



Through the Eyes of the Lyre: A TRANSOCEANIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE SIDI SUFI DEVOTIONAL TRADITION OF WESTERN INDIA

Jazmin Graves

The religious landscape of western India features a unique devotional tradition centering upon the veneration of African Sufi saints by Sidis, Indians of African ancestry, at shrines throughout Mumbai and Gujarat.¹ The tradition boasts a diverse body of devotees which includes Muslims, Hindus and Parsis, reflecting its development within a multi-religious Indian context. Yet one memorial shrine (*chilla*) in Dongri, Mumbai houses four musical instruments which evoke a history and heritage extending beyond the Indian subcontinent. These four instruments impress a lasting imprint on their viewer: they are visually striking, with their imposing size and anthropomorphic appearance, resembling horned skulls with black eye sockets peering out from aged faces.² Similar instruments are found in the Africana Muslim diaspora from Gujarat to the Gulf, illuminating eastern Africa, the Gulf region, and western India as vertices of a triangular pathway along which Africans, including the Sidi ancestor-saints, arrived in South

.....
1 Devotion to Bava Ghor has also spread to the Siddis of Uttara Kannada. See Obeng 2007 pages 115-116.

2 These large sound holes are called *'yun* or “eyes” in the Gulf. See Racy 2006 page 111. For a note on the “zoomorphic symbolism” of the bowl-lyre, see Kebede 1977 pages 383-384.

1a. (opposite, top) Frontal view of two Dongri lyres, with a glimpse of the memorial tomb of Bava Ghor (right). Photo Credit: Jazmin Graves, 2016.

1b. (opposite, bottom) Side view of two Dongri lyres, with a *magarman* (standing drum) between them. Photo Credit: Jazmin Graves, 2016.

Asia.³ This route is associated with the intra- and inter-continental African slave trade and its dispersal of African peoples and traditions throughout the vast yet intricately interconnected northwestern Indian Ocean World.⁴

Sidi musical instruments with links to Africa and the Gulf region suggest the need for ethnomusicological and historical research to determine when, from whence, and by what means these instruments and their bearers arrived in India. Sidi oral histories preserve some of this information and thus invite the scrutiny of linguists and philologists as they transcribe and analyze these texts.⁵ The Sidi oral archive is replete with a legendary corpus of one hundred twenty-five devotional songs (*jikr*) which record various aspects of Sidi history and cultural heritage.⁶ The *jikr* feature in song-dance performances called *goma* or *dhammal*, which honor God, the Prophet, and Sufi saints, especially the Sidi ancestor-saints, invoking trance-possession states in which the ancestor-saints are believed to embody their Sidi “descendants” and other devotees.⁷ Weaving together scholarly research under the disciplines of anthropology, history, religious studies, and philology, this study traces the origins of the four instruments enshrined at the Dongri *chilla* in order to ascertain their distinct contribution to the multifaceted devotional tradition surrounding the Sidi ancestor-saints.

This polyvalent devotional tradition incorporates both South Asian and African influences. While the term *dhammal* associates it with Sufi drumming and dance performances, and rituals such as fire-walking among the Madariyya Sufis of the Deccan, the term *goma* is of Bantu-

.....
3 For more on the Africana Muslim diaspora, see Curtis IV 2014 page 7. For more information about the Middle East as an intermediary point on the journey to India, see Basu et al. 2008 page 293. While this reference refers to the transportation of African captives to India via the Middle East in the nineteenth century, this route is also attested in the sixteenth century journey of Malik Ambar from Ethiopia to India. See Ali 2016. See also Machado 2004 pages 19-20.

4 For an introduction to the slave trade, see Alpers 2004 pages 27-41.

5 Helene Basu records these histories in several of her publications, listed in the references.

6 These songs vary regionally and are said to number 125, a legendary figure at the Sidi saint shrine in Ratanpur, where 125 is the number of days believed necessary to cure an individual afflicted with malevolent spirit possession (personal communication with the lead ritual musician of Ratanpur’s Sidi community).

7 See Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2004 pages 178-211. For possession of Parsi mediums, see Shroff 2008 pages 256-275.

language origin, and is linked to the *ngoma* cults of affliction of eastern, central and southern Africa.⁸ The Sidi *goma* song-dance performance inviting possession by Sufi ancestor-saints reflects a clear relationship with African *ngoma* rituals, which facilitate healing via song-dance performances involving drumming and possession by ancestral spirits.⁹ In contrast with the ritual embodiment of benevolent ancestor-saints, individuals believed to be possessed by malevolent spirits seek Sidi ritual practitioners to facilitate contact with the healing power of the ancestor-saints in order to exorcise the harmful entity.¹⁰ This locates the Sidi ancestor-saint shrine within one of many networks of Muslim saint shrines in South Asia to which pilgrims journey for exorcistic healing.¹¹ With this, the Sidi tradition is grounded in the South Asian context of Muslim saint shrines and Sufi devotional music and rituals.¹² At the same time, the *goma* song-dance performance evidences the tradition's African inheritance, in terms of its connection to *ngoma* cults of affliction. However, the lyres of the Dongri shrine point toward a different African musico-ritual tradition as an additional tributary to Sidi devotional culture; tracing the journey of these instruments to India allows the researcher to follow this stream to its source.

An oral history recounted by the late Asoo Appa, former *mujawari* or keeper of the Dongri shrine, illuminates these instruments' seaborne path to India: "... the ancestors saw the lyres in a dream, saw them floating towards the sea shore and the instruments called out, 'We are here, come and get us.' The ancestors went to the water's edge with incense and brought them here to the shrine."¹³ The instruments are thus lyres which reached the Sidis of western India by sea. Each lyre has a feminine name: Fitna, Nasra, Baputa, and Madanya.¹⁴ At this shrine, the lyres are offered frankincense (*loban*) daily at the time of the *maghrib*



8 Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2004 pages 184-186. For a portrait of a *dhammal* performance at a Sufi shrine in Sindh, see Rehman 2009 pages 140-141.

9 Janzen 1992. See also Basu 2008b pages 236-244.

10 Basu 2008b pages 249-250.

11 See Bellamy 2011.

12 The devotional tradition surrounding the Sidi ancestor-saints also suggests a degree of overlap with elements of Hinduism. See Basu 2004a page 67. Basu also observes a parallel between Mai Mishra's seven sisters and seven Hindu goddesses: see Basu 1998 page 94.

13 Unless otherwise noted, the information in this paragraph is sourced from Shroff 2007 page 312.

14 Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy 2003. The latter three names also refer to Sidi clan names; see Lodhi, this volume.

or evening prayers and are adorned with henna during the death-anniversary celebration (*urs*) of the ancestor-saints.¹⁵ The Dongri shrine is one of the only known locations to preserve these lyres in India today; a lyre has also reportedly been seen in Rander, Surat.¹⁶ Knowledge of how to make, repair or play them has largely faded throughout the Sidi community.

Another Sidi woman, Sakinabai Bilalbhai Myava, recalls seeing such instruments played in Gujarat during her childhood. The instrument is called a *nangas* and its player, a *nangasi*.¹⁷ Myava remembers it played in her childhood by Sidi Murjan Miyan, who composed many *jikr*.¹⁸ While knowledge of how to play the *nangas* was not transmitted beyond him, the term *nangasi* lived on as a hereditary title for the lead musician of a *goma* performance. Today, the *nangasi* leads the singing of the *jikr* in a call-and-response between himself and the chorus. Murjan Miyan's grandson, the late Kamar Badshah, is remembered as the last *nangasi* to know the entire corpus of one hundred twenty-five ongs.

The *jikr* “*Avale Bismillah*” or “Beginning in the Name of God,” credited to Murjan Miyan, complicates our understanding of the term *nangasi* by mapping this role onto the ancestor-saint Bava Ghor.¹⁹ After praising God and sending blessings upon the Prophet, this *jikr* names three Sidi ancestor-saints: Bava Ghor, called “Gori Badshah” or “Bava” in the *jikr*; Mai Misra, Bava Ghor's sister; and Hazrat Bilal, the Abyssinian companion of the Prophet and first muezzin of Islam, whom the Sidis also claim as an ancestor. The song addresses the ancestor-saints as *sadat*, masters, yet identifies Gori Badshah as “*sacca maula*,” “the true master.” Bava Ghor's positioning as master among masters parallels the way in which the *jikr* exalts one *nangasi* over many: “He is the sublime,

.....
15 Shroff 2007 page 312. Personal communication with a young Sidi ritual specialist at the Dongri shrine.

16 Personal communication with a Sidi elder and lead ritual musician in Ahmedabad.

17 Catlin-Jaraizbhoy 2010 page 139. Note that “Myava” comes from the ethnonym “Yao,” a Bantu-speaking people of Tanzania and Mozambique (see Alpers 2000 page 92). The word “*nangas*” is similar to the term *nnanga*, which denotes the bowed-neck harp found in southern Uganda (see Muehrer 2012) as well as other types of harps, lyres, and stringed instruments in the east African region (see Catlin-Jairzabhoy 2004 page 197).

18 This and the remainder of the information in this paragraph is sourced from Catlin-Jairzabhoy 2004 pages 194-5.

19 Ibid., 195-6. Unless otherwise noted, all lyrics and translations are sourced from this passage.

the eminent, the supreme *nangasi*. The *nangasi* has arrived. All *nangasis* have the true name.” As the *jīkr* elevates Bava Ghor among the ancestor-saints, its celebration of the “supreme *nangasi*” among “all *nangasis*” aligns the ancestor-saint Bava Ghor with the figure of the supreme *nangasi*.

The *jīkr* heralds his arrival by exclaiming that he has come (*amade hai nangasi*) before inviting the other saints or prophets to present themselves as well (*ao sacce nabe*).²⁰ *Goma* performances tend to reach a climactic point when the spirits of the ancestor saints are understood to “play” with their descendants and mediums as they dance in a trance-possession state.²¹ This is described as *hal*,²² a state characterized by *maja*, or ecstasy.²³ Thus, the *jīkr* exuberates, “It is a wave from the ocean ... The true master Gori Badshah’s wave” using “Gori Badshah’s wave” as a metaphor for the ecstatic state that the arrival of the true master and his retinue engenders among their devotees.²⁴ The listener may envision Bava Ghor as the supreme *nangasi*, sending a wave of rapture over his listeners by sounding the *nangas* as he sings.²⁵ Some Sidis see Bava Ghor as responsible for bringing the *nangas* to India, and attribute its origins to Hazrat Bilal.²⁶ This explains the *jīkr*’s references to Gori Badshah and Hazrat Bilal, celebrating the former as the supreme *nangasi*.

We thus see two origin stories for the *nangas* among the Sidis of Gujarat and Mumbai. One highlights the instruments’ agency as they journey across the sea of their own accord, notifying the ancestors of their arrival, while another holds Bava Ghor responsible for transporting the *nangas* to India. Combining these accounts, we can trace the path of the *nangas* across the Indian Ocean to western India by studying the Sidi oral narrative of Bava Ghor’s journey to Gujarat. Bava Ghor is remembered as an Abyssinian military leader named Sidi Mubarak Nobī who was

.....
20 Ibid.

21 Basu 2004b page 238.

22 Basu 2008b page 252.

23 Shroff 2013 page 22.

24 Catlin-Jairazbhoy highlights the two-fold meaning of the term *mauj* as both “wave” and “ecstasy:” see Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2004 page 196. The translation of this line is my own.

25 This calls to mind the liquid imagery of love of the god Krishna: see Ghosh 2009. For more on the “liquid love” of Krishna, see McDaniel 1989 pages 75-85.

26 Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2010 page 140. For more on the role of Bilal in shaping identity in the African Muslim diaspora, see Curtis IV 2014.

sent to Gujarat by the Prophet Muhammad.²⁷ His mission: to subdue an oppressive demoness and her minions, and to propagate Islam. Traveling overland from Mecca to Baghdad, he became an initiate in the Rifai Sufi order and received the name “Baba Ghaur,” a title signifying his mastery of meditation, the pronunciation of which later simplified to “Bava Ghor.”²⁸ Bava Ghor marched with a retinue of soldiers along the Makran coast and through Sindh until he reached Gujarat. Eventually, his younger brother Bava Habash and later, their younger sister Mai Misra with her sisters and friends, crossed the sea to join Bava Ghor in India.

These three figures, along with their entourage of soldiers, siblings, and companions, form the family of the Sidi ancestor-saints. This narrative recalling their journey to Gujarat does not explicitly reference the Indian Ocean slave trade, along whose networks Africans commonly arrived in India. However, Bava Ghor’s original name, Sidi Mubarak Nobi, bespeaks a connection to slavery. Historian Edward Alpers notes, “Mubarak is a characteristic Islamic slave name and the suffix Nobi indicates that he was from the Sudan, rather than ... Abyssinia.”²⁹ In fact, one oral history suggests that Bava Ghor had been a slave whose master, beholding the saint’s piety and *roshan rui* or haloed face, emancipated him.³⁰ Anthropologist Helene Basu identifies Bava Ghor as “a metonym of the history of Muslim conquest, state-building and African slaves serving in the military,” a history which is equally exemplified by the names of his siblings: *Habash* denotes Abyssinia or Ethiopia, and *Misra* points to the Arabic name for Egypt.³¹ “The names of these three prominent saints,” Basu elaborates, “evoke the landscape of the Nile Valley—the area from where most African slaves were drawn in the early centuries of Muslim state building.”³²

In this way, the historical narrative of Bava Ghor, Bava Habash and Mai Misra sheds additional light on the history of the Habshi *amarat*,

.....
 27 Unless otherwise noted, the information in this paragraph is sourced from Basu 2008d pages 313-314. See also Basu 2008b pages 234-235. For Bava Ghor as trader and innovator of the agate bead industry of Gujarat, see Kenoyer and Bhan 2004.

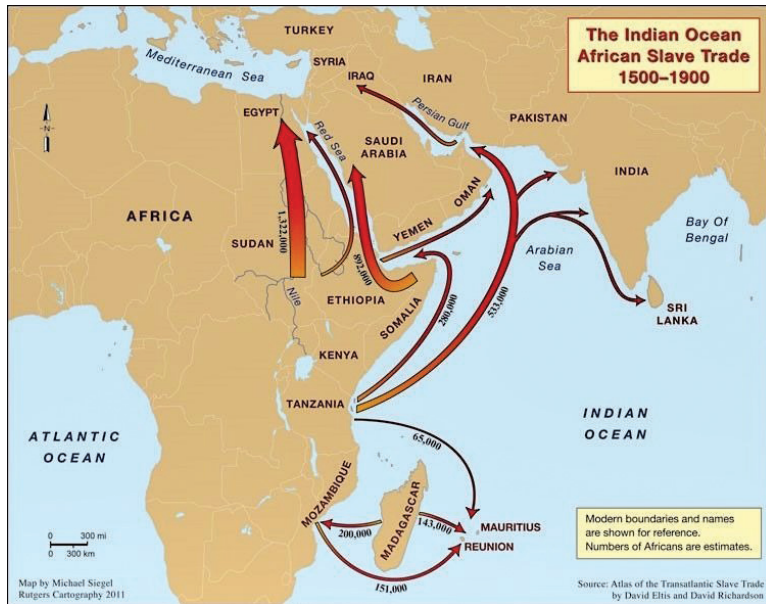
28 Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2004 page 185.

29 Alpers 2004 page 28.

30 Personal communication with a distinguished member of the Sidi community in Ratanpur.

31 Basu 2008b page 235.

32 Basu 2000 page 260.



or the political authority of northeast African Muslim military slaves in premodern India.³³ Their names indicate that, amongst Habshis hailing from present-day Ethiopia and Somalia, as represented by Bava Habash, were Nubians, or Upper Nilotic Egyptians and Sudanese, represented by Mai Misra and Bava Ghor.³⁴ When viewed alongside textual records concerning the life and spiritual lineage (*silsila*) of Bava Ghor, a Rifai Sufi with the authority to initiate others into the Rifai order (*tariqa*), this oral history reveals that, in addition to serving as soldiers, rulers, concubines and courtiers, a number of Habshis in premodern India were also distinguished Sufis.³⁵

The history of slavery preserved by Bava Ghor’s narrative helps to explain the intercontinental pathways of the Indian Ocean slave trade connecting eastern Africa to the Middle East and South Asia. This

33 Robbins and McLeod 2006.

34 Ali 2016 page 24.

35 From a photograph of the Rifai genealogy (*shajra*) listing the initiator and initiates of Sheikh Baba Ghaur, and a photocopy of a one-page biography of the saint, sourced from *Khalif-e Sheikhu'l Islam* by Sayid Nuruddin Ashrafi Curzon. These documents are held at the Rifai Sufi headquarters in Baroda, Gujarat; the complete text of *Khalif-e Sheikhu'l Islam* is not available at this site. Photographs of the genealogy and biography were shared by Ph.D. candidate and lecturer Sofia Pequignot of Université Toulouse II Jean Jaurès. Bava Ghor’s arrival in fourteenth century Gujarat as a military leader accompanied by a retinue of soldiers parallels the advent of “warrior Sufis” in the Deccan from the end of the thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth century. See Eaton 1977 page 19.

2. Map of the Indian Ocean African Slave Trade, 1500–1900. Map by Michael Siegel, Rutgers Cartography 2011.*

* In “The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean World” Online Exhibit, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Accessed at: <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africansindianocean/maps.php>



history, in turn, illuminates the trajectory of the *nangas*' journey to western India. Hailing from the Sudan, the soldier Sidi Mubarak Nobi reached Baghdad via Mecca, and eventually arrived in Gujarat in the fourteenth century.³⁶ His itinerary corresponds to the historical routes of trade and travel along which the most famous of all African elite Muslim military slaves would reach India. The latter is none other than Malik Ambar, the de facto ruler of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate in the Deccan from 1600–1626.³⁷ After being shipped from the Ethiopian port Zeila to Mocha in modern-day Yemen, the young Ambar, like Sidi Mubarak Nobi, arrived in Baghdad, Iraq, possibly travelling overland from Mecca. He was then taken from Baghdad to Basra, and most likely stopped at the port of Surat in Gujarat, Nobi's final destination, before completing the journey to the Deccan. Juxtaposing the India-bound routes of Malik Ambar and Sidi Mubarak Nobi reveals the role of the Middle East—particularly, the Gulf region—as an intermediary point on the journey from northeastern Africa to South Asia.

The attribution of the *nangas*' origins to Hazrat Bilal and its arrival in India to Bava Ghor would indicate that the *nangas* is actually an instrument of Ethiopian origin which Sidi Mubarak Nobi carried with him from the Sudan to Gujarat via the Gulf region. Indeed, the *nangas* is a type of bowl-lyre which is understood to have spread from Ethiopia into neighboring areas such as the Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and the Congo,³⁸ as well as Eritrea and Somalia.³⁹ Here, the parallelism between Malik Ambar and Sidi Mubarak Nobi resurfaces, with the depiction of Malik Ambar's courtier Sidi Sa'ad playing the bowl-lyre. As Malik Ambar was of Ethiopian origin, his courtier Sidi Sa'ad may also have been Ethiopian; this might distinguish the lyre he plays as an Ethiopian rather than Sudanese bowl-lyre, the latter variably called a *kisir*, *rababa*, or *tanburah*.⁴⁰ At any rate, consideration of oral histories and a devotional song concerning Bava Ghor and his *nangas*, supplemented by ethnomusicological and historical evidence, suggests that the *nangas* bowl-lyre originated in Ethiopia, reached the Sudan, and was carried by

.....

36 The one-page biography of Bava Ghor, referenced in the previous footnote, states that Bava Ghor was buried in 785 AH (1383 CE) after having lived for one hundred years.

37 Unless otherwise noted, the information in this paragraph is sourced from Ali 2016 page 27.

38 Racy 2006 page 100.

39 Teferra 2011 page 271.

40 Perhaps the absence of the large, eye-like sound holes in Sidi Sa'd's lyre attests to its difference from the Sudanese lyre.

3. Malik Ambar. Watercolor on paper, ca. 1620. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.*

.....

* In "The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean World" Online Exhibit, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Accessed at: <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africansindianocean/images.php>



the Sudanese *nangasi*, soldier, and Sufi saint Sidi Mubarak Nobi across the Gulf region into South Asia by the fourteenth century. If we are to take this as the definitive story of the *nangas*' journey to India, we must search for the presence of the *nangas* in the Gulf.

Indeed, communities of African descent in the Gulf perform spirit possession and healing ceremonies called *Nuban* or *zar Nubi*, whose musical performances feature the *tanburah* bowl-lyre.⁴¹ The *zar* tradition originates in Ethiopia, from whence it traveled to the Sudan, Somalia and Egypt, and from continental Africa to the Gulf region along the intra- and inter-continental networks of the African slave trade.⁴² The journey of the *zar* tradition through these territories parallels that of the bowl-lyre, as explored above. Just as Sidis associate the *nangas* with a Nubian or Sudanese ancestor-saint, the *zar Nubi tanburah* ceremonies of the Gulf also reflect Sudanese origins. Like the late Asoo Appa's account of the *nangas*' autonomous, seaborne journey to Mumbai, ethnomusicologist A. J. Racy recounts one report of a *tanburah* miraculously transporting itself from the Persian coast of the Gulf, where it was initially used, across the water to the Arabian shoreline in order to escape a devastating fire. Like the *nangas* at the Dongri shrine, the *tanburah* is offered incense and other gifts, although this occurs especially before the instrument is played. In Dongri and the Gulf region, the lyres are given female names. Just as Bava Ghor was both a military leader and *nangasi*, the *tanburah* player in the Gulf is called a *sanjak*, a term which denotes political or military authority. In Basra, the *tanburah* dance is understood as a tribute to Hazrat Bilal; in the figure of the *sanjak*, Ali Racy sees the image of the Abyssinian muezzin Bilal, just as some Sidis associate the *nangas* with the latter. We thus see strong parallels between the devotional culture surrounding the *tanburah* and the *nangas* among African-heritage communities from the Gulf to Gujarat, from Dubai to Mumbai, in which connections to the Sudan are prominent.

We will only begin to understand the implications of these transoceanic connections by retracing the path of the *nangas* and its saintly player back to the Sudan. On our way to the Sudan, we pass Egypt, the home of Mai Misra, where Racy informs us that the *tanburah* is used "in a specific healing ceremony known as zar Sudani or zar Nubi."⁴³ Reaching



4. (opposite) Sidi Sa'ad playing the lyre. Mughal or Deccani painting, ca. 1640–1660. Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection.*

5a. (top) A close-up of Sidi Sa'ad's lyre and a lyre from the Dongri shrine.

5b. (bottom) The Sudanese lyre at the British Museum.**

* In "The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean World" Online Exhibit, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Accessed at: <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africansindianocean/images.php>

** Image accessed at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/sudanese_lyre.aspx. Sidis visiting the British Museum have marveled at the similarity between the Nubian lyre and the *nangas*. See Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2010 pages 140-141.

41 Unless otherwise noted, this paragraph's discussion of the bowl-lyre in the Gulf is sourced from Racy 2006 pages 103-105.

42 Bilkhair 2006 page 43.

43 Racy 2006 page 101.

the Sudan, we encounter the bowl-lyre called the *rababa* being used in a Sudanese spirit possession and healing ceremony called *tombura zar*.⁴⁴ Anthropologist Susan Kenyon explains, “the *rababa* ... is the key ritual symbol of each *tombura* group. Regarded as the property of the *sanjak*, who may own several *rababa*, each represents a distinct local group or house of *zar* for which he is responsible. It is also the *rababa* that is seen as the proof of kinship with earlier generations and with the *sanjak* who first gave the instrument to the group. Each *rababa* has a name ... The names make clear that its identity is seen as male, rather than female....”⁴⁵

In these observations, we find key similarities and one distinct contrast with the case of the Sidi *nangas*. In Sudanese *tombura zar*, the *rababa* is given male names, while in Dongri and the Gulf, the *nangas* and *tanburah* are given female names. Yet just as the *rababa* proves kinship with earlier generations, the *nangas* connects the Sidis with their ancestors, who either received the instrument at the shore or brought it to India from the Sudan. In the role of the *rababa* as proof of kinship with the *sanjak* who first gave the instrument to the *zar* group, we clearly see the image of Bava Ghor as the ancestral *nangasi* who brought the *nangas* to India. As the *rababa* is the key ritual symbol of each *tombura* group or house of *zar* presided over by the *sanjak*, what are we to make of the four *nangas* enshrined in the Dongri *chilla*? Rather than to ritual groups or houses, the names of three of the lyres correspond to the names of distinct Sidi clans. Two of these clan and lyre names, Baputa and Madanya, are of especial interest to this study: historically, the Baputa were makers of musical instruments and players of the Nubian lyre, and the Madanya were both makers and players of the lyre.⁴⁶ The Dongri lyres thus memorialize the cultural heritage bequeathed by these particular clans to the Sidi community as a whole.

To what extent do the similarities between *tombura zar* in the Sudan and *zar Nubi* in the Gulf inform our understanding of Sidi devotional rituals and *goma* performances? This exploration brings us to question the overlap between Sidi *goma* performances, central and southern African *ngoma* rituals, and the *zar* traditions of northeast Africa and its diaspora. Basu notes that Sidi rituals honoring the ancestor-saint Bava Habash parallel the veneration of a class of Ethiopian spirits in *ngoma* spirit possession ceremonies in Zanzibar.⁴⁷ Following these lines, does Bava

.....
44 Kenyon 2007 page 71.

45 Ibid.

46 See Lodhi, this volume.

47 Basu 2008c pages 172-173.

Ghor personify the Nubian class of spirits featured in Zanzibari *ngoma*? Does the fact that *zar* traditions in the Sudan and the Gulf also feature Ethiopian and Nubian classes of spirits indicate overlap between *ngoma* and *zar* traditions, and to what extent? What are the intricacies of the ways in which the Sidi devotional tradition preserves vestiges of both *ngoma* and *zar*?⁴⁸

An oral history concerning Bava Ghor and the *nangas* clarifies the latter question. The *nangasi* of Ahmedabad's Sidi community reports that, during the days of Bava Ghor, *nangasis* did not play alongside other musicians during a *dhammal* performance. Rather, he—as only men could touch the *nangas*—would play solo.⁴⁹ The *nangasis* would serenade Bava Ghor, singing *jikr* in praise of God, the Prophet and Hazrat Ali, and would enter a state of trance (*magan*) while playing.⁵⁰ This vignette underscores the primacy of the *nangas* to the devotional music performance of yore in the Sidi Sufi tradition. The fact that this instrument of choice was played to serenade the saint who brought it to India suggests its functional role during the Sufi practice of ritual audition (*sama*⁶), a session over which the saint would have presided in his role as Rifai sheikh. Like the contemporary *dhammal* performance, the music of the *nangas* induced trances, perhaps reflecting the localization of ritual music performances of the Nubian lyre in the context of Sufi ritual audition in South Asia.

This exercise of tracing the journey of the bowl-lyre from eastern Africa to South Asia via the Gulf region has raised more questions than the one it sought to answer. This exploration has revealed the significance of the ancestor-saints Bava Ghor, Bava Habash and Mai Misra to the historiography of the African diaspora in South Asia. Their narratives and names record the history of enslavement and dispersal of northeast Africans in premodern India in particular and the northwestern Indian Ocean region more broadly. This history parallels that of the dissemination of *zar* traditions and the diffusion of the bowl-lyre within

.....
48 My present research suggests that the Sidi Sufi ritual known as *Mai Misra's Khicari* (Lentils-and-Rice) reflects aspects of the *karama* (thanksgiving) ceremony in Sudanese *zar*, while the *goma* performances of the *'urs* ceremony as I observed them in Ahmedabad, Gujarat reflect particular *ngoma* rituals. For a closer look at the former, see Graves 2018 pages 5-6.

49 Similarly, only men are allowed to play the *magarman* (standing drum), one of the most important instruments of the *dhammal* performance (personal communication with Ahmedabad's *nangasi*.)

50 Personal communication.

northeastern Africa and beyond. Whether or not the journey of the *nangas* from eastern Africa to the Gulf to South Asia also implies the transmission of certain religious practices associated with it, such as *tombura zar*, to western India can only be determined by future research.⁵¹ Suffice it to say, the material culture, oral histories and devotional performance tradition of the Sidis of western India demand sustained, concerted, interdisciplinary research in order to more fully understand the unique heritage of tens of thousands of Indians of African descent, and how this heritage can more deeply inform the fields of South Asian, Africana, and Indian Ocean studies.



REFERENCES

- Ahmad, Imtiaz and Helmut Reifeld. (eds.) 2004. *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptations, Accommodation and Conflict*. Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Ali, Omar. 2016. *Malik Ambar: Power and Slavery across the Indian Ocean*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Alpers, Edward. 2000. Recollecting Africa: Diasporic Memory in the Indian Ocean World. *African Studies Review*, 43, 1: 83-99.
- . 2004. Africans in India and the Wider Context of the Indian Ocean. In Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward Alpers. *Sidis and Scholars: Essays on African Indians*. Noida: Rainbow Publishers. Pages 27-41.
- Basu, Helene. (ed.) 1998. Hierarchy and Emotion: Love, Joy and Sorrow in a Cult of Black Saints in Gujarat, India. In Phina Werbner and Helene Basu. *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*. London: Routledge. Pages 117-139.
- . 2000. Theatre of Memory: Ritual Kinship Performances of the African Diaspora in Pakistan. In Monika Bock and Aparna Rao. *Culture, Creation, and Procreation: Concepts of Kinship in South Asian Practice*. New York: Berghahn Books. Pages 243-270.
- . 2004a. Redefining Boundaries: Twenty Years at the Shrine of Gori Pir. In Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward Alpers. *Sidis and Scholars: Essays on African Indians*. Noida: Rainbow Publishers. Pages 62-85.
- . 2004b. Ritual Communication: The Case of the Sidi in Gujarat. In Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld. *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptations, Accommodation and Conflict*. Delhi: Social Science Press. Pages 233-253.

.....

51 I am grateful to Durga Kale, doctoral student at the University of Calgary, for sharing her knowledge of the presence of the *zar* tradition among the Sidis of coastal Maharashtra.

- . 2008a. *Journeys and Dwellings: Indian Ocean Themes in South Asia*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited.
- . 2008b. A Gendered Indian Ocean Site: Mai Mishra, African Spirit Possession and Sidi Women in Gujarat. In Helene Basu. *Journeys and Dwellings: Indian Ocean Themes in South Asia*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited. Pages 227-255.
- . 2008c. Music and the Formation of Sidi Identity in Western India. *History Workshop Journal*, 65: 161-178.
- . 2008d. Drumming and Praying: Sidi at the Interface of Spirit Possession and Islam. In Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse. *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pages 291-322.
- Basu, Helene, von Schwerin, Kerrin and Ababu Minda. 2008. Daff Music of Yemeni-Habshi in Hyderabad. In Helene Basu. *Journeys and Dwellings: Indian Ocean Themes in South Asia*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited. Pages 288-303.
- Bellamy, Carla. 2011. *The Powerful Ephemeral: Everyday Healing in an Ambiguously Islamic Place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bilkhair, Aisha. 2006. Spirit Possession and its Practices in Dubai United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Musiké* 2: 43-64.
- Bock, Monika, and Aparna Rao. (eds.) 2000. *Culture, Creation, and Procreation: Concepts of Kinship in South Asian Practice*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Campbell, Gwyn. (ed.) 2004. *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*. London; Portland: Frank Cass Publishers.
- Catlin-Jairazbhoy, Amy, and Edward Alpers. (eds.) 2004. *Sidis and Scholars: Essays on African Indians*. Noida: Rainbow Publishers.
- Catlin-Jairazbhoy, Amy. 2004. A Sidi CD? Globalisation of Music and the Sacred. In Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward Alpers. *Sidis and Scholars: Essays on African Indians*. Noida: Rainbow Publishers. Pages 178-211.
- . 2010. Sidi Music in Western India: Remembering an African Heritage. In Shubha Chaudhuri and Anthony Seeger. *Remembered Rhythms: Essays on Diaspora and the Music of India*. London: Seagull Books. Pages 125-158.
- Catlin-Jairazbhoy, Amy and Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy. 2003. *From Africa... to India: Sidi Music in the Indian Ocean Diaspora*. DVD. Directed by Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy. Van Nuys, CA: Apsara Media.
- Chakraborty, Pallabi and Scott Kugle. (eds.) 2009. *Performing Ecstasy: The Poetics and Politics of Religion in India*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Chaudhuri, Shubha and Anthony Seeger. (eds.) 2010. *Remembered Rhythms: Essays on Diaspora and the Music of India*. London: Seagull Books.
- Curtis IV, Edward E. 2014. *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Eaton, Richard. 1977. *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Ghosh, Pika. 2009. Krishna's Dance of Devotion in the Temples of Seventeenth-Century Bengal. In Pallabi Chakraborty and Scott Kugle. *Performing Ecstasy: The Poetics and Politics of Religion in India*. New Delhi: Manohar. Pages 49-89.
- Graves, Jazmin. 2018. Mai Misra's *Khicari*: Remembrance and Ritual Re-presentation in the Sidi (African-Indian) Sufi Tradition of Western India. *Symposia* 9: 1-13.
- Janzen, John. 1992. *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kebede, Ashenafi. 1977. The Bowl-Lyre of Northeast Africa. Krar: The Devil's Instrument. *Ethnomusicology*, 21, 3: 379-395.
- Kenoyer, Mark J. and Kuldeep K. Bhan. 2004. Sidis and the Agate Bead Industry of Western India. In Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward Alpers. *Sidis and Scholars: Essays on African Indians*. Noida: Rainbow Publishers. Pages 42-61.
- Kenyon, Susan M. 2007. 'Moveable Feast of Signs': Gender in *Zar* in Central Sudan. *Material Religion*, 3, 1: 62-75.
- Machado, Pedro. 2004. A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave-Trade, c. 1730–1830. In Gwyn Campbell. *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*. London; Portland: Frank Cass Publishers. Pages 17-32.
- McDaniel, June. 1989. *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Muehrer, Rachel. 2012. Playing Techniques of the *Nnanga* of Buganda. *African Music*, 9, 2: 57-76.
- Obeng, Pashington. 2007. *Shaping Membership, Defining Nation: The Cultural Politics of African Indians in South Asia*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Racy, Ali Jihad. 2006. In the Path of the Lyre: The Tanburah of the Gulf Region. *Musiké* 2:97-122.
- Rehman, Uzma. 2009. Sacred Spaces, Rituals and Practices: The Mazars of Saiyid Pir Waris Shah and Shah 'Abdu'l Latif Bhitai. In Leif Stenberg and Catharina Raudvere. *Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community*. London: I.B. Tauris. Pages 137-157.
- Robbins, Kenneth X. and John McLeod. (eds.) 2006. *African Elites in India: Habshi Amarat*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing.
- Shroff, Beheroze. 2007. Sidis in Mumbai: Negotiating Identities between Mumbai and Gujarat. *African and Asian Studies*, 6: 305-319.
- . 2008. Spiritual Journeys: Parsis and Sidi Saints. In Helene Basu. *Journeys and Dwellings: Indian Ocean in South Asia*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited. Pages 256-275.
- . 2013. Goma is Going On: Sidis of Gujarat. *African Arts*, 46, 1: 18-25.
- Simpson, Edward and Kai Kresse. (eds.) 2008. *Struggling With History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Stenberg, Leif and Catharina Raudvere. (eds.) 2009. *Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Teferra, Timkehet. 2011. The Six-Stringed Bowl Lyre Krar of Ethiopia and its Function as a Melody Instrument. *STUDIA INSTRUMENTORUM MUSICAE POPULARIS II*: 269-286.

Werbner, Pnina and Helene Basu. (eds.) 1998. *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*. London: Routledge.