

AIPS 2014 Summer Research/Travel Grant Proposal

In December 2014 I propose to travel to Sindh and South Punjab for preliminary research to lay the groundwork for dissertation study on the *kāfī*, a form of Sindhi, Punjabi, and Saraiki-language Sufi poetry. *Kāfī* singing is exceptionally popular in Pakistan, although less well known in the academic world outside the country than its world famous sibling *qawwālī*. The poetry of Sufi saints in Punjab and Sindh form the basis of a wide range of musical genres ranging from folk to semi-classical vocal styles. I would like to explore how the poetic text is set to music, performed, and transmitted in the shrine context; where the poetry is sung as a devotional offering by specialized musicians; and how musicians and producers create *kāfīs* for broadcast and commercial use, thereby presenting the songs to wider urban audiences. These processes are not always separable; the resulting popularity of different sung genres in relation to the media and regional language or cultural politics are issues worth investigating.

During a short visit in April 2014, I established initial contact at the shrines of Shāh Abdul Latīf and Khwāja Ghulām Farīd. I would like to follow up with a recording project to build a working library of songs based on the poetry of these two "poet saints" and collect documentation on the music-making process. A large number of recording examples are vital in order to form and test hypotheses with regard to how the musicians set texts to music, especially concerning the relation of musical rhythm to poetic meter. Moreover, different sung versions of the same text, and textual variations themselves, can throw light on the musician's strategies in transmitting their traditions orally.

The shrine of Shāh Abdul Latīf in Bhit Shāh, Sindh, supports several families of *faqirs* who form groups to sing *wai* every night. *Wai* is the name of a special repertoire of *rāgs* used for singing Shāh Abdul Latīf's poetry and said to have been taught to the *faqirs* by the poet himself. Although some recordings of *wai* have been published, the recorded *surs* (chapters) are not complete. Confusion remains regarding both the names and the actual melodic structure of these special *rāgs*. My goal is to clarify these matters by recording the entire 30 *surs* of the Shāh Jo Risālo, undergoing apprenticeship to learn some of this repertoire from the *faqirs*, and using the recordings as the basis for feedback interviews. I hope to learn not only about the musical structure of the repertoire, but also, through open-ended discussions about poetry and singing, about more subjective aspects of *wai* singing.

Khwāja Ghulām Farīd was the first Sufi saint to compose mystical poems in the Saraiki language, and is said to have worked closely with his "official composer" Qawwāl Mian Barkat to assign *rāgs* to his poetry in the 19th Century. The descendants of the saint maintain his shrine in Kot Mithan, Punjab, as well as a library to house original and published manuscripts, and recordings by various artists of songs from the Dīwān-i-Farīd collection. During this trip I plan to survey the recordings and manuscripts in the library collection, and attempt to identify the sources that reportedly assign *rāg* names to particular *kāfīs*. Such information could be vital in my analysis of text-music relationships. Time permitting, I will also augment my archive by recording *qawwāls* who sing *kāfīs* at the shrine.

My proposed trip in December 2014 will be indispensable for me, as studying the recordings and preliminary interviews will allow me to refine my dissertation topic and prepare me to write more well-informed grant applications for dissertation research in 2016 (the year of my general exams in ethnomusicology). This trip will also help me set up a program of Sindhi (or possibly Saraiki) language study in the summer of 2015. I plan to apply to the South Asia Institute at Harvard for funding this language study, and I am likely to get support from the Harvard Department of Music as well. Furthermore, I plan to share some time during this visit with my advisor Richard Wolf to investigate the possibility of inviting a Pakistani musician to Harvard to promote more cultural exchange between US and Pakistan.