

THE DHOLKI: VERNACULAR SOCIAL TRADITION IN WEST PUNJAB

by

Lina Bhatti

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Graduate Faculty

of

George Mason University

in Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts

Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

The Dholki: Vernacular Social Tradition in West Punjab

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

Lina Bhatti
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2019

Director: Bassam Haddad, Professor
Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Department

Fall Semester 2021
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Copyright 2021 Lina Bhatti
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

To Umar, my parents, Farah and Adeel, and to my sisters, Zainab and Aiza, for their constant support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a few prominent people who helped me to complete this thesis. First, Umar, for pushing me to do fieldwork in Lahore and always supporting my academic endeavors. I would like to thank my mother for helping me with tough translations, for providing a pillar of support throughout the project, and for travelling to Lahore with me. Thank you to my father for introducing me to the Sufi traditions of South Asia. I would like to further thank Dr. Benjamin Gatling for his initial interest in the project, and for his consistent and ongoing assistance, guidance, and feedback that allowed me to pursue and complete this project. Thank you further to Dr. Maria Dakake and Dr. Sumaiya Hamdani for providing feedback that benefitted this study greatly. To the aunties who hosted dholkis throughout my childhood and adulthood, I owe you my gratitude for allowing me to witness the beautiful traditions of South Asia. Finally, thank you to the numerous coffeeshops of Northern Virginia, which I inhabited frequently to write this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Dholki as a Flexible Vehicle.....	1
Chapter Two: Qawwali, Dholki, and Women	43
Conclusion.....	75
References	81

ABSTRACT

THE DHOLKI: VERNACULAR SOCIAL TRADITION IN WEST PUNJAB

Lina Bhatti, MA

George Mason University, 2021

Thesis Director: Dr. Benjaming C. Gatling

This thesis describes the vernacular tradition of the dholki, a common wedding event with song and singing. The dholki is framed in a context of a male-dominated religious society and has the propensity to be utilized as a flexible vehicle for the dissemination of religious and spiritual thought, worship, or rulings. The process of writing this thesis started with ethnographic fieldwork in Lahore in the summer of 2021, where the author spoke to a variety of women at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine. This thesis places the dholki within the study of vernacular tradition in the Punjab and broader South Asia. Through a deconstruction of the event, its context, and the songs and beats that women utilize during the event, I argue that the dholki provides a flexible vehicle through which women are able to disseminate, adapt, permeate, and transform religiosity and spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my childhood, dholkis were a common tradition amongst ethnic groups in South Asia, a tradition that I have participated in frequently. The *dholki*¹ is an event where a group of women gather to celebrate some sort of joyous occasion—usually before a wedding. The women who attend can be family members, friends, neighbors, or passers-by who stumbled upon the event. During the event, a woman will sit in front of a dholak, a small wooden drum that has batter-heads on the left and right sides. This woman will play the dholak, while the rest of the women clap and sing songs. One woman will sometimes sit across from the player of the drum and use a metal utensil of sorts, such as a spoon, to hit against the dholak, creating a beat that the participants follow. The dholki is generally for women alone. The songs that are sung are categorized as folk songs, family songs, contemporary music, and religious songs. The latter include a variety of folk songs about religion, religious figures, and even renditions of qawwali, a type of Sufi music found commonly throughout South Asia. The dholki event is generally flexible and not rigid in its structure.

¹ The word “dholki” will be used throughout this study to refer to the event. Although this tradition may be known by other names locally, I have concluded that dholki is the most commonly known term for this tradition.

Growing older and more academically inclined, I started to observe and realize certain trends in dholkis—the references to God, Prophets, and saints, all enclosed within what seemed to me to be a South Asian frame of reference. During a class in my graduate degree, I analyzed a dholki song that I had consistently heard. The song, a rendition of a qawwali, was known by many names, including, but not limited to Lal Meri, Mast Qalandar, and Dama dam mast. Analyzing this song, I stumbled upon a larger question—that of the dholki itself, its context, and its implications as a women-only event.

As a result of the societal institution of purdah² in South Asia, informal forms of feminine worship take place. The study I undertook focused on women in Punjab. Specifically, in June to July of 2021, I travelled to Lahore to speak to women in West Punjab about their experiences with Islam, Sufism, and the dholki. There were a variety of aspects I came across in this study of how women in West Punjab think about worship, spirituality, dholki, Sufism, and orthodoxy. The various responses I received through interviews encompassed views that exemplified a certain strength in conviction and perspective. Through these responses, I embarked on this study to synthesize, analyze, and showcase the plethora of viewpoints of West Punjabi women about the dholki. Through this study, one of the first of its kind on the tradition of the dholki, I wish to bring to academic attention an analysis of the dholki as a common tradition in Punjabi, and generally, South Asian, vernacular tradition. I wish to further utilize the dholki as a case study in an

² The concept of dictating the separation of women from men. Purdah itself means veil.

approach to understand how gender, Islam, orthodoxy, and spirituality are intertwined in the study of vernacular religious tradition in South Asia.

In my original paper on this subject, I focused on the song “Lal Meri” and attempted to unpack the aspects and background of this song, as well as the implications of using this song in the dholki space. In this expanded study, I will be focusing on the space of the dholki itself. Through a deconstruction of the event, its context, and the songs and beats that women utilize during the event, I argue that the dholki provides a flexible vehicle through which women are able to disseminate, adapt, permeate, and transform religiosity and spirituality. The context of the dholki is South Asian; however, how does the context of the dholki affect the way that women interact with the space of the dholki?

Understanding that South Asian religious society, in terms of Islam, is framed by androcentrism is important to note. With this understanding, I will briefly give context to serve as an introduction to the larger study. To do this, we must first go over some frameworks. I will briefly give some context for feminine expressions of Islam, the context of Islam in South Asia, and the methodology used in this study.

Feminine expressions of Islam

Feminine expressions of Islam have been documented through different waves and focuses. One of the first waves of feminist scholarship was dedicated to locating women’s agency—to correct the existing scholarship on Muslim women—that they are

passive, submissive beings.³ This feminist scholarship paralleled what is called “New Left” scholarship—the aim of which was to restore a humanist agency to the peasant in the historiography of agrarian spheres (which had Marxist frameworks).⁴ Much of this scholarship on women’s agency and humanist agency is done with anthropological methodologies, such as the ethnography.

Anthropological notions of women’s agency have been studied in a context of subaltern gendered agency. In an ethnographic work in north Sudan, Janice Boddy argues that in a society where the official normativity of Islam is dominated by men private feminine spaces are sites of cultivation for women’s consciousness.⁵ Private feminine spaces in the existence of a dominant male normativity have been studied then as tools of oppression to ascertain value, exist spiritually, and as a tool to resist.⁶ Thus, the idea of independent agency arises—Mahmood elaborates upon the concept of autonomy, citing from existing scholarship that in order for an individual “to be free, her actions must be the consequence of her own will rather than of custom, tradition, or social coercion.”⁷

Mahmood’s general conclusions on the topic of individual autonomy are formative to understanding the dholki and its functions. Mahmood’s argument is that these notions of freedom have been used to regulate what is seen as a legitimate practice; thus, invalidating Muslim women’s existence within culture as not of their own will, but a

³ Mahmood, Saba (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford. 6

⁴ Mahmood, 6

⁵ Mahmood, 6

⁶ Mahmood, 7

⁷ Mahmood, 11

compulsion, forced. The concept of individual autonomy as a feminist expression within cultural tradition generates a further need to document why women participate in the dholki to document the full intention behind existence of this feminine space. Women who engage in the event of the dholki may do so because of the context of living in a male-dominated society, where singing and dancing is not necessarily encouraged in formal spaces for women; they may engage in it as a simple tradition that has been passed down through generations; perhaps, the dholki is just a fun event for women to partake in and express joy. All of these ideas can stand true, but in a male-dominated religious society, it has been oft-documented, as referenced through Boddy and Mahmood, women attempt to seek out places where they are able to worship informally.

In subaltern studies, Spivak analyzes the role of the South Asian woman with the intersections of colonialism, orientalism, and western feminism. Spivak specifically uses the practice of sati as an example of writing about the subaltern. Through the poignant question: can the subaltern speak, I involve Spivak in her arguments regarding the imperial violence on South Asian women. Engaging with Spivak's analyses, I hope to center the women I spoke to through any conclusions regarding the dholki. Rather than understanding varying traditions as subversive, resistance, or revolutionary, I attempt to engage in my fieldwork through a full emphasis on the women I spoke to. Understanding western privilege, casteism, and ethnic disparities in Lahore were elements that I grappled with throughout the fieldwork, by attempting to be an interlocutor for the women I spoke to rather than a projection of my own narrative and experience. The

majority of the women I spoke to were middle to lower class women at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine. I include an anecdote in Chapter 2 where I came across the tail-end of a dholki hosted by some upper-class women in Lahore and the context was visibly different than that of the previous women I spoke to at the shrine. There are differences in understanding the dholki through class, ethnicity, and religion.

Existing scholarship on the way women worship in mosques indicates that women are often relegated to a small section of worship in the mosque, and that men are given legitimacy in the mosque. In many Hanafi rulings, it is encouraged for women to pray at home rather than go to the mosque. Although speaking from a Shi'i perspective, Ann Betteridge's views on how Iranian women exist in this type of male-dominated normativity is relevant as there is a parallel between Hanafi spaces and Iranian Shi'i views on women existing in formal spaces. She finds that rather than integrating into male patterns of religious behavior, women instead are involved in their own religious activity, which allows them greater expression of religion and ritual participation.⁸ In Iran, women engage in informal religious worship in the structure of shrines, which is a similarity with the way South Asian women practice Sufism. Activities in the shrine are by personal choice rather than a structured ritual or practice. Betteridge concludes that shrines have three roles to offer women: a religious role that allows them to be central in their worship; a social role through which women can leave the house in an approved

⁸ Betteridge (2002). "Muslim Women and Shrines in Shiraz." *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations*. UT Religious Center, Brigham Young University. Accessed via <https://rsc.byu.edu/mormons-muslims/muslim-women-shrines-shiraz>

setting; and a personal role, through which women can have a contact with divinity and to control their own lives in a meaningful manner. Thus, I completed my ethnography in the Bibi Pak Daman shrine, where I conducted interviews with a variety of women. As a majority of the devotees of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine are women, I thought it an apt place to connect conversations about the dholki, as a women-only event, with ideas of spirituality and ritual.

Contextualizing South Asian Islamic Worship

Within the dholki, one will hear songs that are in veneration of different Sufi saints. Many of these songs have originated at shrines and are a result of shrine worship. Thus, the dholki has a connection with shrine worship in a Muslim context. I will attempt to position shrine worship and the products of shrine worship as integral to how the dholki exists as a mechanism of Sufi worship. The veneration of saints is popular in Central and South Asia due to the assertion that shrines are important sites for meaning and reflection.⁹ To situate the shrine worship as genuinely a site for meaning and reflection, we must understand the teleology of places. Spaces require meaning through lived relationships; they are lived when a place is an object of awareness, and when individuals consciously (or independently) exist in understanding of where they are.¹⁰ Many anthropologists analyze shrines as sacred spaces; however, the dholki cannot be analyzed

⁹ Louw, 50

¹⁰ Louw, 51

in the same breath as it is not *just* religious, it is also cultural and social—a tradition embedded in societal vernacular that has the capacity to be a vehicle of spirituality.

The dholki thus is a tradition in the social vernacular of the Punjab. At times, through various songs that may evoke religious figures and ideas, dholki songs utilize South Asian idioms and imagery and draw from Sufism. I will not argue that the dholki and what it encompasses is a Sufi practice—evoking elements that are derived from Sufi poetry, practice, and ritual does not necessarily instantiate an idea as Sufi. Through Knysh’s work on Sufism, he explains the variety of definitions, characterizations, and understandings of what is or is not Sufi.¹¹ Knysh further elaborates on the dichotomy between an insider and an outsider; the outsider makes choices and ask questions of the materials they utilize that differ from those that are made and asked by insiders; the outsiders use “narrative strategies and conceptual frameworks” that the insider does not, and may even consider incorrect; and outsiders attempt to portray the discourse of Sufism in self-serving, apologetic tones.¹²

Sufi worship is a broad term: it can, very broadly, range from shrine worship to the *samā*¹³ to one’s internal connection with the divine. Much of Western scholarship on Sufism follows a trend of reductionism—reducing Sufism simply to the antithesis of

¹¹ Knysh, 54

¹² Knysh 54-55

¹³ Literally translated as “listening,” “hearing,” “audition;” refers to the listening of music, singing, chanting for the purpose of bringing religious emotion and ecstasy. Gribetz, 43.

Wahhabism or fundamentalism; it is presented as a passive, acceptable, exotic, and mystical version of Islam. However, this trend has been disrupted by many anthropologists by showing the Orientalizing lens through which it is said that Sufism is more passive than other forms of Islam.¹⁴

The idea of the dholki as a common tradition is one that allows an introspection into how Sufism affects life in South Asia. Although I will not be arguing that the dholki in and of itself is a Sufi practice, following the work of Knysh, but rather, I do wish to place the dholki in a context that is shaped by Sufi traditions of the Subcontinent.

In Delhi, the Sufi Chishti order took its place through the founding by Mu'in al-Din Chishti.¹⁵ Delhi's rulers at this time turned to Chishti *shaikhs* (religious leaders) for blessings, support, and political authority.¹⁶ The role of Sufism historically allowed it to permeate social, political, and cultural spheres in South Asia. Between the 12th and 14th centuries of South Asia, Sufi preachers and missionaries actively utilized the concepts, images, cultural traditions, and local legends, to allow for Islam to be introduced and understood better by the masses of the lower strata.¹⁷ The veneration of saints, for example, is something that has existed throughout South Asian history, and still exists contemporarily. The veneration of saints consists of a usual veneration of a tomb, where

¹⁴ Louw, 7

¹⁵ Eaton, 234

¹⁶ Eaton, 76

¹⁷ Suvorova, 4

buried remains sit, in addition to material evidence of a saint's temporal life—dress, turban, sandals, staff, weapons, beads.¹⁸ Saint, as an English word as well, perhaps does not embody the word derived from Arabic—*walī* pl. *awliyā*. The term *walī* is understood as one close to God, a friend of God, or beloved of God.¹⁹ In many South Asian languages, *walī* is translated as *pir*. According to Suvorova, in the lower strata of society, popular Islam included veneration of saints as miracle workers rather than Gnostics. Saints were bearers of *barakah*, (divine bliss), patrons of social groups, and castes of artisans.²⁰ Saints were often seen as carrying greater authority than experts in religion, which led to authorities attempting to enlist their support. This attempt can be observed in contemporary Pakistan, as well, where tombs of certain saints are used as a tool for state-sanctioned imagery and the production of nationalist self-consciousness.²¹ From this understanding of Sufism as integral to the realm of popular Islam amongst lower classes, we can understand that although something may not be Sufi in its intentions and position, it can borrow from the context of Sufism in South Asian Islamic traditions, and I would argue, it even lives within this context. As a result, although I will not be arguing that the dholki is a Sufi tradition, I stand firm in my conviction to argue that aspects of the dholki, depending on who is practicing it and how they are engaging with the dholki, can live within a context of Sufi South Asian vernacular Islam.

¹⁸ Suvorova, 6

¹⁹ Suvorova, 8

²⁰ Suvorova, 10

²¹ Suvorova, 30

Fieldwork and Methodology

The Bibi Pak Daman shrine is dedicated to six women who belonged to the family of the Prophet Muhammad. The shrine is located in inner Lahore, nestled in alleyways and surrounded by old haveli architecture. Shopkeepers line the alleys leading up to the shrine's entrance, where a metal gate, similar to gates found around South Asia, blocks the view into the shrine itself. The shopkeepers sell vibrant paraphernalia that evokes imagery of Islam and reverence to the Prophet and his family. Small stones of *aqeeq* (agate), the Prophet's favored stone, are cluttered around the various stalls and booths, calligraphy dots the alley, and posters and signs are put up around the different buildings' crumbling walls, advertising *majlis* (councils) and *mawlid*s (celebration of the Prophet's date of birth) in the area.

In popular Lahori tradition, the six women that the shrine is dedicated to are the supposed survivors of the Battle of Karbala. They travelled east to take refuge in South Asia. Along with the women who escaped, seven hundred male scholars accompanied them. With the men, the Bibi Pak Daman were involved in missionary work in South Asia.²² During the interviews I conducted with women at the shrine, Bibi Pak Daman was, at times, referred to as a single person, specifically Ruqayya, the daughter of Ali and Fatima and granddaughter of the Prophet. Some women spoke of Bibi Pak Daman, then, as a singular individual, while others spoke of the entity as a group of different individuals. I made the decision to recruit women for interviews at the location of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine as

²² Abbas, 130-131

it is a space that is more or less occupied by women, and my study is targeted towards women. Through a variety of different conversations, the former statement was confirmed—many women told me they were uncomfortable with the men who would come to the shrine. Through these conversations, I was able to talk to women in a casual manner, bringing the dholki event into the conversation with ease and laughter. Furthermore, although the shrine is very visibly visited by Shias in Lahore, it is just as frequently visited by Sunnis. In Noor Zaidi's analysis of Shi'i-Sunni relations at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine, Zaidi was able to conclude that the devotees of the shrine were subject to heightening sectarian issues through the implementation of governmental interference in the shrine complex.²³ Through this context, I was able to talk to Shia and Sunni women to understand how they practiced faith, and how that led to differences in the event of the dholki. Such claims cannot be substantiated by a month of fieldwork, but these interviews allowed me to gain a deeper environmental competency into the approaches towards the worship of women devotees.

To conduct the fieldwork, I spent most of my time at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine. I approached most women, but I was also approached by others, who were curious as to what I was doing at the shrine. All of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in Urdu and Punjabi, where I asked questions about shrines, dholkis, and spirituality. The variety of responses I received was indicative of the diversity of South Asian women. Different languages, upbringings, religious affiliations contribute to various

²³ Zaidi, 164

phenomenological understandings of ritual events. All of the women I spoke to participated in the dholki, and the shrine location provided a context for bringing into the discussion Sufism, spirituality, and worship. Furthermore, because I completed the ethnographic portion of the fieldwork at one location in Lahore, this study is limited to one locality, although with a diverse group of participants. The dholki as a vernacular tradition can differ not only due to religious affiliation, but also it can differ in its practice from locality to locality.

The women I conducted interviews with were strong in their opinions and perspectives, which perceptibly was a factor in the way they spoke about the dholki, religion, and power. Through these conversations, I was able to derive a variety of points and themes that I will be expanding upon in this study. As a note, I was not able to attend a dholki during my time in Lahore. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a struggle with my airline ensued, and I had to cut the fieldwork shorter than I anticipated. Furthermore, the timing of my visit, in June and July of the scorching Lahori summer, ensured that people were not having weddings, and thus not hosting dholkis.

Throughout this study then, I will be engaging with the tradition of the dholki. Fascinated by the beats and the melodies of the songs and perspectives of women in South Asia, I hope to give the dholki, South Asian women, and their practices, the proper attention that they merit. In Chapter 1, I explain how the dholki is an informal space of flexibility through which women can engage in different objectives. I analyze various feminist

approaches to the anthropology of Islam in this section, extracting from the works of Saba Mahmood and Lila Abu-Lughod. With this, I will attempt to further locate the dholki as a vernacular tradition. In Chapter 2, I expand on the idea of qawwali and dholki. The intersections of femininity, qawwali, and dholki are points that I wish to explore whilst understanding how male-dominated religious societies compel women to seek informal spaces of worship. Through the variety of topics I discuss, I use the dholki as a case study in understanding gender and Islam in a South Asian context.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DHOLKI AS A FLEXIBLE VEHICLE

The shrine of Bibi Pak Daman is where I embarked on the initial stage of my fieldwork. Providing relevancy, a link, to the Sufi practices of the Subcontinent was my goal in speaking to women at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine in Lahore. The Bibi Pak Daman shrine draws thousands of visitors every year, across Punjab and broader Pakistan. The shrine is said to be the site of the Bibi Pak Daman, six figures who fled the Battle of Karbala. In popular tradition, one of these figures, who is said to rest in the main tomb at the shrine, is Ruqayya bint Ali, the granddaughter of Muhammad. Popular accounts say that the Bibi Pak Daman fled the Battle of Karbala, where they travelled with hundreds of male scholars to “Hind,” as the Indian subcontinent was known as at the time. The Bibi Pak Daman were said to hold mystical events, speaking to their audiences in South Asia through a veil.²⁴ When they arrived in Lahore, they started engaging in missionary work. They interpreted the Quran, were aware of Muhammad’s hadith, and established *zikr* (spiritual exercise²⁵) events for the recitation of Quran.²⁶ The stories of the Bibi Pak Daman as belonging to the family of the Prophet have been attempted to be refuted in contemporary times, many arguing that this occurs in order to devalue significance of the Prophet’s family.²⁷ The Bibi Pak Daman shrine, although visited by both Shias and

²⁴ Abbas, 130

²⁵ Eaton, 89

²⁶ Abbas, 131

²⁷ Zaidi, 165

Sunnis for worship, has also been the site of sectarian conflict.²⁸ Although the sectarian issues between Shias and Sunnis are beyond the scope of this paper, it is significant to provide the context of these relations, as throughout my fieldwork Sunnis would reference Shias, and Shias would reference Sunnis, when explaining their own perspectives of worship.

When arriving at the area of Bibi Pak Daman shrine, near central Lahore, crowds gathered outside. I waded through crowds and crowds of women in tiny alleyways to approach the main gate of the shrine itself, which was shut with a tarnished silver gate. The shrine was officially closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but devotees, slyly looking all ways, would open the door and walk in, sit down, and worship. The crowds of women were pushing and shoving to get to the front of the shrine, and realizing defeat, I stepped back to allow others to enter the mausoleum itself. I then walked back to the little alleys that led to the shrine entrance and observed the dozens of little shops and stalls that lined the alleys. The shops were selling different items of religious significance—garlands of roses and jasmine flowers to put on the tombs in the shrine, red thread that visitors use to tie onto trees and tombs, the two-pronged sword of Ali, neatly packaged into a frame, and various other vibrant items. In these little shops and stalls is where I spoke to the majority of the women in the course of my fieldwork.

²⁸ Zaidi, 161

Shaheen is a frequent visitor to the Bibi Pak Daman shrine in Lahore. I met her in front of a shop that was selling “Masha’allah” (meaning “What God has Willed”) signs to put in one’s house. These signs are said to ward off the evil eye and bad spirits from entering a house, and are very common across South Asia. I approached her, asking about the sign she was purchasing, noticing the red thread in her hands as well. I asked her first about the red thread.

She explained to me that she visited the shrine, what she referred to as “Bibi,” months earlier and tied a red thread to a tree in the shrine complex. Praying for ease of purchasing a house in Lahore, she visited Bibi with earnestness and hope, praying that through Bibi, God would hear her prayers and grant them. The June I visited Lahore of 2021, her wishes were granted, and she visited Bibi again, this time to cut off the thread. While she was there, she wanted her new house to have a “Masha’allah” sign that was from Bibi’s shrine.

Through speaking with Shaheen about Bibi, she spoke of Bibi as an individual, a messenger, a friend of God. Shaheen reiterated devotion to Bibi, Ali, the Prophet, and God throughout our conversation. I asked her if she sang songs in remembrance of any of these figures, to which she joyously replied that songs are very common in her family. She told me that when she is overcome with emotion, she resorts to singing prayers.

“Ali, jivaan tere laal” she sung to me.²⁹

Shaheen told me that she sings this line frequently at dholkis, in addition to “Mast Qalandar.” She said, “There’s nothing more than God, Muhammad, and his family. This is why we remember them at dholkis and other happy occasions. They are there for us when we are sad, so we must praise them and worship them when we are happy.”

Shaheen’s words speak to the phenomena of singing as a tool for worship. The connection between singing and the history of Islam in South Asia can be considered at points, intertwined. In this chapter, I will be arguing that the dholki is a flexible vehicle through which a range of different social, religious, and spiritual functions can be maintained. Through this framework, I will be deconstructing the diverse perspectives of orthodoxy that exist in West Punjab. I do this in order to create an understanding for which my claims on the dholki expand upon. Through this, I will be engaging in an argument of subjectivity to describe the dholki and its functions. I will further be attempting to locate the dholki as a social tradition within a South Asian Islamic context. I will do this as there is little to no academic research on the dholki, and as one of the first attempts to do this I wish to lay a foundation to further analyze the functions of the dholki. Through this, I will be examining how the dholki embodies a vernacular tradition amongst women in West Punjab that can be used to display spirituality, drawing upon the

²⁹ This means “Ali, may your beloved live.” Jivaan tere laal is a common expression used while referring to the Prophet, God, and members of the Prophet’s family. In this case, “laal,” which can translate to loved one, could refer to Hussain and Hassan, Ali’s children.

work of Dr. Farina Mir, who has researched the role of the qisse (legend) in Punjab, as well as other literature regarding Sufi poetry in Punjab.

Diverse Perspectives of Orthodoxy

From my fieldwork in Lahore, many things stood out to me. The diversity of perspectives that women held were reiterated through any conversation I had, as referenced by the above vignette. Because of the dominance of the Hanafi school of thought in South Asia that birthed the Deoband and Bareilvi schools of thought, the ways that Islam has been practiced by groups in South Asia can now be scrutinized by other groups.³⁰ Aziza was a woman I met right after speaking to Shaheen. As we spoke, a man next to us was singing a *qasida* (praise of the Prophet in song form) in a bellowing tone. Aziza showed apprehension to this man and his singing. I asked her why she looked visibly uncomfortable, to which she said that it was a sign of *jahiliyyah* (a state of ignorance) to sing at shrines, showing a perspective quite different to other women I spoke to.

Shanzay reiterated what Aziza was saying. She had overheard the conversation, and chimed in, while shopping for an aqeeq ring for her nephew. Her grandmother and mother followed her into the complex where we were standing. As Aziza left the shrine area, Shanzay reiterated that it was *haram* (religiously forbidden) to sing at shrines, although other groups, like Shias, she said, consider it permissible. Treading carefully, I

³⁰ Suvorova, Anna "Muslim Saints of South Asia" The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries." *RoutledgeCurzon Sufi Series* (1999). 25

asked her whether she participated in the dholki at all, to which she said that she sings songs like “Chitta Kukkar,” “Desan da raja,” and “Mundaya,” all very typical Punjabi songs that are not necessarily religious in objective. I then asked her if she ever sang songs about religious figures at all, to which she gave me a very firm no. Her mother and grandmother chimed in the back, almost reprimanding me, to tell me that it’s haram. Jokingly, I asked Shanzay if she ever sang “Mast Qalandar,” to which she immediately replied that she does sing it, but sensing the next question I was going to ask, she said that she does not sing “Mast Qalandar” for devotion, but just because it is a popular dholki song. She peered over my shoulder and tried to make sure that I had written that she said singing for the purpose of praise is not only wrong, but strictly forbidden. Shanzay said that the Prophet told us (Muslims) that we should not sing and dance. She, like Aziza, expressed apprehension at the man singing qasida.

This apprehension can have many reasons. Lahore, in modern-day Pakistan, is a city with a contentious and tumultuous past. The partition of India forced Hindus and other religious minorities in the newly-formed Pakistan to flee to neighboring Amritsar, in newly-formed India, while Muslims in some parts of India fled to Lahore. Partition has left impacts on South Asia that, to discuss, would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, I would like to focus on one effect of the Partition which is the context of Pakistani nation-building that is imperative to understanding modern views on the way that Islam was practiced in the past and is practiced in the present.

Aziza and Shanzay's perspectives differed starkly from the conversations I had with other women at the shrine, but even they had different ideas of orthodoxy among themselves. To Aziza, singing at the shrine was not haram, but something discouraged,³¹ whereas Shanzay vehemently told me that it is haram to sing at shrines and to even sing for worship. Although this may seem like a slight difference to note, I wish to extract this difference as representative of the approaches that many South Asians engage in to reach conclusions regarding religion. Shanzay's approach was to tell me about a Prophetic ruling on the matter. When I prodded her further to ask how she knows this, she simply said that it is in the hadith of Prophet. This stands uniquely to me as a portrayal of orthodoxy.

Zahra was with a group of girls as she approached me, asking what I was doing. I told her about my intended research and asked if she and the girls she was with, her daughters, would be interested in speaking to me. The daughters were shy at first, hiding behind their shawls, but warmed up as I started speaking to their mother. Zahra and her daughters were from Lahore, part of the historically embedded Shia community. We spoke about their shrine rituals, to which they said that singing is a must for them, specifically the qasida. Asking about the dholki, one of the daughters, Saadia, said that they use a daff, a type of drum instrument, to create a beat that they use in the dholki rather than the dholak drum. In a chorus of responses, the daughters of Zahra told me

³¹ Haram refers to what is theologically forbidden within Islamic law whereas something discouraged is still a permissible act within the confines of Islamic law.

they sing many religious songs at the dholki, particularly songs about the Prophet and Ali. I asked Zahra whether it is possible to categorize the dholki as a religious place, like a shrine. Thinking carefully over this while her daughters wandered off to tie thread on a tree in the complex, Zahra relayed to me that although she sees it as a religious space because she is a religious and spiritual person, for others, that might not be the case. She told me that just like the shrine, she and her family participate in songs about religion, from which they feel spiritually connected to God.

After this conversation, I was lost in thought as I walked around the shops and shrine area. I almost bumped into Fatima, who quickly chirped at me before asking if I was okay. She slyly asked me if I was from the UK, to which I, of course, had to correct her, telling her I was from the United States. I spoke to her of my research, and she agreed to be interviewed. I asked her questions about the dholki, a tradition that she loves engaging in. She happily told me about the way that she engages in the dholki practice, usually singing for around 10-15 minutes, then dancing to contemporary songs. I asked her if she ever recalled hearing any religious or devotional songs at the dholki. She replied that her family almost always sings “Lal Meri” and “Rasoolay Pak ka sayaa.” I asked her about her feelings when singing these songs at the dholki—do you feel spiritual when singing these?

Fatima relayed to me that although she did not feel anything spiritual when singing these sorts of songs as a child, as she became older, she started to understand what they meant,

and consequently feels spiritual when she sings these songs. She explained that she goes to shrines with her mother and feels something in her heart. The songs are spiritual for her because of the religious content. I asked then if she considers them worship, to which she exclaimed in Urdu, which I have translated here:

“I think that anything that makes me remember God, Muhammad PBUH, his family, and saints, is worship!”

In order to understand the context of Islam in Lahore, I would like to explain the institutionalization of Islam in broader Pakistani society. I wish to do this as Shanzay’s interview compels me to unpack the layers of not just Islam in the Indian subcontinent, but the ways in which Islam has spread, the way that it has been revitalized, and the way that it has been used as a tool of the state to purport a rigid orthodoxy, that has trickled down to everyday people. To do this, we must look towards the 1970s. In 1977, Zia ul-Haq overthrew the government of the Prime Minister at the time, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The Zia regime consequently introduced an Islamization program in February of 1979. Zia ul-Haq evoked the concept of *ijtihad* (interpretation) to assert the right to reinterpret Hanafi law for Pakistani society. However, there were vast inconsistencies in how and when to apply a traditional and strict Hanafi interpretation of the law.³²

³² Weiss, Anita M. “Women’s Position in Pakistan: Sociocultural Effects of Islamization.” *Asian Survey* 25, no. 8 (1985): 863–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644115>. (865-866)

Zia's government then announced the reforms, called *nizam-i-islam* (rules of Islam), which were introduced to bring Pakistani society to conformity with Islamic tenets and values. The *nizam-i-islami* were inspired by the reform of economic, political, and social institutions that had occurred when the Prophet Muhammad ruled over Medina (622-632 CE).³³ Zia wanted the economy, judicial system, and education system to undergo Islamization reforms. Under the judicial system reforms, there was implementation of Islamic penal codes and enforcement through the *hadd* punishments. A *hadd* crime is one that is against God's commands.³⁴ The reform in the judiciary affected women in a harmful way, where for example, women could be guilty for rape. This can be explained in the study of Safia Bibi, a young blind woman who was working as a domestic servant. Bibi was raped multiple times and became pregnant as a result of this rape. Through the *hadd* ordinances, Bibi was guilty of *zina-bil-jabr* (sex without consent). Zia had pronounced that a person may be proven guilty of *zina-bil-jabr* with or without the consent of the parties. Bibi was to receive 15 lashes, yet the men who raped her were not punished. Although the ruling for Bibi was reversed later on, other women suffered the punishment publicly, receiving lashes and whips for *zina* (adultery).³⁵ Furthermore, the implementation of *Qanoon-e-Shahadat* (Laws of Evidence), devalued the testimony of a woman to worth half of a man's testimony.³⁶ At the time, many protests erupted across

³³ Weiss, 868

³⁴ The word "*hadd*" in Arabic when used as an infinitive means "to separate" or "to prevent." *Hadd*, in the singular, *hudūd* in the plural, refer to "definite and stated injunctions about the regulation of human behavior." *Hudūd* generally refers to the limits of God. Rahman, 237-51

³⁵ Weiss, 870

³⁶ Weiss, 871

Pakistan, as many of these ordinances had legal arguments against their implementation, in addition to limits as to how they should be enforced.

Through these Islamization reforms, Zia managed to create a Pakistani identity that was intertwined with Islam. As a nation-state founded on religion, the ethnolinguistic diversity of Pakistani people could be potential for disconnect and disunity; however, through the establishment of institutionalized purdah and a society founded upon this institutionalized Islam, there was ability to reinforce the Pakistani identity as a national and religious identity. With Zia's reforms, there was emphasis on establishing a "true Islamic society" in Pakistan.³⁷ Through works by various scholars of religious studies and anthropology, scholars understand a phrasing such as "true Islam" as an evocation of orthodoxy. A true Islamic society is merely one form of Islam amongst many others, as seen through an anthropological lens.³⁸ Through this perception of orthodoxy in Pakistan, many practices that were (and still are) common in South Asia have been deemed un-Islamic. Many Sufi practices are deemed as such by state institutions, certain ulama, and some of the public in Pakistan.

Although the Punjab has a rich and diverse population, in recent years, some of the population has become intolerant of views that differ than their own. There is significant

³⁷ Hassan, Riaz. "Islamization: An Analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan." *Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 263–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283071>. 264

³⁸ Asad, Talal. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." *Center for Contemporary Arab Studies*. Georgetown University. (1986). 1-28. 15.

apprehension towards Shia and Ahmedi Muslims that results in deadly violence targeted towards these groups. For some Shia, even visiting the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman is a challenge as shrines have been attacked by suicide bombers. In the interview with Shanzay, she told me that for her, a Sunni, singing at shrines is not acceptable, but for Shias it is allowed. Fabrications of orthodoxy can be constructed by those who are not part of a particular sect as well—just as when Shanzay told me what Shias believe is permissible or not.

Rather than constructing what orthodoxy looks like in a Pakistani society, it is more pertinent for this study to discuss the relationship that women have with a perception of orthodoxy, and how this perception can influence their religious outlook. For Aziza, it is a sin to sing at shrines, for other women, it is a sin to even visit shrines, for others, it may be a sin to *not* sing at shrines or visit shrines. The perceptions surrounding orthodoxy among South Asian women allow for a variety of different practices and perspectives to frame their worship, spirituality, and religious outlook; it may even lead to the lack of certain practices or rituals. This means that different women have a different view of orthodoxy, denoting that what is practiced at the dholki may differ from individual woman to individual woman. This means that I cannot typify the dholki as generally subversive, generally resistive; rather, it is a vehicle through which women may be able to engage in subversive, resistive, and subordinate practices, rituals, and traditions.

The Islamization reforms institutionalized and state-sanctioned certain cultural procedures in South Asia—the concept of the purdah was further reinforced through the Zia regime, and it continues until today. The purdah is the formal separation of women from the world of men, confining women to certain spaces, and not allowing them free movement.³⁹ The head of the Jamaat e-Islami party in the latter half of the 19th century, Abul A'la Maudoodi, expressed his view on purdah most famously. According to Maudoodi, starting at puberty, a woman must observe rules of behavior inside and outside of the home. The indoor restrictions included prohibition of any non-related male. Outside of the home, a woman was required to cover herself completely, wearing modest dress and using a veil.⁴⁰ The rights of women are linked with the political processes of Pakistan. Pal argues that the *ulama* (interpreters of religious knowledge) as the source of Islamic legitimacy for the existence of Pakistan, impacts women's lives.⁴¹ These factors create a societally institutionalized and socially-enforced purdah.

Taking this, the combination of societally-enforced separation of men and women through purdah and the different phenomenological views on orthodoxy that women possess as a result of various backgrounds, the dholki stands as a common tradition that is, more or less, strictly for women and flexible in its objectives.

³⁹ Kurin, Richard. "Islamization in Pakistan: A View from the Countryside." *Asian Survey* 25, no. 8 (1985): 854. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644114>.

⁴⁰ Pal, Izzud-Din. "Women and Islam in Pakistan." *Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 4 (1990): 449–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283393>. 451

⁴¹ Pal, 462

From the perspective of some women I spoke to, the dholki is a secular wedding event, but to many others the dholki can be a space that allows women freedom to intertwine religious sentiments and folk songs, reaching for some, an ultimate point where the songs they sing can be considered intentional ritual worship. Rather than understanding the dholki as integrated in orthodoxy, the dholki is used by some women as a place to propagate worship, for others, it is merely fun.

Intentional Spaces

Through the previous sections, I am arguing that dholkis can be a space where women are able to engage in religious and spiritual practices, but that does not mean that the sole objective of the dholki for the diverse array of women in Lahore, Punjab, or South Asia is to engage in religious and spiritual practices.

Saba Mahmood speaks of women as actors of patriarchy and agency. Women's subordination to feminine virtues is often a necessary condition for an enhanced public role in religious and political life.⁴² Within the scholarship on women's experience, the main question posed is how do women contribute to "reproducing their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it?"⁴³ With this question, we must take the idea of agency into account. In scholarship of the West, Muslim women have been portrayed as passive and submissive beings, shrouded in male authority. Mahmood's thoughts lead to

⁴² Mahmood, 6

⁴³ Mahmood, 6

a culminated postulation of agency—that “agency is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective). Thus, the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression constitutes the substrate.”⁴⁴ The substrate encompasses the layer that exists beneath individual acts and perceived autonomy. Within a substrate, acts of resistance are more difficult to identify as the context of such acts is enshrouded within ethical and political conditions through which these acts acquire meaning. Mahmood says that acts of agency must emerge through an analysis of concepts that enable modes of being responsibility, and effectivity.⁴⁵ With Mahmood’s analysis, I seek to understand how the women who engage in the dholki are involved in it through their own context, through a precise discursive context.

Boddy’s work in north Sudan shows how the zār practice, a healing cult that uses Islamic idioms and spiritual mediums, can be a medium for “the cultivation of women’s consciousness.”⁴⁶ The use of the healing cult in women’s practice in a society where, what Boddy terms, the “official ideology” of Islam is dominated by men, is a space of subordinate discourse.⁴⁷ For Boddy, the conclusion that the zār practice allows for a cultivation of women’s consciousness implies a consideration that women are actors in their own world.

⁴⁴ Mahmood, 8

⁴⁵ Mahmood, 14-15

⁴⁶ Boddy, 345

⁴⁷ Mahmood, 7

Boddy argues that what those in the West might prefer to consider instruments of their oppression are a means to assert their value collectively through different group and individual contexts, and a means of resisting and setting limits to domination. Women publicly demanding that their value be socially recognized by not competing with men publicly, but by rather emphasizing differences from men and using this as a positive source of self-worth is significant. She says, “Women are moral exemplars, beings in whom reason has checked the admittedly disruptive effects of sexuality, ‘keepers of tradition’ whose domain is the village, whose concerns are the earthly concerns expressed in crisis rites.”⁴⁸

Mahmood interacts with Boddy’s conclusions through a lens of agency—arguing that the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression can allow an act of resistance when conditions are permitting. Boddy’s ethnographic analysis is an understanding of how women exist in male-dominated societies—by engaging in practices that are a result of male-domination. Women are able to, in their societally-enforced roles, emphasize their existence and engage in resistance. As a result, when women create spaces for themselves within androcentric societies, although those spaces are a result of androcentric frameworks, they stand still as spaces that emphasize womanhood, resistance, and attempts at subversion.

⁴⁸ Boddy, 345

Lila Abu Lughod, in her research on Bedouin Arab women and Egyptian women, has allowed a significant analysis into the discipline of anthropology, studying women, and specifically, studying Muslim women. In her study on Bedouins near the Egypt-Libya border, Abu-Lughod interacts with her own analysis and arguments of resistance. Through this study, she identifies four different types of resistance associated with women. The first form, the one I am interested in understanding vis-a-vis the dholki, is the sexually-segregated women's world where women enact minor deviances to hide knowledge from men, cover for each other, smoke in secret, etc. Through this form of resistance, power is enacted through prohibitions and restrictions on women, which they embrace to protect their separate sphere, where the deviances take place.⁴⁹ The last form Abu-Lughod mentions is oral poetry—women expressing relationships with men through poetry and song. Through these resistive acts, we must also understand, Abu-Lughod emphasizes, ways that the development of theories occurs that gives women credit for resisting in creative ways, without “misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experiences—something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics—or devaluing their practices as prepolitical, primitive, or misguided.”⁵⁰ Her second point is how should we grapple with the notions that women can both resist and support existing systems of power, without attributing false consciousness. With

⁴⁹ Abu-Lughod, Lila. “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women.” *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 43

⁵⁰ Abu-Lughod, 47

these questions, Abu-Lughod shifts discourse from a passive state of resistance to what forms of resistance indicate about the forms of power they are attempting to subvert.⁵¹

Through the example of Lila Abu-Lughod, rather than generalize the dholki and its objectives, effects, and contexts, I wish to characterize the dholki, placing it as a vernacular tradition in the Punjab. The dholki takes place as a result of purdah, the separation of men and women. Recalling Zahra from the fieldwork, she and her daughters told me that the dholki is separated from men because women cannot sing and dance in front of men. In Chapter 2, I explain a particular instance where a woman in her village designated a non-related man as a relative in order to dance and sing in front of him during dholkis. The forms of power that the dholki implies exist in a framework of South Asian society. These frameworks may change nation to nation, region to region, village to village, but an overall generalization emically is that the dholki and the women who practice it live in a male-dominated normativity. For example, South Asian Islamic societies are generally known to be male-dominated through the imposition of purdah.

Then, I must ask, can the dholki be seen as a subversion of modesty culture, or an attempt to live within its confines? Rather than categorizing the dholki as a resistive tradition, the dholki seems more clearly to be a vernacular tradition that exists within the framework of a male-dominated religious society. To elaborate, we see the qawwali and other poetry performance in South Asia as being male-dominated. The qawwali, in its rigid structure,

⁵¹ Abu-Lughod, 47

emphasis on adab, and somewhat hierarchical frame, stands as the conventional Sufi practice of South Asia. The dholki is flexible, more unstructured than structured and practiced by women. The dholki thus, rather than an individualized act of resistance, exists as a space where women engage in complex substructures that can be used to subvert the effects of a male dominated religious society. It has the propensity to be subversive, and some women do use it for that objective. The conditions of the dholki and of male-dominated religious society in South Asia exist together. The purdah and idea of a women's modesty is integral in many South Asian groups, cemented through state-sanctioned impositions and social culture. The dholki can be a subversive practice that utilizes certain counter processes to exert a feminine perspective of Punjabi culture and Islam.

Locating the dholki

To locate the dholki as a folk tradition, and to show how the dholki can be used as a space for the subaltern to create and manage religiosity and spirituality, I would like to go into more depth regarding the authority of Muslim women in Sufi spaces, constructions of music, and poetry performance in South Asia.

Through the idea of a Sufi space as a place that is distant from the state sanctioned "true" Islam, places of a Sufi nature allow women to participate more freely. Shrines are one

such place, where women worship publicly, without necessarily having to separate themselves from men.⁵²

In a study on Muslim women mystics and female spiritual authority in South Asian Sufism, Kelly Pemberton explains the existence and significance of women figures in South Asia. Pemberton explains that although there are notions from Shari'a law in South Asia as to why women could/could not become pirs,⁵³ there exists today, and historically, women who are Sufi pirs. Pemberton operates on the argument that gender distinctions in mystical Islam can be rendered deceptive, and thus, meaningless in the face of God. This idea then supports women as recognized authorities in Sufism.⁵⁴ However, women as Sufi authorities also can represent a threat to hegemonic order, where exclusion of women is sought after, and a traditional and male ideal is emphasized.

Through the dholki, women are able to be authorities in regulating the space. Some women write down songs they have heard from their mothers and grandmothers into a household notebook, which they keep for dholkis. This notebook will include different songs, *tappay* (rhymes), or *qisse* (oral epics) specific to the woman who wrote them down. In this way, the dholki can be interpreted as a textual tradition. To focus on the latter, I turn towards Farina Mir's work on social and literary vernacular in the Punjab.

⁵² Some shrines in Lahore, such as Data Darbar, are highly politicized and nationalized, so they will have separate sections for men and women, as they are used as a tool by the state.

⁵³ Word for South Asian Sufi saints

⁵⁴ Pemberton, Kelly. "Muslim women mystics and female spiritual authority in South Asian Sufism." *Journal of Ritual Studies*. Vol. 18, No. 2. (2004). Page, 2

Mir's analysis on the qisse tradition in Punjab allows us to understand many things, such as the context for oral vernacular. Using the qisse to understand Punjabi society is a unique angle that places an oral tradition as a framework for representations of behavior, devotion, and society.

With the qisse tradition, we can further understand the dholki as a vernacular tradition. The word qisse comes from the Arabic cognate verb, qassa "to tell a story, narrate."⁵⁵ Mir explains that the qisse in Punjab evolved from Persia, and that the Punjabi qisse follow the same rhyme scheme as the Persian *masnavi* (poetic form in rhymed couplets), but differs in its meter. The meters of Punjabi qisse are considered indigenous.⁵⁶ Different Punjabi poets, from the 17th century onwards, utilized the qisse as a genre in an oral and literary form. Waris Shah, a poet in the late 18th century, was most famously known for his rendition of the qisse Hir-Ranjha, an epic love tale. The Hir-Ranjha narrative is used throughout Punjabi society, to evoke spirituality most often, through the Sufi relationship of the lover and beloved (see Chapter 2).

Through another work, Mir examines vernacular culture in British Colonial Punjab, attempting to understand the pluralism behind motifs that are used across Punjab. Mir works with the concept of syncretism, ultimately concluding that syncretism cannot be used as an adequate term to describe the various religious traditions in South Asia. She

⁵⁵ Mir, Farina. "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 3 (2006): 734.

⁵⁶ Mir, 736

makes this conclusion on the basis that syncretism assumes the existence of an inherent purity against which it is defined, in order for something to become syncretic. Through Mir's analysis of the qisse tradition as being one that lies at the intersections of the Perso-Islamic tradition, local aesthetics, and different cultural and religious formations,⁵⁷ we can understand the dholki as a folk tradition that encapsulates some of the features of the aforementioned, specifically, locating the dholki at the intersection of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, genres of song, and religious structures. As Mir has used the qisse to analyze Punjabi history, the dholki is a tradition that can be used to analyze contemporary views on religion and spirituality, but it can also be considered and studied as part of the oral tradition and landscape of the Punjab.

Indigenous beats

A Punjabi folk song that was mentioned consistently by the women I interviewed in my fieldwork was "Chitta kukkar," (White chicken). I will expand on this song, first showing the lyrics, then deconstructing the song through its indigenous melody that is repeated with other dholki songs and explaining the phrasing of the song itself.

<i>Chitta kukkar banere tey</i>	There is a white chicken on the parapet of the wall
<i>Chitta kukkar banere tey</i>	

⁵⁷ Mir, 730

<i>Kashni dupattay waliyay munda sadqey</i>	O girl with the sky blue dupatta, ⁵⁸ the boy
<i>tere tey</i>	loves you
<i>Kashni dupattay waliyay munda sadqey</i>	It's an element of destiny
<i>tere tey</i>	It's an element of destiny
<i>Sari khed lakiraan di</i>	The car arrived at the station, the brother
<i>sari khed lakiraan di</i>	was greeting her with love
<i>Gaddi aaye station, te akh pich gai</i>	
<i>weeran di</i>	The shade of the Pipl (long pepper) tree
<i>Gaddi aaye station te, akh pich gai</i>	The shade of the Pipl (long pepper) tree
<i>weeran di</i>	When she came on the dholi (marriage cart), they (her family) gave her love and blessings
<i>Pipli di chaavan ni</i>	When she came on the dholi (marriage cart), they (her family) gave her love and blessings
<i>pipli di chaavan ni</i>	
<i>Aape hatti doli tor ke, ma pay karan</i>	
<i>duawan ni</i>	
<i>Aape hatti doli tor ke, ma pay karan</i>	
<i>duawan ni</i>	The handle was on the plate
<i>Kunda lag gaaya thaali nu</i>	The handle was on the plate

⁵⁸ Kashni in Punjabi refers to a color not necessarily with an equivalent in English. A color between sky blue and light purple is perhaps the closest.

<i>Kunda lag gaaya thaali nu</i>	Henna is put on the hands of a particular
<i>Hattan utte mehdni lag gai ik qismat wali</i>	blessed girl
<i>nu</i>	Henna is put on the hands of a particular
<i>Hattan utte mehdni lag gai ik qismat wali</i>	blessed girl
<i>nu</i>	
	Diamonds are expensive
	Diamonds are expensive
	Those with daughters, God keeps your
<i>Heera lakh sawa lakh da hai</i>	honor maintained
<i>Heera lakh sawa lakh da hai</i>	Those with daughters, God keeps your
<i>Teean walian dian rab iztan rak tha hai</i>	honor maintained
<i>Teean walian dian rab iztan rak tha hai</i>	

The lyrics of “Chitta Kukkar” are very simplistic, yet they include a breadth of meaning. There are also very distinguished Punjabi stylistic examples in the song that relate to Sufi poetry in the Punjab. An instructor at Hast O Neest, an arts and culture institute in Lahore, explained to me that there is significance in emphasizing the mundane in Punjabi Sufi poetry. Through dholki, it is apparent that the mundane is utilized in folk songs to depict imagery, repetition, and the setting of a scene. The mundane is used to evoke feelings of familiarity, of joy, of home.

In her work on the mundane and the prosaic in Bengali folk songs, Evan Friedlander positions the mundane in Bengali folk songs as able to accommodate changing circumstances, modes of expression, and interpretations.⁵⁹ Taking a hermeneutical approach to folk songs, Friedlander analyzes different songs and the contexts of the singers. We can understand folk songs as reflective of values, attitudes, and institutions of those who participate in them.⁶⁰ As a result, the underlying principle in depicting the mundane in Punjabi folk songs could be an effect of many different abstractions—partition, famine, the caste system. The imagery used in various folk songs of the Punjab can refer to the constructions of scenes. Through imagery, dholki songs evoke a variety of complex social concepts: love, devotion, and humor. From their effort at imagining an anthropology of the spectacular and the mundane, Palmer and Jankowiak understand these complex social concepts as evoking basic feeling states, which we then see as inherent aspects of imagery. Metaphorical imagery is used to express love, anger, humor.⁶¹ The theorization of imagery is useful in understanding the dholki by taking cognitive linguistics and anthropology into account. Through the folkloristic understanding of performance as the doing of folklore and the artistic event of performance,⁶² the dholki can be understood as a folk performance. Although to a non-

⁵⁹ Friedlander, Eva. "THE MUNDANE AND PROSAIC IN BENGALI FOLK SONGS." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 11, no. 1/2 (1975): 131–46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40861149>. 131.

⁶⁰ Friedlander, 131

⁶¹ Palmer, Gary B., and William R. Jankowiak. "Performance and Imagination: Toward an Anthropology of the Spectacular and the Mundane." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1996): 225–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656449>.

⁶² Bauman, Richard. "Verbal Art as Performance." *American Anthropologist* 77, no. 2 (1975): 290–311. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/674535>.

Punjabi or South Asian audience, the imagery of the mundane may seem abnormal, to the Punjabi or South Asian audience, the descriptive imagery is used to set a familiar scene to which the audience can relate. From the statement of the white chicken on the parapet to the car arriving at the station to the shade of the Pipl tree, the mundane is set in a particular context, time, and understanding, and could be subject to change. Through my experience attending a variety of dholkis, not for the sake of this research, but through my belonging to a Punjabi family, women change the lyrics for “Chitta Kukkar,” adding their own tappay, rhymes, and elements to make the song more fit for the situation.

The beat of “Chitta Kukkar” is a very common dholki melody. It encompasses five beats. To start, the *dhol* (drum) player will play one beat on the larger side of the drum, another beat on the smaller side, and repeat this again, and lastly, adding a small tap to the drum to create a fifth beat. It goes 1-2-1-2-3, and repeat. Smaller taps on the drum can be added, depending on how skilled the dholak player is. Each verse of the song usually uses 2 repetitions of this beat. Women at a dholki will also add a beat by clapping their hands. The “Chitta Kukkar” beat and melody is used to create other songs completely. I recently listened to a song that was set to the tune and beat of “Chitta Kukkar,” but about Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, who is considered the founder of the Ahmadiyyah sect. The song was considered to be a tappay, and sung at dholkis. Through this, dholki songs encompass aspects of a shared cultural tradition and heritage that allows women to evolve and adapt tunes, beats, melodies, and lyrics to create unique folk songs. Folk songs in the dholki are subject to change; however, this change is not a negative effect. It is, instead, framed by a

pluralist context that allows adaptation and evolution. This adaptation and evolution can make space for religious and spiritual folk songs as well, where women are able to able to change their songs and lyrics to suit a particular context and objective.

Conclusion

Ruksana is from a village close to Multan and Vihari, called Deen Vah. I spoke to Ruksana on the phone, after acquiring her number through an acquaintance in Lahore. She told me about her village's version of a dholki. The dholki, which they call jagha, is done two days before a wedding. They sing songs in their local dialect of Punjabi as a village woman beats the dholki. I asked Ruksana what type of songs they sing, to which she told me they sing tappay, and songs of the Prophet and Ali. I asked her if she feels spiritual while singing these songs, and she happily told me that she feels very spiritual when singing these songs. She told me in Punjabi, translated here to English, "We must remember the Prophet and God on these happy occasions. They stay with us, but we need to remember them all the time."

Ruksana's interview suggested one view of spirituality and religiosity in a general South Asian society. Through song, Ruksana felt spiritual. Through the dholki, an environment was created in which Ruksana could sing a song that made her feel spiritual. This is the phenomena that provides the basis for my argument in this chapter: the idea that the dholki is a flexible means through which a range of different functions can be identified.

In this chapter, I described the dholki as a vernacular tradition of the Punjab, and wider South Asia. I examined the role of Sufi poetry in South Asian society, and specifically how the dholki fits into the sphere of vernacular Islam in South Asia. Ruksana's interview, however, forced me to acknowledge a limitation in this study. Because I studied the dholki in one locality, and because aspects and qualities of the dholki can be "hyper-local," a fuller study would include a higher variety of local iterations. Through this chapter, I have explained the great variety and diversity of understandings that exist of orthodoxy; and these diversities, of course, exist in different aspects of South Asian society. I will now be going over the ways of how women intertwine qawwali and dholki, creating unique effects.

CHAPTER TWO: QAWWALI, DHOLKI, AND WOMEN

Zainab was one of the first women I spoke to at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine, where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork. She was wearing black robes with a colorful shawl, her brown eyes peering at me. As I approached, she drew her shawl over her mouth and stared intensely. Greeting her, I told her about my research and asked if she would be willing to speak to me. She nodded slowly, and as I spoke more, started smiling. She let go of the covering on her face, freely speaking to me.

I asked her first why she was visiting the shrine. She told me that she was there to ask Bibi for health for her son. She wanted to purchase some flowers and thread for the shrine when she would enter, hopefully soon, as she didn't anticipate that the shrine would officially be closed. The crowd of people pushed around us as we continued our conversation. As the discussion became more and more elaborate, I started asking Zainab questions about dholki, specifically if she sang religious songs at the dholki. She told me enthusiastically that although women in her family sing *tappay*,⁶³ they also start the dholki usually with the song "Rasoolay Pak," and end with the rendition of the popular qawwali "Lal Meri."⁶⁴ Zainab explained to me that the qawwalis she usually sings at dholkis are limited to "Lal Meri" and "Allah Hoo," but she reiterated that she feels a

⁶³ A Punjabi word meaning "rhymes"

⁶⁴ Lal Meri is the name for the qawwali that is also known as "Mast Qalandar," "Dama dam mast," "Lal Meri Pat." I use Lal Meri and Mast Qalandar interchangeably.

closeness to God and the Prophet and whatever figure is being sung about, when singing these qawwalis. She said, “It is very spiritual for me to sing about God.”

Zeyda is a home worker, whom I met outside of the housing development, Bahria Town. She works at homes in Bahria Town to provide a living for herself. Although she is married, her husband does not work, so Zeyda is pressured to work in order to provide food for her husband and his family. We spoke inside the house she works at, inside of a private room.

She is from Dipapur in Okara, Punjab. In her village, Zeyda explained to me, dholkis take place very often. She explained that they are women only, but the person who beats the dhol, is in fact, usually an older man, an elder,⁶⁵ who is treated as a *mahram* (a man who a woman is allowed to be with privately in Islamic tradition). The women are allowed to sing and dance in front of him. The man beats a big dhol, while women sing *tappay*, dancing in a circle, which Zeyda said is called *ghumri* or *luddi*. I asked if the *luddi* could ever be seen as a religious worship, and she laughed at me, and said, “What Sufis do? It can be, but it’s also just for fun and celebration!”

I asked her more questions about the songs she and the women in her village sing, and she said they sing “Ya Rasoolala,” “Ya teemo ku sahara,” and others. I asked her specifically about qawwalis they may sing. She mentioned “Lal Meri” specifically, but

⁶⁵ Zeyda used the word *bazurgh* here, meaning “respected elder.”

said that other women in her village, specifically older women, sometimes sing Sufi *kalam*⁶⁶ that she doesn't know.

As I spoke to Zeyda more and more, the more interesting the conversation became about hyper-local practices. Zeyda told me that before a more formal dholki occurs in her village in Dipapur, women sometimes gather using flour, pots, and pans to make beats to sing tappay to. I asked Zeyda if they ever sang tappay about religious figures, to which she said that usually religious figures are off-limits because tappay are more about joking around, but she said that are phrases they say that include the divine—phrases like “Khuda da vasta” (God forbid) or blessings like “Khuda tuje khush rakh” (God keep you happy).

Through these encounters with Zeyda and Zainab, I will be going through the different qawwalis they specifically mentioned, in order to understand what the implications are of women singing these qawwalis. I will be referencing other data from my fieldwork as well throughout this chapter, including the tail end of a dholki I stumbled upon. The dholki tradition is one that allows for renditions of qawwali to occur. Through the dholki, qawwali is used by women, and reinforced by women. The textual traditions of qawwali become oral traditions in the dholki. Expanding upon the previous chapter's conclusions of the dholki being a flexible vehicle through which to disseminate and propagate devotional songs, this chapter will be emphasizing the ways in which qawwali can be used in the dholki. The ways that qawwali is utilized showcases a unique instance of

⁶⁶ Kalam means “words” in Arabic, but Sufi kalam in the Indian subcontinent is a type of Sufi poetry.

women expanding upon a folk tradition that exists in male-dominated formal spaces.

Although the qawwali is a male-dominated space, women have been able to use qawwali music to create their own religious experiences through private feminine spaces, like the dholki.

Private feminine spaces

Anne Betteridge, when speaking of Iranian women, argues that rather than integrating themselves in a male pattern of religious behavior, women have become involved in their forms of religious activity, which allows them greater scope for religious expression and allows them full ritual participation.⁶⁷ I use Betteridge's work to offer a comparative outlook at how women create their own forms of religious activity in male-dominated religious societies. The androcentrism of South Asian Muslim society creates a framework where even through the academic study of practices in these societies, there is an emphasis on male-dominated viewpoints. For example, there are existing various studies and exegesis on qawwalis and shrines, but many of these studies do not include women or feminine understanding.

Lina Fruzzetti, in a study of Muslim women in rural Bengal, India, found that although women did not participate in congregational prayers at the mosques, they took an

⁶⁷ Betteridge, Ann (2002)

exclusive part at the tombs and shrines of local saints.⁶⁸ Fruzetti and Betteridge's works show a common theme amongst women living in male-dominated religious societies—women consistently seek non-public⁶⁹ spaces to create lived experience of worship for themselves. These spaces can be categorized as private or informal.

Through Zeyda's interview, we can see that there are instances when women will create their own interpretations to stay within the bounds of the religiously sanctioned. In her village, Zeyda and other women in the village allow a man who is technically not their relative, to be considered their mahram. Typically, a woman's father, uncle, brother, and nephew are her mahram. When she marries, the man she marries becomes a woman's mahram. It is more common in South Asia that the roles of purdah and the interaction between non-mahrams and between sexes and genders is more strictly enforced amongst higher class women.⁷⁰ However, women of lower classes are still expected to adhere to these social regulations. As a result, it is intriguing that the women in Zeyda's village create a ruling for themselves and for their ease of mind while engaging in an event of happiness. Zeyda told me, "Who doesn't want to dance at a dholki? Why should we worry about men when it is a space for women?"

⁶⁸ Mazumdar, Shampa, and Sanjoy Mazumdar. "Rethinking Public and Private Space: Religion and Women in Muslim Society." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 18, no. 4 (2001): 309. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43031047>.

⁶⁹ I will be categorizing public spaces as spaces that men seek out, while women are turned away, through an underlying attitude of normativity and religious authority. This is influenced by the work of Mazumdar and Sanjoy.

⁷⁰ Pemberton, Kelly. "MUSLIM WOMEN MYSTICS AND FEMALE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY IN SOUTH ASIAN SUFISM." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 1–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44368692>. 19

Although Zeyda and her fellow village women's choices cannot be divorced from the framework of a male-dominated religious society, the informal space of the dholki allows them to be able to dictate their own rules and purposes. Agency is affected by power and frameworks of power. Through an analysis of Western imperial violence on South Asia, Spivak was able to engage in ideas of agency and existence amongst women she termed as "subaltern." Understanding Western imperial privilege, casteism, and ethnic disparities in Lahore are elements that are necessary to understand whilst realizing this study.

Through an engagement with Spivak, we can understand from a Marxist lens the two constructions of the Other in Western discourse—either speaking for the subaltern or silently letting them speak for themselves. Spivak goes over *sati*, which was understood by the English as an oppressive structure, and by the male Hindu, as a voluntary act a woman commits. The subaltern here, the Indian woman, does not have a voice.⁷¹

Understanding the subaltern, and the way that academic imagination can construct the subaltern, is to understand what must not be done in untangling these topics. Through this, I attempt to center the narratives that the women I spoke to, rather than extracting a typified response on what the dholki is or is not. With this in mind, there is still a discourse to be had on the idea of a private and public feminine space.

Ruby Lal, in her historical study of Mughal domesticity and power, has brought up the usefulness of the terms "public" and "private." Although Lal's work builds on Mughal

⁷¹ Maggio, J. "'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?': Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 32, no. 4 (2007): 419–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645229>. 425

studies, her digression on the terminology of public and private forms is relevant to understanding dholkis as I have defined the dholki as a private, informal space. Lal's critique on the division between private and public spaces centers around the stark separation of these spaces. She argues for a blurrier edification on the boundary between public and private spaces. Through understanding feminist critiques of the public-private dichotomy, socialist feminists have argued for the inclusion of other points that explain class and production through sexuality and patriarchy.

Through Zeyda's interview about the man as a mahram, I stood at a crossroads of how to categorize this sort of idea. Using Abu-Lughod's case study on Bedouin women's ritualistic poetry, Abu-Lughod showed how women were not confined to a domestic sphere—instead, they are individuals who use different cultural forms to express a variety of different perspectives.⁷² The decision Zeyda and the women in her village made to include a man as their mahram exemplifies how women use informal spaces like the dholki to express religious and cultural sentiments. From these sentiments, women engage in subversive and dissident methods that are extracted from their own experiences engaging in folk traditions.

From Lal's work, the approach utilized to analyze the lives of Mughal men and women was one that did not allow for a stark division between private and public spaces. Rather,

⁷² Lal, Ruby. "Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World." *Cambridge University Press*. (2005). 17.

the private interacted with and spilled into the public.⁷³ Activities and expression existed in these spaces. Lal argues that the categorization of the women into private and public spaces does not allow for an accurate analysis of existence and expression, but detracts from the lives they did live, which existed beyond the boundaries of academic discourse. Women existing in spaces of dholki *do* engage in these spaces privately, informally, but these spaces are still dictated by male-dominated societal norms, regulations, and enforcement. As the dholki has been analyzed as a flexible vehicle that can exist to subvert male phenomenologically oriented perspectives, it can be a public space, as much as it flourishes in a private space.

In public spaces, the dholki exists as a wedding tradition. Commodified aspects of dholki are popular, particularly amongst the upper class. During the summer I was in Lahore, one particularly sunny day ended with my uncle taking me to high tea at a popular hotel, Ramada. From the hotel restaurant, I heard beats and music that made me utterly curious. Seeking out the room from which the music emanated, I knocked and entered. There were women dancing at the front of the room in coordination. The room was decorated as if for a wedding—a flurry of greens, yellows, and reds. I asked a middle-aged lady sitting next to the door what was going on—a dholki!—and coincidentally, she was the bride’s mother. She told us the drum and folk singing part of the dholki had just finished, and the bride and her friends were dancing now. She allowed me to watch for a bit, while I spoke to her. The songs playing were contemporary pop songs, and there were men in the room

⁷³ Lal, 21

recording the girls dancing. I asked the mother of the bride about the men. She explained that they are doing the dholki as part of a ten-day wedding festivity. In addition to a dholki at Ramada, the bride was planning a qawwali night, a henna night, and more. I was interested in this display of the dholki, so different than the one described to me by women I spoke to at Bibi Pak Daman, marked by the lack of division between men and women, and the utter publicness of it. The women at this high-scale hotel constituted of the upper echelon of Lahori society. Rather than the dholki being a private space, for these women, the dholki and consequent wedding events were a space that allowed a public display of wealth to occur. The bride's mother further told me that they had hired a group of *mirasi* to do the dholki itself.⁷⁴ The event itself ended after around 10 minutes of me being there—I had only caught the tail end. These ten minutes, however, are significant to the fieldwork in the way they showcase a view very different than what I had heard at the shrine, a view of the upper class in Lahore.

I was curious if this event would be different if it was more private, more informal. In this way, I find that the dichotomy between public and private is useful—it allows a categorization and contextual framework that is, at times, necessary in understanding the variety of spaces that can exist when analyzing South Asian women. However, agreeing with Lal, it is understood that these dichotomies are blurred, private can spill into public and public into private.

⁷⁴ Mirasi is a caste, typically lower-caste. They are involved in the preservation of music, writing down of higher-caste familial genealogies. Mirasi is typically used as a somewhat derogatory term for hereditary bards.

Qawwali: A brief overview

Qawwali is popular form of Sufi music in South Asia. Qawwalis are hymns, depicting legends, saints, Prophetic figures, and God. They are meant for spiritual worship and devotion, and they come from a history of Sufism in South Asia. Perhaps no better *qawwal* (one who performs qawwali) is known than Amir Khusrau, a figure from medieval South Asia. Widely understood as the person who “invented” qawwali, Khusrau lived from the late 13-14th centuries. In Delhi, he created Persian ghazals and Hindi poems in praise of his spiritual advisor, Nizam ud-din Awliya, creatively used musical instruments, and performed poetry.⁷⁵ Through a mixing of these different elements, Khusrau performed some of the first qawwalis. Scott Kugle has theorized qawwali as being a combination of high culture of literature and theology with popular culture of folk performances or public religiosity. Although considered an informal folk tradition, the roots of qawwali are molded by the classical arts—poetry, literature.⁷⁶

The spaces that qawwali have existed in, and qawwalis themselves, have been researched extensively. Particularly, there is an abstraction that imposes a view of certain qawwali spaces as being genderless. In *khanqahs*, where qawwali can be performed, in addition to other musical, meditative rituals of *sama*’, many scholars have theorized that these

⁷⁵ Kugle, Scott. “Dancing with Khusro: Gender Ambiguities and Poetic Performance in a Delhi Dargah.” In *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, edited by Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, 245–65. University of South Carolina Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6wgc97.16>. 245

⁷⁶ Kugle, 245

qawwali spaces allow for a departure of an egoistic routine, and that this departure can allow for one to leave aside gender roles.⁷⁷ Kugle argues that Khusrau's relationship with his spiritual guide, Nizam ud-din Awliya allows us insights into how the gender divide in Sufi spaces was not as impermeable and inflexible as many scholars theorize.

Khusrau's expression of his intimacy with Nizam ud-din was metaphorized by taking on the voice and persona of a woman, transgressing gender norms by portraying his guide as a groom and himself as a bride. This relationship, that between a lover and the beloved, is oft utilized in Sufi music and qawwali. I will elaborate upon this in the following sections, understanding that there exists a plethora of scholarship on Sufism and gender normativity. After the initial advent of Islam, poetry was associated with the pre-Islamic gods; however, after the establishment of Islam further in the region of Arabia, negative connotations of poetry were reduced.⁷⁸ Arab Muslims started to take pride in their literary heritage, which consisted of both the Qur'an and pre-Islamic odes. Many Muslims at this time turned to eroticism, passionate love, wine, and courtly etiquette.⁷⁹ Kugle explains that this love poetry had a significant impact on Persian and Urdu literature in South Asia. The elegy for a lost love detached from Arab themes to become a Persian love lyric that became known as the ghazal.⁸⁰ The ghazal also permeated into Urdu literature. With Kugle's analysis, he portrays Khusrau and other Sufis as disrupting gender roles and

⁷⁷ Kugle, 250

⁷⁸Kugle, Scott "When Sun meets Moon: Gender, Eros, and Ecstasy in Urdu Poetry" *The University of North Carolina Press*. (2016). 19

⁷⁹ Kugle, 19

⁸⁰ Kugle, 20-21

norms; however, I would argue that Khusrau, in his use of the woman's persona, embodies what these gender roles are meant to be. Rather than a subversion of gender roles, gender roles are reinforced in Sufi spaces. The womanly persona is submissive to the male persona—the lover displays womanly passion towards the beloved, who stands as a figure of idealistic attainability—the lover wants to embody the beloved. Through adopting a womanly persona, the woman is reiterated, societally reinforced, as a lover. Kugle argues that through celibacy and poverty, however, male and female Sufis were able to escape the burdens of gender normativity.⁸¹ Abbas extrapolates that the visibility of female power is expressed through the female narration styles, the female myths, and intergender and intragender relationships, specifically those between mothers and daughters.⁸² Within a variety of Sufi poems, there is evocation of the relationship between mothers and daughters, expressing mothers as creators of life.

Pathana Khan sung the following in Saraiki:

Ma e ni me kenu akha?

Dard vichaun da hal?

O my mother, to whom shall I tell?

To whom should I tell the agony of my separation?⁸³

⁸¹ Kugle, 17

⁸² Abbas, 120

⁸³ Translation from Abbas, 120

The subversion of gender roles occurs for the men who exist in the spaces of qawwali and performance. As a male-dominated expression of devotion,⁸⁴ qawwali does not allow generally for a woman to subvert her gender roles and to subvert gender normativity.⁸⁵ However, through the emphasis in qawwali, Sufi kalam, and general South Asian Sufi poetry, we can see that there is a significance placed on womanhood. There is something particular about femininity that allows for worshippers to express spirituality, worship, and ritual. I will continue to argue in the rest of this chapter how the dholki is able to provide a malleable channel through which women take qawwali, and even Sufi kalam, to reclaim femininity, express modesty, and engage in worship.

Lal Meri

“Lal Meri” is the popular rendition of the Dama Dam Mast Qalandar Sufi poem. The rendition commonly sung at dholkis was popularized by the singer Reshma, who performed the song at the shrine of Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, Sindh. Although the song is officially known as “Mast Qalandar,” it is commonly referred to as “Lal Meri” by the women with whom I spoke. The song is dedicated to Ali, the Prophet’s cousin/son-in-law, and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, a Sufi saint who lived in Sehwan, Sindh.

⁸⁴ Abbas, 24

⁸⁵ Abida Parvin stands as a stark example against this, but Parvin is normally engaged more so in Sufi kalam spaces rather than qawwali spaces. Parvin has stated in an interview that “Male and female does not even come into it—what you call Allah is one—God is the mehver (center) of everything—you make a round-about and whatever way it goes—it is in that direction—it is as if you have put up a clock tower, and every passage will go through it—it will go to it—it really does not matter whether it is male or female—in fact we can really that in the Sufi’s terminology—if someone is not a male—he is called a female —” (Abbas, 22).

Lal meri pat rakio bhala

O Lal Qalandar, save my prestige

Jhoole lalan

O thou of the cradle

Sindhri da

Of Sindh

Sevan da

Of Sehwan

Sakhi Shahbaz Qalandar

The bounteous Shahbaz Qalandar

Dama dam mast qalandar

Your ecstatic trance is the healing breath

Ali Shahbaz Qalandar

O Ali Shahbaz Qalandar

Ali dam dam de andar

Ali's name is the healing breath

Ma va nu pira bachre dena

Thou giver of children to mothers

Behna nu dena e vir bhala

Thou giver of brothers to sisters

Jhoole lalan

O thou of the cradle

Sindhri da

Of Sindh

Sevan da

Of Sehwan

Sakhi Shahbaz Qalandar

The bounteous Shahbaz Qalandar

Ali dam dam de andar

Ali's name is the healing breath

Another popular rendition of this Sufi song is Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's "Dama dam mast Qalandar." In this rendition, the melody Reshma uses, known as the dhun, is not utilized.⁸⁶ Instead Khan implements his unique melody. Unlike Khan's rendition, Reshma's implementation of the dhun melody allows for the lyrics to be easily remembered and reiterated. The simplicity of its mnemonics and rhythm allows it to be easily sung.⁸⁷

During my time in Lahore, I was invited to a sangeet class at Hast O Neest, an arts and culture institute in Gulberg, Lahore. Night cloaked us as I walked into the institute, nestled in a residential neighborhood. The establishment looked like just another house in

⁸⁶ The dhun melody is popular around Rajasthan, Sindh, Balochistan, and what Abbas calls the "Iran continuum."

⁸⁷ Abbas, 26

the street from the outside, but inside was a large room lined with bookcases, a large, adorned carpet, and cushions. At the front of the room, a microphone and harmonium were positioned. Annexes of the room had a variety of different instruments—a particular antique-looking set of tabla and a sitar stood out to me.

As I peered over my shoulders to take in my surroundings, attendees walked in. Most were young adults, but some middle-aged men and women also entered. They immediately sat in a circle, while the instructor, now seated next to the microphone and harmonium, started playing notes on the latter. When the time for class started, the instructor struck a note on the harmonium and sang the *raag* “sa.” The students started following. Rounds of “sa” chimed around the room. The instructor moved on to the notes “ga,” “ma,” and “pa.” While singing these notes, one man had his eyes closed, and his hand moved in a rhythmic motion to the reverberations. The instructor then moved on to sing different verses from Sufi kalam. The first was “Sultan Khwaja Nizamuddin,” “Awliya pir mero, tum hain Nizamuddin” (Khwaja Nizamuddin, Auliya saint of mine, you are Nizamuddin).⁸⁸ Some students quickly jotted down the verses, to which the instructor stopped the notes, laughed, and said, “It would be better for you to memorize them rather than writing them down. You can’t always have the notebook with you.” These lines were repeated for around 30 minutes with the students in utmost concentration. After 30 minutes, the instructor moved on to a different verse: “Lagay

⁸⁸ Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya was a Sufi saint of the Chishti order, whose imagery is often evoked in qawwali

ankh mein charay asay;” “Hum se chotthi wo gulli eissay (add translation here).” Again, these two lines were repeated for half an hour, with students’ brows furrowed in concentration, the instructor playing the harmonium consistently.

After the class, I spoke to the instructor about Sufi kalam and the dholki, in addition to what I had just experienced watching the class. He told me rather than sangeet, the class was more so a class on kafi (known as *Sufiana kalam*⁸⁹ in Punjabi, but also referred to as Sufi kalam). Throughout this conversation, he emphasized the importance of mindfulness in Sufi kalam. He explained that to engage in mindfulness, intentionality and mind prowess is needed to contemplate the words. “This is why repetition is an aspect of this music. Those who cannot sit and repeat the words are bored by it, and then, this type of music isn’t for them,” he said. I compared it to dholki songs, which are generally very repetitive. The instructor agreed, pointing out that repetition allows for the words to mark one’s mind.

As a result, the popularization of Reshma’s “Lal Meri” rendition can be attributed to the ease and accessibility through which her words and melodies allowed ease of memorization in folk consciousness. In Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety*, feminine expression is observed through women who disseminated lessons on religion in mosque spaces. Mahmood finds that the mosque movement’s emphasis on outward markers of religiosity, which included ritual practices, dress, mannerisms, etc., was unique compared

⁸⁹ Sufi kalam is essentially a type of Punjabi, Sufi poetry

to other groups within the Islamic Revival. Women learned to analyze movements of body and soul to establish a coordination between inner intentions, desires, etc. with outwardly conduct, gestures, action, etc.⁹⁰ Unlike the mosque movement, the dholki as a space exists in flexibility of purpose. A teleological model of the dholki cannot be instantiated through one narrative. Engaging with a teleological perspective allows an understanding of the dholki through the purposes it serves rather than what how it became a tradition in vernacular. Varying subjectivities, referenced through the fieldwork, create varying purposes of the dholki.

Throughout the fieldwork, many women (including Zeyda and Zainab) specifically mentioned the “Lal Meri” qawwali. Through the “Lal Meri” qawwali, there are various saints and religious figures that are native to the Indian subcontinent. The allusion to Shahbaz Qalandar shows the ways in which some Muslims of the Subcontinent have a Sufi phenomenological understanding of Islam. This understanding is framed by native Sufi saints and figures. Although many Muslim worshippers in South Asia have a negative perception of Sufism and what is seen as “heterodoxy,” other South Asian Muslims not only embrace this heritage, but actively uphold it through the visitation of shrines and the use of religious figures in songs that they sing at the dholki.

The word “qalandar” is one who is free from worldly pursuits; the word “mast” refers to a state of intoxication. Thus, mast qalandar is a spiritually intoxicated person—the high of

⁹⁰ Mahmood, 30

spirituality prevails in renditions of “Lal meri.” Khusrau is credited with inventing what became the modern qawwali through his poetry performances accompanied by the *sitar* (seven-stringed instrument) and *tabla* (a set of two drums). Khusrau was also the inventor of the *rag* and the *tal*, which are central to Indian music. Rags are equivalent to a melody, but in subcontinental music, they symbolize a free rhythm. In terms of the setting of the dholki, rags are used informally for women who may be able to understand the rags; however, for the general dholki setting, women sing songs unabashedly, with little to no rules, very unlike the qawwali sphere. However, still, women will repeat lyrics from a song, add in claps, and the occasional yelling to stay on beat, continuing a free form rhythm. Although the song is directly titled after the saint Shahbaz Qalandar, the poem and lyrics themselves show a reverence towards Ali, the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, as well.

The textual tradition of dholki is very much an oral tradition, with families passing down songs, *tappay*, with influence from their dialect/language, their hometowns, and even their lives. Dholkis allow for a certain flexibility within the songs that are performed. As previously mentioned, Zeyda explained to me that she, her family, and the village women will add on *tappay* and lyrics to pre-existing folk songs.

Reshma’s version of “Mast Qalandar” is one of the most renowned versions. This version is the one most commonly sung at dholkis. There is a common view of the way that a woman sings to be one of humility; this view is manifested then in the way that people

singing to at shrines or at rituals tend to try and emulate the female voice—to evoke humility and modesty when speaking to saints and religious figures. This is a common feature of qawwali, yet it speaks to the ideas in which the womanly voice, which in some conservative Islamic traditions can be considered immodest, is instead uplifted and used as a means to reach spiritual veneration. And then, when this idea is put into the form of the dholki, it is manifested as a space where spiritual devotion can be the underlying theme amongst these gatherings.

The “Mast Qalandar” qawwali by Reshma shows the emphasis on the feminine voice, as previously stated; however, what is also a significant point is the way that feminine verb conjugations occur in this song. The most popular renditions of “Mast Qalandar” are songs that include feminine verb conjugations, including Reshma’s rendition. This can be attributed to the idea that the Sufi voice is emphasized in South Asian Sufi tradition, but also it can be concluded that the female preservation and the feminine renditions of Sufi qawwalis have allowed there to be a more feminine version of mainstream qawwali songs.

Regula Qureshi argues that there must be an assumption of music as being part of a culture, and thus, linked to a sociocultural context. Qureshi’s work on qawwali has stood solely as a foundation for the study of Sufi music in the Subcontinent. The three major religions in South Asia all include in practice musical assemblies that are linked in

character and performed by musical conceptions that can be verbalized.⁹¹ For Islam in South Asia, qawwali is this practice. Qawwalis are performed contemporarily by professional qawwals, led by one solo singer, accompanied by drums, harmonium, and hand clapping.⁹² Hand clapping and the dhol are also part of the dholki traditions. The object of qawwali is to induce the audience in a state of ecstasy, devotional love.⁹³ In the qawwali performance, the musicians must be able to adapt, change lyrics, rearrange, or omit parts of the song, similar to the dholki, where women can change the lyrics to a song to relate to the occasion. Where qawwali is a folk process that has a structured, professional element, the dholki stands as a less structured, more informal event.

Through the recording of qawwali music, and affectively the proliferation of qawwali through radios, television, and cassette players, the accessibility of the Sufi music was able to reach wider audiences, specifically rural and lower-class audiences.⁹⁴

Furthermore, through the proliferation of qawwali towards a wider social network, women were able to hear qawwali at their homes, altering the qawwali's traditionally gender-divided sphere.⁹⁵

⁹¹Qureshi, Regula. "'Muslim Devotional': Popular Religious Music and Muslim Identity under British, Indian and Pakistani Hegemony." *Asian Music* 24, no. 1 (1992): 118. <https://doi.org/10.2307/834453>.

⁹² Qureshi, 119

⁹³ Qureshi, 119

⁹⁴ Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt. "His Master's Voice? Exploring Qawwali and 'Gramophone Culture' in South Asia." *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (1999): 65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/853569>.

⁹⁵ Qureshi, 66

This phenomenon of women being able to access popular qawwali allows for women to use qawwali songs in different aspects, rather than intended live performance of qawwali. As a result, women sing “Lal Meri” at dholkis, remembering Shahbaz Qalandar and Ali, whilst evoking Sufi imagery and performance. The melodies of “Lal Meri” reverberating in the dholki attests to a history of qawwali in the Subcontinent, and the innate spheres of musical performance.

Chaap Tilak

Farida told me that she, as well as the women in her family, sing the qawwali “Chaap Tilak” at dholkis. Farida explained to me that she is very fond of Amir Khusrau’s poetry, and that this qawwali is something that she heard growing up. She recited the following to me.

<i>Chaap tilak sab cheeni rai mosay naina milakay</i>	You’ve taken away my looks, my identity, with a glance of your eyes
<i>Prem bhatee ka madhva pilakay</i>	By making me drink the wine of love
<i>Matwali karleeni ray mosay naina milakay</i>	You’ve intoxicated me by a glance
<i>Gori gori bayyan, hari hari churiyan</i>	My fair, fair wrists with green, green
<i>Bayyan pakar dhar leeni ray mosay naina milakay</i>	bangles
<i>Bal bal jaun mein toray rang rajwa</i>	Have been held tightly by you with just a glance

<i>Apni see kar leeni ray mosay naina milakay</i>	I give my life to you, oh my cloth-dyer (color dyer)
<i>Khusrau nijaam kay bal bal jayyiye</i>	You've dyed me in yourself, with a glance
<i>Mohay suhagan keeni ray mosay naina milakay</i>	I give my life to you, Nijam You've made me your bride, with a glance
<i>Chaap tilak sab cheen ray mosay naina milakay</i>	You've taken away my looks, my identity, with a glance of your eyes

Farida mentioned the relationship between the Sufi and the Beloved, or the Divine.

Farida's interview allows further introspection into the ways that modesty is interwoven through the social experiences of South Asian Muslim women. Hajra and Hira, a pair of sisters I met at the shrine, who live close by, mentioned "Chaap Tilak". I came across them while browsing various aqeeq stones. I asked them about particular dholki practices for themselves. Having been to many dholkis as a result of a large family, they said they will host a dholki before a *mehndi*,⁹⁶ as separate events in the house and during engagements. They mentioned to me a couple of songs while giggling, specifically "Bano tere abba ki oonchi haveli," and "Mere Nehar Se," as songs they always sing at dholkis. Hajra told me matter-of-factly that the songs are flirtatious, but not explicit. Hira further said, while holding back a smile, that the lyrics are subtle but they are sarcastic and cause

⁹⁶ A mehndi is a traditional that takes place a couple of days before a wedding. During this event, henna paste (called mehndi in Urdu, Punjabi) is applied to a bride's hands, feet. There are a variety of different rituals and practices that take place during mehndis, grounded in folk traditions and religious rituals.

laughter. I prodded them both, asking what the songs are alluding to. Hajra explained that many tappay are playful; they may reference things like the wedding night, which is scandalous! Hira said, “A woman’s veil is important of course, this is why the dholki is women-only! So we can do things like this.”⁹⁷

Purdah, meaning veil, is a mechanism in South Asia for secluding women from men, confining women to roles within the home, and limited their access to the public world. Through purdah, women’s sexuality and access to outside knowledge is limited.⁹⁸ Purdah is known to be more prevalent amongst upper and middle classes, but there is an emphasis to observe purdah even among lower classes in South Asia. Through this, chastity, modesty, and obedience are emphasized for South Asian Muslim women.

The use of the qawwali “Chaap Tilak” in the dholki implies the following: first, a cover for modesty when discussing the “first night;”⁹⁹ second, the relationship between two lovers is metaphorized as the relationship between God and the worshipper; and third, the connection between the modesty behind sexual intimacy and the metaphorized relationship emphasize the ways through which Muslim women in South Asia are able to reconcile their modesty with devotional music; and lastly the idea that South Asian

⁹⁷ Hajra used the Urdu word, “purdah,” to reference the separation of men and women.

⁹⁸ Bhatti, Zarina. Review of *For Women Alone*, by Hannah Papanek and Gail Minault. *India International Centre Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1984): 265. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23001668>.

⁹⁹ The “first night” is a phrase to denote the first wedding night, where the married couple are allowed to have physical contact after their nikkah/wedding ceremony.

Muslim women create their own private spaces to interpret, experience, and adapt religion stands out.

The dholki takes place before a wedding, where spirits are high, and the overall event is joyous. Jokes and jabs are hinted to the bride and the groom on their upcoming union. Because of the aforementioned purdah and modesty, it is necessary that women do not breach the lines of immodesty. Because of this, women use metaphors to allude to topics that might be immodest. This offers a parallel of Sufi poetry, which consistently uses relationships and metaphors to define love between God and the worshipper.

In Abu-Lughod's introspection into various forms of resistance for Bedouin women living near the Egypt-Libya border, one of the forms of resistance recorded was the use of folk songs, poetry, to resist. Abu-Lughod found these oral lyrical poems to be quite unique in the way that they expressed in these poems sentiments that differed from the ordinary language. Sentiments included vulnerability and love towards members of the opposite sex.¹⁰⁰ Similar to this lyrical poetry stands the use of qawwali or folk songs to convey a variety of meanings in the setting of the dholki.

The foundation of Sufism in South Asia has a long history, and although there is contemporary skepticism of the idea that Sufi missionaries converted the populations of

¹⁰⁰ Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645251>.

South Asian to Islam overnight peacefully, there is still evidence that Sufis had a role in initially spreading Islam in the Subcontinent.¹⁰¹ Sufis in South Asia allowed for an esoteric interpretation of Islam and emphasized each individual's relationship between the person and the Divine.¹⁰² Asani's work shows that Sufi poetry in South Asia evolved through the pre-existing indigenous folk poetry traditions. These traditions were oral, meant to be recited or sung, and were generally traditions of women.¹⁰³ The poetry, Asani argues, draws on forms of folk songs sung by women who engaged in their household duties in the simplest forms. These types of folk songs are popular as well at dholkis. They included songs about grinding food grains (chakki-nama), wedding songs (shadi nama), lullabies (luri nama), married women songs (suhagan nama) and the eulogistic song (suhaila).¹⁰⁴ The song "Chitta Kukkar" is a popular song that utilizes various tappay to create imagery at the dholki, which I elaborated upon in Chapter 1. Richard Eaton argues that women in rural households became the main transmitters of Sufi ideas.¹⁰⁵

This important role of women within Sufi literary tradition in South Asia shows how intrinsic femininity is to Sufi worship. The relationship between the lover and the beloved was an early metaphor that was popularized by Rabia al Adawiyya, a woman who lived

¹⁰¹ Asani, Ali S. "Sufi Poetry in the Folk Tradition of Indo-Pakistan." *Religion & Literature* 20, no. 1 (1988): 83.. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059368>.

¹⁰² Asani, 83

¹⁰³ Asani, 84

¹⁰⁴ Eaton, Richard M. "Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam." *History of Religions* 14, no. 2 (1974): 119. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062004>.

¹⁰⁵ Eaton, 125-126

in Iraq in the late 8th century.¹⁰⁶ It has been reiterated throughout the history of Sufi poetry and literature, culminating in different expressions, as previously mentioned. Bulleh Shah of Kasur, a Sufi mystic of Punjab, writes, portraying the theme of union and separation with the imagery of a lover leaving his beloved¹⁰⁷:

<i>dhōla chhup gaya suraj</i>	O, lover, the sun is hidden
<i>mat kothe carh dekhā</i>	Oh, I climb the roof and look
<i>dhola jāndā jān ve</i>	My lover is leaving, leaving oh

This theme, then, is quite common in Sufi imagery. Amongst other Sufi imagery, the motifs of the color green, bangles, and peacocks are quite common. Green bangles are mentioned in Khusrau's poetry composite of "Chaap Tilak." Similarly, this allusion to green bangles is in the folk song "Mere Nehar Se," which Hajra and Hira mentioned to me, commonly sung at dholkis.

<i>Mere nehar se aaj mujhey aaya</i>	From my in-laws came today
<i>Yeh peela jora, yeh peela jora</i>	This yellow suit, this yellow suit
<i>Yeh hari hari churiyan, yeh hari hari</i>	These green green bangles, these green green
<i>churiyan</i>	bangles

¹⁰⁶ Hoffman-Ladd, Valerie J. "Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam." *History of Religions* 14 no. 2 (1974): 120.

¹⁰⁷ Sakata, 88

<p><i>Ab ke phooli basant mere abba key ghar</i></p> <p><i>Meri ammi ney aaj mujhey bheyja</i></p> <p><i>Pyari ammi ney aaj mujhey bheyja</i></p> <p><i>Yeh peela jora, yeh peela jora</i></p> <p><i>Yeh hari hari churiyan, yeh hari hari churiyan</i></p>	<p>Now the kite flyer came to my father's house</p> <p>My mom sent me today</p> <p>My beautiful mom sent me today</p> <p>This yellow suit, this yellow suit</p> <p>These green green bangles, these green green bangles</p>
<p><i>Ab ke phooli basant mere taaya key ghar</i></p> <p><i>Taayi ammi nay aaj mujhey bheyja</i></p> <p><i>Taayi ammi nay aaj mujhey bheyja</i></p> <p><i>Yeh uptan surma, yeh uptan surma</i></p> <p><i>Yeh hari hari churiyan, yeh hari hari churiyan</i></p>	<p>Now the kite flyer came to my uncle's house</p> <p>My aunt sent me today</p> <p>My aunt sent me today</p> <p>This uptan¹⁰⁸ surma¹⁰⁹, this uptan surma</p> <p>These green green bangles, these green green bangles</p>
<p><i>Ab ke phooli basant mere khalu key ghar</i></p> <p><i>Pyari khala ney aaj mujhey bheyja</i></p> <p><i>Pyari khala ney aaj mujhey bheyja</i></p> <p><i>Yeh phoolon ka gehna, yeh phoolon ka gehna</i></p>	<p>Now the kite flyer came to my uncle's house</p> <p>Beautiful aunt sent me today</p> <p>Beautiful aunt sent me today</p> <p>These flower garlands, these flower garlands</p> <p>These green green bangles, these green green bangles</p> <p>Now the kite flyer came to my uncle's house</p>

¹⁰⁸ Turmeric paste used before a wedding

¹⁰⁹ Surma is kohl

<i>Yeh hari hari churiyan, yeh hari hari churiyan</i> <i>Ab ke phooli basant mere mamoo ke ghar</i> <i>Pyari mami ney aaj mujhey bheyja</i> <i>Pyari mami ney aaj mujey bheyja</i> <i>Yeh jhoomar teeka, yeh jhoomar teeka</i> <i>Yeh hari hari churiyan, yeh hari hari churiyan</i>	Beautiful aunt sent to me Beautiful aunt sent to me This jhumar tikka ¹¹⁰ , this jhumar, tikka These green green bangles, these green green bangles
---	--

Mentioned earlier in this chapter, Zainab spoke to me about the song “Rasoolay Pak.”

<i>Rasoolay pak ka saaya</i> <i>Mubarak ho, Mubarak ho</i> <i>Bulao darzi, silay jora</i> <i>Jo dulhan pehen kar aayay</i> <i>Dulhan ki amma, se kehdheyina</i> <i>Mubarak ho, Mubarak ho</i>	In the shadows of the Prophet Congratulations, congratulations Call the tailor, to sew the suit Which the bride will wear Tell the bride’s mother Congratulations, congratulations
--	---

¹¹⁰ Jhumar is a headpiece worn on the side, tikkah is a headpiece worn on one’s forehead

<i>Bulao mali, banayay sehra</i>	Call the mali,
<i>Jo dulhan pehen kar aayay</i>	What the bride will wear
<i>Dulhan ki khala se khedhey na</i>	Tell the bride's aunt
<i>Mubarak ho, Mubarak ho</i>	Congratulations, congratulations
<i>Bulao sonar, banayay zaivar</i>	Call the sonar, to make the jewelry
<i>Jo dulhan pehen, kar aayay</i>	Which the bride will wear
<i>Dulhan ki bhabhi, se khedhey na</i>	Tell the bride's sister-in-law
<i>Muabarak ho, Mubarak ho</i>	Congratulations, congratulations

The consistent reference to green bangles is significant in that it is a utilization of material culture to allude to a larger thematic reference point. The symbolism of green bangles evokes imagery of weddings and joyfulness. In “Rasoolay Pak,” the Prophet’s shadow is referenced, although consistent lore is that the Prophet did not have a shadow.¹¹¹ Alluding to the shadow is an evocation of blessings—let the wedding be blessed by the Prophet. The former allusion to wedding bangles has a role in devotional songs that flourish in honor of an Indian groom from the Hindu? bhakti tradition,

¹¹¹ The Prophet Muhammad not having a shadow is a reference to his almost other-worldliness. He is a human of course, but over the centuries has evolved in being understood as a perfect human, even more than human, unlike the rest of humanity. The lack of shadow speaks to this, and also allows for another meaning—that of the shadow being a reflection, showing that he only cares about the community’s well-being, covering sins under a cloak.

venerating Lord Krishna.¹¹² Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is an interesting point to note.

Asani explains that love for the Prophet is one of the strongest binding forces in the Muslim tradition, as it is an emotion that transcends all levels of society.¹¹³ The Prophet is a loyal friend, a trustworthy companion. Sufi poetry utilizes metaphors to evoke the imagery of the Prophet. Asani asserts that any metaphor of the Prophet's love and protection for his people is utilized.¹¹⁴ The reference to the Prophet's shadow exemplifies this.

The Sufi implementation of green bangles and wedding imagery speaks to how intertwined the folk traditions of women are with Sufi traditions of spirituality. These elements cannot be separated, and instead, exist together, forming a painting of the landscape of South Asian musical and religious traditions. Although I do not argue that these implementations are subversive, they stand significantly as part of the landscape that constitutes worship, spirituality, and folk traditions in South Asia.

Conclusion

¹¹² Hyder and Petievich, 95

¹¹³ Asani, 91

¹¹⁴ Aani, 91

Through this chapter, I have showed a variety of different elements that support the claims of dholki being a flexible space for women to be able to create and exert religious experience—although it may not be an event intended solely for religious purposes, the dholki shows that amongst South Asian women, religion and spirituality are a larger part of the folk process. This is through the ways that women reform qawwali songs into dholki, the way that they have created rulings on what is or is not permissible through dholki (Zeyda's experience designating what would be a non-mahram as a mahram) and through the use of elements of femininity and feminine voice in Sufi poetry.

Dholkis express a variety of purposes. The dholki is flexible in its purpose and subjective in its objectives. The context of Sufi poetry in South Asia is one that has built upon femininity and expressions of femininity, albeit a femininity that is expressed in gender normativity. By analyzing the various implications of qawwali music and Sufi poetry utilizing notions of femininity, it can be understood how the landscape of South Asian folk women is intertwined with the former.

CONCLUSION

During my fieldwork in Lahore, I was unfortunately unable to attend a dholki in the city due to rising Covid-19 concerns and problems with my flight itinerary. However, as a Punjabi woman living in the diaspora, I have been surrounded by the event of the dholki since childhood. I was able to attend a dholki before my flight to Lahore, in the US. This event wasn't included as part of my research or ethnography, but I would like to include a narrative from this dholki to understand some of the limitations of the research I have presented, and the intersection of these limitations with the conclusive statements of this study.

I attended a dholki in the suburbs of Washington D.C., hosted by a family friend whose son's marriage was coming up in a month at that time. The dholki took place in the living room of this family-friend's single-family house. Decorations were abundant around the house—lights, colorful shawls, cushions, candles, roses, and of course, the dholki set up. A white sheet littered with banarsi silk pillows indicated that dholki participants were to sit here.

The dholki started with the groom's family members, his mother, aunt, and grandmother, singing songs of spiritual significance—Rasoolay Pak, Mast Qalandar, and a naat about the Prophet and Ali. When I spoke to the mother of the groom, she told me that her family was descended from a long line of Sufis in Multan, Punjab, so these songs are

very important to them. After some of the older songs, some of the groom's younger relatives, particular his women cousins, started singing a medley of old Bollywood songs. The medley, which is now a bit standardized,¹¹⁵ includes different songs, that the older women exclaimed were "classics!" The medley consists of the hooks of different popular songs in one conglomerate. One of these songs caught my attention. The original song is called "Main nikla, gaddi lekey." The stanza included in the medley is as follows.

Main nikla ho gadi leke

Main nikla ho gadi leke

Ho raste par ho sadak me

Ek mod aaya, main uthey dil chor aaya

Ek mod aaya, main uthey dil chor aaya

Rab jane kab guzra Amritsar

O kab jane

Lahore aaya

Main uthe dil chor aaya

Ek mod aaya, main uthe dil chor aaya

I left with the car

I left with the car

¹¹⁵ A Google search for "Dholki medley lyrics" pulls up a variety of different webpages and results that include, more or less, the same lyrics in romanized Hindi-Urdu, hence the usage of the term "standardized" here.

On the path, in the street
 A turn came, I left my heart there
 A turn came, I left my heart there
 Lord knows, when we crossed Amritsar
 When do we go?
 Lahore came
 I left my heart there
 A turn came, I left my heart there

The lyrical reference to both Amritsar and Lahore show the underpinnings of the partition of Punjab. Later in the official song, there is a reference to the qisse “Heer Ranjha.” The qisse Heer Ranjha has been documented thoroughly by Mir, who studied the ways in which Punjabis implemented the qisse to speak to depths of layers and emotions.¹¹⁶ The poet Amrita Pritam spoke to Waris Shah, who is most renowned for penning the most famous iteration of Heer Ranjha, in a poem addressing the horrific partition of Punjab.

Pritam recited:

<p>اچ آکھاں وارث شاہ نوں، کیتوں قبران وچوں بول! تے اچ کتابِ عشق دا کوئی اگلا ورقہ پھول!</p>	<p><i>Aj akhan Waris Shah nun, kithon qabraun wich bol</i> <i>Te aj kitab e ishq da koi agla warqa phool</i></p>
--	---

¹¹⁶ Mir, 16

<p>اک روئی سی دھی پنجاب دی، توں لکھ لکھ مارے وین اچ لگھاں دھیاں روندیاں، تینوں وارث شاہ نوں کہن: اُٹھ دردمنداں دینا دردیا! اُٹھ تک اپنا پنجاب اچ بیلے لاشاں وچھیاں تے لہو دی بھری چناب</p>	<p><i>Ek roi ew dhee Punjab dee toon likh likh mare watan Aj likhan dhiyan rhondiyā, tenu Waris Shah nu kehtn Utho dard mandan diyaa dardiya! Uth tak apna Punjab Aj beyle lashan vichyan te lho de bharee Chenab</i></p>
---	---

Today, I call Waris Shah, “Speak from your grave,”

And turn to the next page in your book of love,

Once, a daughter of Punjab cried and you wrote an entire saga,

Today, a million daughters cry out to you, Waris Shah,

Rise! O’ narrator of the grieving! Look at your Punjab,

Today, fields are lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, through my basic desktop research early in 2021, I came across a YouTube video that featured a woman singing what was called “Ahmadiyya Punjabi Tappay.” The lyrics displayed a reverence and appreciation for Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. What was notable about stumbling upon this song was that the singer sang in the same melodic tune that the “Chitta Kukkar” song is in. In future studies on the dholki, I wish to explore

¹¹⁷ Mir, add page number

those who may be religious minorities, and if or how they utilize the space of the dholki as a means of promulgating religious expression that deviates from what the majority religious practice is.

The dholki can have multiple subtleties and nuances. Through the claims that this study presented, I wish to further present that the same argumentative rhetoric can be used to showcase how the modern physical and metaphorical borders of South Asia can be subverted by women participating in the dholki. In addition to this, the dholki seems to be a place where religious minorities in South Asia are able to engage in their own traditions and rituals. This is a conceptualization that I wish to explore further. Through the characterization of the dholki as a flexible vehicle from which women utilize its attributes to disseminate and propagate spiritual expression, the likely anticipation that the dholki can be further conceptualized to analyze nationalism, partition, religious minorities, and colonialism is an extension that, I argue, is validated by this study. I wish to further explore the idea of the commodification of folk culture, which I observed in my time in Lahore, through the upper-class of Lahore utilizing aspects of folk culture to portray some sort of authenticity. Throughout the fieldwork and process of writing, questions of capitalism and globalization crossed my mind. How do we understand the commodification of folk songs as pertinent in discourse around informal spaces and religiosity?

Overall, through this study of the dholki, I have reached a few particular conclusions that I wish to summarize in this section, acknowledging that this study is one of the first of its kind in specifically studying the dholki in Punjab. As previously stated, there is little to no academic analysis of the event of the dholki. The dholki, in any historical document that I have come across, is understood as an instrument that accompanies other South Asian instruments, such as the tabla, sitar, and harmonium. This study, thus, attempts to locate the dholki as a widespread tradition in social vernacular, a task that I believe I have proven successfully through the analysis of the dholki as a flexible vehicle through which women are able to propagate and express religiosity and spirituality.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, Shemmem Burney. "The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices in Pakistan and India." *University of Texas Press*. (2002). 1-240
- Abrahams, Roger D. "Folklore and Literature as Performance." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 9, no. 2/3 (1972): 75–94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3814159>.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41–55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645251>.
- Asad, Talal. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. Georgetown University. (1986). 1-28. 15.
- Asani, Ali S. "Sufi Poetry in the Folk Tradition of Indo-Pakistan." *Religion & Literature* 20, no. 1 (1988): 81–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059368>.
- Bhatty, Zarina. Review of *For Women Alone*, by Hannah Papanek and Gail Minault. *India International Centre Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1984): 264–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23001668>.
- Eaton, Richard M. "Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam." *History of Religions* 14, no. 2 (1974): 117–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062004>.
- Farhadi, A. G. Rawan. "The Human Beloved and the Divine Beloved in the Poetry of Mawlānā Rūmī." *Mawlana Rumi Review* 1 (2010): 100–107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26810287>.
- Friedlander, Eva. "THE MUNDANE AND PROSAIC IN BENGALI FOLK SONGS." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 11, no. 1/2 (1975): 131–46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40861149>. 131.
- Gribetz, Arthur. "The Samā' Controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist." *Studia Islamica*, no. 74 (1991): 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595896>.
- Hassan, Riaz. "Islamization: An Analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan." *Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 263–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283071>. 264
- Hoffman-Ladd, Valerie J. "Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life." *Mystics Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1992): 82–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20717124>.

- Hyder, Syed Akbar, and Carla Petievich. "Qawwali Songs of Praise." In *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, edited by Barbara D. Metcalf, 93–100. Princeton University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv301gh6.15>.
- Kugle, Scott. "Dancing with Khusro: Gender Ambiguities and Poetic Performance in a Delhi Dargah." In *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, edited by Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, 245–65. University of South Carolina Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6wgc97.16>.
- Kugle, Scott. "When Sun meets Moon: Gender, Eros, and Ecstasy in Urdu Poetry" *The University of North Carolina Press*. (2016). Pages 1-348.
- Kurin, Richard. "Islamization in Pakistan: A View from the Countryside." *Asian Survey* 25, no. 8 (1985): 852–62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644114>.
- Lal, Ruby. "Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World." *Cambridge University Press*. (2005). 1-23, 50-68
- Mazumdar, Shampa, and Sanjoy Mazumdar. "Rethinking Public and Private Spaces: Religion and Women in Muslim Society." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 18, no. 4 (2001): 302–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43031047>.
- Mir, Farina. "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 3 (2006): 727–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3879442>.
- Pal, Izzud-Din. "Women and Islam in Pakistan." *Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 4 (1990): 449–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283393>.
- Palmer, Gary B., and William R. Jankowiak. "Performance and Imagination: Toward an Anthropology of the Spectacular and the Mundane." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1996): 225–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656449>.
- Pemberton, Kelly. "Muslim Women Mystics and Female Spiritual Authority in South Asian Sufism." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 1–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44368692>.
- Rahman, Fazlur. "THE CONCEPT OF ḤADD IN ISLAMIC LAW." *Islamic Studies* 4, no. 3 (1965): 237–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20832806>.
- Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt. "His Master's Voice? Exploring Qawwali and 'Gramophone Culture' in South Asia." *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (1999): 63–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/853569>.

Qureshi, Regula. “‘Muslim Devotional’: Popular Religious Music and Muslim Identity under British, Indian and Pakistani Hegemony.” *Asian Music* 24, no. 1 (1992): 111–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/834453>.

Sakata, Hiromi Lorraine. “The Sacred and the Profane: ‘Qawwālī’ Represented in the Performances of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.” *The World of Music* 36, no. 3 (1994): 86–99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43562829>.

Suvorova, Anna “Muslim Saints of South Asia” *The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries.*” *RoutledgeCurzon Sufi Series* (1999). Pages 1-207.

Zaidi, Noor. “‘Our Vanished Lady’: Memory, Ritual, and Shi‘i- Sunni Relations at Bībī Pāk Dāman.” In *Modern Sufis and the State: The Politics of Islam in South Asia and Beyond*, edited by KATHERINE PRATT EWING and ROSEMARY R. CORBETT, 161–73. Columbia University Press, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/ewin19574.16>.

BIOGRAPHY

Lina Bhatti graduated from Broad Run High School in 2015. She received her Bachelor of Arts from George Mason University in 2019, and will receive her Master of Arts degree in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in December of 2021.