

Brian Bond

SEM Roundtable 2015

Adorning the Bride: Lyric and Melodic Confluence in Islamicate Musics

Where Melody Meets Mystical Poetry: the *Sur* Repertoire of Sindh's Shāh 'Abdul Latīf Bhiṭāī

The Indic term *sur* is widely used throughout South Asia to mean “tone,” or “note.” In the subcontinent's northwest, however, *sur* holds two additional meanings, both of which are linked to the eighteenth-century Sindhi Sufī poet Shāh 'Abdul Latīf Bhiṭāī (d. 1752): 1) melody type (akin to *rāg*); and 2) a section, or “chapter,” of Shāh Latīf's poetic compendium, *Shāh Jo Risālo*. This paper examines the *sur* repertoire of Sindh, Kachchh, and western Rajasthan, in which *surs* act as distinct melodic vehicles for Bhiṭāī's mystical poetry. Each section of the *Risālo* is composed along an allegorical or metaphorical theme, and referred to as a *sur* (e.g., *sur Rāṇo*). In textual accounts of the repertoire, the poetic content of a given *sur* (chapter) is said to be sung in its corresponding *sur* (melody type), pointing to the rootedness of poetic content within musical practice, and vice versa, as well as to linkages between melody, geography, and oral culture. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Kachchh in the summers of 2014 and 2015, I explore the extent to which performance practices are in consonance with the textual ideal of melodic-poetic correspondence.