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The *rāg* that Burned down Delhi: Music and Memory between 1857 and 1947*

SUMMARY: The Urdu litterateur Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi (1906–1967) recorded a series of reflections and reminiscences about Delhi, its culture, and how that culture was brought to an end by the violence of Partition in 1947. In his essays on music, he documented the performances and personal histories of a range of singers, dancers, and instrumentalists based in Delhi in the first half of the 20th century and considered their plight after Independence. In this article, I examine three of these essays—two in Urdu and one in English—and ask two questions. Firstly, how does this author develop a sense of historical depth to the social and cultural rupture he experienced in 1947? I suggest that his Urdu essays draw upon a longer history of literary nostalgia and connect a Delhi-centric understanding of Partition to the earlier crisis of 1857. Secondly, how did attending to music allow Shahid Dehlvi to explore the nuances of cultural rupture and personal loss?

KEYWORDS: Partition, Urdu literature, music, nostalgia, Delhi

Writing from his new home in Pakistan, the Urdu litterateur Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi (1906–1967) recorded a series of reflections and reminiscences on his beloved hometown, Delhi, and the cultural world that had

* I am grateful to James Kippen and Layli Uddin for their comments on this essay.

been extinguished there amid the violence of Partition. He wrote several essays dedicated to musical culture, including "Rāg rang kī ek rāt:" one night of *rāg-rang*, a pairing of music (*rāg*) and passion, emotion, and amusement (*rang*) (Dehlvi 2011: 257–263). The essay begins by describing a music party that took place midway through 1947. It was unprecedented in scale, drawing together some two hundred artists, many of whom put aside their rivalries to sit and play and sing together for one night only. Throughout the description of the party, there is a sense of this night being exceptional and a culmination: readers are encouraged to think back to other final gatherings, especially the "Last Musha'irah of Delhi," which had been immortalized by Mirza Farhatullah Baig Dehalvi (1883–1948) in 1927 (Qamber 1979).[1] That assembly of poets was set during the last days of the Mughal period, and Shahid Dehlvi also reaches back in time throughout his essay to discuss an earlier era, when music masters waited on princes in the Red Fort. Indeed, the essay begins in 1857, and describes how when the British dethroned Bahadur Shah Zafar (r. 1837–1857), they refused to assume the mantle of artistic patronage, leaving the great artists of Delhi dependent on support from aristocratic patrons. Shahid Dehlvi recalls the stories the musicians told about these patrons but also about the supernatural powers of their repertoires, ultimately leading to a debate about whether or not it was appropriate to perform *rāg* Dīpak.[2]

Seeing the line-up of maestros in the audience, the *saraṅgī* player Bundu Khan (1880–1955) had proposed to play this *rāg*, boasting that it would be like nothing else anyone had heard. His cousin, Chand Khan, immediately interjected and implored him to play anything else:

[1] Published first in 1927 in the magazine *Urdu Adab* and then as a book in 1928.

[2] Dīpak (literally "lamp" or "kindling") is conventionally sung at noon or dusk in the hot season. Note that *rāg*s are treatments of the scale that provide the basis for composition and improvisation in art music, but also have extra-musical qualities, including associations with elements, emotions, and effects on their environments and listeners.

> Brother, it will come to pass that just by listening to Dīpak, even extinguished lamps burst into flame and things erupt on fire! Starting fires is hardly a good thing, that's why this *rāg* has been abandoned. Even if we don't respect this legend (*riwāyat*) about Dīpak, nonetheless we believe that Dīpak is an unlucky (*manḥūs*) *rāg*. Singing or playing it will surely produce some harm (*nuqṣan*). (Dehlvi 2011: 261) [3]

Bundu Khan rejected his cousin's warnings and began to play. Shahid Dehlvi describes how although he played vigorously, his physical condition became strained and a disturbance (*takaddur*) emanated throughout the gathering. As he finished playing, the participants heard the morning call to prayer and, their spirits restored, retired home. In the very next paragraph, Shahid Dehlvi changes gear and describes the horrors (*fasārāt*) of 1947:

> In the first half of September, Delhi began to be set ablaze. Muslims were being killed and their homes were being looted. Karol Bagh was over. Sabzi Mandi was over. Paharganj was over. Half the city had already burned. Several lakhs of the city's Muslims had fled to the Old Fort and Humayun's Tomb. The dance of Bhairav was in Old Delhi. We ourselves survived and somehow made it to Pakistan. (*ibid*.: 262)

Bundu Khan, Shahid Dehlvi tells us, also emigrated to Pakistan but struggled to find a footing there and "spent his final days in extreme difficulty and poverty." In fact, the reality was less straightforward: while his son, Umrao Bundu Khan, and then his wife had moved directly to Karachi, Bundu Khan himself was extremely reluctant to leave and continued his recording career in India until he moved to be with his family, in either late 1950 or early 1951. Although All India Radio tried to arrange for his return, as Dehlvi suggests, he is remembered as ending his days despondent in Pakistan (Dhar 1995: 52–62). Chand Khan remained in Delhi and after some years, Dehlvi returned there to meet

[3] All translations from the Urdu are my own.

with the aged musician, who remarked to him: "Bhai Sahab, you have seen the misfortune (*nuḥūsat*) of Dīpak! Delhi was set alight. We are in that very Delhi but the fire of separation (*firāq*) has been lit in our hearts. This fire cannot be dampened even with tears" (Delhvi 2011: 262). Shahid Dehlvi concludes his essay with a rhetorical question:

> And I often wonder, in 1947, when Delhi was reduced to ashes, was it really burning with the fire from Chand Khan Sahab's *rāg*? Or was it only a coincidence? It was written in Delhi's destiny alone that they would burn together. (Dehlvi 2011: 262–263)

The traumatic ending of this essay, which had suggested musical revelry in its title, might have come as a surprise to some readers. On the other hand, anyone familiar with Shahid Dehlvi's larger work might have expected to find a meditation on cultural loss and personal trauma embedded within his discussion of music.

In Shahid Dehlvi's essays on music, histories of Delhi intersect with cultural histories of Islamicate society and political histories of violence. When he ostensibly sets out to document specific musical gatherings or curate centuries-long timelines for the development of Indo-Pakistani art music, he simultaneously examines the layers of trauma that have accumulated in Delhi. This approach to the past brings his work into conversation with a longer history of nostalgia in Urdu literature. In particular, Shahid Dehlvi's essays strive to make sense of the cultural rupture of Partition in 1947 by reaching back through this literary history to the fall of the Mughal Emperor in 1857, and further back to the pillage of Delhi in the mid-18th century. This retrospective approach to emotionally engaging with 1947 has a different emphasis from other forms of Partition memory: following Svetlana Boym, recent studies of literary responses to this period have explored the long shadows cast by 1947 into the future, and read accounts of Partition violence and displacement as responding to later developments in the aftermath of Independence (Boym 2001, Kabir 2013). Shahid Dehlvi's works on music are multidirectional: in two Urdu essays

in this discussion, I suggest he is more interested in precedents set by Delhi's past, while in another essay on music, this time in English, he is more overtly concerned with Pakistan's possible futures.

Shahid Dehlvi was the editor of the Urdu literary journal *Saqi*, which was launched in Delhi in 1930 and continued to be published from Pakistan, when he fled India and settled in Karachi. He was the grandson of Maulvi Nazir Ahmad (1836–1912), a celebrated voice in modern Urdu prose who, most notably, had also translated the Qur'an and The Indian Penal Code (Baig 2009). Shahid Dehlvi grew up immersed in Delhi's literary circles and in the wake of Partition wrote a series of haunting eulogies to that lost cultural universe. He has received very little attention thus far in English-language scholarship, though Gyanendra Pandey analysed his most famous account of 1947, *Dillī kī biptā* (*The Calamity of Delhi*, 1948), in his work on Partition memory and historiography (Pandey 1997: 2001). As with collections of Shahid Dehlvi's essays, including *Ujṛā diyār* (*Desolate Terrain*, 1967), this work reflected a personal, narrative account of human suffering, textured by a nostalgia for the romance of the city that was lost in the division of nations (Farooqi 2008: 145–153). Literary accounts of this kind have been increasingly taken up by social historians to restore a human scale to 1947 and its aftermath, especially regarding violence against women and the implications of Partition for family networks and domestic life (e.g. Butalia 1998, see Mahn and Murphy 2018: 1–14). While much of this work has been concerned with prose accounts and poetry, the remit of this scholarship has expanded in recent years to take in material culture and music (Malhotra 2019, Kapuria 2018, Saeed 2008–2009).

In this essay, I examine three of Shahid Dehlvi's essays on music to ask two questions. Firstly, how does this author develop a sense of historical depth to the social and cultural rupture he experienced in 1947? I suggest that his Urdu essays draw upon a longer history of literary nostalgia and connect a Delhi-centric understanding of Partition to the earlier crisis of 1857. To cultivate this sense of depth and to draw out parallels between the mid-19th century and the mid-20th, Shahid Dehlvi had to make a set of claims about the implications of the fall of

the Mughal Emperor and the cultural life of the city thereafter, as well as curate a particular vision of the early 20th century that was skewed towards a static Islamicate past rather than acknowledging more recent developments. Secondly, how did attending to music allow Shahid Dehlvi to explore the nuances of cultural rupture and personal loss? On the one hand, following the work of Margrit Pernau and Eve Tignol, I suggest that his musical reminiscences echo the strategies deployed by other Urdu authors, in asserting the character of a lost Islamicate sensibility and by tapping into shared vocabularies of feeling that articulate collective grief. However, at the same time, music circles had their own vocabularies for articulating loss, as seen in the case of Dīpak. Commemorating the intimacy of music parties and the embodied repertoires of the musicians—transmitted breast-to-breast (*sīna-ba-sīna*) across the generations—allowed him to map the historical lines of continuity and knowledge that survived 1857, only to be cruelly snapped in 1947. Crucially, documenting the lost music of Delhi—often in evocative, descriptive detail—leaves the reader of these essays with a sense of irony: however informative, the words cannot do justice to the actual music, and the more Shahid Dehlvi elaborates, the heavier the silence of the page becomes. The pointed silence of these essays on music poignantly evokes the ineffable losses of Partition.

Musical reminiscence and history

Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi's approach to discussing music and history varied according to his audience and choice of language. Like his aforementioned piece "Rāg rang kī ek rāt," another essay on the *bhāṇḍ* dancers and courtesans, "Bhāṇḍ aur ṯawā'ifen," which was published in the same collection of 1967, draws the reader into the intimate world of gatherings of connoisseurs and musical artists (Dehlvi 1967 , Dehlvi 1978: 257–260).[4] In both essays, these soirées (*meḥfil* or *jalsa*) are evocatively described

[4] "Bhāṇḍ aur tawā'ifen" was reprinted in the *Fikr-e-Nau* in 1978 under the title "Dillī ke arbāb-e-nishāṭ" (Delhi's Department of Performing Arts), perhaps because

with an eye to detail, from the scents of perfumes and steaming dishes to the textures and colours of fabrics and furnishings. Shahid Dehlvi took a different approach in an English article, "Tradition and Change in Indo-Pakistani Classical Music," which was based on a lecture he gave in 1959 at a meeting of the Siam Society (Dehlvi 1959). Addressing a Thai audience unfamiliar with Urdu literary codes, this essay sketched the longer history of Hindustani art music, yet nonetheless reflects a distinctive understanding of time and the teleology of music.

While "Rāg rang kī ek rāt" begins with the large gathering of musicians in 1947, the timeframe rapidly shifts back and forth to the 1850s. Shahid Dehlvi tells us that in imperial days, the artists (*fankār*) had substantial land holdings which "were destroyed in the uproar of 1857." This insight presages the poverty of Bundu Khan when he relocated to Pakistan. Nonetheless, the musicians had the support of Delhi's nobles and grandees, and continued to gather around the *havelī* of Tanras Khan, Bahadur Shah Zafar's court singer. On this particular occasion, the audience was made up of maestros and connoisseurs (*guni*s) and the *havelī* was filled with music from six in the evening until dawn prayers. The musicians performed repertoires inherited from their forebears and ingrained in their bodies, "knowledge of the breast" (*'ilm-i-sīna*), but also told stories from imperial days about the origins of certain pieces and styles. The tabla artist, Gami Khan, related how his forebear, Makkhu Khan, used to teach princes in the Red Fort (possibly in the late18th century).[5] One client did not respect him properly, preferring his caged songbird. When Makkhu Khan (who was very tall) bumped

a later editor was less comfortable with the reference to courtesans (Dehlvi 1978). Unfortunately, I am not sure when these essays were first written or how far they pre-date 1967.

[5] According to the *Sarmāya-i-'Ishrat*, a music treatise from c.1874, Makkhu was indeed a celebrated *pakhāvaj* player but was almost certainly not related directly to Gami Khan. In this work, Gami Khan's direct ancestor, Nazar Ali, is presented in the lineage of Shitab Khan, while Makkhu belongs to a separate tradition going back to Sudhar Khan. According to family documents belonging to Gami Khan's lineage, these families may have converged when Makkhu married Sudhar Khan's great-granddaughter (Kippen 2014). I am grateful to James Kippen for his advice on these genealogies.

his head on the birdcage and interrupted the lark's singing, his patron became very angry and threatened him; Makkhu Khan played a drum composition (*gat*) that stirred up the bird into a squawking frenzy, and the prince was so alarmed that he ordered his servant to crush Makkhu Khan's hand to stop him. The musician left the Red Fort devastated but was miraculously cured by a Sufi. Gami Khan then drummed this very piece for his audience in 1947 and, Shahid Dehlvi tells us, "truthfully it was as though birds were squawking!" (Dehlvi 2011: 260). Shahid Dehlvi connects this "strange and astonishing incident" to the argument that ensued between Bundu Khan and Chand Khan over whether or not it was safe to perform Dīpak, and from there moves to the devastation of Delhi and its musical culture.

The maiming of Makkhu Khan's hand qualifies the idea of a golden age, when musicians were always respected by connoisseur patrons. There is an ambiguity about how devastating 1857 was for the arts: the musicians lost their *jāgīr*s but continued to find patronage from the Muslim elites of Delhi. The music *jalsa* of 1947 marks the twilight of that era, and while the violence of Partition had been presaged by earlier traumas in Delhi, there is a sense that only then, with the fall of the Delhi elites, would this world finally succumb. The sleepy ephemerality of this closing act is brought out by the magical realism of these stories: Shahid Dehlvi writes that he is recounting these details as though emerging from a prolonged dream (*ṯawālat ke khayāl se*), and when the party's noble host (*ra'īs-zāda*) hears Gami Khan's tale and squawking *gat*, he cites a line by the poet Shaikh Imam Bakhsh Nasikh: "The lifeless one speaks, in the hand of the Messiah" (*be jān boltā hai masīhā ke hāth men*) (*ibid*.; cf. Azad 1907: 356). While, in the immediate context, the lifeless one refers to the inanimate drum—touched by the hand and animated with the sounds of living creatures—the larger foreboding in the essay connects this verse to a sense of the apocalyptic, the overhaul of nature, and the tensions between silence, sounding, and death.

"Bhāṇḍ aur ṯawā'ifen" complements these themes and also begins by invoking a world *after* 1857 *yet* one still sustained by the courtly culture of Delhi's Muslim nobles. The key difference is that while the music

parties in the first essay were dominated by men, here Shahid Dehlvi discusses female singers and dancers he had heard in the 1920s: first, a glamorous *bhāṇḍ* dancer called Moti, and then the courtesan singer, Naushaba Jan. He represents these women as ambassadors of a bygone age: after Moti expertly executes the "peacock dance," she is praised by the patron, and herself responds in poised Urdu and Persian: "It is my Liege's clemency and appreciation of merit in art. (My dance) is the trifling of your slave. What more am I, or my wares? I am that which I know." Shahid Dehlvi comments, "With this courtesy and courtly expertise, the artists of pleasure of half a century ago were brought into existence now" (Dehlvi 1978: 257). Since the appreciation of the speech of performing women had a long history, Moti's mellifluous language collapsed the temporal distance between generations (Williams 2017).

In a similar vein, Naushaba Jan is introduced as a celebrated singer and dancer, a reciter of poetry, and especially talented in Delhi's feminine register (*begamati zubān*), witty taunts (*bolī-ṭholī*), eloquent playfulness (*fiqra-bāzī*), and double-entendre (*ẓila'*). She would host celebrated artists and invite one hundred and fifty guests from Delhi's nobility (Dehlvi 1978: 258). She was the disciple (*shagird*) of Ustad Umrao Khan (1860–1930), the son of Ustad Tanras Khan, the last emperor's court singer, whose *havelī* was the epicentre of Delhi's music scene in "Rāg rang kī ek rāt." Her ties to the imperial imaginary crystallise as she sings: a *vilambit* (slow) and then a *drut* (fast) *kẖayāl*, and then two lyrics composed by Bahadur Shah Zafar (under his musical *taḵẖalluṣ*, Shauq Rang), a *tarāna* by Tanras Khan, a *ṭhumrī* and *dādra* (with *bhāv bātānā* gestures), and finally a *ghazal* by Ghalib (*ibid.*: 258–259). These songs prompt the audience to eulogise, "The Emperor was also the Emperor of Music." In this *meḥfil* from the 1920s, these women connected their audiences to the cultural efflorescence associated with Bahadur Shah's reign, over sixty years before. At the same time, Shahid Dehlvi views the way these women were treated as an index of historical change and decline: he notes how *bhāṇḍ* women like Moti were ultimately discounted as low status performers, while the dignity (*waqār*) of the artist and respect (*ĕ'zāz*) for the arts were neglected. While this

decline was gradual, Shahid Dehlvi sees 1947 as sounding the death knell for these women: "Today, one cannot even imagine the courtesans of 50 years ago" (*ibid.*: 258). In *taẕkira*-like fashion, he records Moti Jan and Naushaba Jan alongside other courtesan singers—Doanni Jan, Choti Jan, Amir Jan of Panipat, Kali Jan, Kiti Jan, Shamshad Bai and so on—and describes how these women were courted for their discernment (*tamīz*) and courtesy (*shāyistagī*). This ideal sharply contrasts with their thwarted end, in the wake of 1947. Moti Jan passed away in Lahore. Naushaba Jan remained in Delhi where she was forgotten. To drive home the sense of interrupted futures, the essay ends abruptly with a cruel story about the celebrated singer Kiti Jan. Shahid Dehlvi explained that such women were celebrated regardless of their physical appearance, for "it was known that the time of singing was dawn on the fairyland of Indar's assembly. Kiti Jan was dark-complexioned but she achieved a voice of light." Nonetheless, one day Kiti Jan was wearing a green sari when a youth called out, "Hey, look at that unripe mango rolling past!" Shahid Dehlvi's final sentence is simply: "Left speechless from this jibe, she collapsed and wept, and Bi Jan (i.e. Naushaba) too was shaken" (*ibid.*: 259). Ending on this note provides a stark contrast to the exalted *meḥfil*s of the 1920s, and the imperial imaginary these women cultivated as they drew their captivated audiences back into the fairyland of the 1850s. Having eulogised these women's voices, it is especially poignant that Kiti Jan and Naushaba were left speechless by this crude insult.

Shahid Dehlvi was not alone in connecting courtesan singers to the royal court. In a footnote in his famous essay on the Flower-Seller's Festival, Farhatullah Baig discusses Tirmunhi Khanum, a forceful personality with a crooked mouth who also had a personal connection to Tanras Khan (until they quarrelled and went their separate ways), and sang the Emperor's *ghazal*s in his presence. Tirmunhi was the grandmother of Doanni Jan, who appears in Shahid Dehlvi's list of celebrated singers, while Tirmunhi's sister, Dildar Khanum, was the grandmother of Kali Jan, who is also featured (Baig 1943: 31; cf. Pernau 2018). This Kali Jan was known to Shahid Dehlvi's grandfather, Nazir Ahmad, who once

told a potential Arabic student to take music lessons from her in order to better understand the cadence of poetry (Baig 2009: 32).

While both Shahid Dehlvi and Farhatullah Baig embedded these women in the afterlives of the Mughals and their *meḥfil*s, these women were, in fact, also exploring new creative directions and audiences posed by modern technology. In the early 20th century, Kali Jan and Doanni Jan made numerous gramophone recordings and became celebrity singers (Kinnear 1994: 106, 139, 246–247, 262). While Naushaba Jan is described as presiding over a traditional assembly, she was also broadcast performing *ṭhumrī* and *ghazal* in the 1930s from the Delhi Broadcasting Station of the Indian State Broadcasting Service (All India Radio 1936). Her successful embrace of radio did not go uncontested: most notably in February 1936, the Legislative Assembly heard a complaint by one Sardar Sant Singh against the Delhi Broadcasting Stations' use of Arabic and Persian words in their announcements and their indecent patronage of so-called *nautch* girls (Legislative Assembly 1936: 1464–1477. Naushaba named on 1473). Nonetheless, to be coherent actors in Shahid Dehlvi's universe, these women had to be represented in a post-Mughal *meḥfil* rather than a recording studio. This preserved the integrity of the nostalgic vision of Delhi and made the ruin of the Mughal legacy in 1947 even more devastating.

Intertextual nostalgia

This curated view of musical culture gestures to the longer history of nostalgia in Urdu literature. Drawing on Koselleck's concept of "temporal layers" (*Zeitchichten*), Margrit Pernau suggests that we find a blurring of different historical responses to 1857 in nostalgic literature, whereby each generation of authors brought earlier accounts into their present version (Pernau 2019: 195–218). This simultaneity of memory positions resonates with Soofia Siddique's "contrapuntal" reading of the multi-layered "remembering" of 1857 in her nuanced analysis of literary memory (Siddique 2012). Shahid Dehlvi's representation of trauma and rupture in 1947 was rooted in an understanding of 1857

that had evolved over several generations of authors. His works were explicitly intertextual: besides embedding *ghazal* verses from across the centuries into his prose, he framed his recollections as an echo of earlier traumas. The title of his essay collection, *Ujṛā diyār* is borrowed from a line attributed to Mir Taqi Mir (1723–1810), lamenting the ravaged Delhi of the mid-18th century: "I belong to that desolate terrain" (*ham rahne vāle hain usī ujṛā diyār ke*). While the attribution to Mir has been contested, it is popularly believed that Mir composed this verse when he relocated to Lucknow in 1782 and looked behind him to his ravaged home in Delhi; drawing on this motif, Shahid Dehlvi stands in Mir's shoes, looking back from Karachi. As Eve Tignol has argued, Urdu reflections on 1857—including Tafazul Husain Kaukab's *Fughan-e Dihlī* (*The Lament for Delhi*, 1863)—appealed to 18th-century aesthetics, especially via *shahr āshob* (the city's misfortune) and secular *marṣiyah* (Tignol 2017). Daniela Bredi observes two varieties of nostalgia: one restorative, looking forward to a resurfacing of Islamic civilization, and one reflexive, characterized by emotional longing for a lost age (Bredi 2009: 140–141).[6] Bredi suggests these reflexive authors cultivated the "myth" of a Mughal efflorescence on the eve of 1857, a renaissance personally curated by Bahadur Shah, despite his being reduced to a minor role in the social and cultural life of the city in his own time (Naim 2003, Pernau 2019: 206). This features in Shahid Dehlvi's own essays, with the attention paid to Tanras Khan and the Emperor's own *khayāl* composition: although he claims audiences in the 1920s called him the "Emperor of Music," when Bahadur Shah was alive, he was rarely mentioned by contemporary music scholars [unlike other rulers, especially Wajid 'Ali Shah (r. 1847–1856)].[7] Margrit Pernau suggests the idealized account of the Emperor and his city provided the means for authors to imagine—and find consolation in—an alternative worldview (Pernau 2019: 196–206). Though writing about

[6] See Bredi 2009: 146 for Urdu nostalgic works produced in this period. On nostalgia for Islamic civilization, see Naim 2012.

[7] Shahid Dehlvi discusses Bahadur Shah's compositions further in Dehlvi 1959: 172. On Wajid 'Ali Shah see Williams 2015.

1947, Shahid Dehlvi explicitly begins his essays by recalling the earlier rupture of 1857, and then adopts an ethnographic tone—detailing the names, sounds, and materials of a prelapsarian Delhi—in a similar mode to his predecessors writing on the time before 1857, such as Faiz ud Din Dihlavi's *Bazm-e ākhir* (1885) and Saiyid Ahmad Dihlavi's *Rusūm-e Delhi* (1900). We might also look beyond Delhi to Lucknow, especially in the parallels between these essays and those of 'Abdul Halim Sharar on the court culture of Awadh, written at the turn of the 20th century (Naim 2012).

By folding the Delhi of 1857 into his essays on 1947, Shahid Dehlvi gestures to an almost timeless urban culture, rooted in a markedly Muslim city that had been through traumas before, but was only truly destroyed upon Independence. While his description of the *meḥfil*s might recall Farhatullah Baig, the conversations and poetic exchanges between the participants of the music parties also create connections across time, by appealing to shared vocabularies of feeling. Thus, when Naushaba Jan executes a speedy note sequence (*tān*) in her *drut khayāl*, someone in the audience responds with a couplet by Momin Khan Momin (1800–1852) (Dehlvi 1978: 258):

us ghairat-e-nāhīd kī har tān hai dīpak
sho'ala sā lapak jāye hai āvāz to dekho

each *tān* from this envy of Venus is a lamp:
look at that sound, a darting flame.

Poetry appears throughout the essays, as verses sung by the courtesans, as emotional responses from their audience members, and from Shahid Dehlvi as an intertextual commentary on his own narrative. These verses elicit emotional responses. We follow the responses of one noble, who listens captivated by Naushaba Jan as she sings a *ghazal* by Ghalib, until she reaches a specific verse (*ibid.*: 259):

mārā zamāne ne āsadullah khān tumhein
voh valvale kahān voh javānī kidhar gayī

Time has killed you, Asadullah Khan!
Where is that uproar, where has your youth gone?

Abruptly, the noble's "eyes overflowed with tears, and tossing his handkerchief to his face he began to sob. Watching him, the entire *meḥfil* became dejected."[8] These tears are for the demise of the Delhi that Ghalib had known, appropriated through music and literature, but they also presage the future laments of music lovers that would come in 1947.

Music in Partition

Beyond literary nostalgia and intertextuality, these essays have specific qualities stemming from their appeal to musical imaginaries. As we have already seen in "Rāg rang kī ek rāt," Shahid Dehlvi invokes two *rāg*s in his narrative: the combustible Dīpak as well as Bhairav ["The dance of Bhairav was in Old Delhi" (Dehlvi 2011: 262, see above)] . Bhairav was an especially significant *rāg* in canonical musical literature, as it often appeared first in series of iconographic accounts of the *rāg*s (*rāgmālā*): conventionally, Bhairav was identified as possessing the ascetic countenance of Shiva.[9] Here, Dehlvi refers more specifically to Shiva Nataraja's fiery dance of destruction [which had received renewed attention in the performing arts in the early 20th century (Allen 1997)]; his brief phrase leaves it to the reader whether to imagine a *rāg*, a destructive Hindu god or, by extension, a Hindu mob burning its way through Delhi's Muslim neighbourhoods. The attribution of Delhi's destruction to Dīpak is similarly ambivalent: does the author really believe Bundu Khan burned down Delhi with his *saraṅgī*, or was it a coincidence, or was it a metaphor? This ambivalence contrasts with the specificity of Shahid Dehlvi's other, concrete accounts of Partition violence and allows readers to reflect on 1947 not only through a history configured by figures and dates, but also a more sensory, affective

[8] "ānkhon se ānsu jārī ho gaye, aur munh par rūmāl ḍāl kar siskiyān lahne lage. unhen dekh kar sārī meḥfil afsurda ho gayī" (Delhvi 1978: 259).

[9] His iconography was not generally associated with the terrifying form of the tantric Bhairav. See Williams 2019.

hermeneutic that belongs to an alternative worldview that was itself lost to the flames.

By centring a worldview with roots in Indo-Islamicate intellectual traditions, rather than the dominant, post-Enlightenment model of historical causation, Shahid Dehlvi also gestures to the cultural devastation wreaked by the deaths or displacements of performing artists. The *bhāṇḍ*s, courtesans, and *ustād*s are all presented as living manifestations of inherited expertise and conduits to a golden age of refinement. Musicians and dancers are especially emblematic as masters of embodied knowledge precisely because their arts lie in the movements of their hands, feet, and voices. When their bodies are silenced, marginalised, or killed, the systems of gesture and meaning they had mastered disappear with them. Music dies with the bodies it inhabits.

Because Shahid Dehlvi is documenting this music after the horrors, his accounts have a haunting quality. The music that he heard cannot be heard again, however rich his descriptions. He details the different pieces that are performed in the "programme"[10] of the *meḥfil*s, discusses the range of different rhythmical patterns he heard, the lyrics of the songs and their *rāg* and *tāl* settings. However, these are ultimately silent evocations that cannot do justice to the original sounds which only he and his generation had known: the muted page becomes a monument to the world of sound which also burned to ashes in 1947.

However, stepping outside of the nostalgic imaginary, this is not the only possible reading: providing the titles, *rāg*s, and *tāl*s might also have enabled readers to trace recordings of these songs. As already noted, many of the singers named in his essay were recording artists, and certain pieces in the essays were released by other artists in the same period. For example, the key *kẖayāl* of Bahadur Shah performed by Naushaba Jan, "Ruta basanta apnī umanga soṅ," was recorded in *rāg* Bagesri Bahar—as specified in the essay—by Kesarbai Kerkar (Kerkar 2014). It might be possible to interpret his references to specific compositions as cues for the music lover to seek out the records of songs from those

[10] He uses the English word, Dehlvi 2011: 258.

parties in Delhi, reading the essay as an interactive text that might be resounded. However, this reading only becomes possible if the reader accepts the possibilities of modern technology, which are absent in Shahid Dehlvi's accounts—at least in Urdu.

In his English essay, "Tradition and Change in Indo-Pakistani Classical Music" (1959), Shahid Dehlvi drew on similar themes yet developed a different line of argument based on an alternative approach to history. Originally drafted as a lecture presented to the Siam Society, Shahid Dehlvi sought to represent the prestigious history of South Asian art music and the promise of musical possibility facing a postcolonial society, rather than articulating a nostalgia that only his Urdu readers would appreciate. Indeed, in his preamble, he argues that the arts arouse the emotions by activating "forms which already have acquired some emotional value through association. Certain shapes, colours[,] sounds, came to acquire special emotional value in the eyes and ears of certain groups of people through centuries of use" (Dehlvi 1959: 168). Following this logic, Shahid Dehlvi could not discuss the music of Delhi with a Thai audience using the imaginary of *rāg*s and *ghazal*s, since these would not be a familiar emotional register. Instead, he adopted a longue durée, schematic approach, outlining centuries of musical development in India. This was a history of Muslim creativity: while Indo-Pakistani music might be traced back to ancient Hindu music and hymnody, "this form was later refined and systematized in the courts of the great Muslim kings of Delhi" (*ibid.*: 169). Like the Urdu essays then, the musical world has Delhi as its centre of gravity and is populated by Muslim artists alone; again, Bahadur Shah is central within this centre. Crucially, however, the devastating rupture was in 1857—"When British rule came and all the old kingdoms and thrones were cleared away by the new rulers"—and there is no mention of 1947 (*ibid.*: 174). In the Urdu essays, these two historical traumas bookended a twilight period of musical creativity, brought to a definitive end by Partition. Facing a Thai audience, Shahid Dehlvi presented a different timeline: music was sent into decline by the British but now, through Independence, was advancing once again. While the Urdu essays locate

music exclusively in the Mughal *meḥfil*, in English, Shahid Dehlvi views music "as a living body of art" that satisfied "new demands" through the Parsi theatre companies and then film music (*ibid.*: 169, 175). In sharp contrast to his nostalgic ruminations on Delhi, here he writes as a hopeful ambassador of a new nation's music, cultivated between East and West Pakistan:

> That the unknown or little-known songs which once echoed only in the forests of East Bengal have reached the city dwellers of Lahore and Karachi is a great achievement…The radio musicians have also been practicing such innovations as setting Urdu songs to Bengali tunes and Bengali songs to Sindhi tunes, so that musical ideas and traditions are made to mingle, to circulate, and thereby enrich the musical repertoire of the different regions of the country. (*ibid.*: 176)

The imagined geography of this essay is very different: politically, Delhi can no longer be his centre of gravity, but "the garden of our classical music" is enriched by Bengali and Sindhi folk music, the "soil and source of all national music." This excitement around musical innovation and radio technology, and this very different significant geography, represents an alternative rhetoric around music and the post-colony: rather than lamenting a musical world that has become a scorched wasteland, instead, Shahid Dehlvi optimistically argues the "continuity of the stream must not be broken and the fresh waters of the past should continue to flow into the gardens of the present" (*ibid.*: 177).

Conclusion

These essays gesture to a larger engagement with musical nostalgia in the 1950s, as postcolonial intellectuals considered the place of aesthetics after the violence of Partition. Gautam Ghosh, for example, has explored how the Bengali *bhadralok* made a claim to the refinement of a bygone Mughal nobility and musical connoisseurship in works such as *Jalsaghar* (1958) (Ghosh 2018). Comparing Shahid Dehlvi's Urdu and English essays demonstrates how the same author could construct

different historical arguments on the basis of music, subject to his immediate priorities and readerships. While all three essays assert a timeline between an unstable musical present and the fall of the Mughals in 1857, the Urdu pieces curated an image of a preserved *meḥfil* culture, imbued with the nostalgia of past generations yet resistant to modernity, which was finally quelled in the violence of 1947. When he wrote in English for an international audience, Shahid Dehlvi was more hopeful, eliding 1947 and instead exploring how music would continue to evolve in Pakistan. While I have underlined the apparent differences between the musical histories in Shahid Dehlvi's essays, for all his optimism, his English lecture only hears innovative forms in Pakistan's future, rather than the music of the past in a new setting. Even if the garden of classical music might yet survive, it seems that the roses he had treasured in Delhi could not be transplanted. Articulating this loss required a particular mode of expression, one embedded in sonic affect: from the burning *rāg* to the silence of the printed page.

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