

**EMBODIED RHYTHMS: UNDERSTANDING
MUSIC-MAKING IN A COMMUNITY WITH
SIDI DRUMMING AS A CASE STUDY**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the award of the degree

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled '**Embodied Rhythms: Understanding Music-making in a Community with Sidi Drumming as a Case Study**' submitted by **Vibhuti Sharma** at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance Studies**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University or Institution.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled '**Embodied Rhythms: Understanding Music-making in a Community with Sidi Drumming as a Case Study**' submitted by **Vibhuti Sharma** at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance Studies** is her own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University or Institution. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As I sit down to write this acknowledgement, it amazes me to think of the imprints that I carry within me of a whole range of interactions with people at different points in time; some related or not related to the work, bonds of different nature.

I wish to thank Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt, my supervisor, without whose support and encouragement this work would not have been possible. Besides her valuable feedback, it was more her confidence in me that got me through the research work. Negotiating deadlines, answering endless queries, she has put up with all with her pleasing disposition. I thank her for the space she has always given me to explore ideas in their myriad hues. Prof. H.S Shivaprakash I would like to thank for encouraging me to look critically at the idea of rhythm during our classes. His philosophical and poetic tinge in the discussions stayed with me throughout while I took up the ideas seriously for my research. I would like to thank Dr. Soumyabrata Chaudhary for listening out to all my apprehensions and doubts regarding my work with his characteristic calmness. The modesty and subtlety with which he transforms banal confusions into ideas worth exploration baffles me at times. I am thankful to Dr. Urmimala Sarkar for all those interactions that have fuelled my thought and creative processes from time to time. The comfort and ease with which I could approach her for help, I am grateful to her for that. Dr Urmila Bhirdikar, I am indebted to for opening up the field of critical enquiry of music, whatever little the short span of her course allowed. Balancing aesthetic appreciation with theoretical engagement, she introduced me to the various complexities of research in music. I am grateful to Amlan Das Gupta for taking time out from his packed and short Delhi visits for discussing my work with me at a time when it was extremely scattered. I would also like to take this opportunity for thanking Jagdish Vidyarthi ji and Diwan Ram ji for their immense support and effort in making the official processes since the early days at the school a smooth ride. I am also thankful to Harsh, Satish, Savita and Vinayak in the office for helping me patiently with the sometimes tedious official procedures.

Moving ahead to another set of relations whose tremendous generosity and support actually made this work possible are all the Sidis, some of whom I interacted with and others I simply shared their space with, in all its life and reality. For some bonds that go beyond the field work now, I wish to thank the following people. Shabnam, Sajeda, Mumtaz aunty and Salim uncle, I am thankful to for the warmth they have always welcomed me with. I am grateful to Rafiq bhai and his family for their hospitality and for sharing with me stories and personal memories in addition to answering my endless queries. Rafiq bhai I would like to thank not just for his interest and willingness to help, but those chance bike rides through the streets of Jamnagar that refreshed me completely in the midst of my work. Samim too, despite her hectic Mahila Mandal work has been a good companion during my work in Jamnagar. But acknowledging her is more in reminiscence of the happiness and the confidence that I saw in all the women expressing themselves in ways besides the mundane domesticity. Mumtaz aunty, Iqbal uncle and their family, Aashiyana, Anisha, Amreen and Irfan I am deeply indebted to for keeping me as one of their family members during the *'urs*, for sitting with me for hours explaining those nuances of their music. I wish to thank Hasan bhai and his wife Samim who helped me with my work in Jambur and Shirvan. Most importantly, I am grateful to Irfan, Sadiq, Yunis,

Khayyum, Sohil and Wayyid who through their intense drum beats kept the faith going in that pure naïve thought that led me onto this project.

Another pillar that stands strong and is almost indispensable is the love and support of my friends. I would like to first thank Pratush for the alacrity with which he took upon himself the tedious task of converting one set of field videos, Anirban, for being the savior by lending me his laptop when my technical belongings betrayed me in the last phase of my work. I would like to thank Shefali and Shrinkhla for providing the encouragement and support during a phase when I was approaching my work with faltering steps. More than the help that I could easily depend on him for, I wish to thank Raj for those unforgettable odd-hour conversations, tea-breaks and never enough bike rides. Ruchika deserves special mention for all her warmth and love. Her genuine concern about the progress of my work and willingness to help were very assuring. I thank Vijayant too who got roped in for a moment to help me with the historical perspective in this work. I am grateful to Ankush for being there to discuss and confront me with challenging yet pertinent questions and problems in my work. The ease and the right with which I have demanded him to read my chapters while he was taking a break at home only reassured me of the more work that I could load him with. I thank him for giving me that space and liberty. Bijoy, I need to thank, for sitting through some of the most laborious and exhausting sessions while analyzing the field videos. To the otherwise funnily irritating side of his that I was till now witness to, the serious discussions about my work over endless sessions of tea and junk food were a pleasant change. These I hope will influence in some form his own musical journey too. For the love, humor, understanding, support and help at any hour of the day and much more I am thankful to Jyothi. I especially need to thank her for all her help with the last minute crisis management. How during one of his characteristic ramblings Justin got involved with this project eludes me. But I am thankful to him for allowing me to exploit that to the maximum by subjecting him to the task of proof reading my chapters, completely unrelated to his corporate affiliations, I more importantly need to thank him for putting up with all my erratic ways. A recurring intervention in my life which despite all its contradictions cannot simply be ignored is Soumick. I thank him for moments and time shared, each radiant in its distinct colour and shade.

Finally one comes back to the simple warm cocoon of the family whose sheer lively presence lends wind to my sails. I don't think I would ever be able to thank my grandmother in these very words for the affectionate concern. It is not without a smile that I can acknowledge Gauri. From keeping a tab on my word count, to her self-imposed task of keeping me entertained, and often disappointed at plans of 'fun together' being delayed, she has waited in desperation to see her name in the acknowledgment! My parents, for more than anything else, I need to thank for enduring me, for putting up with most, if not all, of my mood swings and idiosyncrasies. My father, as my adventurous *compagnon de voyage* with his humor, confrontations, endless questions and doubts about my work was an immense source of encouragement during the field work. I thank my mother for her love and support and her undying belief in me. Lastly, it is the most difficult to acknowledge Bulbul who has seen and more than half the time been with me through it all. Discussions, arguments, frustrations, excitement, shared passions, banter, all light and heavy moments, and especially for the complete monster I have been in making her burn the midnight oil during the last leg of the work, this would not have been possible without her.

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**for Dadu, who would have been the happiest to see my
M. Phil mystery finally unravel...**

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Where does my music come from?

I've been asking myself this question for 40 years.

...I know that it's not tied to these words, these notes.

Sometimes I try to catch it, but it keeps receding further and further from my grasp.¹

Thus spoke Kumar Gandharva, a musician whose music, one might well argue, embodies the 'heraclitan flux' and the 'aleatory principle' that Ashok Ranade identifies in Indian classical traditions². It is the impermanence of music that musicians, listeners and critics alike, find difficult to capture and make permanent. This ephemerality and inherent dissolution within the very act of creating music reflects in its resistance to being succumbed to language as a symbolic system. Very explicitly in one his lectures, Roland Barthes articulates the inarticulateness while describing music; the dilemma of translating the music, which belongs to the order of

¹Shabnam Virmani, *Koi Sunta Hai (Someone is Listening) : Journeys with Kumar and Kabir*, documentary produced by Srishti, 2008. See <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/2833>. Accessed May 25, 2011

²One would want to make a note here of the distinction in Ranade's understanding of 'aleatory' from that of John cage's. Cage understands it more in the sense of alienation from the form. He calls such music the 'music of changes' or 'chance'. However, when used in the context of Indian classical music by Ranade, it conveys the flight that the musician takes beyond the fixity of the notation of the composition in the innumerable improvisations that form the quintessential feature of the Indian music tradition. Thus, aleatory is more in the sense of the different permutations and combinations that a musician explores within the fixed structure of the *raag* and *taal*. I personally believe and would want to extend the purview of these two terms to an understanding of music as a whole, something that intrinsically defines music for me. See Ashok Ranade, *Essays in Indian Ethnomusicology*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1998) Also cited in Rajeev Patke, "Thinking Dialectically of North Indian Classical Music", (New Delhi: *Sangeet Natak*, Vol. XLIII, No. 2, 2009).

'difference'³, into language which belongs to the order of 'general'⁴. Jacques Attali too while acknowledging that music legitimizes the dominant order in how it gives noise a form according to a code, nevertheless points at the instability of its reference to a code of a linguistic type; arguing that though music has a precise operationality, it is, drawing from Claude Levi Strauss, a 'language without meaning'.⁵ With the awareness of these ideas, a fundamental question, however warped and cursed, that seems to afflict any study on music is 'what is music?'. 'What purpose does music serve?' To add to these, how can music be studied and theorized as a performative tradition in itself and not always as an entity that adds efficacy or serves as a catalyst within a larger framework of a performance? Or even if the latter holds true, what aspects of music lend themselves to such use?

Music is as much what it expresses as what it leaves unsaid and unspoken. Intrinsic to music is the elusiveness of that which it conceals beneath/within the very act of revealing it. It is interesting how in the utterance of a musical idiom is present also the very volatility that it exhibits through its different elements and aspects. Thus, both the expressible and the ineffable exist within music.⁶ Comparing it to a lover's discourse, Roland Barthes, reads music as drawing from this "successful" relation – "successful in that it manages to say the implicit without articulating it, to pass over articulation without falling into the censorship of desire or the sublimation of the unspeakable - such a relation can rightly be called *musical*."⁷ Thus, for him, the value of music lies more in its being a 'good metaphor'.

³ Difference here could be understood in terms of what Andrews explains as Julie Kristeva's recognition of the heterogeneity of music to meaning and signification. Cited in Ian Andrews, "Music, Desire and the Social", NMA 8, (Brunswick: NMA Publications, 1990) <http://ian-andrews.org/texts/music.pdf> Accessed May 2, 2011

⁴ Roland Barthes, "Music, Voice, Language" in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, Richard Howard (trans), (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 279

⁵ Jacques Attali, 'Noise: The Political Economy of Music', Brian Massumi (trans.), (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1985) p. 25

⁶ Talking about 'The Antinomies of Indian Music', Rajeev Patke uses this idea of an opposed pair in a concept to propose how the extremes in music can 'mark the range of what music spans in terms of what it cannot range.' He uses the idea of the dialectic, of the contradictory tendencies immanent within a concept to talk about music as an identity based on non-identity. See Patke, 2009, op. cit. pp. 66-67

⁷ See Barthes, 1982, op. cit. p. 285

Ranging from the functionality of music to some of its essential features, several interdisciplinary theories have been used to understand this complex, ever elusive idea of music and musicality. While the thought and an existence of a grand unifying theory of musical meaning is unlikely, Nicholas Cook looks at the possibility of important varieties of musical meaning in his essay ‘theorizing musical meaning’. One of them he identifies as falling in the ‘gap between an approach that sees meaning as inherent in music...and one that claims it to be a purely social construction’. Acknowledging the insufficiency of common sense assumptions to critical discourse of either music in its apparent autonomy or socially mediated, he locates the challenge for the music theorist in finding a third way between inherent and socially constructed meaning.⁸ He offers a model of musical meaning where it can be studied as culturally constructed but with the awareness of the ‘constraints upon the meanings any given music may support under any given circumstances’.⁹

Therefore, while these two schools of thought of socialization and autonomy have been critiqued, relooked at and have given rise to various other critical approaches, the entry point they provide to look at the idea of musical meaning cannot be overlooked. Every art form is rooted in a specific socio-cultural context and grows out of a social experience. But immanent in it is also the critique and the resistance to this social context. It is the “unique nature of music”, says Adorno, “to be not an image for another reality, but a reality sui generis”¹⁰. Rajeev Patke says that art survives best when it offers resistance to social assimilation. Exploring this idea further, he quotes Adorno who in explaining the dialectical nature of music says, “Freedom is an intrinsic necessity for music.”¹¹ By way of being social, Patke feels that music realizes its capacity to resist society. This is done through ‘the formalization of

⁸ Nicholas Cook, “Theorizing musical meaning”, *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (Fall 2001), pp. 176- 177

⁹ Ibid, p. 195

¹⁰ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, Edmund Jephcott (trans.), Rolf Tiedmann (ed.), (Stanford :Stanford University Press 1993). Also cited in Patke, 2009, op. cit. p. 69

¹¹ , Theodor Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, Rodney Livingstone (trans), (London :Verso, 1992), p. 151. Also cited in Patke, 2009, op. cit. p. 69

techniques that shape the art-medium towards relative autonomy.’ The abstraction of the sounds from ordinary experience and their formalization into music through stylization constitutes the dialectical interplay between autonomy and socialization. The social is sublimated in music as it makes the transition from language, which is the ‘primary means of human socialization’, to ‘the realm of ‘pure sound’’ having an aesthetic and sensual appeal.¹²

This research project too takes off from these ideas. Wavering between them, pushing them further and looking for new paradigms, this research attempts to explore and study how and whether music can serve as a methodological framework to understand a space (community). Therefore, the study is, quite evidently, directed towards studying a musical culture as rooted in a socio-cultural context. But the attempt is to look at whether it is possible to do so by not subsuming the music analysis within a sociological study, rather to look at the complexities of the society (in a limited scope) through the perspective of its musical tradition. Against this background, a greater part of the research tries to understand the aesthetics of music, those essential concepts of music that come alive during the act of its creation, how these negotiate at various levels and what insights can be drawn from the same. Not limiting itself to the song texts, this research takes up the idea of rhythm in music to understand how spaces are constructed, how percussion (sound) operates within a given space and time and understand what meanings are generated through the act of music making. The endeavour is to explore rhythm as an aesthetic idea; a musical concept to look at a community in its performance framework and on the other hand, as a conceptual-theoretical framework.

As music evolves, it grows and develops to denote something beyond its very structure and grammar. Through the very materiality of the notes and beats, it reaches out to an abstraction where music becomes known for what it is, revealed in new hues and meaning every time it is created. Like a true theme of a work of art, a true piece of music, as Deleuze articulates, “is therefore not the subject the words designate but

¹² Patke, 2009, *ibid.* p. 70

the unconscious themes, the involuntary archetypes in which the words, but also the colours and the sounds, assume their meaning and life".¹³ Music, thus, becomes emblematic of something which is both tangible and intangible. Within the very physical conceptualization or the practice of music-making lies the impossibility or the evanescence of that which is being created; the gap between the notes, the difference between the repetitive beats, the sound of silence within the improvisations, the multiple interactions, dialogues between the musical instruments. Deleuze beautifully describes this as:

Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space with their harmonics or submultiples. The sounds have inner qualities of height, intensity, and timbre. The sources of the sounds...are not content only to send sounds out: each one perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own...: 'first the solitary piano grieved, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin heard its wail and responded to it like a neighbouring tree...'¹⁴

The realization, conceptualization and creation of different potentialities and possibilities with these diverse entities is music. Music is always in a state of flux. 'And the notes of the scale are eternal objects, pure Virtualities that are actualized in the origin, but also pure Possibilities that are attained in vibrations or flux.'¹⁵ Comparing it to a fold, where fold is a labyrinth, Jean-Godefroy Bidima views musical sound as 'a flow, a source of possibility, and in consequence a labyrinth.'¹⁶ He writes how Deleuze accentuates the music in the way it folds and unfolds, in the

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, R. Howard (trans), (New York and London : Continuum Publishing, 2000), p. 47. Also cited in Jean-Godefroy Bidima "Music and the Socio-Historical Real : Rhythm, Series and Critique in Deleuze and O. Revault d' Allonnes ", in *Deleuze and Music*, Janice Griffiths (trans.), Ian Buchanan & Marcel Swiboda (eds.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh university press ltd, 2004), p. 181

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold : Leibniz and the Baroque*, T. Conley (trans), (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota press,1993), p.80 . Also cited in Jean-Godefroy Bidima 2004, Ibid, p.178.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 80. Also cited in ibid, p. 179

¹⁶ Jean- Godefroy Bidima, Ibid, p. 179

way that it wants to be the ‘pure reserve of potentialities, opening outwards onto the infinite.’¹⁷

The exploration of different possibilities across the octave, transformations, the infinite permutations and combinations lend it a state of constant metamorphosis. From within the “self-contained structure”, the different elements take their own flight, traversing, etching and leaving their imprint in these spatio-temporalities. Rajeev Patke’s idea of freedom as built within the ‘architectonic’ structure of musical ideas and motifs becomes significant here as he sees it not as a ‘license’, but ‘the enabling condition for music to be realized as music, not as a realization of a pre-conception, but a sound that can only have its proper space in time.’ Every music expression evolves as a possibility, is ‘shaped like a conjecture’.¹⁸ Adorno calls this the ‘sense of the inexhaustible’ in music, that manifests through ‘a profusion of ideas which constantly regenerates itself and flows in superabundance’.¹⁹ It is in the state of metamorphosis, regeneration and transformation that Deleuze and Guattari identify the concept of ‘becoming’ which lies at the core of their understanding of music. To delve deeper into this concept, it is indispensable to look first at some other ideas conceptualized by them. The coming sections would lead to an exploration of the same, taking threads from other contexts and building them up to arrive at a framework for the musical analysis intended in this work.

The Temporal Concept in Music

Time and Space are the two important entities of music. While the ‘circular disposition of space’ in music is reflected by the concept of sound, rhythm reflects the ‘cyclical disposition of time’. In music, time denotes the movement of notes and beats in a spatial context. Musical experience, as Martin Clayton²⁰ points out, involves the “confluence of two simultaneous streams of time – a physical, divisible, external time

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 179

¹⁸ See Patke, 2009, op. cit. pp. 32-39

¹⁹ See Adorno 1992, op. cit. pp. 194-5, Also cited in Patke, 2009, op. cit. p. 74

²⁰ Martin Clayton, *Time in Indian Music : Rhythm, Metre and Form In North Indian Rag Performance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)

and an internal system of continuous time, devoid of any distinctions”. Time is not just understood as a linear progression, but also a circular time that is unlimited and suspended. The incorporation of the two aspects of time in musical thought draws from music being perceived as a microcosm for the cosmos. Many practitioners and scholars in the context of Indian music, talk about an essential desire that was felt during its evolution to ‘reveal the essence of the universe’ through musical structures. The measurement of time and the production of sound “nada”, as Clayton points out, were linked to the functioning of the universe. Deleuze and Guattari have also argued in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that ‘music is an open structure that permeates and is permeated by the world.’²¹ They define the relationship between the cosmos and music as rhythmical. Rhythm brings in the cyclicity within this linear progression of time, performing a ‘temporal synthesis’, assembling different elements of space, of body, thereby distributing intensities and in the process renewing, resurfacing anew with every cycle. Every rhythmic experience has an inherent feeling of “coming back” to the origin associated with it, thus the arrangement seems cyclic. This cyclicity, however, does not imply repetitiveness, as every performance creates a new musical product which exists till the time it is rendered and then gets dissolved. This idea of renewability within a fixed structure is central to rhythmic organization. This also helps one understand the idea of dissolution of every musical performance within the time of its creation, as, in Rowell’s words, every performance becomes a structure in the ‘process of pure becoming’.

Thus, time and timelessness that permeate the cosmos and music, define both Indian and Western musical and philosophical thought. Referred to as the two forms of Brahma in *Maitri Upanishad*, time is that quintessential force that creates, effects growth and gradually leads to dissolution of things. “Time is a form and formless too.”²² (*Maitri Upanishad*). The Stoics believed the source of the time in the universe

²¹ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, “Plateau 11: The Refrain” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (trans.), (Minneapolis: university of Minnesota press, 1987). Also cited in Ronald Bogue “Musica Naturans : Deterritorializing the Refrain”, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 14

²² Quoted from the *Sixth Prapathaka of Maitri Upanishad. The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Robert Ernest Hume (trans.), (Oxford University Press, 1921).

to be characterised by two concepts; *aion*, the unmeasured time and *chronos*, the time that is numbered, measured and submitted to the cyclical rhythms of the cosmos.²³ Deleuze and Guattari refer to this time, Aion, as “time out of joint”, time of the infinitive, or the free-floating time which Pierre Boulez refers to as the non-pulsed time. This time is not marked by a ‘regular measure of a fixed meter’ that characterises the pulsed time. They describe this as “the indefinite time of the pure event or becoming, which articulates relative speeds and slowness independently of the chronological or chronometric values that time assumes in the other modes.”²⁴ ‘Becoming’, entails a certain destabilization or diversion from the fixed coordinates of time. The time of becoming is elusive and fluctuating. It is the ‘time of the haecceity’, says Ronald Bogue, the *eventum tantum*, “which has neither beginning nor end, neither origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, but only of lines. It is a rhizome”.²⁵ This further implies that within the notion of calculated and measured time of music is immanent the idea of incalculable, indivisible, free-flowing time. It is in this context that the idea of rhythm in music becomes extremely significant to look at.

Rhythm defines temporality in music. A temporality which, unlike the meter, is in a state of flux. The meter here then could be posited as its antithetical concept which ‘presumes an even division of uniform time’. It could be defined a ‘law, calculated and expected obligation, a project.’ Rhythm, hence, needs to be understood in relation to its paradoxical musical measure or beat, ‘la mesure’ in French, as it ‘seems natural, spontaneous, with no law than its unfurling’, as the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre put it.²⁶ But these concepts always co-exist; in each concept’s presence is implied the existence of the other. ‘...everywhere where there is rhythm, there is measure...’²⁷.

http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=2058&chapter=155140&layout=html&Itemid=27 Accessed February 19, 2011

²³ Ibid. p. 15

²⁴ Ibid. p. 28

²⁵ Ibid. p. 28

²⁶ Henri Lefebvre, “Critique of the Thing”, in *Rhythmanalysis : Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Stuart Elden & Gerald Moore (trans), (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 8

²⁷ Ibid. p.8

Measure, says Lefebvre, quantifies time in music. It marks time, while rhythm resists repetition, straightforwardness and equal divisions.

Emile Benveniste in his essay, "The Notion of 'Rhythm' in its Linguistic Expression", redefines rhythm against the commonplace theories which define rhythm in terms of the Greek verb 'ῥεῖν' which means 'to flow'. While these theories were modelled on the idea of the repetitive breaking of waves on to the shore, he argues against these stating that the origin of the term lies in a word that means, 'form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile and fluid, the form of that which does not have organic consistency; it fits the pattern of a fluid element, of a letter arbitrarily shaped, of a robe which one arranges at one's will, of a particular state of character or mood. It is the form as improvised, momentary, changeable'.²⁸ A structure or a pattern of beats played out by a musician does not solely imply rhythm in music; rhythm is rather the change and the difference that exists in the number and the duration between these beats. Olivier Messiaen, the catholic composer whose music in thought and practice seems closest to Deleuze and Guattari's remarks about music in *A Thousand Plateaus*, gives the definition of rhythm as:

Suppose that there were a single beat in all the universe. One beat with eternity before it and after it. A before and an after. That is the birth of time. Imagine then, almost immediately, a second beat. Since any beat is prolonged by the silence which follows it, the second beat will be longer than the first. Another number, another duration. That is the birth of Rhythm.²⁹

Rhythm is borne in the spaces between this fixed beat structure, in the intervals, in the gap between two successive beats, meandering through the fixed time measurements creating new temporal divisions, inspired by the movements of free and unequal

²⁸ Emile Benveniste, 'The Notion of "Rhythm" in its Linguistic Expression', in *Problems in General Linguistics*,. Mary Elizabeth Meek (trans.), (UMP: Coral Gables, 1971), pp.285-6. <http://henrimeschonnic.blogspot.com/>, Accessed on 9 June, 2011.

²⁹ Olivier Messiaen, "Conference de Bruxelles," 1958, cited by Robert Sherlaw Johnson, *Messiaen*, (Berkley :University of California press, 1975) p. 32. Also cited in Bogue, 2003, op. cit. p. 25.

durations. 'Rhythm is born of moments of intensity, incommensurable accents that create unequal extensions of duration'.³⁰ It is revealed in the 'moment', the 'instant' that Lefebvre emphasizes over Bergson's idea of duration (*duree*).

Lefebvre's concept of Rhythm

Lefebvre's 'theory of moments' was influenced by Nietzsche's idea of the moment, *Augenblick*, the blink of an eye which he perceives as 'the gateway where past and future collide'³¹. His privileging of the 'instant' also came from his understanding of history in cycles and change rather than a linear, teleological progression of events. He perceives the moment or the instant as the rupture or the gap that arises when things by virtue of their potential to alter and be overturned, pose a challenge to existing orthodoxies. It is like a moment of crisis, where the inward tension boiling within the perceptible spatio-temporality coordinates, creates radical alterations and adds new meanings beyond what is discernible. Time, for Lefebvre, then is 'resistant to abstracting generalization'.³² Through rhythm, Messiaen says, "one can chop up Time here and there, and can even put it together again in the reverse order, a little as though he were going for a walk through different points of time, or as though he were amassing the future, by turning to the past, in the process of which, his memory of the past becomes transformed into a memory of the future."³³

³⁰ Bogue, *Ibid.* p. 25

³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" in *The Portable Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufmann (ed.) & (trans.), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), pp 269-72. Also cited in Stuart Elden, "Rhythmanalysis : An Introduction" in Henri Lefebvre. *Rhythmanalysis : Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Stuart Elden & Gerald Moore (trans.), London & New York: Continuum, 2004), p. x. 7

³² Elden, *Ibid.* p. xi.

³³ Almut Robler *Contributions to the Spiritual World of Olivier Messiaen*, Barbara Dagg & Nancy Poland (trans.), (Duisburg, Germany: Gilles & Francke, 1986), p. 41. Also cited in Bogue 2003, op. cit. p. 25

Lefebvre conceptualized the idea of ‘rhythmanalysis’ to examine how through an analysis of rhythms – biological, psychological, and social, interrelation between the space and time could be understood in the comprehension of everyday life. He believed that in the collision of everyday time and natural, biological time, that is, the rhythms of our bodies and society, the analysis of rhythms could provide an insight into understanding everyday life.³⁴ For him, the reality of a society could be understood through the model of the triad of time, space and energy. And he believed that ‘everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is **rhythm**’.³⁵ Creating broad categories of rhythms which he refers to as “lived temporalities”, Lefebvre identifies how rhythm presents itself in the everyday, in every animate and inanimate object, and shapes the experiences of the people with the world. In music, Lefebvre feels that rhythm is one of the less explored concepts in the triad of melody, harmony and rhythm. He understands rhythm as an ‘energy’ that unfolds itself in time and space. It is through rhythm that music builds an alliance between time and space, presupposes a unity between the two. It is not just an aesthetic concept or a rule of art, but that which illustrates real, everyday life in its relation to body, time and work. He thus perceives body and its rhythms, the rhythm of changing relations in the society, as lending to musical rhythm. It is through rhythm, he says, that music becomes worldly. Rhythm, as music demonstrates, ‘raises issues of change and repetition, identity and difference, contrast and continuity.’³⁶ For arriving at an analysis of a community through its rhythmic idiom, this becomes a pertinent and a fertile point for exploration. Hence, if music were to be understood as a ‘form of social communication’ and musical performance as ‘a site of social intercourse’; ‘a form of social dialogue’³⁷, then the idea of rhythm becomes an important exposition.

³⁴ Elden 2004, op. cit. Pg viii

³⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Elements de Rythmanalyse*, (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1992) p.26. Also cited in Elden 2004, ibid. p. xv.

³⁶ Elden, ibid. p. xii

³⁷ Michael Chanan, “Musica Practica”, in *Musica Practica : The Social Practice of Western Music from Gregorian Chant to Postmodernism*, (London & New York : Verso) 1994, p. 23

In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre touches upon the idea of ‘cyclical’ and ‘linear’ time. While the cyclical time exists in the cosmic and natural cycles of the day and night, seasons and months; the linear, he says, originates in the everyday activities and social structures. It is the interaction between the cyclical and the linear; the ‘antagonistic unity’ between the two that Lefebvre says creates disturbances and chasms. The two time(s) interfere with each other. “The circular course of the hands on (traditional) clock-faces and watches is accompanied by a linear tick-tock. And it is their relation that enables or rather constitutes the measure of time (which is to say, of rhythms)³⁸. While a dialectical relation exists between the two, both also exert a reciprocal action where each acquires meaning through the other – “Everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions.”³⁹ The ‘cyclical and linear’ opposition will be used as an approach to understand the way rhythm unfolds itself during drumming in relation to the people participating in the act. It will be used to understand the linear time of their social structures against the cyclical time of their music that keeps renewing itself and adds life to the community.

The Spatial Concept of Music with Deleuze and Guattari

Every musical utterance or a repetitive musical gesture delineates or defines a space. Deleuze and Guattari use the notion of the Refrain to refer to “any kind of rhythmic pattern, any repetition, musical or otherwise” that stakes out a territory.⁴⁰ Refrain, thereby brings about an assembling and reassembling of different coordinates within an environment. This leads to a delimitation of a space, created out of chaos, from which order spontaneously emerges. It either brings in a point of stability, marks a circle of property or becomes an opening to the outside; these three being understood as the aspects of the refrain. Thus, in Deleuze’s words, “forces of chaos, terrestrial forces, cosmic forces: all of these confront each other and come together in the refrain”⁴¹. This however does not imply that this marked out space is self-contained and inert. Within the marked territory too there are constant fluctuations, and it is

³⁸ Lefebvre, 2004, op. cit, p. 8

³⁹ Ibid. p.8

⁴⁰ Bogue, 2003, op.cit, p. 17

⁴¹Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, op. cit. p.312. Also cited Bogue, 2003, op. cit. p. 17.

always determined by its relation to the coordinates of other spaces. This new space that is marked out by the refrain, by dismantling the old one or through a relation between two spaces is referred to as the Milieu. “A milieu is a coded block of space-time being defined by ‘periodic repetition’.” Every milieu is in contact with other milieus, and “each code is in a state of perpetual trans-coding or transduction”⁴². This immanent aspect within a milieu owing to which it exhibits this transformative potential, Deleuze calls the intensive reality. By virtue of this, there is something intrinsic within a state, something inside, that makes one change into the other; in the sense that a milieu which claims a fixity can change, because its reality is always fluid like the flow of a river. The river follows different trajectories, takes up new forms depending on the external forces that act upon it, thereby taking an extensive form. This extensive reality always bears the imprint of the intensive flow, energy which is always there. It also carries the propensity to dissolve back, to go back into that intensive state. Thus the territory charted out is an extensive space that is transient. It can transform. It is an inside which can become the outside. Deleuze calls this intensive space, this inherent intensive reality that carries the potential for change; molar or molecular. The point of transformation within these molecular domains of space is what Deleuze calls the ‘becoming’. The essence of music, he believes, is in these ‘molecular domains’ of becoming rather than the macroscopic celestial cycles. The act of becoming is the key to the intensive reality; it is the key to multiplicity. These transformations leading to constant displacement within a space, is multiplicity. The constant state of becoming, this dynamism is what leads one to intensive reality which is multiplicity. So multiplicity is not a causal logic. It is an originary logic of reality. Multiplicity is an important concept in the context of music and will be used in the analysis in the subsequent chapters.

In a nutshell, the question of philosophy is whether it is a question of ‘one’ or multiple. Each one is unique, a whole. But this one is part of a larger one which is a multiple. So a multiplicity organizes itself temporally into a unique whole which claims to be one but is not one. Multiplicity, which is chaotic and unstable, by its very being is always pushed to stability, to be consistent. So it is radically militantly

⁴²Deleuze & Guattari,, Ibid. p 313. Also cited in Bogue, *ibid.* p. 17

heterogeneous, but that heterogeneity is always pushed towards becoming homogeneous. Multiplicity, as an intensive reality, always produces a unique, extensive reality. So the intensive reality presents itself through an extensive reality, though that reality has a direct relation with the intensive in the sense that the extensive has as its originary logic, an intensive reality. Thus, this extensive space always bears the trace of what it can be; it contains within it the possibility of that which it is not, the trace of the intensive.

This dynamic interaction between and within spaces, through becoming, is what Deleuze and Guattari understand in terms of a Territory. A milieu is always fixed and it is with the act of change that affects it, that it becomes a territory. It is thus, an idea, a thought. If one looks through the milieu it is fixed, but if one looks through the territory then it is no longer static. Once a territory is established, the “milieu component becomes at once quality and property, *quale* and *proprium*”⁴³. These components or coordinates of a milieu, he calls ‘dispositives’. These components are determined through the organizational logic or the arrangement logic. Each component is prescribed, that is, the space describes the function. The existence of a component is determined by the space. For instance, the beat in music, owing to its repeatability, becomes prescribed and already determined. But that beat in itself, in time and space has an existence of its own which is not prescriptive. Thus a beat which is otherwise quantifiable due to repetition is a quality; it is one quality, then the other and so on, hence the existential logic of the beat. Thus, the existential logic is not limited by prescription or the space within the milieu. It is not a milieu relation to its component. Here it is an inverse logic; this is referred to as ‘quality’. A quality is, therefore, something that extracts itself. This is the difference between a predicate and a quality. A predicate is not free because it is intrinsically dependant on the milieu. A quality is something that is free of the milieu. In this, one can locate ‘Art’, or rather the essence of art. This is ‘pure’, like the moment where the point of departure could be realized of music in its socio-cultural context to music as a sound idiom for aesthetic contemplation, a system in itself which this work seeks to build upon. It is from this idea that this work endeavors to understand the existence of rhythm in

⁴³Deleuze & Guattari, , Ibid. p 315. Also cited in Bogue, , ibid. p. 19

music, that is, to understand rhythm as something more than the beat though still having a trace of the same.

Territorialisation comes with the interaction between the rhythms of two milieus. Rhythm as differential and unmeasured, unlike the repetitive measure (meter), is what brings in the multiplicity and catalyzes the transformation of one extensive reality into another. It involves the “act of rhythm that has become expressive...”. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, “a milieu does indeed exist by virtue of periodic repetition, but such repetition only has the effect of producing a difference through which the milieu passes into another milieu. It is difference that is rhythmic, and not repetition, which, however, produces it; but that productive repetition has nothing to do with the reproductive measure”.⁴⁴ Milieus, thus, interact through rhythms, existing as “heterogenous blocks’ within a homogenous space-time. In contrast to the measure (or meter) which implies a repetition of the same, self-identical pattern, rhythm is “Unequal or Incommensurable, always in a process of transcoding.”⁴⁵ There is hence an inherent autonomy to the rhythms which is seen as crucial by Deleuze in the establishment of a territory.

Territory comes with the logic of deterritorialization. While one space is being affirmed, another is being negated. This holds true the other way round too, implying a state of constant becoming. The idea of becoming is always present in music. For Deleuze, the idea of becoming is the idea of life; that life is not fixed. Life is always in a state of flux, in a state of transformations. It is never in a state of stasis. But it is always presented in appearance in a state of stasis just like rhythm. How does a rhythm appear? A rhythm appears as the calculated repetition of beats or a pattern of beats. So one could say that it is just one pattern which is being repeated. But what is actually happening as a process is that with every repetition, difference is being encountered. This is because it is no longer just one beat. It is the first beat, then the second beat and so on. Numbers are coming in and hence difference and change are

⁴⁴Deleuze & Guattari, *Ibid.* p 314. Also cited in Bogue, *ibid.* p. 18

⁴⁵Deleuze & Guattari, *Ibid.* p 313. Also cited in Bogue, *ibid.* p. 18

being introduced in terms of the number quantity. This implies that becoming is being introduced. So something which is limited and determined, a milieu, when transforms into another milieu, that act of changing, the in-between state is what he calls becoming, which actually leads to deterritorialization. One territory transforms into another. The moment a territory is staked out, it involves a decoding of certain coordinates. It entails an 'unfixing' of qualities and rhythms which are recoded in relation to the new domain that is being demarcated.

The taking off of musical motifs and concepts from their structured dimensions to destabilize the calculated, measured time is understood by Deleuze and Guattari in terms of the 'diagonal'. Establishing an analogy between pictorial representation and musical representation, Deleuze sees the diagonal as a line running between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon. "The line is that which frees the point, from its origins, leaving only streams of becoming. The diagonal represents a deterritorialization by abandoning the points, thereby making the relationship of music with time quite distinctive. It gives rise to 'non-pulsed' time which by way of resisting a chronological history with past, present and future, actualizes in the pure becoming. Music, thus, becomes in this way a block of expression through diagonals, revealing its essence in these 'molecular domain of traverse becomings'. These becomings signify the immanent multiplicity in music which illuminates through any point which involves a radical organization or reorganization of dispositives. This is what one understands as an 'Event'.

Rhythm as *Laya*

In the Indian musical thought, this objective time of the rhythm is defined as *laya*, against *tala* (beat pattern) which means calculated time. *Laya* is often referred to as that which ensures 'discipline of freedom of musical expression'.⁴⁶ Sarangadeva in his chapter on *tala* in *Sangeeta Ratnakara* refers to it as the 'basis of raga and prabandha'. The word *laya*, as Ramachandra Rao explains, is derived from the root

⁴⁶ T.V Kuppaswami & T.K. Venkata Subramanian, *Rhythm in Historical Cognition*, (Delhi : Kalinga Publications, 1993), p. 9-11

'li' which means "to stick together" and 'to move' (*laya gatyam*). Thus, the word encompasses, both the notion of unison and also time. Tala, on the other hand, is perceived as the measurement of the abstract time-field- *talah kala-kriya manam*. Tala is that which gives a framework within which a melody works. It gives order and clarity to melody which is predominantly qualitative. He further defines tala as a 'time field' or the measure of time duration and laya as the principle of rhythm." Tala, thus, includes the organization of beats in a specific structure which flow and create patterns in a time field whereas laya is perceived as the time that is hidden and pervasive amidst the beats in a given time-field ("Talantara–vartiyah lao'yam laya-namakah").⁴⁷ Nabokov in his novel *Ada* or *Ardor* says :

Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is Rhythm, not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the grey gap between black beats: The Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks.⁴⁸

Rhythm evokes a sense of timelessness within musical time. It gives an idea of time that is suspended and not tied to any fixed coordinates. It is not confined to the stable identities and chronological time, but subtly peeps through the gaps between this linearity of everyday time. This 'timeless time' perceived in rhythm does not imply that that this timelessness is outside rhythm. It is always about possibilities, both outside and within. Within limited structure, there are possibilities of opening up. A rhythm is always an opening to the next rhythm. Within the idea of rhythm is the idea of repetition. So the existence of one beat has the possibility of the next beat which is different than the earlier one. One beat as a unit of rhythm has the potential of multiplicity. It is the extensive reality; one beat is structured, calculated and then that extensive reality has the immanent possibility of an intensive reality which is opening

⁴⁷ S.K. Ramachandra Rao, *Psychology of Laya*, (Bangalore : Percussive Arts Centre, 1988).

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth cites all but the last sentence in *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* where she uses Nabokov's work among others as an example to understand the 'shifts in our comprehension of time and history'. Also cited in Elden, 2004, op. cit. pp. xiv- xv.

up into another beat. Each beat is hence different. Calculatively it is same, but difference is being induced by virtue of progression. Also, one beat cannot be the other beat because the spatio-temporality changes.

It is important to note here that the ideas above are adumbrated within the context of building an understanding of rhythm as postulated by different strands of thought. In putting them together, the attempt is not to look over the differences in their conceptualization and their respective concerns. Hence while both Adorno and Lefebvre place music within the sociological context, one needs to understand that Adorno looks at music as a means of social engagement within the purview of his critique of modernity while Lefebvre specifically looks at rhythm in the sense of understanding spaces and diverse temporalities. Rhythms convey music of the society for him which appropriate spaces in a non-political way. In the philosophical thought of Deleuze and Guattari, music serves as a key to understand the relation of art with the natural world. As a dimension of human creation, music also reveals and is inseparable from the 'creative processes of the natural world'.⁴⁹ Roland Barthes on the other hand, places music within the context of his concerns as a semiotician who wants to defy the constraints of language. Besides these ideas, this work also proceeds with the awareness that while the western musical terminology is context-specific, the terms from Indian musicology too are loaded with the complexities of classical, folk and tribal music. To resist falling into any such problematic and contentious categorization, the terms are not applied directly within the context of this research. Rhythm versus metre/measure, *laya* versus *tala* are used broadly to show the distinction in their conceptualization of time and how that translates into music. Drawing from such understanding, two recurring words that one will observe during the course of the work are; beat cycle and rhythm. Beat cycle refers to the structural arrangement of beats which when repeated at regular intervals produces rhythm. Rhythm, on the other hand, is understood as encompassing both this regularity and the capacity to resist this repetition. Rhythm is what envelops one in a musical field implying both repetition and difference.

⁴⁹ Bogue, 2003, op. cit, pp 2-3

Within this context, this research probes into the idea of how rhythm can serve as a musical gesture through which people interact within and between spaces. Within the framework of music as a means of social intercourse, and as the tonal expression of human experience in the context of different kinds of social and cultural organization, a study of rhythm as both a component of and complement to music and the practice of drumming becomes important. Taking up drumming as a very ubiquitous manifestation of rhythm, this work involves the study of the 'rhythmic soundscape'⁵⁰ that drumming or a percussion ensemble creates and how that carries the potential for communicating or defining the various aspects and the forces at play in a given space and time. The research endeavours to reverse the anthropological model to see if a space can be studied through the lens of the music it creates and understand whether and how this can serve as an approach in performance studies. The ethnomusicological studies aim at approaching music through an understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics from which the music emerges. This research, without making any tall claims, while emerging from such an analysis, would also want to push these boundaries a little further. It seeks to go beyond the context-oriented study of music and arrive at an analysis of music, by looking at certain fundamental questions inherent within this entity called music. These, one believes, are often left unaddressed while studying musical practice in the Indian context, (and this applies to all the created categories of regional, folk and classical) owing probably to a lack of an adequate framework within the approach of Indian ethnomusicology. Through culling out certain performative ideas with respect to musicality, the research endeavours to arrive at problems and possibilities of theorizing music, of difficulties concerning such studies of rhythm, drumming and the philosophy of music under the oeuvre of performance studies.

⁵⁰ Kofi Agawu, *African rhythm : A Northern Ewe Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.216

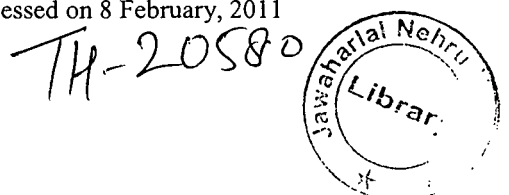
The Sidi Community : A Case Study

The Sidis, also known as Habshis, are descendants of Africans, believed to have come to South-Asia from the hinterlands of the East African coast. Referred to as Indo-Africans by some scholars, this community traces its ancestry primarily to the East African coast from Sudan, Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) to Mozambique, but some are believed to have come from as far off as Nigeria and even South Africa. There are several legends about the origins of the early Sidi settlements, but a paucity of studies of African Indians, as noted by some modern scholars like Harris⁵¹, seems to add to the inadequacy in verifying their early oral history or substantiate the Sidi claims of various ancestries. Their history is rooted in the 'history of navigation and commerce in the Indian ocean'.⁵² Around the 16th century, the Indian Ocean world was widely opened to maritime and trading connections extending to East Africa as much as to Arabia, the Persian Gulf and South-East Asia. Seafarers from Africa, known for their maritime skills, served in many of these ships involved in trade. These included not only the ships of traders from India, the Swahili coast and Arabia, but also those of Portuguese, British and other European colonial trading companies. Many sources reveal that the monsoon winds over the Indian Ocean favoured an extensive trade system of spices that were shipped from Kerala through North-East Africa to Rome and other parts of Europe. On the other hand, Zimbabwe and Congo were emerging as important suppliers of ivory, gold and other valuables which found their way to the East African coast to areas such as Kilwa, Mombasa and Zanzibar.⁵³ From here, it is believed they were further shipped across the Indian Ocean to India and other parts of Southeast Asia, China and even Japan. African presence in India was thus facilitated by such trading systems as most of them came as sailors, traders or slaves and continued to stay here, settled down mostly in the main ports of Gujarat and in small pockets along the coastal belt of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

⁵¹ Joseph Harris, *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade*, (Evanston; Northwestern University Press, 1971). p. 13. Also cited in *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians*, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.12

⁵² Edward A. Alpers, "Africans in India and the wider context of the Indian ocean", *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians*, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.27

⁵³ "Sidis (Seydis):The African Kings of India" <http://www.africaresource.com/rasta/sesostris-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/sidis-seydisthe-african-kings-of-india/> Accessed on 8 February, 2011



This research looks at the Sidis in Gujarat, mostly in the area of Jamnagar, Sasan (Gir), Jambur and Shirvan. The Sidis of Gujarat are Muslims with a strong Sufi tradition. They are devotees of the African merchant and saint Bava Gor, invoked in their rituals through singing and dancing, to the accompaniment of rigorous drumming. The pulsating rhythms of their drums serve as the cultural and identifying markers of the community. This is what the community knows itself for and defines itself by. The drumming tradition and the rhythms not only bind the community together but also serve as a means and a space through which they negotiate their interactions both internally and with the external world. From ritualistic accompaniment to weddings and other occasions within their people, their drumming is also popular outside the community, especially during the *Navratri garba*, weddings and festivals. The empirical data collected during the field work covers their drumming outside their community during the *Ayyappa festival* in Vadinar⁵⁴, the stage performance of the *Sidi Goma*⁵⁵ in Porbandar where drumming and dance depart from the ritualistic space as part of a cultural program, *Selam*⁵⁶ in Shirvan within a very closed knit group of Sidis of that village and finally the *dhamal*⁵⁷ at the Jamnagar *dargah* during the 'urs⁵⁸ of Baba Gor. The *dhamal* at 'urs shall remain extremely significant and the focus of the analysis in this work as the intensity of that experience in terms of drumming surpasses all, both for the musicians and the audience. The vivid and profound experience of drumming at 'urs serves as an important performative space to understand the dynamics of music-making within a community.

⁵⁴ Ayyappa festival is the annual festival of the Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple in Kerala. Families from Kerala staying in Vadinar observed their own festivities celebrating and seeking the blessings of Ayyappa, whom they believed to be the Mohini avatar of Krishna and Shiva. The Sidis were called to play in the procession where the idol was taken through the streets in their locality.

⁵⁵ The specific context and nature of the performance will be explained in the first chapter.

⁵⁶ According to my informant, this is the fortieth day of Muharram commemorated through an overnight drumming session.

⁵⁷ *Dhamal*, a characteristic feature of the Sidi performative and ritual tradition, is a form of ecstatic worship which involves trance, possession, group singing and dancing accompanied by night long drumming sessions. This is explained in detail within the context of the work in the following chapter.

⁵⁸ Celebrated annually, 'urs commemorate the final union of the saint with god on his death anniversary.

In its attempt to study this interface between rhythm and community, this work over the next three chapters moves from establishing the Sidis in the context of their cultural and historical background to an analysis of their drumming and the various interactions that unfold with the act. Drawing mainly from the primary sources, the first chapter places *'urs*, as observed during the field work, within the performativity of its rituals. One takes off, in the next chapter, from this sociological context, to delve into the process of music making; to analyse the various stylistic nuances of their drumming repertoire. Here music is studied as it is produced through the coming together of various elements in the act of its creation. The negotiations between the music makers and receivers are culled out in the very act of the performance. Moving a step further, the third chapter, focussing on one observation that comes through predominantly in the previous chapter, looks at rhythm as embodied. It proposes to look at the musical beat in the interface between the body of the drum and that of the musician. Arguing this materiality of music, which further becomes layered with the location of the musician as a subject within his socio-cultural context, the chapter explores this interaction between the subject and the community through the rhythm.

The theoretical concepts, for their validity, should emerge from within the analysis and various arguments that are put forth in the context of rhythm and community. The work, thus, does not try to look at the community and the performative tradition, in application of the theoretical concepts, rather observes how the concepts are reflected in the various negotiations at work. At certain places these concepts, however, do provide a foundation in order to substantiate one's analysis on the basis of which one seeks to broadly look at the scope of understanding music-making within a community; a space through the performative practices of the people that constitute it. With transformations happening at various levels, can music under the discipline of performance studies, serve as a methodology for understanding these? Not just as an analysis of rhythms, this work, borrowing from Lefebvre's idea, would try to look at rhythm as a 'mode' of analysis, use it as a 'tool' to raise questions.

While posing the question, “what is rhythm?”, G. Burns Cooper⁵⁹ immediately responds to himself with another question, “who’s asking?”. As a fundamental law that governs and is inherent in all activities of nature, rhythm lends itself to different interpretations depending on the different theoretical and socio-cultural perspectives. While this research work attempts to understand what meanings are revealed with this particular probe into the idea of rhythm, the work, completely unaware of what lies ahead proceeds by joining the dots that surface through the course of the analysis. The only hope being that in the process of this joining-the- dots exercise, the work plays with and around the beats, weaving and creating its own rhythms.

⁵⁹ G. Burns Cooper, *Mysterious Music: Rhythm and Free Verse*, (Stanford : Stanford UP, 1998), p.16. Also Cited in Julie Ann Huntington, *Transcultural Rhythms : An Exploration of Rhythm, Music and the Drum in a selection of Francophone Novels from West Africa and the Caribbean*, Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in French, May 2005, p.7

CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL AND THE SACRED: EVERYDAY RHYTHMS OF THE SIDIS

SOCIAL AND THE SACRED: EVERYDAY RHYTHMS OF THE SIDIS

It is a hot summer afternoon in the sleepy village of Jambur. An air of resonating silence amid the usual humdrum of daily activities, typical of a rustic summer afternoon envelops the village. While some of the men seem to be away for work, the women are either busy with the house chores or huddled in small groups, playing cards, completely unperturbed by my presence. It is Thursday. Accompanied by Hasan bhai, I walk through the lanes of the village, in time for the evening lubaan batti at the dargah of Nagarci baba. The attendance is very thin. A lost, seemingly drunken man 'fiddles' with the naubat for a couple of minutes, during which a woman, hair open, wailing and shouting aloud, runs within the precincts of the dargah. As my first Sidi experience, I am completely clueless and disappointed, more so after stories about the intoxicating dhamal at the dargah on Thursdays from Hasan bhai and also Fatima aunty and her family at Vadinar where I was staying.

So I return to Vadinar, a little disillusioned and doubtful if the drumming is practiced at all now with the deteriorating economic conditions, other concerns coming up and the usual lament about the lack of interest by the younger generation; when one evening, I witness a group of young Sidi drummers taking a crowd berserk, making them sway to their energetic and playful beats at the local Ayyapa festival celebrations. While this rekindles the hope and the excitement about Sidi drumming, it also brings back the yearning to experience dhamal at the dargah. The search for the elusive dhamal thus begins again...in repeated field visits, through Goma performance at Porbandar, Selam in Shirvan, lubaan batti at Jambur again, I finally reach Baba Gor dargah at Jamnagar. From observing the lubaan to endless

conversations with the people, I come back here again for the 'urs where finally dhamal reveals itself in all its intensity, vigour and colour.

For a community whose origins are foregrounded in multiple yet fragmented versions and narratives, it becomes rather interesting then to observe their music and dance traditions. In the absence of adequate written records, it is the oral tradition, the individual and collective memory of their traditions that bear traces of their interactions with time and society. In conveying the cultural memory and group identity, music and dance play a major role.⁶⁰ This expression works at different levels, through various transactions and innovations. The performance, as something manifested on the level of 'sensory experience' becomes an important point of contact, revealing new insights not only about the community but also of art intertwined with life itself. The Sidi community with its performative traditions highlights these aspects.

A Historical Overview

In the research work being conducted by historians and linguists, one comes across various ethnonyms such as Sidhi/Sidi/Siddi or Habshi/Habsi in India, Shidi/Shidee in Pakistan and Kaffir in Sri Lanka⁶¹. The term 'Sidi', as some linguists assume, is derived from 'Saiyed' or 'Sayyad', an aristocratic honorific meaning 'a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad'⁶². In the past, prisoners of war from Sudan and Ethiopia were sold as slaves to other African rulers. These rulers further sold them to the slave traders who in turn brought them to the Middle East and India. It is believed that as late as the beginning of the 20th century, there were around more than 10,000 African

⁶⁰ Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, "A Sidi CD? : Globalizing African Indian Music and the Sacred", *Sidis and scholars : Essays on African Indians*, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward a. Alpers (eds.), (India: Rainbow Publishers, USA: Red Sea Press, 2004), p. 179. Catlin mentions this while noting the parallels between between the Cambodian and Lao to the Sidi situation; both as 'forced migrations across vast distances to highly complex societies...'.
⁶¹ Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi " *Bantu origins of the Sidis of India*" 2008-10-29, Issue 404 <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/51594>, Accessed on 6 January 2011. Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi is an associate professor in Swahili and Comparative Bantu at the Department of Linguistics & Philology at the Uppsala University, Sweden.

⁶² See Footnote 1 of this Chapter

mercenaries in the Ottoman armies, spread all over the Ottoman Empire. It is from the early Arabic or Ottoman usage that the term Sidi might have been borrowed in India.⁶³ Many scholars feel that this ethnonym suggests that the Sidis were employed by the ‘Sayyads’, the Muslim rulers of India when they were brought from Ethiopia and Sudan in the 1500s as mercenaries and prisoners of war and sold as slaves.⁶⁴ Abdulaziz Lodhi in his research on the etymology of the term Sidi and its variants proposes a possible alternative meaning of the term. He suggests that the term ‘Sidi’ as existing in many African dialects of Arabic could also be a variant of ‘Saydi’ which means ‘captive’ or ‘prisoner of war’. Platts too understands ‘Sidi’ as “vulgarisation of *saiyidi*, ‘An Appellation of Africans; a negro’ ”. Scholars like Sharif state that ‘The Sidi or Sayyidi, “Master”, is an African negro’.⁶⁵ In the pre-Ottoman period, African soldiers in India were also referred to as Habshi or Habsi.⁶⁶ Derived from the Arabic term for people who belong to Abyssinia or Ethiopia, it is often used in India. This work shall use ‘Sidi’ throughout for all its references pertaining to this community.

Most of the trade, prior to the European presence in India was conducted by Arab merchants. They brought Africans to work as sailors, both free and enslaved, on the ships stemming from Ethiopia to Mozambique to different parts across the Indian Ocean. Edward Alpers locates the ‘meaningful presence of Africans in India’ within the rise of Islam, which, he says “gave new life to commercial and cultural linkages across the northwest Indian ocean, in particular.”⁶⁷ With adequate labour already present within India to be employed and exploited in the fields, the demand for non-Indian slave labour was quite low. It was, thus, only with the expansion of the Islam to northern India at the end of the 10th century, as noted by many historians, that huge number of slaves from mainly Africa entered the subcontinent as military slaves.

⁶³ Lodhi, 2008 .

⁶⁴ Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Diaspora in India: The Role of Habshis and Sidis from Medieval Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century." in *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, edited by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya and Richard Pankhurst (eds.), 189–221. (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2001.) Also cited in Lodhi, 2008.

⁶⁵ See Footnote 1 of this Chapter

⁶⁶ For more, see Footnote 8 of this Chapter

⁶⁷ Alpers, 2004, op. cit p. 27

Disparate archival sources provide some evidence, however fragmentary, about the presence of African slaves since the early establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi, from 13th to 16th century. They played a significant role as military slaves during the Muslim domination in India. They were brought from different parts of Africa to serve as soldiers in the armies of the Nawabs and Sultans. Alpers points out that enslaved Ethiopians played a prominent role as soldiers, concubines and eunuchs in Muslim India.⁶⁸ References abound of the presence of Habshi slaves employed in the courts in the sultanate of Delhi and many parts of north India, the kingdom of Bengal⁶⁹ and the Deccan. These Africans brought to India during this time hence often adopted Islam, took Muslim names and indigenous languages. This is often noted as a reason for the difficulty in identifying them in the archival sources but nevertheless, many travel accounts, records, logbooks kept by the Arab and African traders bear testimony to African presence in Asia, such as in the western states of India as slaves, and some employed by local rulers as soldiers, body guards and domestic servants.⁷⁰ As Amy Catlin points out, Sidi settlement was the result of a process which began in the 12th century or before, and lasted until the 19th century. “They came as slaves, sailors, servants, and merchants who remained in India after arriving through the sea trade with East Africa and the Gulf.”⁷¹ Sidis in the French and Portuguese enclaves were mostly of slave origin and worked in the aristocratic households. The women were often employed as herbalists and midwives. In the noble families, it was also more of a status symbol to employ them as domestic servants⁷². The Sidis in present day Karnataka are believed to be descendants of these

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 31

⁶⁹ As the story goes, the ruler of the state, Rukn-al-Din Barbak Shah (reigned 1459-1474), was killed in a palace coup d’etat led by an Indo-African general serving in the king’s army, who went on to proclaim himself the king and ruled for seven years. He was subsequently killed by another high-ranking Indo-African general, Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah (1491-1494) who remained loyal to the original ruling family and placed the young son of the murdered king upon the throne. Cited in “*Sidis (Seydis): The African Kings of India*” . Also see, Alpers, 2004, op. cit p. 32

⁷⁰ Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward Alpers, “Introduction”, *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians* , Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.13

⁷¹ Catlin, “India’s Lost Africans : Special Report”, <http://www.nigeriamasterweb.com/special.html>, Accessed on 6 April, 2011

⁷² It was a convention, as Abdulaziz Lodhi points out, to keep ‘habshis’ and other non-Indians as personal attendants in the north Indian families. The reason for this trend is often cited in the fact that servants having no local social or blood connections guaranteed political loyalty and security.

Sidis who worked in the Portuguese colonies of Goa. Their ancestors were probably of Mozambique and Angola origin.⁷³

Therefore, while a larger part of the history of this community is rooted in the slave trade, it is an established fact now that there were several Africans who immigrated to India as traders and sailors. The African presence in India brings to light the subcontinent's place in the trade networks across the Indian Ocean, and at the same time also testifies the system of feudal power and warfare that prevailed in the past. Medieval Indian history abounds with references to Ethiopian or Abyssinian slaves serving at royal courts or in the armies of imperial and local rulers. They were paid servants on the one hand, and on the other, they also often wielded power and acquired wealth. Other accounts by scholars point at cases where after having arrived at first as slaves they were so successful as fighters that they at times usurped power from the rulers they were supposed to be serving. Hassan bhai, my informant in Jambur, recounted many a times in our interactions of how some of their ancestors owned lands and were considerably well-off but either could not maintain it properly or lost it all in debts. The detailed investigation of the historical background of this community is beyond the scope and concern of this work but it is important to understand that many different historical events make up the history of the Sidi communities in the different parts of the subcontinent.⁷⁴ Hence grouping them under one single history as a single community is fraught with its own inconsistencies. Without delving deeper into speculation of the historical links and moving further from a very brief overview of their history mentioned above, this work will focus primarily on the Sidi community living in Gujarat, specifically in Jamnagar and the Saurashtra area of Sasan; Jambur and Shirvan. During the course of my interactions, many Sidis here expressed the fragmented nature and almost lost links in the way they

⁷³ The narratives of the slave descent are often told by the Sidis, especially those in Gujarat, as their stories 'of royal employ', of their aristocratic connections. Hence, references to themselves as 'badshahi' or 'badshah'. Lodhi draws one's attention to this point where in his interviews with the Gujarati Sidis, they categorically claimed that they are not of slave descent. A similar experience from one's own field work is touched upon in one of the later sections of this chapter.

⁷⁴ J. Mark kenoyer and Kuldeep k. Bhan, "Sidis and the Agate Bead Industry of Western India", in *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians* , Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.44

have come to understand their history, their ancestral lineage and how they came from Africa. Many seem to rely only on the stories told to them by the anthropologists and historians from India and abroad who might have visited them as part of their research. With the absence of elderly people in many villages who might be able to reminisce the ancestors' journey across the seas far away from their native land, the present generations live their life with both the awareness (whatever is available) and the absence of it, carrying forward the distinctive cultural markers that make up the community. One such is that of drumming, the music and dance and their religious practices. Focussing on these aspects, this chapter will look primarily into the performative and spiritual traditions, mostly centered around the ritual practices dedicated to their saints in the Jamnagar *dargah* of Baba Gor and that of Nagarchi Baba in Jambur.

Sidis in Gujarat : The Case of Jamnagar

Historians agree that the Arabian Sea has been open to travellers of African origin who have been travelling back and forth since a very long time. Many archaeological excavations⁷⁵ and literary sources have revealed the presence of Africans in the subcontinent in the early centuries AD. As already outlined in the previous section, the presence of African diasporic communities in the northwest Indian Ocean is attributed both to the Muslim domination in Gujarat and the developing trade links in the port cities of Arabian Peninsula, owing to the changes in the world economy driven by the industrial revolution in Europe and America. The demand for enslaved labour from Africa intensified with increasing trade relations, while the Muslim slave trade also persisted till the 19th century in the western Indian Ocean.⁷⁶ Historians link the ancestry of the Sidi communities in Gujarat more to East Africa, than northeast Africa. Both Sidi men and women are believed to have been employed in the wealthy

⁷⁵ Excavations, write Kenoyer and Bhan, 'at places like Rojdi in central Gujarat have revealed the presence of domesticated grains that had their origins in Africa', "Sidis and the Agate Bead Industry of Western India", *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians*, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.44

⁷⁶ Edward A. Alpers, "Africans in India and the wider context of the Indian ocean", *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians*, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.31

households of local merchants and rulers⁷⁷. Some men were officials in the Muslim and Hindu armies, others serving as royal bodyguards rose to power in more than one place, such as Jafarabad, Radhanpur, Ahmedabad and Aurangabad.⁷⁸ Many were employed as singers and ceremonial drummers. The women were mostly employed to serve the queen.

Within Gujarat itself, every Sidi settlement, for instance in Ratanpur, Jamnagar, Bharuch, Baroda, has a different tale to narrate about its history. The Sidis in Jamnagar were part of the king's retinue (*rajwara*). Rafiq bhai, one of my informants here, traced this history to around 150 years back when there were only around 14-15 houses of the Sidis. Some settled first in Sarodar, a small village near the river, where they are believed to have been brought by Raja Jam sahib⁷⁹. Women worked as the queen's attendants, midwives and for other domestic work. The men, he says, were employed in different tasks pertaining to the maintenance of the army, worked in horse stables, some were employed as the royal bodyguards, others as drummers during the ceremonies or during the war. Within the community, some families are still known and referred according to where they served or lived such as 'sarodar wale' or 'rasala wale' (those who worked in the horse stables, mostly with the surname Murimai or Murima). Iqbal uncle, my other informant in Jamnagar, during one of our discussions, went through a couple of neatly folded and packed papers; some old documents in Urdu sketching the history of Baba Gor, kept by his father he said, others were very old newspaper cuttings with a tattered copy of an article in English by Helene Basu, with him in one of the pictures. Iqbal uncle recollected that among his ancestors, his grandparents and great grandparents were in the king's retinue. He said he remembered his mother, Sakheena mai, telling him stories about her father being a trusted servant of the king. He often was in-charge of the king's treasure and worked directly under the royal family. The childhood of many of the

⁷⁷ Alpers cites one such information of the presence of a village near Dwarka in the 1940s inhabited by Africans who were descendants of slaves imported from Zanzibar specifically to entertain the Nawab of Junagadh in Saurashtra. (Couceiro, 1969, 138)

⁷⁸ Lodhi, 2008

⁷⁹ While Jam Sahib was the title of the ruling prince of Nawanagar, as the princely state of Jamnagar was known, here Jam Sahib could either be a reference to Jam Ranjitsingh or his predecessor Jam Vibhoji.

surviving members from the royal lineage must be imprinted by the memory of being brought up and taken care of by Sidi women who worked for the queen. Rafiq bhai very proudly remembers one such incident of someone he claims was from the family of Jam Ranjitsingh. While trying to get some Sidi contacts for a researcher friend of hers, she came in touch with Rafiq bhai who particularly emphasizes her excitement on stumbling upon this link from her past after years as she reminisced being taken care of and brought up by Sidi women. Many such anecdotes and stories, polished with every narration from different sources make up the collective memory of the community and its link with history. Some fondly remembered, some with pride, others with a disappointment of not being able to establish contact with people back in Africa. This disappointment however is expressed in passing only by a few, for instance Rafiq bhai, who has been in touch with research being conducted on his community. For others, such are the issues of everyday life that they are grappling with, that thinking about Africa as a 'remembered point of origin or a desired destination' seems inconsequential and absurd.

The integration of Sidis in Gujarat with the mainstream society is a subject fraught with its own ambiguity, owing to the caste-conscious and hierarchical society. They exist as a minority community, dispersed over various parts such as the districts of Ahmedabad, Amerili, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Bharuch, Ratanpur, Surendranagar and Cutch. Conversing in Gujarati, Cutchi and Hindi, they identify themselves as Sunni Muslims⁸⁰, following the Sufi cult of Gori Pir. Living in urban class working quarters, or small pockets of their own, and some, though few, in villages, they have merged with the working class sections of Gujarati-speaking population. As anthropologist Helene Basu who has conducted extensive research in this area explains, "Within the caste-society of Gujarat the Sidi are part of the Muslim community, occupying special ritual roles in relation to the values of that society. They could be called the Muslim analogues of the Hindu Untouchables, but with the

⁸⁰ The religion of the Sidis was mostly an influence of the religion followed in the area they settled in or where they were employed. Therefore, it varies with every settlement. For instance, the Sidis in Karnataka, one was told, are Hindus while those in Goa follow Christianity. Interestingly, though the Sidis in Jamnagar came along with one of the jam sahibs of Jamnagar, from the Jam Jadega clan which is a branch of Samma Rajput, the religion they follow is Sufi Islam.

emphasis more on honor and dishonor than on purity and pollution.” Interestingly, with the assimilation within the society and situating themselves within the Muslim community, also comes the need to retain their identity observed in the emphasis the community lays on endogamous marriages. In the interviews, Rafiq bhai brought to one’s notice a lot of such instances where the family had to pay a token fine for marrying outside their community.

Illiteracy and poverty are the two problems that the community deals with everyday. Unemployment persists mostly among the younger generation now where they are completely dependent on earning through drumming. During the wedding season, the *Garba* dance programmes during Navratri and other such occasions these people are the most sought after for their highly spirited drumming, orchestras and DJ bands. They are also often called for programmes outside, in Mumbai and Delhi, to perform their Sidi goma dance in the hotels during the peak tourist season. There are months when the young men sit without any work at home much to the displeasure of those involved in encouraging the community towards employment, education and upliftment. With a small organisation for the Sidi jamaat where the community selects one person as their ‘patel’ with few other members to form a committee, the Jamnagar Sidis are constantly involved in improving their education and social conditions. Vocational training to girls, grants for getting them admission in colleges and other causes for women are often taken up by committees like the Mahila Vikas Mandal. Despite its ups and downs, and constant friction within members and outside with the local administration, the efforts continue nevertheless by some determined, literate men and women, often retired from services in VSNL or municipal cooperation. In my field visits to Jambur and Shirvan though, I witnessed quite the contrary. Jambur is a small Sidi village near Madhapur with around 150 small kuchcha houses. Further ahead, not very far from Jambur is Shirvan, a village deep into the gir forest, access to which is restricted and one often needs a permit from the forest authorities to visit this village with around 15-20 houses of the Sidis. The economic conditions here are even more deplorable. A low literacy rate has often resulted in them not being able to seek

maximum benefit from whatever support⁸¹ is given to them by the central government owing to their 'Scheduled Tribe' status⁸². Therefore, the Sidis living in cities and small townships like Jamnagar and Vadinar are comparatively better off than their more impoverished counterparts living in Jambur and Talara district, in the Sasan area. In many interviews in Jamnagar, for some among the younger generation the idea of visiting Talara was met with a lot of hesitation, a sympathetic query of how the experience had been and amusement at their complete indifference to anyone who visits them from outside their community. Unaware of the society outside, immersed in their own lives, mostly working as labourers or unskilled workers, and spending the rest of the time drinking and playing cards is how they are usually considered and described by city-based Sidis. References to Talara as 'mini Africa' surfaced many a times hinting at the high concentration of the Sidis not only as small pockets in the villages but also to their presence in the markets, where some worked as vendors or owned small *paan* shops. The Sidis living in Jamnagar, on the other hand, understand themselves to be aware of the activities and issues in the society at large. The young men subsisting themselves through music and dance are exposed to and highly influenced by rap and hip hop and cultural icons like Michael Jackson and Akon. With the growing tourist industry, where entertainment becomes a source of economic improvement, this serves as an interesting play on ethnicity.

Saints and Rituals

It is to the extension of trade in the locally mined agate to Africa, that the Sidis of Gujarat trace their links. It is believed that in the 14th century, an Abyssinian named Sidi Mubarak Nobi, came to Gujarat to trade in agate. He is accepted as the community progenitor and saint (*pir*). Referred to as Baba Gor or Gori Pir by the Sidis, he is often associated with the arrival of Islam during this time. Rafiq bhai explained that sorcery and magic practices were quite rampant in India. To combat such evil spirits, Baba Gor, while he was on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca,

⁸¹ According to the census of India 1961, Jambur village was the first Sidi enclosure to get support in the form of its own panchayat (five member leadership committee), a primary school and a shop.

⁸² Jayanti Patel mentions in her article that while Saurashtra Sidis were declared a Scheduled Tribe, quite peculiarly the Sidis living in Ahmedabad or other areas were not included in this.

was given the order by the Prophet Mohammad⁸³ to go to India and spread the message of Islam⁸⁴. The story of the confrontation between Baba Gor and Makhan Devi further supports this belief of the Sidis. In separate interviews, Rafiq bhai and Iqbal uncle recounted this story, rather animatedly about Makhan Devi, the demon goddess, who lived on top of the hill in Ratanpur. Foreshadowing virtues of goodness, her black magic was proving to be inauspicious for the people and the land too, making it barren and infertile. Noticing this, Baba Gor was sent by the prophet from Mecca to vanquish this evil spirit and rescue the people. The conflict between the two continued for twelve years. During the fight, Makhan Devi sank into the ground with her long braid still sticking out. Gori pir was unable to vanquish her completely, following which he sought the help of his brother Baba Habash and sister *Mai misra*. After they came to Gujarat to help Baba Gor, it was through a game of dice that Makhan Devi accepted that she could be defeated if they win the game. According to both my informants, it was also a matter of the Islamic rules of modesty in which Baba Gor and Baba Habash were bound according to which they were forbidden to fight against a female. Thus, after having won the game of dice, it was *Mai misra* who succeeded in overpowering the demoness completely. It is believed that she kept on beating Makhan Devi's braid that was sticking out with her shoe till it was swallowed up in the ground. Consequently, Baba Gor built his residence and agate workshop on top of the hill, along with his brother and sister. Ratanpur, therefore, is an important sacred place for the Sidis as it houses the main shrine (*dargah*) of these three important Sidi *pirs*.

⁸³ According to this legend, as J.Mar Kenoyer and Kuldeep K. Bhan note, it would have been during the life of Prophet Muhammad (570 AD to 632 AD) that Gori Pir would have arrived in Gujarat. This dates back to almost a century before the conquest of Sindh by the Arabs in 711 AD). This association of Gori Pir with Prophet Muhammad, which has not been seen to be supported by other historical or oral traditions, they point out, probably 'reflects a legitimization of their Islamic heritage and mission.' in "Sidis And The Agate Bead Industry Of Western India", *Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians*, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p.49

Baba Gor, as Iqbal uncle pointed out, was originally known as Hazrat Sheikh Nubi Mubarak Sarkar, Nubi suggesting Nubian⁸⁵ origins. It was only when he was given the knowledge and the mission to spread Islam (*vilayat*) that he was named Sheikh Sayyid Baba Gor. Historians have agreed on the fact that Baba Gor originally came from Ethiopia⁸⁶ who travelled and stayed in Mecca for some time. It is infact a commonly accepted legend, says Patel (1986) that Baba Gor is supposed to have originally come from Kano in Nigeria via Sudan and Mecca after his Hajj pilgrimage. Some believe that it was in Iraq that he encountered his Sufi master Ahmad Kabir Rifa'i (Basu 1999: 9), presumed to be of the lineage of the founder of the Rifa'i movement⁸⁷. He studied with the Rifa'i Sufis, whose master bestowed upon him the honorific Baba Ghaur, which derives from an Arabic word meaning 'revered master of deep meditation'⁸⁸ or Baba Ghur, meaning 'saint of the deep pit, valley'. From here he was sent on his 'missioning journey to India'.⁸⁹ Wandering as a religious mendicant and a bead trader he travelled to various places including Sindh and Karachi, before eventually reaching Saurashtra (south Gujarat) where he travelled extensively. According to Rafiq bhai, he first came to a place called Ghoga in Bhavnagar district before finally settling down in Rajpipla hills near Bharuch and Khambat. Here he developed mining and trade in agate.⁹⁰ Many of his Sidi followers continued with the agate business until after Independence, for whom it served as a major source of income and economic support. Believed to have supernatural properties in the Gulf and East Africa, it was largely used by Muslims as prayer beads and talismans. In one story narrated by Rafiq bhai, Baba Gor was part of a king's army/battalion (*lashkar*). The king, though a powerful ruler, was unable to conquer some part of land occupied by a rival king, despite various attempts. This was a matter of grave concern for him when one day during his evening prayers, or in his

⁸⁵ An ancient region of north-eastern Africa (southern Egypt and northern Sudan) on the Nile; much of Nubia is now under Lake Nasser (WordWeb dictionary)

⁸⁶ Alpers believes that the name Sidi Mubarak Nobi suggests quite different links. Mubarak is a characteristic Islamic name and the suffix Nobi indicates that he was from Sudan, rather than Ethiopian highlands or Christian Abyssinia. See Alpers, 2004, op. cit. p. 28.

⁸⁷ Amy Catlin, 2004, op cit, p. 184. Quoting Trimmingham (1971 :37-38), she explains, 'the rifa'i were renowned for their retreat in the swamps of southern Iraq where they meditated and engaged in ecstatic dancing, firewalking and riding lions.'

⁸⁸ www.bavagor.com Accessed on March 13, 2011

⁸⁹ Catlin, 2004, op. Cit., p. 184

⁹⁰ A certain variety of agate beads are known as Baba Ghori, and another maroon cornelian stone is named after his sister and successor Mai Mariyam, also known as *Mai misra*/Mishra. Cited in Lodhi, 2008.

dream, he felt Prophet Muhammad telling him that there was one person in his cantonment (*chavni*) who could help him win over his enemy. He said that if the king goes out at night, in the cantonment, he would see this man praying (*'ibadat karta hua milega'*). It thus happened that one night on his walk, it was Baba Gor who was seen praying and was appointed the army leader the next day by the king. Interestingly, to connect all the different stories about Baba Gor as a ruler, as a religious mendicant and a bead merchant, Rafiq bhai said that despite being part of the king's army, it was his religious inclinations that made him take the pilgrimage to Hajj. On being given the responsibility of spreading the message of Islam in India, he was sent here as a bead merchant because he needed something to subsist him and from here he took upon himself the *fakiri* order as he got more and more involved in the sacred task bestowed upon him. The connection of his different roles through one narrative, personally one would want to treat with some apprehension. This however does not deny the fact that these narratives might exist as different stories around the legend of Baba Gor.

The stories of Baba Gor's travels find a proud place in the narratives of the history of the Sidis. Some of these places he visited are commemorated by them during the *'urs*, the death anniversary of the saint, celebrated annually. The community's faith in the sanctity of their saint is reflected in their customs, traditions and rituals, whatever they have been able to retain. The reference to the tomb of the Muslim saint Gori Pir is first found in the writings of the Muslim historian ad-Dabir of the 16th century. The document by ad-Dabir mentions Mahmud Khilji, the first Khilji ruler of Malwa undertaking a pilgrimage in the year 1451 to the tomb of an 'Abyssinian' saint called Gori Pir, while he was on his military campaigns through south Gujarat. Years later, points out Helene Basu, references to 'negroes' settled at the shrine were made in accounts by British colonial officers. The shrine since its inception has served as 'a material base for subsistence' to African slaves dispersed over various areas.⁹¹ It becomes a marker of their identity uniting Sidis in different regions. Rafiq bhai

⁹¹ Helene Basu, "Redefining Boundaries : Twenty Years at the Shrine of Gori Pir", Sidis and Scholars : Essays on African Indians, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A .Alpers (eds.), (India; Rainbow Publishers, USA; Red Sea Press, 2004), p. 62

mentioned how, in one of the TADIA (The African Diaspora in Asia) conferences, during the informal discussions, the Sidis from Bombay once enquired if they had a community *pir* and where the shrine was located. They were quite surprised and elated, he says, to find this link in this search for their roots amidst a history of displacement. Baba Gor thus becomes emblematic of a distinct identity of the Sidi community, the Sidi *jamat* which identifies itself, defines its spiritual identity with the 'fakir' order. This is what holds the community together, allows them claim to a part of history which is theirs.

The social life of the Sidis, therefore, revolves around the cult of the Sidi Sufi saints. Practicing, as Catlin mentions, the 'Indian Variant of Sunni Islam', they worship their ancestors and founders of settlements with song and dance celebrations at the *dargah*, that is, in ritual contexts, and in other ordinary non-ritualistic contexts too. Without any formal affiliation to the four major Sufi orders, this cult seems distinct where very simply put, on the basis of one's observations in Jamnagar and Jambur, the Sidis seem concerned primarily with the embodiment and fostering of the gifts brought to them by their ancestor and saint, Baba Gor, the black African mystic; Wandering as a 'fakir', begging for alms while playing certain instruments and singing songs in praise of the Allah, travelling in the forests of Suarashtra and Gir, keeping the lions at bay through his powers and performing miracles such as curing people of their illness and suffering. This music and dance, leonine associations, the joyful spirit of the people, also suggested through words like *mauj* and *lahar* in the song texts, besides the phenotypical physical markers is what the community identifies with and celebrates.

The leonine associations are overtly referred to more in the Sidi villages around the Gir forest (Sasan). Some Sidis work as forest guides in the safaris. Interactions with some of them like Imran and his friend were tinged with lively anecdotes, some very evidently playful and exaggerated about their experiences with the lions in the forest. The nonchalance about the frequent lion sightings in villages like Shirvan, which is within the forest cover, are moments of innocent boast and pride, especially in

conversations with city dwellers whose cameras start clicking even at the sight of a pug mark during the safari. Identification with the lion, the carefree and fearless spirit of the Sidis is thus more played out here. Joking with his friends, Imran often referred to his community as 'badshah', the strong, unafraid and unrelenting Sidis. References to these motifs of the lion, jungle, 'jungle dance' abound in the performances of the Sidi goma, for instance performances by the group led by Imraan named 'Habshee Goma'. Performed mainly for the tourists, in hotels and other commercial programmes around, their dance in comparison to other groups in Jamnagar perfectly complements and is complemented by their association with the forest. With the painted faces, peacock feathers and the lion-printed skirts as their costumes, all of which is common to the other Goma groups too, the idea of 'Africanness' and the 'primitive tribal dance' is performed to the optimum. Opening with popular phrases like *mambo jambo*, *hakuna matata* and few Swahili expressions, the exoticism does not leave you even for a moment. Besides, the space completely transforms into a carnivalesque space with the energetic, athletic movements around the fire, blowing out fire with kerosene in their mouth, flinging coconuts (sometimes saucers) up in the air and then breaking them with their heads⁹². Moreover, the movements imitate animals from the forest, monkeys scratching their bodies, hunter and hunted images, and gestures sometimes ridiculing the bourgeois codes of propriety. All this and more was part of the Goma performance I attended by Imran's group at Porbandar, as part of the Foundation Day cultural program of the Amar Group of companies. The performance was the concluding dance and like a perfect climax, the build up, constant references to it as 'ajooba' dance, 'never seen before item' by the compere worked successfully in eliciting the excitement in the audience; from the first glimpse of the performers in their costumes on the stage till the last bit till they join the dancers on the stage. It did not take one by surprise when in the middle the performance is literally stopped owing to the ruckus it had made with the audience going completely berserk, wanting to jump on stage to join them, only to be resumed when people got back to their seats. Each and every tactic and dance movements by the performers had the audience completely entertained. The nature of the *zika* sang during the stage performances is evidently and justifiably so, less intense as what is

⁹² These practices were earlier usually observed in the shrine too during the trance possessions. The ecstasy that one experienced during the ritual drumming and dancing sessions led one to such transformation where such tasks could be carried out.

intended in these performances is pure entertainment to earn money, with this being the only source of livelihood for some. Short, repetitive phrases like *gor gor baba gor, sobilale sobila, chimilele chimipaya, mastkalandar illallah* are sung within a span of five to ten mins while the dancers warm up and set the fire. It later recedes into the background with the drum beats, as a component adding up to the spectacle that is unfolding before completely spirited audience now. mobiles, cameras, half of the people on the stage, some being carried by the dancers on the shoulders, others sticking out money to the dancers who receive it with improvised animated gestures every time, all coalescing toward the last part of the performance where the audience joins the dancers to the lively rhythm of the *Garba*. This brief description of the *Goma* performance in a non-ritualistic space should help one juxtapose the song and drumming tradition in the ritual activity of the 'urs and come to an understanding of how these performances are imagined and executed by the performers.

The rituals performed at the *dargah*, the song, trance inducing drumming and dances are all evocative of this *Sidi fakir tariqa* that they find themselves dedicated to. Anthropologists like Helene Basu and ethnomusicologists like Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy have acknowledged in their research the existence of this practice, till before independence of Sidi women, men and children travelling in small groups as fakirs. They collected alms, singing, dancing and drumming from village to village. It is, in fact, these music traditions and the percussive elements that define them as distinct from the other fakir traditions and ritual specialists. Instruments such as *malunga* besides the drums like the *musindo* or the *naubat* are venerated as 'emblems of Sidi fakirs' and symbols of Gori Pir. Mumtaz aunty, Iqbal bhai's wife very emphatically claimed that the drums and the musical styles were inherited or passed on to them from their ancestors in 'fakiri'. The Sidis also trace this tradition to Hazrat Bilal⁹³, whom they believe travelled as a *fakir* playing the *daf* and singing songs in praise of Allah (*zikr*). Thus, music and dance, 'tied to the foundations of their Islamic roots'

⁹³ Hazrat Bilal was an African slave who, owing to his religious devotion was chosen by the Prophet Mohammad to recite the *azan*, the call to prayer to the believers from the mosque. Sidis perceive themselves to be descendants of Bilal whom they believe was of Ethiopian origin. With their ancestor and saint Baba Gor as the 'bringer' or 'messenger of Islam' and Bilal as the first African slave *muezzin*, Sidis regard themselves as gifted and the chosen few to carry forward the spiritual tradition. Some of the spiritual songs that the Sidis sing and dance to (*zikr*) are dedicated to Hazrat Bilal too.

serve to convey their ethnic identity.⁹⁴ As Helene Basu notes, “the specifics of Sidi *fakir* practices were made manifest in the style of singing referred to as *jhikkar*⁹⁵, drumming and dances known as *goma* or *dammal*.” The nuances of these styles and the nature of the Sidi cult with rituals centered around their *pirs*, will become clear in the following section within the context of the *urs* celebration at Jamnagar⁹⁶, held in the month of March, two months before *Rajjab*, that was part of the field work for this research.

‘Urs at Jamnagar

The narrow street leads up to the beautifully lit dargah, brimming with people. The space seems completely transformed. It is finally the time of the annually held urs in Jamnagar, the time to experience for real the stories and anecdotes that people have shared with me so far during the field work about the ‘mauj’ and ‘masti’ at the ‘urs. One can feel the festivity that envelops the place. Men and women in their best clothes. Little girls in bangles run around with heads covered. The boys in their white skull caps are all set and excited to accompany their fathers or uncles in playing the dhamal. There is a constant murmur in the air, women exchanging greetings, talking (chit-chatting), catching up with what their daily domesticity doesn’t leave them with any time for. The muzavar⁹⁷ Mahmood Babu presides over the preparations in the chilla inside which is covered with beautifully embroidered and sequenced chadar and chodh, decorated with flowers. The sweet fragrance of milk, gulab jal⁹⁸ and itr⁹⁹ from the morning ritual of ghusal of the saints still scents the air faintly. At one corner in the dargah sits another caretaker burning coal and camphor for the lubaan¹⁰⁰. At midnight, the place is effervescent, alive as if waiting in anticipation of what is going to follow. It seems pregnant with mixed feelings of excitement, serious religiosity, ritual fervor as well as a moment of fun, togetherness and general

⁹⁴ Catlin, 2004, op. cit, p. 182

⁹⁵ This is similar to the *zikr* mentioned elsewhere in the work.

⁹⁶ The time of celebration of the *urs* differs at every place inhabited by the Sidis. For instance, *urs* at Ratanpur main shrine is celebrated in the month of June (*Rajjab*, as per the Muslim calendar).

⁹⁷ *Muzavar* is one who presides over the activities in the *dargah*.

⁹⁸ Rose water

⁹⁹ Incense

¹⁰⁰ Camphor incense

camaraderie. People are coming in, filling in the space... different, heterogeneous material elements. What will follow, what will come of these different entities, how the different intensities will assemble and synthesize, we all know will not completely transform them but also the space. I am very much a part of the anticipation too. I wait with bated breath, while also being conscious of this new spatio-temporality of my being, this very moment.

While the camphor incense diffuses into the space, the mugarman, decorated with flowers and garlands, is worshipped and prepared for the occasion. With the three blows of the nafil, everyone settles down gradually. The musindo players take their place alongside the mugarman players. The excited boys are ready with the small dhamal placed under their left arm. Chandan mixed with gulab jal and itr is kept in a bowl is placed before the chilla of Baba Gor. Kava made of sweet milk is served to the seven dhamalis and then shared with everyone present. With the next blows of the nafil, the nissandar or the chhadidar announces the beginning of the celebration of Baba Gor, seeking his blessings to preside over the three day festivities. The musindo begins, setting the pace for the mugarman and thus commences the drumming, setting the rhythm for the baithi dhamal. The mugarman in a ponderous slow pulse complements the beats of the musindo to which begins the evocation and praise of the Allah and Baba Gor badshah, 'avale nabiyo salwale, avale bismillah...' Gradually building up in a leader-chorus fashion, everyone from the kids to the elderly in the gathering participates in this serious, meditative zikr called bismillah in Gujarati and sulvaat in Swahili.

It was as *baqshish*, a token from the king of Jamnagar (*rajwara*) that the Sidis got the space here for Baba Gor and Maisaab (as *Mai misra* is fondly called by the Sidis) *dargah*. The *dargah*¹⁰¹ was recently built (after Independence) and has since then, despite problems of low attendance and other frictions, provided the Sidis here with a

¹⁰¹ Besides the main Gori Pir shrine, there are several small shrines built wherever Sidis live to commemorate Baba Gor. These smaller shrines are known as *chilla* while only the main shrine is referred to as the *dargah*. The Jamnagar shrine is a *chilla* too, though people here prefer to call it *dargah*.

meeting ground. If not on other occasions, the 'urs seemed as the perfect time for such a union, when the entire community got together to be part of the three-day festivities at the *dargah*. These festivities commemorate the saint's final union with god on his death anniversary ('urs). As organizers, audience, participants and performers, everyone assembles in this major ritual event of the 'dhamal'.

An essential element of the Gori Pir cult, the *dhamal* encompasses the various forms of sacred worship observed by the people of the community as well as outsiders who wish to be part of the festivities, or are sometimes specially invited by their Sidi friends. It should be noted here that the Sidi cult comes across as a syncretic cult in how, as Helene Basu puts in rightly, "by eclectically combing and mixing Sufi, Bhil, Hindu and African elements, the cult of Gori Pir can be understood as a new, uniquely creolized cultural production that has been brought about by the inheritors of Sidis with their social environment."¹⁰² In fact, the syncretism of this cult is further reflected in the space of the *dargah*, be it the central shrine or smaller shrines or *chilla* in other places such as this one in Jamnagar. In Helene Basu's words, "the liminal space of the *dargah* provided an arena which allowed for boundary crossings and for the accommodation of difference. Social, ethnic or religious constructions of identity were treated dismissively." The cult does not burden with any elaborate tenets of religiosity or by professing a particular religion. What brings different communities of believers together is the belief in being uplifted from one's suffering by the power of the saints. The ecstatic forms of worship open out to everyone equally, the music and dance liberate, fill one with pleasure. The cult is thus, "addressed to any human being (*inshan*) suffering from poverty, illness and oppression' where the Sidi task involves "transforming the suffering which caused believers to visit the shrine into pleasure and enjoyment", where this transformation is experienced in moments of ecstasy during ritual singing and dancing. The Sidi fakirs understand their goal as evoking and giving pleasure, fun and enjoyment (*majha*). This idea pervades not only their

¹⁰² Basu, 2004, op. Cit. Pp. 66-67

Basu makes these observations in the context of her field work at the central shrine of Gori Pir in Ratanpur. These lines are quoted with the awareness that though the field is different, the central idea behind the cult remains the same. The way the cult exists and is understood in other shrines is broadly on these lines. This is also further substantiated by the observations made during the field work for this research.

idea and philosophy of life but also translates into their religious contexts where their notion of religiosity does not “emphasize unambiguous surrender to a superior power; on the contrary, it aims at creating a counter-world in which claims to authority and power could be proved hollow.”¹⁰³ Joking and acting as jesters are common during the group dancing. Humor and general playfulness in gestures sometimes mocking and ridiculing the claims of society are observed in both ritual and non-ritualistic contexts. The *dhamal* thus makes space for both non-serious carnivalesque bonding between people as well as serious meditative moments of ecstasy and trance. This shall unfold during the course of this section which seeks to recreate in words such moments that added different hues and emotions to the three day highly spirited ‘*urs*’ celebration.

The ‘*dhamal*’ in Gujarati is also referred to as ‘*goma*’ by the Sidis, Iqbal uncle pointed out in one of the interviews. Noted in other research work too, *Goma* or *Ngoma*, derived from Bantu or Swahili meaning drum or drum dance, they believe could be a recent usage owing to contacts with East Africa as earlier accounts usually used *dammal*. *Ngoma*, writes Amy Catlin, is the “Swahili name of an important drum-dance healing ritual in south and central Africa, including the coastal areas.” A long wooden drum, similar to the *mugarman* used by the Sidis, is called *Ngoma* in Africa. She further points out, as it came through in the interview with Iqbal uncle too, the Sidis referred only to the dance as ‘*goma*’, hence the name of their dance groups, Sidi Goma or Habshee Goma groups, touring and performing in different social occasions. It was not usually used to refer to the drum, though Iqbal uncle did, in passing, once mention that the *musindo* is called *goma* in Swahili but this usage is very uncommon among the Sidis. *Goma* is how people too have come to understand the dance of the Sidis popularly.

There are seven different type of instruments played in *dhamal*: *mugarman*, *musindo*, *dhamal*, *mai misra*, *malunga*, *naubat* and *nafil*. The term *mugarman*, according to linguist Abdul Aziz Lodhi, derives from Swahili which means “four feet”. While the

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 66

large standing drum used by the Sidis is three-legged, it does bear very evident African remnants, as other ethnomusicologists have also observed. The technique and the use of such drums is quite common in Africa, unlike India where footed drums are not known to exist. Built like the *ngoma* drum of Zimbabwe using a hollow log into which three arches are cut into the base. The upper membrane which is hit by the players, usually made of buffalo skin, is attached using wooden pegs. A set of three *mugarman*, one big and two comparatively smaller in size, is played in the *dargah*. Women are forbidden from touching it and sometimes, it is even to be kept away from the shadow of women. While the latter may not be strictly followed, women are asked not to touch the instrument and especially keep away during their menstruation. The bigger *mugarman* is never to leave the shrine precincts, though the smaller one can sometimes be taken out, but only for ritualistic purposes. For touring programs, hence, Sidis have started making collapsible *mugarman* with metal stands to make them less cumbersome and easy to carry.

The *mugarman*, Sidis believe, came from the *dariya* during the sea voyages by their ancestors and Baba Gor. It is thus revered as a cultural marker of their past, an identifying feature of their community. The sanctity associated with the instrument can thus especially be seen in the small rituals that accompany the preparations, before the *dhamal* commences. As a personification of their ancestors, it is properly covered with a cloth, decorated with flowers, worshipped by making an offering of raw eggs and lemon (done to ward off the evil eye) and smoke from the *lubaan*. The *mugarman* is also referred to sometimes as Sheikh Farid or Selani Pir, named after their ancestors.

Musindo- believed to be retaining an African derived name *msondo*, used for cylindrical drums in Tanzania, *musindo* is a medium-sized laced cylindrical drum. It is very similar to the ubiquitous Indian *dhol*, though it is played with only the hands, unlike the *dhol* where sticks are used. During the *khari dhamal*, *musindo* is sometimes slung around the neck and played, while it is always otherwise, and especially during the *baithi dhamal*, played by placing it horizontally on the ground. Many Ethiopian

connections have also been observed and made with this instrument by students of anthropology.¹⁰⁴

Dhamal is a small laced cylindrical drum held under the armpit and played with the other hand. In the *khari dhamal*, with the crescendo building up by the virtuoso drumming, to which everyone sings and dances with complete abandon, this drum comes effective in spinning around, and dancing while taking small steps backward and forward. The dancer usually comes in the centre of a rhythmically moving circle making such swift movements with the *dhamal*.

Naubat – According to Iqbal uncle, *naubat* is the Swahili word for the shallow kettledrum which is part of the instrument ensemble in *dhamal*. When refurbished with plastic heads, it is called *seener* or *senior* in Gujarati. A large single *naubat* is a common sight in the *dargah*, where it is played during the *lubaan* in the morning and evening, especially on Thursdays¹⁰⁵. In the Nagarchi *pir dargah* at Jambur, people from different castes and communities, both Hindus and Muslims, from the nearby villages visit the *dargah* during the evening *lubbān* on Thursdays and worship to the accompaniment of the rhythm of the *naubat*. Believed to have been played during the war for different purposes, for instance to send an alert against the enemy, sometimes by the African slaves on the ships¹⁰⁶, the ‘naubat’ is reminiscent of Nagarchi *pir* for the people here. Considered to be Baba Gor’s younger brother, Nagarchi *pir* is worshipped by the Sidis of Jambur who many believe also served in the army of Mahmud Ghazni and played the drums. Nagarchi, some propose, means drum master. For Akram bhai, who played the *naubat* one Thursday on one of my field visits to Jambur, the instrument and its rhythm symbolizes and evokes these associations during the *lubaan*, when they remember their saint. As an aside, it must be noted here that the Nagarchi baba *dargah* at Jambur is again a good example of the polyvalence that

¹⁰⁴ Catlin, 2004, op. cit, p. 192

¹⁰⁵ Monday and Thursday, (especially Thursday) are significant days of the week in a Muslim calendar. These are dedicated to the remembrance of the *pir*; family and community saints.

¹⁰⁶ "They brought with them their musical instruments, drumming in the ships, dancing, singing, doing the religious practices that they were doing in Africa, even falling into trances in the ships," says Dr Ababu Minda Yinene, an Ethiopian anthropologist working in India. <http://www.binscorner.com/pages/j/jambur-indias-african-community.html>. Accessed on March 20, 2011

describes the Sidi Sufi cult incorporating different religious conceptions leading to its 'heterogenous cult following'. In fact the eclectic combination of different cultural elements and diffusion of cultural boundaries that Basu mentions for the central shrine and also mentioned earlier in the context of the Jamnagar *chilla*, is more pronounced and evident here, owing to its location where it is a central place of worship for all the nearby villages. Hence, it was interesting to see once a man from the Rabari community during the lubaan here, calling out aloud to Nagarci baba at times in the middle of his possession.

Malunga is regarded as the most unusual instrument, once played by the Sidis and disappearing now owing to the absence of the ancestors who were unable to pass this on to the coming generation, largely because of its difficult and tedious playing technique. Since it was not a part of the ensemble in the 'urs, where drums, conches and rattles prevail, it is mainly through research by ethnomusicologists like Amy Catlin that one understands about the instrument. Personal observations were limited to the interviews where the people tried to recreate the image of the instrument and place in its significance within the rituals. Instruments resembling the *malunga* are hardly known in India and its technique and musical structure bear specific African resemblances. It is in all probability a Bantu word, 'a wonderfully eastern African bantu word in structure', derived from the word 'lung' which means "to join by tying". This musical bow has a fixed guard resonator and a tuning noose found to be very similar to the Afro-Brazilian *berimbau*. As Amy Catlin explains, 'like the *berimbau*, the string of the *malunga* is separated into two parts of differing pitches by a tuning noose, or brace, or tied around the bolt bow and string at a point where octaves result. A resonating half-gourd is moved nearer and farther from the body to create timbre modulations, similar to vocal modulations...the string is struck with a stick held in the right hand which also holds a rattle- a coconut rattle is used by the Sidis, but a basket rattle in brazil.'¹⁰⁷ Used mainly in mendicancy, references to Baba Gor wandering as a fakir with a begging bowl (*kishti*) playing this instrument abound in the interactions with the Sidis. Iqbal uncle mentioned of Baba Gor being known as *mast malang fakir*, where *malang*, implying *malunga* evokes associations of the saint with the instrument, 'gori pir ka nishan', as Catlin puts it.

¹⁰⁷ Catlin, 2004, op. cit, pp 188-189

Nafil or *Nafil* is the conch shell, predominant even in India in different ceremonial and ritual contexts. The *nafil*, writes *Amy Catlin*, were straight metal trumpets used by the Arabs in the 11th century in military and royal processions. While it could have been later adopted in India from here, the *nafil* in the *dhamal* does come across as the result of confluence between the Sidis and the Indian Ocean world. Rafiq bhai, on being questioned about this probable influence, did not seem much convinced or inclined to answer.

Mai misra, a pair of coconut rattles played usually by women and children are another African resembling instruments named after one of their saints. Sister of Baba Gor, *Mai misra*, could mean ‘mother Egypt’, drawing from with the Misr region of Egypt. The hollow coconuts are usually filled with agate nodules or beads, still found near the main shrine in Ratanpur. The *Gori Pir* cult has a well delineated male and female sphere. While this will become clear with the description of the respective rituals during the next two days of the ‘*urs*’, it is pertinent to understand this infusion of female power symbolized by the rattles here.

All these instruments, each with its specific sound, technique and rhythm structure communicate, punctuate and enhance the interactions in the given space, leading people through a range of emotions. They are usually played to the accompaniment of the ‘*ziker*’, songs part of the musical repertoire of the Sidis sung in the praise of their ancestral pirs. Meaning ‘remembrance, mentioning or telling’ (Platts), ‘*ziker*’ is the ritual or devotional practice in Sufism of ‘reciting or ‘recollection’ of god’s name. ‘The constant recollection of god’, *ziker*, writes Qureshi, “consists of the repetition-silent or voiced of divine names or religious formulae”.¹⁰⁸ Replete with local references, the Sidi *zikers* describe the journeys and the different attributes of their saints, for instance the play on words such as *leher/dariya* and *mauj*. These encompass the essence of the sidi fakir tradition as mentioned earlier, where these

¹⁰⁸ Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *sufi music of india and Pakistan : sound, context and meaning in Qawwali*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 82

words imply both 'wave' and 'enjoyment, rapture, ecstasy or frenzy'.¹⁰⁹ Very rightly put by Amy Catlin, "it pictures *Gori Pir* obtaining his spiritual gifts of joy and rapture from the waves of the sea during his lengthy journey to India, and then sharing the gift with the seekers who come into his presence. To listen to this *jikr* is to be reminded of a ship setting sail slowly, and then coursing through the waves'.¹¹⁰ The punning on these two words is thus part of the 'sacred fun' that is embodied during the Sidi rituals and performances. Varying from meditative invocation to short, repetitive phrases to which they dance ecstatically in groups, *zikr* are mostly composed in Urdu and Gujarati while containing many Swahili words¹¹¹ too. In the *dhamal* they are sung in the call and response (*sawal* and *jawab*) style between the musicians and the rest of the people assembled joining as chorus. It is either on the basis of seniority or the knowledge of the *zikrs* that one of the musicians on the *musindo* leads. As Rafiq bhai explained, there is no hierarchy within the musicians in the case of drumming.

The incense brazier is carried around for people and the instruments to take the smoke from the lubaan. With Muhammad Mangida leading on the musindo, the singing progresses in leader-chorus style with allah and bilal resounding in the space. Still seated, everyone sings together evoking their saint Baba Gor, salwale nabiyo. Describing his voyages over the sea, 'sayila illallah dom gore badshah, dariya ma che, che che dariya ma' to zikr seeking his blessings, 'baba mere pir niwaro...', to simply singing his name aloud, 'gor gor Baba Gor', the baithi dhamal continues for the first twenty minutes. With about seven zikrs sung during this time, the chorus moves towards a heightened climax, stops abruptly, setting the mood, warms up the players for the khari dhamal which is to follow after a short prayer. Men and kids are excitedly arranging themselves in a circle in the centre of the shrine, to the gradually increasing tempo of the mugarman and musindo. Moving together in a circle, maintaining the rhythm of the group with that of the drums, the dhamal builds up in energy and intensity. Along with the dancers, the rest of the people, mainly women,

¹⁰⁹ Catlin, 2004, op. cit, p. 196

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 196

¹¹¹ The meanings to a lot of Swahili words in the *zikr* are unknown to the Sidis. They are simply being passed on to the generations through the songs.

seated around the dancers, continue singing the zikrs, rejoicing in the name of Gor badshah. The zikr is a short reiteration now as compared to its meditative enunciation during the baithi dhamal.

The tempo is increasing. The mugarman and musindo keep up with the high-pitched rhythm of the senior (naubat with a plastic head), all moving towards a feverish pitch. Two small girls playing the mai misra try to maintain the pace too while the nafil blows intermittently to heighten the excitement. The drumming is revealing itself in full virtuosity and rigour. Served with bhang at times, each part of the body of the drummers pulsates with the rhythm. Women and men, being drawn into ecstasy built up the drums, dance possessed- in trance. As the time of the sandal nears, there is complete tumult in the shrine with the reverberating drums driving everyone to a state of heightened emotions, frenzied excitement, transcending ordinary moments of consciousness. The songs give way to the drumming and what hovers over the space is a cloud pregnant with sound, extremely energetic fast beats of the instrument ensemble.

Sandal is that time of the night around 2:30- 3:00 which seems to encapsulate the quintessential spirit and the most intense moment in the urs. It is a time of revelry of everything that Baba Gor is for the community. It celebrates the victory of Baba Gor, of what he was and did for the community and people at large. The *chandan* mixed with *gulab jal* and *itr* that was prepared and kept before the *baithi dhamal* commenced is now applied to Baba Gor, Baba Habash and Mai Misra. The muzavar puts the imprints of his palms (soaked in this sandalwood paste) on their *chilla*. This is considered very pious and auspicious. After the paste is applied to the instruments, it is given to the other people and worshippers. As Rafiq bhai explained, while the three day festivities also take the form of a 'mela' (fair), 'utsav' (occasion), of the community get-together, it is 'sandal' which encompasses the sanctity of the ritual celebration of 'urs'.

The *dhamal* continues the entire night with alternating tempos and energies till the morning six o'clock *azan*. The goat sacrifice follows the *azan* which is done to the accompaniment of the smaller *mugarman* ('sheikh farrid ka chchota bajta hai' (Iqbal uncle)). The morning *dhamal* especially includes zikr dedicated to Hazrat Bilal : *la illah il lallah, bilal ka fazar dekho, dom gore badshah, bilal ka fazar dekho* ('fazar', in urdu, meaning morning). A brief session of *dhamal* concludes the activities of the first night. The *dhamal* usually sung in the morning is dedicated to Hazrat Bilal. People go back to their homes only to come back after a few hours for the morning ritual which starts off the second day of 'urs.

Huge groups of women are assembled at the 'panj pir ki mazar'. It is women who will be at the centre of activities today. Mumtaz aunty while leaving home had already foretold, "see how much fun it will be today. We women will be dancing to the dhamal.' Shining steel water tumblers, garlanded at the neck, are placed in a row. They are being filled with water from the well which will then be carried to the dargah to prepare the evening meal, nyaaz. Women carry the water on their heads. In two rows, with other women walking behind them, to the accompaniment of two musindo, mai misra, singing zikrs dedicated to both Baba Gor and Mai misra, they walk through the streets of Jamnagar. The muzavar, after certain intervals, keeps making the offering of raw eggs and lemon to ward off any evil eye.

Some people are already seated inside. The smoke from the lubaan fills in the space. The tempo and the ambience of the dargah is being set by the playing of the mugarman. The procession swaying to the beats of the musindo enters the precincts of the dargah and then the central part of the shrine. The point of contact between this external rhythm with that of the space inside seems rather interesting. The two spaces, their different tempos, rhythms interact, reassemble and rather surreptitiously within no time, everyone is swaying to their rhythm together. The musindo and the mugarman take the entire space within their soundscape. The women carrying their water pots dance rhythmically in a circle in the central part, joined by other women, some of whom in trance dance inside the circle. Some are dancing in joy like the little

girls dancing with their friends, others slowly getting into the mood, just simply dance, letting their body sway and swing to the rhythm.

This continues for a while till the pots are handed over to the dargah caretakers who would be presiding over the cooking of the sacrificed goat for the evening meal. A community lunch follows where rice cooked with potatoes is served. Small groups eating together in huge plates, eat and chat to their fill after the exhausting activities of the day and soon retire for home only to return for another session of night long drumming and dhamal.

'Urs is also considered an auspicious time for people who want to make certain offerings to the saint in order for some wish fulfillment (mannat), wishes kept by a family for the well-being of its members or for completion of some task. Known as *shodh*, usually a decorated piece of cloth, *chadar* is offered to the saint. It is carried till the *dargah* from the house of the person where the family invites other people from the community. Held by four people on its edges, people on the streets, depending on their will and belief make small offerings of money which is collected in the *chadar*. To the beats of the drums, singing and dancing to the saint, they walk till the *dargah*, where the muzavar accepts and covers the mazhar inside with the offering.

After a few hours of rest, we head towards the house of one such family. The beautiful green chadar with Islamic/Islamicate motifs is held by four boys. Five musindo players slowly start playing and singing salwale nabiyo, salwale aval nabiyo, nabewala... people are beginning to gather. The nafil blows. The drummers play and move in a circle moving from one zikr to the other. The people follow them in the singing as chorus and with every zikr, the drumming picks up speed. With Sajid bhai and Yunus improvising and playing interlocking rhythms, the drummers enjoyably play and sing Man mero lage Baba Gor che which gradually with the building tempo shortens to repetitive chanting of baba gor che, baba gor che. The nafil adds to the

building up intensity. After taking it to a crescendo, the drumming abruptly comes back to the original beat structure and the crowd moves forward. More and more people join the procession. The men and the young boys dance in front of the drummers while the women dance at the back. Excitement, fun, extreme joy and merriment that accompanies any group singing and dancing reaches a new high. The energy and the intensity of the drummers very evidently draw from and add to it. The rigour and the passion with which they play is purely an aural and visual delight. Completely immersed in the rhythm, the pleasure of the 'carnavalesque' in their idea of religiosity can be easily felt. The men dance mimicking animals, spinning, making swift movements. Some young boys imitate the hip hop movements, some even dressed so, keeping the excitement of the group going to the chanting of 'gor badshah'. The procession moves ahead, charting out its territory in the streets of Jamnagar. Improvisations, some unconsciously too, interesting playing techniques and creating complete intoxication by the time of the crescendo, and then coming back to the original rhythm is the basic structure of the drumming, intermittently punctuated by the blows from the nafil. This continues for the next one and a half hours till we reach the dargah where the air is saturating with the feeling of the heightened climax. The women now dance around the drummers in the circle. 'gor badshah, sidi badshah' in a call and response style reverberates in the space. There is a very positive madness that engulfs everyone. With a concluding beat structure, the drumming stops and everyone is now settling down, relaxing before it is time for the evening baithi dhamal. Opening with 'bismillah' as usual, the intensity of the percussion resurfaces, rather continues in the baithi dhamal too, more intense than the previous day. The energetic and rather frenzied day soon ends with the meal of the sacrificial goat.

As mentioned in the earlier sections, the places that Baba Gor is believed to have visited while wandering as a *fakir* are often commemorated during the 'urs. The third and the last day of the 'urs at Jamnagar is marked by celebrations and rituals at one such place called Sodivari. As Rafiq bhai and Iqbal uncle narrated (in different interviews), Sodivari was earlier surrounded with a forest cover with the sea (*dariya*) behind. Once while Baba Gor was sitting relaxed on one raised platform, he saw few men pass by carrying heavy loads towards the shore. Those were bags containing

sugar (not the crystallized sugar but huge chunks like that of salt). When Baba Gor approached one of them to enquire what they were carrying, given his fakir demeanor they thought he might ask for some sugar. One of them lied to him saying they were carrying salt to another village. But Baba Gor, as Rafiq bhai puts it, was the son of Allah who knew everything. Everyday people would visit him to seek his blessings and cure them of their sufferings. How could this lie go unnoticed by him? But the *karwa*, completely unaware, moved ahead with their business. Loading the bags in their boat, they set out on their journey. After sailing for a while, they were asked to check the bags and ensure if everything is fine. To their shock and amazement, they found that the bags were filled with salt instead of sugar. Completely convinced that the bags originally contained sugar everyone was confused, when suddenly they remembered their brief encounter with the *fakir*. On being narrated the entire incident, their leader decided to go back and see the fakir, whom he now believed to be in possession of some powers. They all came back to the place, met Baba Gor and apologized to him. Forgiving them, the saint asked them to go check the bags which will be full of sugar again. Inspired by this story, a *ziker* was composed by the Sidi ancestors, *banjara eklo na jayo, dade ka potiya le jayo*, implying, according to Rafiq bhai, that one should always carry along with himself, imbibe the advice and teachings (*potiya*) of Baba Gor, fondly addressed as *dade*, instead of travelling alone (*eklo*). Baba Gor is believed to have stayed in Sodivari for half a day (Iqbal uncle). It is few kilometers away, on the outskirts of Jamnagar. This day is marked by festivities in which not just the Sidis but people from different villages participate.

In the afternoon, the procession begins from the dargah. Two women carry the water from the previous day which will again be used to cook the meal today. The musindo players with the Mai misra and nafil joining in, lead the huge crowd of people. Few are led into trance on the way while others walk the long way to Sodi Vaari. Passing through different cityscapes, the procession walks through the fields that surround the colourfully tiled dargah of Baba Gor and a small beautiful chilla, raised above the ground, of Mai misra under a tree. People are already gathered here in huge numbers. Families have settled around the dargah. The kids run helter-skelter playing

on the rides installed near the food stalls. It brings to mind the picture of a village fair, bustling with activity of different kinds with a feel of festivity in the air.

The procession dances around the entire length of the dargah, taking seven rounds, chanting the name of Baba Gor. The water carriers from the women are then taken to be used for the cooking. What follows are different offerings, for instance cereals which will be ground together and distributed among the people present. These are carried around the dargah seven times to the energetic accompaniment of the musindo and senior with men and women singing and dancing in the memory of their saint. This is followed by a baithi dhamal. The ambience of the space beautifully complements this meditative rendition of zikrs with the words 'avale bismillah' reaching out to the open sky with people joining in chorus.

One of the main characteristic features of the Sidi cult is the parallel veneration of the male and female saints. The delineation of a separate male and female sphere in the cult becomes very evident in the rituals centered around Mai Misra. This day is also celebrated by the Sidis as Mai Misra's engagement (*mangni*) reflected in the offerings made to her of clothes, bangles apart from the small fruit and food offerings which will later be distributed among everyone. Seven different types of cereals¹¹² are ground together by seven women, boiled in water mixed with jiggery and given as *sharbat* to everyone. Mai Misra is venerated especially for her powers of fertility. Women sing and dance in the praise of mai saab, symbolizing her love for dancing, in order to appease her and seek her blessings. Though dancing to the accompaniment of *musindo*, senior and *nafil* played by the men, only women are permitted to enter the central part of the chilla of Mai Misra. Just as women are generally barred from entering the inner sphere of a male saint's shrine, the men are excluded from the sacred inner spheres of the female saint too. The central shrine is covered with bright colourful chadar and fragrant with the rose petals that it is laden with. All rituals here pertaining to the female domain of the cult are performed by the women. There is an entire repertoire of *zikrs* too that are dedicated to her. A brief session of *baithi* and

¹¹² These include *tur ki dal*, *moong*, *urad*, *jowar*, *gehu* (wheat), *chawal* (rice) and *sookhe moth*.

khari dhamal follows. In the inner part, women dance ecstatically, some in trance, completely immersed, invoking the feminine power. This soon concludes, also concluding the three day 'urs of Baba Gor at Jamnagar.

The full moon of the Purnima shines over the huge gathering of people. People are dispersing, exhausted but alive with the fervor of the shared musical experience of these three days. Families and friends sit to eat together before they retire for home. With the conclusion of the material act of music making with all its social affiliations, something diffuses into the space through the sieve of this social event. The remnants and the echoes of the music, an entire world of sound lingers over the entire expanse of Sodi Vari. Over the three days, it seemed as if the music enveloped each entity like an invisibility cloak, making them traverse different realms, communicating with each in myriad ways, leading each to his own path, though still joining them all in the memory of their saint. This is the essence of music which stays, which is left behind as the dhamalis walk away carrying their instruments.

Some people assemble at the Jamnagar dargah again where for fifteen minutes the musindo are played. A short prayer follows asking the saint to bless the community till next year when everyone would again come together in his celebration.

As many different sources infer, the music and dance traditions of the Sidis come across as the strongest links they have to their roots. At the margins of society, these traditions define the community, and play a 'major role in conveying cultural memory and group identity'.¹¹³ The Nigerian web quotes "The Sidis are very poor. Most have lost touch with their roots. Music may provide a clue to their origin." It is their spiritual and performative heritage; the drumming, their percussion ensemble, the *dhamal* through which the community identifies itself. It signifies for them the revelry that their *fakir* tradition associates itself with in order to embody and celebrate their saint, Baba Gor. This chapter within the context of 'urs brings to light some of

¹¹³ Catlin, 2004, op. cit, p. 179

these aspects about the community. Drawing from personal observations from the field work and a study of other researches taken up in this area, it places the rituals within the context as a foundation for the analysis of the rhythm and other questions drawing from their act of music making that the subsequent chapters will attempt to deal with. From the perspective of both the musicians and the listeners, understanding the essence of the musical idiom, with an awareness of its intriguing elusiveness, is what the following chapters endeavour to explore.

CHAPTER 2

BEATING THE DRUM: AN ANALYSIS

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This chapter plunges directly into the process of ‘music-making’. As a culture that understands itself through its performative tradition and which at the same time does not claim to any stylized musical organization or structure, a study of what the individuals do with the music becomes a challenging yet interesting task especially in light of observing what music is doing to them. The nonchalance to questions about training, music repertoire, the probable existence and nomenclature of any specific beat cycle abound in the interviews taken of the musicians during the course of this fieldwork. In the surviving oral cultures, music may or may not exist as an exclusive activity practiced only by a specialized few. While some communities have distinct musician castes and hierarchy within the musicians, in the context of the Sidi community more or less all men of the community have some expertise on the drums. While this does not disregard the presence of extraordinary music talent, it does throw light on the fluid and symbiotic relation between music senders and receivers. Moreover, it also points out to the ‘everyday-ness’ of music for the Sidis. With central focus on the *dhamal* at the ‘*urs*’, this chapter endeavors to analyze the rhythmic patterns of the drumming and the various musical exchanges that are borne out of this coming together of the community. In the absence of a musical reference or framework, the analysis stems and draws from the observations of the musical activity that one witnessed in the field. The chapter is thus broadly divided into three main instances from the field work. These being, (1) *baithi* and *khari dhamal at the dargah*, (2) *musindo* ensemble on the street and (3) *senior and musindo* at Sodivari.

Baithi dhamal

The *baithi dhamal*¹¹⁴ begins with the slow singing of the *bismillah* in the leader chorus style:

Avale nabiyo salwale, avale nabiyo salwale,

Avale bismillah, avale bismillah, baba mera oliya re, avale bismillah

¹¹⁴ See Clip 1

Bismillah malekom, gore badshah malekom, he asayida malekom, gore badshah malekom...

The *musindo* plays a two- beat cycle, very simplistically repeated, with the *mugarman* joining in, in a slow eight beat cycle. The *musindo* covers one cycle on the *mugarman* with 4 cycles. The low pitched drone of the *mugarman* is sometimes difficult to decipher especially with the sharp, high pitched tone of the *senior* which infact makes for interesting interventions. The *senior* is prominently heard between the alternate cycles of the *musindo*, just half a beat after the first strike on the *musindo* (Table I, c.). Complementing the rhythms of the *mugarman* and *musindo*, the *senior*, through its sharp tone as it falls on one's ear, seems to connect the two. This appears more prominently during the fast tempo in the *khari dhamal* as one will soon observe. For convenience and a better understanding, Table I tries to show this structure with the strokes marked out for every beat.

(The moment when the *mugarman* is hit in the centre on the membrane is being assumed here to be the first beat. The structure stated below is not permanent and is based on one's own interpretation and analysis of what was seen and heard in the field. There is no confirmation on this from the musicians as such. They don't have answers and reasons to what they play and how they manage to repeat cycles accurately, but the rhythm is intrinsic to their playing.)

Table I :

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
a. <i>Mugarman</i> (Right hand)	Center	Side	Side		Side			
b. <i>Musindo</i> (both hands)	L	R R	L	R R	L	R R	L	R R
c. <i>Senior</i> (with sticks)			- 1				-1	

With prominence more to the vocal in *baithi dhamal*, the drums gracefully play to the accompaniment of the *zikr*. The cyclic rhythm of the instrument weaves into the singing which quite interestingly, one notes, is not strictly set to the cyclic structure. That is, the entire song is sung in rhythm, the lyrics are in rhythm, but where they begin and end is not specified. There are portions where it seems to be completely following the cycle of the *mugarman* but then it again exceeds it. While the *mugarman* maintains its 8s, the *musindo* continues it 2x4s. Though these cycles determine the tempo and rhythm of the song, they do not really determine the beginning and end. The lyrics of one line could continue to a number of cycles and the next line could even begin in the middle of another cycle as soon as the previous one ends, irrespective of whether the cycle of the instruments has concluded or not. And when the group concludes singing the *zikr*, all the cycles abruptly come to an end, irrespective of the 8s and 4s of the instruments being played to completion. In this respect, the playing of the *mugarman* also makes for some interesting observations.

The *mugarman* follows a fairly precarious mode of playing. The blank spaces in the eight beat cycle fall at unexpected places. To strike the drum thrice and then give a beat's gap followed by another strike and three beats' gap, thus playing 4 irregular beats out of the 8. Moreover, maintaining it throughout, without the song strictly falling into the structure or having something to refer back to, can be very difficult. Thus, it remains a speculation why the *mugarman* is played at such irregular intervals, and how it manages to keep to its cycle when there is no point of reference. The *mugarman* players keep to their internal rhythm while also contributing to the larger rhythmic field being created. The *musindo*, on the other hand, sticks to its 2 beat cycle, being played repetitively. While the dhamal in general gets its vigour and is centered around the drumming, the melodic and rhythmic emphasis differentiates the *baithi* from *khari dhamal*. With the emphasis on the singing in the *baithi dhamal*, there are no intended improvisations on the instruments with only a few minimal changes naturally seeping in by the individual players. These include slight variations like a double strike replacing a single one or vice versa, thus lending a new energy to the existing rhythm. In the Jamnagar *baithi dhamal*, however, usually a single stroke

is used except in the *zikr* dedicated to Hazrat Bilal where, as Iqbal bhai mentioned, a double stroke on the *musindo* is sometimes played.

As pointed out by Rafiq bhai, the main structure and the repertoire of the *dhamal* is more or less the same in the different Sidi settlements within Gujarat, but what differs is the treatment of the same. Thus differences could be noted in the tempo of *baithi dhamal*, the style of singing the *zikr*, the emphasis on the crescendo build up in the *khari dhamal*. To substantiate this completely through one's observations would be difficult as only the Jamnagar 'urs could be attended during the time of the field work. However, what one usually did observe, within Jamnagar was that the younger drummers tend to be more eager to move to a faster tempo while the older generation believes in carefully working through before reaching the crescendo.

Interestingly, the stroking on the *musindo* is one aspect that defines the individual style of the musicians or the style of playing usually practiced in the area they are coming from. For instance, in Junagadh and Ratanpur double strokes are more common. In Jamnagar, double stroke comes only later when the tempo increases while the single stroke is more common and especially preferred during the *baithi dhamal*. Therefore, as the Sidis from other areas in Gujarat now settled within the Jamnagar *jamat*, come together to play in the 'urs, these differences in styles sometimes become quite evident and make for an interesting conglomeration of rhythmic ideas and lineage. Yunus and Khayyum, for instance, who now play and tour with the Jamnagar group whose virtuosity in drumming we will witness in the later clips, come from Junagadh and use the double strokes. Such minor differences lead to layers within the similar rhythmic structure that opens up immense scope for improvisation and rhythmic complexities. The effect of this is seen in full force on the streets on the second and third day of the 'urs when a group of *musindo* players leads the crowd to the dargah.

Khadi dhamal

With the increasing tempo of the *khari dhamal*, the virtuosity of the musicians gains prominence, initiating people into moments of ecstasy and working towards building up a heightened climax. The playing of the *mugarman* thus moves towards filling in the spaces within its cycle as Table II illustrates. This is made possible by beginning with the basic cycle played in the *baithi dhamal* so far (refer to rows a. and b. of the table when the drum is beaten only with the right hand) and eventually playing it with both hands as the tempo rises¹¹⁵. Being played by both hands now, clearly the number of strokes increases, the gaps decrease and different patterns are weaved into the cycle. The tempo is taken to a high point and established over a period of time with the help of *c.* and *d.*, while *e.* is occasionally introduced as a sub-high point within this phase.¹¹⁶ At most of these moments in the *khari dhamal*, especially during *sandal*, everyone is driven to extreme moments of ecstasy and excitement. At this point, it is nearly impossible to clearly make out what is being played on the *mugarman*.¹¹⁷ In keeping with the rhythm of both *musindo* and *mugarman*, one can observe and hear a number of permutations and combinations within their cycles being played on the *senior*. But it is the sheer madness of the percussion in display. The table attempts to comprehend some of these cycles to simply give a glimpse of the nature of such variations.

From serving as an accompaniment in the case of the *baithi dhamal*, evidently the instruments become much more pronounced here. Within their respective cycles, there are intricate patterns being worked out, that allow for more scope for exploring rhythm and give space to artistic articulation through improvisation and rhythmic embellishments. While the table only shows some ways of playing among many others, it is these moments of brilliance and expertise of the musicians that help in sustaining the *khadi dhamal* till dawn.

¹¹⁵ See Clip 2

¹¹⁶ See Clip 3

¹¹⁷ See Clip 5

Table II:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
a. <i>Mugarman</i> (Right hand)	Center	Side	Side	-	Side	-	-	-
b. <i>Mugarman</i> (Right hand)	Center	Side	Side	-	Side	Side	-	-
c. <i>Mugarman</i> (both hands)	R	-	R L	L -	R L	L -	R L	R L
d. <i>Mugarman</i> (both hands)	R	LR	R -	LR	R -	LR	LR	LR
e. <i>Mugarman</i> (both hands)	R	LR	LR	LR	LR	LR	LR	LR
f. <i>Mugarman</i> (both hands)	R	LR	L -	RL	R -	L-	RL	RL
g. <i>Mugarman</i> (force on left)	R	RL	R	RL	R	RL	R	RL
h. <i>Musindo</i>	R -	LL	R -	LL	R -	LL	R -	LL
i. <i>Musindo</i>	R -	LL	RR	LL	R -	LL	RR	LL
j. <i>Senior</i>	Could not be comprehended accurately enough to be presented in the table.							

Thus with mere shift in emphasis (in g. for example), doubling the strokes (in e.) or modulating the way the hand strikes the membrane, the *mugarman* keeps inventing something new and at the same time keeps up with the increasing tempo of both the *musindo* and *senior* that are also simultaneously improvising within their beat cycles.

While there is an amount of suspense as to how much it can stretch, every element within the space seems to be reaching out to sheer frenzy as an intense energy field

encloses the dancers, musicians and the spectators, each deriving and adding to the energy of the other.¹¹⁸ A sudden hysterical cry or hoot while dancing, impromptu group chants, a powerful striking of the *senior* or *musindo*, all affect the ambience and the music being created. During this frenzied moment, the lyrics are short phrases being sung out aloud repetitively, the sound of the percussion and singing at an intensely high point, and energy at the maximum.

This acceleration of the tempo accompanied by the intensification of the sound is quite interestingly explained by Gilbert Rouget too. On the basis of his observations of the record titled 'Feast for the offering of the first yams to Shango', he says, *accelerando* in some musical traditions does not necessarily imply an acceleration of the tempo, rather the increase in the number and insistence of the drumbeats within it. The spacing between the beats reduces. Crescendo, on the other hand, results both from intensification and dramatization of the singing and the horn call.¹¹⁹ This simultaneous increase in the number of strokes with the crescendo building like the one observed in the above example, is a recurring trend in Sidi drumming, one of its main features as the rest of the examples will also illuminate.

The above cycle continues for few minutes after which the tempo dips suddenly to the original slow rhythmic cycle. Every time this crescendo has to be cut, someone signals the players and with a sudden abruptness, the tempo is brought down to half the speed of what was being played.¹²⁰ The *ziker* is sung again mostly by the seated women, and the men dancing together sway in slow rhythm matching up with the instruments. So there is a sudden displacement for a minute and while getting into the slow tempo, the various elements gradually assemble again. Within some time, the instruments playing to the *ziker* in a slow tempo gradually start building up the tempo.

¹¹⁸ See Clip 6.

¹¹⁹ Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance : A Theory on the Relations between Music and Possession*, Brunhilde Biebuyck in collaboration with the author (trans. and revised), (Chicago and London : The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 82

¹²⁰ For convenience in explaining, this is being referred to as one session of the *khadi dhamal* in this chapter.

With the increasing rhythm, the instruments start weaving intricate patterns again only to find people dancing with a newer enthusiasm.

As compared to the observation earlier about the cyclicity of the rhythm of the instruments and a somewhat linearity of the *zīkr*, it should be noted here that during the fast tempo, the rhythm of 'gor gor baba gor' being chanted now by the group is marked by a repetitive circularity. It acts as a refrain now which not only encloses the people gathered within a space clearly demarcated from the other space but by virtue of its repetition also serves to induce trance and ecstasy.

With the tempo rising and dropping in short intervals, an entire night of *khadi dhamal*, one could say, would seem as if made up of a number of '*crescendos*' and '*accelarandos*'. What makes this interesting is that the tempo built up in each crescendo is also at times higher than the earlier one, thereby forming several small crescendos within one large crescendo, each moving, as it were, towards a larger climax. The intensity increases with time, the energy of the space increases with time as more and more men and women dance together in sheer ecstasy in the central space of the *dargah*.

Everyone plays in turns, from the elders in the community, some of whom lead with the *zīkr* on the *musindo*, to the youngsters who not only accompany their elders but also display their virtuosity and expertise in the field. With an enthusiasm they try new possibilities of improvisation on the *mugarman*, fresh stress points on the *musindo* and intricate patterns on the *senior*. Each player lends his own expression to the drumming by virtue of his body engagement, energy and creativity which can be easily observed in the clips mentioned so far. With variations in the rhythmic cycle with every crescendo of the *khadi dhamal* and with the players alternating, this dynamic is maintained all night till early hours of the morning.

It is also during such occasions that the young boys get initiated into the drumming tradition, copying their father, brothers or uncles, through non-didactic methods. With drumming woven into their everyday existence, without any formal training, through mere observation as they start playing in occasions such as the *'urs* while sitting with the elders, the tradition is passed on. Apart from the dance and rhythmic repertoire, some of the *zikh* too that remain are passed on through their repetitive singing in leader-chorus fashion that enables everyone to pick them up. It is thus through the medium of dance, body and rhythm that different generations come in contact, foster their bonds while expressing their immanent differences too. This is in fact observed more when the *musindo* are being played in *baithi dhamal* as it becomes easier to catch the basic rhythm then.

Musindo ensemble on the street

Before the *musindo* ensemble sets out on the street, they begin by establishing the rhythm among the drummers by finishing one short session outside their house, where their body gets used to the rhythm.¹²¹ As the *musindo* players walk through the street playing the two beat cycle with other Sidi men and women joining them in dance and singing, they simultaneously keep demarcating their space within the heterogeneity of the street. The repetitive rhythm as refrain, the blowing of the *nafil*, the grained sound of the *mai misra* played by small girls, the strokes of the *musindo*, the cheer and thrill of the crowd - all mark and announce the presence of the community on the street.¹²² With outsiders as onlookers, they delimit their space from the external coordinates, thereby intensifying this internal space of theirs which Deleuze would refer to as a milieu. But this does not imply the homogeneity of a milieu. In terms of both the crowd and music, within this milieu there are layers of interaction happening between the different components. The exchanges of the musicians, amongst each other, with the other Sidis dancing, and exchanges within the separate small groups of men and women who dance and sing adds volatility to the space. The milieu does not claim a fixity here. It is not an inert space. The fact that this procession sustains for hours before it reaches the *dargah* implies a constant activity which is not in any way

¹²¹ See Clip 7

¹²² See Clip 9

exhaustive. It renews itself at every moment, transforming each milieu, and being contributed to by several factors.

Firstly, the musicians playing the *musindo* are core to the formation and are at the centre of the interactions within this space. The absence of an intricate beat repertoire, which they themselves acknowledge and point out, poses a difficult challenge on them in terms of very basic requirements of music especially in a space like a street. The onus lies on them for maintaining the interest and excitement of the participants and not letting the repetition die down into redundancy, rather making the space effervescent. They in fact do manage to create through their music, moments of surprise and unpredictability in the very predictable beat structure that takes not just the crowd but them too through a range of emotions and ecstasy. At the same time, one also understands that repetition, in the rhythmic pattern and also of the short phrases that are chanted by the crowd, is one of the determining features in this delineation of space, creating and maintaining a rhythmic field in which the crowd sways somewhat intoxicated.

What happens within the repetition, one observes, is the varying engagement of the body of the musician with the rhythm and music. Within the same pattern of rise and fall of the tempo, one hears various modulations of sound which come with the negotiations of the body of the musician with that of the drum.¹²³ This is important to note here because improvisation in their music does not come through thought out mathematical combinations of the beats, but mostly through the intensification and increased energy with which the body beats the drum. Very often at such moments, the *nafil* also tries to match to the *musindo*'s beat (as can be observed in clip 10). This energy and the affect or the feel that is created through the play with tempo and strokes come across as equally important aspects of their drumming, moving an entire community to engage with each other through music and dance. The sound production comes not just from the strokes executed by the hands but the entire body breathed into the rhythm being produced. The experience of the *dhamal* and '*urs*

¹²³ See Clip 8 and 10

comes though such madness of the body and the percussion. While this bodily affect of rhythm is dealt with in the next chapter, one must understand that this communication with and expression of music through the body and the consequent spontaneity and difference within such communication is what keeps transforming the milieu. One experiences this at its highest in the crescendo. The sheer frenzy and complexities that are built in to the rhythmic structure by virtue of different sound modulations in the strokes on the drum lends this intensive space its multiplicities. It is thus never in stasis that the community comes together in the procession, there is a constant negation and affirmation of new spatio-temporalities at work, what Deleuze calls territorialisation and deterritorialization.

As elaborated in the 'Introduction', by virtue of these multiplicities, this intensive space carries within it the potential to transform into an extensive space; an extensive reality which always grows from this intensive space, and with its own set of interactions within its components will always transform and serve as an intensive space to another extensive space. In the context of this procession, this moment of transformation is music in its full vigour, the musicians completely one with the rhythm, music divested of all its socialability for a moment. This is where music is actualized not as a representation of a community, in a specific time and place, but music in its very being. The rhythmic improvisation as if suspended in time for a moment is not tied to any structural dimensions yet manoeuvred within those very coordinates. This is where one would like to place the essence of music; music as an entity in itself. This is the 'becoming' in Deleuzian terminology, where music reveals itself for what it is. Looking back at one of the discussions in the Introduction, these improvisations could be understood as if operating through a diagonal keeping the broad structure of the nature of the procession intact; infusing difference while maintaining the repetitive refrain which defines the space. Thus the procession as it progresses in the street is given to constant becoming. The musicians are constantly 'making' music. With every new lane, the music gets a new fervour even though its constituting elements are same. Every new location that they move to, every new turn, every lane, is thus the marking of a new aesthetic point, a new dimension, a new event.

Secondly, the presence of a crowd both within their space and outside is important for the musicians in terms of playing and establishing the rhythm. The crowd by rhythmically moving and dancing to the beats of the drum not only becomes a part of the exchange of energy with the musicians, but also encourages them by showering money on them as token, hooting, cheering and chanting which intersperses and intensifies the rhythmic affect that envelops all. The playing of the conch at moments of heightened excitement steers everyone towards more intensity. Every round of *gor gor baba gor* and *ho mast kalandar illelah* in the street keeps adding a newfound layer of energy to the existing milieu. It draws people towards itself and the occasional off-beat 'hoy' interspersed with the rhythm of the drum gives it an elasticity which can extend to hours of playing.¹²⁴ It is their sporadic occurrence that adds to the spirit of the music in the environs of a street. Therefore, the audience/spectator participation and the reactions that music elicits in them is a major contributing factor to its sustenance too. The audience is an important element here contributing to the process of music making, adding life to it and forging their own identity in the streets of Jamnagar.

In this case, both the creation and reception of music is encompassed in the space of the street. In contrast to the *dargah* where the community and religious markers are somewhat defined, the street is a heterogeneous space where the elements are more diversified and dispersed. Carving out a specific space within such varied elements comes about through the music. The medium of connectivity and change here is rhythm. Within the performativity of the street, it unfolds a matrix which is musically and emotionally multivalent. Despite working as a representation of an identity on the street, it transcends these meanings to exist just as an activity, a spontaneous act which exists only in its actualization and then dissolves. It is not a sign adding to the representative structures.

This activity of music that unfolds on the street reminds one of John Cage's idea of the 'activity' of sound against that of the music 'talking'. John cage differentiates

¹²⁴ See Clip 11

between the two, preferring the former over the latter, in the sense of how sounds like those one hears in the traffic on the roads, by virtue of being louder or slower, higher or lower, do not necessarily need to convey or signify anything. These sounds do not need to be anything more than what they are, he says. He puts this very beautifully drawing from Marcel Duchamp's piece called 'sculpture musicale' saying that in the process of different sounds coming from different places and lasting, what is produced is a sculpture which is sonorous and which remains.¹²⁵ This is what this procession conjures in this activity of playing with different sounds, a sonorous sculpture which resonates through spaces touching one and all.

Senior and musindo at Sodi Vari

Such sculptures that both exist within and yet remain independent of their context are created anew and resonate even louder on the third day at Sodivari. Among different examples, this section specifically looks at the *musindo* ensemble that is played circumambulating the *dargah* with the *senior* this time. As the central instrument in this ensemble, the *senior* player has the full freedom to improvise while the *musindo* keep the rhythm for it. Irfan, Sadiq and Yunis who have immense exposure to the performance scenario since they tour with music troupes play together on the third day. Irfan on the *senior*¹²⁶ (with the camera aimed at him) exhibits an amazing play of hands while he plays the most intricate of patterns with complete nonchalance. However, what might seem as customary drumming played during the '*urs*' with the feel of a ritual to gather the crowds or bring the community together, can also be at the same time be viewed as an extremely thoughtful and deliberate attempt at showmanship and creative expression. It is created with a purpose and intended to leave a mark, a trace.

The improvisations and the complex rhythmic structures become a marker of the musicians' prowess too. Every musician gets a chance to show their talent in different situations in different ways. With Irfan at the centre who sets out the stage with his

¹²⁵ John cage about silence, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y>

¹²⁶ See Clip 12

sharp strokes, playing with sound in different ways, Yunis and Sadiq with others on the *musindo*, though initially subdued by the senior's sound, create layers of sound with their two beat cycle matching the tempo of the *senior*. Taking cues from this rhythmic fabric being created, Irfan leads the ensemble by adding and contributing through twists and turns of the beats in complex improvisations. While all of them together slowly get immersed in the rhythmic field they have set out to create, completely unaffected by the other jarring sounds such as that of the generator, a sense of competition or interaction between the instruments comes in. Playing interlocking rhythms, in response to the other player, complementing each other with an occasional 'waah' or an appreciative nod or a thunderous strike on their instrument, communicating through the rhythmic patterns, they draw energy as well as influence each other towards rhythmic expression.

In addition to this, sometimes after taking the music to a certain level, when everyone has comfortably got tuned into the rhythmic soundscape, if one were to draw a graph, which till now shows an ascending line, there comes in a point of stability where through repetitions now the rhythm is maintained.¹²⁷ There are no improvisations but the intensity grows with every repeating pattern, with every loop. Each musician while part of the larger rhythmic space now gets completely drawn into his own rhythmic cycles, intoxicated and in frenzy. Sadiq, for instance, gets into one such state, disconnected from the surrounding environment lost in the circularity of his own rhythmic structure, in trance.

It is interesting to note that, with the time for the evening *lubaan*, there is another *naubat* being played inside the *dargah*, while the procession plays on outside and around the *dargah*.¹²⁸ In the cacophony of sounds, this is a rather interesting moment when each plays completely unperturbed by the other, both the rhythmic fields independent of each other, serving their respective ritualistic function. One would like to observe here that while on the one hand, the rhythm exists as an ambivalent gesture

¹²⁷ See Clip 13

¹²⁸ See Clip 14

where within the act of enclosing people within a space, it moves them towards a range of experiences depending on their subjective states. On the other hand, despite and within that anonymity certain rhythmic motifs also exist as expressive organisation signifying particular contexts.¹²⁹ This could also be the other way round where while connoting certain specific attributes, the rhythm also gives the space and the freedom, to both the musician and the audience, to move away from such signs and meaning and experience it according to how one interprets it. The rhythm of the *naubat* played during the *lubaan* at the *dargah* is distinctly different from the rhythmic complexity one witnesses at the *'urs*. As an eight beat cycle, it is played for around ten to fifteen minutes during the morning and evening *lubaan* while the priest takes the burning *lubaan* around to everyone present at the *dargah* towards the end. Without any complex patterns weaved into it, it is played as a conclusion to the whole ceremony. The following table shows the rhythmic structure of the *naubat* played at Jambur and Jamnagar *dargah*.¹³⁰

Table III:

	1		2		3		4	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Jamnagar	RL	-R	-R	--	RL	-L	-R	--
Variation1	RL	-R	RL	R-	RL	-L	-R	--
Jambur	RL	-R	-R	--	RL	-L	-R	--
Variation1	RL	-R	-R	--	RL	-L	-R	--
	RL	-L	-R	--	RL	-L	-R	--
Variation2	RL	-L	-R	RR	RR	RR	RR	--

¹²⁹ For more see Richard Wolf, "Embodiment and Ambivalence: Emotion in South Asian Muharram Drumming", *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 32 (2000).

¹³⁰ See Clip 15 and 16. In the *lubaan* at the *dargah* one witnesses persistent cases of possession-trance known as *hazri*. For a detailed description of the belief and remedy sought for such afflictions, see Basu, 2004, op. cit, pp 67-68.

In one of the interviews, Rafiq bhai, who has his own orchestra, talked about the experiences of some of the Sidi troupes who were invited for performing in hotels and tourist spots. One of the main problems they faced, he pointed out, was the limited repertoire of the performative tradition. Apart from the burlesque, energetic athletic movements and acts like breaking the coconuts and playing with fire of the *Sidi Goma* dance similar to the one mentioned in the 'Introduction', kept the audience completely entertained, the *dhamal* often presented in these programmes to the able accompaniment of the *mugarman* and drums like the *dhol* (with plastic heads) seemed quite repetitive and restrictive. This concern, he says, was often expressed by the organisers who wanted them to come up with new songs and dance compositions. In the absence of which, they would have to resort to numbers from Bombay cinema or those popular as African songs. This anecdote brings out the common view among Sidis that except for the few rhythmic patterns that are played on the drums and few surviving *zikh* and songs sung at the 'urs and couple of other occasions, there is not much one can explore in terms of music and performance in their surviving tradition. In this context then, irrespective of the growing trend of Sidi orchestra and groups drumming to the popular dance numbers, the tradition, whatever of it remains, thrives in the *dargah* during 'urs. Spread over three days of festivities, the numerous *baithi* and *khari dhamals* make for a new experience every day. The intensity and interactions among the people involved in both music-making and receiving reveal differently every day.

In all of the above instances, it is important to note that the two basic elements of any rhythmic structure in a percussion ensemble, that is, repetition and difference (as a result of variations within that repetition), come across as characteristic features of the Sidi drumming too. Every improvisation introduced within a cycle challenges a player to push the boundaries further to add another layer to that cycle in the next repetition. Surfacing as sudden bursts of life, they add an element of freshness, adding new levels to the rhythmic intensity. These additions and spurts of life also translate into the bodies of the people moving to those rhythms who respond with their cheers and hoots. But not all of these eruptions of rhythm linger on or leave a trace; some get repeated so often that they naturally and habitually seep in, while others never recur.

Thus every act of music making is evanescent. It comes like a spark at a moment and then fades out. This is perhaps also the way music evolves. Music does not exist as a tradition fixed in time. It needs to be constantly rethought and conceptualized according to one's spatio-temporality. What exists today as music might not exist tomorrow. Infact, what will follow tomorrow will always have the trace of the old. But there has to be something immanent within music which during the act of music-making transcends these banalities of structure and appears, even if for a moment, with the force and freshness of the new. This is what defines art and this is how art continues to thrive.

In the context of Sidis for whom drumming is a way of life, it is rhythm that exhibits this quality that binds them together. It becomes a means of not only assimilation but also an agency through which they forge their identity by expressing differences within that semblance of a homogenous community. The next chapter attempts to explore this embodiment of rhythm, the very materiality of their drumming which not only translates into the act of music making but also extends into opening up and throwing light on broader questions about the identity of the individual and the community.

CHAPTER 3

MUSIC AND COMMUNITY: SHARED BODIES AND SPACES

MUSIC AND COMMUNITY: SHARED BODIES AND SPACES

Taking a step backward from the analysis of rhythm being produced, understanding the way beats meander through spaces while being maneuvered, would be to simply hear the beat in all its sonority; the beat in its very being and existence as it reaches the ear. A beat, by the very definition of originating on being struck repeatedly against something, is produced as part of that something. It carries the trace of that interaction. To listen to the beat then, is to listen to these frictions in which it is produced, each lending it its own texture and flavor. In the case of drumming, it is the collision or the interaction between the body of the musician and that of the drum which produces the beat. The material engagement that it engenders adds to the affect and the force of the beat which is a raw material for the rhythm. In the rhythm is embedded this sensuality of the beats, the articulation of the relation between the body and music. The first section of this chapter, thus, seeks to approach the beat not just as a musical object but a corporeal one too. Within this assembling of sounds and bodies, co-mingling of the rhythms and affects of body and music, this chapter seeks to look at not just the body inscribed in music, but also the music written on the body. The later sections explore the dynamics of embodiment, at the site of contact between the musician in a socio-cultural context and the drum as an emblem of the community, a cultural symbol. With embodiment, also comes the negotiation of the people involved within a particular performance tradition where they are constantly defining themselves. The identity of the subject is not only formed by the modes of representation within which a community is contextualized but also due to the interaction with and within those modes in the here and now. In this process, the community is also constantly and simultaneously being revitalized with the transformation of the subject. Within this context, with drumming at the heart of the Sidi community's performative tradition, this section will attempt to understand the dynamic relation between rhythm and community, drawing from various theoretical and philosophical concepts. This chapter, as a whole, seeks to address the primal in art, not to create very consciously an aesthetics critiquing the idea of *autonomist* and

*heteronomist art*¹³¹, but to explore performance from a new possibility; to engage with art in its very materiality, the *gestures* in music, the synthesis of time in rhythm; all leading to both *plaisir* and *jouissance*¹³² and the possibility of a different new in every performance.

The Corporeal Music and the Musical Body

...a second semiology, that of the body in a state of music; let the first semiology manage, if it can, with the system of notes, scales, tones, chords, and rhythms; what we want to perceive and to follow is the effervescence of the beats.¹³³

Roland Barthes in a series of essays outlines an understanding of music with the body as a referent. Considering music as a “field of signifying” and not a semiotic with a “system of signs”, for him, it is by virtue of being corporeal that the musical differs from the linguistic. Underscoring the presence of body in music, he calls for an aesthetics that moves away from the grammar and the technical analysis of music. In linking beats or beating to “the body in a state of music”, as John Mowitt writes, Barthes draws our attention to the “calculated ‘hearing loss’ that nevertheless continues to organise our perception of the domain of music” by changing the nature of the disciplinary object that academic musicology usually deals with.¹³⁴ This takes one to one of his seminal essays, “The Grain of Voice”, where Barthes articulates this

¹³¹ As Szekely points out, *autonomist art* suggests that meaning in/of art rests solely in art's own tools and processes, while *heteronomist art*, suggests that meaning in/of art rests in its social, cultural or political contextualization. Michael David Szekely, “Gesture, Pulsion, Grain: Barthes’ Musical Semiology”, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, published on December 18, 2006. <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=409>

¹³² Barthes differentiates between the two in the sense of *plaisir* referring more towards cultural enjoyment and identity, the homogenising movement of the ego while *jouissance* conveys radically violent pleasure which dissipates, loses that cultural identity. (Roland Barthes, “Translator’s Note”, *Image, Music and Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), (London; Fontana Press, 1977) p. 9

¹³³ Roland Barthes, “Rasch” (1975), *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art And Representation*, Richard Howard (trans.), Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982, p. 312.

¹³⁴ John Mowitt, *Percussion :Drumming, Beating and Striking*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2002, p.152

predicament of music criticism of being tied to a language of adjectives. To overcome this he states, “rather than trying to change directly the language on music, it would be better to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language. It is this displacement that I want to outline...”.¹³⁵ He locates music not in its execution, or the finesse with which it communicates, but rather in the materiality of the body, in the body that “passes into music without any relay but the signifier”¹³⁶. While singing, what one hears just before the words transform into language, the words, the letters and the sounds as they fall on one’s ear, as Barthes puts it in the context of Russian bass, “from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages... as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings”¹³⁷, is where he finds music. This, he identifies as the ‘grain’ in the singer’s voice. The grain, for him is this ‘fringe of contact’ which he situates between “the very precise space (genre) of *the encounter between a language and a voice.*” This section shall take further this idea that Barthes applies ‘simply to a part of vocal music (*lied* or *milodie*)’ and understand how it can be extended to the beats in instrumental music and the ‘beating’ body of the musician. While looking at Barthesian ideas of the grain, the materiality of the geno-song and the pulsion of the body, it will explore the relevance of the same in understanding the drumming of the Sidis. The performative pulsating body of the Sidis as they lose themselves in drumming, one would like to argue, demonstrates some of these ideas. With a given repertoire of songs and specific rhythmic structures, it is in the energy and the intensity of the body that their music and drumming is articulated anew with every performance.

The Context of ‘grain’

Borrowing from Julia Kristeva’s model of the phenotext and genotext, Barthes derives two categories of opposition, the former being ‘theoretical’ and the other

¹³⁵ Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice”, *Image, Music and Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), (London; Fontana Press, 1977) pp. 180-181.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 308

¹³⁷ Barthes, 1977, op. cit., pp. 181-182

'paradigmatic' between two singers; Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Charles Panzera. The pheno-text, as Kristeva defines it, includes a "language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms of 'competence' or 'performance'." ¹³⁸ It presupposes a subject and an addressee between whom communication exists, obeying certain rules and techniques. It thus encompasses a proper structure. Barthes' cautiously transposes this idea to his formulation of a pheno-song whose performance, he says, includes everything "in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything which it is customary to talk about, which forms the tissue of cultural values (the matter of acknowledged tastes, of fashions, of critical commentaries), which takes its bearing directly on the ideological alibis of a period ('subjectivity', 'expressivity', 'dramaticism', 'personality' of the artist)." ¹³⁹ Structure of the genre, style of singing, the composer's idea, every rule of enunciation of the language being sung is respected. The geno-song on the other hand, deriving from geno-text which Kristeva defines as 'process' which is not linguistic in the way it articulates structures that are 'ephemeral' and 'non-signifying' ¹⁴⁰, Barthes succinctly explains as :

The *geno-song* is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate 'from within language and in its very materiality'; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language - not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters - where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language. ¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Margaret Waller (trans.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 87. Also cited in Michael David Szekely, 2006, op. cit.

¹³⁹ Barthes, 1977, op. cit., p. 182.

¹⁴⁰ Kristeva, 1984, op. cit., p. 86. Also cited in Michael Szekely, 2006, op. cit.

¹⁴¹ Barthes, 1977, op. cit., pp. 182-183

Therefore, while the pheno-song predicates the following of certain rules and codes within a structure, emphasizing a perfected technique, the geno-song, on the other hand, includes that which precedes the speech as communication. It is deeply ingrained in the idea of the body; the 'materiality' of the singing. The affect in music is produced by the presence and manipulation of the body and its many gestures while singing. Marking out a soul-body dichotomy, he says, in the pheno song, it is the soul that accompanies the song and not the body, a soul that is emotive but does not seduce. Understanding Fischer-Dieskau's singing as 'pheno-', Barthes notes how despite respecting everything in a structure that musical pedagogy outlines, and despite being 'excessively expressive' where the diction is dramatic, caesuras, the checks and releases of breath intervene as in the upheavals of passion, it is in this 'functionality' of language that the enjoyment (*jouissance*) gets lost. Within the perfection of Fischer-Dieskau's singing which Barthes does not deny at all, he identifies the absence of something essential that he finds in Panzera, the "truth" of language as opposed to the aforementioned functionality. Panzera, according to Barthes, skated over this clarity in meaning. He moved around the modes of articulation to uncover that which lies at the very base of the expressive, as raw and divested of any cultural meanings and values. As Barthes puts it:

With FD, I seem only to hear the lungs, never the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose. All of Panzera's art, on the contrary, was in the letters, not in the bellows (simple technical feature: you never heard him *breathe* but only divide up the phrase).¹⁴²

It is the physicality of singing which escapes the tyranny of signification of the linguistic that Barthes associates with Panzera. This is what he identifies as the 'grain' in the voice. Grain is the bodily affect in the voice that Barthes comprehends as quintessential in music as it displaces language. Corresponding to the 'physical,

¹⁴² Ibid p. 183

material aspects of language'¹⁴³, such as certain combinations and sounds of the letters which characterise the geno-text for Kristeva, in the geno song, Barthes, wishes to feel the flavour, the voluptuousness of the sounds, its various accents and descents, the play of breath but not just the technique of breath in the voice of the musician. As Szekely puts it, for Barthes, “ ‘in the letters’ marks not so much an emphasis on the linguistic, but precisely that realm whereby Panzera's singing unabashedly betrays the "grittiness" of singing-which is to say, the grain of the voice.” Taking the reference of Panzera’s music, Barthes sees in art, in music not a direct translation of emotions, of representation of something within a given socio-cultural context. This is what he conceptualizes as *signifiante* supplementing Benveniste’s idea of music as semantics¹⁴⁴. Distinguishing *signifiante* from significance, Barthes conceptualizes it as that which cannot be reduced to representation, communication and expression. Unlike significance, it involves a play of signifiers which do not represent a fixed, specific signified. It is the *enonciation*, the act, the process of uttering, that Barthes distinguishes from *enonce*, which signifies the end-product, the statement that is uttered. *Signifiante* thus implies the fluidity of meanings, the state where the subject does not ‘try to master the language (as, for example, by a work of style)’, rather it is that ‘radical work (leaving nothing intact) through which the subject explores - entering, not observing - how the language works and undoes him or her.’¹⁴⁵ It is this signifiante, for Barthes, that the grain lays open: ‘the 'grain' is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs...’¹⁴⁶ The grain is that musical gesture which lies in the ‘liminal’ space ‘between the non-linguistic and linguistic, between signification and meaning’¹⁴⁷ It exists at ‘the very friction between music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the

¹⁴³ Leon S. Roudiez, Introduction to Julie Kristeva, 1984, op. cit., pp. 5-6. Also cited in Michael Szekely, 2006, op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ In *Problems de linguistique generale* II, Benveniste proposes two opposed domains of signification; the *semiotic* and the *semantic*. While the former conveys an order of signs, each with a corresponding meaning, the latter involves an order of discourse which as a whole is given a capacity for signifying but the individual units as such do not necessarily reach out to a specific meaning. Music with its sounds which do not operate as signs, was placed under semantics. It is believed to be ‘a language which has a syntax but no semiotics.’ (As explained by Barthes in “Rasch” (1975), 1982, op. cit., p.311

¹⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, “Translator’s Note”, *Image , Music and Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), (London; Fontana Press, 1977) p. 10

¹⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, 1977, op. cit., p.188

¹⁴⁷ Michael Szekely, 2006, op. cit.

message).¹⁴⁸ This space at the threshold of language which has not yet fallen into the category of signification is where Barthes places music.

“ this body that beats”

With the emphasis on materiality in music through the idea of the ‘grain’, instrumental music becomes an interesting site to explore this dynamics in the background of Barthes’ ideas. Having no language ‘to lay open *signifiante* in all its volume, at least there is the performer’s body which again forces me to evaluation.’¹⁴⁹ The presence of the body producing the music, the touch, the thrill, the carefree, subtle stroking, the impulse and the force of the body all find their impression in the rhythm and sound of the drums. As one will observe, this restoring of the body to the beats, to the music, is also marked by a simultaneous process of the musician’s body in possession of the music.¹⁵⁰ In fact, the materiality of the musical beat comes from the utterance produced due to the interaction of the body of the musician with that of the body of the drums. How this touch and contact translates into the drumming of the Sidis will be explored in the following section.

When a group of Sidis walking in the streets of Jamnagar stake out their territory through the strokes of their drums, it is not just music they are creating. The beats as the structural units of the musical text, are not just a series of movements that create a particular rhythm, executed perfectly in unison, and sometimes as interlocking rhythms complementing each other. The rhythmic affect that it has goes beyond the meter and the playing of a particular organisation of the beats. Their drumming signals their very material presence in a given place and time. In the beats that fall on our ears, we also hear their body. It always begins as a blank canvas, a space whose contours will appear with every inscription of the beat and the interactions that

¹⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, 1977, op. cit., p. 185

¹⁴⁹ Ibid p.188

¹⁵⁰ One should thus make note that this section in the context of barthes’ usage of the term deals with not just the musical ‘beat’ but also ‘beating’ in the sense of action of the body. Beat, says barthes, is ‘whatever makes any site of the body flinch...’. (Barthes, “Rasch”, 1982, op. cit., p. 304.

emerge through this sonic contact between bodies. Initially, the beats traverse as flashes, randomly flowing in the space. The 'rhythmic incisions' become marked gradually with the redistribution of intensities and the reassembling of the bodies. The body, in possession of the rhythm, beats not only literally but also in the sense of how the musical beat carries within itself the glimpses of the body enunciating itself musically. As Barthes would put it, '...what I hear are blows: I hear what beats in the body, what beats the body, or better: I hear this body that beats.'¹⁵¹ It is thus the body in a state of speech, *quasi parlando*¹⁵², the speech being corporeal and no longer linguistic. In the beats, thus one hears the 'subtle movements of the body'. In the modulation in the rhythm, accents on particular beats, are embedded 'the figures of the body' which Barthes calls "somathemes" that form musical *signifying* (*signifiante*). As musical figures, it is the body, which through its different contractions and movements makes the beat audible to us not as a musical sign system, but as a process where the musician creates music, as 'enunciation' and 'sensation' of music.

This is audible in the drumming by the Sidis. The slow heavy beating of the hand on the *mugarman* conveys the gradual centering of the body of the musician from his external milieu into the space of this music making. With only one hand being used, the ponderous beating sounds like a calm flow of beats, filling in the space, while being interspersed by the slightly high pitched beating of the *musindo*. It is only gradually that the body loosens up and the limbs get into sync with the beats of the other drums. As the tempo increases with the conclusion of the *baithi dhamal*, by *khari dhamal* both the musician and the drum seem to have warmed up. With the feet firmly fixed to the ground, both hands of the musicians gracefully move up in the air alternately only to fall harder with the entire force. The lightness of the upper part of the body and the free movement of the elbows only means smoother execution and more intensity in the beating when the palms fall flat on the buffalo skin membrane of

¹⁵¹ Barthes says this with reference to Schumann's *Kreisleriana* (opus 16; 1838).
Ibid p. 299

¹⁵² Taking the indication from one of Beethoven's *Bagatelles*, Barthes uses *quasi parlando* in the context of Schumannian oeuvre which he defines as: 'this is the movement of the body which is about to speak.' Ibid, p.306

the *mugarman*. Drawing and exchanging energy from the rest of the *mugarman* players and matching up with the sharp strokes of the *musindo* and the *senior*, the musician's torso completely gives in by the time of the build up towards the crescendo. With the head swinging, the arms moving in sheer frenzy, one can see the rhythm flowing like a gush of blood within the body of the musician. The body could be posited like a percussion instrument itself; the beat in its flesh and blood.¹⁵³

The *musindos* played on the second day of the *urs* through the streets of Jamnagar conjures a different sort of madness altogether. Playing in unison, sometimes complementing the other, filling in the other's gaps; each body seems to be in a state of flight, light yet possessed by something. The defined movements of the hand; the force of the fingers producing a higher pitched sound in coordination with the base sound from the lower part of the palm, the energy that comes shooting from within the body, manifested in the free movement of the limbs, each body part pulsating with the rhythm, linking simultaneously with the other musicians.¹⁵⁴ With the similar membrane on either side, unlike other instruments where one side usually balances the other slightly higher pitched side with a base sound, it is only through the beating that the sound modulation can be executed in the *musindo*. The emphasis and the manipulation of the hand to create layers of sound and improvise within that, most of the time unconsciously, becomes more pronounced here. In the varying intensity of the beats one can feel and see the way the body is creating and reacting with different musical and non-musical elements. It reminds one of the Schumannian body, the '*pulsional body*, one which pushes itself back and forth, turns to something else-thinks of something else; this is the *stunned body* (intoxicated, distracted, and at the same time ardent).'¹⁵⁵(*my emphasis*). With this idea of the pulsional body, Szekely explores how the idea of pulse, though used in the non-musical context by Barthes in his essays on Masson and Twombly, relates to musical phenomenon, especially the bodily affect in the rhythm. Barthes defines pulsion as a 'certain demand of the body

¹⁵³ As one will observe in Clips 1 to 6.

¹⁵⁴ See Clip 8 and Clip 10

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 300

itself'.¹⁵⁶ While, it has been loosely translated as 'drive' or the 'force', none of which seem to adequately capture the essence of the idea, Szekely proposes that an apt model to understand pulse could be the 'primal, ecstatic, intoxicated rhythms of Nietzsche's Dionysian. Or maybe the music/musician analogue to Deleuze and Guattari's "schizo", where one finds the notion of *intensity* as occupying a key role.' It is this ecstasy and intoxication that envelops the musicians, participants and the audience alike during the *dhamal*, each responding, experiencing and interpreting it in his own way. The pulsating body of the Sidis thus conveys both the material creation and experience of their music.

The complete abandon with which the Sidis play in both religious and secular contexts stems from their very embodiment and oneness with the rhythms they are creating. The drumming in the community is not only symbolic of the *fakiri* tradition that the community identifies as its very essence, but the drums too become emblematic of and personified as their ancestors. This is an important aspect to explore in the context of Sidis where the codification of the drums and the act of drumming attains special significance with respect to their cultural history. The drums mean something more than a mere instrument that is to be played. Here, one would like to look at John Mowitt for a while who attempts to make sense of what he calls "senseless beating" to understand how rhythm works in music and society. He calls the drum a "richly catachrestic instrument"¹⁵⁷ by which he means that the drum, in his words, must not only be abused to be played, but that 'in possessing a body, a skin, a head, and a voice, the drum has long represented the expressive interiority that we call the subject, the human being insofar as it intones "I".'¹⁵⁸ The representation of the drum through the figuring of a body comes across as a common motif. In the Sidi community, besides the *malunga*, the *mugarman* is one such instrument which is believed to have come from Africa through the river with their ancestors and thus

¹⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper," in *The Responsibility of Forms*, 1985, op. cit., p. 175

¹⁵⁷ Mowitt, 2002, op. cit., p. 6. Drawing on catachresis as an important theoretical formulation in his work, Mowitt explains that the term designates an "excessive" use of language in which the substance appears sacrificed to form. Looking at drum as a catachrestic instrument, he theorizes the idea of the drum as a speaking body in his work analysing rock and roll drumming against cultural studies and new musicology.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid p. 6

named after one of them too. Referred to as Sheikh Farid, Selani Mama or Miya, the *mugarman* is also revered as a gift from Baba Gor. The rituals centered around the instrument and its central presence in the celebrations at the *dargah* reminds one of historical and cultural narrative that joins the community. Hence with the act of beating the *mugarman*, the musician embodies and assembles the narratives that lend the community its distinct identity. One would though like to propose here that the identity that is marked out cannot remain static as a singular historical and cultural discourse. The musician owing to his own time and space always adds something new to that which defines the community through his interaction with these identifying markers. The music and the rhythm that is so central to the community owing to the drumming, while creating a 'territory' for the Sidis also becomes a means of forging new relations, identities and create ruptures within that continuous narrative of the Sidis. In John Mowitt's words the very act of 'slapping the skin of the hand against an animal's skin', that is, the 'skin contact produces a subject who at once makes sense of various patterns of contact and who is itself the locus of sense for such contacts.' Mowitt calls this the 'genealogy of skin' to understand ideas of beating, embodiment and identity constructs with respect to rock and roll drumming. The point is to show, he says, 'as with the drum itself, that the subject forms in and through the limits of embodiment.' Drumming touches on and plays with these limits, and in so doing makes sense.¹⁵⁹ Drawing from some of these ideas, the following section attempts to propose how the musician as a subject transforms the cultural language of the community while being transformed by it through the rhythm. Rhythm here is to be understood in the broader sense of not only the musical rhythm but also the sociological rhythm through which people understand their relations within a space and time. Taking off from the exposition in the Introduction chapter, it is the idea of rhythm as a temporality that is not measured and calculated; rhythm as flux which unfolds within the linear, everyday time; Rhythm as metrical yet a 'caesura'. This section of the chapter endeavours to theorize this relation between rhythm and community through Henri Meschonnic's understanding of rhythm in *Critique du rythme historique du langage* (The Critique of Rhythm : A Historical Anthropology of Language). Henri Meschonnic as a key figure of French New Poetics, through the confluence of his translation of the Hebrew verse of the Bible, his own poetic

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.7

experience and Benveniste's etymology of rhythm, conceptualizes his idea of rhythm. He understands rhythm as that which, while ruling over meaning, also involves the continuity of experience; it lends units of sign a continuity, whereby, through the historical activity of the subject the older meanings are constantly being dismantled by the new. Rhythm, for him, brings in this transformation.¹⁶⁰ The applicability of the same and how his philosophical position can help one in conceptualizing rhythm with respect to this particular research work is what the following section explores.

Rhythm and Community

Moving away from a metrical study and the usual sort of rhythmic analysis, Meschonnic places rhythm at the centre of negotiations that a subject makes in a particular space and time and then contends how it governs meaning. If one were to understand historicism as a continuum where a moment in the past through a linear movement becomes a present which through further linear movement becomes a future, then rhythm for Meschonnic produces a rupture in that continuity, thereby producing a historicity by breaking that historicism. As a linear narrative, historicism follows a logic of representation which is preceded by a subject. There is always the presence of an authorial voice in the narrative, of one who is producing the history. It is this continuity of a narrative that Meschonnic feels rhythm displaces. Rhythm becomes the logic of production of this moment of discontinuity within the continuity. This, he explains within the context of language which could be understood in the idea of a discourse.

Based upon representation, a discourse within itself exists as homogenous. The different components within a discourse are joined together by a common thread of narrative, a history that brings them together. For instance, a discourse of a particular community brings together the community through certain markers as a form of representation. This representation stems from a certain socio-historical or cultural background, a certain history so to speak, all leading to a linear continuity of

¹⁶⁰ Henri Meschonnic, "Interview : Henri Meschonnic", Gabriella Bedetti and Henri Meschonnic, *Diacritics*, Vol. 18, No.3 (Autumn, 1988), p. 95

narrative. A community is always formed in the sense of a oneness, in the sense of how meaning creates one out of a multiplicity, through which a community becomes representable. Without an idea of representation a community cannot come into being, in terms of its identity.

But within this larger history, the community negotiates at various levels through different encounters, with spatio-temporal changes. The subject constructs itself anew with every interaction within the representation that binds the subject with others within a community. This then produces within the larger *discourse* a singular *discourse* of a particular time and space. This singularity exists in the sense of a historicity; a singularity that is not falling as a component and part of a linear historicism. This specific singularity that is both continuous and discontinuous is constituted through what Meschonnic calls the rhythm. Understanding each *discourse* as singular, each moment in history as specific and particular, it is rhythm that brings in this singularity of *discourse*.

The Sidi drumming ensemble, for instance, as a community identifying marker and with respect to its rhythm repertoire finds its context and analysis within the culture it is placed and it inhabits. It becomes qualified by the cultural components. Hence, owing to their history, one cannot but speculate on the influence of their long lost African past in their tradition and culture. African remnants in the instruments, musical styles, in the rhythmic patterns are always referred to, some also analysed in-detail by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists. The point being that the identifying markers are cultural in nature. The *discourse* of rhythm also alludes to such influences and narratives from the past. The *naubat* and its rhythm played during the *lubaan* at the Jambur *dargah* is believed to be symbolic of the drum played by the African slaves during the voyages and the war. It conjures up the image of their ancestor Nagarchi Baba, who, stories tell and historical accounts testify, was employed especially for this purpose in the army of Ghazni. The rhythm that is played invokes this spirit of their ancestor. These aspects of their culture become defining features of the community. The community is represented through these narratives and

performative traditions that their culture is rooted in and people live together by associating with the same. The Sidis, however, by playing out that rhythm, are at the same time forging new identities from their interactions with their environment, both in terms of the musician and those who transcend conscious states of mind, with drumming serving as a catalyst. The *dhamal* during the *urs* celebration joins the community in the memory of their saint and ancestors. The musicians through the drumming not only evoke the quintessential spirit of the community, but in the process of creating music every time, with improvisations, with different intensities and energies interacting, every performance creates something new which adds life to the basic rhythm and music repertoire of the Sidis. The drumming hence is not static in the sense of how the drums have continued to be played by the Sidis. Within the repetitive beats and rhythms, there is always a moment of difference. The bodies that are enunciating musically cannot but be in the state of constant renewal with every act of coming together. And hence it is not just the rhythm that is treated differently each time. People, as heterogeneous materials coming together as a 'rhythmic assemblage', define themselves under a new set of relations within and outside the community. Here, rhythm does play a part in terms of that continuity of that representation, in terms of formulating that representation. But in spite of that oneness what rhythm does is to illuminate the taking place of that oneness; the operation of that oneness when the subject and the community are actually coming into being, actually gaining that representation.

Thus an act of representation which gives community its meaning, proposes Meschonnic, cannot always be a static, singular act. At each point, there is always a displacement of earlier meaning which is replaced by a new meaning through the taking place of a moment of singularity. So, despite a continuity and linearity in the representative structure, there is always a discontinuity. There is rebirth at every moment. For Meschonnic this singularity of rebirth of the community comes through rhythm which further brings in the singularity of rebirth of the subject too. Within the dictates of representation, there is a moment of enunciation of the subject where it transgresses this regimentalization, where the subject is formulated through the singularity of that *discourse* which he inhabits. What he explains in terms of rhythm is

that on one hand rhythm inhabits the *discourse*, gives it the identity which it deserves, the identity which it has, by which we name it in terms of language. But, on the other hand, it has something unknown inherent within it which is extra-cultural. In this sense, rhythm becomes a *discourse* which forms the subject, the individual. But with this, he also realizes a simultaneous process of the formation of the *discourse* by the individual or the subject through the rhythm. Every moment of the constitution of the subject through the rhythm is also the constitution of the community itself. This is a significant proposition that Meschonnic puts forth on which is based his understanding of rhythm. In Meschonnic's words :

‘for the rhythm is a subject-form(er). The subject- form(er). That it renews the meaning of things, that it is through rhythm that we reach the sense that we have of our being undone [*defaire*], that everything around us happens as it undoes itself [*defaire*], and that, approaching this sensation of the movement of everything, we *ourselves* are part of this movement.¹⁶¹

Rhythm as an Act

Central to this philosophical position of Meschonnic is the conflict between historicism and historicity; of the discontinuity in history that produces the singularity of the *discourse* which does inhabit the cultural signifiers but in spite of this, there is an excess which is the taking place of that singularity. Hence, if music is understood as generating meaning in the sense of a representation, of music representing a community, then the rhythm and other musical components exist as a ‘sign’ in a *discourse*. By virtue of this, one is already within the *discourse* and finding meaning of that *discourse*, that community. What Meschonnic argues is that, besides this, the individual also has an inaugural moment of becoming that subject, which precedes

¹⁶¹ Henri Meschonnic, “The Rhythm Party Manifesto”, David Nowell- Smith (trans.) , p. 5.
<http://www.thinkingverse.com/Henri%20Meschonnic,%20The%20Rhythm%20Party%20Manifesto.pdf>

this representation, which is the performance of the becoming of the subject. Rhythm, he says, inhabits that performance. So, rhythm can be qualified in terms of the predicates that it generates, in terms of the representation it formulates, but at the same time, it is also pre-individual in the sense that it is an act. It is an act of individuation in itself and this is the performative quality of that rhythm:

‘..rhythm exposes the subject through its body language, and that subject is the locus of *historicity*, a term which, in contrast to *historicism*, is contained in the advanced position which Meschonnic holds and maintains in a polemic engaged on almost all important fronts’.¹⁶²

As an act then rhythm exists as a value not meaning. As against meaning which implies a limited relation of a sign and a signifier, between a signifier and a signified, a value denotes something as happening. Rhythm in this sense is to be realized and experienced in the moment of its enunciation, as an act of actualization that cannot be reduced to any of the predicates; ‘For rhythm is heard only when the subject prevails.’¹⁶³ As Meschonnic further puts it, ‘...it involves the person in the choices one makes in community.’¹⁶⁴ Hence it exists as an excess. It is always an ‘event’, a ‘becoming.

So rhythm in this case is a presentation of the representation of a community. It is the act of the community coming into being, not in the sense of an individual but as an individuation. Individuation here could be understood as an act prior to the totality of an individual. It is the process through which an individual comes into being. Rhythm, thus, both constitutes and exposes this act. It is like the voice, situated at the threshold, which, through language, marks the becoming of the individual. So it is not the totality but the act of coming into being of that totality. In other words, it is not an

¹⁶² Ibid p. 432

¹⁶³ Gabriella Bedetti, “Henri Meschonnic : Rhythm as Pure Historicity”, *New Literary History*, 1992, Vol. 23, No. 2, *Revising Historical Understanding* (Spring, 1992) p. 431

¹⁶⁴ Ibid p. 434

appearance which has always already appeared but it is an appearance which is in the act of appearing. But the paradox that lies here is that the act of appearing always comes through representation. Theatre can be conceptualized through representation but immanent in that representation is also the unfolding of something unknown. The foundational logic of theatre or performance for that matter is this disappearance that is embedded in the act of its appearing. Rhythm, in this sense, could be understood as the foundational logic of music which paradoxically cannot but surface through music as a structure, music as representation.

Rhythm as an Incomplete Gesture

Every performance that is actualized at a particular historical juncture also exposes the possibility that it is incomplete, that it can be further interpreted, that it still has a possibility. A theatre performance, for instance, would be perceived as a complete performance in the sense it always acts out a complete text which further has a relation to reality. The reality thus becomes an object that it unfolds on the stage. But at the same time the performance that unfolds before one inhabits a space of a vanishing point, an act in whose appearance is also the act of its very disappearance. In the representation then there is an incompleteness which it cannot fill. So, in that sense, theatre is always an incomplete gesture. If a community were to be understood within such a paradigm, then a community exists as a community in the way it is represented. It is worked out in its meaning, in its representation. Within this context, if a percussive tradition specific to a community articulates its coming into being, then it automatically implies an enunciation of the rhythm. The rhythm contributes to the structure of music which acts as representation, which has its own set of cultural connotations and own set of diverse meanings. But rhythm in itself is an act which is happening and vanishing. If one takes the community as that which is coming together through the act of that rhythm then it implies its coming together as a single representation but through an act which disappears. Hence there is always a need to re-invent the community. It, on one hand, continues but also on the other hand every time a community actualizes a rhythm, it actualizes the possibility of a coming community. Thus, interestingly, it is through this possibility that a community can

sustain itself. This potential of its renewal is what sustains it and makes it continue in the future. It is the similar logic of a reinvention of a tradition. By virtue of its being incomplete, a tradition holds the immense possibility of being reinterpreted and performed anew every time. If a tradition is complete and it actualizes itself now, it might just exhaust itself and die. Therefore, the historical narratives about the Sidi community exist as a given and will always serve as a predicate to situate the community in a given context, but what Sidis are, in flesh and blood, what adds life to the community comes through these moments of performance, these moments of creative expression that bring them together. The embodied rhythms of the drum that pulsate, define a space for them which is both specific and fluid, where different bodies are brought together in an individuated event of, let's say, the *dhamal*. Rhythm, within those continuity of gestures brings in the discontinuity in terms of transforming this unit of signification Hence the dynamics change every time these people are brought together through such rhythmic distribution.

With the percussion ensemble, the improvisations within the repeated rhythmic patterns, the organization and dancing together in a circle during the *khari dhamal* makes for interesting observations too in this context. The circular composition exhibits the synthesis of different bodies temporally and spatially under the effect of rhythm created by the drumming and singing. Each body part links with those of the other dancer's, moving together, parallel, yet each as an independent entity in itself. To use what Phil Turetsky cites from Elias Canetti who writes about the rhythmic composition of crowds in the Haka of the Maori people from New Zealand, the circle acts as 'a single individual 'as if the whole body of performers were actuated by one impulse' directed towards a single goal.'¹⁶⁵ Marked by differential speeds, different relations of movement and rest, the dancers move as one exhibiting a 'rhythmic impeccability'. This energy field that they create manifests from within. The unity is maintained internally through the distribution of intensities, instead of being imposed by an external order. Resisting any sort of dissolution from within, the Sidis dance to the changing tempos of the drum, drawing more people into the group, the feet

¹⁶⁵ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Carol Stewart (trans.), (New York and London; Penguin, 1984), p. 31-4. Also cited in Phil Turetsky, "Rhythm : Assemblage and Event", *Deleuze and Music*, Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (eds.), (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 140

moving together in unison, hands, limbs in rhythm, each contributing to the heightening of emotions, some in trance, dancing in happiness, sorrow or even nostalgia. As the dancers dance together in ecstasy with the rhythm moving towards an irresistible climax, there also lies within such repetitive movements, the capacity to facilitate ways for 'new stages of life'¹⁶⁶.

Rhythms both organise these heterogenous materials by distributing them over time and also arise from differences within and among these materials and from their complex interactions.¹⁶⁷

Offering a thought-provoking analysis of the Haka, Phil Turetsky explains this rhythmic assemblage, as a confluence of three passive syntheses of time: the living present, the *a priori* past and the future. Translatable in terms of origin, actualization and possibility, these three syntheses exhibit the different modes of existence of the assemblage. While the living present involves the synthesis in terms of bodies connecting through repetition of gestures, the *a priori* past is constituted by the bodies becoming individuated and expressive, in the sense of their capacity to affect and be affected. The living present encompasses the kinesthesia of bodies synchronizing with each other through their capacity of entrainment. Explaining entrainment as 'the tendency for an oscillating body to synchronize or lock into phase with other oscillating bodies'¹⁶⁸, Turetsky notes how this not only involves the organization of bodies under a rhythm but the rhythm too is being organized during its actualization. The group 'demonstrates the potential for rhythms abstracted from particular bodies to transfer to, suffuse, and organize other complex bodies'.¹⁶⁹ Hence, with the synthesis of habit and rhythmic gestures comes order, constituting the assemblage as a single living present. Now the contraction of different gestures through habit comes through representation. It involves a repetition of gestures which through habit are also passively being contemplated in their difference by the subjects. A difference is

¹⁶⁶Canetti, Ibid, p. 31-4

¹⁶⁷ Cited in Turetsky, 2004, op. cit., p. 143

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 145

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 146

being extracted constantly with their very repetition. 'Since the instances contemplated do not change, there can only be a repetition if something changes in that which contemplates them, that is, if a habit is formed'.¹⁷⁰ Turetsky further quotes Deleuze who believes this idea echoes Hume's claim that 'repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it'.¹⁷¹

Just as in the Haka, within the *khari dhamal* too, gestures being repeated through representation and habit can be extended only till the group sustains its energy. With gradual decrease in the tempo, tiredness and sudden abrupt ending of the drumming the group keeps dislodging itself. The extension of gestures is thus limited owing to such very practical constraints. Thus, for continuity and simultaneity of this synthesis into a single living present, explains Turetsky, the present needs to pass to give rise to the next moment with every passing moment. While this present cannot pass into the same time it constitutes, there is an intratemporal movement into another time, the passage of present into another synthesis of time, which he refers to as the *a priori* past. This second synthesis is rooted in the past as a memory. If the first synthesis retains movements that are being passed in the very here and now, the second synthesis reproduces past as representation. This past that is being represented however does not exist in isolation. It is represented in association with the former presents and the present present, besides also representing its own act of representation. Memory, thus, 'performs an active synthesis combining acts of reproduction, reflection and recognition'.¹⁷² The past thus exists as a resonance of different moments of the former present operating in repetitions. 'It is a medium in which memory focuses on a particular former present.' The past, then proposes Turetsky, is never present as a complete block of time. Constituting a set of paradoxes, it exists a dimension of time which always coexists with the present, contains elements which always have a former present, passing into a successive

¹⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, P. Patton (trans.), (New York; Columbia university press, 1994), pp. 74-6. Also cited in Turetsky, *Ibid.* p. 146.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70. Also cited in Turetsky, *ibid.* p. 146.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 79-81. Also cited in Turetsky, *Ibid.* p. 147.

present and by virtue of this dynamic multiplicity, in it also lies the existence of the future as a possibility, the third synthesis of time.

With the multiplicities of different people interacting with each other, every embodied rhythm, every rhythmic motif that is established within the group always carries the potential to reach out to another rhythmic structure. In fact, the new motif that emerges carries the trace of the preceding structure. Its emergence is already prefigured and incorporated in the continuous modulation of the preceding structure. Thus implicit within each passing rhythm is the resonance of the preceding rhythm and the glimpse of the succeeding motif. Taking off from habit and memory, this production of something new exists as a point of becoming, an interruption or caesura where the assemblage takes on a new dimension, exceeding both its agent and condition. Hence while the form of the new is embedded in the present mode of existence, the new assemblage needs to arise by dislodging and displacing these very components. This is also the intensive reality where Deleuze locates the essence of any assemblage, any extensive space. This is the transformative potential in an assemblage which prevents its exhaustion. It is in this moment of becoming that the essence of any form can be located, this moment of transformation into another extensive space. And it is in these moments of difference from the repetitive structures of repetition that the community locates its existence, where it renews itself. The negotiation of rhythmic gestures and relations between people in the *khari dhamal* which one would like to understand as a microcosm for the macrocosmic Sidi community signifies this incompleteness in every act, incompleteness in rhythm as a gesture by virtue of which the community defines itself anew each time.

Rhythm, thus, in its actualization is a 'sensation'. It exists as a force which gives the community the power to sustain itself. The Sidi community traces its history back to the displacement of their ancestors from Africa, their consequent scattered settlements in different parts of India and the celebration of their saints and ancestors through music is what defines them. But this is not what it is in totality. Owing to negotiations and interactions with time and space, it is always inhabiting difference within these

very realities. This difference, this moment of its becoming where there is always an inherent potential for something new is the life of the community which rhythm brings up. The *mugarman*, *naubat* and *musindo* come together during the 'urs celebration every year within the same predictable musical structure and create something new which cannot be reduced to any of the organized components. There will always be an element of undecidability in terms of both expression and experience and this is what brings the ensemble back with renewed vigour and energy every time. The music, while existing as a system of representation also transgresses that very representation to reveal the subject and the community in their moment of enunciation and creation of that music. In that moment lies the essence of music which is not tied to any of the cultural opinions. It exists here as a thought for a form. Hence, rhythm as thought or as an abstraction of thought. Though in its reality, there exists only music in its empiricism; there is no rhythm without music and no music without rhythm. But in abstraction, there is a fragile moment of the thought being born where it has not been actualized yet, but exists as a possibility. It is not bound to the representation of the community or the subject, but rather, exists as its moment of enunciation; the thought of community as a possibility of a community.

CONCLUSION

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A rhythm does not change in terms of its internal logic. It is through the coming together of repetition and difference, that rhythm becomes the force that sustains the life of the community. The inherent multiplicity opens up the community and makes it real. Every community contains within itself the knowledge of its culture and tradition. It is enclosed within itself through the daily practice of these codes and markers. But there are always gaps within this that displace certain coordinates of the community and drive it to communicate with the world outside. If a percussive tradition of a community defines it, then at the same time those drum beats could also destabilize the notion of that community as self-enclosed and give it new coordinates and reassemble its reality. That is, a tradition never exists as a tight and insulated box; there are always forces within or outside that add something new, which create that blurred line of contact with the elements outside. There has to be something real, some life that sustains it. This can be located in music. It is not entirely the socio-historic reality that sustains them but something intrinsic in music, something existential in music, the way music exists which has a direct relation with the way humans exist. This idea and belief has served as a background for the analysis of the Sidi community and its drumming tradition.

Guarding oneself against any conclusive observation about the practice of music in the case of Sidis, what this work does is, observe their music in its everydayness; their drumming as a way of life; rhythms as embodied. Intrinsic to the idea of a Sidi identity and in the absence of a hierarchical structure or exclusivity of practice, their music is everybody's. It springs and dissolves from within the interactions of the people and in that process enriches itself. Music is conceptualized in their everyday reality. It is immediate. The *zikr* celebrate and capture the essence of their spiritual tradition, drawing from the narratives of Baba Gor, the sea voyage and the gift of happiness that he is believed to have brought with him. The element of joy, pleasure and carnivalesque in their notion of religiosity transcends into their performative practices too. The ecstasy and frenzy that the highly spirited accompaniment of

drumming sets forth, results from their very intimate and material engagement with each other. It does not claim to a distinct, highly intellectual understanding of music practice. The rhythms are their own, deeply embedded and revitalized anew with every process of music making. Everydayness implies these interactions within the creative process that result from the immediate experiences of the self. The pulsating rhythm of their drums are the rhythms internalized and recreated anew with the exchange and interaction of various intensities. In the banality of their performative practice is the infinity of such moments and possibilities which breathe new energy and life into it.

What tools does musicology provide one with through which this quintessential musicality of a community can be studied academically? In the Introduction of this work, one of the main concerns highlighted for research in music was to not subsume the musical analysis within the sociological perspective. While one has been and still is quite wary of the social fetters that one feels limit the understanding of music by placing it within a system of representation, the first chapter with its anthropological description might seem quite paradoxical. This chapter situates the community and its rituals within their respective context which is rooted in the historical and socio-cultural background of the Sidis. The description of the instruments, and the various aspects of the *dhamal* over the three days of the 'urs, all is located within the social, cultural milieu. One cannot ignore the social completely as music is not created in isolation. Different contextual elements do add to its nature and the way it is conceived and received within a group of people. But at the same time, one believes, music also holds within it the capacity to transcend these and create affect moving over such functional concerns. This, for one, is revealed in the process of its being made; the process of music making. The act precedes and transcends any definitions and is experienced in the very fundamental state of its unfolding. This is where lies its power, so to speak, the essence that should come through irrespective of its social and cultural context. Hence the emphasis in this work to look at the interactions and negotiations between people when they come together within a space to create music.

One cannot deny the ritual and cultural specificity of the *mugarman* and *musindo* when they are placed within a *dargah* on the occasion of 'urs every year. The narratives that bind the community with their performative tradition, the stories of baba gor and fakiri as a way of life that they associate themselves with, will continue to be passed down to every generation. But there will always be something different happening every time these instruments are played. The rhythmic affect is created and experienced anew with every performance and that is what is quintessentially music. This work with a belief and interest in this aspect is an endeavour to explore precisely this dynamic, by looking at the process within a community. The study then draws directly from the field documentation to analyse the exchanges that take place at the level of music. The stylistic techniques and the performative pattern hence convey the idea of musicality of the Sidis, their idea of music within a collective which initiates them to states of ecstasy and heightened emotions. The intensity that they create through the drumming through those highly energised strokes on the drum, one observes, cannot be divested of their material presence. Music becomes a performative expression of the body and while this remains central to the affect that they create musically, this point also raises further questions about the musician as a subject and the community, broadly about music and community.

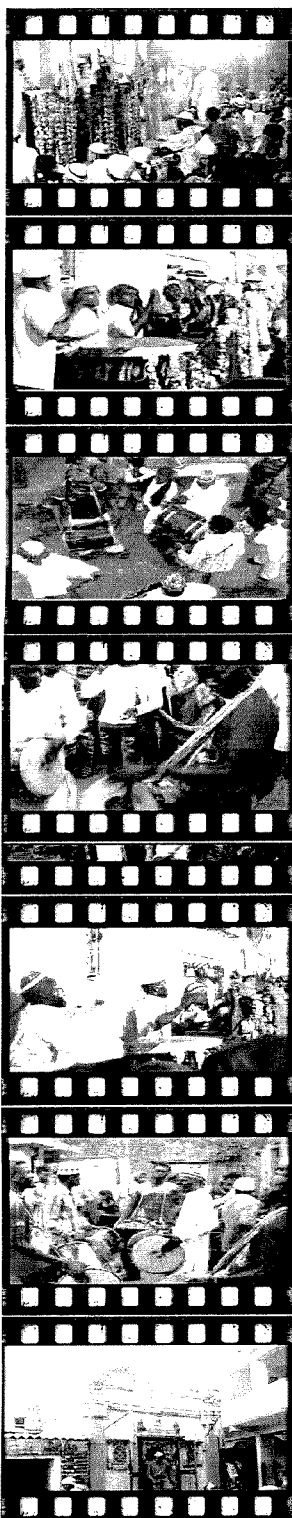
Embodied Rhythm is thus the rhythm felt and lived everyday in the negotiations of the people with each other. It is not that which exists outside of oneself as a given, but deeply ingrained in the body, it is experienced depending on how one interprets it. Rhythm here defines a temporality which within a measured fixity, brings about the element of regeneration and metamorphosis. Within repetition, it resists stasis. It is revealed in the 'moments' of surprise, of change that enter a rhythmic organization, transforming or revitalizing it. It serves as a system of signification, but is also revealed subtly through gaps within that representative structure in the moments of difference. In the case of Sidis, rhythm, one believes becomes interesting in the context of how the community survives or defines itself through the rhythmic patterns that are central to its performative tradition. These rhythms not only represent them but also give them the space to articulate themselves in a given space and time. It becomes of utmost significance within this context, an examination of the idea of the

musician at the locus of contact between the community and the individual subjects; how rhythm becomes a medium through which the subject defines his identity in a community owing to his spatio-temporality and how that redefines the community in turn and vice versa. Within a continuous historical narrative of a community through which the identity of its people is defined and represented, the presence of rhythm comes across as a rupture, an interruption, a caesura within that continuity. The rhythm does not merely exist as a representative structure, in the repetitiveness of the beats marking out the Sidi identity, but there is always something new being added to it every time it is actualized. This further also influences the identity of the individuals who are creating these rhythms, who are constantly defining themselves on the basis of the relation and interactions within different elements coming together in the act of this creation. The subject is formed through the rhythm and simultaneously also creates the rhythm through his enunciation. Hence, within its repetitiveness, there is always an element of difference and the possibility of something new. This study in a way underlines the concern of this work which is premised on the belief that within a discourse of culture and history, there are always certain determiners that act as qualifiers but one cannot reduce the cultural and social systems to these predicates. There is always an inherent incompleteness within them from which stems this possibility of difference and this is what sustains both the music and the community. This is what defines art and life. It takes one back to the idea of time, delineated in the 'Introduction' of the co-existence of the calculated, repetitive time with the unmeasured lived time which resists and suspends this continuous, homogenous idea of temporality. *Embodied Rhythm*, therefore, marks the confluence of the measured quantitative time with its qualitative component. The metrical frame of time in the demarcation of beat combines with the experiential frame which is perceived in the process of the musical work. The Sidis in their music and community are explored within the light of such a nexus.

In the context of exploration of such ideas, this work draws from various approaches of philosophy, sociology, semiotics and linguistics in an attempt to defy the constraints that limit such an enquiry into the aesthetics of music. This however might not and does not overlook the problematic areas that it opens up, the questions it

raises about methodology, the use of ideas which might not have their genesis in one's socio-cultural context. The concern to base one's analysis entirely to the process of music-making is in one part of an endeavour to search for music as a model, music as methodology. At the nascent stage that this work is in, all these thoughts and analysis are in a state of experimentation, volatile and fraught with their problems. The detailed technical analysis, as one sometimes observes in other cases, removes the 'music' from the analysis. The viability and the scope of this approach thus remains a matter of confusion and raises many questions for one. On the one hand, the analysis in this work seems to be the only undiluted method available where music does not just become an object of study but a tool of understanding, for instance in this case, to look at what Sidis do musically. On the other hand, within that approach, a conscious attempt is made to not draw from other musical cultures as a frame of reference and place them in comparison with the music in context. At this level of the work, one believes the music also needs to be read into as it appears. That is how the process of music making can be captured. This and many such issues the research constantly deals with. As thoughts and ideas in process, these might or might not lead to some conclusive inferences, could place the work in the midst of major debates while also open a space to provoke such critical discussions. The attempt here is, to underline, look at and raise for further enquiry the stakes involved in theorising, within the requirements of academic research, ideas of music as inherently linked to life and its processes, to capture the emergence and gradual evanescence of music that the Introduction of this work begins with, conjure the 'sculpture musicale' of Duchamp and Cage.

LIST OF CLIPS



1. Clip 1- Baithi Dhamal/Zikr (10:05)
2. Clip 2- Khadi Dhamal/beginning (05:17)
3. Clip 3- Khadi Dhamal/mugarman in fast tempo (01:30)
4. Clip 4- Khadi Dhamal/variations on the mugarman (01:20)
5. Clip 5- Khadi Dhamal/Day 1 and Day 2 (02:46)
6. Clip 6- Khadi Dhamal/body dynamic (01:55)
7. Clip 7- Musindo ensemble beginning (06:31)
8. Clip 8- Musindo ensemble, Khayyum's style of playing (01:57)
9. Clip 9- Musindo ensemble on the street (01:42)
10. Clip 10- Musindo ensemble, Sadiq's variations (01:29)
11. Clip 11- Crowd chants and dancing (01:21)
12. Clip 12- Irfan on senior on the way to Sodi Vari (07:42)
13. Clip 13- Drumming around the dargah at Sodi Vari (02:47)
14. Clip 14- Meeting of rhythms, naubat and senior (02:18)
15. Clip 15- Luban at Jambur, trance (01:33)
16. Clip 16- Luban at Jamnagar (02:00)

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