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The 'Bloomsbury Gharana' : A Genealogy of scholars of South Asian Music

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Abstract

This paper explores a long and influential tradition of research on South Asian music linked to SOAS University of London and the wider Bloomsbury academic world. It focuses on recent path-breaking works by Katherine Butler Schofield (2004; 2024), Richard David Williams (2023), and Radha Kapuria (2023), and places them within a longer scholarly lineage shaped by figures such as Arnold Adriaan Bake (1899-1963), Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (1927-2009), and Richard Widdess. While carefully using the term gharana, the paper treats this tradition as a kind of scholarly lineage formed through both research and mentoring. It argues that although this work is usually described as ethnomusicology, it is strongly historical in approach, grounded in close engagement with archives, manuscripts, music treatises, court records, and colonial sources. The rich South Asia-related collections in London, especially those at SOAS and the British Library have played a major role in sustaining this way of working. By tracing this intellectual background, the paper shows how this "Bloomsbury" tradition has reshaped the writing of South Asian music history, widened the range of sources used, and brought new regions, periods, and social groups into the historical narrative.

Key words: SOAS and Bloomsbury, South Asia, Music History, historiography, gharana (scholarly lineage).

Research Paper

In the West End of London falls Bloomsbury, a district known for much more than its stylish streets, Georgian terraces, green squares, and silent gardens. Its real identity is as one of London's great centres of learning and culture. The British Museum, with its possessions from across the world, stands at its heart. Neighboring is the British Library, one of the largest collections of books and manuscripts anywhere. The area is also home to the University of London, University College London, Birkbeck, and SOAS University of London. Bloomsbury's name in medicine is equally strong, with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, and the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine. Closely connected through academic collaboration, King's College London shares much of this intellectual landscape, even though its main campuses lie just beyond Bloomsbury's boundaries. Together, these institutions give Bloomsbury global importance as a place where scholarship, research, and innovation thrive together.

It is also a place closely related to literature and the arts. Charles Dickens, the great Victorian storyteller, lived here. In novels like A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations, he wrote on the struggles of ordinary people and the inequalities of his time. His Bloomsbury home is now a museum which attracts visitors from around the world. Virginia Woolf, the pioneering modernist writer, also resided in Bloomsbury. Her writings, including Mrs Dalloway and A Room of One's Own, broke new ground in style and spoke forcefully about women's lives and creativity. With the circle of writers and artists known as the "Bloomsbury Group," Woolf helped turn the district into a symbol of bold ideas and artistic experiment. Today the name Bloomsbury is also known through Bloomsbury Publishing, the firm that published the Harry Potter series. To appear under its imprint is considered an honour.

SOAS University of London, located in Bloomsbury, was founded in 1916 as the School of Oriental Studies. It was established to educate officials of the British Empire in the languages, history, and cultures of Asia and the Middle East, and was modeled on similar institutions in Germany and France. In 1938, African studies were

added, and the institution became the School of Oriental and African Studies. After the Second World War and the period of decolonization, SOAS moved beyond its imperial role and evolved into a major center of research and teaching. Today, it is known worldwide for its expertise in the study of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

One of the significant scholars who contributed to this change and transformation was Arnold Adriaan Bake (1899-1963), a Dutch pioneer of South Asian ethnomusicology. Bake first came to India in the 1920s, and studied at Tagore's Santiniketan. There he learned Bengali, studied Hindustani classical music, and became familiar with folk and devotional traditions like Baul songs and kirtan. He, along with his wife Cornelia, later undertook extensive fieldwork across India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and made some of the earliest audio and film recordings of South Asian music. Bake did his doctoral research at the University of Utrecht (1930), focused on the Samaveda and Vedic chant traditions. In 1948, he joined SOAS as Lecturer in Sanskrit and Indian Music. His teaching encouraged the inclusion of non-Western musicology at the doctoral level for the first time in Britain that laid the foundation for ethnomusicology as a discipline at SOAS. His archives, preserved at SOAS and the British Library, remain significant resources for the study of South Asian music and culture (Poske and Widdess, 84-105).

Bake's legacy at SOAS was carried forward by Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (1927-2009), who first worked as his assistant at SOAS (Poske 36). Educated at Cambridge and later completing his doctoral research on the rāga system, Jairazbhoy became one of the most influential ethnomusicologists of his generation. His book, The Rāgs of North Indian Music (1971), is still a groundbreaking study. In the 1960s he supervised the transfer of Bake's recordings to magnetic tape, and with Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy he co-authored The Bake Restudy in India, 1938-1984. Jairazbhoy moved later to the United States and founded the Department of Ethnomusicology at UCLA, but his intellectual roots remained tied to Bloomsbury and SOAS. Thus, due to the efforts of Bake and Jairazbhoy, SOAS emerged as a global center for the study of Asian and African music, connecting Bloomsbury scholarship with international ethnomusicology.

Richard Widdess, FBA is an internationally acclaimed ethnomusicologist and music historian whose work has profoundly shaped the study of South Asian music in the universities of Great Britain. He taught at SOAS from 1979 until his superannuation in 2020. He played a key role in establishing both the Centre of Music Studies and later the Department of Music, which turned SOAS a global leader in ethnomusicology. His scholarly contribution has ranged widely, from the history and theory of rāga and the North Indian vocal genre of Dhrupad, to the sacred singing traditions of Nepal's Newar community. Among his most significant publications are The Ragas of Early Indian Music (1995), Dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music (2004, with Ritwik Sanyal), and Dapha: Sacred Singing in a South Asian City (2013). Acknowledged for combining historical depth, performance analysis, and ethnography, he was honored with the Music Forum (Mumbai) Award in 2006 and elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2015.

Beyond his own research, Widdess has been a great mentor and has guided a significant range of doctoral studies that keep their own place in the field of South Asian musicology. His South Asia-centered supervisees include Carol Tingey (1989) on pancai baja music of Nepal; Martin Clayton (1993) on rhythm in North Indian classical music; Anna Morcom (2002) on Hindi film songs and the cinema; Nicolas Magriel (2002) on sarangi style in North Indian art music; Katherine Butler Schofield, then Katherine Brown (2003) on Hindustani music in the time of Aurangzeb; Anthony Dean Morris (2004) on the transmission and performance of khyal in the Gwalior gharana; David Kane (2008) on music and Islamisation in Bengal; Jyoshna LaTrobe (2010) on marai kirtan in Rarh; Chloe Alaghband-Zadeh (2013) on analysing thumri style; Morgan Davies (2017) on sarangi music and players in Rajasthan; Rasika Ajotikar (2019) on women's protest singing among Dalits in Maharashtra; Christian Poske (2020) on Arnold Bake's research in Bengal; and William Rees Hofmann (2022) on Indo-Persian music and Sufism in the Sultanate period. Together, these works form what can be described as the "Bloomsbury gharana," a lineage marked by rigorous historical research and deep engagement with primary sources (Widdess SOAS).

Widdess' students are now carrying this intellectual tradition forward, notably Katherine Schofield at King's College London, whose own supervisees such as Radha Kapuria and Richard David Williams are extending these approaches into new socio-musical contexts. In this way, Widdess' influence endures not only through his writings and institutional achievements, but also across a scholarly community that has evolved under his

mentorship. It is like a distinct academic gharana that continues to redefine how South Asian music is studied and understood today.

In this essay, I will examine some of the recent titles produced by scholars belonging to this broad Bloomsbury circuit. Three books discussed here, along with an unpublished dissertation, not only expand the spatial and temporal dimensions of the historiography of South Asian music, but also argue for a longer historical view, and focus on new sources for Hindustani music history (Datta 409).

In 2003, Katherine Butler Brown née Schofield submitted a groundbreaking doctoral thesis at SOAS under the supervision of Professor Widdess on Hindustani music under the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). Aurangzeb is often described as the ruler who banned music and therefore left a "dark age" in cultural history of North India. Schofield tests this claim against the evidence of Indo-Persian treatises, court chronicles, letters, and biographies. She concludes that music was never abolished; instead, it flourished in new ways during his reign. She argues that this idea of prohibiting music is based mainly on a few selective sources that have been read uncritically, especially the hostile account of the European traveller Niccolao Manucci (1638-1717). By examining Indo-Persian chronicles, travel writings, and musical evidence, she establishes that musical activity continued during Aurangzeb's reign in the court, the harem, and among nobles. The well-known story of the "burial of music," she suggests, became a powerful symbol used later to portray Aurangzeb as a fanatical ruler, rather than proof of an effective and lasting ban. She therefore calls for a more cautious and balanced reading of both Aurangzeb's policies and the history of music in Mughal era (Butler Brown née Schofield, 77-120).

In her more recent book from 2024, Katherine Butler Schofield explores the history of Hindustani music in the final century of the Mughal Empire, from the reign of Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) to the uprising of 1857-58. She argues that although music and sound are inherently ephemeral and cannot be recovered directly, they can nevertheless be written into history through a remarkably wide range of sources. These include musical tazkiras and genealogies, song collections and innovative notational experiments, ragamala paintings and poetry, risalas or music treatises, colonial administrative records, ethnographic writings and visual representations (Schofield 1-19). Drawing on this extraordinarily rich archive, Schofield reconstructs vivid encounters with performers whose exceptional skills positioned them at the intersection of elite and subaltern worlds. Her protagonists include ustads and courtesans, singers of dhrupad, khayal, and Persian and Urdu poetry, players of the ancient bin and the newly emergent sitar, hereditary maestros and "gentleman amateurs," and both successful and less successful seekers of patronage, fame, and livelihood. While a few of these figures remain celebrated, the majority have long been forgotten and are recovered here for the first time. Alongside musicians, the book also introduces, sometimes fleetingly but significantly, emperors, princes, nobles, and invaders, Indian and European literati and connoisseurs, colonial administrators and soldiers, and, crucially, their wives (Widdess 273-75).

The book is structured around the lives of nine musicians, (five men and four women), and the courtly worlds they inhabited during the long transition from Mughal sovereignty to British rule. As one reviewer has aptly observed, Schofield effectively conducts six successive master classes in archival and interpretive methodology, with Chapters 2 through 7 each centred on a distinct type of musical document Katz 139). The opening case study focuses on Khushhal Khan Gunasamudra, a foremost imperial singer of the Mughal court, whose association with Ragini Todi exemplifies how music in Mughal thought was never mere entertainment but a central element of politics, sovereignty, and cosmic order (Schofield 20-48). His grandson, Anjha Baras Khan, is then juxtaposed with his more famous contemporaries, Sadarang and Adarang, to exhibit that remembrance and oblivion depended not simply on talent but on historical contingencies such as adaptability, genre preference, discipleship, and patronage. Though Anjha Baras and Adarang, both were leading musicians in Muhammad Shah's Delhi, were dispersed by invasions and the collapse of Mughal authority, and died in the 1760s, Adarang's innovations in khayal and the sitar secured his lasting fame, whereas Anjha Baras, committed to dhrupad and resistant to musical change, gradually slipped into obscurity (Schofield 49-78).

Another interesting chapter brings together Khanam Jan, a celebrated courtesan at the court of the Nawab of Awadh in Lucknow, and Sophia Plowden, the wife of an East India Company officer, who learned several of Khanam Jan's compositions and preserved them in her personal tunebook. Their interaction provides an uncommon and intimate entry point into the cultural and musical exchanges between Indians and Europeans

that unfolded alongside, and sometimes in spite of, intense political upheaval (Schofield 79-116). Schofield then talks about Mahlaqa Bai Chanda and her ustad Khushhal Khan Anup at the court of Hyderabad, whose extraordinary corpus of approximately two thousand day and night ragas offers an unparalleled glimpse into the performance history of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century courtly music (Schofield 117-46). Equally captivating is the chapter on Mayalee, a pious courtesan who appears only in the marginal notes of the account book of a superintendent of the Sambhar Salt Lake in Rajasthan. Through this small and fragmentary archival trace, Schofield demonstrates how salt functioned as far more than a simple commodity or form of remuneration. Mayalee's claim on being paid in salt rather than cash reveals a form of agency that also illuminates a deeper epistemological clash between indigenous rulers, for whom musical performance was a ritual and moral obligation, and British officials, who increasingly reduced it to mere entertainment (Schofield 147-79).

The monograph also devotes a chapter to Miyan Himmat Khan, one of the last Mughal binkars, who not only continued an older instrumental tradition but also co-authored a new and explicitly modern treatise on tala systems in Hindustani music. His career exemplifies both continuity and transformation in a period often mischaracterized only in terms of decline (Schofield 180-218).

This meticulously researched monograph offers a number of important takeaways for students and scholars of music history. First, it authoritatively dismantles the twentieth-century reformist myth of the illiterate ustad and demonstrates instead that many hereditary musicians were deeply engaged with writing, theory, and textual transmission. Second, although this was a time of acute political instability and the outward decline of Delhi as an imperial centre, new cultural centers such as Lucknow, Hyderabad, and Jaipur flourished and attracted artists and musicians, confirming that musical life continued to thrive. Third, the period from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century emerges as the decisive moment in which Hindustani music coalesced into noticeably modern forms. The crucial thing is that Schofield conceptualizes this transformation not simply as a product of colonial intervention but as a form of 'paracolonial' modernity that emerged alongside and even beyond colonial rule.

Richard David Williams, a student of Katherine Butler Schofield, carries forward the same archival rigor and sensitivity to musical practice into the nineteenth century Bengal and shows how Hindustani courtly music was reorganized rather than ruptured under conditions of exile and colonial rule. Williams's The Scattered Court: Hindustani Music in Colonial Bengal is a prudently argued social history that challenges dominant narratives of rupture, decline, and modernization in nineteenth-century Hindustani music. Although the central chapters of his book concentrate on Wajid Ali Shah and his exiled court at Matiyaburj, Williams's larger conceptual contribution lies in developing the idea of the "scattered court." By this he refers to a distributed social formation in which courtly musical practices, values, and relationships survived beyond the loss of political sovereignty and the decline of cultural centers like Delhi and Lucknow; and spread across smaller princely courts, zamindaris, elite households, women's quarters, and informal musical gatherings under colonial rule (Williams 1-23).

Chapter 1 forms this argument by reconstructing Bengal's engagement with Hindustani music before 1856. Focusing on Murshidabad court, the zamindaris of Burdwan and Nadia, and the court of Bishnupur, Williams shows that north Indian classical music already carried very high prestige in Bengal during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When older courts started declining financially, zamindars emerged as important patrons. Williams is particularly careful in his treatment of Bishnupur. Rather than assuming the physical migration of ustads from north India, he demonstrates how claims of northern origin operated as myths of legitimacy that aligned local musicians with Hindustani authority. The chapter dismantles the romanticized image of the stable court musician and underlines mobility, insecurity, and negotiated patronage well before the high colonial period (Williams 24-52).

Chapter 2 moves to early nineteenth-century Calcutta and studies how Hindustani music was discussed and practised in an urban, multilingual setting. Williams examines Radha Mohan Sen Das's Sangeet Taranga (1818) and Jagannath Basu's Sangeet Rasa Madhuri (1844) as social documents rather than technical treatises. These and other works reveal a mixed Persianate, Hindustani, and Bengali musical world created by patrons who were sometimes amateur performers themselves. By reading these texts alongside satirical writings such as Nishachara's Samaj Kucharitra, Williams shows how there were debates about sociability, morality, and class conduct and what kind of discussions around music were taking place in these debates. The chapter makes

a clear point that Calcutta did not become a centre of Hindustani music because of Wajid Ali Shah; the ground was already prepared (Williams 53-63).

The third chapter shifts the focus to Lucknow and examines how the image of Wajid Ali Shah was constructed as a decadent ruler in contemporary English and European accounts. Here Williams shows how music and dance were used politically by the East India Company for explaining and justifying annexation of Awadh. He also places these colonial portrayals alongside Indian-language newspapers that debated elite Muslim conduct and class responsibility. By reading Wajid Ali Shah's Persian and Urdu writings seriously, Williams demonstrates how the nawab "understood the appreciation of music in terms of the Solomonic ideal of the Islamicate ruler, the political virtues of mastering the emotions and exploring the affective self through music, and his aesthetic preference for the fantastical" (Williams 20). The chapter shows how "decadence" emerged as a historically produced type that later solidified into accepted historiography (Williams 64-95).

Chapter 4 forms the core of the book, as Williams himself writes that the thirty years of Wajid Ali Shah's were transformative chapters in the Bengali-Hindustani musical connections (Williams 3). Williams reconstructs Matiyaburj as a tightly regulated nawabi court-in-exile, moulded by the constraints of a colonial pension and perpetual bureaucratic surveillance. Williams devotes close attention to Wajid Ali Shah's supervision of musicians, the printing of songbooks in traditional music genres along with thumrī, dadra and dance gats, the organization of performance spaces like the jalsakhana, and theatrical forms such as naql and rahas. He also examines rules governing women, including questions surrounding mut'ah relationships, and shows how gender, discipline, and musical labour were regulated. Williams also critically reads Urdu sources, especially Sharar's writings, with a view to expose their retrospective nostalgia and distortions (Williams 96-130).

Fifth chapter shifts attention to gender and makes a strong intervention by foregrounding the cultural and intellectual contribution of pardanashin women, not only courtesans. Through the life and poetry of Khas Mahal (the senior begum of the nawab), Williams reconstructs women's literary and musical creativity within private spaces. At the same time, drawing on an extensive legal archive, he also reconstruct how the begum emancipated herself from nawab, gained financial independence, and acquired her own household in Calcutta, where she could enjoy music on her own terms. The revisionist biography of Pyare Sahib, grounded in a court case, further demonstrates how his intimate relations with begum's female musicians could later help him in charting out a successful career in upcoming recording industry.

Chapter 6 examines how musicians of the Nawab's court interacted with the larger city and how the courtly music circulated through both emerging institutions and elite domestic spaces. Williams keeps Sourindro Mohan Tagore's Bengal Music School against the small, invitation-based gatherings that sustained Hindustani music in Calcutta. Although institutions mattered ideologically, yet Williams shows that music thrived primarily within trust-based, intimate networks, which he conceptualizes as a "networked sphere." These gatherings, rather than public concerts, constituted the real infrastructure of musical learning and transmission among the Bengali bhadralok.

Thus, in order to reconstruct this dense social world of musical practice, Williams draws on a varied range of sources (Bengali, Urdu, Persian, and Hindi texts; music treatises and songbooks; satire and memoirs; colonial administrative records; and legal archives). As Amlan Dasgupta writes, "Williams's book excels both in the larger portrayal of the Matiyaburj court and its interactions with the larger cultural and social environs of late 19th century Bengal and in the vignettes of individuals and institutions" (Dasgupta 22).

Alongside Williams, Radha Kapuria, another of Schofield's supervised scholars at King's extends this line of research into colonial Punjab. Her 2023 book, Music in Colonial Punjab: Courtesans, Bards, and Connoisseurs, 1800-1947, challenges the rustic stereotype of Punjab and argues that Hindustani art music flourished in the region through courts, princely states, urban publics, and reformist institutions. It underscores the central role of women performers, the contested status of hereditary groups like mirasis, and the reshaping of music under colonial and reformist pressures.

The first chapter examines Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Lahore court in the early nineteenth century. Kapuria argues that women performers were not marginal entertainers but key actors in state ceremony. Courtesans like Moran Sarkar became part of the political and cultural life of the court. Performances before European invitees helped frame the image of the kingdom. The

"Amazonian" troupe, cross-dressed female dancers who carried arms, embodied the military splendour of Ranjit Singh's Punjab in symbolic form. Ranjit Singh's darbar thus used gendered performance to craft its authority. Kapuria also highlights how European observers described these scenes with Orientalist disdain, calling the Maharaja licentious. Yet within the court, women performers indicated prestige, legitimacy, and sovereignty. The chapter recasts the darbar as a site where women's bodies and voices shaped politics along with culture.

The second chapter turns to the fate of mirasis, the hereditary bards and musicians of Punjab, under British rule. Kapuria underlines how census reports, ethnographic surveys, and gazetteers reclassified them as lowly and degenerate. Officials such as Charles Swynnerton and Richard Temple wrote of them with contempt and talked about them as a corrupting presence. The chapter shows how colonial knowledge practices along with elite disdain stigmatised a group that had a flued but significant presence and respect in the socio-musical scene in the region. At the same time, missionaries saw a use for Punjab's music in their own work. Female missionaries such as Henrietta Cowden and Anne Wilson learnt local songs from hereditary musicians and adapted them for their proselytizing activities. Kapuria argues that this adoption placed women at the heart of musical encounters between empire and Punjab. She also notes that mirasis themselves responded with reform. The Mirasināmah (1891), a reformist tract written by a police constable in provincial Gujranwala, and directed at the mirasis, emphasized piety and continuity rather than the abandonment of tradition.

The third chapter has its focus on the urban centres of Lahore, Amritsar, and Jalandhar in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These cities constituted a connected cultural corridor along the Grand Trunk Road. Reform movements flourished here. Middle-class elites attacked courtesans and nautch performances as immoral. Groups like the Punjab Purity Association led anti-nautch campaigns. Yet reformers did not want to stop music. They wanted to repossess it for respectable households. The result was a shift in pedagogy and practice. Institutions such as the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Lahore, established by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar in 1901, trained students in a new, "purified" classical tradition. The Harballabh festival at Jalandhar, founded earlier in the nineteenth century, also became a key site for devotional and public performance. Women from reformist families entered these new spaces. Figures like the Arya Samaj preacher Mai Bhagwati wrote manuals for middle class, 'respectable' female singers. Devki Sud later published Sangīt Prabhā in the 1930s, a music text aimed at respectable women. Kapuria shows how these shifts produced a new image of the bourgeois wife as a cultured singer. This chapter underlines how reform restructured gender roles and remade the urban musical public.

The fourth chapter examines the princely states of Patiala and Kapurthala. These states emerged as important centres after the fall of Lahore in 1849. Kapuria argues that Patiala consolidated the traditions from different sites in and beyond Punjab, especially from Lahore and Jaipur, that came together to be known as the Patiala gharana. Artistes such as Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali brought the court fame across India. At the same time, Kapuria recovers less celebrated figures such as Ralla Dhadhi, Abdul Karim, and Kehar Singh. These performers characterize the subaltern side of musical life, generally ignored in elite accounts. Kapurthala, by contrast, tried with Western idioms. Its ruler brought European musicians to court and encouraged fusion practices. The state became famous for its cosmopolitan culture that combined Indian and European forms. Kapuria stresses that both courts worked under colonial constraints but still nurtured musical innovation. They provided patronage when urban reformers tried to marginalise hereditary performers. This chapter highlights how princely states preserved, adapted, and expanded musical traditions in colonial Punjab.

Kapuria uses wide range of sources in Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Braj, and English. These include colonial archives, missionary writings, reformist tracts, music manuals, and local newspapers. She also brings in paintings, photographs, and murals as evidence of performance culture. She complements the archive with oral histories from India, Pakistan, and diaspora communities. The breadth of sources allows her to bring in courtesans, mirasis, reformers, missionaries, and princes in a single frame that presents the socio-musical history of colonial Punjab.

The book thus restores Punjab to the mainstream history of Hindustani music, which has often focused on Bengal, Maharashtra, and Southern India. It demolishes the rustic cliché of Punjabi music and shows that Punjab also had strong traditions of courtly, devotional, and urban music. Reviewers have appreciated its breadth, archival depth, and recovery of neglected actors. Equally, they also

note its weakness: it ends in 1947 without addressing how Partition altered patronage, migration, and memory (Khan 399-402; Malhotra 450-52; Saha and Kaur). Despite this, one of the main strengths of the book is its relevance for wider Punjabi social and political history. As Anne Murphy has noted in her review of the book, "Kapuria's learned book invites readers into a vibrant world of song and dance, but also into the domains of state formation, regional and cross-regional exchange, contestation and cultural transformation… Music here is at the center, but is tied to a far larger world, and the book moves through music to represent the complexity of Punjabi life worlds at the cusp of and through the transition to colonial control." (Murphy 374).

Yet another work to be read alongside Radha Kapuria is the doctoral thesis of Kirit James Singh, completed at SOAS in 2023. Singh focuses on the relationship between Hindustani classical music and Sikh devotional singing in colonial Punjab. He Highlights how music was central to politics, community, and religion in the century between 1857 and 1947. His work is based on Gurmukhi manuscripts, colonial records, early printed tracts, and oral histories gathered in both India and Pakistan. By combining these materials, Singh presents Punjab not as marginal but as a region where music shaped authority and identity.

The first part of the thesis talks about the Sikh courts of Patiala, Kapurthala and other small princely states. After the fall of Lahore in 1849 and the revolt of 1857, these courts became important centres of patronage. Patiala rulers patronized musicians like Ali Bakhsh and Fateh Ali, whose vocal style became popular as the Patiala gharana. This style, full of ornament and faithfully linked to sarangi and thumri, expressed a Punjabi identity that challenged Mughal ideals of restraint. Kapurthala designed itself as a cosmopolitan state, welcoming both Indian and European forms of music. In both courts, the patronage of music was not decorative but political. It helped rulers claim legitimacy under colonial rule and assert the musical standing of Punjab.

The study then turns to Sikh religious institutions. Singh talks about a rich body of Gurmukhi manuscripts from the nineteenth century. Among them is the Buddh Prakash Darpan, written in 1681 in Lahore by Diwan Lachhiram. Although originally a Vaishnava text, it was preserved and copied in Sikh shrines well into the nineteenth century. The survival of the text shows how Punjab maintained older strands of Hindustani musicology and adapted them to Sikh devotional context. These texts placed ragas at the centre of shabad kirtan and gave Sikh musicians a vocabulary shared with larger Hindustani traditions. Sikh religious shrines, mahants, Gurdwaras, and akharas thus emerge not only as sites of worship but also as places of learning and debate about music.

In the early twentieth century, Sikh devotional music ushered in the print age. Singh argues that what later came to be called gurmat sangit was already evolving by this time. Bhai Mit Singh's Shabad Sangit (1909) is a key example, that offers notation and repertoire guidance for a broad audience. Reformist groups in Lahore and Paluskar's Gandharva Mahavidyalaya also shaped new forms of music pedagogy. At the Golden Temple, regulation had begun earlier, with the Dastur-ul-'Amal of 1859 assigning fifteen daily chaunkis, divided between ragis and rababis. By the early twentieth century, however, reform and print had begun to reinforce the dominance of ragis while dropping the space for hereditary rababis. Hence codification brought order and accessibility but also exclusion.

Singh devotes a separate chapter to this exclusion of the rababis of Amritsar. For centuries these Muslim musicians had performed at the Golden Temple, tracing their descent to Bhai Mardana. They were not just accompanists but also interpreters of the scripture, and their presence was considered auspicious. Partition forced almost all rababis across the new border to Lahore, where many joined radio or film. Yet in the interviews recorded by Singh, they recall their service at the Golden Temple as central to their identity. Their memories talk of a vision of Sikh sacred sound in which Muslim rababis were indispensable, even though reformist histories later obliterated them. Oral testimony thus becomes a counter-archive, that keeps alive a shared and syncretic musical past.

Read together with the work of Kapuria, Singh's thesis shows the range and complexity of Punjab's musical life. Kapuria brings courtesans, mirasis, and reformist publics, while Singh talks of Sikh princes, ragis, and rababis in focus. Both dismantle the traditional stereotype of Punjab as rustic and bring back it to the mainstream of Hindustani music history. Both disclose how gender, caste, religion, and politics shaped sound. Read together, they highlight that Punjab was a laboratory of musical modernity, where tradition and reform, inclusion and exclusion, were worked out through performance and memory.

At the end, I will conclude with a humble submission that I am not the one who has used the term 'gharana'

for the first time with regard to the works which are being produced by the scholars at SOAS, Kings and other British universities. It was none other than Prof. Daniel Neuman who gave the idea that "there is now a well-established gharānā of ethnomusicologists in England, distinct but collaborative with their Indian and North American counterparts" (Neuman). Prof. Neuman had made these remarks 13 years earlier. The works discussed in this essay not just confirm, but compel us to ponder upon the new parameters, the social history of South Asian music this gharana has set.

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