

Hereditary Musician Groups of Pakistani Punjab

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With notable exceptions, professional musicians in Pakistani Punjab have come from exclusive, hereditary groups. The ubiquitous term *mīrāsī* has been used by the cultural elite and scholars to refer to many among these types of musicians. The application of the term has been inconsistent, and it often disregards how the musicians view themselves. However, one must come to terms with it in order to grasp the social configurations of Punjabi professional musicians. With that in mind, this article critiques the literature on Mirasis to demonstrate the diverse and often confusing ways these musicians have been categorized. It will then draw on field data to explore the multiple ways which musicians, non-musicians, and ethnographers define the professional musicians of West Punjab.

A distinctive feature of Pakistani Punjabi musical culture is the almost exclusively hereditary nature of musicianship. Unlike professional musicians of Europe and North America who choose their occupation, the roles of Pakistani Punjabi musicians are ascribed from birth: these people are born into families of occupational specialists whose ancestors have been musicians for centuries. Non-musicians and the few non-hereditary musicians in Pakistan use the pejorative term *mīrāsī* to refer to all hereditary musicians. The widespread use of such a negatively perceived rubric amply demonstrates the low social status of professional musicians in Pakistani Punjab, but more importantly it also indicates a considerable ignorance of the many diverse subgroups of musicians who have a wide range of sociomusical identities and roles.

My aim here is to explore and clarify the polysemy of the term *mīrāsī* to show how hereditary musician groups in Pakistani Punjab differ greatly depending on kinship practices, musical sophistication, and particular sociomusical contexts. Ultimately, I am interested in how the term *mīrāsī* pertains to the social configuration of *tablā*-players and other hereditary musicians that I worked with in Lahore, Islamabad/Rawalpindi, and Peshawar in the years 1994-96, and 1999.

Literature on the Mirasis

Much has been written about the Mirasi “caste” of musicians (Bor 1986-87; Kippen 1988; Neuman 1990), and yet the term does not seem to have been used in ethnographic and musical treatises until the major British Orientalist studies of the Indian caste system of the late 19th century. The following review and comparison of four ethnographic sources will demonstrate the diverse and often confusing ways the term *mīrāsī* has been used in scholarly discourse.

British Orientalist Classification: H. A. Rose

The most comprehensive study of caste in pre-1947 Punjab is H.A. Rose’s *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*. Based on the census reports for the Punjab by D. Ibbetson in 1881 and by E. MacLagan in 1892, Rose’s massive three-volume work was published over a ten year period early in the 20th century.¹ From the outset of his section on the Mirasis of Punjab, Rose admits the complexity of the situation in defining this ostensible caste:

The Mīrásī form one of those large heterogeneous bodies, varying in status, occupation and doubtless in origin as well, which are conventionally called castes in the Punjab, though they correspond to no definition, actual or potential, of the term ‘caste.’ (Rose 1970:105)

According to Rose, the definition of *mīrāsī* is simply “genealogist.” This is related to the etymology of the term, *mīrās*, (“inheritance” in Arabic), which refers to the primary occupational specialization of the Mirasi as low-status hereditary genealogists for higher-ranking castes. Rose cites directly from the Gujrat Settlement Report of 1865 for the essential definition:

The duties of the Mīrásīs or village bards are as follows: To get by heart, and to be able to repeat from memory offhand, the pedigrees of the heads of the families within the tribe. They were always appealed to in former times in the case of any dispute about hereditary property. They have to attend upon the guests of their masters. The agricultural classes keep no household servants but these, and would consider it *infra dig.* to wait upon their own guests. They have to accompany their masters on visits of condolence or congratulations, they summon relations from far and

near, they have to accompany the daughter going to her father-in-law's house, or the son's wife to visit her paternal home. (Rose 1970:105)

That 1865 description goes into further detail concerning the social role and rituals of the Mirasi; however, suffice it to say, this portrait shows them to be low status service professionals who kept their patrons' most important oral knowledge. The actual social status of a Mirasi depended largely on the status of the patron caste for which he worked. Rose quotes from Ibbetson in this regard:

Like all the client or parasite classes the Mírásí's position varies with that of his patron, and a Mírásí permanently attached to a Rájput clan and benefited by it, ranks higher than one who is merely a strolling player or casual attendant at a Ját wedding. Even the outcast tribes have their Mírásís who, though they do not eat with their patrons and merely render them professional service, are considered impure by the Mírásís of the higher castes. (Rose 1970:106)

The second defining feature of the Mirasis mentioned by Rose concerns their role as public performers of music. Again, Rose cites Ibbetson extensively because the latter, rather than dealing with music and genealogical recitation as polarized notions, emphasized the combination of music and genealogy in the performances of the Mirasis:

...the Mírásí is more than a genealogist; he is also a musician and minstrel; and most of the men who play the musical instruments of the Punjab are either Mírásís, Jogís or *faqírs*. The social position of the Mirasi, as of all minstrel castes, is exceedingly low, but he attends at weddings and on similar occasions to recite genealogies. (Rose 1970:106)

The remainder of Rose's discussion of the Mirasi caste is a description of the bewildering array of Mirasi subgroups, forcing one to wonder if the term itself was and still is too broadly applied to be of any worth. Figure 1 outlines the subgroups of Mirasis as mentioned by Rose as they pertain to music in the Punjab and adjacent regions such as Rajasthan.

Before I discuss some of my conclusions based on the extensive list of Mirasi groups in this figure, I should point out some of the inherent limitations in Rose's approach. His discussion of each group was quite

short—usually two sentences to one paragraph—and much of the information is inconsistent and incomplete. The patron groups are frequently absent from the descriptions, and Rose did not definitively identify the sectarian identities and musical functions of each group. One can assume that all the groups discussed in the Mirasi section had some type of musical function combined with a genealogical function in the service of a higher-caste group. Rose obtained much of his ethnographic data from Ibbetson's works on Punjabi castes, but it is not clear how this information was obtained, nor by whom. Furthermore, some of the information appears to be factually incorrect, at least from a contemporary viewpoint: Rose's description of the *rabāb* (i.e. a lute) is confused with a *daf* (i.e. a frame drum) in group 22 (1970:112); and the religious designation of *Sikh* for the Muslim Rababi subgroup 19 appears strange (1970:111). Rose's accuracy in other spheres is thus called into question, but on a general level one can see similarities between his documentation and some contemporary ethnographic sources for the Punjab and its adjacent areas. Despite the traumatic upheaval following Partition, some social continuity appears to have been maintained.

According to a series of ethnographic studies conducted by Indian anthropologists for the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) from 1985 to 1992, there are two striking similarities with Rose's classifications. Firstly, the *ḍholī* group of Jaipur (21) is probably the same group, or are closely related to the *ḍholīs* mentioned in the ASI of Rajasthan (Singh 1998:343-346). Natavar also discusses this group as being both *kathak* dancers and performers of the *ḍhol* drum (1997:146-156). Secondly, the Dum of Rohtak (1) are most likely the same group discussed in the ASI of Haryana (Singh, Sharma, and Bhatia 1994:159-161).

One of the obvious conclusions to be drawn from Rose's list of Mirasi subgroups is that the term *mīrāsī* obfuscates the diversity found among musicians and public performers of various types in the Punjab. Although the term denotes a distinction between musicians and non-musicians in Punjabi society at large, it does little to illuminate the various degrees of stratification, hierarchy, and exclusivity that musician groups identify and practice among themselves. As seen in groups 13 and 18, even the Mirasis and Dharis had their own Mirasis.

To reiterate, social status distinctions between Mirasi groups depended largely on the status of their patron groups, their own kinship practices, and the supposed origin and caste background of the Mirasi group in question. Thus, there were higher ranking Mirasi such as the Rai Mirasi (group 4) who were literate, whose patrons were Brahmans, and who themselves claimed to have had Brahman ancestors that converted to Islam. In the case of the Dhari community (group 8), endogamy was not practiced, unlike groups 15 and 39, and yet the Dharis refrained from

Fig. 1. H.A. Rose's classification of Mirasi subgroups of Punjab and adjacent areas. (A blank cell is information that was not provided by Rose.)

	Client Group	Area	Patron Groups	Musical Instruments, Sociomusical Context and Additional Information	Religious Community
1	<i>Dúm</i>	Rohtak	Dhang	<i>sárangí, tabla</i> ; accompany dancing girls p. 106	Hindu (i.e. not "Muslim")
2	<i>Langá</i>	Dera Ghazi Khan	Baloch; used to accompany their masters in war	<i>saranda</i> ; Muslim epic song p. 107	
3	<i>Langá</i> or <i>Mírásí</i>	Multan	Daudpotra	not mentioned p. 107	
4	<i>Rai Mírásí</i>	Hoshiarpur, Lahore	Jat of Jind	not mentioned, poets, educated, "teaches boys Hindi accounts like a <i>pádha</i> " p. 109	Muslim, but claim Brahman descent.
5	<i>Mír Mírásí</i>			panegyrists, recite in Punjabi p. 109	
6	<i>Mír Mírásí</i>	Ludhiana		panegyrists, recite eulogies in Persian and Arabic p. 109	
7	<i>Dhádhi</i>	Ludhiana, Jind		<i>dhádhi</i> , epic song p. 109-10	Muslim, endogamous
8	<i>Dhádhi</i>	Mandi		<i>dhádhi</i> (?), epic song; "women-folk do not sing and dance before the ladies of their patrons, like other Mírásí women" p. 110	Muslim, not endogamous; but will not marry with lower castes.
9	<i>Dhádhi</i>	Loharu	Sheoran Jat	Also cultivate, and work as laborers during harvest time. p. 110	Muslim
10	<i>Dúth</i>	Bikaner	Punia Jat	p. 110	Muslim
11	<i>Palna</i>	Shaikhawati of Jaipur	Jat (?)	p. 110	Muslim
12	<i>Babar</i>	Shaikhawati of Jaipur	Rajput (?)	p. 110	Muslim
13	<i>Bhatia</i>		Dhádhi	p. 110	

Fig. 1 continued.

	Client Group	Area	Patron Groups	Musical Instruments, Sociomusical Context, and Additional Information	Religious Community
14	<i>Kaláwant</i>		Rajputs	<i>tambourine</i> , "...Mírásis possessed of skill (<i>kala</i>)...They especially affect the <i>dhurpat</i> mode in music; the famous Tán Sen...was a member of this group" p. 110	Muslim
15	<i>Karhála</i> or <i>Khariála</i>			<i>sárangí</i> , <i>tabla</i> ; story-tellers	"Rank below the real Mírásis because their ancestors married women of other castes; Other Mírásis do not marry with them." p. 110-111
16	<i>Karhái</i>	Gurgaon		epic singers p. 111	
17	<i>Kumáchi</i>		Brahman	p. 111	
18	<i>Mír Mangs</i>		Mirasi	p. 111	
19	<i>Rabábi</i>			p. 111	Sikhs; Endogamous
20	<i>Rabábi</i>	Bikaner		<i>rabáb</i> p. 112	
21	<i>Dholi</i>	Jaipur		p. 112	
22	<i>Rabábi</i>	Rohtak		"They used to play the <i>rabáb</i> , also called <i>daf</i> or <i>dáira</i> , the only instrument permitted to Muhammadans, and then only on condition that it is played without the <i>jháng</i> ..." p. 112	Muslim
23	<i>Bhagtia</i>			"...a mimic who is said to be known in Lucknow as a Kashmiri." p. 112	
24	<i>Bhanwáyia</i>			"...perform various feats of juggling on a brass plate. They also sing and dance." p. 112	
25	<i>Cháran</i>			"...the foot-man, messenger or envoy of Rájputána." p. 112	
26	<i>Dafzan</i>			"...women of the <i>Dháthi</i> class, who sing in a circle" p. 112	

Fig. 1 continued.

	Client Group	Area	Patron Groups	Musical Instruments, Sociomusical Context and Additional Information	Religious Community
27	<i>Dafāli</i>			"...play on the <i>dafri</i> or small drum and sing songs in praise of holy men." p. 112	
28	<i>Hurkia</i>			"...play the <i>hurak</i> , while their women, in gay apparel, clap hands." p. 112	
29	<i>Kalāl</i>		Kumhar	"Sometimes they do potters' work..." p. 112	
30	<i>Khamru</i>			"...play the <i>tabla</i> , a kind of drum or rather tambourine with a single skin." p. 112	
31	<i>Kanjri</i>			p. 112	
32	<i>Kar Kabit</i>			"...singers of war-songs, but the term is said to be a modern one." p. 112	
33	<i>Kateroria</i>			"...sing songs in praise of Krishna and are said to wear the sacred thread." p. 112	Hindu
34	<i>Kaṭhak</i>			"...teach singing and dancing to prostitutes." p. 112	Hindu
35	<i>Shrota or Sota Hathāi</i>		Jat	p. 112	
36	<i>Gopa</i>			<i>tambourine</i> p. 112	Muslim, endogamous
37	<i>Safarḍa, Sipardai</i>			"...play <i>tabla</i> and <i>sarangi</i> ... They too teach dancing girls. They rank high, but are classed below the singers. Like the <i>Kalāwant</i> they are Muhammadans." p. 112	Muslim
38	<i>Tatua</i>			"...sing and dance, playing on the <i>pakhawaj</i> and <i>rabāb</i> ." p. 112	
39	<i>Sewak or Qawwāl</i>	Multan	Quraishi	<i>guitar</i> p. 117	Muslim, Sufi "They too claim to be descendants of the Prophet, yet they intermarry with the low-caste <i>Chāran</i> ."
40	<i>Qawwāl</i>	Dera Ghazi Khan		"...especially employed as singers at shrines at the <i>urs</i> or other occasions, acting as <i>Mirdāsi</i> to the saint of the shrine and being paid by him or his followers...Tan Husain is regarded as their <i>Pir</i> and teacher in the art of singing." p. 119	
41	<i>Mirdāsi</i>	Dera Ghazi Khan		<i>naqāra, dhol, sharmā</i>	Shia Muslim

Fig. 1 continued.

	Client Group	Area	Patron Groups	Musical Instruments, Sociomusical Context and Additional Information	Religious Community
42	<i>Pirāin or Pirāhin</i>	Mianwali		"The Pirāhin is a Mirāsī who affects Pīr Lālanwāla or Sakhi Sarwar and begs in their name. Vows are made to the Pīrs for male issue and gifts made to the Pirāhin accordingly. He carries a drum to which are fastened wisps of cotton offered by women of all creeds. The Pirāhin would appear to be the Bharai of the rest of the Punjab." p. 119	
43	<i>Mirāsī or Dūm</i>	Mianwali		"The Mirāsī or Dūm is a drummer too, but he waits upon guests at weddings and funerals, and is also employed as a confidential messenger. His earnings vary with his patrons' prosperity." p. 119	
44	<i>Kalāwant</i>	Mianwali		"...a musician, more skilled than the Mirāsī." p. 119	
45	<i>Sarodī</i>	Mianwali		"resembles [the Kalāwant] but he plays on the <i>rabāb</i> or <i>sarod</i> and performs also as a tumbler" p. 119	
46	<i>Dhādhi</i>	Mianwali		"a genealogist or story teller...not attached to any particular family or tribe." p. 119	
47	<i>Bhānd</i>	Mianwali			
48	<i>Naqārchīs</i>	Mianwali		"...are Mirāsīs who play the <i>naqāra</i> or big drum at weddings and at the tombs of Muhammadan saints." p. 111	
49	<i>Mirdangi -ia</i>			"...a player of the <i>mirdang</i> ." p. 119	Not listed in the Mirasi section.
50	<i>Mutrib</i> , or <i>Mutrib</i>		Sayyid and Shaikh	"...a musician, a class of Mirāsīs or a synonym for that name. The Mutrib was the principal of the castes which the Thags would not kill. In Sahāranpur (United Provinces) the Mutrib is described as the highest class of Mirāsī-Dūms; it can only take alms from Sayyids and Shaikhs. They sing at weddings and other festivities, ...recounting the deeds of Hasan, Husain..... and Ali." p. 138.	Not listed in the Mirasi section.

forging affinal ties with members of lower castes in order not to lower their own social status and rank.

As far as the musical information is concerned, much of what Rose documented is sketchy. Nonetheless, it can be assumed, based on Rose's essential definition of the Mirasi caste, that most, if not all the groups, engaged in some type of public performance genre that ultimately lowered their social status in the wider social scheme. Many of the groups also engaged in non-musical or non-performative activity such as harvest cultivation.

Of particular interest are the groups that might have a direct relation to the classical musicians of the contemporary Punjab. Several groups appear to have specialized in playing the *sārangī* (bowed fiddle) and tabla, instruments traditionally associated with the accompaniment of "dancing girls" or "nautch" girls; "nautch" (from the Hindi, *nāch*, meaning "dance") ensembles, or "parties" were pervasive throughout India in the 18th and 19th centuries (Bor 1986-87; Kippen 2000). The main difficulty lies in assessing precisely which groups were the likely sources from which classical musicians of that period were recruited, or indeed from which emerged later generations of classical musicians. Groups 14, 44 (Kalawant), 37 (Safurda/Sipardai), 40 (Qawwal), and 45 (Sarodi) are most likely the musician groups that had at least a partial if not fully-fledged involvement in art music contexts. These groups, with the exception of 40, were singled out by Rose for their musical competence; and from these, it appears that 14 and 44 were probably classical singers who would have been employed in the feudal courts. Strangely, Rose mentions that they played the *tambourine*, which of course, might have been another information blunder, or else is a reference to the use of the *daf* frame drum prevalent in earlier iconographic sources—a practice that has long been discontinued. Rose's direct reference to the apical ancestor of classical singers, Tan Sen, and the genre "dhurpat" (i.e., *dhrupad*) is an indication that the *dhrupad* genre was prevalent in the Punjab during this time.² Unfortunately, there is no mention of the marriage and kinship practices of group 44. However, group 37 (Safurda/Sipardai) are compared to them: the words "They too teach dancing girls. They rank high, but are classed below the singers" seem to suggest that perhaps group 44 also maintained a close association with female professional dancers/entertainers.

A larger and more relevant question for this research concerns possible links between the groups mentioned by Rose and those appearing in contemporary studies of Pakistani Punjabi musicians. A review of ethnographies provided by Adam Nayyar and Wayne McClintock will explore this topic.

Contemporary Ethnography of Punjabi Mirasi Groups: Adam Nayyar

One of the few studies of Pakistani Punjabi musicians to date is by Adam Nayyar, who was an anthropologist and associate director of the Institute for Folk Heritage, Lok Virsa, in Islamabad. Published in the *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South Asia* (2000), Nayyar's entry stands as an important source for information on Pakistani Punjabi music and musicians because of his extensive association and research with hereditary musicians of his native land.

Nayyar begins by mentioning the "traumatic" events of Partition. He claims that hundreds of Muslim musicians migrated from East to West (Pakistani) Punjab: indeed, "most of the classical musicians in the eastern half migrated to West Punjab." He asserts that these migrants from the East "had traditionally been performers of Sikh religious music...The family of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, for example, was among them" (Nayyar 2000:762).

While it is widely known that many Muslim musicians were employed in gurdwaras to perform Sikh religious music, and that these musicians comprised a separate, endogamous social group called *rabābīs* (see groups 19, 20, 22) they certainly were not the only Muslim musicians of Eastern Punjab. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan came from a lineage of *qawwāls*, not *rabābīs*. Furthermore, almost all of the classical musicians of Punjab were Muslim, and most of them were located throughout Eastern Punjab, with the cities of Lahore and Qasur remaining as the main Western Punjabi centers of art music. Notable vocalists of Eastern Punjab who enjoyed feudal patronage included the *khayāl* singers Amanat Ali and Fateh Ali Khan of Patiala, the *dhrupad* singer father of Mohammad Afzal and Mohammad Hafiz Khan, and the internationally renowned Salamat Ali and Nazakar Ali Khan of Sham Chaurasi.

Concerning the general discussion of professional musicians in contemporary Pakistani Punjab, Nayyar observes that "Professional musicians belong to one of several endogamous groups that are ranked hierarchically according to their performance context and sophistication of repertoire" (2000:763). These factors of performance context and repertoire are very important, as was seen to some extent in the H.A. Rose ranking of musicians. I will later explore this issue in greater depth in my own discussion of the informants of my fieldwork in 1994-96.

The most important dimension of Nayyar's article is his distinction between two major groups of hereditary musicians: Mirasi and non-Mirasi. He makes a further breakdown within the Mirasi group between urban classical music specialists such as the Ghazalgoh, Gavvaya, and Sazindah and less sophisticated Mirasi subgroups such as Bhand, Ras Dhariya, and Naqqal. Thus, in this instance, Nayyar clears up the main

deficiency of the Rose classification and the general colloquial usage of the term *mīrāsī* that lumps all musicians together as one homogenous group.

In another sense, Nayyar's description of Mirasi appears to be very similar to earlier accounts of this musician group as fulfilling the role of musician-genealogists for higher ranking castes. Nayyar mentions the role of memorizing and reciting the genealogies of patrons who range from "wealthy rural families" to "common peasantry" (2000:764). He also identifies other characteristic features such as Mirasi's quick wit and the special argot they use in the presence of their patrons.³ Yet, one of the problems with Nayyar's description of Mirasi social traits is that he does not specify which of its sub-groups are genealogists. Later, in his description of the Qawwal sub-group, Nayyar mentions that they "no longer work as genealogists, unlike the main stream *Mīrāsī* musicians" (2000:765). "Main stream" is never clearly defined. One might assume from this that all categories except for Qawwals perform genealogical services for a patron group. This would seem highly unlikely, for reasons to be discussed next in my review of the ethnography by McClintock.

Listed in figures 2 and 3 are Nayyar's categories of musicians of the West Punjab. Notably, there are few parallels with the H.A. Rose classification of Mirasi and non-Mirasi subgroups. The obvious matches appear to be groups 39, 40 Qawwal (Rose) with 54 Qawwal (Nayyar); and groups 7, 8, 9, 46, Dhadhi (Rose) with 65 Dastangoh (Nayyar). Group 44, Kalawant (Rose) is similar to group 55, Gavvaya (Nayyar) and group 37, Safurda/Sipardai (Rose) might be a match for group 57, Sazindah (Nayyar), although the latter category more readily fits group 62, Chatu/Kanjar (Nayyar), i.e., male musical accompanists of dancers-prostitutes.

Fig. 2. A. Nayyar's Mirasi subgroups of Pakistani Punjab

	Mirasi Group	Patron Group	Musical Instruments and Genres	Sociomusical Context and Additional Information
51	<i>Mirāsī</i>	Wealthy rural families and common peasantry	unclear; general introduction does not specify group, instruments or genres pp. 762-65	Villages.
52	<i>Bhāṇḍ (Nakkāl)</i>	Villagers/urbanites	"...large tan leather clapper"; "buffoonery, humour" p. 765	Villages and cities.
53	<i>Rās Dhāria</i>	Villagers	<i>cimṭā</i> (metal tongs); drama to folktales p. 765	Villages.
54	<i>Qawwāl</i>	Religious officials at Sufi shrines	harmonium (pump organ), <i>āṭe-vālā tabla</i> (<i>dāyān</i> and wooden <i>bāyān</i> with flour paste); Sufi devotional songs pp. 765-66	Sufi shrines.
55	<i>Ghazalgoh</i>	Bourgeoisie and urban cultural /economic elites	semi-classical vocal music; sung poetic genres p. 766	Cities.
56	<i>Gavayyā</i>	Bourgeoisie and urban cultural /economic elites	accompanying instruments (i.e. sarangi, harmonium, tabla); classical vocal music (i.e. <i>khayāl</i> , <i>dhrupad</i>) p. 766	Cities.
57	<i>Sāzindā</i>	Bourgeoisie and urban cultural /economic elites	accompanists of classical and semi-classical music p. 766	Cities.

Fig. 3. A. Nayyar's Non-Mirasi musician subgroups of Pakistani Punjab

	Non-Mirasi Group	Patron Group	Musical Instruments and Genres	Sociomusical Context and Additional Information
58	<i>Bhirāin</i>	Villagers	<i>ḍhol</i> ; marriage, festival harvest music pp. 766-69	Villages. Agricultural labourer
59	<i>Perna</i>	Villagers	<i>garvi</i> (small brass milk pot) p. 769	Villages. Peripatetic group. Casual prostitution
60	<i>Qalandar</i>	Villagers	<i>baghalbān</i> (bagpipe) and <i>ḍholak</i> p. 769	Villages. Peripatetic group. Animal trainers.
61	<i>Putlivālā</i>	Villagers	<i>reed whistle</i> , <i>ḍholak</i> ; puppeteers p. 769	Villages. Seminomadic
62	<i>Chatu / Kanjri</i>		accompanying instruments: harmonium, <i>tabla</i> ; professional, "exotic" dancers p. 769	Cities. "...professional, endogamous prostitute-and-pimp groups operating out of brothels." Accompanied by Sapardai.
63	<i>Sāin</i> and <i>faqīr</i>		<i>cimṭā</i> , <i>king/iktār</i> (plucked lute); devotional songs pp. 769-70	Villages/cities. Sufi shrines
64	<i>Na't Khwān</i> (both Mirasi and non-Mirasi)		Unaccompanied praise songs of the Prophet. pp. 770	Unclear. "They can be from any group, including the Mirāsī."
65	<i>Dāstāngoh</i> (<i>Tāḍī Dāstāngoh</i>)		<i>ṭad</i> (pressure drum), <i>joṛi</i> (double flute), <i>king</i> , <i>choṭī sārāṅgī</i> (simple bowed fiddle), "Ballads, romances, and war tales." p. 770	Unclear. "[they] do not suffer the social stigma of the Mirāsī and may belong to any ethnic group. They may also own land, which is unheard of for a Mirāsī."
66	<i>Khusrā</i>	Urbanites.	Male circumcision ceremonies. pp. 770-71	Male circumcision ceremonies. "Eunuchs, hermaphrodites, and male transsexual entertainers dressing and living as women"

Contemporary Ethnography of Punjabi Mirasi Groups: Wayne McClintock

The distinctive feature of Wayne McClintock's ethnography of Mirasi musicians of Pakistani Punjab is that his informants appear to be a separate group from the so-called Mirasis that I worked with in Lahore who specialized in urban art music. McClintock's study was based on four years' research in the 1980s among Mirasi groups living on the outskirts of Lahore and in neighboring villages. In terms of general lifestyle, kinship practices, and *birādarī* (clan or brotherhood) structure, McClintock's Mirasis were the same as other Punjabi groups from the "urban and rural poor" (McClintock 1991:8).

His informants engaged in "semi-nomadic behavior...Many of them live in tent-like dwellings and squat on vacant pieces of publicly or privately owned land" (ibid.). My informants, on the other hand, probably migrated to urban centers at least two generations ago or prior to Partition or both. The most important difference was that McClintock's informants were indeed musician-genealogists. Yet, McClintock discussed in detail the fact that his informants had been abandoning their traditional genealogist occupations for non-traditional forms of employment over the past fifty years. Figure 4 lists both the traditional and non-traditional occupations that McClintock mentions. While there are still Mirasis who reside in the rural, village context and work for their patrons, many have migrated to cities.

While in many rural villages of the Punjab the Mirasis continue to practice their traditional role of entertainers and genealogists, there has been a general weakening of their traditional economic and social relationships with their patron castes. During the 1960s technological innovations in farming practices, and changes in the land tenure system, transformed the rural economy. Many peasant farmers lost the small amount of land they had been cultivating and were forced to migrate to the towns and cities. This process accelerated the destruction of the traditional. (McClintock 1991:17)

As McClintock has noted from his study of British census reports of the Punjab for 1911 and 1931, the traditional work of the Mirasi as musician-genealogists had declined considerably:

While in 1911 eighty-two per cent of the workforce had been engaged in these occupations, by 1931 this

proportion had fallen to sixty eight percent. This shift away from the traditional occupations was accompanied by increasing numbers of Mirasis being employed in agriculture, trade, and the arts and professions...Nonetheless this trend for the Mirasis to seek employment outside their traditional occupations was not a new phenomenon. Seventy years before the 1931 census the author of the Gujrat settlement report noted that: “They [the Mirasis] are now taking to cultivation but, being tenants at will, they make little money out of it, some have educated themselves and obtained service.” (McClintock 1991:13)

Fig. 4. McClintock’s occupations of Mirasi groups of outer Lahore

Traditional Occupations		Non-Traditional Occupations	
67	<i>Bhand</i> (comedian) with instrument: <i>chmota</i> (leather clapper)	71	Tenant Farmer and Agricultural Labourer
68	Musicians and Singers with instruments: harmonium, <i>dholak</i> , tabla and <i>chimtā</i>	72	Sevicemen
69	Dancer (young males, rarely girls/women)	73	Policemen
70	Genealogist	74	Construction Labourer
		75	Hawker
		76	Carrier
		77	Fruit seller
		78	<i>Dunga vechanalla</i> (Livestock trader)
		79	Scavenger
		80	<i>Munganalla</i> (beggar)

Contrary to Nayyar’s claim that Mirasis “...would not deign to do any professional work other than music” (2000:768), McClintock states that they were employed as unskilled agricultural laborers and construction workers (1991:35-36). Also in contrast to Nayyar is McClintock’s claim that some Mirasis are landowners whereas Nayyar writes that it is “unheard of” (2000:770).

Perhaps the most important feature of McClintock’s ethnography is the absence of a connection between Mirasis and urban art music. Other

than the harmonium and tabla, not one of the instruments, musical genres, and sociomusical contexts of urban art music is mentioned as a Mirasi specialization. It is possible that McClintock was unaware of such obvious musical connections. This is striking given that many urban art music Mirasis were employed at the Lahore radio station, and he would have noted too their performances at private *mehfils*, *baiṭhaks*,⁴ and in public concerts as I observed during my fieldwork. With the absence of such a connection one can only assume that McClintock's Mirasi group was very different from the group that I worked with, and quite possibly the groups that Nayyar refers to. Nayyar, curiously, does not clarify this distinction.

Thus, we arrive at the question: Just who are the urban art musicians of the Punjab? To answer this, I must first review Daniel Neuman's canonical work on the Mirasis of Delhi.

Urban Classical Music Mirasi Groups: Daniel Neuman

First published in 1980, *The Life of Music in North India* by Daniel Neuman has defined the field of the ethnomusicology of Hindustani art music. I will review what Neuman has written about the Mirasis of Delhi to provide a comparative source for my later discussion of the Mirasis of Lahore. It should be noted that the social conditions of Hindustani art music have changed considerably since the time of Neuman's research in the late 1960s, especially in light of the exponential rise of non-hereditary musicians in India who have now virtually replaced the Muslim hereditary specialists who once dominated Hindustani music.

The main focus of Neuman's ethnography concerns the observation that Hindustani music involves a specific type of sociomusical hierarchy, involving the presence of two separate groups of hereditary musicians who perform Hindustani classical music: 1) the Kalawant who are soloists (i.e., their main role is the performance of *rāg*) and mainly vocalists; and 2) the Mirasi, who are melodic and rhythmic accompanists specializing in the sarangi, harmonium, and tabla. While both of these groups perform music together on the concert stage and in private musical venues (*mehfils*), Neuman claims they came from different and mutually exclusive social groups, and therefore had different hereditary backgrounds. The Kalawant group enjoys relatively high social status for being primary tradition bearers and soloists of a sophisticated urban art form. In contrast, the Mirasi endure low social status for being accompanists to these soloists; they carry, too, a social stigma because they are invariably associated with insalubrious musical contexts, namely, the courtesan traditions based in the red-light districts of Northern India. The main factors that maintain the higher social status of the Kalawant group are that they do not perform as musical

accompanists, they are not associated with the courtesan tradition, and they do not intermarry with the Mirasi.

Neuman's use of the term *kalāvant* is, for the most part, an analytical tool for his sociological analysis of classical musicians in Delhi. His choice of this term is in part due to its apparent use in the feudal Muslim courts of the 16th through the mid-19th centuries to denote musicians of high caliber. He cites the important Urdu treatise *Ma'dan ul Mousiqā* written by Hakim Mohammad Karam Imam in the mid-19th century, and its statement that the term *kalāvant* applies specifically to four celebrated Hindustani musicians and their descendants. Neuman notes that Imam also makes a distinction between Kalawant and Qawwal based upon the type of music they sang, the former "Indian" and the latter both "Persian" and "Indian" (Neuman 1990:88).

Although not entirely different from these earlier usages of the term, *kalāvant* is defined by Neuman in the following description of the group:

...Kalawant is used in at least two distinct ways. In the most general, it is translated as artist, and any musician can call himself a Kalawant by this definition. More precisely, however, the title Kalawant refers to members of certain established families of musicians who are defined by their descent from a well-known ancestor, and in whose pedigree there is no evidence of sarangi or tabla players...Nowadays, Kalawant as a formal identity is largely restricted to families whose major specialty is vocal music... Although *Kalawant* is now used in a categorical sense to refer to hereditary musician families specializing in vocal music, it is not a term by which they typically identify themselves. Their own identity is established by their descent in a particular family. (Neuman 1990:95)

The main difficulty with the above description is assessing the Kalawant claim that their lineages are separate from Mirasi lineages. We are left trusting that the Kalawant have nothing to hide in their genealogies. This seems unlikely due to the general tendency of all social groups—virtually anywhere in human time and space—to seek social mobility by a variety of means.⁵ I cannot contest the veracity of Neuman's fieldwork with the musicians he calls Kalawant, yet it is quite possible that these musicians have a vested interest in distancing themselves from low status tabla and sarangi-players to the extent that their pedigrees were affected by "structural amnesia" (See Kippen 1988:84). Moreover, Neuman does not discuss the caste identification of the Kalawant musicians, even though he states they are one group of many vocalists who "...come from a

fairly wide variety of ethnic, caste, regional, and religious backgrounds” (Neuman 1990:120).

In contrast to the etic category of Kalawant, Neuman’s use of the term Mirasi is based on its actual currency in colloquial discourse, although he indicates that the term is rarely used by the Mirasi themselves. Neuman locates the Mirasi decisively in Delhi while a related group, the Kathak, are located further east:

In North India there are two communities, one of them Muslim (the aforementioned Mirasi) and the other Hindu (known as Katthak), who together have contributed the vast majority of Hindustani accompanists. The Mirasi are found in the North around Delhi and the Katthak are in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, with a large concentration in Banaras. (Neuman 1990:124)

In contrast to his conception of the Kalawant group, the Mirasi fulfill the two requirements for a caste: occupational specialization and endogamy. Neuman does not mention other castes such as the Doms as a possible source of recruitment for Hindustani music, even though Rose identifies the “Dúm” group of Rohtak (a city not far from Delhi, in Haryana) as sarangi- and tabla-players, and accompanists to dancing girls. Instead, Neuman mentions briefly that there are Mirasi groups that are not classical musicians, and the group he cites appears to be from the same area as the Dom group cited by Rose:

Rural Mirasis in contemporary Haryana (a state formed out of the southern part of Panjab in 1967), who still specialize in music, no longer allow their women to perform in public... Mirasis who are classical musicians are, virtually without exception, urban dwellers. Although they often claim village origins, places and names have usually been forgotten. Rather, these classical musicians have their more immediate origins in towns and cities, and in these urban areas they are usually concentrated in certain wards (*muhallās*), a practice which for musicians in Delhi can be traced back to the fourteenth century. (Neuman 1990:131-32)

Brief Comparison of the Sources

Mirasi

There are two main observations that can be drawn from the above review of sources on the term *mīrāsī*. Firstly, the term as a rubric is clearly and strongly associated with all musicians of hereditary background. The ethnographic surveys inherently recognize the popular use of the term as a catch-all for musical occupational specialization. The common belief that all hereditary musicians are Mirasis indicates considerable ignorance of the subtleties and complexities of musician society as a whole, and suggests the rubric may not be particularly useful from an analytical perspective. However, *mīrāsī* is polysemic, as attested to by the dozens of sub-categories.

Secondly, *mīrāsī* is used to denote a specific group of hereditary musicians from among many. This usage is seen most clearly in Neuman's ethnography, and to a lesser extent in Nayyar's and McClintock's works. Importantly, these specific Mirasi groups have different names for themselves, which suggests that they differ considerably in group identity and social organization. Neuman offers several terms that his Mirasi informants used for themselves, and one wonders if they had more terms that Neuman did not know or did not report (Neuman 1990:124). Either Neuman encountered a situation markedly different from that of the Punjab in general and Lahore in particular, or he adopted the rubric without the sub-categorical diversity suggested by Rose and Nayyar.

Kalawant

Kalāvānt, as a term of ethnographic description, needs critical assessment because it is rarely used in Hindustani music society. While it may serve Neuman's purpose for describing a pattern of social organization of musicians in Delhi, it should not stand as a normative term for all of Hindustani music culture. The term was mentioned by H.A. Rose as a sub-group of Mirasis who sang dhrupad, but no special mention was made concerning the kinship practice that is central to Neuman's thesis. The term is quite rare in the Punjabi context (*kaḷaunt*), and the closest equivalent can be found in Nayyar's category Gavayya.

Dhari (Dhadhi)

This term is perhaps the most difficult one to understand, historically and ethnographically. Upon reading Neuman's discussion of the Dhari, one would assume that the group comprised classical musicians based on his

hypothetical historical reconstruction of how Mirasis made their entry into the urban art from their lowly background as rural folk musicians:

Dharis intermarrying with Kalawants became soloists and separated themselves from those Dharis who accompanied tawaifs and who probably intermarried with Mirasis practicing the same occupation. For their part, Mirasis entered the classical tradition from a rural folk musician background through urban migration... Once in the city, the stepping-stone from the folk to the classical tradition was through the medium of the courtesan salons...It is still unclear why Dharis were subsumed socially and terminologically in the Mirasi fold, but I think it was due to the ambiguity of the social tag “Dhari” with a now double social identity split between Kalawant and Mirasi. Substituting “Mirasi” as the general social tag resolved any ambiguity in meaning about who was what, a concern of no small importance in Indian society. (Neuman 1990:133)

If the term has any relation to its current use in the Punjab, then it is still not certain who these musicians were in 19th century India, or even before then.⁶ Both the Urdu term *dhārī* (sometimes *dhādhī*) and the Punjabi alternate *dhāḍī* are general, nonspecific terms that mean “professional musician.”⁷ Rose also cites the term “Dhādhi,” and according to his classification (groups 7, 8, and 46), they are epic singers (groups 7, 8, and 9) who play the *dhadh* (a small drum) and/or genealogists (group 46), but definitely not classical musicians.

Lastly, Neuman’s statement about social and terminological subsumption of the Dharis begs the question: Who did the defining? Moreover, who does it now? If current-day so-called Mirasis do not use the term to describe themselves, as Neuman notes, they may never have used it historically either. Quite simply, we lack information on how the musicians viewed themselves as opposed to how they were defined by the Indian cultural elite or British Orientalists scholars. With that in mind, I will next explore the multiple ways which musicians, non-musicians, and ethnographers define the professional musicians of Lahore.

Ethnography of Urban Art Music Groups of Lahore

My own ethnographic research into groups of urban art musicians in and around Lahore showed that five descriptive terms were commonly

encountered: *mīrāsī*, *kasbī*, *rabābī*, *kanjar*, and *atāī*. This adds yet another interpretation to the mix already encountered above. I will discuss each group below, and then explore some of the discursive contexts in which musicians themselves negotiated their own identities through the use of these labels.

Five Main Groups of Musicians

Mirasi. This first group, Mirasi, is primarily associated with the red-light district generally known as the Shahi Mohalla, and more specifically as Hira Mandi (“the diamond market”), which is one of its neighborhoods. The recent ethnography by Fouzia Saeed (2001) is a rich source of information on the musicians who perform in this environment. According to her, Mirasis are an occupational ethnic group or caste of musicians. Its members comprise both higher-ranking *ustāds* (lit. “teacher” or “master”) who teach dancer-singer-prostitutes (*kanjarīs*) of the Shahi Mohalla, and the lower-ranking instrumentalists who provide *kanjaris* with accompaniment.⁸ Importantly, Saeed observes that the Kanjar and Mirasi communities do not intermarry, and thus constitute exclusive endogamous kin groups (*birādarīs*). The males of the Kanjar *biradari* do not contribute much to the economic welfare of their families because Kanjar society is essentially matriarchal. Conversely, all male Mirasis (i.e. Safardai) claim that none of their own female kin performs music or dance in public. The importance of this observation of two separate *biradaris* in the Shahi Mohalla cannot be understated due to its relevance to our understanding the urban art musicians of Pakistani Punjab; furthermore, there is tremendous ignorance of the social complexities of the red-light district in Pakistani society.⁹

We must remember that, unlike the other terms under discussion, *mīrāsī* in its most common, colloquial, and public sense, is used as a catch-all designation of hereditary musical specialization. One sometimes learns more about who the Mirasis are by observing who they are not. Saeed claims that “...most of the master musicians [of Lahore] were, in one way or another, linked to the Shahi Mohalla” (2001:15). Yet, with only a few exceptions, the majority of the great urban classical musicians of Lahore that Saeed refers to have lived outside of the old city of Lahore, and they had or have little or no direct dealings with the red-light district. The case of the Patiala classical vocalists Amanat Ali and Fateh Ali Khan was mentioned by Saeed as proof of such an association of high-ranking musicians with the Shahi Mohalla (2001:15). However, although they may have lived in or near the red-light district when they initially migrated to Lahore after 1947, they subsequently moved out to a more middle-class setting (Karim Park) and earned their livelihood through other means. Indeed, this distancing of urban classical musicians

from the Shahi Mohalla was an adaptive strategy for gaining legitimacy in a new Islamic state uncomfortable with the idea of supporting musicians performing secular music genres. It was also an important strategy because Amanat Ali and Fateh Ali Khan are Kasbi, not Mirasi.

This, in turn, raises the question of repertoire, and which musicians specialized in the more austere classical genres such as dhrupad, khayal and instrumental art music. Again, with few exceptions, the majority of classical musicians who were either soloists or accompanists for public concerts, radio, and television broadcasts had little or no association with the red-light district of Lahore. This was certainly the case for tabla-players such as Talib Hussain (also a pakhavaj-player), Shaukat Hussain, and their respective students. Both were Kasbi. On the other hand, tabla-players such as Altaf Hussain “Tafo” Khan and the late Bashir Hussain “Goga” performed “light music” almost exclusively for the film and cassette industries of Lahore, and not for outstanding classical vocalists such as Amanat Ali and Fateh Ali Khan, Roshanara Begum, and Salamat Ali Khan. These tabla-players are and were Mirasi.

Repertoire is intimately connected with notions of prestige. Saeed’s use of the term *ustād* for the musicians who were the proprietors and central teachers of several important *baithaks* where kanjaris would receive training is problematic. Although these accomplished musicians were ustad-s in the context of the Kanjar and Mirasi communities of the red-light district, they are almost certainly not considered ustad among the musicians who specialized exclusively in art music.¹⁰ Notably, whereas outstanding performers such as the ghazal-singer Mehdi Hasan, or the world-renowned master of qawwali, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, were and are referred to as “ustad,” the use is downright offensive to khayal or dhrupad singers who live in economically marginal conditions because they have refused to stoop to sing the “light music” genres that appeal to the masses. Only the “serious” genres of classical singing or playing have been traditionally considered the true index of musical knowledge among hereditary professional musicians.

Kasbi. The primary musician group I worked with were the Kasbis. The meaning and use of the term *kasbī* (“one who works”)¹¹ is very similar to the Afghan term *kesbī* as found in pre-Soviet Afghanistan. According to Baily, *Kesbi* signified a musician who belonged to a hereditary group of professional musicians as opposed to the Shauqi who were non-hereditary, amateur musicians who either did or did not make music their primary occupation (1988:101). Sakata basically agreed with Baily’s assessment, but also “found that the term was often used to refer to a Shauqi musician who had publicly ‘gone professional’” (1983:85).

More specifically, Baily described the use of the labels *Shauqi* and *Kesbi* as an act of social positioning by musicians who did not want to be associated with the lowest ranked musicians of Herat:

The importance of *shauqi* and *kesbi* status amongst musicians was symptomatic of a high degree of participation in public music making by amateurs, who wished to dissociate themselves from the traditional, male hereditary musicians of Herat, players of the *sorna* and *dohol*... *Sorna* and *dohol* players embodied a particular stereotype of the musician, with many negative connotations, and occupied a particularly low rank in the social order. (Baily 1988:102)

Among Pakistani Punjabi musicians, *kasbī* was not widely used, but not uncommon. Its use in Pakistani Punjab appears to be similar to its function as a marker of social group distinction in Herat: to differentiate the most basic social division between the non-hereditary musician (*Atai*) versus the hereditary professional musician (*Kasbi/Mirasi/Dhari*), and to further divide the hereditary professional musicians between *Kasbi* (classical musicians) and *Mirasi* (red-light district musicians).

In some sense, my encounter with the term *kasbī* is similar to Neuman's use of the term *kalāvānt*, insofar as it is primarily an analytical tool. Called *Mirasis* by the society at large, the *Kasbis* had minimal or no association with the red-light district, even if they had former ties to the courtesan tradition prior to the social forces of modernization following Partition. Most of them came from prestigious student-teacher lineages (*silsilās*) of the "serious" classical genres of Hindustani music. As mentioned previously, most of them lived outside the old city of Lahore, most likely as an index of engaging in the social project of modernity; they did not remain in the traditional musicians' quarters with the low-status musicians. Many were staff or casual employees of Radio Pakistan or PTV.

A large number of *Kasbis* have roots in East Punjab and were employed as court musicians—such as Fateh Ali Khan and Amanat Ali Khan at the court of the Maharaja of Patiala—until these petty fiefdoms were dissolved after 1947. With very few exceptions, the vast majority migrated to Lahore and Karachi where they obtained positions at the radio stations and film studios, or where they languished without a new patron class to replace the old. Undoubtedly, some musicians from prestigious musical lineages were forced to find employment in the red-light district, either through lack of opportunity or the inability to compete at the highest level for the few opportunities that did present themselves.

Rababi. The Rababi group of musicians is primarily known for its association with the performance of Sikh religious music. According to legend, the founder of the group was Bhai Mardana, a Muslim companion of Guru Nanak (1453-1537); he played the *rabāb* (plucked lute) and sang devotional music for the founder of the Sikh faith. From that time until 1947, a hereditary, endogamous group of Muslim musicians, known by the term *rabābī* (players of the rabab) specialized in performing Sikh religious music. The majority of them were also highly skilled performers of Hindustani art music, and Hindustani musical structure is prevalent in Sikh devotional music (*kīrtan*).¹² After 1947, the vast majority of Rababi families settled in Lahore where they gained employment in the film and later the television industries, and only secondarily with Radio Pakistan. Numerous outstanding film composers have Rababi backgrounds, including the renowned Master Ghulam Haider.

The one substantial study of the Rababi families of post-1947 Lahore is by Feriyal Aslam (1999). This work is a very important resource on this musician group due to the detailed information she was able to collect, and the anthropological analysis of her data. Aslam presents multiple perspectives on various issues such as group origins, identity, kinship practices, and musical activities.

According to Aslam, there are multiple claims to the origins of the Rababis by the group members themselves: some claim to be descendants of Bhai Mardana, while others say that their ancestors were disciples of Bhai Mardana. Either way, Bhai Mardana is a central figure and apical ancestor of the Rababis (1999:48-51).

In terms of group identity and kinship patterns, the Rababis continue to be an endogamous, hereditary group, a large percentage of whose members specialize in musicianship. A majority of them live in a specific neighborhood of the old city of Lahore called Katri Bawa ki Haveli, located in Channa Mandi, an area quite distinct from the red-light district. As they are endogamous, they are a distinct group from the Mirasis and Kasbis. Aslam has provided extensive genealogical charts of the main Rababi families and their descendants (1999:tables 5-8). An important part of the distinction that Rababis made between themselves and Mirasis is that they do not perform in the red-light district and their women do not perform in public. As further evidence of their separateness, they say that female Mirasis are public performers, which Mirasis themselves deny. Aslam confirmed the absence of women Rababi performers, yet did not find any evidence for or against the claim that Rababi musicians perform in the red-light district (1999:62). Aslam notes that Rababis are often viewed as Mirasis because, as I have already observed, the latter term is used by most Pakistanis to denote all hereditary musicians (1999:52).

I will return to the specific references that Aslam makes about Rababi tabla- and pakhavaj-players in a comparative section below.

Kanjar. As mentioned previously, the most thorough account of the endogamous Kanjar community is to be found in the work of Fouzia Saeed. Two distinctions should be made concerning the Kanjar community: firstly, the women—kanjari-s—are primarily dancers, prostitutes, and to a lesser extent singers, but they are by no means classical vocalists or instrumentalists. They may receive training from Mirasi musicians, but they are not “musicians” per se. In this matriarchal society, Kanjar men are relatively powerless, and only a small handful are performing musicians. Secondly, the kanjaris are different from the *gashīs*, “ordinary” prostitutes who only work in the sex trade. Undoubtedly, many great female vocalists of the past have come from social groups such as the Kanjar, yet even the most esteemed mother-daughter lineages of Lahore no longer have any connection with prostitution (Saeed 2001:27).

Atai. Musicians who do not come from a hereditary background are called Atai, regardless of the genre of music performed. This category is essentially the same as the non-hereditary musicians of Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion of 1979 (See Baily 1988:118-120; Sakata 1983:84-85; Sakata 1986). The term *atāi*, however, appears to be specific to Pakistan as the Persian-Afghan term *shauqī* (*shauqīn* in Urdu) was not as common as the former. And unlike the Shauqi of Afghanistan, the Atai are very few in number in Pakistan.

The Atai are not a social group per se because they are not bounded by consanguinal links or kinship patterns. Nevertheless, they constitute a social category because of their unusual social background. While they do not carry the stigma of being hereditary musicians in Pakistani Punjabi society at large, they do carry a stigma within the community of musicians. The art of the Atai is generally considered inferior to that of the hereditary musicians due to the training they have received (or lack of it) and also quite simply due to the folk-notion that music is not “in their blood.” Ironically, this sense of the term *atāi* is quite different from its much earlier meaning as a court musician of the highest rank (See Neuman 1990:86).

Another type of Atai should be mentioned at this point: professional pop bands comprised of young, middle to upperclass non-hereditary musicians. These musicians have little or no knowledge of South Asian art music genres, and have learned Western music theory and performance genres abroad or within Pakistan. Most of the bands, such as the very popular Janoon and Vital Signs, are based in Karachi; however, quite a number can be found in Lahore, performing rock cover

songs at weddings. The success of these musicians largely hinges on several factors that hereditary musicians do not possess, namely: the ability to speak fluent English, access to transnational media and travel, financial resources to afford high-tech musical instruments and recording equipment, and of course, the prestige accorded them for being proficient in Western musical genres. Hereditary musicians generally despise these types of Atais because of their lack of knowledge of and respect for art genres, and for usurping the performance opportunities that were once the purview of the hereditary musicians.

Discursive Contexts

Thus far, I have described the musicians of Lahore from a distanced, analytical perspective. It is therefore worth examining specific instances of how musicians negotiate their own identities by using certain labels for themselves and others. By examining the following examples, I am led to conclude that there is hardly a consensus among the musicians themselves as to the category and terminology for musicians in Pakistani Punjab. Thus, social identity tags are inevitably contested and in a state of flux.

Context 1: The “Real” Mirasis

Early in my residence in Lahore in 1994, I became acquainted with two violinists, Dilshad Hussain and his son, Samar Hussain. These two musicians were qualitatively different from most other hereditary musicians of Lahore in two ways. Firstly, they were of *muhājīr* (migrant) background from Delhi, not the Punjab, and claimed to belong to the Delhi *gharānā* “of vocalists and tabla-players.” Interestingly, Dilshad Hussain considered the vocalists *and* the tabla-players of the Delhi as consisting of one group of musicians as opposed to two separate groups (i.e., in Neuman’s terms, soloists and accompanists). To prove that he belonged to the Delhi gharana, he recited strings of Delhi *qāidās* (a genre of tabla composition) along with an explanation of how to improvise on them. Based on my musical instruction from Delhi tabla-players, Dilshad Hussain’s qaida recitations were entirely correct. Secondly, Dilshad Hussain and his son were very innovative, socially savvy musicians who had adapted quite successfully to the new sociopolitical environs of Pakistan. Dilshad said that musicians could not be successful by relying on the standard institutions for employment such as Radio Pakistan. Aside from being fluent in the English language, Dilshad Hussain had moved to a suburb of Lahore, taught both Western and “Eastern” classical music at one of the schools for children of foreign diplomats, and gave regular concerts for the expatriate community.

In one of my discussions with Dilshad Hussain, the topic of caste arose, but not by my instigation. Dilshad was quite aware of the ethnographic dimension of my work and began discussing who were the “real” Mirasis of Lahore. In this sense, he specifically referred to a group that was most likely the same that McClintock worked with in the outskirts of the city. Dilshad Hussain offered to take me to meet to these Mirasis, although I never had the opportunity to do so. Nevertheless, what is interesting in this instance is how Dilshad made a qualitative difference between musicians who indeed met the classic definition of the Mirasi as musician-genealogists versus those such as he who were *modern*, urban classical musicians. Thus, he was quite aware of the general usage of the term Mirasi by the general Pakistani public and the much finer social definition among musicians in Lahore.

Context 2: “We are Mir Alam” and “I am a Mirasi”

The next instance is that of musicians calling themselves Mirasi. I have encountered only two examples of this, one directly and one narrated to me.

The first was during an interview with the tabla-player, Ghulam Hasan “Khuk” who was a student of Inayat Ali “Neti” Khan and Khalifa Mian Qader Baksh. His father was Nathu Khan, who played tabla for seventeen years until he became a vocalist and studied with Jarnail Fateh Ali Khan, one of the founders of the Patiala gharana (of vocal khayal). Ghulam Hasan commanded a formidable knowledgeable of tabla compositions from both the Mian Qader Baksh and Qasur lineages of Punjabi tabla-players. During the interview, the issue of musician groups arose. Since Ghulam Hasan had mentioned that he resided in Amritsar prior to 1947, I tried to ask him who the Rababis were, and he responded that he was a “Mir Alam, a Dhadi from Patiala.” According to one source I had read prior to my arrival in Pakistan in 1994, *mīr ālam* was “...a more acceptable term designating hereditary professional musicians” (Nayyar and Sakata 1989:35).

A second instance is of Fariad Hussain “Bhulli Khan,” an outstanding tabla-player who learned from Ghulam Hussain Jalandhari. Bhulli Khan resided in an area next to Hira Mandi, one of the neighborhoods of the Shahi Mohalla. According to his student, Saqib Razaq, Bhulli Khan had said in direct terms that “I am a Mirasi.” Such a usage from a tabla-player who resided in the red-light district seems hardly surprising given that his association with this area is undeniable. In other words, there appears to be no attempt on the part of Bhulli Khan to be socially mobile through changing his musical performance contexts, identity terminology, or actual physical residence. In this

instance, his use of the term fits the model of the Mirasi as described by Fouzia Saeed.

Context 3: “Mir Alam: in the language of the Atais, that’s what they call Mirasis”

Another very important encounter with the terms *mīrāsī*, *mīr ālam* and *atāī* occurred when I visited Peshawar in March 1996 to interview Khalifa Akhtar Hussain, the most widely recognized authority of Punjabi tabla-playing. Khalifa Akhtar Hussain used all three terms when he began narrating a story about the nineteenth-century encounter between the Sufi mystic Lal Hussain and the tabla-player Mian Qader Baksh (I).¹³ In this story, Khalifa Akhtar Hussain referred to Mian Qader Baksh I as a Mir Alam. I then asked, “Who is a Mir Alam?” to which he became indignant and replied: “In the language of the Atais, that’s what they call Mirasis.” The possible meanings to be found in this short interchange are many, although my interpretation of it corresponds to the usage of *mīr ālam* by Ghulam Hasan “Khuk.”

Why would two musicians, firmly trained and involved in classical music, choose to use the term *mīr ālam* in my presence if such a term was a euphemism for the pejorative term *mīrāsī*? My only understanding thus far is that their use of the term is an assumption that I would not know any other terms for musicians such as *kasbī* or *gūnī-ādmī* (lit. “knowledgeable person”). Given the likelihood of my lack of subcultural knowledge, both Khalifa Akhtar Hussain and Ghulam Hasan “Khuk” were forced to use terms they felt I would have known. Thus, based on my own position as a foreigner who probably acquired much of my perception of musician groups from non-musician Pakistanis, they probably thought that I viewed all musicians as Mirasis. Of course, the possibility exists that Khalifa Akhtar Hussain preferred the term *mīrāsī* over *mīr ālam* in the sense that Bhulli Khan used it. However, this is unlikely given that Khalifa Akhtar Hussain enjoyed very high status among the community of musicians, and had no association with the red-light district in Peshawar or later when he moved to Lahore.

Context 4: “My mistake was to go into music” and “I am playing with my office buddy”

A final example is of interest in the way it demonstrates the most basic categories of social identity among musicians in Pakistani Punjab: hereditary and non-hereditary. The *barsī* (death anniversary) of Mian Qader Baksh is held every year in Lahore in a public venue, although the majority of attendees are professional musicians. Various instrumentalists and vocalists perform in addition to several outstanding

performers of tabla solo. In 1995, the barsi was held in one of the auditoriums at the Al Hamra Arts Complex in Lahore. The vast majority of performers were hereditary musicians, although a few non-hereditary musicians also performed. One non-hereditary amateur performer was Zahid Farani, an accomplished tabla-player who is also proficient in *khayāl gāyākī* and *bānsūrī* (flute).

Zahid Farani performed twice during the evening: once as a tabla soloist and the other as an accompanist. Before he began his tabla solo, Zahid Farani expressed a small caveat to the audience that “my mistake was to go into music.” In this coded language, he recognized that it was an honor for him to perform at the barsi of Mian Qader Baksh in the presence of so many hereditary musicians. It was a way of appeasing any hereditary musicians who might have had objections to his act of performing a tabla solo at an event of such great importance for the musicians of Lahore. Significantly, Farani received applause upon stating his non-hereditary sociomusical status.

Later in the barsi, Zahid Farani performed again in the role of accompanist for a well known ghazal-singer.¹⁴ When the singer first entered the stage, he had no accompanist and one was requested from the audience. Ghulam Haider Khan, a highly respected vocalist and musicologist from the Qasur biradari, suggested that Zahid Farani accompany. This was indeed accepted by ghazal-singer, but not without comment. As Zahid Farani tuned his tabla, Hamid Ali quipped, “I am playing with my office buddy.” This obvious reference to Zahid Farani’s status as an Atai was in some sense the only way the singer could save face for having a non-hereditary musician accompany him in the presence of an audience of *khāṣ* (lit. “special,” “real”) hereditary musicians.

Summary

The hereditary musician groups of Pakistani Punjab are many and diverse. This was also the case when the land was united under British rule, as seen in the earliest substantial source, the H.A. Rose compilation. Therefore, broad sweeping generalizations about these hereditary musician groups, especially when all are referred to by the rubric *mīrāsī*, are of minimal value for understanding the complexities of the social relationships and identities of musicians themselves. A close examination of how group identity terminology is used in speech discourse is vital for gaining a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the history and current status of hereditary musician groups in the Punjab.

Even though they are called Mirasis by the wider public, the hereditary musicians involved in classical (i.e. “art”), light-classical and staged folk genres do not fit the classic notion of the Mirasi: musician-

genealogists for a patron group. If they indeed have the genealogical information of or historical ties to patron groups, they do not practice genealogy, as do the Mirasis of McClintock's study. Even McClintock's informants have been abandoning their traditional occupation due to pervasive social changes such as urbanization, and most importantly the sea change wrought by the social upheaval of the Partition of the Punjab in 1947.¹⁵

The musicians of McClintock's study were definitely not the urban classical musicians of my research, and this is attested to by Dilshad Hussain's reference to them as the "real" Mirasis. My informants were highly specialized, sophisticated musicians of art music genres, based solidly in urban areas; they provided entertainment, and to a lesser extent musical training, to the public at large through concerts and various forms of media. The majority of them preferred alternative terms for their own social identity, such as *kasbī*. Alternatively, they were from a separate, endogamous group, such as the Rababis. Both the Kasbis and the Rababis differentiated and distanced themselves from musicians who performed for the *mujrās* (dance entertainments) of the Shahi Mohalla, the red-light district of Lahore. Interestingly, some musicians associated with the Shahi Mohalla did call themselves Mirasis, as in the case of Fariad Hussain "Bhulli" Khan. Yet, these musicians were distinct from the *kanjaris*, the dancer-singer-prostitutes for whom they provided musical accompaniment.

One could argue that the forces of musical modernization, which involved a shift in sociomusical contexts from the feudal courts and red-light districts of urban centers to the concert stage and radio/television broadcasts, involved a finer degree of social identity formation. When the old, feudal patronage system was eliminated after the dissolution of the Princely States after 1947, many musicians were forced to find patronage in new institutions which created new classes of musicians: some lived and played in the red-light districts, and others disassociated themselves with the district by moving to the suburbs and obtaining employment through Radio Pakistan, PTV and the private and public concerts.

In sum, the situation in Pakistani Punjab and more specifically in Lahore, resembles what Daniel Neuman hypothesized in the split between the Kalawants and the Mirasis almost two centuries prior. The former group became soloists, exclusively: they did not intermarry with accompanists (sarangi- and tabla-players) because the latter group accompanied *tawā'ifs* (courtesans). In a similar vein, the Kasbis and the Rababis appear to deny similar associations with musician groups that perform for *tawā'ifs* in the Shahi Mohalla, hence their distaste for the pejorative term *mīrāsī*. In terms of actual kinship patterns, it is well established that the Rababis are a separate, endogamous social group whose members do not intermarry with musicians working in the red-

light district. In the case of the Kasbis, this has yet to be determined. Do members of this new group practice intermarriage with Mirasis of the Shahi Mohalla? In some sense, this is the most important test of social differentiation, as Daniel Neuman has observed in his work with musicians in Delhi.

Notes

¹ The original publication dates of the three volumes by Rose are the following: Vol. I. 1919, Vol. 2. 1911, Vol.3. 1914. The first reprint was in 1970 by the Languages Department Punjab (Patiala), Punjab National Press, Delhi.

² Many of the informants of my research in Pakistani Punjab made this claim as well.

³ See the classic description by Tandon (1961:79-80).

⁴ A small room where musicians learn, teach and perform music for each other; also, the occasion of the performance itself.

⁵ This continues today, and most observers would be very surprised to learn the true identity of some of India's most celebrated musicians.

⁶ See Imam (1959:18) for a 19th century description of the Dhari community of musicians.

⁷ This was the usage of these terms as found in contemporary Pakistani Punjab, and as such, differs greatly with Indian Punjab where dhadhis are a specific group who are the sole performers of a well-defined genre of music.

⁸ A common term I heard several non-musicians use for the instrumental accompanists was *safardai* (*sapardai*), which appears simply to be another term for a male *mirasi*. Interestingly, Saeed (2001:150) uses a close variant of the term, *sapardai* only once in reference to the famous vocalist, Bare Ghulam Ali Khan, who was known to have come from a group of instrumental accompanists from the city of Qasur.

⁹ The same observation was made by Naqvi 1997 in his ethnography on prostitution in the red-light district of Lahore.

¹⁰ See Baily 1987:120-121 for a succinct discussion of the term *ustad* and ranking behavior.

¹¹ Translation from Nayyar (2000:763).

¹² See for a Mansukhani (1982) for the structural elements of Hindustani art music in Sikh kirtan.

¹³ According to Khalifa Akhtar Hussain, Mian Qader Baksh I was a disciple of Lala Bhawani Das, the apical ancestor of Punjab gharana.

¹⁴ The name of the vocalist will not be mentioned due to the sensitivity of this example.

¹⁵ Thompson (2000:403-04) makes the same observations about changes in client-patron links in North India.

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