of classical music to illustrate the effects of nationalist social reforms on performing arts communities in India.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the drive to create proper classical forms provoked a campaign against *devadasis*, or female temple performers. The temple dancing tradition, amongst other forms of public women's performance, was immediately identified as immoral by the colonial gaze. *Devadasis* in particular, who were known to be consorts of temple priests, were vilified and in turn targeted by South Asians looking to both elevate the new moral standards of the performing arts, and increase their own status in the rapidly shifting economics of modern South Asia. Amanda Weidman addresses this movement, focusing on the life of M.S. Subbalakshmi, often praised by music critics as the "voice of the century" (Weidman 2006:146). Born as a *devadasi* and married into the Brahmin caste, Subbalakshmi was a child prodigy who exemplified the new ideal Hindu woman, abandoning what social reformers viewed as an immoral performance tradition, and turning to performance practices that were detached from the decadence and corporeality deemed threatening to the modern Indian moral compass. Underlying

the disapproval of women's public performance were criticisms of physicality reflecting a mixture of conservative Hindu, Muslim and Victorian influences. Removing *devadasis* from the temples was fundamentally controlling the public image of Indian women, both in religion and in the newly codified performing arts cultures. A result of conservative ideologies and their imposition (by her husband and manager), Subbalakshmi's vocal performances were molded to deliberately deny her corporeal form (Weidman 2006:125). When rarely allowed to perform in public, women were completely restricted in their body movement, compared to the dramatic gesticulations by male vocalists (Rahaim 2012). As one of the most famous playback singers later in her career, Subbalakshmi's voice was sequenced with the movements of dozens of Bollywood film actresses, divorcing her voice from her body. Subbalakshmi's disembodied voice filtered over the airwaves, projecting the sound of a faithful, chaste and reformed Hindu woman, expressing a reformed and nationalist gender ideal.

The ideological campaign of purity and morality to reform the *devadasis* eventually produced a new classical dance form, *bharata natyam*. According to Rukmini Devi, "music and dance had to be rescued from the hands of degenerate *devadasis* and taken up by women from respectable families" (Weidman 2006:120). This refers not only to upper-caste Brahmins, but also to women from other castes, which were then more welcome to participate in the performing arts as the musical culture shifted from the courts and temples into conservatories. According to Lakshmi Subramanian, "the campaign against the *devadasis*, therefore, naturally entered the new cultural project undertaken by the Madras elite who were in the process of recasting the tradition of music and dance, secularize it, and make it accessible to the middle class" (2006:132). The secularization noted by Subramanian remained a Hindu-normative endeavor, privileging the majority Hindu population's traditions in the drive to modernize. With power resting in the hands of reformed Hindu elites, even India's socialist-leaning government attacked the temple dancers,

banning them in 1947, as a symbolic gesture of modernity to accompany independence. With their cultural value drastically altered, *devadasis* transitioned to schools, conservatories and academies, yet they never recovered from the tinge of moral corruption and stigma as prostitutes.

Rachmi Diyah Larasati's (2013) term, the *replica* can help illuminate state-sponsored nationalist efforts to mold performing bodies. Focused on Indonesian performance cultures, Larasati uses *replica* to characterize a more recent generation of performers who came of age during the long military regime of the late twentieth century. Newly codified performing arts genres formed after the brutal 1960s purge of millions of communist “sympathizers,” deemed to be subversive, including many artists and performers. Characterizing the violence as an erasure by the state and then a subsequent cultural reconstruction, Larasati writes about her upbringing in the aftermath of the communist purges, where she became a prime exponent of a new style of folkloric dance, manufactured by state censors: the *replica*. Her brave exposition of this history can help us understand India’s vast codification process. While the Indian context didn’t result from one dramatic violent event, nationalist gender ideologies transformed many traditional art forms, restructuring economies and ruining the careers of many talented performers who failed to conform to modern Indian morality and femininity. *Bharata natyam* performers replicated traditional dance forms in a newly sanitized aesthetic, attempting to erase unacceptable symbols and practices.

Other dance traditions also succumbed to the modernization/sanitization process via codified gender roles. Concerned with representations of overt sexuality and feminine empowerment, regional classical dances like *orissi*, *kathak* and other women's performances were “cleaned” up. During the British Raj, *kathak* dance experienced a sharp decline as both British administrators and indigenous elites put it in the same category as the *devadasis* (Walker 2014). While privately accessing the pleasures of the *nautch* (dancing) girls, colonial officials

disparaged their art form as seductive, which only enhanced the negativity women dancers felt from Indian ideologues and nationalists. Attacking traditional dance forms as debauched entertainment, nationalists reformulated an Indian dance tradition that was properly classical and chaste, often by framing it as a revival of traditional values.

Matthew Allen affirms the drastic changes in *bharata natyam*, illuminating the historical and technical details codified within this dance form, which transformed it into India's national dance. Allen's premise challenges the term "revival," which claims a pure art form existed long before Muslim and British colonialism. Finding "revival" far too limited, Allen argues for broader terminology:

a re-population (one social community appropriating a practice from another), a reconstruction (altering and replacing elements of repertoire and choreography), a renaming (from nautch and other terms to *bharata natyam*), a re-situation (from temple, court, and salon to the public stage), and a restoration (as used in Schechner 1985:69, a splicing together of selected "strips" of performative behavior in a manner that simultaneously creates a new practice and invents an historical one). (Allen 1997:63)

As Allen observes, the revival process often takes on a celebratory sheen, erasing the sources of tradition and inspiration not conforming to the dominant nationalist discourse. The development of *bharata natyam* mirrored the creation of classical music canons in India, since it retained a sense of interior spirituality, addressed in chapter one's theoretical section on the voice, while meeting the moral requirements of a proud new Indian modernity.

The study of proper and traditional forms of music became a virtue for the modern family. As India's leading pedagogue responsible for infusing Hindu ritual into the classical genre, V.D. Paluskar made it his nationalist mission to educate women in respectable music (Bakhle 2005:281). Women were to play classical instruments with poise and perfect posture, with little corporeal expression, downplaying virtuosity in women's performances. In fact, women's performance in public, after the anti-*devadasis* campaign, was practically unheard of,

yet musical practice remained an integral part of modernization. Knowledge of classical music for women was linked with domesticity, and as such was promoted in the media, in conservatories and in the idealized modern Hindu household.

Referencing an article by Subramanian (1999a), Weidman writes, “the reorientation of music and dance-performance style, repertoire, and the performers themselves – toward an urban, largely Brahmin, middle class - was part of a ‘sanitizing’ mission that emphasized the spirituality of Karnatic music and Bharata Natyam over their sensual aspects” (Weidman 2006:129). This sanitizing mission suggests a sense of purity from within, a uniquely Indian interiority, where subtle gestures, rather than lewd displays, expressed a pure voice, divinely inspired. Purity has always been central to constructing caste and social hierarchy in India. Scholars have routinely identified the notion of purity at the core of Hindu beliefs, making it no surprise that modern campaigns for purity and chastity in the performing arts focused so much on this moral directive in order to mold performing bodies to represent national ideals.

In exploring the effects of the nationalist, anti-colonial and modernizing movement on India’s classical dance forms, Pallabi Chakraborty, using similar theoretical arguments that I apply to the slide-guitar, emphasizes how changes in the art form are “emblematic of Indian national identity and national ideology to a new era of cultural contestation” (2006:117). As nationalists crafted the ideal Hindu-woman as representative of Indian purity, performers and theorists adjusted their practices to new modes of representation, thereby codifying art forms like *bharata natyam*. The following section explores how nationalist and spiritual ideologies converged in the artistic manifestation of motherland symbolism, creating and reinforcing gender norms through images that would come to represent a specifically Hindu nationalism.

The Symbol of the Motherland: *Mataram*

The motherland symbolism enshrined in Hindu nationalist propaganda is one of the most common metaphors used today to express connection to the Indian soil. My fieldwork experiences repeatedly exposed me to these metaphors, inspiring questions about the construction and utility of a symbol that conflates nationalist boundaries with a Hindu deity. As I learned about the slide-guitar in India, I was exposed to myriad ways this image has penetrated social life and nationalist ideals. The beloved national literature, poetry, film and songs of Hindu India frequently draw from the symbolism of a mother goddess (*mataram*), which is equated with the land, rivers and nature. In examining the history and utility of *mataram*, this section provides context for understanding how gender becomes intertwined with the idea of the nation.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the *mataram* symbol had been incorporated politically into the anti-colonial movement, representing the spirit of the Indian nation, purposely gendered to promote an image of female fragility, and to inspire masculine protectiveness. Despite this modern construction, the history of a gendered association with the land easily predates the encounter with the West. Since ancient times, the feminine power of the goddess Kali has been attributed to Kolkata and its riverside territory (Barbiani 2005). Worshipped by the *Shakta* sect of Hinduism, Kali embodies the fierce incarnation of Durga, the mother-goddess that is typically superimposed over an image of India's modern borders as the *mataram* symbol. Scholars around Kolkata speculate that goddess worship derived from matrilineal *adivasi*, or tribal cultures, predating Hinduism's consolidation, and endured because of the connections it made between spirituality, nativism and the land. The phrase of "sons of the soil" appears in Bengali poetry and the related notion of a mother-goddess, has been widely disseminated across India after its politicization in the late nineteenth century.

First published in 1881 during the height of the Bengali Renaissance, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's popular novel *Anandamath* (Chattopadhyay 2005) greatly politicized the motherland symbol in Indian culture. Set during the terrible 1770s Bengali famine, the book framed colonial activity in India as crimes against the soil. Inspired by India's *Sanyasi Rebellions* between the 1760s and 1780s, and infused with the passion of the more recent 1857 rebellion, *Anandamath's* depiction of a war fought by indigenous ascetics against colonizing forces promoted courageous sacrifice to protect the nation. These ascetics worshipped the mother goddess as the nation, swearing fealty to her across religious lines and singing her praises with the song "*Vande Mataram*."

Chattopadhyay's narrative takes on spiritual and nativist qualities while simultaneously promoting the Western ideology of the secular nation state. By reconfiguring the sacred symbols in a nationalist light, *Anandamath* renounces spiritual differences to focus devotional energies into a more visceral, familial connection to the soil. Chattopadhyay asks, "Do you both renounce your castes? For all Children belong to the same caste. In our work we do not differentiate between Hindu or Muslim, Buddhist or Sikh, Parsee or Paraiah. We are brothers here – all Children of the same Mother India" (Chattopadhyay 2005:99). In Hegelian terms, we find here the *spirit of the nation* whose deterministic trajectory towards freedom has been reconfigured into the fulfillment of Hindu-normative secularism and thinly veiled traditional gender roles. Men must fight and die for the country, while women must carry on the fight in their wombs as representatives of the nation.

Female characters in the *Anandamath* narrative face a moral quandary: they must choose devotion to the nation over love, making duty and sacrifice the ideal. According to Tanika Sarkar, *Anandamath* placed the idealized Hindu woman at the crux of India's cultural nationalism, claiming that Chattopadhyay viewed *sati* as symbolizing the "last hope of a doomed nation"

(Sarkar 2001:42). If women represented the nation with their behavior and their bodies, strict gender roles and martyrdom were justified with patriotic fervor. The purity of an idealized Hindu woman, conflated with the idea of the nation created a motherland trope that quickly captured the imagination of Indian nationalists.

Anandamath explicitly glorifies the pure Hindu woman, whose sacrifice and chastity bolster the nation's image. In this way, the literati “attempted to define social and moral principles for locating the position of women in the ‘modern’ world of the nation” (Chatterjee 1989:625). Thus, *Anandamath* initiated the modern nation-building game in South Asia, in the symbolic form of what Franz Fanon (1963) calls, the “literature of combat.” The national awakening has thereby been thrust into the arts and in the realm of ideas, inspiring sacrifice towards the inevitable achievement of self-representation, while also creating a sacred aura around national boundaries.

Within both Indian and colonial consciousness, the potency of *Anandamath*’s motherland symbolism cannot be overstated. In response to British colonialism, India’s already-patriarchal society firmly outlined a gendered and nature-oriented opposition between East and West. As Jasodhara Bagchi observes:

the masculine Occident conceived the Orient as a feminine image. Ironically the nationalists conceived their own country as the great mother figure in keeping with the sanction derived from the religious practices of Hindu Bengal. This helped to Hindu-ise the tone of nationalism in Bengal. By representing the country as a Hindu mother/goddess the nationalist culture helped to inject a significant order into the struggle to rejoin what is intimately and unmistakably one's own. (Bagchi 1990:65)

According to Bagchi, Hindu culture appropriated the image of the goddess Shakti for nationalist ends, while also infusing British morality into an already restrictive view of women's roles. Thus, the same politicization process described in the codification of women’s roles in the performing arts is being enacted here with the motherland symbolism. Women and the mother goddess are

conflated, positioning the nationalist drive as the authoritative vision of how the modern Hindu woman should behave. Partha Chatterjee adds, “since the spiritual domain was the weapon in the hands of the nationalist, the glorification of motherhood was the double refined spirituality that was used as a major mode of representation by the Bengali nationalists” (Chatterjee 1989:249). In this context, Hindu spirituality becomes the political force that ensures South Asian freedom from colonialism.

Chattopadhyay’s most enduring creation is the song “*Vande Mataram*”, which was adopted by many groups in the *swadeshi* independence movement, particularly after the British attempted to partition Bengal in 1906. The chanting of “*Vande Mataram*” became closely associated with the independence movement’s violent elements, prompting many Indian leaders to re-evaluate the musical composition that had become a national rallying cry. While “*Vande Mataram*” has undergone significant changes to be placed at the center of the national imagination, with many of its more bellicose lyrics redacted, the phrase *vande mataram* itself continues to be chanted at nationalist events and promoted in popular culture. The evolution of the motherland symbolism and the politicization of this imagery shows how dominant classes in India have impacted the performing arts, using populism, Hindu spiritualism, and anti-colonial sentiments to promote a nationalist agenda that exploits femininity in the quest for self-determination.

“*Vande Mataram*”: India's National Song in the Golden Age

This section explores the composition “*Vande Mataram*,” directly connecting it to my fieldwork and research on the slide-guitar in India. In illuminating the enduring controversies over this song, my aim is to show the relationship between nationalism, spirituality, gender and

the performing arts. Just as the slid-guitar has been accepted into the traditional and spiritual aspects of Indian music through a politically charged structural and aesthetic transformation, so has the image of the motherland become a political tool via the ubiquity of the composition, “*Vande Mataram*.”

For more than 125 years, the song and slogan, “*Vande Mataram*,” has been one of the world’s most recognized songs.¹⁶ Originally written in *sadhu bhasa* or the older form of Bengali, “*Vande Mataram*” (called “*Bande Mataram*” in Bengali) has been continuously remade, with more than a hundred versions recorded in the twentieth century. Narrowly missing a designation as India’s national anthem, “*Vande Mataram*” nevertheless holds the status of a national song, recited at nationalist rallies and schools, and routinely played before important political radio broadcasts. Controversial for its overt Hindu overtones, its motherland metaphor is rarely questioned.

I became aware of “*Vande Mataram*” early on in my experiences in India and heard or discussed it throughout my time at language training institutes between 2010 and 2015, in both Jaipur and Kolkata. In the summer of 2010, I observed the infamous Wagah border crossing ceremony, where “*Vande Mataram*” was used as a weapon, chanted against the enemy on the other side of the India-Pakistan border. At Wagah, “*Vande Mataram*” is part of a highly choreographed daily ritual where military pomp, music, dance, and chauvinist taunting accompanies the lowering of the flag on each side of the border.¹⁷ After witnessing its symbolic capital at the border, I encountered “*Vande Mataram*” in numerous productions from A.R. Rahman’s (1997) album commemorating fifty years of independence, to a version sung by Lata

¹⁶ <http://www.mustring.org.uk/articles/mataram.htm> - this website details the global popularity of the song along with other interesting facts about “*Vande Mataram*” and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

¹⁷ The following references describe the event at Wagah in detail; Butalia, Urvashi. *Stepping Across the Line at Wagah Border*. 2013. http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/stepping-across-the-line-at-wagah-border/?_r=0; Jacobs, Frank. *Peacocks At Sunset*, 2003 <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/03/peacocks-at-sunset>

Mangeshkar set to video directed by Bala and Kanika in 1998.¹⁸ “*Vande Mataram*”’s ubiquity indicates how popular it has become, but I was yet unaware of the long path this song had traveled to enter mainstream Indian culture.

A few years later, while involved in the Kolkata musical community, I attended an album release party of producer and tabla maestro Bikram Ghosh, whose newly produced (2012) version of “*Vande Mataram*”¹⁹ was to be broadcast nationally, preceding the prime minister's speech on India's Independence Day, August 15, 2012. This new rendition boasted over twenty master musicians of different backgrounds in a highly stylized eight-minute video that pans through scenes of a diverse Indian culture. Ghosh's version includes few lyrics beyond the title phrase, yet it fills the narrative with regular musical interpolations featuring instruments that represent India's traditional and modern musical constituency. Included in this production was the senior slide-guitar performer, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. His appearance confirms the slide-guitar's vernacularization, since the instrument can now be found in the most important national song of Hindu India. As thrilling as it was to find the slide-guitar so prominently represented in “*Vande Mataram*,” other aspects of this production, including the gendered symbolism of the motherland and the Hindu normative narrative of its subject matter, posed further questions.

In this new “*Vande Mataram*” video a young girl meanders through all the scenes looking forlorn, as she frequently glances at her forearm, where she reads the tattooed phrase, “*Vande Mataram*” in *devanagari* script (Sanskrit and modern Hindi's standardized script). What inspired the image of this sad girl, branded with this nationalist mantra? According to Stuart Hall, identification is constantly mediated, shifting and interacting, yet it retains its basic foundation at the level of the physical body (Hall 1996). By adopting symbolic associations, the baseline self after birth is modified through time and social contexts. Hall uses Stephen Heath's notion of

¹⁸ Bala and Kanika, sung by Lata Mangeshkar. 1998. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACmGXktTxco>

¹⁹ Ghosh, Bikram. *Vande Mataram*. 2012 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag-o-oH_qvk

suture (Heath 1981) to describe the graphic process of attachment to newly encountered ideas about the self. Thus, this tattooed young girl represents the responsibilities accorded to Indian women through their biology, compounded by a tradition steeped in the patriarchal worship of a mother goddess-as-nation, entwined with anti-colonial politics.

Notions of Hindu purity underlie the image of this tattooed girl, where the innocent and helpless motherland must be protected from pollution by the “other.” Ghosh's video presents no antagonist, but the girl's melancholy demeanor expresses an existential dilemma where she must accept her fate as a symbol of Indian tradition under the gaze of doting onlookers. How strange is this choice of imagery? What is the fate of this young girl? Is she to be a martyr for the country like the female characters depicted in *Anandamath*? Why did the producers choose a girl who looks so stereotypically non-Indian? Because the production's depiction of the motherland and the aura surrounding this song are sacred to Hindu nationalists, my questioning may elicit negativity from those unwilling to unpack this dense symbolism.

Just like Ghosh's remake, most compositions invoking “*Vande Mataram*” typically feature the tonality of *raag desh*, which I will detail in the chapter on repertoire further on. *Raag desh* is a common tonality for other patriotic music and it is closely associated with Indian national pride. The symbolic imagery associated with different “*Vande Mataram*” productions run the gamut from fierce Hindu chauvinism to secular inclusivity. Ghosh's version promotes a positive and inclusive sense of the motherland, while also creating new modern meanings, best characterized as advertisements—with flashes of graffiti proclaiming that “India is cool!” and “India is fun!” The video promotes Indian culture as a colorful tapestry, populated with characters representing Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and other religious persuasions as well as traditional and modern signifiers, both visual and sonic. “*Vande Mataram*” has evolved into a secular, all-inclusive and joyous slogan of a new India. Unfortunately, the young girl's image

revives some damaging symbolism, reinforcing the female body as the site at which the nation is established and maintained.

Recent studies of war, violence and nationalism have emphasized the relationship between women's bodies and nation building, especially in colonial and post-colonial South Asia (Mills and Sen 2004; Kandyoti 1991). The motherland metaphor makes an explicit connection between women and the nationalist project, where the female body provides a “boundary marker” demarcating ideologically or ethnically opposed communities (Evangelista 2011:1). This association becomes horrific in ethnic or sectarian violence where rape is constituted as a “symbol of conquered terrain” (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault 2000:20). The cultural production of symbols that promote gendered associations with the nation thus become very dangerous for the women they idolize since their bodies become a focal point for nationalist aggression and manipulation. “*Vande Mataram*” performs this function in music, uniting images of gender and nationalism, and tasking women with the burden of the nation, inseparable from their bodies. New versions of “*Vande Mataram*” remain potent, mainstream symbols of the nation, and still arouse controversy despite efforts to redefine, secularize and sanitize its more divisive meanings.

Long before Ghosh's remake, the lyrics of “*Vande Mataram*” were altered over political controversies. As resistance grew to the song's imposition in public life, the overt Hindu-centric elements were redacted, leaving only the first two stanzas as India's national song. The complete lyrics of “*Vande Mataram*,” translated into English by Sri Aurobindo Bhose, are:

*Mother, I bow to thee! Rich with thy hurrying streams, bright with orchard gleams,
Cool with thy winds of delight, Dark fields waving Mother of might, Mother free.
Glory of moonlight dreams, Over thy branches & lordly streams, Clad in thy blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease Laughing low and sweet! Mother I kiss thy feet, Speaker sweet and low!
Mother, to thee I bow.*

*Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands When the sword flesh out in the seventy million hands
And seventy million voices roar Thy dreadful name from shore to shore? With many strengths
who art mighty and stored, To thee I call Mother and Lord! Though who savest, arise and save!*

To her I cry who ever her foreman drove Back from plain and Sea And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law, Thou art heart, our soul, our breath Thou art love divine, the awe In our hearts that conquers death. Thine the strength that nerves the arm, Thine the beauty, thine the charm. Every image made divine In our temples is but thine.

Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen, With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen, Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned, And the Muse a hundred-toned, Pure and perfect without peer, Mother lend thine ear, Rich with thy hurrying streams, Bright with thy orchard gleams, Dark of hue O candid-fair

*In thy soul, with jeweled hair And thy glorious smile divine, Loveliest of all earthly lands, Showering wealth from well-stored hands! Mother, mother mine! Mother sweet, I bow to thee, Mother great and free!*²⁰

Rich with naturalistic metaphors, the second stanza explicitly endorses anti-colonial militarism, and the fourth stanza invokes Hindu mother-goddess archetypes. As suggested above, Hindu elites immediately embraced the song's nativism and connections to the land but non-Hindus eventually found it troubling. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2003) describes the political debates surrounding the song's candidacy for the honor of being India's national anthem, which it lost to Rabindranath Tagore's "*Jana Gana Mana*." The subsequent impulse to secularize the song met resistance from right-wing Hindutva groups who regarded it as crucial to fostering a Hindu-normative national consciousness.

Campaigns since independence, and as recent as 2006, have attempted to mandate the song in all public schools,²¹ sometimes producing riots and protests.²² Conservative Hindutva websites and publications²³ still call for its performance, *in toto*, at all national events, and BJP-Shiv Sena Representatives have argued that "to remain in this country, you have to recite "*Vande Mataram*."²⁴ Conversely Indian Muslims,²⁵ Sikhs,²⁶ and other non-Hindus have opposed the

²⁰ The lyrics to "Vande Mataram" translated by Sri Aurobindo Bose available across numerous websites. www.sanyal.com/india/vande.html and www.outlookindia.com/website/story/vande-mataram-the-song/232360

²¹ "BJP vs Congress: It's Vande vs Kandahar" *Asian Age*, 28 August 2006. Details compulsory "Vande Mataram."

²² "Boycott Threat Over Indian Song" 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5300996.stm.

²³ Hindu Janajagruti Samiti website - <http://www.hindujagruti.org/activities/campaigns/national/vandemataram>.

²⁴ Lakdawala, M.H. "Vande Mataram is back as a handle to beat Muslims with" <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15082002/1508200250.htm>.

²⁵ Rahman, A Faizur – islamicvoice.com/September2006/Controversy/index.php#VandeMataramandtheMuslims.

²⁶ "Singing of Vande Mataram against Sikh tenets" <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060907/delhi.htm#11>.

performance of “*Vande Mataram*” as their national song. The source of the song, *Anandamath*, also glorifies the killing of Muslims and frames all non-Hindus as foreigners to be ousted from India, and all religions to come together under idolatry of the nation. Ultimately, “*Vande Mataram*”—as a national song—alienates non-Hindus from inclusion into the nation.

National songs and anthems express the values of independence movements and choosing which song represents the nation inevitably prioritizes some revolutionary ideologies over others. The lyrics of such compositions create not only symbolic references to the struggles for sovereignty, but also to reinforce the cultural dynamics embedded in that struggle. In the case of India, both violent and non-violent movements for independence had their own literary voices. Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* and “*Vande Mataram*” represented not only a violent solution, but one that placed gender roles at the forefront of imagining the new Indian nation. As the motherland metaphor glorifies Indian women, it simultaneously imprisons them to embody the nation's essence. Some of India's greatest intellectuals recognized how nationalism can focus its normalizing efforts on subordinate groups: One such notable was India's Nobel Poet Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, whose view of the motherland metaphor in “*Vande Mataram*” remains instructive.

Rabindranath Tagore: Reflections on Nationalism and Gender

As a student of Bengali literature and modern song in Kolkata, I encountered the influence of Rabindranath Tagore throughout my studies. The affiliation I received for my work on the slide-guitar was from a university named after this monumental figure, and his music was a constant part of the din of urban Bengali life. Bengalis accord Tagore the utmost respect, which is why his perspectives on nationalism and gender provide even more weight to my critical

analysis. I reference Tagore in order to highlight his own objections to the politicization of the motherland and the negative effects that Hindu nationalism has had on South Asian cultures.

Active from the latter half of the nineteenth century to World War II, India's renowned poet, composer, and artist, Rabindranath Tagore's output was so prolific that his musical compositions now constitute an entire genre of Bengali music called *Rabindra sangeet*. Tagore's relationship with Indian nationalism assumed numerous forms, revealing a careful treatment and nuanced understanding of nationalism's power and pitfalls. Early in Tagore's consideration of an Indian national consciousness, he promoted "*Vande Mataram*," even performing the song himself at the 1896 Indian National Congress. Like many other intellectuals of the time, he initially considered "*Vande Mataram*" a "symbol that helped to bridge the social, religious and political domain of colonial society" (Bagchi 1990:66). Tagore would soon reverse himself, arguing against it as India's national anthem, and seeing it as undermining a secular and inclusive vision of the nation. The explicit connection between Indian soil and Hindu religion, as well as the violent rhetoric of *Anandamath* and "*Vande Mataram*," excluded non-Hindus as part of the nationalist resistance to British dominance.

In the celebrated political novel *Ghare-Baire* (1916), Tagore develops two male characters, the educated and passive Nikhil, and the nativist firebrand Sandip, representing two opposing ideologies who challenge the conflicted and idealized housewife, Bimala. She must choose between Nikhil's measured and pluralistic modernity, and the seduction of Sandip's passionate Hindu nationalism. As Nidhi Varma observes,

"Tagore represents Bimala in *Ghare-Baire* with a very specific purpose – to discredit Sandip's brand of nationalism. His approach nevertheless throws up an interesting corollary. Was Tagore also telling us how the nationalist project is and always will inherently erase issues central to women? Are nationalism and gender empowerment intrinsically antithetical?" (Varma 2013)

While the motherland symbol glorifies women in Tagore's novel, they are not empowered.

Ghare Baire's characters show how nationalist zeal imposes the injustice of patriarchy, distracting women with the nightmare of the foreign oppressor while denying them their full rights. “*Vande Mataram*” is evoked repeatedly while revolutionaries burn foreign imports in Satyajit Ray's 1984 film rendition of the novel, “Home and the World.” These scenes make vivid Tagore's criticism of violent *swadeshi* nationalism, a controversial position as India headed towards independence.

Tagore frequently implemented the motherland metaphor in his work, drawing from his Bengali cultural background. As he implemented nativist symbolism in his poetry, he assessed nationalism carefully. The nation-state ideology being imported into India from the West had disturbing consequences of erasing the plurality of South Asia's religious and ethnic landscape. Seeing nationalism as a product of a global capitalist framework, Tagore observed that “the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value; but they are bound in iron hoops, labeled and separated off with scientific care and precision” (Tagore 1917:6). As a system of cultural and administrative organization, nationalism is globally accepted as the only game in town, but can nationalism ever situate itself in a non-hegemonic framework?

Masculinity As National Pride

While women's gender roles have dominated my discussion of Indian nationalism, masculinity also matters. Beginning with policies regarding corporal punishment, the British penal system had limited effects on the male Hindu body. Many punishment policies during the colonial period were deemed ineffective, including capital punishment. As Anand Yang observes, the revised penal system for India's convicts transported them to penal colonies in Southeast Asia

(Yang 2003). This exile across the Indian Ocean constituted spiritual and transgressive punishment for many Hindus who considered crossing the *kala pani* (black waters) as tantamount to expulsion from their communities. Depriving Indians of their cultural and spiritual status worked well for the British, who could more easily manage convicts in Indonesia, since they had no desire to return to their homelands as pariahs. Death held little consequence for individuals whose religious beliefs ensured them rebirth. Thus, a punishment of the body had to be replaced by a punishment of the soul.

Imposing the British tax and legal systems, its administrative structures, and agrarian schemes all undermined the Indian psyche, bringing subordinate classes under colonial influence. Post-colonial nationalist discourse and modernizing ideologies inevitably shifted Indian orientations, particularly within the state and military, aligning them more closely with Western ones. As the colonial powers valued the masculinity of military procedure and spectacle, Punjabi physicality and British marching band choreography became the dominant imagery promoted in Indian nationalist displays. Srirupa Roy's *Beyond Belief* (2007) describes how India carefully crafted its image of a developing nation-state, using media, ritual and symbols of an adolescent secular industrial modernity. Roy's description of Republic Day in Delhi suggests the often quoted "unity in diversity" slogan has been superseded by displays of strength and masculinity in military pageantry. The typical music is powerful *dhols* and Western marching band ensembles with an infectious up-tempo dance-rhythm. Similarly, Bollywood's dance and music draws together idealized recreations, folkloric sanitized dances along to a ubiquitous Punjabi *bhangra* beat, which is traditionally a male-dominated dance-form.

Displays of masculinity in India's Western military style clearly show in the nationalist performance at the Wagah border ceremony. I observed at Wagah a daily display of national physicality directed at Pakistan, whose own construction of masculinity is practically identical.

High stomping and rabble-rousing at this event conjures images of colonial military order, which provide the model for the Indian and Pakistani armies. As they patrol the borders of the motherland, mutual nationalist animosity is celebrated.

In the performing arts, masculinity emerges in techniques of exaggerated expressiveness and intense virtuosity with rhythm and tempo. Aside from a few studies on masculinity (Derné 2000; Chowdhry 2015; Rajan 2006; Ahmed 2008; Aslam 2014), there seems to be much more scholarship on how women's performances are carefully controlled and marginalized according to nationalist ideals. Constructions of masculinity tend to be focused on economics or sports activities like cricket, soccer, and wrestling, suggesting that masculinity in South Asian performing arts is an area that calls for much more research in order to understand the full scope of the effects of nationalism and politicization on gender roles.

In the age of burgeoning Indian nationalism, ideal representations of masculinity and femininity were imbedded into the structure of cultural arts, profoundly influencing South Asian music cultures. As in the case of the Madras music academies and V.D. Paluskar's efforts in North India, music pedagogues, theorists, critics, and enthusiasts pushed classical music into the average Indian household, with certain gender roles embedded in a vision of Indian modernity. By promoting classical music as essential to educating a modern woman, musical theorists and cultural ideologues aligned with nationalist efforts to connect the preservation of tradition to gender roles. Resistance to these normative influences did occur, creating a highly contested public sphere. Yet women were by and large excluded from these debates, were the subjects of reforms, and were broadly prevented from directly influencing how their culture was constricting the boundaries of the expressive arts.

This chapter also highlights new theoretical terminology that could be useful in understanding the development of the slide-guitar within Indian culture. Allen's terminology regarding the codification of Indian classical dance helps to theorize the slide-guitar's vernacularization. For example, the appropriation of Hawaiian style guitar music begins the process of *re-population*, where cultures begin to adopt new musical forms, perhaps as a marker of cosmopolitanism. A *reconstruction* results from replacing the repertoire of Hawaiian and Western songs with Bengali light music and film songs, and later, the instrument is adapted with new structural forms, making it suitable for classical music. *Renaming* occurs at a basic level, with the instrument being called the Indian or Hindustani slide-guitar, not to mention all the creative Sanskritic names for it that have proliferated in the past twenty years. *Re-situation* has occurred as slide-guitar music has travelled from light and folk genres, into Hindustani classical music, and eventually into the heart of Hindu nationalist music. Finally, *restoration* has been accomplished by connecting the slide-guitar to ancient Indian performing- arts traditions, where the slide technique and the guitar itself allegedly have Indian origins. Applying these terms to the slide-guitar's evolution illustrates the transformation process, as it has been controlled by the powerful and influential pillars of the performance community.

Especially in urban Kolkata, women have participated in the vernacularization process by actively adopting the instrument as an accompaniment for practice of vocal music in the home. Many concert playing slide-guitar performers today testify to the vibrant life of the instrument in domestic settings, and to the large percentage of women slide-guitarists who inspired the following generation. The quick adaptation of slide-guitar into Bengali light music successfully stripped the instrument of prohibitive foreign associations, making it suitable for women in the already liberal atmosphere of urban Kolkata to embrace the instrument as their form of expression. Bengali communities across India were some of the earliest groups to promote slide-

guitar performance. For example, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the city of Varanasi's Bengali Tola neighborhood housed a number of slide-guitar playing families. One of the first female performers, Mani Sontakke, gained considerable renown, teaching new generations of women including the most prominent slide-guitarists, Kamala Shankar. By all accounts, women who played slide-guitar early on did not perform outside of their communities. Likely they avoided much of the shaming and disenfranchisement discussed throughout this chapter by confining their practice to private settings of light music.

Because the slide-guitar was initially associated with light music genres like *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*, the instrument had many close associations with Bengali identity. By way of this cultural connection and the powerful influence of Bengali culture on the broader Indian national identity, the slide-guitar became a medium appropriate with which to express Indian-ness across many different genres. The resilience of the slide-guitar in South Asia during the first half of the twentieth century can be attributed to its popularity outside of public view. Difficult to research, especially from my positioning as a white male, the musical traditions that flourished in homes are just as influential as the reformed traditions for public consumption. Once the slide-guitar migrated into the classical genre in the 1970s, the instrument had already passed its first hurdle by being fully adapted into a Bengali musical tradition and home music-making practices.

This chapter has argued that the modern constructions of traditional music and dance in the classical arts were shaped by both colonial and nationalist pressures, which drastically altered the boundaries of what women could and couldn't do as performers. In line with symbolic constructions of women as culture-bearers and the nation as mother-goddess, an unreasonable burden of responsibility, purity, chastity and virtue was placed on Indian women. Women, while relegated to the domestic world by patriarchal norms, continued to cultivate traditions like the

slide-guitar, preserving repertoires and techniques with far less recognition than they deserve. In my efforts to focus on women's contributions to the slide-guitar traditions of South Asia I have integrated much of my research on the history of social and religious reforms and identity politics. By viewing musical cultures in India through the lens of social theory, post-colonial studies and gender issues, we can better understand the power dynamics that have shaped their communities. Otherwise we might see the replica as the real thing, or the golden age as the only real description of India's rich cultural history.

Chapter 4: The History of the Guitar in Indian Music

Beginning with the guitar's migration into South Asia, this chapter addresses the different socio-cultural contexts that supported early guitar performances by drawing from colonial publications, advertisements, and field diaries. The guitar remained largely segregated from Indian music cultures until the slide-technique was applied to raised strings in the Hawaiian style. The slide sound transformed the guitar into an instrument capable of producing many styles of Indian music, making it popular for the rendition of light and film music. The slide technique is primarily responsible for the guitar's integration, yet the origins of slide pose a historical quandary, with multiple theories on cultural origins that interact with nationalist motivations to produce a prolific mythology of creation narratives.

The slide-guitar gained a foothold in India by the mid twentieth century, developing a rich lineage that has little documentation in ethnomusicological literature. The history of the Hawaiian style of slide-guitar in India underscores the role of radio, film music, and cassette technology in disseminating the tradition throughout South Asia. The Hawaiian slide-guitar became the instrument of choice in Bengali light music for its expressive ability, while symbolically, it connected with notions of cosmopolitanism, Western modernity, foreign music and the leisure of island life. By describing some of the more famous Indian exponents of this instrument, I highlight a diverse hagiography and an industry that eventually gave birth to a tradition of further guitar modification. The decline of Hawaiian slide-guitar in Bengali culture left a thriving instrument manufacturing industry to search for solutions. The subsequent creation of the Hindustani slide-guitar, discussed in the following chapter, revitalized the light music genres while providing classical musicians a new medium with which to express themselves. By beginning with the standard Spanish guitar, we can track the symbolic and structural changes that

facilitated the instrument's vernacularization into Indian music, evolving from a foreign to a native instrument.

The Guitar in India

The Western guitar with six strings, standard E,B,G,D,A,E tuning, and frets to mark twelve intervals within an octave, is commonly identified in India as the standard or Spanish guitar. Its modern form was developed by Antonio Torres Jurado (1817-1892) in the mid-nineteenth century but hundreds of designs have been created throughout Eurasia since the lute-shaped chordophones of antiquity. Western antecedents of the Torres model, such as the Spanish *vihuela*, migrated to South Asia via French, Portuguese, Dutch, and British trade routes, but the modern Spanish guitar arrived in India during the late British colonial period, around the late nineteenth century, predominantly for folk and religious music. The instrument's portability made it common in military and maritime communities, where it accompanied diverse musical forms, with romantic and proletariat themes. For example, early forms of Portuguese *fado* music with guitar accompaniment would have appeared in Goa to assuage home-sickness with its bitter-sweet melancholia. Other chordophones far preceded the modern guitar in South Asia, but the structure, tuning and aesthetics were radically different from European ones.

Early paths of the guitar's migration into India also included various Christian religious communities, especially through the Roman Catholicism of Portuguese, Italian and Irish Jesuits during the sixteenth century. The Catholic community employed the guitar for worship music and proselytizing missions, creating a strong association between the guitar music and Western religious activity in India (Macleod 1869). As missionaries travelled through the subcontinent, highly portable guitar models were the often the first Western instruments to escape the colonial

capitols.

Baroque and Western classical guitar styles found audiences in salons of wealthy Europeans, bureaucrats and high ranking military officials, yet the guitar was more often observed in informal and non-aristocratic segments of European colonial society in India. Appearing on British military bases and hill camps, instruments described as guitars were documented in diaries of colonial officials, providing much-needed moral support by supplying nationalist and folk songs from the homeland.²⁷ A market for guitars developed in colonial Calcutta by the nineteenth century, with advertisements appearing in newspapers across India.²⁸ International trading corporations like the British East India Company imported guitars on special order, along with other Western instruments, filtering these products through major colonial port cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Through the early twentieth century, despite an increasing proliferation of cheap models, guitars made practically no observable integration into Indian music genres.

Throughout my research I encountered Western writings that use the word “guitar” generically for string instruments in describing Indian music performances, where knowledge of instruments like the *veena*, *sitar* and *sarod* was limited.²⁹ Such an inadequate vocabulary for Indian string instruments makes it difficult to glean the structural and aesthetic characteristics of these instruments from colonial documentation. The dominant orientalist historiography during India’s Western colonial period treated the guitar as a superior European instrument, given its ability to modulate between keys and develop harmonic progressions according to Western musical aesthetics. When the term “guitar” was employed to describe Indian instruments, it was

²⁷ “David Dabchick’s Diary in the Hills”, *Pioneer*, Allahabad, 11/4/1867, pp. 3.

²⁸ Advertisement for guitars, *Pioneer*, Allahabad, 8/23/1865, pp.10.

²⁹ “The Legend of Kusa Jataka” in *Ceylon Observer*, Published as Colombo Overland Observer, 2/15/1865. - A long poem about a Singhalese kingdom and the appearance of a ‘guitar’ as generic term for string instrument in the English translation.

often preceded by derogatory modifiers or qualified with criticism stemming from a bias of Western aesthetics.³⁰

From the perspective of Indian sources, the guitar held little appeal and its integration into Indian music was unlike that of other Western instruments. Beginning in the nineteenth century, instruments such as the violin and harmonium began their popular ascent in India as musicians incorporated them into folk, classical, popular and spiritual musical traditions. While the violin was adored as a new “king of instruments” in South India (Weidman 2006), the harmonium was reviled as the “bane” (Rahaim 2011) of Indian classical music despite its overwhelming popularity. Described in more detail in chapter two, the ability of these instruments to articulate the melodic nuances of Indian classical music was an important quality that concerned communities of listeners, theorists and performers. Fretted instruments like the Western guitar and mandolin, while having a number of notable performers in the classical genre today,³¹ experienced integration into classical music almost a century later than the violin and harmonium. Even today, Spanish guitars, both electric and acoustic are rarely used to perform traditional styles of music in South Asia, typically appearing in pop and rock and roll derived from Western aesthetics.³²

The standard guitar offers tonal qualities, typical tunings, and techniques incompatible with many Indian aesthetics, although some unique models with scalloped frets, allowing for increased bending of the pitch, were created in the 1970s. The fixed frets and flattened fret-board on most guitars confines melodic possibilities to the Western twelve tone system, allowing slight deviations through the bending of strings. Indian music exhibits frequent adornments (*alonkar*)

³⁰ “The Governor at Tanjore” in *Madras Mail*, 10/19/1871, page 2.

³¹ John McLaughlin (UK), Mathias Muller (Germany), Johannes Moller (Switzerland), Bart Stenhouse (Australia).

³² Exceptions to this statement include South Indian performer Sukumar Prasad, who brought the standard electric guitar into Karnatic music in the 1970’s. An artist called Prasanna has also made considerable advancements in incorporating the electric guitar into Karnatic music, www.guitarprassana.com. Another notable integration is the mandolin, adapted without structural modification by U. Srinivas.

of pitches that waver back and forth between notes in ways the standard guitar cannot express.³³

Standard guitar tunings (E, A, D, G, B, E) also don't produce a stable chord on the open strings, which is valued in Indian music for creating a supportive tonal background appropriate for modal music that doesn't change its harmonic center. The common use of chords and harmonic progressions on the standard guitar would have initially sounded foreign, especially to Indian classical practitioners. Tuning is an important aspect of integration, as the violin was altered from the standard Western tuning (G, D, A, E) to a typical tuning of only the tonic and perfect fifth (C, G, C, G) for Indian music.

Another factor excluding the guitar is its lack of sustain. In comparison, the violin is capable of long drawn out notes through continuous bowing techniques, within which pitches can be moved back and forth because of the lack of frets on the fingerboard. The harmonium can also produce a virtually endless note via the continuous pumping of the bellows that produce its sound. The standard guitar also lacks the timbral qualities prized in other Indian instruments, many of which like the *sitar* and *sarod*, have evolved structurally over long periods of time to acquire the appropriate Indian tonal aesthetics, including sympathetic strings that prolong the duration of notes. The lack of sustain and relatively fixed pitch of the standard Spanish guitar may have been some of the main sonic factors excluding it from Indian music.

Visually, the Spanish guitar creates strong associations with the West. As a medium best adapted for Western harmonic music, the guitar's image represents the foreign colonial power, causing negative reactions from South Asian critics motivated by nationalist sentiment. If an object was symbolic of the oppressive colonial regime, it was sure to elicit condemnation and perhaps subject to destruction as other foreign goods during the more violent actions of the

³³ Described in chapter two, the harmonium also faced the issue of fixed pitches, leading to its rejection by many classical music enthusiasts who protested the instrument's inability to produce all twenty-two *srutis* of the Indian classical music system.

swadeshi movement. Depicted in the previously mentioned film, “*Ghare Baire*,” director Satyajit Ray composed many scenes evoking the *swadeshi* decentralized nativist movement’s efforts to destroy imports as an act of resistance to colonial economies that disenfranchised and exploited South Asian workers for gains in the global economy.

Corroborated by Martin Clayton, who is also referenced in the introduction to this dissertation, the guitar had been in India for hundreds of years, yet it remained confined to European circles and was regarded as foreign until the development of slide-guitar traditions in the twentieth century (Clayton 2001). While Clayton’s article implies the political controversies surrounding the adoption of foreign objects and traditions, the political atmosphere of the time most crucially explains the guitar’s evolution, similar to the experience of other foreign instruments in South Asia. In the twentieth century, prior to Indian independence, social pressures motivated both a drive towards the modern and Anglophilic, and conversely, towards preserving the indigenous. Falling in line with Chatterjee’s bi-furcated theory of post-colonial nationalism, two competing streams of national identity, representing the traditional and the modern, would have been brought to bear on the evaluation of the guitar. The cultural changes taking place in nineteenth century South Asia leading up to independence become the necessary backdrop of assessing the vernacularization of foreign instruments. Whether through religious reform, social movements, performance practices, or codified gender and caste roles, such shifts in the cultural landscape would have influenced the performance and consumption of guitar music, reflecting both the realities of colonial rule in India and a drive towards independence and modernization.

The first guitar to successfully enter Indian musical traditions was the Hawaiian slide-guitar, which arrived in the 1930s and became widely available by the 1960s, appearing in many forms of Bengali light music. The Hawaiian form of slide-guitar was quickly adopted as a means

of performance in many light music genres due to the availability of cheap guitars in the marketplace. Mechanically, the slide-technique lends itself to producing essential characteristics of Indian music not available in standard guitar playing, including the above-mentioned *alonkar*. Additionally, the Hawaiian slide-guitar's tuning produces a stable chord when all the open strings are played (for example from low to high pitched strings, D, A, D, F#, A D, which produces a D major chord, I, V, I, III, V, I). Since a slide implement is typically a straight metal bar played perpendicular to the strings, it only offers one vector for which to control pitch. Large chords are only possible along this vector, with small alteration possible by turning the slide at a forty-five degree angle. These mechanics make the open tuning essential for slide-guitar playing in traditional Indian music, where chords besides those based on the tonic, are rare and harmonic movement is limited or absent.

The slide sound of the Hawaiian guitar is by far the most likely reason for its popularity in Indian music cultures. Using a slide on raised strings removes the frets from the equation, relegating them to visual markers rather than obstructions that fix the pitch. All twenty-two *srutis* that characterize Indian classical music tonality become available without frets, and a slide-guitarist can engage these notes with both visual markers and a trained ear. Additionally, with a single stroke, the slide-guitar is able to traverse numerous octaves, creating a range that rivals most other string instruments, Western and Indian alike. For expressing the nuances of vocal inflections, the slide is uniquely capable of these subtleties, with a sustain that lasts long after a struck note that lingers regardless of upward or downward movement of the pitch. With the simple alteration necessary to convert any guitar to a slide instrument, the slide sound became popular for listening audiences and new players interested in playing their own music on the instrument.

The popularity of the Hawaiian slide-guitar in twentieth century India can be rationalized

also because of the many slide instruments that already existed in South Asian music cultures.

The *vichitra veena*, for example, is an ancient instrument that uses a spherical glass slide implement to play classical music on suspended strings. This rare instrument is not only difficult to play, but difficult to manufacture compared to the standard assembly process of guitars.

Curiously, when compared to other Western imports into India, the guitar acquired a diverse origin mythos that reflects the distinct era of Indian nationalist discourse arising in the late twentieth century. The guitar's evolution from a foreign to an Indian instrument is obscured by an increasingly common tendency to claim, or perhaps reclaim, the instrument and slide-techniques as indigenous, reimagining their evolutionary paths with nativist historiography.

Nationalist Discourse and Origin Stories

In my fieldwork, I encountered guitar and slide-technique origin narratives that define cultural objects as Indian in opposition to a global or Western modernity. While shaping a revisionist history can be the function of reclamation or decolonization, in this case, it has mostly bolstered Hindu nationalism and golden age mythologizing. Connecting the techniques implemented on the slide-guitar to ancient Indian musical practice initiates a process of legitimization and vernacularization, not as an adoption of something foreign, but as a reclamation or revival of a traditional art form.

The standard guitar's acceptance into traditional Indian genres began with the implementation of slide techniques over raised strings. Examining the origins of this and many other modifications arouses passionate contentions of both personal and national ownership. In contrasting the origin narratives that follow, my aim is to emphasize the relationship between organological innovations and cultural nationalism. Rather than problematize the revisionary

narratives, I consider origin claims to be part of process of self-empowerment, establishing a sense of pride and tradition previously undermined by marginalization and colonialism. Specifically, I examine the question of how the adoption of slide technique made globally popular by Hawaiian style guitar playing has been rationalized as reclaiming an Indic slide tradition.

The first narrative makes an early connection between India and Hawaii, promoting an Indic origin to the Hawaiian style of slide-guitar playing. Martin Clayton (2001:200) recounts the story of an Anglo-Indian sailor, either an indentured worker or prisoner, by the name of Gabriel Davion, who travelled to Hawaii in the 1880s and taught the slide technique to Hawaiian performers (Humphrey 1994:110). This meeting of cultures purportedly fused the slide technique with the open tunings typical of Hawaiian slack-key playing to create a new style. Representing Indian ingenuity, Davion is argued here to have introduced Hawaiians to slide technique, framing the style as a South Asian invention connecting back to a genesis within Indic ancient history. Mantle Hood's (1983:144) article on Hawaiian steel guitar also supports this narrative, digging deeper into the story's chronology and arguing that Davion must have demonstrated the technique derived from the *gottuvadhyam* first documented in the seventeenth century Telugu text, *Sringara Savitri*, long before Hawaiian contact with European trade routes to India.

This likelihood of Indic genesis has been repeated by Indian slide-guitar performers, as in the liner notes to Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's *Meeting by the River*, written by Kavichandran Alexander states, "it is quite possible that the "slide" technique as it was initially done in Hawaii and later by Delta bluesmen could have been influenced by these North and South Indian musical instrument models" (Plasketes 1995:52). This slide-is-of-Indian origins narrative has been bolstered by references to the *ektantri* (a one-stringed instrument played with a slide-implement) in the ancient Indian treatise on music and dance the *Natyasastra*, attributed to the

sage Bharata and dated between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Later instruments in this slide lineage include the *vichitra veena*, found in the Hindustani classical tradition of North India, and the *chitraveena*, also called the *gottuvadhyam*, present in the Karnatik classical tradition of South India. Clear development of slide techniques on these ancient and now rare instruments provides a compelling case for slide origins in South Asia, yet the fact that these techniques have existed for so long is not direct evidence of spreading the technique to Hawaii, or for being the source of inspiration for all modern slide-guitarists in India.

Casting doubt on this narrative are other nationalistic origin stories. Just as the slide technique is claimed as indigenous to South Asia, the guitar itself has also been argued to have originated in the subcontinent. Relying on the compelling etymology of the words “*geet*” and “*tar*”, meaning “song” and “string” in Sanskrit, some websites³⁴ and many players I encountered in India claim the guitar, and other fretted lute-shaped chordophones were created in ancient India. “*Tar*” has clear linguistic roots in Indo-European, making its way into Persian, Latin and their linguistic descendants. Having discussed and vetted claims about the guitar and the slide-technique’s origins in India, my position on this question of origins remains undecided considering the history of slide-guitar as told from the perspective of blues and Hawaiian music researchers. By articulating alternative narratives in contrast to those of Indic origins, I mean to highlight how political and nationalist motivations affect organological history.

Slide techniques on a guitar could have also originated from West Africa, and traveled through the Americas to Hawaii, before arriving in India. Slide repertoires on ancient African musical bows helped develop the African-American instruments called the *jitterbug* or *didley-bow* (Evans 1970).³⁵ These styles later proliferated in the American blues tradition, skyrocketing

³⁴ <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-origin-of-guitar-Is-it-derived-from-Veena-Indian-musical-instrument>.

³⁵ Evans is referenced in Rick Payne’s discussion of African slide-instruments.
http://www.document-records.com/show_article.asp?articleID=186.

to popularity by the 1930s. In his autobiography, *Father of the Blues*, W.C. Handy recounts an early story of slide implements in blues music. One morning at the Tutwiler, Mississippi train station Handy noticed a guitarist and observed, “As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of his guitar in a manner popularized by the Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars” (Handy 1957). This suggests that it was a novelty in the blues tradition to use a device to slide across the strings, or that Handy was more familiar with Hawaiian guitarists using this technique than the history of slide implements in African and African-American string instrument traditions. Handy mentions Hawaii, although not specifically as the origin of the technique, but more so as the style which popularized the technique around the globe.

The origins of the simple transformation from a fingered chordophone to one using a slide could be impossible to discern, however the development of a repertoires specifically using this technique provides a more tangible way to discuss organological genesis. Regardless, there remain many scholars who have attempted to solve the quandary of slide-technique origins. As Rick Payne notes, by the early 1900s, the guitar, banjo and other string instruments became common in the United States because they were portable and accessible through catalogs that reached remote rural areas. Even before that, simple home-made instruments like the one-stringed *jitterbug* could have been created even in the most impoverished of settings. It is hard to believe that the idea of a slide-technique didn’t exist during times when musical materials were scarce and likely improvised organological structures predominated in musical settings. Following this logic, Payne claims, “It is a safe bet to say, that knives, bones and glass would have been used on the guitar as an extension of the *jitterbug*. The guitar became more widely used with a slide, after a young Joseph Kekuku made a recording using this style.”³⁶ This observation privileges the likely ingenuity of a particular cultural group, rather than focusing on

³⁶ Rick Payne, *History and Origin of Slide Guitar in the Blues*. <http://www.guitarnoise.com/lessons/slide-guitar-history>. Accessed 10/27/2013.

the development of a repertoire and style. In contending between these two points of origins, Hawaiian and African, arguments easily develop around cultural ownership or appropriation, potentially leading to ethnic nationalist claims based on the idea that a particular technique must have been created out of the innovation of one's ancestors (Troutman 2014:27).³⁷

With little material evidence, Payne nevertheless argues that: "The Hawaiians have always laid claim to the invention of the slide guitar, but it is fairer to say, that it was a development rather than an invention. Anyway, the young J.K. (*Joseph Kekuku*) could easily have got the idea by listening to an American Negro sailor, whose ship had docked in Honolulu!" Emphasizing the slide-technique's African lineage, Payne theorizes that sailors, slaves, and indentured servants would have transmitted these improvisations with new playing techniques and materials to Hawaii, where they were adapted to the guitar playing of a mix of Portuguese and Mexican ranchers in the Hawaiian population. These cowboys hired by King Kamehameha in 1832, have been credited with bringing the guitar itself to Hawaii. Incorporating the guitar into rural agricultural life in the Hawaiian islands led to slack-key styles, or alternative tunings like low-to-high (E,A,E,A,C#,E) and (D,G,D,G,B,D),³⁸ amongst many others, which allowed for the open strings to produce full chords. This playing style is also referred to as Hawaiian guitar, regardless of whether is slide or a pick is implemented in the right-hand technique. Who first played slide-techniques on these instruments to inspire the Hawaiian slide-guitar technique is also subject to Hawaiian nationalism.

The aforementioned Joseph Kekuku and his followers have contributed a number of slide origins stories (Smith 1959:52; Johnson 1939:499). Once, while walking down the railroad tracks, Kekuku is said to have kicked a spike which, when propelled along the steel track,

³⁷ Troutman describes bottleneck slide-techniques as an "Africanism" that has been difficult to contradict because of political motivations.

³⁸ Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association Website <http://www.hsga.org/history.htm>, accessed 2/1/2016.

produced an inspiring sound that he soon adapted into his guitar playing.³⁹ According to John Troutman, Kekuku and his group migrated to the Pacific Northwest and later to New York, where his playing style became immensely popular between the 1920s-50s (Troutman 2016). The Hawaiian slide-guitar style soon attracted listeners across the United States, where many traditional compositions and folkloric revisions entered the vernacular of American popular music. Soon, the Hawaiian slide technique was adapted to country Western music, and folk music styles and new instruments were developed, including the dobro, the pedal steel, resonator guitar bodies and the first electrified guitar instruments (Troutman 2013:32-38).

Successive generations in various communities from Hawaii, the United States and India have all developed competing genesis mythologies that generate self-empowerment.⁴⁰ The creation of these myths reinforces cultural nationalism, often emerging when political and social contexts demand affirmation. Rediscovery, as is the case in narratives that place the slide technique in South Asian origins, fuels the folkloric imagination, proposing a reclamation of traditional art forms rather than an appropriation from external sources. Authenticity is couched in historical lineage, which when obscured by generations of cultural loss can be resuscitated through creative, embodied, or ancestral memory, often classified as a revival.

The Afro-Peruvian song and dance tradition illustrates the revival of art form. Monica Rojas and Heidi Feldman (2006)⁴¹ have explored the creative reconstruction of music and dance traditions by Nicomedes and Victoria Santa Cruz. Together, they drew organized Afro-Peruvian styles into a newly codified folkloric form, popularized through their ensemble performances and radio broadcasts. This revival conceptualized the music and dance as encoded in their bodies,

³⁹ One of the many Kekuku origin stories described to me by Hawaiian slide-guitar scholar John Troutman, personal conversation (April 2016).

⁴⁰ John Troutman, personal conversation, April 2016.

⁴¹ Chapter 2 and 3 of Feldman's text discusses the concept of ancestral memory as it applies to the reviving of African performing arts traditions in Peru during the 20th century.

emerging spontaneously or when the memory of their ancestors channeled artistic forms. Their efforts, bolstered by community engagement and ethnographic research, brought about a renewed interest in the Afro-Peruvian performing arts. Likewise, the inspiration of a once rich cultural heritage also seems to be at work in the slide-guitar community. The idea that slide techniques are ancient Indian musical practices resonates with players who point to painting and sculpture as evidence of the slide in India's ancient past (Wade 1996).

Considering all the evidence for the separate origin stories, polygenesis most likely explains the development of slide-techniques over strings. In India, however, multiple points of conception do not fit the nationalist narrative, where Indic origins have become essential to the post-colonial and modernizing paradigm. On one hand, the symbolism of ancient ideas, instruments and techniques adds considerable capital to modern slide-guitar playing. On the other hand, the potentially criss-crossed migration patterns of slide-technique carry globalized associations, suggesting that these performance practices are hybrid innovations, or fusions of different styles. With the purity of any particular lineage tainted by the concept of hybridity, authenticity fades away under the criticism of cultural appropriation.

Anyone within the Indian classical music world familiar with the popular refrain "fusion is confusion," famously expressed by Ali Akbar Khan, can understand how highly a sense of purity, of unbroken lineage and traditionalism is valued in India. The abundance of new names for Indian slide-guitars, employing cosmological modifiers with the word *veena* (or lute in Sanskrit) shows the imperative of Indic genesis. It is a resurrection that imbues each new creation and its wielder with the symbolic capital of ancient Sanskritic glory. The commonplace denial of polygenesis comprises a chauvinist polemic that cannot be disentangled from nationalist and post-colonial ideologies. The imperative of creating national forms of musical expression contributes heavily to the shifting values attributed to the image and sound of

instruments in genres that express a sense of tradition or cultural belonging. Outside of India the same process occurs. The perception of foreignness and newness thus becomes a central point of argument, both positive and negative, in manufacturing of modern cultural identities.

Throughout the guitar's history in India, it has been seen as a modern import. In navigating from a foreign to a local, and even a nationally recognized Indian instrument, the slide-guitar crossed lines of representation, entering unpredictably into Indian households. Clayton notes that it became "*de-rigue*" in the 1950s for middle-class Bengali women to learn slide-guitar to mark their maturity and suitability for marriage (Clayton 2001:188). Thinking back to the nationalist drive to shift the site of classical music from the court system into middle-class households, seeing the slide-guitar being taken as the alternative to the *sitar*, *sarod* or *veena* as a marker of Hindu modernity in the mid twentieth century provides quite an anomaly. Only in Calcutta did this occur, yet broadly enough so that it became ubiquitous to post-independence for the average middle-class Hindu household to have a slide-guitar as an accompaniment instrument for practicing vocal technique. By melding the foreign and traditional into an alternative conception of the modern, the slide guitar became separate from a Western-dominated hierarchy of the new. Perhaps through a sense of solidarity amongst colonized populations—Indian and Hawaiian—this instrument gained a status of the "in-between," a hybrid that did not merely reproduce Western aesthetics, but could be used to present an authentic Indian voice. As the slide-guitar was first incorporated into Bengali non-classical, or light music genres, the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to illuminating the important Indian figures that helped vernacularize the slide-guitar from a Hawaiian tradition to an Indian one.

The Hawaiian Style Slide-Guitar in India

Moving into the twentieth century, most of the slide-guitarists in India's light music genres that I consulted credit the arrival of the slide-guitar from Hawaii to the legendary guitarist, Tao Moe. Moe performed slide techniques on what in India is commonly regarded as the Hawaiian guitar, which is a standard six string guitar with the strings raised approximately two centimeters above the fret-board to allow a smooth movement between notes and increased sustain. Speaking with historian and slide-guitarist Probir Kumar De⁴² I learned that Moe's story began in early 1930s Kolkata, which sparked a craze for the slack-key guitar style, or open tunings that easily accommodate the predominantly modal music of India. Moe's arrival created a different context and aesthetic for guitar performances that greatly altered perceptions about the guitar in India.

The Hawaiian style slide-guitar's smooth legato melodies and open-chord tunings were appealing for producing the modal supportive qualities of other Indian instruments while also being capable of precisely replicating melodies and articulations common in Indian music. In his dissertation on Hawaiian slide-guitar in Indian music, at Prakash Sontakke writes:

The Hawaiian guitar particularly lends itself to such universal expression because of its versatility and its adaptability to a wonderful array of styles, covering the globe from west to east, enhancing tradition, and embracing the modern, while leaving ample scope for personal expression and improvisation. (Sontakke 2015:277)

Sontakke's emphasis on boundary crossing is indicative of the different sonic and symbolic qualities of the Hawaiian slide-guitar. While still foreign, and modern in conception, the Hawaiian slide-guitar wasn't tied to the colonial power, yet still tied to modernity, providing an intriguing exoticism in downtown Kolkata's cosmopolitan atmosphere.

At first, Moe's playing and style attracted students who all replicated his Hawaiian aesthetics. Moe's most successful and influential student was Garney Nyss, a Kolkata transplant

⁴² Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

and distant relative of the famous Bengali poet Madhusudan Dutta.⁴³ Largely a Western-style musician, Nyss accumulated a vast repertoire of Hawaiian music, which he sang while accompanying himself on the slide-guitar, and with the popular group, the Aloha Boys. He became a regular on All India Radio channel B, which played only Western music. As Moe's leading student, Nyss was primarily responsible for passing on the tradition to the next generation of players in Kolkata. De, who studied with Nyss only briefly at the end of his life, recounted his closeness to his teacher, detailing his efforts to preserve Nyss's name in the world of slide-guitar. Documentation of Nyss's role in the musical community is sparse; we know more about his career as a sportsman and photographer.⁴⁴ After Nyss's death in 1998, De was alarmed to see Nyss's belongings, including his original guitar, destined for the trash after foreclosure. De intervened and has continued working to preserve Nyss's memory.

The next generation of Indian Hawaiian guitar players, including Sujit Nath, Batuk Nandy, Rajat Nandy, Kazi Aniruddho and Sunil Ganguly, were all—directly or indirectly—students of Nyss.⁴⁵ During the 1950s and 1960s, these Kolkata-based artists rose to fame playing the music of Bengali poet genres on Hawaiian guitar. Soon the slide-guitar became the most common instrument for playing *Rabindra sangeet*, the music of Bengali Poet Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, and also *Nazrul geeti*, the music of Bangladesh's national poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti

The poetic song genres of *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti* constitute essential components of modern Bengali musical culture. These two genres were codified in the twentieth

⁴³ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

⁴⁴ Nyss is also described in Taj Mahal Foxtrot website, under Calcutta's Hawaiian summer, <http://www.tajmahalfoxtrot.com/?p=659#more-659>.

⁴⁵ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

century and have permeated the performing arts worlds of both West Bengal and Bangladesh. In Bengal's performing arts universities, both genres can be found as concentrations or degree programs, primarily for vocalists. Instrumental renditions of this music have long appeared, but no other instrument has been more commonly featured as a lead melody player than the slide-guitar. The generations accustomed to the lyrical and melodic content of these songs can easily appreciate instrumental versions, whose melodies conjure the lyrics, mood and affect of the compositions. Poetic song genres are often considered light music, the popular music of their time, or as nationalist music by Bengalis today in both India and Bangladesh. Surprisingly, the slide-guitar rather than other instruments more clearly indexing Indian-ness, has fulfilled the prominent cultural role of interpreting these revered poets.

For his genius in the arts and his role as cultural ambassador for India, Rabindranath Tagore became Bengali culture's most celebrated figure. The first non-European recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, he composed in a myriad of performing, visual and literary arts genres. His musical compositions number more than two thousand works, including the national anthems of both India, "*Jana Gana Mana*" (1911), and Bangladesh, "*Amar Shonar Bangla*" (1905). Discussed in more detail in chapter three, his thoughtful and nuanced approach to nationalism appeared in fictional narratives and in critiques of contemporary movements of his time. Tagore ceaselessly promoted cultural advancement, founding Vishwa Bharati University in 1921, for example, which remains a bastion for the arts and cultural exchange in Santiniketan, West Bengal. Tagore figured prominently in the nationalist movement and his music and poetry helped define Bengali, and a broader Indian, identity.

Written in 1905 in a climate of colonial oppression, one of Tagore's most enduring songs, "*Todi Tor Dak Shune*," commonly referred to as "*Ekla Cholo Re*," became an anthem against British attempts to partition Bengal in 1906. In the *swadeshi* or "homeland" section of Tagore's

publication, *Gitabitan* (1941), “*Ekla Cholo Re*” and many other similar songs of Bengali cultural and Indian national importance were featured. The song has endured with renditions in the style of folk, protest, hip-hop and rock song. In 2004, A.R. Rahman produced a Hindi language version of “*Ekla Cholo Re*” for the film *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero*. The eminent Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan also performed the song in Hindi for the 2012 film, *Kahaani*. During my fieldwork and language studies in Kolkata, “*Ekla Cholo Re*” held a special place in my connection with other musicians, especially Bengalis. Even before my research on slide-guitar, I worked with Bengali musicians in downtown Seattle’s Wing-Luke Asian American Museum, where I produced a permanent interactive musical exhibit by recording compositions with local South Asian musicians. For this project, “*Ekla Cholo Re*” was the immediate and unanimous choice for representing Bengali culture.

As one of the first compositions I learned on the slide-guitar with my teacher Rhitom Sarkar, “*Ekla Cholo Re*” (see Appendix A) symbolized not only my fieldwork experience, in the sense of charting new ground in ethnographic research, but also the relationship between the slide-guitar and Indian national consciousness. That is, the sentiment of walking alone has always inspired the courage to tread a separate path and ultimately to triumph in the face of obstacles. Slide-guitar performers have similarly persevered amidst criticism, working to legitimize their medium in some of the most conservative musical genres. The struggle for sovereignty from the British was voiced through similar metaphors about perseverance and faith, becoming a unifying declaration against colonialism inspiring many great political leaders of India’s independence era. After learning this piece with Sarkar, it became my go-to composition when interacting with other slide-guitarists about the *Rabindra sangeet* tradition. By no means uncommon, my first meeting with slide-guitarist Somranjan Chakroborty culminated in us singing, and playing this song, and discussing its importance in Indian slide-guitar traditions as

well as to Bengali national identity.

During my fieldwork experiences in 2015 and 2016 I attended the Indian International Guitar Festival in Kolkata where light music competitions on slide-guitar took place. These competitions were geared towards finding new talent in the community and rewarding them with tuition at a local school of music. For the category of *Rabindra sangeet*, a number of songs were chosen for contestants to perform in front of a panel of experienced and often very famous judges including the festival organizer, Debashish Bhattacharya. Two of these songs, “*Tumi Rabe Nirabe*” and “*Gram Chhara Oi Rangamatir Por*” are described with notation and lyrics in Appendix A of this dissertation. These songs were chosen according to popularity and assigned to either junior or senior age groups according to difficulty. While only briefly described in this dissertation, the Indian International Guitar Festival was a pivotal event for Indian slide-guitarists, and I intend to further explore the performances and social dynamics of the event in a forthcoming article. Most relevant to this chapter is how the public presentation and dedication of the festival was geared towards reinforcing the international and migratory qualities of the slide-guitar while offering tribute to the poet genres that opened the door for slide-guitar in India.

While Tagore is revered across Bengali cultures in India and Bangladesh, he is rivaled by another thoughtful luminary, Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976). Known as the rebel poet because of his fiery and impassioned verses, Nazrul dedicated himself to fighting oppression and injustice. Considered Bangladesh’s national poet, Nazrul set his verses to many different forms of music, including *ghazals*, *shyama sangeet* and revolutionary mass music. His corpus of songs comprises the genre of *Nazrul geeti*, also referred to as *Nazrul sangeet*. Many have been featured in Bengali films, notably the revolutionary song “*Karar Oi Louho Kopat*” in the 1970 prison drama *Jibon Theke Neya*. This was an allegory for the autocratic government control of the Eastern Pakistani regime and Bengali language movement, which led to Bangladeshi

independence. Another popular revolutionary song, *Bidrohi*, translated as “Rebel,” has been interpreted in several popular music genres, from Bangla hip hop to rock (see Appendix A).

Much like Tagore’s “*Ekla Cholo Re*,” these lyrics of “*Bidrohi*” strike a chord, promoting strength and resilience in response to the calamities of colonial occupation. Kazi Nazrul Islam was the first to compose *ghazals* in Bengali, a song form traditionally in Arabic, Urdu or Persian.⁴⁶ Many of these compositions introduced Sufi Islam to a large Bengali speaking audience. Nazrul also contributed to the Bengali genre, *shyam sangeet*, a Hindu devotional music of the *Shakta* sect, dedicated to mother goddess Durga and her Kali incarnation. The Rebel Poet holds a special place in Bengali culture for bridging religious differences and for inspiring the Bangladeshi independence movement (Huda 1997).⁴⁷ His songs have been recorded by many Bengali singers and by playback singers in Hindi films. Many prominent vocalists in *Nazrul geeti* have been women, including Firoza Begum, who studied with Nazrul in her youth. Begum and other early recording artists of *Nazrul geeti* have established canonized performance practices that have added stylistic nuances to the original compositions.

Within this dissemination of Nazrul’s compositions, the slide-guitar has also contributed its own voice. The melodic flourishes and adornments given to these songs have been exchanged in mutual mimicry between singers and slide-guitarists. Probir Kumar De remarked on the feedback loop between singers and slide-guitarists across genres of Bengali light music.⁴⁸ He noted how small mistakes and stylistic flourishes have been canonized because of famous recordings. Today, those recordings are some of the primary sources to sparsely notated musical compositions. As the genres slowly develop, the core melodic stepping stones are preserved, yet

⁴⁶ <http://www.thedailystar.net/news/nazrul-the-ever-shining-beacon> - website article also details the effects of Nazrul’s famous compositions.

⁴⁷ Bangladesh’s war of independence in 1971 had a profound effect on Bengali culture, precipitating a massive influx of refugees into India, especially Kolkata. This was a period where poet genres experienced a resurgence as a shared cultural legacy that bound Bengali’s across national borders. Explored in more detail in Appendix B, Debasis Chakraborty explains the impact of this population shift on musical communities in India.

⁴⁸ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

the interpretation and improvisation of adornments that connect them subtly change.

Kazi Nazrul's son, Kazi Aniruddho (1931-1974), also became a well-known musician and often interpreted his father's music on the slide-guitar. Also an accomplished singer, pianist and standard guitar player, Aniruddho learned slide-guitar from Garney Nyss and rose to prominence in the Kolkata community, recording with EMI, HMV, and collaborating with many well-known slide-guitarists of the 1960s. In a 2015 conversation with Kazi Aniruddho's widow, Kalyani Kazi, she reviewed Aniruddho's career as a singer and steel-string guitarist, who carried on the tradition set forth by his father, surrounding himself with prominent Kolkata instrumentalists including slide-guitarists like Rajat Nandy.⁴⁹ She commented on the differences between playing *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*, noting the emotive expression coming from the subject matter tended to make Nazrul's compositions heavier and more aggressive. In order to express the defiance and revolutionary qualities of Nazrul's music, slide-guitarists were encouraged to attack the strings more vigorously and take more improvisational risks with the slide compared to the more delicate music of Tagore. Kazi Aniruddho followed in his father's footsteps by promoting poetic yet socially relevant music, engaged with the everyday struggles of the average Bengali, while also incorporating naturalistic themes and metaphors.

As early as the 1960s, Indian slide-guitarists began recording entire albums of *Rabindra sangeet*, *Nazrul geeti*, and film songs as this playing style became more in demand. According to my Kolkata interviewees, community performances of light, religious and popular music were almost always headlined by a slide-guitarist interpreting Tagore's music, the best known slide-guitarists being Batuk Nandy and Sunil Ganguly.

Batuk Nandy (1929-2001) became known primarily as a performer of electric slide-guitar in the Hawaiian style. He released over a dozen records, most of which were instrumental

⁴⁹ Kalyani Kazi, personal conversation, January 2015.

renditions of Tagore songs. He also rendered instrumental versions of popular Hindi films songs, thus appealing across linguistic barriers. Bollywood soundtracks, then and now, dominate the popular music sphere in India. By playing the melodic lines of such well-known songs on the slide-guitar, Nandy connected with a broad range of Indian audiences.⁵⁰ His son, Nilanjan Nandy, released a eulogy of his father's life in 2001.⁵¹ Amongst noting the elder Nandy's accolades, the eulogy describes his unique playing style and dedication to elevating the quality of *Rabindra sangeet* renditions on the slide-guitar. In the 1960's Nandy formed a performance group called SABS, an acronym for the four performers including Sujit Nath, Kazi Aniruddho, Shibnath Nandy and himself. This group became one of the most popular slide-guitar ensembles in Kolkata, collaborating with many local artists like Manohari Singh, who went on to compose music for Bollywood film scores. Nandy created his own custom electric slide-guitar, featured on many of his albums from the 1970s onward, constructed using American pickups and Malaysian pine wood. As the archivist for all of Batuk Nandy's recordings, Nilanjan Nandy continues his father's legacy and still performs *Rabindra sangeet*, preserving his family's connection to Bengali poet genres.

As another of the most recognized names in slide-guitar, Sunil Ganguly (1940-1999) has also taught many of the contemporary performers of Bengali poet genres and classical music. For much of his career, he recorded Hindi film songs, for which he would be best known throughout India. Amateur slide-guitar historian, Probir Kumar De recounted a story about the challenges of playing slide-guitar, and the need to see the top of the instrument to approximate the bar's placement over the raised frets.⁵² Without the visual cue, many guitarists find it difficult to play

⁵⁰ <https://excavatedshellac.com/2009/09/30/van-shipley-guitar-filmi-tune-you-have-to-love-me/> – posted in this thread is discussion of Batuk Nandy's contributions to Hawaiian style playing in India.

⁵¹ <http://bb.steelguitarforum.com/viewtopic.php?t=193460In> – posted in this thread is Nilanjan Nandy's eulogy to his father, great *Rabindra Sangeet* slide-guitarist, Batuk Nandy.

⁵² Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

in tune, sometimes shutting down lessons and even performances when poor lighting made this impossible. But Ganguly apparently had tremendous aural skills and could play without looking at the strings. Once when De was taking a lesson, the power shut down, but Ganguly continued playing perfectly without skipping a beat. Ganguly claimed he was accustomed to performing in the dark because he grew up in a poor section of Kolkata where light was unreliable. When young, he mastered the slide-guitar in the dark, developing a unique skill set, which is practically non-existent today. Having observed slide-guitar construction in Kolkata, I learned how important visual markers were to the structure of the instrument. Many customers solicited the instrument maker to adjust or modify the visual cues on the guitar's neck to make it easier to play in tune.

Sunil Ganguly's success throughout India, especially on the radio when many Indians outside of Bengal first heard the slide-guitar, is one of the primary reasons interest in the slide-guitar increased in mid-twentieth century India. Ganguly remains one of the most recognized names in Indian slide-guitar since the 1970s, and many of his records could be found in both Delhi's Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology (A.R.C.E.) archives and from North Kolkata street vendors. At the A.R.C.E. archives, I collected a wide array of slide-guitar recordings, most prolific of which was Hindi film songs by Sunil Ganguly and Dipankar Sengupta. Hindi film songs, now a dominant music genre in India, were a starting point for slide-guitarists to expand beyond Bengali audiences. Especially in the 1970s, Hindi film songs, while kept off All India Radio due to copyright restrictions, nevertheless represented India's drive to modernize and find its own identity in the cinema world.

Founded in 1930, All India Radio (A.I.R.) also contributed significantly to the development of Indian slide-guitar cultures. A.I.R. featured two channels in Kolkata: A.I.R.(A) The Indian Music Section, and A.I.R.(B) the Western Music Section. Initially, players like Tao

Moe and Garney Nyss broadcast their music on A.I.R.(B), sparking considerable interest in traditional Hawaiian tunes in and around Kolkata. Hawaiian slide-guitars were slowly introduced into the A.I.R.(A) lineup, initially as background melodies for children's songs. Children's radio shows like *Shishu Mahal* and *Golpo Dadur Ashar* regularly began broadcasting Hawaiian guitar in the 1950's. As slide-guitarists began interpreting Indian music, A.I.R.(A) began to program popular Bengali songs, *bhajans*, *thumris* and other forms of light music or *loghu sangeet*. The slide-guitar soon became popular for interpreting Hindi songs, escaping the confines of Bengali culture.⁵³

Increases in popularity led to competitiveness and an industry dedicated to not only making Hawaiian style slide-guitar in India, but also to modifying them with new technology. Much like the Hawaiian slide-guitar's enormous popularity in the United States from the 1920s to the 1940s, the Hawaiian slide-guitar took India by storm. Technological advancement soon set in, including pickups and amplification, making it so that the slide-guitar was the first modified electric instrument in India. Electric slide-guitars became increasingly common and Indian acoustic aesthetics were incorporated into the structure and technique of the instrument. The electric slide-guitar was initially used live for theatre productions, and then for film interludes, and even as solo instrument for silent films. As popularity increased in the 1960s, many non-Bengali performers began taking up new models of electric slide-guitar.

One well-known performer of this new generation of electric slide-guitarists, Van Shipley (1927-2008), played an 8-string slide-guitar he invented.⁵⁴ Popular during the 1970s and 1980s, he made his debut as *The Man with the Golden Guitar* (1962), performing a slide-guitar rendition

⁵³ Information provided by Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

⁵⁴ <http://anuradhawarrier.blogspot.com/2013/03/the-masters-van-shipley.html> - biography of Shipley
<http://vanshipley.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html> - Van Shipley's website.

of the composition “*Jane Kahan Gaye*” live at the BBC.⁵⁵ Made famous in Raj Kapoor’s 1970 *Mera Nam Joker*, the song provided the theme for the protagonist’s melancholy circus life. Another successful Bollywood guitarist was Samir Khasnabis, who regularly appeared playing the electric slide-guitar for All India Radio’s (B) western section. These two performers greatly influenced young players across India, showcasing the slide-guitar as well as the standard Spanish guitar. By the 1970s the standard guitar was also gaining popularity, especially with Indian poets and singer-songwriters, contributing to the decline of Hawaiian style slide-guitar in India.

The Hawaiian slide-guitar and subsequent electric variations dominated mid-century genres of Indian popular, nationalist and film music. Many slide-guitar instruments filtered into India through the global economy, but many were also constructed in India by a growing domestic industry. Early instrument companies in India like Givson and Signature produced slide-guitars along with standard steel guitar models, flooding urban areas with cheap instruments.⁵⁶ Kolkata is the epicenter of the Hawaiian guitar’s vernacularization into Indian music genres, making the deepest inroads into Bengali light music and Bollywood film music. The popularity of the instrument comes from its malleability in the hands of a player, who, by using a slide technique, is able to reproduce distinct styles of music across cultures. The slide allowed Bengali players to play specifically Bengali music while using a medium that represented modern technology, cosmopolitanism and Hawaiian exoticism, while at the same time being able to articulate deeply traditional styles of music. In the latter half of the twentieth century generation changes and access to new technologies took hold, creating decline for the Hawaiian style in Indian light music genres.

⁵⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRUEFQJdQPE>.

⁵⁶ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016. Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal conversations, 2015-2016.

Decline of the Hawaiian Style in India

In Kolkata my research sought out the reasons why Hawaiian-style slide-guitar playing waned in the younger generation's consciousness. The answer: young listeners had little familiarity with the Bengali poetic genres that had provided so much semantic meaning for the music. When the words and melodic nuances of the music of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam were no longer ubiquitous in Bengal's auditory culture, interest in the instruments that evoked these musical and lyrical ideas also declined. Many of the political and social contexts that inspired Tagore's and Nazrul's music, and connected it with an Indian audience, disappeared amidst the cultural changes of the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁷

Revolution against the colonial power was no longer an issue for university-aged students and nationalist dimensions of the music were increasingly irrelevant. With the Emergency, or the Indian constitution's suspension in the 1980s, young Indians increasingly distrusted the corruption and scandal-plagued central government, motivating a self-referential rather than an anti-colonial nationalism. As the political climate shifted, so did the musical aesthetics of young India, often toward adopting new technologies and increasingly accessible Western styles.

Technology promoted the slide-guitar's decline. Due to electronic, MIDI-controlled keyboards and sampling technology, the slide-guitar gradually lost its integral place in community performances.⁵⁸ A single keyboard player could perform for less cost than an ensemble of two or three musicians, so specialization on the slide-guitar was overshadowed by cheap competition. The Spanish guitar was also becoming popular as a rhythm instrument for singers, and other standard electric guitars and basses were thriving as a result of India's increasing exposure to Western popular music. On college campuses, U.S. rock and pop was

⁵⁷ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016. Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversations, 2015-2016.

⁵⁸ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016. Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversations, 2015-2016.

easily adaptable to the portable standard guitar, and English language training reached an all-time high as part of India's economic opening to the rest of the world in the early 1990s.⁵⁹

My slide-guitar teacher, Rhitom Sarkar reflected on the tensions between playing Western and Indian music, claiming he's found Indian students more interested in studying the standard Spanish guitar. It is the most popular instrument in Kolkata, especially on university campuses where modern Bengali folk singers, film music, and American music are extremely popular.⁶⁰ One Bengali folk singer, Kavi Suman Chattopadhyay, has revived interest in using the Western guitar as an accompaniment to poet genres like *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*. His music, the *jivanmukhti* genre (or reality song), is topically reminiscent of American folk singers like Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan.

Rock, jazz and metal also have an increasing presence in Kolkata and many of Sarkar's students find these genres more exciting than those adapted to slide-guitar. In describing the standard guitar's popularity, Sarkar emphasized the visual aspects of the instrument, and the relative ease with which new students can master enough chords to complete a song. "Young players want to impress the ladies and strike a pose with their guitars," says Sarkar. "The guitar is almost a prop when these youngsters sing modern songs, but the slide-guitar is hard to see and difficult to play, so it is unpopular."⁶¹

The rapidly decreasing amount of time younger generations dedicate to performance training has also challenged traditional Indian art forms. As Probir Kumar De suggested, the waning of original Hawaiian guitars in India comes from a lack of motivation, dedication and attention span. De quipped,

People now want to enjoy 20-20 cricket and not a test match. They have no time to learn an instrument by devoting a lot of time. Many things can be managed by a keyboard.

⁵⁹ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016. Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversations, 2015-2016.

⁶⁰ Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversations, 2015-2016.

⁶¹ Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversations, 2015-2016.

Now the Hawaiian guitar players are not so interested in learning the specific genres of Indian music. They learn to play a single Nazrul geeti or Rabindra sangeet or a modern (*adhunik*) song, but they don't properly train to be experts in any genre on guitar.⁶²

As performed in India, the Hawaiian guitar developed a style requiring the ability to copy, as accurately as possible, the original themes and lyrical nuances, which required not only high skill levels, but also familiarity with the vocal genres they mimicked. De also reminded me that the difficulty of playing this music was compounded by the risk of playing a wrong note or incorrectly articulating a vocal flourish on the slide-guitar.⁶³ A famous slide-guitar player on A.I.R. of both the poet genres and classical music once confessed to De that he was more comfortable playing the latter, with all its note repetitions and prescribed structures.⁶⁴ Even though Hindustani classical music required extensive improvisations sometimes many hours long, it was less intimidating than playing a three-minute Tagore song because of the scrutiny each note would garner.

The consequences of imperfectly rendering *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti* go far beyond criticism. For much of the twentieth century, these two genres were so highly guarded that a panel of experts became the arbiters of any and all recordings produced in India.⁶⁵ Headquartered at Vishwa Bharati University, this panel had the final say for all renditions, both vocal and instrumental. Without approval, artists who recorded *Rabindra sangeet* or *Nazrul geeti* could be sued by the Tagore estate. This could severely damage any artist, and thus it intimidated players and students, and limited the music's performance and recording. While such strict regulations contributed to the decline of Hawaiian slide-guitar renditions of the Bengali poet

⁶² Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

⁶³ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

⁶⁴ Probir Kumar De, personal conversation, January 2016.

⁶⁵ Probir Kumar De and Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversation, January 2016.

genres, the opposite occurred once the copyright expired in 2001.⁶⁶ According to many performers, the legal case that ensued between the Tagore estate and a young recording artist reignited national consciousness about the Tagore repertoire. When infringement charges were dropped, many younger musicians were freed to interpret Tagore's music however they wished. Tagore's music began appearing in modern genres like rock, pop and electronica, and the Hawaiian slide-guitar enjoyed some renewed interest. Despite this more recent upsurge in Hawaiian slide-guitar popularity during the early 2000s, the slide-guitar's incorporation into North India's Hindustani classical tradition was far more revolutionary.

The guitar's history and evolution in India is a story both migration from abroad and reclamation of an ancient art form. The narratives that illuminate both the guitar's and slide technique's origins are compelling, not for historical accuracy, but for the passionate contentions that they inspire. Few defenders of traditional music happily admit appropriation from other foreign sources, so a common strategy is to symbolically connect ideas to an idealized past. Ethnic and cultural nationalism are powerful forces that have exerted themselves on slide and guitar origins, claiming ownership and establishing lineages that privilege nativism. This chapter has attempted to show this relationship by contrasting origin stories, creating a context for the analysis of the slide-guitar in India that is instructive for understanding the political motivations for integrating or rejecting new instruments.

The sound of the slide on the guitar allowed for the instrument to be adapted and adopted into Bengali music and eventually film music that was broadcast throughout India. The vernacularization of the Hawaiian style can be observed in how slide-guitars became central to

⁶⁶ Probir Kumar De and Rhitom Sarkar, personal conversation, January 2016.

the performance of *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*, turning a foreign object into a household name. Despite the fact that all the famous players discussed here are men, women played a great role in perpetuating the slide-guitar tradition at home. All evidence shows that few, if any women had performance careers as slide-guitarists until the late twentieth century, yet personal communication with today's players indicates that women were greatly responsible for teaching light music on slide-guitar to the next generation, effectively weathering the decline of the style in the 1970s until classical players recreated the instrument for their genre.

As the slide technique reached its height of popularity right after Indian independence, it is easy to understand how this instrument came to represent not a foreign modernity, but a new Indian modernity that mixed influences from tradition and the West. The progression of India's political history, new technologies, and generation shifts in taste and musical affinity brought a decline to the popularity of slide-guitar in India, yet it also created the conditions for a new instrument to be born, the Hindustani slide-guitar. Discussed in the next chapter, the Hindustani slide-guitar emerges conceptually and structurally out of the lineages addressed here. A continuing thread through this and the next chapter is the unpopular notion of polygenesis. As the next chapter focuses on inventors, the ideas they have created inevitably deny the possibility of multiple origins, preferring unadulterated narratives that bring focus, renown and power to the individual just as nationalist narratives of origin stories empower the cultures that claim them.

Chapter 5: The Hindustani Classical Guitar

Adapted by brilliant performers to operate seamlessly within the boundaries of Hindustani classical music, the Hawaiian slide-guitar underwent a structural and conceptual evolution in the 1970s to become the Hindustani slide-guitar. Small modifications led to new creative designs, experimentation with string configuration, and playing techniques, producing a competitive atmosphere where new players looked to define themselves through custom slide-guitars and new names divorcing the instruments from their Western lineage. This chapter will first introduce the most senior generation of players and their efforts in fostering a community of slide-guitar playing in India. Their contributions to the vernacularization of the slide-guitar into Hindustani classical music has opened the door for the next generation, who faces challenges of their own, not least of which is choosing which instrument and style to emulate, or conversely, to create their own instrument and technique.

As these custom instruments have become popular within India and amongst classical and fusion enthusiasts globally, new issues arise including who owns the intellectual property rights of new designs, creating contentions that have had a profound effect on the slide-guitar community in India. In order to better understand how the Hindustani slide-guitar, its practitioners and the classical genre are developing in India, one needs to understand the often tumultuous process of creation from its inception in mind's eye, onto pencil and paper, through the hands of the maker, and into the hands of the player. My ethnographic fieldwork put me in contact with many of the leading players of Hindustani slide-guitar in India, as well as instrument makers, who I argue to be at the center of the community because of the crucial function they provide, namely bringing custom designs to life with top quality craftsmanship. My experiences working with luthier Bhaba Sindhu Biswas offered a unique perspective on the

organological development of the Hindustani slide-guitar. Through Biswas, I was able to connect with dozens of performers, understand the construction process of new instruments and get a feel for the social life of slide-guitarists as they interact with those who provide them the tools of their trade. Biswas and the performers who have collaborated with him to invent new slide-guitars comprise a rapidly-changing Indian cultural modernity, a field of competitors who make claims to innovation, invention, inspiration and technology, while also expressing traditional values, promoting piety, humility, nationalism, sophistication, and artistic achievement.

The Hindustani slide-guitar's evolution in India can best be observed in parallel with India's political history, as the instrument symbolizes changes in the social and political landscape, cosmopolitan formations in urban centers, and—as a byproduct of generational changes in musical consumption, an increasingly connected and globalized economy. This time-frame encompasses the different social, political and economic climates in which the guitar, compared to other western instruments, experienced vernacularization. When the violin and harmonium emerged in South Asia, what would become the nation of India was still under colonial control and modern Indian culture was in the process of constructing its own sense of national identity. In contrast, by the time the slide-guitar entered Hindustani classical music, India had become sovereign, seen the rise of Hindu nationalist politics, and experienced economic liberalization. Bringing to bear my theoretical terminology, historical research, and ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that the Hindustani slide-guitar's vernacularization into Indian classical music has been a result of the efforts of pivotal innovators who reinvented the slide-guitar at a historical juncture in the late twentieth century when the local and global markets were receptive to a new type of guitar-hero.

Pioneer Maestros: Invention and Guitar Heroes

Originally from Jodhpur, Rajasthan, the first individual credited as an inventor for adapting a slide-guitar to Hindustani classical music performance is Brij Bhushan Kabra (born in 1937). Inspired by the Hawaiian slide-guitar, which he first encountered in Kolkata, Kabra began playing slide techniques on a hollow-body arch-top steel string guitar with the addition of two high pitched strings tuned to the tonic, to serve as a *chikari*.⁶⁷ Without *chikari* strings, the Hawaiian-style slide-guitar had trouble producing the right sounds for the final section of a traditional *raga* performance, called *jhala*, distinguished by fast alternation between melodies on the main string and the *chikari*. With this new string configuration, however, Kabra broke the first structural barrier preventing the slide-guitar from entering the classical tradition. Kabra studied under Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and quickly distinguished himself with his landmark 1967 recording, *Call of the Valley*.

Apparently Kabra faced resistance from conservatives, including in his family, yet it wasn't aesthetic criticism but rather the instrument's connection to a foreign culture, and to popular folk traditions from Bengal. A musician connected a lineage of court musicians, it was believed, should not be performing on folk instruments.⁶⁸ Such criticism must have fallen flat because in Kabra's hands, his slide-guitar could produce all the important elements of Hindustani classical instrumental music, evident through his mastering of the *Maihar* repertoire (a school of North Indian classical music founded by Allaudin Khan in the early twentieth century) on the instrument.

For audiences of Hindustani classical music, Kabra's slide-guitar had an uncanny ability to mimic vocal articulations and flourishes. The left-hand technique producing these sounds was

⁶⁷ <http://www.brijbhushankabra.com>.

⁶⁸ <http://www.mid-day.com/entertainment/2002/oct/34757.htm>.

honed to perfection in the genres of *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*, but it developed even further with the instrument's entrance into Hindustani classical music. The slide implement could also cover three full octaves in one stroke, far out-doing other common classical instruments, including the *sitar* and *veena*. The slide-guitar's long sustain and ability to smoothly glide between notes in a style even more reminiscent of vocal aesthetics⁶⁹ made it a formidable instrument in a genre where vocal emulation holds great value in the instrumental style.

Since the 1960s Kabra has played a modified Hawaiian slide-guitar, promoting the instrument as an "Indian classical slide-guitar." By the 1990s the trend of naming instruments began to emerge. A senior student of Kabra, Debasis Chakraborty asked his guru "why don't you name your instrument after yourself? So many of the younger players are doing it these days." Chakraborty suggested the *brij veena*, *bhushan veena*, *kabra veena* and few others before Kabra stopped him to remark, "why confuse the situation? After all, it is just a modified slide-guitar."⁷⁰ This anecdote has become rather poignant given the difficulties the younger generation has had navigating the dozens of names and lineages of newer models and playing techniques within the burgeoning Indian classical slide-guitars tradition.

Kabra's original slide-guitar still lacked sympathetic strings, however, so it did not have the characteristic shimmering quality of the other string-endowed instruments. Also, the instrument, while able to reach some of the highest notes, was rather empty on the bass end and susceptible to a tinny or thin timbre. In its early stages, the Hindustani slide-guitar's structure and technique still had plenty of space to develop. Considered India's original classical slide-guitar maestro, Brij Bhushan Kabra greatly influenced younger practitioners and was treated as the special guest of honor at the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival in Kolkata.

Another early luminary is Barun Kumar Pal (born in 1948), who began performing

⁶⁹ <http://www.vishwamohanbhatt.com/profile.htm> - Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's website.

⁷⁰ Debasis Chakraborty, personal conversation, 2015.

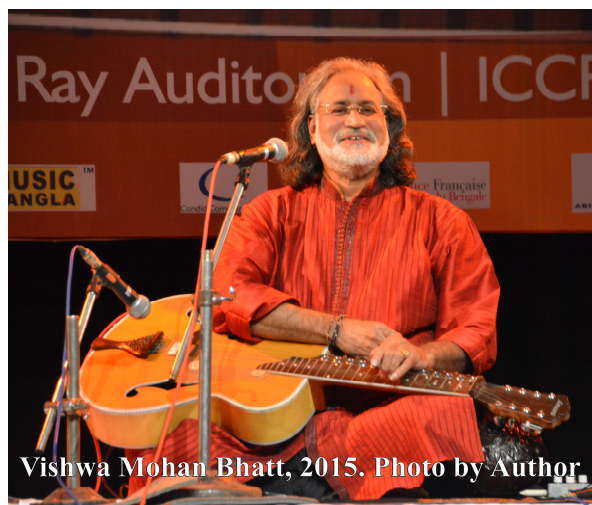
Hindustani classical music on the Hawaiian guitar at an early age. Born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Pal was surrounded by music, as his father Bankim Kumar Pal, was a leading *sitar* player under the tutelage of legendary *sitarist* and pedagogue Enayat Khan. According to his website, Barun Kumar Pal was doing radio performances of classical music on the slide-guitar as early as 1952.⁷¹ A musical prodigy, Pal soon became one of the lead disciples of *sitarist* Ravi Shankar. Applying similar slide-guitar techniques and structural innovations as Kabra, Pal experimented with the addition of *chikari* strings as well as sympathetic strings to provide the full tonal depth required in Hindustani classical music. Additional sympathetic strings provide a wash of sound as any note played on the main string vibrates an additional course of strings tuned to particular *raga* that is being performed.

Soon Pal would begin searching for the right luthier to collaborate with and develop an instrument that melded the playability of Hawaiian guitar and the traditional structural aesthetics of Hindustani instruments. The result was the *hansa veena*, first created by the luthiers at Delhi's famous RikhiRam instrument shop. Supposedly, this instrument was invented by Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, who asked a luthier to construct a *tanpura*, the four-stringed drone instrument typical of Hindustani classical music, with markings on it to measure the melodic distances to be used with a slide.⁷² Bhatt, who studied alongside Pal under Ravi Shankar, described how his guru, when struck by Pal's fascination with this new invention, ordered the luthier to gift the new instrument to him. As the *hansa veena* was created in this exchange, something far more important was kindled amongst slide-guitarists in this community, the drive to innovate and lay claim to these new organological inventions. This flair for invention marks the history of the Hindustani slide-guitar, where craftsmanship, lineage and aesthetics mix the traditional and modern, correlated with Indian culture's own restructuring of cultural and national identity.

⁷¹ <http://darbari.tripod.com/> - Barun Kumar Pal's website.

⁷² Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal communication, 2014.

A contemporary of Barun Kumar Pal, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt (born in 1952) of Jaipur, Rajasthan, would ascend to the greatest heights achievable by an Indian classical musician. Recipient of all the top awards for Indian classical performance, Bhatt began playing on a guitar with a slide at a young age. He first encountered the guitar because one of his



father's German students gave the family an acoustic guitar as payment for music lessons.⁷³ Rather than continue his *sitar* practice in the family tradition, Bhatt began experimenting with the guitar, altering the construction and using all manner of objects to manipulate the sound, including stones, bottles, batteries, and eventually, the finger-length metal slide that has become the standard. Soon Bhatt became dissatisfied with the instrument's construction and decided to commission a luthier by the name of Mahavir to help him create a new slide-guitar with physical modifications, marking it as uniquely Indian.⁷⁴

According to Kanchan Mathur (2006), Bhatt did daily *pujas* (Hindu rituals) during the instrument's construction, since spiritual importance was mapped onto this new invention, now called the *mohan veena*. Sympathetic strings were added underneath the main strings, which were reduced to four, and then a course of *chikari* strings were added, closer to the body, to imitate the sitar's construction. This design has become the most popular slide-guitar model in the marketplace today and cheap imitations are sold by many Indian guitar manufacturers, including the Givson guitar company in Kolkata. Having created and named two new slide instruments, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt has distinguished himself not only for his brilliant

⁷³ Chandra Mohan Bhatt, personal communication, 2012.

⁷⁴ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal communication, 2014.

performances and nuanced renditions of classical *ragas* on the *mohan veena*, but also as an inventor of instruments that represent a new Indian modernity that retains a deep connection to traditional musical forms.

A devout and humble Hindu, Bhatt has developed a positive reputation nationally as a pillar of not only the slide-guitar community, but the Hindustani classical community in general. Having performed nationally on slide-guitar since the late 1970s, he has crafted an image of calmness, wisdom and spiritual strength. Bhatt's spirituality even bordered on the eccentric, such as rumors that he considers his instrument to be a holy, sacred idol the incarnation of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge and music. At concerts, Bhatt has been known to voice objection if the audience was above the performance space since it would be a mark of disrespect to the deity embodied in the instrument.

As an act of devotion to the deity, *bhakti* and *sufi* musicians have often considered performance as an act of love, not necessarily sexual, but rather a spiritual union with the divine creator. As Bhatt plays the idol of Saraswati on his lap, with a bullet slide that resembles little else than a phallic *lingam*, associated with the deity Shiva, it is difficult not to imagine such performances as spiritual intercourse. While perhaps controversial, such union represents the highest level of devotional performance, and certainly adds a level of intimacy and spirituality to the aura of this music. Such expressions of bliss, piety and spiritual devotion also resonates considerably within the contemporary Indian classical community, where a secular design takes on Hindu ritual behavior, promoting the connection between sound and creation described in the Rig Veda (10.71) as *vac* or the holy utterance, and sometimes as *nadha brahma*, or the "sound of God."

The cultural capital of Bhatt's spiritual performances in Hindustani classical music are complemented by his international acclaim as an innovator, where he has been dubbed a modern

maestro,⁷⁵ and recognized by global music markets through a Grammy Award in 1994, a rare honor for an Indian classical musician. Since then, Bhatt's fame has skyrocketed in both international and national markets. He's also been featured in several Hindi film scores, and recently, in a remake of the Hindu nationalist song, "*Vande Mataram*" (discussed in chapter three). His Grammy award signaled to many Indians the international recognition of their traditions. Bhatt's website lists many of his accolades, including a *Times of India* article that proclaims "Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt is the most popular Indian artist abroad." Other newspaper articles, websites and commentaries have called him the "cultural ambassador to India," the "god messenger of Indian classical music," and "world music hero."⁷⁶

After spending three summers studying sitar with his nephew Chandra Mohan Bhatt and befriending his grand-nephew, Ankit Bhatt, I was able to interview Vishwa Mohan Bhatt at his Jaipur home. Bhatt explained that his first experimentation with Indian music on the guitar was inspired not by the Hawaiian style guitar but rather by Mughal paintings depicting court musicians performing a very rare instrument, called the *vichitra veena*.⁷⁷ This direct connection to a regal past, and Bhatt's own family legacy as court musicians of Jaipur, created an alternative narrative to the slide-guitar in India. Rather than a foreign import from Hawaii, Bhatt's narrative affirms an Indic genesis and inspiration for the slide-techniques.

Vishwa Mohan Bhatt described the tensions that he has experienced between tradition and modernity expressed in his performances, and also the challenges he's faced from conservative critics of his slide-guitar renditions of classical music. Essential to each performance, Bhatt has to replicate the timbral aesthetics of other classical instruments. While he was a good player, he knew from the beginning that his instrument needed fine tuning and tonal

⁷⁵ Harsh Kabra, "Musical Modernity's Pandit." *The Times of India*. October 27, 1999. (The Times of India Group, 1999); Renu Ramnath, "Reinventing Tradition." *The Hindu*. Oct. 18, 2005: Kasturi & Sons Ltd., 2005).

⁷⁶ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, <http://www.vishwamohanbhatt.com/press.htm>.

⁷⁷ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2014.

stability to accomplish this. This sparked his India-wide quest to find an exceptional guitar luthier with classical music sensibilities. He was referred to an instrument maker in Kolkata, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, who's been an important associate for Bhatt since their first meeting in the late 1970s.⁷⁸

As Bhatt worked to modernize his instrument's form and function, new options were developed that walked a fine line between traditionalism and modern technology. Biswas installed an electronic pick-up array onto Bhatt's instrument so that precise control and volume balance became a possibility. His eyes lighting up with enthusiasm, Bhatt eagerly described how this increased quality of sound and control over balance between the main and sympathetic strings revolutionized slide-guitar performance.⁷⁹ Yet initially he had to hide it from view: Bhatt recalled that he had the electronics and chords wrap around the back of the instrument as well as himself, since electrified instruments were severely frowned upon in the traditional classical music world. Despite being new, the instrument's visual details, tone, and technique still conjured traditional musical aesthetics. Bhatt was able to hide his advancements, while still benefitting from modern technology: most important, he declared, was the sound. The medium, his guitar, was just a conduit for this traditional musical form, and he found he could break the rules here and there as long as the sound was correct.⁸⁰

Bhatt's forward thinking also surfaced in our discussions about the tensions between foreign and local culture. Hindustani classical music has been declining in India for the past few generations, and Bhatt sees the guitar as the best hope for keeping the genre vibrant, without compromising traditional values and aesthetics.⁸¹ Essential to this has been the process of spreading classical music instruments both around the world and into other genres. Bhatt credited

⁷⁸ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2014. Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2015.

⁷⁹ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2014.

⁸⁰ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2014.

⁸¹ Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2014.

his guru, Ravi Shankar, for opening Western ears to Indian music in the 1960s. While Shankar was dismayed knowing that many Americans were intoxicated during his performances, they nevertheless helped expand the reach of Indian music. In discussing the hedonism, debauchery and exoticism that marked Indian classical music's initial reception in the U.S., Bhatt didn't express the protectiveness that many other Hindustani classical musicians exhibit. To Bhatt these were just growing pains before audiences learned to appreciate the music.⁸² Bhatt's liberal perspective also extends to fusion music, which he has embraced without qualms since it opens up audiences to the classical system. Bhatt's positivity stands in stark contrast to the pessimism many of his contemporaries display over Indian classical music's future and his ingenuity with his instrument has inspired many other slide-guitarists to follow in his footsteps.

One of those followers, his son, Salil Bhatt (born in 1971), has become not only a slide-guitar player, but also as an innovator, with a guitar design of his own, the *satvik veena*. The younger Bhatt has been building an international reputation, participating in both fusion and classical contexts and adding extra flair to his father's style.⁸³ With his faster, hard playing and dazzling *sherwani* robes and gold chains, Salil distinguishes himself from his father. While briefly involved in acting and car racing, Salil has continued his family legacy, performing frequently in duet, or *jugalbandi*, with his young cousin, *sitarist* Ankit Bhatt (born in 1982), as well as with many international performers. Salil Bhatt was recently in the spotlight over a disagreement with his father regarding the fate of the first *mohan veena*.⁸⁴ The elder Bhatt had donated the instrument to a performing arts institution in Nagaland, greatly upsetting his son, who disapproved of it not residing in the Bhatt household. After much contestation, Salil convinced his father and the organization to return the instrument, demonstrating the symbolic

⁸² Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2014.

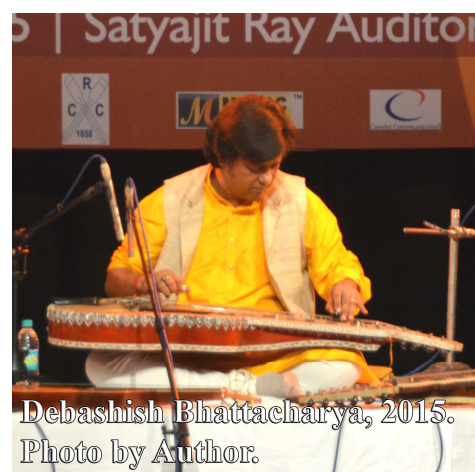
⁸³ Chandra Mohan Bhatt, personal conversation, 2013.

⁸⁴ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/music/news/Pt-Vishwa-Mohan-Bhatt-Mohan-Veena-our-familys-legacy-is-not-with-us-now/articleshow/51092329.cms>.

value of the original *mohan veena*.

Vishwa Mohan Bhatt has taught disciples from around the world, and many have carried forward his original *mohan veena* design as their own. Others have continued to modify the instrument,⁸⁵ their stories are included in Appendix B. Bhatt's influence over the world of slide-guitarists has been tremendous, especially for understanding how an object can shed foreign associations and undergo an evolution in body and voice that has crossed boundaries of local and global, traditional and modern, and folk and classical, complicating these representations and challenging these dichotomies.

In Eastern India, Bengali practitioners have also developed the slide-guitar into new forms and created new techniques to rival the Rajasthani tradition. Early practitioners in Bengal faced resistance in the classical music world, but persevered because of the guitar's international appeal and because of the groundbreaking work of Brij Bhushan Kabra, who inspired many Bengali slide-guitarists to switch to classical music. Today, the most renowned player in Kolkata is the Grammy-nominated maestro Debashish Bhattacharya (born in 1963), who developed his own slide-guitar models, incorporating new organological forms and using names derived from his Bengali background.⁸⁶ Bhattacharya grew up in a musical family and began playing Bengali light music on the guitar, along with Hawaiian tunes. Growing up, Bhattacharya began experimenting with new forms, working with the luthier Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, at his



⁸⁵ Andy Ellis, http://www.premiarguitar.com/articles/The_Secret_World_of_Hindustani_Slide Accessed 10/27/13.

⁸⁶ Derek Beres, "Debashish Bhattacharya: Calcutta Chronicles: Indian Slide Guitar Odyssey." *Sing Out!* (Summer: 124, 2008. *Literature Resource Center*).

workshop in the same Ultadanga neighborhood of North Kolkata.⁸⁷ Bhattacharya created three very successful slide-guitar models, perfectly adapted to his own playing style with the *chikari* strings on the far end of the instrument, opposite to Bhatt's *mohan veena* design. This allowed much faster playing and finger picking patterns that had not been used previously by slide-guitarists in Indian classical music. Along with this revolutionary string placement, Bhattacharya's first instrument, the *chaturangui*, keeps the full six strings of the Hawaiian guitar, allowing notes in a much lower register to be produced. In order to play smooth notes on such thick-gauge bass strings, Bhattacharya sometimes uses a different slide implement than the standard metal bar, one much larger and egg-shaped like that used on a *vichitra veena*. The *chaturangui* also features a set of sympathetic strings, but offset so they can be played like a harp, or *swarmandal*, commonly used by vocalists. Bhattacharya's next instrument was the *gandharvi*, a double-coursed instrument with five pairs of strings rather than a set of sympathetic strings next to the main strings. Bhattacharya also produced a paired down, small model of slide-guitar called the *anandi*, which offers a less classical tone without sympathetic strings, bridging the classical style and Bengali/Hawaiian style he has balanced throughout his career.⁸⁸ Bhattacharya continues producing new models for his Trideb International company, patenting his creations and displaying a savvy business acumen.

Debashish Bhattacharya's long history as one of the most prominent slide-guitarists includes studies under Brij Bhushan Kabra, and collaborations with the most celebrated musicians from around the world. His success within both fusion and traditional Indian classical genres has been met with wide acclaim.⁸⁹ Bhattacharya also researches the history of slide-

⁸⁷ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

⁸⁸ <http://www.debashishbhattacharya.com/about.php>. Debashish Bhattacharya's website.

⁸⁹ Rick Anderson, "Review: Calcutta Slide – Guitar by Debashish Bhattacharya." *Notes: Second Series*, Vol. 62, No. 2 Dec. 2005, p. 475. (Published By Music Library Association); David Dennen, "Calcutta Slide Guitar by Debashish Bhattacharya. Review." *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 55, No. 3 Fall p.540. (University of Illinois Press 2011); Andy Ellis, "Culture Riffs: Debashish Bhattacharya's Spellbinding Slide." *Guitar Player*. July 1, 2005.

guitar's connection to Hawaii, the fruits of which he's posted at his website.⁹⁰ He made the pilgrimage back to Hawaii to meet with the then 90-year old Tao Moe and his connection has been kept strong by collaborations with Hawaiian musicians including Alan Akaka and Jeff Peterson, who appeared as guest performers at the Indian International Guitar Festival (I.I.G.F.) in 2015. Organized by Bhattacharya and reprised the following year, this was India's first music festival dedicated solely to the slide-guitar traditions, a pivotal event in the local and international recognition of the instrument as vernacularized into Indian music.



Given his vested interest in connecting India's slide-guitar tradition to the Hawaiian slide-guitar style that arrived in Kolkata during the 1930s, Bhattacharya has been a crucial source of information for this project despite my inability to sit with him for a proper interview. Currently, Bhattacharya teaches students at his Bhattacharya School of Universal Music in Tollygunge, South Kolkata, while maintaining a busy performance schedule. He is also perhaps the most

(United Entertainment Media, Inc.); Stan Scott, "Film Review: Hindustani Slide Guitar, Debashish Bhattacharya." *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring – Summer, 1996), pp. 364-367. University of Illinois Press: Society for Ethnomusicology).

⁹⁰ <http://www.debashishbhattacharya.com/about.php>. Debashish Bhattacharya's website.

successful performer internationally, and has become close to many communities throughout Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia. His success stems from his mastery of the light music and classical genres of India in tandem with prolific collaborations and fusion projects, which have served as cultural exchanges, placing side by side the guitar's various global incarnations.

Bhatt and Bhattacharya have become the two pillars of the Indian slide-guitar community, both representing a musical tradition that has broken through national boundaries and divisions of traditional and modern. As direct students of the first Indian classical slide-guitar player, Brij Bhushan Kabra, their rivalry has developed for the past twenty years. Since they have created their own instrument models and wildly different performance techniques, young aspiring slide-guitarists wonder: Which style do I emulate? Which tradition should I pursue? Which community offers the best connections and affiliations? The social life of slide-guitarists have become increasingly complicated, and many of their choices have become political, especially their decision of which slide-guitar to play.

Another important question facing young Hindustani classical slide-guitarists is from whom the instrument should be purchased. The following section focuses on the organology the Hindustani slide-guitar, detailing my ethnographic experiences with the luthier Bhaba Sindhu Biswas. The stories of the luthiers who work to change the structure, function, and tone of an instrument are often ignored in favor of narratives that focus on the brilliance and innovation of performers. Instrument makers have been at the center of the slide-guitar's evolution. Without their expertise, the instrument would never have been so well-integrated into the highly guarded musical aesthetics of the classical tradition in India.

Organology and the Luthier

Organology, or the study of the construction of musical instruments, has often been treated as secondary to the ways influential performers uplift the aesthetic, stylistic and musical qualities of an instrument. Previous academic research on the Hindustani slide-guitar (Clayton 2001; Sontakke 2015) gives no hint to how and by whom their iconic instruments were created. Most performers give no details about the luthier or company that creates their instruments, only specifications and narratives about divine inspiration.⁹¹ The skilled luthier who actually made, and often also designed the instrument, gets lost, as if slide-guitars are constructed by unnamed menial workers. Only recently have some top players begun discussing their instrument's maker with audiences. Most players now admit their dependence on their slide-guitar makers to keep their customized instrument in top performance condition, and they lament the lack of public recognition for the workers who make their careers possible. No comprehensive or accurate account exists about the life and work of the luthiers who have given structure to the Hindustani slide-guitar.

In response, my fieldwork has been focused on the world of musical instrument makers so as to better understand the way luthiers work with musicians to create new, customized instruments. I spent months discussing with luthiers the organological details of Hindustani slide-guitars, including measurements, wood qualities, design innovations, and essential materials. My fieldwork took me from Jaipur to Delhi, and then to North Kolkata, where I forged a relationship with the instrument maker who stands at the center of the slide-guitar's successful integrations and vernacularization into Hindustani classical music, Conchord luthier Bhaba Sindhu Biswas.

⁹¹ <http://www.vishwamohanbhatt.com/veena.htm>; <http://www.debashishbhattacharya.com/trinity-of-guitars.php>.

I believe that the instrument maker gives form and function to an object, which makes it possible for the objects to accrue value, or symbolic cultural capital. For example, the Hawaiian slide-guitar design as it existed in mid-twentieth century India was ill-suited tonally for Hindustani classical music. With structural changes made by the luthier, however, the instrument could better produce the sounds that identified it as explicitly Indian. Adding sympathetic strings is no small feat since it puts thousands of pounds of tension on the neck of the instrument: the guitar's entire structure depends on maintaining tension. Likewise, altering the shape of the instrument's sound hole, through experimentation, allowed the slide-guitar to be adapted to please the ears of classical music aficionados and performers. These technical and structural insights are indispensable to the instrument, and require decades to refine.

Beginning in Jaipur, I began speaking with instrument makers in a neighborhood of the old city populated with small instrument shops. A tabla maker talked about the challenges of producing acoustic instruments, and the virtue of novelty musical instruments.⁹² New instruments require structural elements to fit into their intended genre, including visual adornments that appeal to musicians and audiences. An instrument maker generally sticks to traditional instruments because a system, sometimes ancient in origin, has been developed that proves the value and capability of an instrument design.

The risk taken by a maker to improve or fundamentally alter aspects of a traditional instrument usually ends in failure. The relationship between the maker and performer must be good for an instrument to achieve any status outside of novelty, meaning it must endure and prove itself in the musical community. It is thus incredibly difficult for any new invention to succeed, much less achieve what the slide-guitar has done in the past twenty years. Instrument characteristics, such as endurance, playability, reproducibility, symbolic capital, and tonal

⁹² Mukesh Singh, personal communication, 2014.

aesthetics help explain the Hindustani slide-guitar's emergence, acceptance by gatekeepers of a genre, and vernacularization into the vocabulary of consumers.

Most Jaipuri luthiers and drum makers I spoke with had no interest in making new instruments. It wasn't economically feasible for them, especially for those still working to establish their reputations for crafting traditional instruments. Since Jaipur lacks a reputation for producing top quality instruments for Hindustani classical music, local makers vie to make a name for themselves. Most classical instrument players in Jaipur generally go to larger cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata to acquire concert quality tools of the trade. To consult one of the top instrument makers, RikhiRam, I traveled from Jaipur to downtown New Delhi. I arrived just as the slide-guitarist Salil Bhatt was entering the store. Since I knew him from having lived for several summers one floor above Bhatt's home (while I was studying with his cousin, Chandra Mohan Bhatt), Salil was able to introduce me to the shop owner, Sanjay Rikhiram, thus turning my cold call into a successful visit.

As we sat down to chat, Rikhiram retrieved a custom instrument he had been crafting for Anoushka Shankar, *sitarist* and daughter of Ravi Shankar. Showing me some new additions, Rikhiram discussed the growing trend of musicians asking for custom instruments. Most new models commissioned at the RikhiRam shop were alterations prompted by the need for more control over the volume and tonal qualities of the instruments, meaning that pickups and equalizer technology were being added to the standard structure of traditional instruments. One exception was a completely new, lightweight and smaller sitar model for Ravi Shankar, developed by Rikhiram so that the aging maestro could play more comfortably without aggravating his left shoulder and continue his performance career. Shankar's electric *sitar*, sometimes called a *zitar*, had a solid body of wood, without the gourd that is typically affixed to the bottom of the instrument. The neck was thinner and shorter, facilitating quicker movements

up and down its length.⁹³

When I asked Rikhiram about new instruments, he reminded me about their prohibitive economics. Since completely new instruments have no traditional foundation, it is difficult to produce more than just a one-off custom model and not take a loss. Modifications to existing instruments are more successful but they are often dismissed as novelties with little chance of enduring unless players fully dedicate themselves to the instrument. In such cases where a dedicated musician exists, a luthier generally just works with that musician to upgrade or fix the single model, rarely producing many more because of lack of demand. Thus, rather than taking initiative, Rikhiram typically waits for a famous musician to approach him with a custom request. Yet since prominent players are used to traditional models, Rikhiram claims it is best to alter them only slightly. Students and amateurs are best suited to generic traditional models, on which their guru can properly instruct them in performance technique. The small economy for custom instruments poses a great challenge for Indian classical slide-guitarists, whose instruments are not only rare, but expensive.⁹⁴

To incorporate innovations and improvements in instruments that have endured for hundreds of years poses a challenge. When I suggested that the structure of the *tabla* and *sitar* have changed in the past century, Rikhiram claimed it was a slow evolution that occurred only the larger context of an instrument becoming well-known, championed by players and approved by audiences. I asked Rikhiram whether Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's *mohan veena* was an exception to his view of the timeless quality of traditional instruments. Rikhiram considered it not as a new instrument, but a carefully crafted modification to a foreign instrument, the guitar. While perhaps accurate conceptually, the *mohan veena*, or more generically, the Hindustani slide-guitar, is very different structurally and tonally to the guitar, and even the Hawaiian slide-guitar, that it seems to

⁹³ Sanjay Rikhiram personal communication, 2014.

⁹⁴ Sanjay Rikhiram personal communication, 2014.

be a much more dramatic innovation than just a modification.

Rikhiram's own attempt at a slide-guitar produced the *shankar veena*, played by Kamala Shankar from Varanasi. This instrument differs significantly from the typical slide-guitar models, since it is made with a different neck and a very specific wood (cedar) that gives it a unique visual and tonal color. Rikhiram wasn't sure if the model would persevere like the *mohan veena*, since Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's charisma and presence as a guru and celebrity was vital to how younger generations adopted his instrument.⁹⁵ Kamala Shankar has a following of her own, especially with young women performers who hope to follow in her footsteps. A few of the contestants at the light music competition that I spoke with during the Indian International Guitar Festival identified Shankar as an inspiration, especially for walking her own path rather than following established players like Bhatt and Bhattacharya.

Noting the challenges faced by slide-guitarists, Rikhiram conceded that the instrument, while a rare, unique, and modern hybrid of Western and Indian instruments, was establishing its own tradition. It relied of course, on the musicians, but also on the instrument's availability, whose scarcity makes it not only valuable, but subject to controversy and contention. The secrets to making durable and tonally beautiful Indian slide-guitars are highly guarded, especially as savvy entrepreneurs have attempted to control the market and the instrument's production. Knowing my fascination with the slide-guitar, Rikhiram suggested I travel to Kolkata and speak with musicians there who could describe more specifically how their instruments evolved into their present incarnations, which I did in 2014.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Sanjay Rikhiram personal communication, 2014.

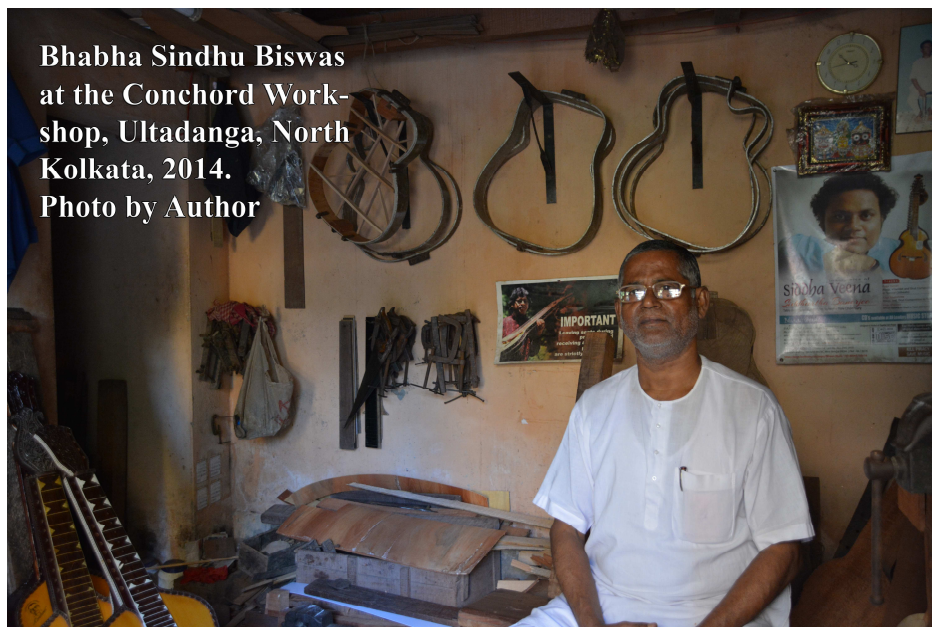
⁹⁶ Sanjay Rikhiram personal communication, 2014.

Bhaba Sindhu Biswas and Conchord Guitars

Across from the old Lily Biscuit factory in the Ultadanga neighborhood of north Kolkata stands Bhaba Sindhu Biswas' workshop, the Conchord factory. Amidst barking dogs, the construction next door, and cricket games on the street, you can hear the sounds of hammering and polishing all day coming from this small, single-story, two room structure. Wood shavings often cover the 12-foot square front room. A wooden chair and cabinet stand on the right, and tools and a floor-level workspace on the left. Half that size, the second room houses a dozen or so hanging guitars, hardware, and materials. Up above in the rafters, dozens of planks of wood await their final phase of drying before being worked into the body of a new guitar. Underneath the single bulb in the main room, Biswas sits, inspecting the fret-board of a new standard 6-string Spanish guitar. His assistant Ravi polishes a guitar neck on the floor, holding two ends with his feet, and working with a lathe and sand-paper. On the walls appear posters of famous slide-guitar players, including Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Barun Kumar Pal, Subhash Ghosh, Siddhartha Banerjee, and Rhitom Sarkar, all of whom are his clients. Biswas is the biggest name in professional Indian slide-guitar manufacturing, and his plastic benches have been occupied by the greatest slide-guitarists in India.

Picking up a hammer, Biswas adjusts the frets on an instrument while explaining to me in broken English that after many years dedicated to slide-guitars, he started making Spanish guitars again since they're fast becoming India's most popular instrument. Gesturing to the iron guitar frames hanging behind him on the walls, he says he can make Spanish guitars much more quickly. These frames bend thin pieces of plywood into the shape of the guitar body, a much less work-intensive process than carving the body from a solid piece of wood like his top quality instruments. Keeping a balance between the cheap, quick guitars and the custom instruments is

an economic choice, which keeps his real passion afloat: the invention and development of the new, high-quality slide instruments.⁹⁷



**Bhabha Sindhu Biswas
at the Conchord Work-
shop, Ultadanga, North
Kolkata, 2014.
Photo by Author**

Bhabha Sindhu Biswas (born in the 1950's) is from Kolkata and most of his family still resides there or in the Hooghly district across the river. He grew up in a family of instrument makers, beginning work in his twenties at his elder brother's workshop, Signature Guitars, which is one of India's most popular brands.⁹⁸ In the 1960s and 1970s, Kolkata reached a peak of slide-guitar popularity, especially playing Bengali popular and film songs on Hawaiian slide-guitars, as discussed in chapter four. By the early 1980s Biswas had developed his luthier skills and took to building slide-guitars under the name of Conchord, initiating a new era of development in the slide-guitar's structure, material and tone.⁹⁹

As the classical form began to overtake light music as the genre of choice for slide-guitarists in the early 1980s, Biswas began modifying his instruments to reflect classical music

⁹⁷ Bhabha Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

⁹⁸ Bhabha Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

⁹⁹ Bhabha Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

aesthetics.¹⁰⁰ The addition of sympathetic strings demanded a new structure to the guitar's body and neck to hold the pressure of twenty or more high-tension strings. Increased sustain and a warm, clear, and stable pitch required experimentation with the instrument's wood and form. After almost forty years of experimentation, and hundreds of structural changes and consultations with top Indian musicians, Biswas is widely hailed as the best slide-guitar maker in India.

In this same surprisingly humble workshop, these other instruments were born, all variations of slide-guitar, and generically termed "Indian slide-guitars": *mohan veena*, *satvik veena*, *chaturangui*, *gandharvi*, *anandi*, *siddha veena*, *sarasvani veena*, and many more.¹⁰¹ Body modifications are Biswas' recent passion, with versions that make the instrument resemble other Indian standards like the *sarod*, *sitar* and *tanpura*. Almost all professional Hindustani slide-guitarists have worked with Biswas, many to design their own, custom slide-guitar. Of the dozens of slide-guitarists I interacted with during my fieldwork, most of them have confided in me their close and dependent relationship with him (See biographies in Appendix B). They affirm his stubbornness, but also his genius, the unmatched quality of his instruments, and the debt the slide-guitar world owes him for creating instruments that compete with the top *sitar* and *sarod* manufacturers.

Unfortunately, finding the Conchord workshop is much more difficult than it should be for a luthier with such renown. There is very little web presence for the Conchord brand and only a few blogs and discussion threads give any clues as to how to contact Biswas.¹⁰² Other websites sell the Conchord brand instrument, but with brief reference, if any, to where and how it was

¹⁰⁰ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁰² <http://www.sitarsencat.com/cat-sitars-tabla-india/259/concord>; <http://lectio-brevior.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-guitar-maker.html>; <http://www.indianguitartabs.com/f18/concord-guitars-calcutta-44501.html>.

created.¹⁰³ Some performers with a personal connection to Biswas have advertised the brand, yet rather than explicitly crediting the maker, these portals serve as intermediaries for distribution.¹⁰⁴ Biswas has even been approached with contracts by distributors hoping to legally bind the Conchord brand into only selling instruments through one particular company, a proposition that he has rejected, seeing it as an affront to his freedom of creation.¹⁰⁵

My first meeting with Bhaba Sindhu Biswas was arranged by Anup Das Gupta, a slide-guitarist referred to me by Sanjoy Bandopadhyay, the director of instrumental music at Rabindra Bharati University, where I had established an affiliation. Anup had asked me to meet him at Ruby Hospital after his appointment so that we could take a bus together to Ultadanga via the EM bypass. After I had expressed interest in where and who made his instrument, Gupta—knowing my research objectives and my need to better understand the guitar-production process suggested that we visit Biswas.¹⁰⁶ This was crucial for my research, since meeting Bhaba Sindhu Biswas established not only my connection to him, but also practically the entire Indian slide-guitar playing community. While challenging, what I could muster of my Bengali language skills was appreciated by Biswas, who was also swayed by my growing list of referrals from players like Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, as well as Biswas' old friend, Anup Das Gupta.

After introductions and a discussion of my options for commissioning a new instrument from scratch, Gupta took Biswas outside to discuss privately how to approach me and my research. At Gupta's urging, Biswas began telling me about his business, his clients, and the scope of the Kolkata slide-guitar community. Aside from my interest in a new instrument, he quickly understood how my research goals required a wide range of interviews with both players

¹⁰³ http://www.indian-instruments.com/stringed_instruments/mohan_vina.htm; <http://www.india-instruments.eu/details-346/items/slide-guitar-mohan-veena-concord.html>.

¹⁰⁴ <http://rhitomsarkar.com/guiter.php>.

¹⁰⁵ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal conversation, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Anup Das Gupta, personal communication, 2014.

of the instrument and players in the industry.¹⁰⁷ After a few visits with him he agreed to design an instrument with me and show me each step of the construction process, from choosing materials, to form, to string placement, and a host of other aesthetic and structural concerns. I will describe much of what he said later in this chapter, being authorized by him to tell his story and describe his techniques. In addition to access to these well-guarded secrets, he dropped his cell phone into my lap and named off over thirty contacts of slide-guitarists with whom he had worked. The Biswas' workshop soon became the central information hub for my research, where not only the construction process was transparent for me to document, but my weekly visits allowed me to rub elbows with slide-guitarists from around India, exponentially growing my network and collection of interviews.

The pantheon of Indian classical instruments has expanded throughout the centuries but few foreign instruments have become as fully vernacularized into the genre as the slide-guitar. As discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, instruments like the harmonium and violin have been vernacularized into classical music while projecting visual and symbolic aesthetics that denote modernity, colonialism and Western culture. In contrast, the Hindustani slide-guitar's modifications express a different set of signifiers: not just modern, but also traditional; Western but highly stylized with visually Indian aesthetics; and decidedly a post-colonial hybrid that has revived international interest in traditional Hindustani classical music. Bhaba Sindhu Biswas has been central to these developments and deserves recognition for his accomplishments. Having pioneered the slide-guitars evolution from this workshop, Biswas has profoundly influenced how the slide-guitar has transformed from a popular and light music instrument into a significant addition to Indian classical music's instrumental categories.

¹⁰⁷ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

Constructing a Hindustani Slide-Guitar

Constructing the slide-guitar requires making choices about string configuration and desired playing style. Structure dictates the instrument's style, sound quality and playing techniques. The choices made by the pioneering musicians, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya—especially about string placement and guitar form, have created styles that are the closest thing Indian slide-guitarists have to an instrumental *gharana*, or stylistic tradition. The wide range of choices, however, also can make the process of selecting an instrument a bit confusing.

To illustrate, consider the experience I observed during my fieldwork, which demonstrates how difficult it is to choose and create a custom model at the Conchord shop. One afternoon in the fall of 2014, an American traveler, Virupaksha, and his partner came to Ultadanga searching for a slide-guitar. I had been at the workshop checking the progress of my own instrument, chatting with Rhitom Sarkar, who lives around the corner. Biswas' American customers were well-versed in Indian music and culture, with experience playing *sarod* and a strong identification with Hindu theology and literature, yet they had no Bengali or Hindi language ability. Offering our help, Rhitom and I facilitated the following conversations about the slide-guitar, which eventually also influenced my own slide-guitar's design specifications.

The answer to Virupaksha's first question, “can I try one out?” highlights the reality of the Conchord factory. As much as it is a small workshop that produces a few dozen guitars a year, it is also a laboratory, where slide instruments have undergone rigorous experimentation over many decades—their failed incarnations and dismembered parts turned into furniture, paper weights and backscratchers. New models stand with their insides exposed, their shapes suggesting Conchord's current inventory, requiring at least a week to assemble the finished product. “No”

was the answer, one could not try a slide-guitar here, nor buy one without a list of specifications based on a player's personal preferences. Without understanding all the slide-guitar's permutations, these decisions require consultation and some reflection before buying an instrument.

Other questions followed: Could it be played like a *sarod* or a regular guitar? Not exactly. The instrument can't be played effectively turned upright because the slide-mechanism must be balanced on top of the strings like a lap-steel, dobro, or Hawaiian guitar. While slide-guitar players have experimented with guitar picks, the *sarod*'s *jabba*, and the *sitar*'s *misrab*, most have returned to two metal finger-plectrums and one plastic thumb-pick in one hand, and a bullet-shaped metal slide with the other. With these now standard accessories, one can play techniques on a slide-guitar that mimic those of the voice, *sarod*, *sitar*, and Spanish guitar. A technique is commonly referred to as *baj* or *ang*, for example the *sarod*-style is referred to as the *sarod ang*, and the vocal style is referred to as *gayaki ang*. So the answer to this question of whether the slide-guitar can be played like a *sarod* or regular guitar was not unequivocal because yes, one can sound like a *sarod* on the slide-guitar, but it requires a completely different technique to produce the same sounds, which is described in Appendix A.

String placement can dramatically change what is possible on the slide-guitar and produce completely different playing techniques, thus becoming a baseline marker of whose style a player is capable of emulating. What is the best string configuration? No player could answer this question free from personal bias, based on one's favorite artists and techniques. Biswas described how some artists provided their own personal aesthetics as blue-prints for the eventual product. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, for instance, preferred to have the two *chikari* strings placed on the back, closer to the body, where the lower bass strings would be on a standard guitar. These *chikari* are to be played with the thumb, adding weight to each stroke to produce a

sound that Biswas described as *ghunj*—perhaps best translated as *crunch*. Some players regard this style as similar to playing the sitar, allowing a stronger attack with the thumb but reducing speed because it is necessary to alternate between the main string and the *chikari*, which are the farthest from each other in this configuration.

Alternatively, the *chikari* string configuration can be placed on the front, farthest from the body, to be played with the fingers while the thumb plays the main melody string, thus resembling the configuration of the *veena*. Debashish Bhattacharya pioneered this configuration, developing increased speed and more complicated patterns for the *jhala* section of a raga performance. Without the *chikari* next to the thumb, Bhattacharya also has two lower strings like a Hawaiian slide-guitar, available on his *chaturangui* model.¹⁰⁸ This configuration requires an extra neck attachment for placing the *chikari* string tuners on the front of the instrument. The small adjustment alters the instrument's overall form, requiring a customized carrying case. Out of many other choices regarding the strings, the *chikari*'s placement has become a focal point for player differentiating not only extreme variations in technique, but also for identifying models when they're embroiled in a struggle over intellectual property rights.

Beside the *chikari* placement, many other choices still remain. Placement of the sympathetic string courses, or *tarab* strings, can be situated underneath the playing strings, increasing the volume and making it easier to activate the sympathetic strings. The alternative requires another piece of wood connected to the neck on the front of the instrument, strong



¹⁰⁸ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

enough to sustain all the sympathetic strings. While pushing the *tarab* strings to the side of the guitar reduces the sympathetic vibrations and enlarges the neck considerably, it does allow the musician to easily play those strings, much like a *swarmandala*, a common zither instrument used by vocalists as accompaniment. Amongst other alterations, this structural change contributes to technique, which is often based on the emulation of other styles. The *swarmandala*-like course of strings provides embellishments on the slide-guitar typical of vocal music.

Another option was the shape of the sound hole. Originally, Biswas had used round holes just like the Spanish and Hawaiian guitars popular in India. Some twenty years ago though, he switched the slide-guitar's sound hole to the f-hole shape of violins and cellos with stunning success.¹⁰⁹ These were now the standard since they produced a warmer, clearer and more stable tone. Biswas explained that the circular holes of the past models couldn't control the instrument's pitch and emitted a "howling" sound, which failed to produce the pure, clean, and unwavering tone expected in classical music. Such tonal stability was necessary so that the instrument's main strings would engage with the sympathetic strings and provide the unique and compulsory aesthetic resonance of Indian classical instruments.

Far from being able to walk into a store and purchase an instrument, Virupaksha's decision took over a week, with many visits to the Conchord workshop and frequent consultations with Biswas. Rhitom Sarkar showed him several different instruments at his home, and offered Virupaksha some introductory lessons. Ultimately, Sarkar convinced him to purchase a slide-guitar with the *chikari* strings on the front. Since he had initially ordered it on the back, and since the carrying case had already been completed, a new case had to be constructed.

¹⁰⁹ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

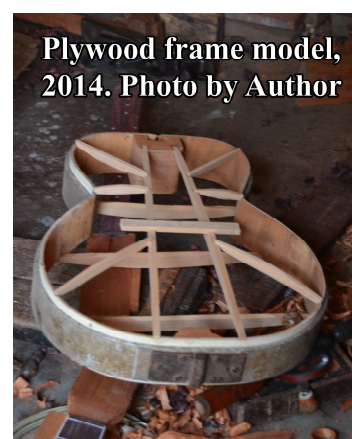


I spent a few months discussing with Biswas the process of building a slide-guitar from scratch. We discussed the merits of having the instrument made with plywood and frames to create the body versus a single piece of wood for the body, which allows a longer sustain and warmer tone in the latter. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt at one point played the plywood frame version, noting how bright the sound was, yet sometimes also unstable, with mediocre sustain. Bhatt's son Salil named the single piece of wood version the *satvik*

veena. It held a tone for much longer than the original *mohan veena* made of plywood, and while not as bright, it was very stable in pitch. Soon both father and son were playing instruments made from one piece of wood but still calling their instruments their respective names.

According to Biswas, the one-piece design is clearly superior, but also much more expensive, and much more work intensive, regardless what you call it.

Additionally, Bhaba Sindhu has created a wide range of body types: one resembling a standard arch-top guitar, one of similar shape but smaller, one with the shape of a *sitar*'s lower body (dubbed by Siddhartha Banerjee as the *siddha veena*), and one with the elongated body and shorter neck of a *sarod*. All these forms were only baseline templates for the instrument, awaiting other customized additions and modifications. The shape of the instrument and placement of *chikari* was a choice dictated for me by my comfort level with each

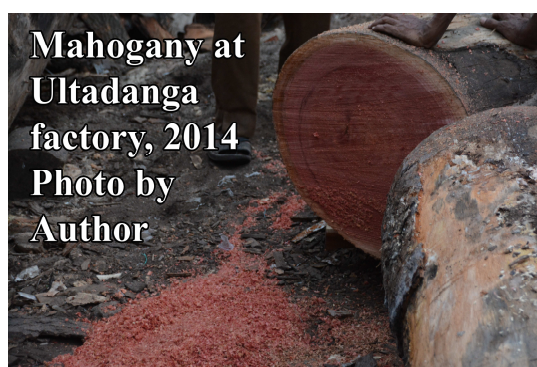


of the dominant playing styles of Bhatt or Bhattacharya. Because of my background playing flamenco, classical, and folk guitar fingerpicking styles, I had the *chikari* attached to the front of an arch-top guitar-shaped body, near the main string so that I could adapt some of my own

techniques and work closely with Rhitom Sarkar, who also plays in this style.

Other technical specifications have an effect on a player's technique. Having explored many string gauge possibilities, Biswas has been opting, over the last five to six years for a thicker gauge of guitar strings starting with the *chikari* and main string at eleven or twelve millimeters thick. Many players have toyed with these measurements, some preferring a thinner sound, leading to a smaller gauge, between eight and ten, which also allows for faster picking. Some prefer a thicker warm sound, with thirteen gauge strings, which produce more sustain.

Biswas was very specific about his wood preferences, emphasizing that the quality and life of the material allows his instruments to project a full and warm tone. Since the guitar has a different construction than a *sarod* or *sitar*, the wood used for those instruments wasn't always the best choice for



Conchord guitars. The typical rosewood of other Indian classical instruments created a very bright and sharp tone on the guitar, possibly also because the *sarod* and *sitar* have no sound holes, whereas the guitar features the standard Conchord f-holes. Teakwood has been tried, but it was too sharp in the treble range for the slide-guitar. Instead, Biswas keeps only the fretboard as rosewood—generally purchased from Orissa, but he makes the guitar's body and neck from Indian mahogany, harvested from Assam. Biswas showed me a beautiful piece of Indian mahogany at his colleagues sawmill, noting its rich reddish color and fragrance. This wood was very hard, yet porous, allowing the sound to be controlled within the body of the instrument while still retaining a warm and stable quality.¹¹⁰

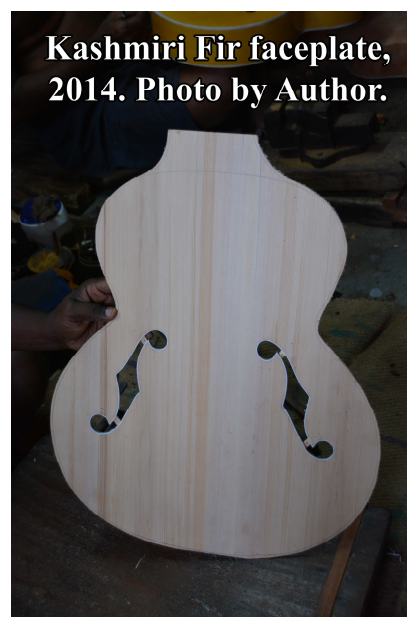
For the face plate of the slide-guitar, Biswas experimented for many years with different

¹¹⁰ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

woods from all around India. Only recently did he find his holy grail: the rare and government-protected Kashmiri fir.

Unlike fir trees in the Indian lowlands, this wood was tempered by high altitudes and temperatures that encase the tree in snow for most of the year. This causes the soft and porous wood to be strong and flexible, while also acting as the perfect board through which sound projects out of the instrument.¹¹¹ To acquire this wood requires a special process, where a team of government-sanctioned loggers

enters the highlands and cut down one or two trees a year. The wood arrives in Kolkata where the Conchord company buys it at auction with practically no competition. Thus, the wood, while rare and rather expensive, is not difficult to acquire; too soft to create stable furniture, no other woodworking companies work with Kashmiri fir.¹¹²



Conchord guitars use silver and brass alloy frets, hammered into grooves that space the frets apart according the size of the instrument. Conchord's slide-guitars have the frets painted onto the neck, or inserted in a similar fashion as the standard guitars. For slide-guitars, these serve as visual markers so that a player can stay in tune. If the neck bends at all, these frets can then be offset, which makes it difficult to match the right tones with spacing. When I asked Biswas whether he ever installs a truss rod to keep the neck straight, he claimed it would require a reconfiguration of the *tarab* strings, which are often strung through the hollow neck and out to tuners that line the neck closer to the body. Instead, to keep the neck durable and resistant to bending, Biswas splices the neck itself together from different woods with grains alternating

¹¹¹ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

¹¹² Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

direction.¹¹³

When it comes to other materials and electronics, Biswas has also pioneered a range of improvements. With local materials, he has created his own free-saddle pickup array, which allows the player to control the main strings, *chikari* and *tarab*, separately. Using Korean electronics called EQ Rose and the U.S. Fishman brand, Biswas has assembled the input, pickups, and volume control now found on the instruments of the top slide-guitarists. The instrument's structure also dictates the pickup placement since string configurations can vary. Each new design then becomes an experiment, requiring small adjustments throughout the life of the instrument. As such Biswas regularly sees his creations throughout the years, making special adjustments to each one in consultation with their performers.

The finishing touches for most Conchord instruments occurs in partnership with Sanat Haldar, a detail designer and woodworker who honed his craft producing the elaborate decorations found on the *sitar* and *rudra veena*. From the outskirts of Kolkata, Haldar and a team of four workers apply the custom adornments that make the instrument appear truly Indian. Polishing and final details like the Conchord brand logo are applied at the end of the carving process and then the strings and electronics are assembled.¹¹⁴



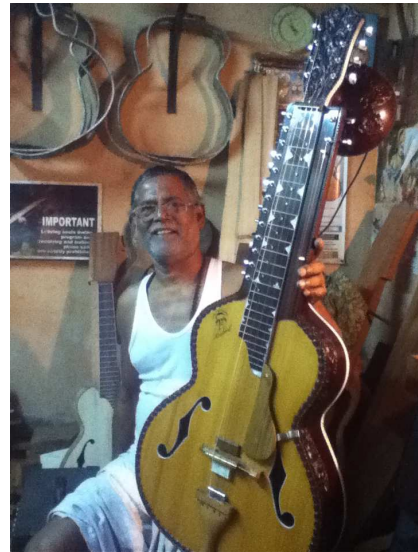
With unparalleled craftsmanship, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas' experience and intimate knowledge of wood, structure and other materials are precious to the slide-guitar community and the future of these slide-guitar instruments. Sadly, his name is not as well-known as it should be. Biswas has resorted to putting an image of his face above the brand to spread his name. Perhaps he believes it will deter players, caught up in the social tensions within the community, from

¹¹³ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

trying to erase or scratch off the Conchord insignia from their instruments. Hopefully, his contributions will soon be acknowledged publicly, and his innovations, designs and special knowledge will live on—through his apprentices—into the future.

Bhaba Sindhu Biswas' monumental contributions to the slide-guitar and its many incarnations are far removed from the naming issue. He keeps his distance from the issue because it has caused tensions in the community, including affronts to his own business. To Biswas, the name matters much less than the design, the innovations, and the development of the unique Conchord sound. Regardless, naming and patents became a focus of our frequent conversations because of the stress it has caused him and other players in the community.



**Bhaba Sindhu Biswas with author's completed instrument, 2015.
Photo by Author.**

The Politics of Instrument Creation: What's in a Name?

Mohan veena, satvik veena, hansa veena, shankar veena, siddha veena, chitra veena, swar veena, gyan veena, vishwa veena, swar-rangini veena, sarasbani veena ... these are some of the new names given by their performers to instruments derived from the structure of the slide-guitar in India. Each name adds a cosmological modifier to the Sanskrit word for lute, imbuing the objects with traditional Hindu symbolism. Other modified slide-guitars include the *chaturangui*, *gandharvi*, and *anandi*, whose names add their own personalized touch to the instrument. In the course of my dissertation research working with musicians in Jaipur and Kolkata, these names presented an interesting mix of symbols and signifiers, which amongst

audiences, critics and other musicians, has generated confusion and controversy in the process of vernacularizing the slide-guitar into Indian music cultures. These names have also generated political affiliations connecting performers, teachers, students and instrument makers in a web of allegiances that have had a powerful effect on the social life of guitarists in the Indian classical music scene.

Many new players have followed in the footsteps of Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya by playing the same models they designed. Some players also emulate their flair for invention, working to create new instrument designs and names that can be more closely associated with their own personalities and playing styles. This drive to distinguish oneself with a unique instrument is encouraged by the national and international fame bestowed upon the previous generation of inventors. Designs have such value in the community that some players have gone to great lengths to protect their intellectual property. Both Debashish Bhattacharya and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt have created patents for the designs of their instruments in order to have some measure of control over the production of their designs. The resulting attempts to enforce patent laws and prevent makers from creating instruments with even similar designs have created a rift in the community, specifically between Debashish Bhattacharya and the original maker of his instruments, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas.¹¹⁵ This has caused great tension in the community, and I found myself embroiled in this feud just by associating with Biswas and learning about their personal battles.¹¹⁶ Without taking sides, I wish success for both of these monumental figures, but just by virtue of playing a Conchord instrument I was told I might be unwelcome at Bhattacharya's school of music.

Even before meeting Bhaba Sindhu Biswas and purchasing an instrument from him, I approached Debashish Bhattacharya in the hopes of acquiring a slide-guitar. Curious about the

¹¹⁵ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

construction of his instruments, I asked Bhattacharya to see the factory where his Trideb instruments were produced. I was denied, on the grounds that there was a patent on the instruments.¹¹⁷ This was confusing since seemingly a patent would only further protect Bhattacharya's intellectual property. I soon discovered that Biswas' cousin, Rishikesh Biswas, was the luthier Bhattacharya had employed to produce the Trideb models. Having signed a non-disclosure contract, Rishikesh was prohibited from discussing with me the instruments he made. This obstacle to constructing any comparative framework for slide-guitars is unfortunate, but understandable considering the social tensions that have filtered into the larger community.

This feud is a dispute over the notion of who should control the production of instruments. Bhattacharya conceived of designs, using material evidence to claim a patent on the placing of *chikari* strings in the front of the instrument, along with other modifications typical of his *chaturangui*, *gandharvi* and *anandi* models. Following his international success, Bhattacharya offered Biswas a contract to exclusively create instruments for his company Trideb international.¹¹⁸ Biswas's refusal began a series of contentions, leading to him receiving a cease-and-desist letter for making Hindustani slide-guitars with Bhattacharya's alterations.¹¹⁹ Upset that his once friend was pursuing legal action against him, Biswas conceded that he had no interest in legal battles, becoming frustrated with his attempts at seeking legal counsel and the exorbitant costs to defending his case as the individual who brought these designs to life. Having all the knowledge and experience of how to make quality instruments, Biswas was integral to making the realistic adjustments, finding the materials and constructing the framework for an instrument he is being told never to produce again. One alternative presented to Biswas was to patent every instrument he designs, which was very unappealing to a craftsman and artist who is

¹¹⁷ Debashish Bhattacharya, personal communication, 2014.

¹¹⁸ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, personal communication, 2014.

constantly creating and refining his ideas.

While legal actions haven't materialized against Biswas, he continues creating new instrument designs and configurations that he bestows on players he trusts. Many of these younger players arrive and consult Biswas, taking his instruments and branding them with their own names. What is stopping a young player from taking out a patent on their new instruments and seeking legal control over the design? A senior like Vishwa Mohan Bhatt took out the patent on the *mohan veena*, only to find that the name had already been used by Radhika Mohan Maitra for a modified *sarod*, adding another layer of confusion to the naming issue. Biswas continues making *mohan veena* slide-guitars as he is a close friend and dedicated engineer to Bhatt's instruments. Bhatt, amongst a large percentage of other slide-guitarists in India have lent their support to Biswas, creating a rift that brimmed just under the surface of the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival dedicated to Indian slide-guitar traditions.

The Indian International Guitar Festivals of 2015 and 2016 were organized by Debashish Bhattacharya. The first year was monumental for the life of Indian slide-guitar as it gathered together the largest ever group of slide-guitarists from around India. Both years, an entire week of performances, workshops and competitions brought talent of all age groups to Kolkata. Present was grand-guru Brij Bhushan Kabra and in dedication to him, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt agreed to perform. Attending this festival allowed me to meet face-to-face many players I had interviewed over the phone or through Skype, and introduced me to dozens of other performers in the community. Soon I realized the festival was a skewed representation of the community since very few Kolkata players not associated with Debashish Bhattacharya chose to attend. As I went back and forth between the festival events and the Conchord workshop, many local players gathered with me to hear of the festival they dared not attend. Even as the festival proceeded with international guest performers and many players from across India, one glaring omission

was evident: despite many players performing on Conchord guitars, there was no public recognition of the vital role of Bhaba Sindhu Biswas to the history of slide-guitar in India.

Beyond the social rift manifested at the slide-guitar festival, the hyper-customization of slide-guitars in India has posed many challenges to younger generations of players looking to further their skills on slide instruments in the classical genre. For example, the lack of standardization has made booking performances difficult. According to slide-guitarist Deepak Kshirsagar, promoters tended to ask whether he played *mohan veena* or *chaturangui*, to which he replied “Hindustani slide-guitar” as Kshirsagar had not been a direct student of either maestro. Bhatt and Bhattacharya’s instruments are recognized names, vernacularized into the common vocabulary for performance promotions, yet other instruments of this ilk, even a generically termed Hindustani slide-guitar have not been as successful.

My primary slide-guitar instructor, Rhitom Sarkar also criticized the naming issue, calling it a “gimmick” for “cheap popularity.”¹²⁰ Opposed to alternative names, he believes the instruments should all be called Hindustani slide-guitars, if performed in the classical tradition. This is how it was before the 1990’s, observable in liner notes to both Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya’s albums before the naming craze took off. To Sarkar, the variations in names and string arrangements are merely small differences, and unique instrument names only creates confusion, and a lack of standardized programs, thereby discouraging young students. When questioned by magazines and newspapers, asking if he plays *mohan veena* or *chaturangui*, he always responds: “Hindustani slide-guitar.” For Sarkar, pretty much all these successful guitar designs come from one maker, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas who—while agreeing with Sarkar—has no control over how his instruments are identified. Sarkar mused, “If I add one *chikari* and the playing technique remains the same, does that mean I can call the instrument something

¹²⁰ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

completely different?”¹²¹ In contrast, he recognized how guitars in the West generally just get identified by a modifier, *7-string* guitar, *steel-string* guitar, *nylon-string* or *classical* guitar, and so forth. Like others in his generations, Sarkar sees the naming issue as a lingering obstacle to the slide-guitar’s success.

Some players identify the lack of standardization as the central problem in the world of Indian slide-guitar. The lack of unity amongst slide-guitarists provides the biggest concern, only heightened by the wide range of names for classical slide-guitars. The particular names given by Bhatt and Bhattacharya, for example, are very peculiar in a classical music context where no other instruments carry such a wide range of monikers. The sitar, for example, has no specific names. Slight alterations to structure or string count identify particular styles—such as those of Vilayat Khan versus Ravi Shankar or Nikhil Banerjee, but they don’t evoke an entirely new name, like the slide-guitar. Kshirsagar advocates a common name, such as the “Indian classical guitar,” among all performers, so that young players don’t have to defend their choice of the *mohan veena*, *chaturangui*, *gandharvi* and so forth. Kshirsagar views the distinctions between the slide-guitar models as more symbolic than structural, whose maintenance disadvantages players like him who don’t identify with these lineages. Without a “godfather” imparting their style and instrumental namesake, players like Kshirsagar struggle to gain recognition and performance contracts.

At first, I considered Kshirsagar’s drive for standardization as a potential stylistic hindrance, where structural variations in the slide-guitar lend themselves to specialization. The deeper we discussed the issue, however, I realized that once again the naming situation was problematic since its distinctions indicated less about style and skill than about political alignment within the slide-guitar community. Players with no affiliation are often better off

¹²¹ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

creating a new instrument of their own in the face of not having a slide-guitar guru to induct them into a supportive community and economy.

While the slide-guitar is a comparably young instrument in the classical genre, the lack of standardization has also slowed its integration into conservatory curricula. A guitarist from Bangalore, Mallikarjuna Kolvi discussed with me his frustrations with his educational aspirations. After completing a degree in classical music, he sought a Master's degree and was told that he would have to abandon the slide-guitar for a standardized instrument in the genre. Despite petitions and searches for other programs, Kolvi eventually abandoned this idea. Many other players have discussed this lack of institutional support, including Rhitom Sarkar and Debashish Chakraborty, the latter of which began one of the first programs dedicated to classical slide-guitar playing at Mangalayatan University close to Aligarh.

The naming process not only highlights the players' ingenuity and identity, but also their cultural, religious and national identifications. A well-known slide-guitar player, Prakash Sontakke, told me that given all the problems engendered by musicians naming their instruments after themselves, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt was an unparalleled genius for first dubbing his slide-guitar the *mohan veena*. To tap into that root of tradition, and to slip under the radar of the conservative gate-keepers of the Indian classical legacy, was the single most subversive act the guitar could make.¹²²

A full vernacularization of a foreign object into traditional Indian culture isn't a new function, but the historical context places it at the upsurge of a new Indian modernity, defining itself with respect to the past and carrying forward a sense of cultural and national pride. India is a post-colonial, rapidly developing superpower and the Indian slide-guitar more than any other instrument represents that modernity by being a new product in a traditional context, which has

¹²² Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2015.

been globally recognized. Names have a profound currency in South Asia because of cultural, ethnic, religious and national identifications that have been in conflict for centuries. A name that references Hindu mythology, ritual, or literature can be conflated with Indian cultural nationalism, whose associations can be very beneficial in a music genre with an audience inclined to have spiritual inclinations. In India, and abroad, the name of the slide-guitar instrument one plays could offer more gigs of a certain type, even better feedback during a performance or a completely different audience in attendance. The value of a name, as Sontakke proclaimed, can make or break the career of a slide-guitarist.¹²³

This chapter has explored the history, structure, creativity and controversies behind the Hindustani slide-guitar. The visionary performers of the first generation of slide-guitarists in the classical genre broke new ground with an instrument they strived to vernacularize into both South Asian culture and classical music genres. Their efforts paved the way for the succeeding generation, but not without creating pitfalls that complicate the path of young performers. Amongst many challenges facing Hindustani slide-guitar students are choosing and acquiring an instrument. I experienced these challenges first hand by seeking out a luthier to better understand the organology of Hindustani slide-guitars. In getting to know Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, I uncovered some of the major tensions dividing the community, which while detailed in this chapter, I do not intend to foment further resentment, but rather to problematize the relationship between players, inventors and luthiers. Who owns the right to create an instrument? How are patent laws enforced in ways that privilege those with resources? In the struggle over his art, Biswas has made enemies for not conceding his contributions as derivative. Debashish

¹²³ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2015.

Bhattacharya himself also deserves the right to control his intellectual property. The arguments between them indicate broader issues that are relevant to new emerging technologies in the world of music. Considering their long and fruitful relationship, it is my hope they will bury the hatchet and bring their allies together to celebrate their common instrument, the Hindustani slide-guitar.

Conclusion

The Hindustani slide-guitar's development in India is a compelling organological evolution that raises significant theoretical, historical and socio-political inquiries that have populated this dissertation. It is an object that has crossed boundaries and defied theoretical dichotomies, such as tradition and modernity, which inform the contemporary understanding of Indian cultural nationalism. With structural roots in both the guitar and the classical instruments of South Asia, it is a hybrid instrument that represents traditional aspects of Indian classical music and culture, while simultaneously projecting an aura of modernity. Theoretically, the invention and innovations developed on new instruments like the Hindustani slide-guitar are indicative of the dialectic between modern, globalized cultural and technological developments and traditional, local cultural values and ingenuity. It is an object around which intricate promotion strategies, spiritual and nationalist narratives, and contemporary legal battles have manifested, raising questions about ownership, intellectual property and organology that are important themes in ethnomusicological research. It is my hope that this work offers scholars of other emerging traditions a comparison and theoretical framework with which to understand the politics of musical invention and innovation, especially with the emphasis I have placed on the role of instrument makers.

This dissertation has applied a range of theoretical terms in order to analyze aspects of slide-guitar history and culture in India. Vernacularization, while carrying some negative connotations by suggesting a process of making something more common, is employed here specifically because of its linguistic meaning, aiming at how the naming issues for new Hindustani slide-guitars have simultaneously elevated awareness of the instrument while also hampering its standardization. The aura and cultural capital are terms that I have used to discuss

the many symbolic ways slide-guitars and their performers have accrued value by connecting with broader cultural and spiritual associations, particularly Indian nationalism. Context is paramount to understanding these processes, especially as the relatively short history of slide-guitar in India is coterminous with some of greatest social, political, religious and administrative reforms that have occurred on the sub-continent. The hybrid and post-colonial nature that I have ascribed to the instrument serves to locate it in modern India so that the life of the instrument is clearly understood as part of the culture in which it developed.

Understanding performance practices have also been central to this work, not only because it allows me to articulate repertoire and technique, but because developing my skills on the instrument, and in its languages of instruction, was a social process that provided a foundation for this research. My fieldwork in Jaipur and Kolkata came before any attempt to theorize the object, coalescing because of my personal relationships with performers and love of the art form it participates in. With experience in playing sitar, tabla, Western guitar and vocal music, the Hindustani slide-guitar was a perfect union of my musical affinities and I was lucky enough to pursue this synergy with a supportive community dedicated to advancing their instrument in creative ways.

In tandem with theory, ethnography and performance studies, I have placed much emphasis on the historical and cultural backdrop that paved the way for the Hindustani slide-guitar. The effects of colonial era musicology from European and South Asian perspectives have influenced performance trends, the codification of systematic music forms, and the restructuring of musical life in India. The socio-cultural movements of the nineteenth century are some of the most important historical events in relation to modern South Asian identities. Without understanding their effects on ideology, economy, spirituality, and gender norms, it would be impossible to assess the context within which the Hindustani slide-guitar took shape. Missing

would be answers to how foreign instruments were adapted to traditional music, how certain populations gained access and preserved performance practices, how expressions of faith and nationalism are integral and indicative of the instrument's acceptance, and why some players have found national and international success with such a groundbreaking instrument.

The history of Indian nationalism is a central topic in this work. The efforts of Hindu ideologues contributing to the creation of a consolidated modern Hindu nationalism is a cultural backdrop that has inspired the renaming, and thus vernacularization, of the Hindustani slide-guitar. In appealing to traditional cultural symbolism, slide-guitarists have tapped into a strong current of national pride that has had very positive effects on their careers. In examining this deliberate choice to rename, I have also uncovered tensions in the community about the lack of standardization, even though the pioneers who implemented new monikers for their instruments are generally praised. By augmenting their cultural capital with Indic instrument names, players redefine themselves, not only to fit into a modern economy of South Asian guitar performance, but to fit into a very traditional context within a classical music genre that has been systematically molded by nationalist ideologies.

Chapter three's emphasis on gender also engages with the effects of nationalistic movements, because these two topics are at the crux of how the slide-guitar has become so popular for women performers. Just as colonial influences dramatically changed the field of musical performance in India, so did cultural gender roles undergo a restructuring. The unfair treatment of women performers such as the *devadasi* community is indicative of the nation-wide efforts to modernize while purging elements of the culture that seemed incongruous with a Western inspired modernity. In urban Kolkata, women slide-guitarists avoided or were hidden from the spotlight, yet contributed to the preservation of the light music tradition in the modern Bengali household. Today, my fieldwork confirms that, while dominated by men in the

professional world of performing arts, women represent a large population of players that carry on the slide-guitar tradition in classical, light music and folk genres.

I dedicate much attention to the politicization of the motherland symbolism because of how powerful and revolutionary the idea of the nation as mother became in the nationalist movement. The slide-guitar's interaction with these streams of fierce Hindu nationalism and recent integration within the Hindu national song, "*Vande Mataram*" is further evidence of its successful vernacularization into the modern Indian cultural ethos. For women themselves, I have argued that the politicization of the motherland symbol has been disempowering, as they have been forced to conform to ideals that represent tradition, while being targets of nationalist aggression. The development of the ideal Hindu woman in literature, cultural movements, and state-sponsored propaganda has emphasized their roles as bearers of tradition, challenging individual personal sovereignty, and exploiting their bodies for nationalism. This is by no means a unique development in India, but the creative constructions that brought about the politicization of women's bodies are unique in their details.

Women slide-guitarists have emerged out of this patriarchal cultural milieu finding success in performance careers with many more challenges than men. The slide-guitar community, due to its cosmopolitan beginning in Kolkata, has a more even balance of gender than many genres of Indian music. It is perhaps from this vantage point that we can understand how women's contributions to the development of the slide-guitar have been more pronounced and valuable. They show that performance, not only in light music genres, but now in classical music, is a realm in which women can contest hegemonic gender roles.

The slide-guitar's appearance as a dominant instrument in Bengal's light music genres has rarely been examined in academia. Bringing awareness to the great performers and innovators of the genres of *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti* should provide an important contribution to

ethnomusicology. These genres were the entry point from which the slide-guitar was able to vernacularize into Indian music contexts. As these Bengali musical genres are part and parcel of modern Bengali identity, the slide-guitar's acceptance in this music paved the way for a broader Indian acceptance of the instrument, not as foreign or colonial, but as modern and post-colonial. The many slide-guitar players of the past who contributed to these Bengali genres are innovators whose influences are less evident than what the narratives of today's players make them out to be. Telling their stories may subvert the narratives more powerful figures present of the evolution of slide-guitar in India, yet without them a fair and complete understanding of the tradition is impossible.

Especially in the classical tradition there has been an emphasis on connecting to slide-tradition within India rather than from abroad, which can have the effect of erasing influential contributors and the paths of the instrument's migration. Whether from nationalist motivations or self-promotion, dominant narratives of the most prominent performers have caught the imagination of audiences, especially those with nativist tendencies. As the slide-guitar becomes more integrated into Indian music, I expect an increase in mythologizing its origins because it has become a highly successful tactic for performance careers.

The Hindustani slide-guitar has revived traditional aesthetics, while also resonating with a sense of global modernity. The instrument's national and global accolades have helped it rise in popularity, yet the community that supports the economy of slide-guitar making is very small. Scarcity of professional quality slide-guitars is also high. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Debashish Bhattacharya, and many other players have augmented their particular slide-guitar's symbolic capital, although perhaps to the detriment of less iconic models. Their skills have popularized Hindustani slide-guitars globally, deservedly becoming new symbols of classical stardom. Conversely, their patents on designs have worked to control the growing market surrounding the

instrument, constricting its production and promoting the particular names they have created rather than a more generic term like Hindustani slide-guitar.

Most important to this dissertation is the emphasis on organology and the monumental contributions of instrument makers. By illuminating the story of Bhaba Sindhu Biswas and the Conchord company, I hope a broader range of scholars and musical enthusiasts will understand that innovation comes from collaboration, and that inventors rarely create in a vacuum. This misconception appears to be very common in the public understanding of where Indian slide-guitars come from. Unfortunately the tendency is to portray a player and inventor as not only solely responsible for a new creation but often divinely inspired. These sorts of narratives provide great increases in cultural capital, benefitting the luminary player, but relegating their partners in instrument craftsmanship to irrelevant workers. My efforts to give proper recognition to luthiers contradict many of these narratives of creation, but I stand resolute in celebrating the figures who have brought inspired designs to life. While many players praise Conchord luthier Biswas, they have not done enough to heighten his profile as a master craftsman. As of the publication of this dissertation, Conchord has no dedicated website and players personal sites do little to credit Biswas or Conchord for their instruments.

Contentions over intellectual property have to do with structural details of new slide-guitar instruments as well as the names associated with them. From my interviews with the younger generation of players (see Appendix B) I have found that the naming craze has been one of many obstacles for their success. Players also struggle to find programs and institutional support for slide-guitar music, where the extreme diversity of guitar models and styles makes standardization difficult. Since the slide-guitar has been so frequently compared to other instruments and disparaged for its newness, foreignness and perceived limitations, practically all my interviewees lamented how difficult it was to be accepted into traditional classical genres.

This conceptual barrier is perhaps the primary reason slide-guitars have acquired so many different sanskritic names, precisely to fit into the dominant cultural context.

My interviewees also note the obstacles to performance careers generally in India, citing the grading system and other structures that mediate opportunities. This field has been difficult to negotiate, sometimes due to preconceived notions of musicality, judicial prejudices, or financial barriers. While crucial for understanding Indian culture and classical music's philosophical origins, religion and spirituality remain a difficult subject to address. Since most performers come from Hindu backgrounds—or the normative, majority position—faith has not been a common subject of discussion in my interviews. For those from minority or marginalized groups, however, acceptance has been a life-long struggle. The same applies to gender, where women, a minority as performers, must contend with additional challenges to form a successful performance career.

The fortuitous culmination of my fieldwork was two consecutive years of the Indian International Guitar Festival (I.I.G.F.) in Kolkata. Here the living dynamics of the slide-guitar community were on display. While I have left out an extensive description of the event, I have emphasized how each of these week-long festivals have brought together slide-guitarists from around India to celebrate their instrument and musical traditions. These events were hugely successful in bringing attention to these musical traditions and I credit the efforts of Debashish Bhattacharya and his associates for this stunning accomplishment. It is my hope that the event will continue and evolve in order to heal some of the rifts that have arisen in the community due to personal contentions.

My fieldwork in Kolkata and Jaipur revealed a rich and vibrant community of players with distinct lineages and many young enthusiasts to carry on the tradition. Beyond these two fieldwork sites I have interacted with players that represent this instrument from many diverse

locations in India including Varanasi, Mumbai, Agra, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Chandigarh, and Assam. Beyond India's borders I was also able to interact with players from countries like Bangladesh, Japan, Australia, and the United States.

I hope to continue my slide-guitar studies, illuminating the efforts of other players, especially women, to this vibrant tradition. As I continue studying Indian music, I am slowly building on the skills fostered by my slide-guitar teachers Rhitom Sarkar and Anup Das Gupta. My aim is to turn this dissertation into a full-length monograph that expands my research, theoretical analysis, and repertoire. The inclusion of ethnographic data from the Indian International Guitar Festival would benefit many who seek to get a feel for the social fabric of the Indian slide-guitar community, including the tensions that have been obscured by the public image this event creates. I also hope to interact with the few degree programs that exist in India for slide-guitar music in order to see how this tradition is beginning to receive institutional support.

I conclude with a parable spoken to me by luthier Bhaba Sindhu Biswas one afternoon at the Conchord workshop that emphasizes the relationship between teacher and student: "*Chapiyo, chhan ke, guru chuno, gyan ke*" translated as "As one drinks chai, take the cream, just as one chooses a guru, take the wisdom. Biswas's council was meant to encourage me to be discerning in choosing the path and people I studied slide-guitar with. His guidance and support has given me the tools to do so, and I hope this work does some small measure to repay the wisdom he has generously given.

Appendix A: Repertoire

Ethnomusicology's methodology forefronts participation, musicality and the ability to articulate the nuances of the repertoire. From my private lessons, discussions with players, and observations of performances, this appendix introduces my fieldwork repertoire along with basic definitions of Hindustani classical music terminology to explain the details and aesthetics of traditional *raga* performance (specifically the system of *khyal*) in its full concert format. Studying the Hindustani slide-guitar has helped synthesize my knowledge of Indian classical music with my expertise in Western string and percussion instruments. This background was invaluable in participating in the social life of training and performing in Kolkata and Jaipur. My gurus of *sitar*, *tabla*, vocal music and slide-guitar have all helped me in this endeavor, revealing how the system of Hindustani classical music transgresses instrumental mediums.

As this work focuses on the distinct value of the slide-guitar's capabilities, part of this chapter presents a comparison between instrumental and vocal techniques, often described as *ang* or *baj*. As the slide-guitar's vernacularization into Indian music genres is predicated on the ability to mimic the voice and timbres of other instruments, it is instructive to describe how such techniques are accomplished. Beyond mimicry, the slide-guitar has its own unique musical abilities that deserve recognition as a new category of technique or style, which I call the *slide-guitar ang*. A codification of slide-guitar techniques will contribute to the legitimacy of the instrument, placing it on par with other classical instruments, all of which have advantages and disadvantages in sound production.

To acquire skills and knowledge on the Indian slide guitar, I took lessons with Rhitom Sarkar and Anup Das Gupta three to four times a week in 2014-2015. Our frequent meetings allowed me to practice exercises (*palta*) and composed material (*gat*, *asthai*, and *anthara*), thus

building a small repertoire to complement a larger collection compiled from my past *sitar* and *tabla* lessons. Throughout my studies of slide-guitar performance I continued studying with my *sitar* guru, Debi Prasad Chatterjee, who helped me better understand theoretical and structural aspects of *khyal* performance. Between these three gurus, I developed a feedback loop of instructional material that allowed me to focus in-depth on a specific *raga* or composition while adapting it to the slide-guitar and *sitar*. These comparisons allowed me to test the limits of technique and musical adornment, illuminating the expressive characteristics available to each instrument.

Since Hindustani classical music improvisation operates from a small framework, the compositions notated below only serve as a skeleton of a performance, which must be augmented with knowledge about the *raga* (*pakad*, *chalan*, *vadi*, *samvadi*, and other nuances), in order to display tunefulness, musicality, rhythmic mastery and virtuosity.

Basics of Hindustani Classical Music

Raga and *tala* constitute the two most basic elements of Hindustani classical music. A *raga*, often referred to as *raag*, provides the music's melodic content, consisting of ascending or *aroho*, and descending or *avaroho*, steps within an octave. The ascent and descent can skip notes or create zigzag melodic patterns that give a very specific character to each *raga*. Many *ragas* have similar melodic content, even containing the same *aroho/avaroho*, but the way they move, described as the *chalan*, differs. To perform the music well one must understand the fine tonal and expressive contrasts between similar *ragas*.

While some *ragas* are described in ancient texts like the *Rig Veda*, V.N. Bhatkande's *thaat* system prevails with ten categories of *ragas* including: *bilawal*, *khamaj*, *kafi*, *asavari*,

bhairavi, *bhairav*, *kalyan*, and *marwa*. Within each category falls dozens of *ragas* that offer different tonal qualities, moods, and colors, sometimes referred to as *rasa*. Almost all *ragas* have an additional quality in the most important notes that characterize their melodic tendencies, referred to as the *vadi* and *samvadi*, which appear in the upper and lower half of the octave respectively. The system also classifies *ragas* according to the appropriate time of day when they should be performed. *Ragas* with a minor second, for example, are often associated with the morning hours representing the slow awakening of the dawn. These groups according to a time of day are organized from early to late in the day: *bhairav*, *todi*, *bilawal*, *sarang*, *kalyan*, *kannada*, *malhaar*.

To illustrate the parallels between Western and Hindustani music, we can compare the terminology for scale degrees. Below is shown diatonic system from Western music represented in roman numerals and Western solfège syllables with the C major scale as the foundation. The last two rows indicate the corresponding Hindustani *sargam* syllables also in shorthand.

C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B
I	ii	II	iii	III	IV	iv	V	vi	VI	vii	VII
Do		Re		Mi	Fa		So		La		Ti
<i>Shadja</i>		<i>Rishabha</i>		<i>Gandhara</i>	<i>Madhyama</i>		<i>Panchama</i>		<i>Dhaivata</i>		<i>Nishadam</i>
Sa		Re		Ga	Ma		Pa		Dha		Ni

The Hindustani classical system differentiates twenty-two subdivisions to the octave, called *sruti*. Some *ragas* discussed below will take into account nuances of the *sruti*, but most detailed in this repertoire use notes that fall into the Western twelve-tone system. Thus, *shadja* (I) and *panchama* (V) cannot be modified, but the second, third, fourth, sixth, and seventh scale

degrees, just as in Western music, can be modified with terminology that corresponds to sharp (*tivra*), flat (*komal*) and natural (*shuddha*). The fourth scale degree is only described with *shuddha* (IV) and *tivra* (iv). In the notations below, only syllables will represent the melodic compositions, using lower case when modified, for example: S r G m P D N denotes a *komal rishabh* (ii), a *tivra madhayama* (iv), and the rest of the notes *shuddha*. Often one sings these scale degrees as the primary method of instruction and it is the expectation that any instrument will be able to reproduce the melody. Vocalists take the *sargam* one step further, using them as syllables in performance to demonstrate their command of melody and scale degree.

Tala, or the rhythmic aspect of Hindustani music occurs in cycles with standard forms referred to as *theke*. Learned as sentences of percussion syllables, these sound poems precisely indicate what stroke is to be played by the percussionist. Tuning the instruments so the primary tone matches the tonic, or *shadja* (I), a *tabla* player will play *theke* as an accompaniment to a melodic instrumentalist or vocalist. Among the many dozen *talas* the most commonly performed is *teentaal*, which is sixteen beats long. Notated below is the basic *theke* for *teentaal* using syllables that correspond to strokes on the *tabla* drum.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
(dha	dhin	dhin	dha)	(dha	dhin	dhin	dha)

<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>
(ta	tin	tin	na)	(dha	dhin	dhin	dha)

Teentaal occurs in four groupings (*vibhag*) of four. 1-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-16. The first note on beat one is the *sam* and the halfway point in this rhythm, on beat 9, is the *khali*. The *khali* provides an explicit signal to denote position within the beat, which is a helpful guide to the instrumentalist who improvises melodic ideas over the rhythm. Each rhythm in Hindustani music

has its own structure with a unique *theka* and *khali* placement. Other common *talas* are *jhaptaal* (10), *dadhra* (6), *ektaal* (12), and *rupaktaal* (7).

Tempo, or *laya*, dictates how quickly a composition and rhythm is played. Fine distinctions separate these categories, but simply put, the *vlambit*, *madhyalaya*, and *drut* correspond to slow, medium and fast speeds respectively. While Hindustani classical music contains much greater complexity, these basics will at least help explain the musical notations and discussions examined in this project.

When creating a composition to play in concert or for pedagogical purposes, a *raga* and *tala* are chosen, and a fixed melodic phrase, or a *gat* is given. These compositions generally last one or a few cycles and may feature styles passed down from a long tradition of music-making. Generally, a *gat* has two to three sections corresponding to a tonal range. The first part, an *asthai*, appears in the instrument's middle octave. The second part, the *manja*, occurs in a lower octave, and the third part, the *antara*, reaches into the upper octave. Some compositions omit the latter two parts, leaving those tonal ranges free for improvisation within the *raga* and *tala* structure.

The structure of a Hindustani classical performance provides an aesthetic that gradually develops the *raga*'s tonal qualities. An instrumentalist or vocalist begins with an introductory section, an *alap*. Often very slow and meditative, this stage in a performance lacks rhythm, but it explores systematically the *raga*'s important tonal qualities, first descending to the lowest octaves available, and then ascending to the upper octaves. This reveals the full range of the instrument and the *raga* in an aesthetically pleasing way that makes no dramatic leaps or movement until all the notes have been explored one by one. The *alap* can have many sections but it may also be condensed into a very brief introduction of the *raga*, an *aucha*. Because of time constraints, this might be done in performance or recording settings as an alternative to a long *alap*. The *jor* section follows the *alap* or *aucha*. The *jor* traditionally has thirteen different

sections, all of which incorporate rhythm, but just as the *alap*, it has no accompaniment and allows the instrumentalist or vocalist to demonstrate their creativity, musicality, tunefulness, and rhythmic control without help from a percussionist. The *jor* generally proceeds using a similar gradual exploration of the notes of a *raga*, culminating in the upper octave ranges of one's instrument.

After the *alap* and *jor*, the melody player will begin a *gat* composition where the accompanist can enter, generally with a tasteful introductory flourish or statement that ends on the cycle's first beat. From there, the percussionist locks in the standardized *theka* and the performance continues with the melody player exploring different parts of the *gat*, improvising melodic ideas called *bistar*, and inserting rhythmic sequences of notes called *tans*, between periodic returns to the main *gat* composition. Relying on extensive improvisation, the true artistic merit emerges from the musician's ability to create beautiful melodic and rhythmic structures that depart and reunite with the rhythmic cycle and the original composition. A *gat* composition has a characteristic opening phrase called a *mukhra*, or face, which starts often on the *sam*, *khali* or on beat 7 or 12, leading up to the following *sam*. Both in and out of rhythm, the instrumentalist has endless possibilities for demonstrating technical mastery. Often the tempo builds slowly, with the percussionist given some free reign to show off their skill. While famous *gats* have been passed down through the centuries, many experienced players also improvise their *gats* right on the spot, making sure to use the characteristic movements of *raga*.

The final section of a *raga* performance, the *jhala* section, is played at quick *drut* tempos, typically altering the main *gat* to fit into the accelerated rhythmic cycle. This section features the *chikari* strings, which reiterate the tonic (*shadja*) at a high octave, adding a bright and aggressive timbre to the overall texture. A typical pattern consists of playing a note, followed by three *chikari* strokes, almost always vocalized as “*dha, chi, chi, chi.*” Depending on the improvisation,

experience and communication between the melody player and the accompaniment, the *jhala* section can display many different twists and turns.

Hindustani classical music training not only prepares musicians to improvise an entire concert, but it allows performances between players who have never practiced together before. Most impressive, perhaps, a melodic player and accompanist can synchronize the characteristic final phrases of an improvised idea with a stream of notes repeated in triplicate, or *tihai*. A standard *tihai* phrase repeats a sequence of notes three times using equal spacing between each reiteration. Sometimes no space exists between each phrase, referred to as *bedam*, and sometimes the spaces between and the tempo of the melodic phrases are altered to correctly land on the *sam* in what is referred to as a *upaj tihai*. The final note of the third pass through the phrase tends to end perfectly on the *sam*, but one can perform the *tihai* landing on other beats corresponding to pleasing entry points back into the composed material. To demonstrate a *tihai*, consider below the simple notation of a *bedam tihai* phrase in *rupaktaal*, which is five notes long, ending with the last note on the first beat of the next cycle.

(beat)	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>								
(<i>theka</i>)	thin	thin	na	dhi	na	dhi	na	thin	(rhythm)							
(<i>tihai</i>)	(S	R	G	M	P)	(S	R	G	M	P)	(S	R	G	M	P)	(melody)

Exceling at improvisation and understanding the standards and structures for making appropriate compositions requires rigorous practice, or *riyaz*, but it can take many forms, not just playing an instrument, as long as attention focuses on musical performance practices. My slide-guitar teacher Rhitom Sarkar stressed the importance of sitting to practice one's instrument when the passion arises. Too much *riyaz* on a single concept, while honing a particular skill to perfection, can also blind the musician to other intricacies or ways of playing. Also, one must study with a proper instructor or guru, receiving knowledge directly in the *guru-shishya*

parampara or teacher-student tradition. That connection and transmission of knowledge is described as *talim*.¹²⁴ Learning from recordings and copying ideas without a guide can cause us to misunderstand *raga* and *tala*, and especially their fine, but crucial distinctions. With their knowledge and passion for this rich and ancient music system, only with the guidance of many gurus has this project moved forward with any coherence and authority.

Technical Aspects of Performing Slide-Guitar

When performing Hindustani classical music, the slide-guitarist must adapt to the norms of the genre while still maintaining an aesthetic beauty and demonstrating skill. My interviewees often discussed the advantages and disadvantages of playing the slide-guitar compared to other instruments, particularly the *sitar*, *sarod*, and vocal music, the first two because they're string instruments, and the last because it provides the baseline medium for understanding melodic ornamentation. Besides these comparisons, we must also consider the competing slide-guitar styles (and string configurations) championed by the instrument's two primary schools, represented by Bhatt and Bhattacharya's styles of back and front *chikari*, respectively.

To play the slide-guitar, one typically rests the instrument on the lap while sitting cross-legged. The standard equipment includes three plectrums worn on the thumb, index and middle finger of the right hand, and a metal slide manipulated with the left hand. Stability can be challenging as one positions the instrument on the lap, so many players use their right hand pinky finger to stabilize as they pluck and strum with the other fingers. Unlike the *sitar* and *sarod*, no left-hand grip keeps the instrument in place. As such, the slide-guitar appears to be floating since one doesn't touch the body of the instrument with the hands.

¹²⁴ Neuman, Dard. "Pedagogy, Practice, and Embodied Creativity in Hindustani Music." *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 3 (2012): 426-49. For a discussion of *riyaz* and *talim*.

When playing the slide-guitar, the right hand can produce strumming patterns in relationship to the string configuration. As previously mentioned, some players have the *chikari* strings in the front, to be played with the fingers, and some have them in the back, to be played with the thumb. The relative strength of each of these fingers creates a different tonal quality when striking the strings, distinguish two styles audibly by the force applied to the *chikari* strings. Strumming at very fast tempos on a single string, often described as *dha-ra-dha-ra* (strumming down – *dha* – and up – *ra* – on a single string), is a difficult skill to acquire. Slide-guitarists use two unidirectional plectrums to produce what a single double-sided implement does in *sitar* and *sarod* playing. This has been one of the most frustrating aspects of my own slide-guitar studies since I have been accustomed to playing at high tempos with a single pick. The mechanics of *dha-ra-dha-ra* playing with unidirectional finger plectrums requires alternation between thumb and index finger, which in my own playing persists as a clumsy and inaccurate technique that often results in hitting the wooden pick-guard on the instrument unintentionally. Debashish Bhattacharya pioneered these fast strumming patterns, otherwise known as *taiyari* playing, which distinguishes his style from other players.

When playing the slide-guitar, the left hand operates under the same principles regardless of string configuration. A three to four inch slide is positioned between the index and middle finger of the left hand, held in place by the thumb. It is played by moving the implement across the string, keeping the middle finger behind the slide touching the string to control the sound. When a note is struck with the left hand, a player can move the slide up and down the string to alter the pitch, keeping slight pressure on the string to maintain contact, allowing for a long and unbroken note that can produce numerous pitches in a fluid melisma. Separate staccato notes can also be played by lifting the slide and placing it at the appropriate point on the string, again using the middle finger to control the tone.

The advantages using the slide implement include the ability to hold a note for a very long sustain and being able to modulate that note across one string reaching several octaves. The impressive sustain of the slide-guitar lasts much longer than either the *sitar* or *sarod*, and is rivaled only by bowed instruments or the voice. The range attainable with a single stroke on the slide-guitar surpasses *sarod*, ranging from bridge to bridge, while also remaining audible because of the reduced friction of the metal slide against a metal string. These unique qualities allow the slide-guitar to reproduce long and complicated vocal flourishes impossible on the *sitar* and *sarod*, and thus, the slide-guitar benefits from being closer to the human voice than these other non-bowed instruments.

The slide-guitar's disadvantages stem from the instrument's innate structure. When playing melodies with the left hand, it takes considerable experience to maintain proper tonality as there are no frets to keep oneself in tune. This challenges beginners whose tonal mistakes are common and glaringly displeasing. The slide-implement also suffers from a lack of speed with the left hand, making very fast melodic phrases more difficult than with the *sitar* or *sarod*. Since the slide implement acts as the left hand finger would on these other instruments, techniques like *krintan*, or hammer-on and pull-off notes, can only be accomplished to and from notes held by the open strings. Most slide-guitar models also don't reach into the lower octaves as would a *sitar*, making this lower range on the bass (*karaj*) string unattainable.

As the slide-guitar has evolved in structure, string placement, and playing technique however, it has often resorted to mimicry of these other instruments and the voice. These experimentations have opened new possibilities for the slide-guitar, allowing it to more effectively adopt important aesthetics from classical music. The following section presents definitions and details of techniques associated with other instruments and how the slide-guitar is able to reproduce these sounds and timbres, as well as creating musical ideas unique to the

instrument.

Styles of Performance: Toward the Guitar *Ang*

When comparing the styles and techniques associated with the voice, *sitar* and *sarod*, the term *ang* is often used. The vocal techniques are described as *gayaki ang*, the *sitar*'s as *sitar ang*, and the *sarod*'s as *sarod ang*. When learning the slide-guitar, any composition or musical phrase can be modulated according to these three *ang* styles in order to display a wide range of expression with the same melodic content. In exploring the *ang* styles, we'll also propose a new category, *slide-guitar ang*, which offers description of musical phrases that characterize techniques developed on slide-guitar instruments.

Gayaki Ang

Gayaki ang refers to melodic phrases that characterize vocal techniques. This includes a long sustain, an increased range of pitch for a single notes, and very quick melodic flourishes. The flourishes, or *murkhi*, generally flutter between two notes in rapid succession, creating a sound resembling a bird twitter. *Murkhi* can be accomplished on most instruments but the slide-guitar's feather-light tonal quality makes this a common adornment in slide-guitar improvisation. Additionally, since the slide-guitar can reach some of highest audible pitch ranges, *murkhi* techniques on the instrument can be even closer to the actual bird sounds.

Long melismatic phrases have also been attributed to the *gayaki ang*, attained with a single stroke on the slide-guitar followed by a slide movement that ascends and descends potentially many octaves before the sound dissipates. Other musical adornments open to all string instruments also fit into the *gayaki ang*. The *meend*, for example, bends a note in one direction, which the *sitar* accomplishes by bending the string from a fixed position across the

curved frets after a stroke, and the *sarod* and slide-guitar achieve by sliding the left hand up and down the string after plucking the note. *Gassit* is a more specific term for sliding the left hand, possible to achieve on all instruments but only the slide-guitar can retain an impressive duration of sustained sound. The most complicated form of *meend* is the *gamaka*, which involves a forceful string modulation between two notes, pushing from the first note up to the second and back. The *gamaka* can be played on the *sarod* and slide-guitar by moving the left hand quickly between the two notes, but sustaining it repeatedly can be difficult. The *sitar* can more easily produce this sound since as the left hand fingers pull the string, its natural tension returns the pitch to the original position.

Throughout the descriptions of the slide-guitar on websites and promotional materials of performers, a consistent claim is that the slide-guitar is more effective than most other classical instruments for enunciating techniques from the *gayaki ang*. Many players focus exclusively on this type of playing, preferring slow and meditative *alap* sections of performance to demonstrate their skill with pitch control and melodic nuance rather than a virtuosity based on speed.

In the great diversity of ragas of classical Indian music, there are many whose intervals are very difficult for instrumental performers. For example, a *rag* like *bopali todi* has a very large interval (ii to V) that is difficult to produce quickly on a stringed instrument.

Sarod Ang

Sarod ang describes the playing style that draws from the techniques and sound production typically associated with the Hindustani classical instrument, the *sarod*. Using a plectrum similar to a two-sided pick common to the standard guitar and called a *jabba*, a *sarod* player can create incredibly fast and forceful accents on a string. They result from the strength of the thumb, which, when replicated on the slide-guitar, produces a much louder attack than the

plectrums on the index or middle fingers. The *dha-ra-dha-ra* pattern of fast strumming with sharp accents is generally viewed as a *sarod ang* even though it can be produced on both the *sitar* and slide-guitar. The *dha-ra-dha-ra* pattern on the slide-guitar is accomplished by alternating the thumb and index finger picking, but as mentioned earlier, is much more difficult because one has to coordinate two plectrums rather than one to create the same sound. One composition in *rag kirwani* (included in the repertoire below) was where I practiced the *sarod ang* technique because the slowly ascending melody created enough space to easily alternate styles.

The *sarod* can also achieve long *gassit* technique, or slide, which is accomplished by using the nail of the left hand's middle finger to press the string down against the metal fingerboard. By pressing the string with the nail, a smooth timbre can be achieved with increased sustain and mobility between pitches. Despite this technique, the *sarod* has far less sustain than the slide-guitar, so the long *gassit* isn't typically considered a characteristic of the *sarod ang*.

Sitar Ang

Sitar ang describes the playing style drawn from techniques developed on the *sitar*. The *sitar* player uses a *misrab* plectrum fixed to the index finger to be able to pluck the strings in both directions. A technique generally considered part of the *sitar ang*, the *krintan* creates modulation by hammering on or pulling off a note on the string, made easier by the frets, which stabilize the pitch on the *sitar*. Both the *sarod* and slide-guitar can produce this technique, although it sounds best when done between an open string and a note played with a finger. The *sitar*'s fret structure also makes it easy to produce very fast rhythmic runs or *taans*, which can be one of the greatest challenges for a slide-guitarist. Mentioned in the biographical vignettes of Appendix B, a number of players discuss the difficulty of learning compositions from *sitar* gurus

because some quick *taans* can be mechanically impossible for a slide-guitarist.

Slide-Guitar Ang

Finally, the *slide-guitar ang*, describes new playing styles specific to the techniques available to the slide-guitar. First, by virtue of utilizing three plectrums on the right hand, a slide-guitarist can produce quick plucking patterns that skip strings and engage with the *chikari*, both in the front or the back. By alternating a combination of the thumb, middle, and index, the slide-guitar can replicate the fingerpicking practices common in other types of guitar music. Plucking with multiple fingers simultaneously or across an arpeggiated chord could constituted as techniques attributable to a *slide-guitar ang*.

For the left hand technique, the bar can produce large chords and even harmonic movement. Especially on slide-guitar models that keep six main strings, like the *chaturangui*, these large chords produce a crisp and stable sound compared to the small muddy chords possible on the *sitar* and *sarod*. Derived from Hawaiian style slide-guitar playing, the introduction of chords other than the tonic into Hindustani classical music is indicative of loosening of the strictly modal character of raga music. By introducing harmonic resolution, the slide-guitar may be innately equipped to produce performances of *ragamala*, or modulation between ragas in a single performance.

Another plausible technique that might be attributable to the new *slide-guitar ang* would be the extreme range of the slide on a single string. A *sitar* can generally run just over two octaves on a single string from the low bridge to a bent note from the highest fret and a *sarod* is comparable, reaching up to the end of the metal fingerboard. Because of the slide implement and because there's no need to press against a finger board, the slide-guitar can reach from the open note to the bridge on the other end of the string. Few voices can match the range available using

this technique, making it another musical idea unique to the slide-guitar.

Just as slide-guitars use the *angs* of other instruments as a means of expanding repertoire, technique and expression, other instruments could adapt some of the techniques described here. Conceptualizing a *slide-guitar ang* contributes to establishing the slide-guitar as a legitimate instrument in the world of classical music. A pedagogical system specific to slide-guitar clearly exists at schools like the Bhattacharya School of Universal Music and at Mangalayatan University run by Debasis Chakraborty. With more research and access to these institutions a synthesis of the curricula could be accomplished and presented at other institutions in India and abroad.

Hindustani Classical Compositions

During my classes with Rhitom Sarkar and Anup Das Gupta, I generally learned new material by writing down important aspects of the *raga* and *tala*. Then my teachers would recite a *gat* composition using these parameters, transmitting an *asthai*, *manja*, and *antara* when appropriate. I would record these details and the notes of each composition in small notebooks and tape our sessions, so they could be reviewed later. Traditionally, students were expected to memorize the music they were transmitted, but short-hand has always been used as a trigger to memorization. Some critics of notation pedagogy claim that writing down music undermines one's playing ability and improvisation because writing becomes a crutch, leaving memory undeveloped. Ideally, a player will memorize a composition and then be adept enough at improvisation and aware of the *raga* and *tala* rules to be able to create an entire performance based off a *gat*.

The next sections will present the *ragas* and *talas* I learned with my two slide-guitar

teachers. They will give a sense of the repertoire and styles used in accurately playing each composition. Each *raga* will be described with the *aroho* and *avaroho* to make clear the melodic ascent and descent of the *raga*. The main notes of emphasis, the *vadi* and *samvadi*, will also be listed, along with some examples of *chalan* or typical melodic movements associated with the *raga*. All compositions below span notes in three different octaves where syllables are represented in shorthand with a dot underneath denoting a pitch in the lower octave and a dot above to identify notes in the upper octave. For example: $\dot{N}$ S R M P N $\dot{S}$. Superscript notes indicate grace notes achieved through adornments like bending, hammering, pull-offs or sliding (*meend*, *krintan*, and *gassit* respectively).

Raag Desh

This *raga* is included here because it is commonly used in nationalist music compositions, including many different versions of “*Vande Mataram*” described in chapter three. *Desh* is a late evening *raga* that is meant to evoke a romantic mood. It can be difficult to render because it shares characteristics with other *ragas* like *khamaj* and *tilak kamod*. Similar to *malhaar* *ragas*, it is considered effective during the rainy season.

Thaat: Khamaj

Arohan: S R M P N $\dot{S}$

Avarohan: $\dot{S}$ n D P M G R G S

Vadi: Re

Samvadi: Pa

Chalan: R M P n D P, R M G R S $\dot{N}$ S, M G R G S R $\dot{N}$ S, D M P N N S

Gat in *teentaal* in *madhya laya* tempo. *Mukhra* begins on beat twelve.

Asthai:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
			(R	M	G	R	S
			$\dot{N}$	S	$\dot{N}$	S	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
^G R	-	R	-	M	-	D P	P N

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
D P	-	-	)				

Anthara:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
			(M	R	M	-	P

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
^S N	N	^S	-	^S ^R	^S ^R	N	D

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
P	-	-	)x2 (R	M	^G ^R	^S N	^S N ^S

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
^S ^R	-	^S n	D	P D	-	P M	G

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R G	^R S	N S)					

Raag Ahir Bhairav

Ahir bhairav is a *raga* that mixes *rag bhairav* and the *rag kafi*. Being impure, it isn't considered a *janya raga*, but rather *chhayalog*, or a union of two *ragas*. Between Sa and Pa, it is *raag bhairav*, and between Ma and upper octave Sa it is *rag kafi*. So the *rag ahir bhairav* reflects are salient features of *kafi*: n D n P D P, and *bhairav* r G M P, G M ^Gr S. It is an early morning *raga*. One should be able to demonstrate the *sruti* on *komal re* by bending from Sa to touch slightly above and below the fixed note.

Below is the composition learned from Rhitom Sarkar, who emphasized the melodic

movements that contrasted the major third (Ga) and minor second (re). Starting on beat seven, this is a famous *gat* that begins with two quick flourishes of triplet notes, follow by a slide from beat nine to ten, emphasizing the Ga to re movement of *bhairav*. The re upon descent was given an oscillating character, subtly wobbling the tone. The *antara* also begins on beat seven, using the *gat*'s material for the first six beats to transition.

Thaat: Bhairav

Arohan: S r G M P D n Ś *Avarohan:* Ś n D P M G r S

Vadi: re

Samvadi: Pa

Chalan: G M r S, , M D ṇ r S, P D n ṛ Ś, P n D Ś n D n, n D n P D P

Pakad: n S D n r S (combines salient characteristics of both *ragas*)

Gat in *teentaal* in *madhya laya* tempo. *Mukhra* begins on beat seven.

Asthai:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
						(MGP	MGM

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
G	r	S	r	-	ṇ	S	r

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	-	G	G	M	-)		

Anthara:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
						(M	G

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
M	D	-	D	P	D	DŚN-	D P

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
M	G	M	r	S	-)		

Tihai melody begins on beat 14 using notes (ḌṆ, S, r, G) with four silences between phrases:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
					(ḌṆ	S	r	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
G	-	-	-	-	ḌṆ	S	r	

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	1
G	-	-	-	-	ḌṆ	S	r	G

Raag Mishra Bhairavi

A *raga* derived from *bhairavi* but altered to be more flexible, *Mishra bhairavi* takes on a mixed (*mishra*) quality. While many *ragas* are performed in *mishra*, these interpretations aren't considered deep traditional forms, but they are very popular and most players become well versed in altering a *raga* to produce this effect. Just as *rag bhairavi*, it is an early morning *raga*, with re as the *vadi*, and P as the *samvadi*. Because of the *mishra* nature you can put in touches of other notes such as *shuddha ga*, *tivra ma*, *shuddha ni*, these are considered *vivadi* notes, or not within the *raga*. *Mishra ragas* are always considered lighter music because of their deviation from strict rules of maintaining a fixed *raga* tonality. When descending one must always use the *komal re*, but on ascending to *ga*, *shuddha re* can be used.

Thaat: Bhairavi

Arohan: S r g M P d n Ś *Avarohan:* Ś n d P M g r S

Vadi: re *Samvadi:* Pa

Chalan: g M P d P m P, S r g gGg r S, g M P d nN n d P

Gat in *teentaal* in *madhya laya*. *Mukhra* begins on beat thirteen.

Asthai:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
				(ṇ	S	g	M	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
P	-	P	-	n	dNd	P	-

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
g	M	r	Gr S)				

Anthara:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
				G	M	M ⁿ d	n (or N)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ś	-	Ś	-	ḡ	ṛ	Ś	-

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
n	d	p	d	P	M	g	M)

Raag Kirwani

While a performer favorite, *kirwani* is not a traditionally classical *raga*. Since it was not included in Bhatkande's *thaat* system of organization it falls outside a strict classical form.

Kirwani has no real *vadi* or *samvadi* but there is emphasis on the notes Pa, then Re, ga and dha.

This *raga* gets performed around midnight or *madhyaratri*. The North Indian Hindustani *raga kirwani* comes from the South Indian Karnatic *raga kiravani*, which is the twenty first *melakarta* (a tonal category like the *thaat* system), called *kiranavali*. Many players tell me it resembles the tonality of certain Spanish flamenco keys with its large intervals between the vi and VII scale degrees.

Arohan: S R g M P d N Ś *Avarohan:* Ś N d P N g R S

Chalan: Ṇ S R g M P, R g M P d P, S R g R S Ṇ d P

Gat in *teentaal* starting on beat 9 or *khali*.

Asthai:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(S	S	R -	R g	g	M -	M P	d N d

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
P	-	-	d P	d M	g	R -	R S)

This particular *kirwani* composition has appeared often in my studies—heard, performances at the Indian International Guitar Festival and taught to me by Rhitom Sarkar. The composition, or *gat*, is generally performed with sharp attacks of the thumb in a *sarod ang* to emphasize the ascending pattern of the first half of the cycle, ending with a legato flourish across beat 15 and 16 to land on the Pa note at the *sam*.

Rag Shyam Kalyan

Shyam kalyan was the first *raga* taught to me by Rhitom Sarkar. We initially discussed the *aroho* and *avaroho*, identified the *vadi* and *samvadi*, and proceeded with the melodic phrases according to the *chalan* to get a feel for the *raga*'s mood. I knew parts of this *raga* from my experience playing *tilak shyam*, a *raga* created by Ravi Shankar and taught to me by Chandra Mohan Bhatt during my time studying *sitar* in Jaipur. *Shyam kalyan* has similar zigzag patterns on the descent, and extensive use of the *tivra madhyama* while touching *shuddha madhyama* on the final part of the descent. Re is important ascending, heard frequently SR, but weaker descending, requiring support from the note above, GR. This quality of approaching a note through another note is called *kan swar*, allowing a player to enunciate weaker notes in a *raga*

without emphasizing them. Also weak on descent, *tivra* Ma is treated in the same way, touching Pa first. It is a late evening *raga*.

Thaat: Kalyan

Arohan: S R m P N Ś *Avarohan:* Ś N D P m P G M R S

Vadi: P

Samvadi: S

Chalan: R m P G M R S (*Pakad*), N S R m Pm P

Gat in *teentaal* in the *Massitkhani* style beginning on beat 12.

Asthai:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
			(R	S	N	-	S

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
R	-	R	S	m	P	G	M

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	R	S)					

Antara:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
			(M	P	N	Ś	Ṛ

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
N	-	D P	m P	R m	P D	m P	G M

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
R	R	S)					

Bedam tihai ending at the *mukhra* and starting on beat 3.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
-	-	(m	P G	M R	S	m P	G M R S

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
m	P	G	M R	S)	(<i>mukhra</i>		

Tihai ending at the *mukhra* and starting on beat 16.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	M	R	S	N	S	m	P
G	M	R	S	N	S	m	P
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
G	M	R	S	N	S	(m	P

Raag Tilak Kamod

Tilak Kamod is another one of the first *ragas* Rhitom Sarkar taught me. We worked with this *raga* as a counterpoint to *shyam kalyan* in order to make clear distinctions between the character of each *raga*. Also a *chhayalog* raga

Thaat: Khamaj

Aroho: S R M P N Ś

Avaroho: Ś P D M G R G S

Vadi: Sa

Samvadi: Pa

Chalan: P D M G R G S, M G R G S R N S, P N S R M G R G S R N S

Gat in *teentaal* with *mukhra* beginning on beat 9 or *khali*.

Asthai:

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(R	P	P	M	P	M	G	R
							G

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
S	-	-	R	-	M	G	-
							)

Manja:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
N	-	P	N	-	N	S	-
							)

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(S	R	R	M	G	R	G	S
							-

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
R	M	M	P	N	S	R	N
							S
							)

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(P	D	-	M	G	R	G	S

Antara (two cycles long):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
M	P	P	N	Ś	Ṛ	N	Ś -)

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(N	Ś	Ś	Ṛ	Ṣ	Ṛ	Ṛ	Ś

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ṛ	Ṛ	Ṛ	Ṛ	Ṣ	Ṛ	N	Ś)

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(P	D	-	M	G	R	G	S

Raag Bilashkhani Todi

Bilashkhani todi is a deeply serious and sad raga originally created by Bilash Khan, a musician of the Mughal court and youngest son of Mia Tansen. There are a number of unspoken rules added to the basic framework of the melodic movement of the raga. For example, one should not play Ma to Pa, and a phrase like r n S r g is acceptable despite not matching with the *arohan* and *avarohan*.

Thaat: Bhairavi

Arohan: S r Mg P nd S' *Avarohan:* r n d M g r g r S

Vadi: ga

Samvadi: dha

Chalan: r n d P d n d M g r g r S, S r g r n d S, g p n d d r n d d S, r g p d m g r g r s

Pakad: r n d S r g

Gat in *teentaal* beginning on beat one.

Asthai:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(g	-	-	-	g	P	P	d M

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
g	r	S	nd	-	S	-	r)

Asthai:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(d	n	P	-	g	r r	g	M

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
g	r	S	S	r r	g	-	P)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(S	-	-	-	S	r r	g	r

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
n	d	S	g	P P	- n	d	n d)

Raag Vrindavani Sarang

This midday *raga* must produce the character from *rag sarang*. In *sarang* you have to use the sequence Re Ma Re. Due to the large intervals that characterize this *raga* it is difficult to balance speed and tonal accuracy when performing on the slide-guitar. Considering the common movement between Re and Ma, some players alter their tuning to resemble a *sarod* by having the main string tuned to Ma, facilitating movement between a fretted Re and open string Ma.

Thaat: Khamaj

Arohan: S R M P N Ś *Avarohan:* Ś n P M R S

Vadi: Re *Samvadi:* Pa

Chalan: S R M P R M R, R M R N S n P, R M P n P R M R, n P M P N S

Gat in *teentaal* beginning of beat one (*sam*).

Asthai:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
R	M M	R	^s N	^s N	S	R	M M

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
P	N	-	P	R	M	M	R	S

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
R	-	S	-	P	N	P	-

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16					
M	P	P	N	N	S	S	R ^M	R	S ^N	N	N	S

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
N	S	S	R	M	P	n	P	-

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8						
P	n	-	P	M	P	-	M	R	M	-	R	^S N	S

New Rhythmic Cycles with Fractional Values

During my classes with Anup Das Gupta, we discussed the composition of *gats* in fractional rhythmic cycles. This added layer of complication required for new *theka* to be constructed for the accompanying percussion player. It is possible to translate the 7 ½ rhythm to 15 beats long, but the way the *talas* are described makes it more intuitive to notate the rhythms with “&” symbols signifying the space between the beats. Below are notations with simple percussion *bol* patterns, or syllables, which dictate the correct strokes on the *tabla*.

7 ½

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
dhin		tere	kita	dhin		na	

5	&	6	&	7	&	½
tun		na		dhi	dhi	na

10 ½

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&
dhin		tere	kita	dhin		na		tun	

6	&	7	&	8	&	9	&	10	&	$\frac{1}{2}$
na		kat		ta		dhi	na	dhi	dhi	na

Fractional rhythmic cycles are one of the many strategies that performers today utilize to distinguish themselves from other players. By becoming adept in these rare cyclical forms, a slide-guitarist is pushing the boundaries of traditional form, presenting innovative compositional forms that impress audiences and challenge accompanists. I was asked not to give notation for the melodic compositions within these new *talas*. It was important for Gupta to keep his compositions private within his group of students to keep control of his intellectual property.

Technical Practices and Exercises

For the practice of *murkhi* or quick melodic flourishes

SNSN NDND DPDP PMPM MGGM GRGR RSRS

RSRS GRGR MGGM PMPM P

SNSRSNS

RGMG GMPM MPDP PDND

Light Music Compositions from Bengal

During my time in Kolkata, I was exposed to dozens of songs from the light music genres ranging from *Rabindra sangeet*, *Nazrul geeti*, *lok sangeet* (folksongs/worksongs), *Atul prasadi*, *Dijendra geeti*, Bengali *adhunik gaan*, and Hindi *adhunik gana*. The slide-guitar was consistently the instrumental medium of choice for these compositions, demonstrating how integrated the instrument has become within Bengali music. Each year during the Indian International Guitar Festival, a competition took place where students were to play compositions to demonstrate their skill. I have notated some of these compositions below along with other

tunes learned during my time in Bengal.

“Todi Tor Dak Shune/Ekla Cholo Re” by Rabindranath Tagore

Translated into English by Rabindranath Tagore:

If they answer not to your call walk alone
 If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall
 O unlucky one, open your mind and speak out alone
 If they turn away, and desert you when crossing the wilderness
 O unlucky one, trample the thorns under thy tread, and along the blood-lined track travel alone
 If they shut doors and do not hold up the light when the night is troubled with storm
 O unlucky one, with the thunder flame of pain ignite your own heart, and let it burn alone

1	2	3	4	5	6
		(N	N	N	-

1	2	3	4	5	6
S	-	S	R	R	-

1	2	3	4	5	6
^R P	-	-	M	-	-

1	2	3	4	5	6
G	M - G	-	R	S	-

1	2	3	4	5	6
R	-	G	G	R	- ^G R

1	2	3	4	5	6
R)					

1	2	3	4	5	6
MP	-	P	^P n	n	- D

1	2	3	4	5	6
P	-	M	G	^R S	-

1	2	3	4	5	6
R	-	G	G	R	- ^G R

1	2	3	4	5	6
S	-)				

“Esho Shyamolo Sundar” by Rabindranath Tagore

Based on *raag desh*, “Esho Shyamolo Sundar” is a popular composition, especially because it doesn’t conform to the strict rules of the *raga* system. Translated by Anjan Ganguly,

Green beauty, you are welcome
 Fetch you cool thirst-quenching nectar of togetherness,
 The parted lady is waiting impatiently, staring high into the sky
 Her twitched heart spreaded
 Through pleasant shady *tamal* bushes
 Sad melody in her drenched eyes
 Garlanded *bakul* blossoms kept ready,
 Flutes in the courtyard playing in anticipation for the union
 Come with your *mondirai*
 It would accompany with the brisk dance movements
 Bangles will make pleasant noise, feet-jewelry will sound
 They will strike a pleasant crashing sound

As the melodic line from the original vocal version is fixed, slide-guitarists add flourishes and extra strokes to add character. This song is played in a common folk *tala* called *keherowai* which is eight beats long. Represented are measures of four beats with the corresponding notes below. The two Sa notes are a pickup to the main melody. The main theme of the composition is notated below:

		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
S	S	(R	-	M	P	-	S	N	R

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
S	-	-	N	S	N	S	-

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
N	S	N	S	-	R	S	R

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
S	S	n	n	D	-	P	-

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	
M	-	R	R	M	-	P	n	D

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	
P	M	G	G	-	R	G	S	-

“Tumi Rabe Nirabe” by Rabindranath Tagore

The *Rabindra sangeet* standard, “*Tumi Rabe Nirabe*,” is one of the songs chosen for the IIGF competition in 2016. This song features a rhythm in triple meter, called *dadhra*, and is a sweet love-song popularly interpreted by modern Bengali pop artists. The lyrics, translated by Rabindranath Tagore, are as follows:

Thou shalt dwell in silence in my heart like the full moon in the summer night
 Thy sad eyes shall watch over me in my wanderings
 The shadow of thy veil shall rest upon my heart
 Thy breath like the full moon in the summer night shall hover about my dreams
 Making them fragrant

“*Tumi Rabe Nirabe*”’s melody is quite simple, but the adornments on certain words for emotive expression bring the composition to life. Below the basic melody is notated with notes that are commonly embellished written in italics. Grace notes are depicted using a font in superscript.

		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
G	G	^R G	G	-GM	^R GR	-GR	G

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
	^G M	-	-	-	-	MG

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
	^G P	-Pm	-Pm	P N	-DND	Pm

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
	PD	-MP	^G M	- ^R G	GP	MPM

“Gram Chhara Oi Rangamatir Por” by Rabindranath Tagore

This song is also very popular and commonly played and sung by children. One of Tagore’s more tender songs, “*Gram Chhara Oi Rangamatir Por*” was often featured on children’s radio programming on A.I.R. and was chosen as the junior competition selection for the Indian International Guitar Festival. Translated by Rabindranath Tagore:

My King’s road that lies still before my house makes my heart wistful
 It stretches its beckoning hand towards me; its silence calls me out of my home;
 With dumb entreaties it kisses my feet at every step
 It leads me on I know not to what abandonment, to sudden gain or surprise of distress
 I know not where its windings end –
 But my King’s road that lies still before my house makes my heart wistful

While the main melody is long, it is spacious and presents only a few instances of tricky off-beats, ameliorated by the slow tempo at which it is usually played. The notation follows:

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
D	-	S	-	S	S	-	S R

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
G	-	P	P	-	D	P	- M -PM

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
^M G	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	-	-	- M	P	-	-	-DP

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
M	-	-	-PM	- G	-	- S	- R

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	-	-	M	^M G	-	R	-GR

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

“*Bidrohi*” by Kazi Nazrul Islam

The lyrics, translated by Kabir Choudhary, speak of tempestuous natural forces, culminating in the last several lines:

Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling bloody sabers
 Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet
 I the great rebel
 I am the rebel eternal
 I raise my head beyond this world
 High, ever erect and alone!¹²⁵

“*Sundari Kamala*”

A famous folk song from Bangladesh, “*Sundari Kamala*” is considered part of the *lok sangeet* genre. It was recently recorded for MTV India’s *Coke Studio* project by Ram Sampath, Usri Banerjee, and Aditi Singh Sharma. This composition comes from a long oral tradition of

¹²⁵ http://nazrul.org/nazrul_works/poems_lyrics/kabir_rebel.htm

folk and work songs which were traditionally sung by agricultural or nautical workers. *Sundari Kamala* translates as beautiful Bengali woman, as *Kamala* is a common Bengali name. Like most folk songs still resonant today, this song refers to traditional clothing, anklets and the *sari*, and also has a double entendre in the description of crossing the river from her father's from her in-laws.

Translated by Dipankar Choudhury:

(Strum strings of couplet nicely; dances Bengali beauty
 Bengali beauty's feet adorned with belled anklets chimes harmonically) chorus
 Bengali beauty wears a sari which shines in the sunshine deary me!
 Bengali beauty wears a nose ring whose pendant sways to and fro o'my
 Go to father's place from in laws we have to cross sparkling river dear me
 My set of trousers and shirt became wet and also became wet the lady's sari

“*Sundari Kamala*” is an interesting song, not based off any traditional *raga*. It has distinct parts that modulate between two different keys for the verse and chorus. The notation is written below in triple meter, *dadhra* in six beats:

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
						(S	S

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
S	-	R	g	R	S	S	R

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
n	-	S	S	R	g	S	R

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
M	-	M	G	R	-	R	g

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
R	-	S	-	S	-)		

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
-	M	G	M	P	P	P n	D n

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
P	D	-	P	-	-	n	D -PMG

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
-	P	-	d	P	-	d	-

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
P	P	P	d	P	-	M	-

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
M	-	P	M	g R	S R)		

These compositions and the information about *ragas* and *talas* remain a challenge on my given instruments of *sitar*, *tabla*, and slide-guitar. Since the compositions can be played across instruments, a compelling exercise has been to adapt musical material learned on the slide-guitar to the *sitar* and vice-versa. Once the *gats* are mastered, then comes the task of improvising a performance using these compositions as the baseline kernel of stylistic development. The melodic movements in each of these *gats* outline the intricacies of their respective *ragas*, and these movements end up being elaborated through improvisation. For these beautiful compositions, I am eternally grateful to Rhitom Sarkar, Anup Das Gupta and Debi Prasad Chatterjee. I hope I have done them justice with the notations I have provided.

Learning this repertoire has been significant to my research for many reasons. By taking lessons in the community, I was better able to understand the musical aesthetics involved in playing Hindustani classical music on slide-guitar. The patronage I was able to offer my teachers and the instrument maker contributed materially to the community. In return, I was given numerous connections for furthering my interviews along with valuable insights into the nature of the instrument. Since the slide-guitar was first adapted to play classical music, new styles for

expression have been created, sometimes mimicking other mediums, and sometimes producing new techniques best produced with a slide-guitar. The notion of a *slide-guitar ang*, has yet to catch on, nevertheless, it provides definitions that highlight what slide-guitar has to offer to Hindustani classical music. In order to see how the slide-guitar has become vernacularized it is essential to understand how the slide-guitar fits in the pantheon of classical instruments. By learning how to play the instrument, its capabilities have become clearer, revealing the foundation of its successful appreciation and acceptance.

Appendix B: Biographies

As each successive generation of slide-guitarists breaks new ground in performance and instrument design, their stories can get lost in the broader historical narrative about their community. Thus, it is important to learn about the lives and perspectives of the players themselves because their struggles and success are at the forefront of how effectively the Hindustani slide-guitar is accepted and perpetuated into the future as a respectable instrument in the classical genre. Slide-guitarists who perform in the Hindustani classical tradition face unique challenges. As a new and small community, less institutional support exists for slide-guitar preservation and dissemination than for all other classical instruments. Young players compete for patronage with other classical instrument performers using an instrument that still raises eyebrows in traditional settings and often appears at the end of a long list of preferred instruments for Hindustani classical music.

As the social life of the classical musician evolves into the twentieth century, it faces resistance from cultural, aesthetic and ideological norms based on a long tradition of aesthetics and social organization. Joining a *gharana*, or school, and attaching oneself to a venerable and reputable teacher (*guru*) constitutes the student (*shishya*) musician's most important decisions. Connecting to a lineage with a recognized tradition provides structure and community. The allegiances forged from the *guru-shishya* system become even more valuable when the family tree is only a few generations long. As such, the slide-guitar's relative youth and scarcity make the social tensions across two dominant *gharanas* particularly acute.

While many slide-guitar players have switched from light music to the classical genre, no player I encountered had become a dedicated student of one classical slide-guitar playing style, represented by Bhatt or Bhattacharya, and then switched to the other. This translates into firm

divisions of style, design and character for the musical descendants of Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya, splits the community. Many other guitarists have been unable to study with either of these luminaries, instead finding local teachers or studying with gurus who specialize in other instruments. In many ways, these rogue slide-guitarists, without direct access to slide-guitar maestros end up experimenting more with style and technique, developing new ideas and implementing them where they can.

Many of the following biographical narratives will also discuss technical aspects of playing, equipment and guitar design, reflecting personal preference and the creation process. In the first few decades of the twenty first century, many of these younger players have new challenges to contend with. Since many of today's players champion particular models, naming continues to be a common thread in my many discussions about the contemporary challenges of slide-guitar. Some players expose social divisions and rivalries. While controversial, examining them can shed light on how and why the community has changed, struggled, adapted, and ultimately celebrated their accomplishments.

Manish Pingle

A slide-guitar performer from Mumbai, Manish Pingle grew up in a musical household. When young, he took vocal lessons and learned classical music from his mother, who was a *sitar* player. At this time in the 1970s, the slide-guitar was a novelty without standardization or lineage, and had no practically no role in the classical genre. Pingle's introduction to the slide-guitar came primarily from Bollywood songs, where for over twenty five years, Sunil Ganguly (discussed in chapter four) had been playing the Hawaiian slide-guitar as an accompaniment instrument or as a lead melodic line in instrumental renditions of film music favorites. Ganguly

inspired slide-guitarists across India, and brought a predominantly Bengali tradition to a broader listening audience. Pingle soon procured a Hawaiian style slide-guitar and began studying with Hindustani slide-guitar maestro Vishnu Waliwadekar in Indore. He soon encountered recordings of the first Hindustani slide-guitarist, Brij Bhushan Kabra and sought to emulate his style. Thus began a long process of constantly refining his art.¹²⁶

Lacking access to leading slide-guitarists, Pingle experimented with many techniques, string configurations, and slide-guitar models. He initially played the Hawaiian style, tuned as DDADAD, and played with his middle-finger as lead on his right hand after observing Kabra. When Vishwa Mohan Bhatt came to Indore to perform in the 1990s, Pingle was granted an audience and opportunity to perform in front of the maestro. Since Bhatt displayed a very different technique, including the use of index and middle fingers, and a much longer bar for his left hand, Pingle revamped his style and prepared to follow up with Bhatt at his household in Jaipur. Once Pingle studied directly with Bhatt, lessons continued only erratically and technical discussions gave way to lessons conducted only via vocal recitation. Pingle returned home confused, and wondering how to advance his playing. Rather than continuing to search for a slide-guitar guru, he decided, not atypically, to study with a maestro of a different instrument. Thus began his training as a slide-guitarist with the legendary *sitarist*, Ustad Shahid Parvez in 1995.¹²⁷

Pingle's experience with his new guru shows the challenges slide-guitarists face when joining an instrumental music tradition with a standardized technique and repertoire developed over so many generations. The first *raga* he learned from Parvez was *rageshree*, but the first *gat*, or composition, was incredibly difficult on slide-guitar, especially matching the speed of his fellow students. The styles of *sitar* compositions were mismatched with the capabilities of the

¹²⁶ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

¹²⁷ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

slide-guitar, and staying in tune at high speeds was challenging. Pingle altered his technique again, incorporating his thumb into his right hand playing, which also took him down some dead-end roads. While Pingle cited Debashish Bhattacharya as an inspiration for this technique, Bhattacharya's string arrangement differed so significantly from Pingle's that it was difficult to emulate his style.¹²⁸

Pingle continued with his original slide-guitar model, the *mohan veena*-style, but kept experimenting, periodically adding an extra string, changing the set-up and spacing, all with the guidance of Conchord luthier, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas. One uncommon modification he made was to remove the slanted pick guard. While many players rest their pinky finger on the guard to elevate and stabilize the right hand while playing, Pingle prefers to float his right hand above the strings and periodically rest his wrist on the bridge. This would seem really tiring, but it prevents the player from hitting the pick guard, which when done unintentionally can be an unwelcome and jarring sound.¹²⁹

With so many modifications and adjustments, Pingle decided to work with other luthiers as well, including Steven D'Sousa from Goa. With D'Sousa, Pingle adjusted the bridge, implemented a pickup arrangement, toyed with a truss rod to strengthen the neck, and tried out solid-versus-multiple-piece neck constructions. Pingle also used other materials for his left-hand playing technique. One mainstay has been the use of Tribo tone slides, which are metal covered with plastic and which produce a quicker left-hand technique, but a reduction in accuracy since they slip more frequently.¹³⁰

Resonating with other players, Pingle encountered physical challenges, such as constantly having to look down at the fret-board to approximate pitch. This caused him some back and neck

¹²⁸ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

¹²⁹ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

¹³⁰ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

problems, which could be remedied but only with intense practice using aural clues and muscle memory. Such skills, including memorization without the use of written materials, seem to be a thing of the past. Ironically, it always seems to be poverty or lack of technology that forces players to develop these valuable skills. This was reminiscent of the anecdote about Sunil Ganguly, whose experience playing in total darkness shaped his special awareness and ear training.¹³¹

The economics of slide-guitar performance hindered Pingle as well. Under the tutelage of Parvez, he noticed that all his colleagues playing traditional Indian classical instruments could consistently get shows, book festivals and avoid critiques of their playing and authenticity. For players like Pingle, the overwhelming criticism was, “Why guitar? There are other instruments that people have actually heard about!” Others criticized the slide-guitar as an “incomplete instrument” compared to a *sitar*, for example, which allows higher speeds and greater tonal accuracy. In response, players like Pingle defend the slide-guitar, reminding us that the instrument is still young, still evolving, but fully capable. Pingle believes that succeeding generations of players will undoubtedly expand instrument’s possibilities. Already the contributions of the maestros Bhatt and Bhattacharya, have begun to bear this out.¹³²

Despite having a sterling pedigree, not being a direct student of Bhatt or Bhattacharya placed Pingle on the outskirts of the slide-guitar community, hindering his ability to develop a reputation with increased marketability. Nevertheless, Pingle persevered and took advantage of the instrument’s closeness to the capabilities of the human voice, especially the generous sustain. By keeping a balance between instrumental and vocal music, Pingle has adapted vocal repertoires to the slide-guitar. After working hard for many years to establish his name, he sees his choice of the uncommon instrument as an asset, finding much less competition within

¹³¹ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

¹³² Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

classical and fusion economies. Pingle emphasized the hybrid nature of the slide-guitar, claiming it had a little bit of a Western feel, even when playing “hardcore Indian music.” This has made the slide-guitar, in his opinion, one of the most versatile instruments in India for playing fusion music. Having toured with blues musicians, Pingle enjoys the contrast, which he describes as hearing the voices of the East and the West interacting.¹³³

By the end of our conversation, Pingle offered some insights to younger players. He suggested that one should emulate the greats, but achieve a balance. Using elemental terms, he described *gayaki*, or vocal technique as water, and *tantrakari*, or instrumental technique, as fire. These concepts were conceptually tethered to the left and right hand, or to melody and rhythm respectively. Pingle described some players as fire, some as water and the best as a balance of the two. Finally, Pingle stressed the importance of having a high quality instrument as necessary inspiration for true players to succeed in building their skills, confidence, and for proving the slide-guitar’s superiority to the world.¹³⁴

Deepak Kshirsagar

One afternoon at the Conchord workshop, I met Deepak Kshirsagar, a slide-guitarist from Baroda, and we spent the evening discussing the state of slide-guitar in India. Kshirsagar’s story was couched in the narrative of struggle, since his career falls outside of the Bhatt and Bhattacharya lineage. Kshirsagar represents the fourth generation of musicians in his family who studied primarily in the classical vocal traditions of Gwalior and Jaipur. Kshirsagar’s grandfather, B.N. Kshirsagar was a prominent vocalist and amateur *sarangi* player who, after catching the ear of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan on the radio in Mumbai, was invited to become the administrative

¹³³ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

¹³⁴ Manish Pingle, personal communication, 2015.

principal at the Jodhpur Kalakendra performing arts academy, in the same city as Khan.

Kshirsagar's father excelled in the literary world, with over fifty publications and professional connections to the Oriental Research Institute and the Sangeet Natak Research Academy.

Kshirsagar himself, chose the slide-guitar as his instrument after Vishwa Mohan Bhatt came to Jodhpur to perform with his father. Kshirsagar developed an obsession with the slide-guitar and vowed study with Bhatt.¹³⁵

Kshirsagar began his slide-guitar lessons in Indore with a Bhatt disciple, Satish Khanwalkar. Kshirsagar then returned to Jodhpur for a literature degree before enrolling in a PhD program at Rajasthan University, just blocks from Bhatt's Jaipur home. Focusing on classical music theory and the history of fifteenth to nineteenth century court musicians of Jodhpur, he nevertheless remained so devoted to his *riyaz*, or practice, that he left the program to pursue his dream of becoming a Bhatt disciple. But after fifteen years studying on the periphery of the Bhatt family legacy, Kshirsagar was not accepted. Family politics and personality clashes blocked him from entering this lineage, and thus Kshirsagar doesn't call Bhatt his guru, despite playing in a similar style on the same slide-guitar design. Currently, Kshirsagar works as an assistant professor in vocal music at the University of Baroda, performing frequently as a vocalist and Hindustani slide-guitarist.¹³⁶

For Kshirsagar one challenge to playing slide-guitar involves the difficulty of mastering the instrument itself, choosing a style, and subsequently the structure for one's instrument. He views the slide-guitar as a thousand miles behind other instruments, especially in its *taiyari*, or rhythmic technique. Playing fast melodic patterns with large intervals can be difficult on the slide-guitar compared to the *sitar*, especially without tarnishing the tonal integrity of one's playing. Bhattacharya reigns as the master of *taiyari*, distinguishing himself and others in his

¹³⁵ Deepak Kshirsagar, personal communication, 2015.

¹³⁶ Deepak Kshirsagar, personal communication, 2015.

lineage for their lightning fast playing. Despite Bhatt being less adept at top speeds, Kshirsagar prefers his style on the *mohan veena* because the melodic content and character, or *swaraz*, is much cleaner in Bhatt's playing.¹³⁷

Kshirsagar's vocal background leads him to focus on *swaraz* development, yet he also proudly demonstrates the advantages the slide-guitar holds over other Indian instruments for replicating vocal techniques, or *gayaki ang*. Kshirsagar emphasizes the advantages of studying vocal technique in tandem with slide-guitar for tonal accuracy, even though he admits the strain this puts on his time management. Thus, Kshirsagar cites another challenge, commensurate with the instrument and the (classical) music's high learning curve: the long hours of practice required to master the slide-guitar. While common to some other Indian classical instruments, at least fifteen years must be spent in serious training before proper *raga* music can be performed. Kshirsagar sacrificed his academic career to focus on *riyaz*, and was lucky to find employment in the conservatory as a vocal instructor.¹³⁸

A certain economic standing has always been necessary in the classical genre, where practice and focus demands the sidelining of other career ambitions. Unable to satisfy these requirements, a proliferation of performers have practiced a style of slide-guitar, but not mastered the artistry. Young professionals, in particular, show their prowess with speed rather than subtlety and depth in their playing. Kshirsagar sees these as shortcuts in performance careers, which young players use to craft an image. That glamour can produce more performance and teaching contracts, and to attract more students, but it inevitably dilutes the tradition.¹³⁹

The lineage competition dominates the world of Indian-slide guitar. While Kshirsagar claims players should emulate everyone, across instruments and styles, he had to also admit the

¹³⁷ Deepak Kshirsagar, personal communication, 2015.

¹³⁸ Deepak Kshirsagar, personal communication, 2015.

¹³⁹ Deepak Kshirsagar, personal communication, 2015.

advantages students accrue from mimicking and offering filial piety to one's guru. As the younger generation pursues the great names, Bhatt and Bhattacharya, less guidance and technique correction occur from the overemphasis on keeping up with star performers. When discussing *gharanas*, Kshirsagar emphasizes two perspectives. First, there's the *senia-maihar* tradition of classical music, to which most slide-guitar players adhere. Second, there's the *gharana* organized by guitar-model lineage, which polarizes the field between Bhatt and Bhattacharya. Kshirsagar saw no alternative between the styles of these two maestros, and herein lies the problem.¹⁴⁰

Siddhartha Banerjee

A young player from Varanasi, Siddhartha Banerjee hails from a Bengali family with a long musical tradition. His first inspiration, his mother Jaya Banerjee, played slide-guitar as a hobby at home and sang *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti* tunes. Growing up in this atmosphere, Banerjee describes the slide-guitar as part of his "blood genes." Working with various music teachers, Banerjee sought a diverse range of skills for experimenting on the slide-guitar. He began with Shivnath Bhattacharya in Varanasi, and then turned on to Narayan Das Chakraborty, with whom he worked to implement ideas from the *sitar*, *surbahar* (bass range sitar) and vocal techniques. Following this he practiced with Amit Bhattacharya, a *sarod* player and disciple of the famous Annapurna Devi, sister of Ali Akbar Khan. Study was a spiritual endeavor for Banerjee, but also one of exploration, leading him to continually switch teachers and work hard at mastering their repertoires.¹⁴¹

As a result, Banerjee has been challenged to translate and incorporate all the ideas his

¹⁴⁰ Deepak Kshirsagar, personal communication, 2015.

¹⁴¹ Siddhartha Banerjee, personal communication, 2015.

gurus taught him. In response, he's sought to capture the mood of other instruments—including the *sarod*, *surbahar*, *sitar*, *sarangi* (a classical bowed instrument), *bansuri* (horizontal flute), and vocal style—and incorporate them into the slide-guitar. This has uniquely shaped his slide-guitar playing since his techniques have been developed from teachers who had no experience on the instrument. A *vichitra veena* player was the closest he came to studying with a slide player. As a result, Banerjee also experimented with various material approaches to playing the slide-guitar, including different types of picks, from finger plectrums, to the *sitar's* *misrab*, to the *jabba* from *sarod*. Banerjee tried batteries, paperweights, and the *vichitra veena* slide, changing materials and textures every couple of months. He tried alternative tunings for the instrument, imitating those of *sitar* and *sarod*, and also altered the gauge of the strings and their placement. Seeking to imitate on the guitar the unique effects of other Indian classical instruments, Banerjee took mimicry to its ultimate form.¹⁴²

Eventually, Banerjee's drive for experimentation led him to custom design his own instrument with Biswas. The result was a body shape, similar to a *sarod*, with one *chikari*, four main strings, four supporting strings, and fifteen sympathetic strings. The *chikari* were placed closer to the body, much like Bhatt's style, although with a larger density of strings tuned to the *raga* rather than the tonic. The result, completed its first incarnation in 2006, Banerjee named after himself, the *siddha veena*. While the instrument continues to change, Banerjee has his own this particular model, initially designed by Biswas. Banerjee's fierce loyalty to Biswas stems from the skills he has applied to create the instrument upon Banerjee has established his reputation.¹⁴³

Among other places, Banerjee's reputation has emerged from the world of music competitions. At a young age, Banerjee won first place for guitar in the Junior Group of All India

¹⁴² Siddhartha Banerjee, personal communication, 2015.

¹⁴³ Siddhartha Banerjee, personal communication, 2015.

Prayag Sangeet Samiti in Allahabad. Using a six string Hawaiian instrument, he won by changing his low string to high *chikari* so he could play a *jhala* section at the end of his performance. Then in 2003, he won the gold medal for the senior group of the same competition, yet in an unspecified instrumental category for classical music. Banerjee recounted how his first win was a novelty since he was so young and playing the slide-guitar in a classical style shocked the judges. Having heard the judges saying things like, “it is not possible to do something really awesome on the guitar,” Banerjee was determined to break this mentality. When he returned in 2003, he proved that his slide-guitar could compete with other instruments.¹⁴⁴

While a few players like Kabra, Bhatt and Bhattacharya have found slide-guitar success in classical music, having to match their accomplishments has been daunting. Thus, Banerjee has had to push back against negative comments, such as “not everyone can be famous like Bhatt and Bhattacharya,” or “it is a guitar, it should be a second class instrument in India!” or “you can’t do anything with this instrument!” So, despite the previous generation’s inroads, Banerjee has been criticized by musical conservatives, especially in competitions and the conservatories, where the slide-guitar has not been well-incorporated into the performing arts curriculum. According to Banerjee, practically no professional degrees in slide-guitar exist, and other instruments are almost always chosen first, which can discourage a young slide-guitarist. Lucknow’s Bhatkande Conservatory and Allahabad’s Samiti have preliminary, but fragile programs and they struggle reconciling the Bhatt and Bhattacharya playing styles. Banerjee believes the naming competition inaugurated by these two great players might even be detrimental to the instrument’s future, yet he’s resigned to follow in their footsteps, naming and designing a new slide-guitar, and hoping to prove that he and other great young players are not

¹⁴⁴ Siddhartha Banerjee, personal communication, 2015.

just blind-followers or anomalies.¹⁴⁵

Kamala Shankar

The most famous woman in the classical slide-guitar playing world, Dr. Kamal Shankar grew up in Varanasi. She studied with Mani Sontakke and Amarnath Mishra, first in the vocal medium, and then playing the slide-guitar in her early teens. On guitar, she studied with Shivrath Bhattacharya, Chhanulal Mishra, and Bimalendu Mukherjee. Shankar was the first woman to graduate with a music degree while specializing in slide-guitar from Benares Hindu University (BHU) under the guidance of *vichitra veena* player, Gopal Shankar Misra. Her broad training, conservatory credentials, and status as a child prodigy contribute to her broad range of performance practices, which also includes forms of light classical music like *thumri*, *bhajans*, *kajari*, and *chaiti*. She remains one of the most active classical slide-guitar performers, frequently traveling internationally to give concerts.¹⁴⁶

While she was a headliner at the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival, we talked briefly. The day before her performance, she gave a slide-guitar workshop with Debashish Bhattacharya, where they focused on expression and improvisation of *raag kafi*. The structure and design of her instrument, custom built by Sanjay Rikhiram of Delhi,¹⁴⁷ drew considerable attention. Dubbed the *shankar veena*, Shankar has followed other musicians who have championed new types of slide-guitar, and renamed the instrument to personalize the model. Made of cedar, Shankar's instrument has distinctive and characteristic color along with other unique structural details. In particular, the spade-shaped head stock stands out since the tuning

¹⁴⁵ Siddhartha Banerjee, personal communication, 2015.

¹⁴⁶ <http://thekamalashankar.com/>

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.rikhiram.com/instruments/shankar-veena-66.html>

pegs are much more spread out than usual. The slight increase in the string length doesn't seem to affect the sound or instrument performance but it does provide an unusual visual aesthetic. The *shankar veena*'s string configuration resembles the *mohan veena*, since it places the *chikari* strings on the back side, closer to the body so they can be played with the thumb. The *shankar veena* has no sound hole, thus producing a warm tone more closely resembling the standard *veena* than the bright timbres of the guitar.¹⁴⁸

While I haven't completed a full interview with Shankar, many younger women players I've encountered at competitions and festivals cite her as their inspiration. Shankar has demonstrated that Indian classical slide-guitar is not just a boys club. Since many women have entered the Hawaiian guitar scene in Kolkata, the classical scene's low gender ratio for slide-guitar players remains similar to the rest of the instrumental categories. Many young players today hope to follow in Shankar's footsteps to prove that gender has nothing to do with playing ability.

Poly Varghese

One of the few slide-guitarists from South India, Poly Varghese comes originally from Kerala, and is now based in Chennai. He stands out amongst other slide-guitarists because he emphasizes philosophy and spirituality, derived from a lifetime of travel throughout India, interacting with various mystical communities. Originally having a Christian background, Varghese left the comfort of his community to pursue a path of self-discovery, taking him to the West Bengal jungles, to the Rajasthan deserts, and then abroad to dozens of countries. We met and conversed during the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival in Kolkata. We

¹⁴⁸ Observations gathered from attending a slide-guitar workshop with Kamala Shankar, I.I.G.F. 2015.

communicated again after the event, and I spoke to him again in 2016, over Skype, at his home in Chennai.

Varghese defines his performance career as a personal journey, aiming to understand the root and divinity of both sound and silence. He described his fascination with sound and representation with an anecdote from his youth that blended ideas of anthropology and psychoacoustics. At the age of 8, on the playground, Varghese began considering the power of sound in the timbres emanating from the schoolyard bell. Described as the interaction between two forms of metal, to Varghese, this sound represented a modern age, one of human detachment from the natural where technology rules supreme. Yet through this same technology, humanity reconnects with the eternal, through the history of civilization and the knowledge that has been passed down through the generations.¹⁴⁹

Varghese noted that the bow was the first instrument used by humans, which without manipulation is silent and without energy. With the tension brought to the arc by strings, people can externalize their voices, creating a medium outside themselves that produces sound only with the player's intention. Like the energy in a musical bow, the meeting of metal on metal was a sound Varghese viewed as representing humanity's development. It is a timbre he recognized one day while watching a poorly broadcast television program of Hindustani classical music featuring Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. While the image was obscured, Varghese connected profoundly with the sound and resolved to seek out Bhatt as his guru. He began sending letters to Bhatt, but he received no reply.¹⁵⁰

Throughout his formative years in South India, Varghese became adept at Karnatic music while attending the Kerala Kalamandalam University of Arts and Culture, focusing his studies on the *mridangam*, a percussion instrument steeped in both the structural and mathematical. While

¹⁴⁹ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

¹⁵⁰ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

still interested in string instruments, his modest family background and shortage of instruments made it difficult for him to pursue any real training. He also described feeling disconnected from the classical music world because of the prejudice against non-Hindus. Varghese has experienced violence and persecution because he has been deemed polluted by temple worshippers. These experiences propelled him away from organized religion, and he resolved to set forth on a personal journey with nothing but his *mridangam* strapped to his back.¹⁵¹

Making his way north into rural West Bengal, Poly settled in Santiniketan, a small town made famous by the establishment of the Vishwa Bharati University, the institution Rabindranath Tagore created to teach humanities and the arts. Santiniketan also provides an important cultural center for the *Baul* tradition, a mystical and philosophical practice focused on esoteric poetry, ecstatic performance, and tantric ritual. There he became a student of Basudev Baul, a leading performer of *Baul* music, while also attending the Sangeet Bhavan's music program at the University to learn Hindustani vocal music and percussion instruments. Varghese continued studying film, literature, and languages, embracing the love of knowledge, while also avoiding cultural attachments. He noted, "to find oneself you must cut off your root and travel. The root is the ego, the culture, the religion, but only until you abandon these things will you truly find yourself."¹⁵²

Similarly, Varghese described his philosophy of sound: "I am always searching for the silence, because all sound and intention is structure, but all returns to silence."¹⁵³ Varghese finds inner peace and truth in the creation and destruction of musical expression and emotion. "Tears are the truth of life" he stated, and once they have dried, oneness can be achieved.¹⁵⁴ These perspectives resonate with *Baul* philosophy, a syncretic tradition that borrows heavily from

¹⁵¹ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

¹⁵² Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

¹⁵³ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

¹⁵⁴ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

Sufism and tantric Hindu traditions. Within the rituals of musical ecstasy, *Baul* musicians find their truth. Thus, many *Bauls*, including Varghese, typically reject organized religion, material possessions, wealth accumulation, and rigid cultural norms, in favor of continuing their quest for self-realization through performance.¹⁵⁵

As we discussed these philosophical ideas, it remained important to understand how Varghese has experienced the economic and social aspects of the performance community and the broader musical profession in India. He seemed unbothered by the criticism he has faced for not maintaining traditional boundaries and structures in his performances. He announces his performances as merely personal explorations of sound, with and without structures, which the audience is welcome to join by listening. While Varghese remained deeply involved in these personal and spiritual explorations, he did not lose his fascination for string instruments. When he lived with a Bhutanese friend, he played on an electric guitar, developing a unique style derived from his vocal training at the Sangeet Bhavan. Soon after he learned that Vishwa Mohan Bhatt would be playing a Kolkata concert. Varghese arrived at Bhatt's hotel with the electric guitar, prepared to play for his prospective guru. Bhatt immediately recognized him from his letters, was impressed by his musicality and dedication, and invited him to study slide-guitar in Jaipur, Rajasthan.¹⁵⁶

After many years under Bhatt's tutelage, Varghese has become a well-known slide-guitarist with a uniquely shaped *mohan veena* that he plays with a very long slide implement, unlike any other. While Varghese performs all sections of the *raga*, including the *alap*, *jor*, and *jhala*, he can be his freest and most expressive in the *alap* portions due to its lack of structure and rhythmic periodicity. This preference aligns well with his general philosophy against constricting structures. He views culture and religion similarly, expressing his sadness about the condition of

¹⁵⁵ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

¹⁵⁶ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

his homeland. India, he noted, constantly conflicts with itself. The attachment to tradition, politics, religion and conservatism creates prejudice he finds toxic. I pointed out that most nations, cultures and individuals struggle with these same issues as they try to create a distinct identity and protect tradition. Few opt for the itinerant and unstable life of a *Baul* musician. Nevertheless, Varghese, with his radical philosophy, is quite beloved in the slide-guitar community, as many see him as a being on an enlightened path.

Returning to the material world, we discussed the future of the slide-guitar community. The instrument hasn't made much headway into South Indian musical genres, and Varghese senses little interest in slide-guitar, even from players of the *gottuvadhyam*, another South Indian instrument using a slide implement. When Varghese was invited to the guitar festival in Kolkata in 2015, he arrived with great hope and joy to see so many players coming together to celebrate their shared medium of expression. After a few days, though, he felt the festival was less a celebration of the community and more a celebration of the organizers. While he hopes for a more democratic future at the festival, he recognizes how social and political contentions in the slide-guitar community will make that very difficult.¹⁵⁷

Mallikarjuna Kolvi

Born into a musical family, Mallikarjuna Kolvi is another South Indian slide-guitar player. He began vocal lessons with his father and then studied in Arya Sangeet Vidyalay in Bombay before settling in Bangalore. During his childhood, Kolvi was introduced to Sunil Ganguly's slide-guitar playing from films and the radio, and remembers listening every night at 9 p.m. to the *Saz aur Avaz* show, hoping to hear the Hawaiian guitar. By the time Kolvi reached

¹⁵⁷ Poly Varghese, personal communication, 2016.

college, he had listened intently to the records of Brij Bhushan Kabra, and decided he wanted to focus his musical energies into playing slide-guitar even though he had no instrument and no teacher. When Kolvi moved to Bangalore he found his first Hawaiian guitar teacher, Wayan Subbarao, a staff artist at All-India-Radio Bangalore with experience on many different instruments. Kolvi began learning in the *vichitra veena* style with very slow tempos and vocal phrasing.¹⁵⁸

Kolvi eventually caught on to the playing of Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and sought to emulate his style. Living so far from Jaipur, Kolvi found his studies frustrating but kept hope alive by making inroads socially with the Bhatt family. After a few years he visited Jaipur and received Bhatt's blessing, which for the devout Kolvi, meant he had to continue pursuing the instrument regardless of the challenges. After ten years of practice he was finally able to perform for Bhatt, describing it as the highlight of his life. Since then he has received some small suggestions, arrangements, and a few compositions from Bhatt but has struggled to find his way, especially within the conservatory structure. In the years before his encounter with Bhatt, Kolvi studied music at Allahabad University. He completed four years of training but when he tried to pursue a Master's degree, the institution suggested he change instruments. Without slide-guitar in the curriculum, conservatory work was a dead end for Kolvi. Unable to change the curriculum, he dropped out. Thus, in my conversations with Kolvi, he stressed this difficult challenge for Indian slide-guitarists: a lack of institutional support. This leaves aspiring players scrambling for access to the maestros, who themselves face busy touring and teaching schedules all over the world. Players raised this issue again and again, some blaming the instrument's relative newness while others emphasize the institutional conservatism of Indian classical music.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Mallikarjuna Kolvi, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Mallikarjuna Kolvi, personal communication, 2014.

Kuntala Ray

Another slide-guitarist I met at the Conchord workshop, Kuntala Ray performs the Hawaiian style of slide-guitar in light music genres and the *hansa veena* (a slide-guitar model championed by Barun Kumar Pal), in the classical style. Coming from a musical family in Kolkata, Ray initially studied with guitarist Uttam Chakraborty, and then focused on Hindustani classical music with Barun Kumar Pal. Aside from working within the *Senia-Maihar* tradition practiced by most classical instrumentalists, Ray has dedicated herself to learning the Vishnupur tradition with *sitarist* Soumitra Lahiri.¹⁶⁰ Among a minority of players versed in the Vishnupur system, Ray holds a unique place among slide-guitarists. Heavily based on *dhrupad* music, the translation of the Vishnupur style to the slide-guitar produces more introspective and lengthy *alap* sections and an emphasis on lower bass-range tonalities. This rare school of performance has generated some interest in the scholarly community and thus experiencing some recent resurgence. As discussed by Capwell (1993), the Vishnupur *gharana*'s decline was largely due to lack of patronage and geographic remoteness from major cosmopolitan centers in West Bengal. Now that practitioners have moved to urban centers, the tradition is returning, albeit slowly.

Ray's *hansa veena* model of slide-guitar has a body much more closely modeled after the South Indian *veena*. The very long neck and teardrop-shaped body provides a warm tone yet it is slightly quieter than the slide-guitars modeled after guitar-shaped bodies. Ray typically performs classical music on the *hansa veena* but finds the Conchord models more suitable for light music, both because of tonal and visual aesthetics. People expect a more "folksy" looking instrument for the light music genres like *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*. The aesthetic comes from the way the poet authors of these genres themselves lived, without extravagance. When I met her, Ray was having work done on her instrument to adjust the height of the strings against the neck. She

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.kuntalaray.com/>.

praised Biswas's work and offered to help me keep in communication with him after I returned to the United States.¹⁶¹

Ray noted that women have always played an important role in the informal, private life of the slide-guitar. While practicing vocal music and slide-guitar at home, many women (as in other Indian communities, as well) have been blocked from public performances by men in their families.¹⁶² Ravi Shankar's first wife, Annapurna Devi, provides perhaps the most famous example of this cultural patriarchy. Notoriously jealous, Shankar forbade her from playing publicly.¹⁶³ Ray confirmed the proliferation of women slide-guitar performers, claiming they are concentrated within the light music genres where the social rules are less rigid and where women have become prominent contributors to the performance scene.

Kolkata itself has much more liberal gender attitudes than most Indian cities. Famous for its education and cosmopolitanism, Kolkata features many more performance opportunities for women. Even outside the urban center, Bengali culture has been more egalitarian in the arts and performance, likely due to the matrilineal roots of Bengali culture. Ray occupies the position of senior slide-guitarist. She is cited by young women performers at the slide-guitar competitions, who find her inspiring as a highly skilled performer. Ray's diverse training and nuanced and meticulous rendition of classical *ragas* provides virtuosity equal to the speed and complexity brandished by other performers. Her promotion of the Vishnupur *gharana's* aesthetics also contributes a distinctly Bengali approach to classical and light music performance.

¹⁶¹ <http://www.kuntalaray.com/>.

¹⁶² Kuntala Ray, personal communication, 2015.

¹⁶³ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Pandit-Ravi-Shankar-was-unhappy-as-I-was-drawing-more-applause-Annapurna-Devi/articleshow/41379379.cms>.

Debasis Chakraborty

One evening in Kolkata, I spoke at length by phone with Debasis Chakraborty, among the few players coming from a family of professional slide-guitar players going back a few generations. His father, Madhushudan Chakraborty, was a guitarist during the 1970s and a student of Sunil Ganguly, from whom he learned and performed mostly *Rabindra sangeet*. During this time, his father—like many other players—was emulating players like Ganguly, Kazi Aniruddho and Batuk Nandy. During Chakraborty's childhood he listened to Kazi Aniruddho sing and play steel guitar, frequented local concerts during the 1960s, and began playing in 1971 at the age of ten. In our conversation, Chakraborty illuminated more so than other musicians the cultural environment of this period.¹⁶⁴

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the cultural field changed tremendously in West Bengal. The increasing brutality used by the Eastern Pakistani government against the Bengali population (in what is now Bangladesh) provoked the 1971 Bangladeshi war of independence. Politically, Bengali cultural unity across the India-East Pakistan border was at risk, as well as the preservation of the Bengali language itself, which East Pakistan suppressed in favor of Urdu. Bengali cultural icons like Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam were crucial to the population whose cultural identity was marginalized by the ruling military government. Chakraborty affirmed how many West Bengalis thought they should support other Bengalis, even though they were wary of the flood of refugees crossing over the border, fleeing the violence.¹⁶⁵ Kolkata in the 1970s featured large refugee camps, which developed a reputation for crime, disease, and backwardness. The camp populations were slowly integrated into Kolkata's general population and even today many migrant and lower-class workers, especially in the Muslim

¹⁶⁴ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

community, descend from these large refugee communities.

In this context, it was at first challenging to find a narrative for slide-guitar in this tumultuous era. The instrument had apparently migrated to Dhaka from Kolkata in the 1950s, and was seemingly just as popular in Bangladesh's capital as in Kolkata. The cassette age provoked another revolution, expanding slide-guitar's reach inside and outside of India. During the 1980s cassettes became the primary means of sharing and distributing music. Explored by Peter Manuel (2008), the cassette increased portability and dramatically changed the way Indians consumed music. Fans could trade and copy music cheaply, thus expanding the range and popularity of slide-guitar music. But this also increased access to other forms of music, especially popular music from the United States.

With these historical changes and the new technology that came with them, a great shift took place in the slide-guitar community. Perhaps due to this and generational changes, the music performed primarily on the slide-guitar began to wane. Hindi film tunes, Bengali modern song, *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*—all forms of light music, began to lose some of its audience.¹⁶⁶ Many younger listeners gravitated towards Western music and slide-guitar music began to lose meaning.

By the late 1980s, Chakraborty was completing an advance degree and his father took him to learn classical music with Barun Kumar Pal.¹⁶⁷ At the time, Pal was working with All-India-Radio and with Ravi Shankar. Eventually Chakraborty studied with Brij Bhushan Kabra in the mid-1990s and also, along the way worked with Jyotin Bhattacharya, a *Maihar gharana* stalwart, disciple, and secretary to Ustad Allaadin Khan. Chakraborty recalled working with Kabra, whose first question was “why did you come to me?” Chakraborty told him he came to

¹⁶⁶ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

play in a better way. But Kabra replied, “first, I’ll teach you how to be a good human being.”¹⁶⁸ To study with Kabra, Chakraborty moved to Jodhpur, which impressed him as a holy place, due to the presence of great players like Ali Akbar Khan and his student Dil Kabra, and Vasant Kabra, another student of Annapurna Devi. In Jodhpur, Chakraborty performed mostly in duet, or *jugalbandi*, with the Kabra family and routinely stayed up all night, inspired by the music.¹⁶⁹

From Chakraborty, I learned a little about the story of his guru, Brij Bhushan Kabra, as India’s first classical player of slide-guitar. Out of curiosity, Kabra first bought a slide-guitar from a Bombay shop, taking it back home to Jodhpur. Kabra’s father was a businessman, *veena* player, and disciple of Inayat Khan. When the elder Kabra saw his son take up the slide-guitar, he immediately rejected it, advocating the *sitar*, *sarod*, or *veena* instead. Insistent, the young Kabra was allowed to play it only if he performed Hindustani classical music. Kabra’s family connections allowed him to study with Ali Akbar Khan, from whom he learned exercises and short practical compositions called *paltas*. After a year with Khan, Kabra returned, played for his father, and gained his blessing. Kabra’s subsequent tours around India established his reputation and inspired many players to adopt the slide-guitar and play *raga* music.¹⁷⁰

When Chakraborty first encountered Kabra, the slide-guitar was already established, and some players were already adding new looks, techniques, and arrangements. Chakraborty was content to begin with the simplest Hawaiian guitar to learn the basics, but was nevertheless intrigued by new models emerging from the Kolkata workshops. Kabra urged him to change the string configuration and add a *chikari*, after which he taught Chakraborty compositions from the *Senia-Maihar* tradition. Early on, the most affordable Hawaiian slide-guitars came from the Givson and Hobner companies in Kolkata, so they all required modification before being played

¹⁶⁸ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

in a classical context.¹⁷¹

With so few university-level performance programs offering slide-guitar in India, Chakraborty established a degree program at the private, Mangalayatan University, close to Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. The program establishes a four-year graduation schedule, with a two year Master's degree and a one year Master's of Philosophy (M.PH.I.L.), which focuses on Indian classical music and the Hawaiian style, specifically for the slide-guitar. Since its inception, programs have cropped up at Delhi University and Bhatkande University, where the guitar has been incorporated into a Western program as well as a Hindustani music program. Chakraborty still feels the more famous players aren't "doing their job" introducing the instrument to other Indian universities, especially public ones.¹⁷² Nevertheless, he remains optimistic, hoping the university grants commission will notice the work he and his compatriots have done to standardize a curriculum, and thus fund more slide-guitar programs in Indian universities.

Prakash Sontakke

Raised in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, Prakash Sontakke learned music from his parents, including the slide-guitar. His father, R.B. Sontakke, was a disciple of Omkanarth Thakur, a venerable figure in the area, transmitting both vocal and instrumental traditions of classical music. Sontakke's mother, Mani Sontakke was the first female slide-guitar performer in India. She had a long performance and teaching career, mentoring many well-known slide-guitarists.¹⁷³ At an early age, Prakash Sontakke began experimenting with sound, creating new textures and timbres with acoustic instruments, and soon becoming fascinated with electronic sound manipulations. Sontakke's father warned him that the authorities will be judgmental to new

¹⁷¹ Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁷² Debasis Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁷³ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

ideas, yet encouraged him to persevere because nothing grows without resistance. Taking this advice, Sontakke has become a pioneer among slide-guitarists to use electronics when playing the classical, light music and fusion traditions.¹⁷⁴

I interviewed Sontakke over the phone and then met him at the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival. He had just completed his dissertation (2015) on practical aspects of Indian slide-guitar playing and was eager to discuss his research and gear with me. Sontakke commonly uses reverb and delay effects to replicate the sound of sympathetic and *chikari* strings on electric, Hawaiian style instruments. He developed an electric instrument, the *swar veena*, which melds the structure of the *swarmandal*—a string instrument commonly used by vocalists to maintain the *raga* tonality, and the *chitraveena*—another Indian slide-instrument. Sontakke removed his instrument's sympathetic and *chikari* because he found the high register notes were too harsh and disruptive to the sound, which he prefers to be smooth and meditative. He uses volume adjustments to fade sound in and out, and to soften the attack on the strings, while incorporating octave pedals to transpose the pitch both down and up in the appropriate contexts of *raga* music. Bass-range tonalities on the slide-guitar were one of the first new territories Sontakke explored. The electronics create a unique style and tonal subtleties, allowing him to focus on sound quality differently than most slide-guitar techniques.¹⁷⁵

Sontakke uses a range of acoustic instruments as well, exploring outside India to find slide instruments, including a lap steel, customized tear drop Weissenborn built by Bill Asher in California. The hollow fret board of this guitar provides a rich full sound and has been used in Hawaiian style guitars since the 1940s (Troutman 2016)¹⁷⁶. Sontakke talked about using a National Tricorn, a model made by the original U.S. slide-guitar producers. He also uses a dobro

¹⁷⁴ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁷⁵ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁷⁶ Troutman extensively discusses the development of the Hawaiian slide-guitar and its structure in the United States, focusing on the early performers like Joseph Kekuku.

resonator by Paul Beard Goldtone, and other instruments by Givson, Grason, Crona, Tarafdar, Radhakrishna Sharma and Bhaba Sindhu Biswas.¹⁷⁷

Besides Indian music, Sontakke discussed his other influences including the Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd, citing their experimentations with sound in particular. Other Western slide-guitarists, including Jerry Douglass, Derek Trucks, Bob Brozman and Jeff Beck, have inspired Sontakke to play with volume and dense effects and textures, and making him wonder, “why not electronics in Indian classical music?” Using this approach, Sontakke has developed an extensive performance career with diverse ensemble projects and fusion groups. He also successfully produced the 2013 Global Music Festival in Bangalore, dedicating it to his parents and teachers. From these activities, Sontakke has built an international reputation, and Debashish Bhattacharya invited him to judge the first Indian International Guitar Festival’s competitions in 2015.

Despite his success, Sontakke has also faced a lot of resistance to the electronics in his performances. He encounters two types of audiences: First, some appreciate the sounds and structures he produces without preconceived notions. These listeners accept new sounds and methods of producing music regardless of genre. The second type of audience criticizes his electronics and his non-traditional instruments. While typically only partially educated in classical traditions, they nevertheless attack what Sontakke is trying to do.¹⁷⁸

Conservative audiences prize acoustic-ness, but often only in a visual context. Sontakke illustrates this with a story about how performances are marketed and described. Once he played a concert billed as a classical music event, but performed with an electronic instrument and effects. An audience member enjoyed the music tremendously and asked him what instrument he had used. When Sontakke explained his electronics and his electric guitar, the listener scolded him for not using a traditional instrument. This bothered Sontakke so he marketed his next event

¹⁷⁷ <http://prakashsontakke.com/>.

¹⁷⁸ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

as a mixed electronic fusion, but performed the same classical forms. This time he received only praise from the audience, thus revealing the sensitivity and protectiveness about the classical, not necessarily mediated by sound or performance quality, but rather by visual and material expectations.¹⁷⁹

Modern music has a place in Indian society that is strictly segregated from the Indian classical music world. Nationalist sentiments still associate certain technologies with the foreign, and many treasure the purity of keeping the music and its production frozen in an idealized form. Amusingly, Sontakke told me how Vishwa Mohan Bhatt came to him to discuss electronics and contacts to help him incorporate these effects, yet he nevertheless worried about keeping them secret from the viewing public.¹⁸⁰

Sontakke and I discussed how tradition, when strictly enforced by conservative ideologues, undermines innovation and new traditions, thus negating positive contributions to music and culture. In most Hindustani classical contexts for plucked instruments, tone is modeled after the *sitar*. The primacy of the *sitar* tone and vocabulary fosters unfair expectations for new instruments like the slide-guitar. “*Sitar* has ruled for too long” according to Sontakke, but many are not ready to accept other ways of playing classical music.¹⁸¹ We discussed how Western classical music has developed into exciting contemporary forms, where experimentation is a boon to new performers and composers who add to the vocabulary of instruments. Compared to the Western classical world’s openness to newness, traditionalism reigns from the Indian perspective. Sontakke feels that “traditionalists think that going too modern is going to kill the music and the tradition. But tradition never dies, people live it constantly and change it

¹⁷⁹ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁸¹ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

constantly by making their own.”¹⁸²

According to Sontakke, traditions are so carefully guarded in India that despite obvious changes, like the creation of new *ragas*, hegemony controls those developments, mediated by powerful families or institutions. As a result, he fears the classical world is shrinking, making itself obsolete by holding on to the idealized form. Sontakke continued, “traditionalism is preservation above a human level, almost mechanical and judgmental when it doesn't fit into preconceived notions. Newness must be cloaked, masked, and framed in a certain way, so that you can't say classical music has electronics.”¹⁸³ Many slide-guitarists experience such resistance, where musical authorities allow only a narrow spectrum of instruments, thus shrinking innovation by sanctifying a golden era (generally the 1960s because of figures like Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, and Nikhil Banerjee) when the great players were allowed to experiment. The result now appears more like codifying or ossifying the tradition.

Yet new music also has its problems. Sontakke worries about new classical players offering only shallow *raga* music expositions that are “poppish” because they focus exclusively on one sort of virtuosity: speed. While I noted that speed characterized younger players in practically all musical genres, Sontakke elaborated on his critique, “some skills can be hollow, so beyond skill there is expression and innovation that is possible at any speed or section of the *raga*.”¹⁸⁴ The flashy technicality of high-tempo playing (*drut* is the term used to describe high tempo compositions or rhythmic cycles of 200+ bpm) is given the most attention nowadays, commonly omitting bass registers and *alap* improvisation, where tonal and expressive virtuosity are important aesthetic factors. Sontakke echoes other innovators in critiquing “blind followers” of any individual player, stressing how mimicry alone doesn't contribute to the establishment of

¹⁸² Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁸³ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

new instruments. Unfortunately, shallow playing still is associated with the slide-guitar because of its association with popular music forms and styles. Finally, Sontakke stressed the increased instrument quality and tonal character, which he attributes to modern luthiers, especially Bhaba Sindhu Biswas. Changing structures and making improvements to the instrument's sound are crucial to the slide-guitar's future.¹⁸⁵

Somranjan Chakraborty

A leading player of classical and light music (or *loghu sangeet*) in Kolkata, Somranjan Chakraborty has been a prominent slide-guitarist for more than fifteen years. Chakraborty began studying classical music to expand his repertoire, and has become one of Debashish Bhattacharya's foremost disciples, as well as an instructor at the Bhattacharya School of Universal Music in Tollygunge. Over tea at his home near the Dakkineswar temple in North Kolkata, we discussed how the local music scene has changed over his lifetime, as well as his personal journey across genres.¹⁸⁶

Chakraborty began playing slide-guitar when he was four years old, guided by a close family friend. Light music genres were heard in his household and his mother also played some slide-guitar. Soon, under the guidance of Ashish Mitra, Chakraborty learned Hindi and Bengali film songs, *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti* on the Hawaiian slide-guitar. In his twenties, he began studying with Bhattacharya, making the shift to the Hindustani classical style of music. This shift opened many new opportunities for Chakraborty's career. In his opinion, the light music scene, especially for *Rabindra sangeet* and *Nazrul geeti*, had become stale and was declining by the 1980s. While many Bengalis still love the music, the way it was played on slide-

¹⁸⁵ Prakash Sontakke, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ Somranjan Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

guitar was so closely tethered to the vocal notation that it left no room for innovation, much less improvisation. This provoked the instrument's move into other more exciting and flexible genres like Hindustani classical music. Chakraborty also reiterated the influence of cassette tape technology during the 1980s, which flooded the market with affordable copies of old music, making new "facsimiles" unappealing since the originals could be readily found at the same price. International interest has also initiated the shift. According to Chakraborty, in Europe, the Americas, and the South Pacific, interest in Indian classical music has been growing steadily, enough to rival its patronage in India. Aware of the opportunities abroad, many slide-guitarists, like Chakraborty, have pursued classical music as a career choice.¹⁸⁷

Somranjan and I spent some time playing songs from different genres, discussing the universal appeal of the Tagore song, "*Jodi Tor Dak Shune*," commonly referred to as "*Ekla Cholo Re*." Playing a Conchord—brand *chaturangui* with six main strings and two front *chikari*, Somranjan demonstrated the Tagore song, mixing single note melodies and chords provided by the open tuning in D major. The chords were reminiscent of the Hawaiian style and Chakraborty used generous tremolo and long melismatic phrases. Playing a *ghazal* song, he explained the music's popularity in informal and non-classical settings. It resonates with romantic lyricism, and since it is generally not based off of pure *ragas*, it allows the player to "break" the tonality without audience protest. This led us to discuss the importance of setting for Indian music performances. In Chakraborty's experience, mixing classical and light music genres in a concert setting is quite taboo, and one should ask permission to play light music in a classical setting, and only at the end of a concert.¹⁸⁸

Wondering how cultural changes contributed to how the slide-guitar has evolved, Chakraborty referred back to Tao Moe in the 1930s, when upper class Bengalis would come to

¹⁸⁷ Somranjan Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Somranjan Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

see him and his daughter at Park Street bars in Kolkata. Not only was the slide-guitar suitable for Bengali music, but the model ensemble presented by Tao Moe included women, displaying a lack of gender segregation in performance contexts. Between the 1940s and 1970s the guitar reigned as a light music instrument, but Chakraborty offered an additional explanation for its decline. He blamed the changing climate of home-musicking. By the 1970s, television had become widespread in India, replacing music in the home and undermining the light music genres common in informal settings.¹⁸⁹ Less popular on guitar right now, many players nevertheless keep playing light music, thus increasing the competition for fewer performance opportunities. Light music seems to thrive only in the home and in dedicated institutional programs.

Experiencing the criticism of the slide-guitar in the classical genre, Chakraborty recounted a 2015 performance in Kolkata where a newspaper critic wrote that he was completely out of tune. Chakraborty spent all night listening to the recording of his performance, but could find no observable tonal mistakes. He soon learned that the critic had only arrived at the concert during the final, or *jhala* section. Rather than evaluating the actual merits of his performance, Chakraborty believes he was targeted by the conservative bias toward him and his instrument. Elsewhere he's heard claims that "you can't play Indian classical music on Western instruments," yet other Western instruments, like the violin, mandolin, and harmonium have long been integrated into Indian classical music.¹⁹⁰

Like Prakash Sontakke, Chakraborty believes that much conservative criticism is purely visual. Preconceived ideas about how a traditional or classical instrument should look subjects players with unadorned guitars to greater criticism. For example, Chakraborty's guru, Debashish Bhattacharya, often performs with his other guitars on a stand behind him so the audience can

¹⁸⁹ Somranjan Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁹⁰ Somranjan Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

see the instrument better. Since a slide-guitar lies on the lap, however, it offers a poor profile, making it difficult to project the visual aesthetics to the audience. Visual aesthetics have also changed in the past fifty years, becoming much more elaborate and fancy, and ornamented instruments are expensive. Chakraborty noted how in the 1960s, most famous performers wore very plain *kurtas*, but nowadays many wear gold necklaces and fancy wedding-style *sherwanis*, and spend lavishly to adorn their instruments.¹⁹¹ Young players seem more like aspiring film stars than humble exponents of an ancient tradition, and this bravado also translates into their playing.

Today, fewer performances of Indian classical music happen, and they're often not allowed the timeframe to properly develop a *raga*. Important sections get compressed and players use speed to dazzle audiences rather than a virtuosity of expression or tonal subtlety. These musical developments mirror the flashy imagery promoted in performance. *Vlambit* (or very slow tempo compositions) *gats* are increasingly rare and many of the other sections like the *jor* and *jhala* are faster and shorter.

My encounter with Somranjan Chakraborty has been fruitful for his insights and generous contacts. During the second Indian International Guitar Festival, he facilitated the light music competition and led an ensemble of students called the guitar symphony, which headlined the day's events at Jadavpur University. While I've not yet secured a proper interview with his guru, Debashish Bhattacharya, Chakraborty has represented the *gharana*. Among other things, I've learned much about the Bhattacharya School of Universal Music, where I hope to attend courses and learn more about the slide-guitar from Bhattacharya himself.

¹⁹¹ Somranjan Chakraborty, personal communication, 2014.

Koel Saha

A well-known classical and light music performer, Koel Saha is a senior disciple of Debashish Bhattacharya. A leading exponent of her guru's slide-guitar playing style in Kolkata, Saha has been a frequent performer around Northern India, including the 2015 Indian International Slide Guitar festival.

Having communicated with Saha by phone, I soon encountered her recordings while studying *sitar* with my guru, Debi Prasad Chatterjee. One of Chatterjee's disciples had coordinated an ensemble performance of classical compositions featuring Koel Saha as the representative slide-guitar performer. Currently employed at Kolkata's All-India Radio as the resident slide-guitarist, Saha has become one of the most prominent Kolkata-based women slide-guitarists. At the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival, she performed a *jugalbandi* (duet) with Somranjan Chakraborty, taking turns with him playing cycles of improvisations. Aside from our brief phone conversation and introduction at the festival, I've been unable to interview Saha in more depth about Kolkata's slide-guitar scene.

Dipon Sarkar

Perhaps the best classical slide-guitar player in Bangladesh, Dipon Sarkar performs primarily on the *chaturangui*, a slide-guitar model designed by Debashish Bhattacharya. Sarkar began playing at a very young age in Dhaka and has since received several honors from the Bangladeshi artist community, including the gold medal for the national guitar competition. Today Sarkar is a popular special-grade artist of Bangladesh Betar and an A-grade artist of Bangladesh Television. His numerous accolades come from a lifetime of promoting slide-guitar in both the classical and light music forms.

Sarkar and I met at the 2015 Indian International Guitar Festival and we reconnected at the following year's festival. Sarkar began studying slide-guitar under the guidance of Samir Chanda, a famous Hawaiian guitarist from the city of Mymensingh. In 1996, Sarkar traveled from Bangladesh to India where he studied with aging Sunil Ganguly. Since then he has become a disciple of Debashish Bhattacharya, and has introduced the Bhattacharya style and instrument to many players in Bangladesh.

Sarkar and I discussed some of the realities of playing classical music with a slide-guitar in Bangladesh. Especially in cosmopolitan Dhaka, Sarkar found that public performances of classical music and light music were well-received, especially as the light genres pay tribute to important figures in Bengali history and culture. Sarkar commented that music was not open to everyone, and that there were conservative segments of Bangladesh's Muslim society that rejected music as a decadence. Because of this, women were even less likely to perform in public in Bangladesh than in India.

Despite conservative resistance to music in Bangladesh, Sarkar finds the atmosphere to very supportive, especially within the last ten years. His guru Bhattacharya remarked how he had played huge concerts attended by thousands of people in Bangladesh, all of whom paid to attend the performance. In contrast to India, Bhattacharya complained that it was very difficult to get local audiences to pay any money to support performers.¹⁹² Sarkar reiterated this lack of financial support in India, noting that he has been more successful crafting a career for himself in Bangladesh and only now is making headway in the Indian slide-guitar scene.

¹⁹² Debashish Bhattacharya, personal communication, 2015.

Subhash Ghosh

Currently residing in Chandigarh, Punjab, Subhash Ghosh is a slide-guitarist with a flair for custom designed instruments. Ghosh grew up in a musical family, learning *tabla* and vocal music before turning to the slide-guitar in his early college years when he became a fan of the instrument for *Rabindra sangeet* and Hindi film music. He studied briefly with Sunil Ganguly, and more extensively with Ganguly's senior disciple, Dipak Roy. Besides mastering the Hawaiian-style Bengali repertoire, Ghosh began composing music, which eventually led to his current position as composer for Bollywood films and the Festival of India organization. In the 1970s, he first heard Brij Bhushan Kabra and decided to switch to a purely classical form of playing, seeking out Barun Kumar Pal as a teacher. Ghosh's family wholeheartedly accepted his choice to play the slide-guitar, especially because they were vocalists. He recounted listening with his parents to Bade Gulam Ali Khan, Kartik Kumar and many classical and Bollywood singers, and then emulating their vocal flourishes on the guitar.¹⁹³

After college, Ghosh went to Delhi to meet the renowned classical player, *sarod* maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. From this he learned that the quality of his instrument was a roadblock against his full acceptance into the Hindustani classical community. Inspired by his science background, Ghosh began to systematically alter his instrument and technique, first emulating the *sarod* style. This type of playing we identified as *sarod-baj*, or *sarod* style, a term meant to distinguish the technique from vocal or other instrument styles. *Sarod-baj* is characterized by fast picking on the main string, with sharp accents and a heavy rhythmic emphasis. Despite changes to his technique, Ghosh remained dissatisfied with his instrument, and thus sought a custom design from Bhaba Sindhu Biswas.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

Constructed by Biswas, Ghosh's first instrument design combined aspects of the guitar and *sarod*, but also included a lower bass string. He dubbed this instrument the *sarasbani veena*, or white lotus, avoiding a self-identification with the instrument. Ghosh's decision came from a place of humility, shunning any sort of deification or self-aggrandizement. He wanted the audience to focus on the instrument itself, inspiring him to adorn it with intricate carvings and faux gemstones. Ghosh soon designed another, more compact slide-guitar instrument called the *swar-rangini*. Shaped more like a large mandolin, it was even closer to the timbre of the *sarod* when augmented by electronics, which amplified the lower end of the instrument. Visually, the *swar-rangini* boasts a curved headstock, artificial diamonds and three to four thousand gemstones. When asked about his tendency to bedazzle his instruments, Ghosh claimed it compensated for the slide-guitar's lack of visual appeal.¹⁹⁵ The instrument's horizontal placement on the lap makes it difficult for the audience to see. Ghosh wanted this instrument's look to match the mood, emphasizing romantic elements with the gemstones, which attracts the audience and helps distinguish his own playing and style. While Ghosh seems uninterested in the spotlight, his instrument surely attracts attention, especially when illuminated.

As a doctor and performer, Ghosh has balanced his two careers without the financial struggles experienced by many other slide-guitar players. Recognizing his own privilege, Ghosh contributes pro-bono performances, collaborating with hospitals, human rights, and social justice organizations. Performing all over India and the Middle East, he's raised funds for the poor, the disabled, and most recently, for a cancer-research initiative. Ghosh has worked with many ashrams, promoting meditation for a healthy lifestyle and founding his own personally-funded institute, The Academy of Indian Classical Music and Fine Arts. This Institute teaches refugees, lower-class, and lower-caste students, many of whom come from large urban slums. Many of his

¹⁹⁵ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

students have gone on to do popular music and classical music on a variety of instruments.¹⁹⁶

Besides discussing his social work, Ghosh voiced some concern for the future of music in India. The typical, cultural way to succeed in the Indian music world has been to attach oneself to a guru and follow in their footsteps. Nowadays students seem more interested in performing short, catchy tunes, hoping to achieve overnight popularity. This encourages performances with shock value, which Ghosh sees as a huge cultural problem, especially from genres of rock and hip hop that feature “vulgarity.”¹⁹⁷ He also lamented the government’s sharp reduction in performing arts funding, which hasn’t slowed him down, but affected many of his students and other slide-guitarists. With dwindling audiences in India, Ghosh understood why Zakir Hussain, Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan all settled in California.

The technical specifications on Ghosh’s instrument stand out. As a great fan of Amjad Ali Khan’s playing, Ghosh modeled his slide-guitar playing after the sarodist. He tunes his instrument S P S M and has *chikari* strings placed in the back, just like a *sarod*. Ghosh’s style mixes *sarod* ideas with his own background in vocal music, resulting in his students learning compositions generally in a *gayaki*, legato-heavy vocal style, with improvisations taking advantage of his *sarod*-inspired techniques. To highlight his instrument’s advantages, Ghosh has composed *ghazals*, *bhajans*, film music, and fusion songs, even collaborating with a Western symphony. These musical contributions, along with his social work, have drawn honors from all over India and the Middle East. He’s also one of the first musicians to play Hindustani classical music in Iran after almost forty years of Islamic rule.¹⁹⁸

Finally, Ghosh and I discussed wealth, morality and recognition. He spoke about the performing arts with idealism, claiming that one’s knowledge of art forms comes with a moral

¹⁹⁶ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁹⁷ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

imperative, to pass on the tradition and to educate those less fortunate. Besides his background and wealth, I wondered what had been most important to his slide-guitar career. He pointed to his innovation: that is, the will to create new musical ideas that unite people and inspire more creativity. Also, he credited his access to a craftsman who could take designs and create a high-quality instrument. Ghosh has pursued an unusual path compared to other Indian slide-guitarists. Rather than having a direct attachment to lineage and a guru, Ghosh emphasized his connection to the luthier, Bhaba Sindhu Biswas, remarking, “everything returns back to Bhaba Sindhu ji, without him, none of us would be where we are today.”¹⁹⁹

Rhitom Sarkar

Growing up in North Kolkata, Rhitom Sarkar began studying slide-guitar at nine years old. Playing cricket in the alleyways next to his uncle’s house, he’d hear the sound of slide-guitar emanating from a neighbor’s house. It was the home of Debashish Bhattacharya, who became Sarkar’s first guru, teaching him for ten years.

Before that, he was most influenced toward music by his aunt, Aroti Bhose, who still sings and plays various genres of light music on the slide-guitar. Later in his music career, Sarkar studied vocal music with Niyati Sarkar in the Vishnupur style, while also exploring the world of Bengali folk music. Sarkar further advanced his studies with Shyamol Chatterjee, a student of Mohammed Dabir Khan, who is one of the last



Rhitom Sarkar and the author, Kolkata 2015.
Photo reproduced with permission from Rhitom Sarkar.

¹⁹⁹ Subhash Ghosh, personal communication, 2014.

descendants of the mythical Mia Tansen. With Chatterjee, Sarkar has placed an extra emphasis on the applied and theoretical knowledge of many rare *ragas* and *talas*. Sarkar now has an active performance career internationally and teaches students of both Indian and Western guitar styles in Kolkata.²⁰⁰

As my primary slide-guitar instructor during my Kolkata fieldwork, Sarkar and I spent a great deal of time together. Although Sarkar has dozens of Indian students, most of them have chosen to study Western guitar music. In fact, most of Sarkar's slide-guitar students are foreigners, many of whom he recruits from the nearby Conchord workshop. An associate of Bhaba Sindhu Biswas for years, Sarkar orders both slide and Spanish guitars from Conchord for his students. This alliance has been lucrative but also controversial for Sarkar. The rift between Biswas and his former guru, Bhattacharya, has been awkward for Sarkar, who interacts very little with Bhattacharya, even though Sarkar champions his technique. Grateful for Bhattacharya's positive and undeniable influence on his playing, and for "teaching him how to hold the bar at the tender age of nine-years old,"²⁰¹ Sarkar and many other Kolkata-based slide-guitarists were nevertheless not invited to either Indian International Guitar Festival. For this, he and some others harbor some bitterness about not being able to represent their passion in such monumental events for the Indian slide-guitar community.

For his career path, Sarkar has often taken the road less traveled. He completed a technical degree and put aside his guitar for a few years to acquire financial stability. He worked for two years in the furniture and woodworking business, but then left the job, at great risk, to return to his music. Now that he has a family, his full-time return to music allows him to be at home and work more closely within his own community. Sarkar has successfully pursued numerous performance opportunities in Europe and the United States, while also upgrading his

²⁰⁰ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

²⁰¹ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

All-India Radio status to A grade, which is a coveted qualification that helps in all aspects of promotion. These accomplishments bode well for Sarkar as a future slide-guitar heavyweight. His youth, dedication, expertise, and unique training make him an appealing performer, especially for audiences interested in advanced slide-guitar techniques and rare *ragas* and *talas*.²⁰²

Sarkar's expertise was indispensable for helping me design an instrument at the Conchord workshop. We tested different string configurations, discussing the merits of each style. In the end, I settled on a hybrid between the *mohan veena* and *chaturangui*, that is, with the four main strings of the former and the front *chikari* of the latter. Sarkar also helped me develop my technique and taught me key exercises and compositions. The contacts he supplied, including his introduction to Probir Kumar De, helped me immeasurably to better understand the light music world of Bengali music.

One of the most virtuosic players on the scene today, Sarkar matches Bhattacharya's speed but also adds creative new strumming techniques, extensive vocal training, and rare or uncommon musical forms from the classical tradition. His album, *Serenity* (2014), tops my playlist for slide-guitar music, featuring performances in *rags madhukauns*, *hindoli*, *dhulia malhaar*, *rohini bihag*, *kaushik bhairav*, and *samant sarang*, all of which I had never before encountered. Many of these *ragas* are unique mixtures of other standards, made even more complex by their performance in uncommon *tala* cycles including, *matta taal* (9 beats), *chartaal ka sawari* (15 beats), and *deepchandi* (14 beats). Influenced by Shyamol Chakraborty, Sarkar acquired not only these rare musical forms and structures, but also the confidence to perform them.

Confidence is difficult to develop for all slide-guitar musicians, and like other players,

²⁰² Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

Sarkar has experienced his share of criticism. From the early 1990s through the 2000s, he encountered frequent resistance, especially in competitions where judges wanted to ban slide-guitars as inappropriate, Western instruments. This was exacerbated by the poor range characterizing early guitar models. Brij Bhushan Kabra's original instrument, for example, was criticized for lacking bass and being too bright in the treble range. The slide-guitar had to change form to be accepted, like so many others, Sarkar credits Biswas' research and experiments with form and wood, for allowing the slide-guitar instrument to compete on an equal level.²⁰³ During the slide-guitar's early development, techniques had not been extensively developed, which made it impossible to perform certain parts of Hindustani classical music, such as fast *taan* patterns.

Even very recently in the 2010s, Sarkar asked to perform the certification test to be an empaneled artist at the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (I.C.C.R.). When they learned Sarkar was playing a Hindustani slide-guitar, the judges scoffed at him, rejecting slide-guitar as a viable instrument. According to Sarkar, the judge said, "the guitar is not an Indian instrument, I have been here for ten years and my husband plays the guitar, if we haven't empaneled him, why would we empanel you?"²⁰⁴ In response, Sarkar asked to see the list of empaneled artists. Pointing out many violinists on the list, he asked, "how come you have empaneled the violin if you cannot empanel the guitar? It is also a Western instrument."²⁰⁵ The judge claimed these were Hindustani classical performers, implying that Sarkar could only play Western, popular or light music on his instrument. Emphasizing his classical training and hearing no legitimate basis for his disqualification, Sarkar asked to perform before the judges. After playing, Sarkar easily acquired I.C.C.R. status, which helps immeasurably in securing shows in the Kolkata music

²⁰³ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

²⁰⁴ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

community.²⁰⁶

Despite the challenges facing new students of slide-guitar in the twenty first century, Sarkar remains optimistic about the slide-guitar's place in the Indian classical music community, noting its increasing acceptance and its country-wide recognition as an instrument capable of producing top quality *raga* music.

Anup Das Gupta

A senior slide-guitar performer from Kolkata, Anup Das Gupta and I met through contacts at Rabindra Bharati University. Gupta, in turn, first introduced me to Bhaba Sindhu Biswas at the Conchord factory. For many years, Gupta has taught in the community and is one of the primary instructors affiliated with the Rabindra Bharati music conservatory, offering lessons in both light and classical music. In several lessons together, he first introduced me to slide-guitar basics and some of his own specialty: compositions in new rhythmic cycles that incorporate fractions (see Appendix A).

Since I met Gupta early on in my research, when my Bengali language skills were just beginning to develop, our interactions were at first challenging because of his speedy delivery and because he did not speak English. But we soon forged a close relationship that opened doors to crucial aspects of this research project. On a weekly basis at his residence close to Parnashree Pally in southwest Kolkata, we discussed his own history and the performance characteristics that make the slide-guitar a unique Indian instrument. Gupta began his career playing light music, specifically *Rabindra sangeet* and film music, for which he was a prominent Kolkata

²⁰⁶ Rhitom Sarkar, personal communication, 2014.

performing artist beginning in the 1960s.²⁰⁷ His father, Gopal Das Gupta, was a famous composer and producer for All-India radio, so at an early age he was exposed to a diverse range of music. Although his father considered light music an “uneducated” style, Anup Das Gupta went on to achieve a high B grade from All-India Radio (a national grading system that benefits performers of various genres) for light music performance, and transitioned to the classical genre only after acquiring a suitable slide-guitar instrument from Bhaba Sindhu Biswas. Brij Bhushan Kabra was an early inspiration for switching genres, coming to Gupta’s attention and pushing him toward classical performance in 1969. At that point, Gupta was a music student in Santiniketan’s performing arts programs, where he steeped himself in the Hindustani classical tradition, including vocal and instrumental music, under the tutelage of Ranadeep Ray, a well-known *esraj* player (a bowed instrument with curved frets). Gupta also studied with other great performers, including slide-guitarist Barun Kumar Pal, violinist V.G. Jog, *sitarist* Debu Chaudhari, and finally *sitarist* Soumitra Lahiri, who is also an accomplished slide-guitarist.²⁰⁸

Testing several times, now for classical music, with All-India Radio, Gupta initially received a high B grade, and then an A grade after furthering his studies. Gupta claims that while the grading system looks for mastery of traditional forms, it is also subject to personal politics and prejudicial opinions. Performers coming from a light music background don’t often do very well in these rating systems due to preconceived notions about their provincial or lower-class musical backgrounds. As Gupta explained, the grading system is crucial since for the most widely consumed music, such as on the radio or television, one must achieve top grades to get performance contracts.²⁰⁹ While the system has prevailed for many years, Gupta believes it still suffers from having conservative graders insist on preserving the tradition as they see it. He’s

²⁰⁷ Anup Das Gupta, personal communication, 2014.

²⁰⁸ Anup Das Gupta, personal communication, 2014.

²⁰⁹ Anup Das Gupta, personal communication, 2014.

also concerned about the testing fees, which exclude players from lower-income backgrounds, and privileges wealthy players who can repeatedly test their skills. The word *pandit*, according to Gupta, no longer denotes a great teacher, but only one's position on the national grading scale. In protest against an inferior grading system, Gupta cited the *sitarist* Vilayat Khan, who famously rejected numerous awards and boycotted All-India Radio for some time.²¹⁰

Describing his performance approach, Gupta claimed that when playing *raga* music, he focuses on the appropriate image or *chobi*. For example, when performing *raag marwa*, he conjures images of loss, sadness, and solemn contemplation in order to fully feel the character of the *rag*. He produced a list of common associations: a catalog of colors, images and moods that guide his improvisations. Materially, Gupta's slide-guitar is rather unique because it has both front and back *chikari* strings, giving him options according to his mood and what part of a performance he is playing. During the *alap* and *jor* sections he uses the back *chikari* because it is has a denser tonal color by virtue of being three strings tuned to *sa*, *sa*, and *ni*. Then during the *gat* and *jhala* sections, which are rhythmic and considerably faster, he uses the front *chikari* because of the proximity of these strings to his main string, which allows for rapid strumming patterns. In technical terms, he plays the *jor*: (*chi dha dha dha*) where the *chi* represents the *chikari* played with the thumb and the *dha* represents the main string played with the index. Then he plays the *jhala*: (*dha chi chi chi*) where the *dha* is played with the thumb and the *chikari* is played with the index. These alternating techniques conserve motion so the highest speeds can be attained.²¹¹

Gupta's position in Kolkata's world of musicians was also quite clear. His long relationships with Bhaba Sindhu Biswas and Rabindra Bhatari University were key factors in helping me establish research connections. As I was inducted into the local slide-guitar

²¹⁰ Anup Das Gupta, personal communication, 2014.

²¹¹ Anup Das Gupta, personal communication, 2014.

community as a guest researcher with Gupta's blessings, I found my inquiries coalescing into a real research subject that circumvented the more famous and inaccessible slide-guitarists, and offered an ethnographic perspective that has not yet been explored.

Clearly these biographical vignettes don't cover all of the influential players in the Indian slide-guitar scene. A number of other artists I interacted with or had discussions about deserve mention, including Satish Khanwalkar, Amano Manish, Pradip Nag, Pratish Sinha, Neel Ranjan Mukherjee, Ajay Jha, Neeta Singha, Gyanendra Bhatt, Susmita Kabir Asha, Debashish Karmakar, Joyento Halder, Dipanjan Bhattacharya, Ratan Bharati, and more. Interviews have been central to my ethnographic fieldwork as they have provided a much broader understanding of the social and political aspects of the slide-guitar community. The challenges to the current generation of players discussed here include lack of institutional support and programs, the lack of standardization of the instrument and naming issues, resistance from conservatives who still see the guitar as incapable of performing classical music, and the rift in the community over intellectual property of instrument designs. Beyond providing direct information for this dissertation, my interviewees generously connected me to new sources scholarship, opportunities to see performances of slide-guitar, and crucially, a connection to the instrument maker Bhaba Sindhu Biswas. I hope these small biographical sections do justice to the legacies of my informants and look forward to continuing collaboration, both in scholarship and music.

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Glossary of Terms

Adhunik Gaan / Adhunik Gana – term for modern song in Bengali and Hindi respectively.

Alap – introductory and un-metered part of a performance of Indian classical music.

Anandi – model of slide-guitar developed by Debashish Bhattacharya.

Ang – term for a style or feeling of playing, with instruments or ragas, ex: *sitar ang*.

Anthara – second part of a Hindustani classical composition that touches upper octave Sa.

Arohan – ascending intervals in a *raga*.

Asthai – first part of a Hindustani classical composition.

Arti – Hindu fire ritual.

Atul Prasadi – Bengali folk music genre.

Avarohan – descending intervals in a *raga*.

Baj - term for a style or feeling of playing, with instruments or ragas, ex: *sarod baj*.

Bande Mataram/Vande Mataram – National song of India composed in 1881.

Bedam – term describing a *tihai* with no pauses between phrases.

Bharata Janata Parishad (BJP) – political party representing Hindu majoritarian politics.

Bistar – melodic improvisation, often moving in and out of sync with rhythmic accompaniment.

Carnatic music – South Indian classical music genre.

Chalan – typical melodic phrases of any particular *raga*, how it “goes.”

Chaturangui - model of slide-guitar developed by Debashish Bhattacharya.

Chhayalog – a *raga* derived from two different *ragas* joined together.

Chaura Rasta – a main thoroughfare in the Old City area of Jaipur.

Chitraveena – an ancient Indian string instrument played with a slide implement.

Dijendra Geeti – a genre of Bengali folk music.

Devanagari – script used in Sanskrit and Hindi.

Diya – small wax candles usually with a clay basin.

Dha-ra-dha-ra – four note alternating strumming pattern. *Dha* is downstroke, *ra* is upstroke.

Drut – term for fast tempo.

Gamaka – an adornment characterized by quick movements between two pitches.

Gandharvi - model of slide-guitar developed by Debashish Bhattacharya.

Gassit – an adornment that slides the pitch between two notes.

Gharana – a term for a school or style of playing in Indian classical music.

Ghazal – a light music genre with poetic form and romantic themes.

Geet / Geeti – a term for song.

Gottuvadhyam – an ancient Indian string instrument performed with a slide implement.

Guru-Shishya Parampara – student-teacher tradition, oral transmission and face-to-face learning

Hakka – a term for first generation Chinese

Hansa veena – model of slide-guitar developed by Barun Kumar Pal.

Hindustani music – the genre of classical music of Northern India.

Jabba – plectrum for the *sarod*.

Janya – a *raga* that is derived purely from a single tonal identity, not a mixture.

Jhala – the concluding section of a classical performance at a very fast tempo.

Jor - the second section of a classical performance, when the melody player improvises alone

Khyal – a structure of Hindustani performance with *alap*, *jod*, and *jhala*.

Kurta – a men's traditional attire.

Krintan – an adornment equivalent to a hammer-on or pull-off on string instruments.

Karaj – the bass string on a string instrument.

Kali Yug – the mythological end times from Hinduism

Loghu Sangeet – the term describing light music genres in Indian music.

Lok Sangeet – the term from folk music in Bengali.

Madhyalaya – medium tempo.

Mahabharata – one of the great epics from South Asian literature.

Malhaar – a *raga* and group of *ragas* most appropriate for the rainy season.

Manchurian – a sauce in Indian Chinese cuisine.

Manja – a composed section of a *gat* that reaches into lower octaves.

Massitkhani – a style of composition (*gat*) that has a fixed rhythmic pattern.

Mia Tansen – the historical godfather of Hindustani classical music.

Meend – a term for any adornment of a pitch, but also used to refer to bending a note.

Misrab – the plectrum worn on the index finger for *sitar* playing.

Mohan Veena – a model of slide-guitar developed by Vishwa Mohan Bhatt.

Murkhi – an quick fluttering adornment meant to resemble bird twitters.

Nagara – a pair of kettle drums found in regal processions.

Nataraja – the form of the Hindu god Shiva in cosmic dance.

Natyasastra – an ancient text on music attributed to the sage Bharata.

Nautches – dances.

Nazrul geeti – the genre of music composed by Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Nirguna – formless, a term associated with a type of theism.

Pakad - the most characteristic phrase of a *raga*.

Pranam – to praise and show respect by touching of the feet.

Pushpaka Vimana – the mythological flying chariot from the *Ramayana*.

Ohm – the syllable associated with the creation of the universe.

Rabindra sangeet – the genre of music composed by Rabindranath Tagore.

Raga – tonal color made of ascending and descending notes in an octave, each with unique flavor.

Ramayana – a Hindu epic that centers on the story of Lord Ram, an avatar of Krishna.

Record-wala – the one who sells records, *wala* is a suffix added to things to denote connection.

Rig Veda – the earliest text from the Vedic tradition.

Riyaz – a term for focused practice of music.

Rudra Veena – a rare string instrument capable of reaching some of the lowest octaves.

Rupaktaal – a rhythm composed of seven beats, grouped 3+2+2.

Saraswati – the Hindu goddess of wisdom, music and learning.

Saraswani Veena - a model of slide-guitar developed by Subhash Ghosh.

Saris – women's formal wear in India.

Sarod – a lute-shaped string instrument adapted into the Hindustani music tradition.

Sam – the first note of the rhythmic cycle.

Samvadi – the important note in the upper part of the octave in any particular *raga*.

Sama Veda – an ancient text that has some of the earliest accounts of music theory.

Sati – the ritual act of self-immolation done by women on their husband's funeral pyre.

Satvik Veena – a model of slide-guitar developed by Salil Bhatt.

Senia-Maihar – the school and style of music created by Allaudin Khan and his disciples.

Siddha Veena – a model of slide-guitar developed by Siddhartha Banerjee.

Sitar – one of the most well-known string instruments from the Hindustani tradition.

Sherwani – a fancy formal wear often seen at weddings.

Shiva – One of the main Hindu deities whose worshippers are called *Shaivites*.

Swarlin – an experimental violin model with extra sympathetic strings.

Tabla – a pair of finger drums that typically accompany instruments in Hindustani music.

Taiyari – a style of playing characterized by fast rhythmic patterns.

Tala – the rhythmic aspect of Indian music.

Talim – a term for direct knowledge passed from teacher to student.

Tans – rhythmic runs of improvised melodic notes that return to a main composition.

Tar – the word for string and star.

Tarab – sympathetic strings.

That – a system of categorizing *ragas* developed by V.N. Bhatkande.

Tihai – an ending music idea that repeats a phrase three times before landing on the *sam*.

Upaj – a term attached to *tihai* where the phrases are not evenly spaced.

Veena – the prototypical string instrument in South Asian music genres.

Vichitra Veena – an ancient string instrument played with a slide implement.

Vlambit – a very slow rhythmic tempo.

Vadi – the important note in the lower part of the octave in any particular *raga*.

Important Historical Dates in South Asia

1990 Indian Economic liberalization plan

1980's Emergency suspension of Indian constitution

1971 East Pakistan/Bangladesh Independence

1947 Indian independence

1947 Partition of India and East and West Pakistan

1930's (early) Arrival of Hawaiian slide-guitar to Kolkata, West Bengal

1906 British attempted partition of Bengal

1857 1st War of Independence/Mutiny

1757 British Colonial settlement of Calcutta, Battle of Plassey