MUSICAL RESILIENCE

Performing Patronage in the Indian Thar Desert

SHALINI R. AYYAGARI
Musical Resilience
Shalini R. Ayyagari

MUSICAL RESILIENCE
Performing Patronage
in the Indian Thar Desert

Wesleyan University Press  Middletown, Connecticut
pothī paḍh paḍh jag muā, paṇḍit bhayā na koī
do ākhar prem kā, paḍhe so paṇḍit hoī.

Reading books upon books, everyone died
and none became wise.

Four letters: love.

Read those and be wise.

Kabir
transliterated and translated
by Linda Hess
CONTENTS

Preface ix
Note on Translation and Transliteration xiii
Acknowledgments xv

INTRODUCTION Musical Resilience 1

ONE (Post)Patronage 41
TWO Performance 76
THREE Development 107
FOUR Politics 136

CONCLUSION Ongoing Resilience 165

APPENDIX Organizations and Festivals 173
Notes 177
Bibliography 195
Index 215
I first saw the mural pictured on this book's cover in January 2019 when I was living in Jaipur City in Rajasthan, India. I was on my way home from a meeting and recording session with one of my key research interlocutors, Dara Khan. He and his group of accompanying musicians had arrived in Jaipur from his village Hamira for a commissioned performance. The drive should have been short at any other time of day, but at the height of rush-hour, my taxi crept through the city’s thick and diverse traffic—cars, buses, motorcycles, bicycles, camels, and pedestrians filled the dusty street.

Halfway home, my taxi screeched to a halt at a stoplight on New Sanganeer Marg, next to the New Aatish Market metro station. As I looked out my car window from the taxi’s back seat, I saw a larger-than-life mural painted on the wall outside the entrance to the station (figure FM.1). Painted by Shunnal Ligade, a Bangalore-based freelance artist, the mural features a musician playing the *kamaicha* instrument (bowed lute). The musician is obviously from the Manganiyar community because they are the only community to play such an instrument. The late afternoon winter sun cast a warm glow just above the musician, placing him in a shadow. He has a white handlebar mustache and wears a blue turban and matching blue coat. A caricature of a *kamaicha* rests in the musician’s lap on top of his white dhoti, with the instrument’s body unrealistically misshapen and its strings and bridge haphazardly painted on like an afterthought. A thin black line represents the bow being pulled across the instrument. To the musician’s left is a burnt orange silhouette of a sitting camel, but the musician does not see the camel.

As I looked at the mural, my gaze panned out to see the surrounding context. The musician seems to hover above a dusty brick sidewalk, unbothered by the long ditch filled with rocks, dust, and trash that runs in front of him and frames
the bottom of the mural. The silhouette of the camel to the musician’s left points towards a slanted peach colored wall that stands out against the winter blue sky behind it. As I made the visual connection of the blue of the musician’s turban and coat to the sky, it was as if the cement wall between them disappeared and I was transported with the musician to the Thar Desert.

I heard a truck horn from behind my taxi in the traffic and I was brought back the busy intersection in Jaipur. My gaze was then drawn away from the kamaicha and camel to the musician’s more realistically painted eyes and furrowed brow. The painted musician looks worriedly to his upper-right at something in the distance. It is as if he is flatly placed in the Thar Desert atop the large cement wall but is actively looking toward something beyond his painted world—something new and uncertain. I rolled down the taxi door window and peered up, following the painted musician’s line of vision along the geometric and sharp lines of the building’s cracked cement wall to the tall cement metro station and the raised train platform above. A metro train whizzed by on the raised tracks. I was not sure if I imagined the musician slightly cringing and bracing himself in response to the speed and noise of the metro train. When the traffic light turned green and my taxi started back on the route home, I convinced myself that the slight

x Preface
movement I thought I saw of the flatly painted Manganiyar musician was just the vibration of the building in response to the metro train.

Ligade's interpretation of a Manganiyar musician painted on the side of a modern urban metro station in front of a bustling road full of international brands of cars and trucks honking their horns and spewing exhaust continued to haunt me long after the car ride. Throughout the writing of this book, I have been pulled back to Ligade's image as I thought about Manganiyar musicians torn between tradition and modernity, an imagined past and an envisioned future, and the nuances and contradictions of Manganiyar traditional patronage and postpatronal relations.
NOTE ON TRANSLATION
AND TRANSLITERATION

Throughout the book I use popular romanized spellings of personal names, proper names, geographic locations, and words that are commonly used in English. Using romanized script, I have transliterated words that are taken from standard Hindi language and Marwari dialects. I chose not to use diacritics for ease of reading, and instead I used adjusted transliterations for ease of pronunciation. For example, I use “aa” instead of “ā” to designate a long vowel sound. This excludes personal names, proper names, geographic locations, and terms that are used in English and have a standardized spelling. These common terms that have entered the English lexicon appear without diacritics, adjusted transliterations, or italics but are defined at first use to make clear how I am using them. Non-English words are italicized at first use in each chapter and definitions are not repeated in every chapter. The English plural suffix -s has been used instead of Hindi and Marwari plural forms for ease of readability in English.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kabir, as one of India’s most influential poets of vernacular devotion and mysticism, has inspired musical traditions throughout the Thar Desert borderland. Manganiyar songs embody Kabir’s enticement to listen, to be connected to each other and the world through the ephemerality of sound and spirit. Embedded in so many of Kabir’s poems is a signature line that both identifies the poem as being by Kabir and embraces the important act of listening: Kahe Kabir suno (Kabir says, listen).

Throughout my years of listening to Manganiyar music, I found myself drawn to those songs in which Manganiyar musicians set Kabir’s poetry to music. I listened for the signature line and the pithy, spiritual message that followed. The irony of Kabir’s inspiration is that it encourages the listener to engage with life not through the written word but through embodiment and experience. Yet, throughout the research for and writing of this book, I sought inspiration from Kabir, often saying to myself, “Kahe Kabir, research!” or “Kahe Kabir, write!” In this book, I barely touch the surface of Manganiyar life and musical practice, but I hope that glimpses of Manganiyar stories and my embodied research experiences shine through its pages.

My acknowledgments span decades, continents, institutions, and desert borderlands. Needless to say, I have accumulated many debts of gratitude while on this journey. Here I barely touch the surface, but I attempt to thank and acknowledge some of the most transformative connections I have made while researching and writing this book.

My biggest debts and appreciation go to the Manganiyar community. Many musicians and their families gave their time, patience, and music to help me better understand their worlds. Khete Khan Hamira was the first Manganiyar musician I met. He welcomed me to Hamira Village with open arms in 2002.
He went on to become a friend and noteworthy interlocutor for my research. He opened the door to his entire extended family again and again, year after year. I need to mention many musicians just in Hamira Village. First and foremost, Padma Shri Sakar Khan (the Hamira Village Manganiyar patriarch and a renowned musician) provided hours of conversation, interviews, and music. It is from him that I learned the most about Manganiyar patronage, postpatronage, and musical practice. Sakar Khan's four sons all sensational musicians in their own right, taught me a great deal, and need to be mentioned by name: Ghewar Khan, Firoz Khan, Dara Khan, and Sattar Khan. Pempe Khan (Sakar Khan's brother) was patient with my questions and presence in his home. His sons, Khete Khan (mentioned above) and Chuge Khan, both taught me a great deal and accompanied me on numerous field trips. I must also acknowledge the Manganiyar women in Hamira Village with whom I spent many nights learning about their worlds and telling them about mine. I especially treasure the conversations I had with the wives of Sakar Khan, Pempe Khan, Ghewar Khan, Firoz Khan, and Khete Khan, as well as with Ghewar Khan's daughter, Gudiya.

Many Manganiyar musicians beyond those in Hamira Village welcomed me into their homes and helped me with my research. I thank the Manganiyar women performers with whom I spent time: Rukma Bai, Ankla, Daria, and Sonu, all of whom are amazing musicians in their own right and courageous public figures. I also thank Gazi Barna for inviting me to his homes in Jaisalmer City and Barna Village and to performances in India and abroad. Likewise, Mame Khan took time out of his busy touring schedule to talk with me about his music and postpatronage experiences. I value the information Mame Khan provided and the photographs he gave me permission to use for this book. I have always drawn inspiration from Hakam Khan’s virtuosic kamaicha performances. His music, captured in many lengthy and soulful recording sessions, motivates this work. I also thank Padma Shri Anwar Khan Baiya, Padma Shri Lakha Khan, Imam Khan Alam Khana, Hakim Khan Hardwa, Sarwar Khan Alam Khana, and Rais Khan for insightful conversations and recording sessions. I hope that Manganiyar musicians will treat any misunderstandings or inaccuracies in this book with lenience and forgiveness. Any errors are completely and only mine.

My PhD advisor Bonnie C. Wade was there for me from the beginning of this project, steadfast and patient as I found my way in my research. She was and continues to be my strongest advocate, and I cannot thank her enough for her kindness, support, and advice over the years. Her dedication to the field of ethnomusicology and attunement to music scholarship continue to inspire me.
During my time at the University of California, Berkeley, many other people were of great help. Jocelyne Guilbault took the time to mentor me and taught me how to write. Alan Pred and Alan Dundes, whose graduate seminars I took, inspired me to think about my research as not just writing but as engagement with people and their lives. I also learned a great deal from Lawrence Cohen, Prachi Deshpande, and Usha Jain while at Berkeley.

I have been blessed to have so many scholars whom I consider close friends and advocates. My colleagues from graduate school who kept me going with love and support include Marié Abe; Pamela Schnupf; Pattie Hsu; Ezra Wood; Matt Rahaim; Carla Brunet; Bill Quillen; Christina Sunardi; Jeff Packman; Kendra Salois; Donna Kwon; and, last but not least, Eliot Bates and Rebecca Bodenheimer, co-members of the Fast-Track Dissertators Club. A number of scholars of South Asia have left indelible intellectual marks on this book. Their inspirational scholarship and countless conversations have helped me shape my work. They include Carol Babiracki, Peter Manuel, Daniel Neuman, Suzanne and Lloyd Rudolph, Kathleen O’Reilly, Anna Schultz, Zoe Sherinian, Sarah Morelli, Stefan Fiol, Jayson Beaster-Jones, Anna Morcom, Gregory Booth, Bradley Shope, Gabi Kruks-Wisner, Anaar Desai-Stephens, and Max Katz. I also thank close friends I have made along the way through my institutional affiliations: C. Annie Claus for her constant motivation, Andrea Emberly for her support, and Caroline Faria for her camaraderie.

I worked on parts of this book while at four universities. First, as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, I traveled to India for exploratory research with a Graduate Opportunity Fellowship. With the help of a Foreign Languages and Area Studies grant, I was able to improve my Hindi language skills through the American Institute for Indian Studies’ Hindi language program in Jaipur. My doctoral work was funded by a Fulbright IIE Fellowship and UC Berkeley’s Department of Music. I had the wonderful opportunity of finishing the writing my dissertation and teaching two courses while holding a Marilyn Yarbrough Dissertation Writing and Teaching Fellowship at Kenyon College. It was there that I was given the time and space to finish the dissertation and start thinking about this book.

While at Dartmouth College on a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities, I began to develop the project that has resulted in this book. Thanks go to Theodore Levin, my faculty mentor at Dartmouth, and Adrian Randolph, the director of Dartmouth’s Leslie Center for the Humanities. I must also thank Christian Wolff, professor of Music, emeritus, for the space to live and write
and for the farm hikes. I worked on parts of this book while on the faculty of the Department of Performing Arts at American University. Thanks go to my former colleagues in the department for their support: Fernando Benadon, Daniel Abraham, and Nancy Snider. Thank you to Lindsey Green-Simms, for co-teaching an amazing course that led me to think about my work differently. I am also indebted to a number of amazing undergraduate students with whom I had the opportunity to work and think. These include Allie Martin, Ellen Rice, and Jackson Anthony. At American University, research for this book was funded by a Faculty Research Support Grant and an International Travel Award that enabled me to travel to India for follow-up research.

I have many people to thank during my time so far at the University of Pittsburgh. To my colleagues in the Department of Music, especially Adriana Helbig, Mathew Rosenblum, Michael Heller, Dan Wong, and Olivia Bloechl, thank you for your continued support and friendship. Outside of the department, the small community of South Asianists on campus, including Mrinalini Rajagopalan, Neepa Majumdar, and Joseph Alter, have been a wonderful group of colleagues. I have benefited from conversations and teaching undergraduate and graduate students at Pitt. I wish to thank my former student Stephanie Jimenez for designing the map for this book, and graduate student YuHao Chen for his help in preparing my manuscript for submission. Pitt has been generous in its research funding and has supported this book every step of the way through an Initiative to Promote Scholarly Activities in the Humanities Grant, a Global Studies Center Faculty Research Grant, a Central Research Development Fund Small Grant, a Hewlett International Grant, a Type I Third Term Research Stipend, a Summer Term Research Stipend for Untenured Faculty, a Dr. Mohinder and Saroj Bahl Book Grant, and a book subvention from the Richard D. and Mary Jane Edwards Endowed Publication Fund.

There are many people to thank in India. During my fieldwork, the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE) was my home away from home. Shubha Chaudhuri is an important mentor who provided fieldwork advice, contacts, ideas, and support. But more importantly, she is a friend who helped me get through a number of difficult research stints. Also at ARCE, Umashankar Manthravadi was a delightful colleague and gave me invaluable microphone and recording advice. In Jodhpur, I had the opportunity to meet Komal Kothari before he died in 2004. Even in our one short meeting, he inspired me to pursue my research. Kuldeep Kothari (his son, and the current director of Rupayan Sansthan), opened up the world of Manganiyar music to me: in 2002, he became the
first person to connect me with Manganiyar musicians. Throughout the many years of my research, he has served as a contact, organizer, and host for several research projects. I thank the American Institute of Indian Studies and the generous Senior Research Fellowship I received to spend an extended period of time in India in 2018. In Jaisalmer, I would not have felt at home without Arun Ballani's accommodations at Hotel Swastika. While I was initially invited to stay there as a tourist, he treated me like a family member during the many months I lived there. I greatly appreciated the friendship, conversations, and humor shared over tea and biscuits almost every afternoon at Hotel Swastika with the “Fagdard Fouj.” I survived my dissertation fieldwork with the help of two fellow Fulbright scholars in particular, Anjali Deshmukh and Siddarth Puri. I also benefited from conversations with Tanuja Kothiyal in Delhi and Faith Singh in Jaipur.

Presenting my research to engaged audiences over the years in the United States and India has encouraged me to think differently about various aspects of this book. Presenting my work at Berkeley’s Center for South Asian Studies and the Tourism Studies Working Group initially helped me shape my ideas about postpatronage. Institutions where I have given research talks include the Leslie Center for the Humanities at Dartmouth College, Asia Society in New York, Dhar Center for Indian Studies at Indiana University, University of California, Los Angeles (through its Mohinder Brar Lecture Series at the Herb Alpert School of Music), Boston University, University of Maryland at College Park, Swarthmore College, Gandhi Memorial Center in Bethesda, and Eastman School of Music. The archival and media work I was able to do at the Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis Digital Archive at Indiana University allowed me to think about my work in a different way than just the written word. While in India, I had the opportunity to give talks at a number of institutions and received valuable feedback. These include the Indian Institute for Technology at Gandhinagar, University of Hyderabad, Trivedi Center for Political Data at Ashoka University, and Jaipur Virasat Foundation. I presented conference papers on segments of this book as a member of numerous conference panels, including national or international conferences of the Society for Ethnomusicology, American Anthropological Association, Association of Asian Studies, American Musicological Society, and International Council for Traditional Music, as well as at the Annual Conference on South Asia.

I thank the people at Wesleyan University Press who have helped me so much in the past few years and have made the publishing process extremely clear, engaging, and creative. In particular, I thank Deborah Wong, Jeremy Wallach, and
Sherrie Tucker, the editors of the Music / Culture series, for their encouragement of this project. I am extremely grateful to my editor Suzanna Tamminen for her unerring patience, calm, and dedication in seeing this project through in a timely manner. I am grateful to the two anonymous readers of my manuscript. While they were both kind and generous in their reviews, they gave me critical feedback that pushed me to clarify my thoughts and provide added nuance to my arguments. I also give credit to others involved in the publishing of my book. Also at Wesleyan University Press, I thank marketing manager Jaclyn Wilson and publicist Stephanie Elliott Preito. And I wish to thank production coordinator Jim Schley.

My family members have quietly supported me through this long journey. I thank my parents, Venkata and Gay Morrison Ayyagari, for their unwavering love. My sister Sujatha Ayyagari Nigam and my brother Raj Ayyagari have always been there for me, encouraging me with a much-needed sense of humor. I consider my oldest and dearest friend Carrie Grable to be a member of my family: she has been a constant in my life since the age of six. While Shanti Ayyagari did not live to see this book come to fruition, I always appreciated her nudges (and barks), encouraging me to take much-needed work breaks, walks, and life one moment at a time.

Finally, I cannot thank enough my partner and the love of my life, Andrew N. Weintraub. Through the many years of research and writing that went into this book, he has not only put up with me but has been my biggest fan. His ideas, interlocution, and inquisitiveness have marked every page of this book. He will never know just how much he inspires me to be a better thinker, scholar, and person. This book is for our son, Amir, the greatest optimist I have ever known, who shows me what it means to imagine the ultimate bright and resilient future ahead.
Musical Resilience
INTRODUCTION
Musical Resilience

MURDER IN THE THAR DESERT

On the night of September 27, 2017, Aamad Khan, a member of the Manganiyar community of hereditary musicians was murdered in Dantal Village, in the remote Thar Desert on the borderland between India and Pakistan. This violence shook the entire Manganiyar community. In the aftermath of his death, sadness and turmoil led to community-wide concern and protest, culminating in the uprooting of the Manganiyar families that had called Dantal Village their home for hundreds of years. Because of this dislocation, the Manganiyar families from Dantal were forced to abandon the only occupation they had known for centuries, performing music for hereditary patrons.

It does not seem like a coincidence that Aamad Khan’s murder took place during Navratri, a nine-day Hindu religious festival that celebrates what the Manganiyar community calls lachila, or resilience. Navratri valorizes the power of the Hindu goddess Durga, symbolized by her nine manifestations of lachila. It also recapitulates the Hindu god Ram’s adventures through nine nights of theatrical performances of the Ramliila (Lord Ram’s play), which is based on the Ramayana, a Sanskrit epic. In the Ramliila’s final act, on the ninth night of celebration, the actor playing Lord Ram slays the demon Ravana and declares victory of good over evil, displaying his own lachila as he sets an effigy of Ravana ablaze with fireworks. Lachila is celebrated throughout the Hindi Belt in north India on the last day of Navratri: the many Hindu neighborhoods in Jaisalmer City in western Rajasthan (the largest state by area in India) and surrounding
villages in the Thar Desert are lit up with bonfires as people communally celebrate the resilience mustered in living another year in the harsh desert.

It was during these annual Navratri festivities that Aamad Khan was summoned to one of Dantal Village’s temples to perform a jaagaran (awakening), an all-night ceremonial performance of Hindu religious music that sometimes involves dance and spiritual possession. Jaagarans hosted by jajmans (hereditary patrons) and performed by Manganiyar musicians in the Thar Desert, like this one in Dantal in 2017, are usually adjudicated by a temple’s Hindu bhopa (faith healer and priest) and include musical performance interspersed with religious ceremony. Although the members of the Manganiyar community are Muslim, their traditional patrons, determined by ancestral hereditary relations, are predominantly Hindu. Local patronal relations dictate that Manganiyar musicians perform at the life-cycle ceremonies (births and weddings) and religious festivals of their jajmans, who in turn support their musicians. In this borderland region, where the line between practiced Hinduism and Islam is blurry, it is not uncommon for Muslim musicians to perform in Hindu temples, especially when traditional patronal relations are at play (Piliavsky 2013). According to his brother Bariyam Khan, Aamad Khan’s task at the jaagaran was to conjure up the spirit of the locally worshipped sati ma goddess, Rani Bhatiyani, so that it entered the body of Ramesh Suthar, the temple’s bhopa, enabling the possessed bhopa to properly perform his religious healing duties while in a trance. During the ceremony, the bhopa supposedly accused Aamad Khan of making musical mistakes that prevented him from entering a state of trance. Aamad Khan contested this accusation and questioned the bhopa’s faith. In a fit of anger, the bhopa broke Aamad Khan’s harmonium, the portable reed organ keyboard instrument he used to accompany his singing. Late that night, Aamad Khan was abducted from his home. His dead body was found the next morning on the outskirts of Dantal.

Grief-stricken, terrified, and in fear of more violence directed against them, Aamad Khan’s family did not have time to investigate questions about or possible motives for the killing. They approached their jajman, traditionally a trusted confidante and the first point of adjudication for Manganiyar families, who told them Aamad Khan had died from a heart attack. The jajman encouraged Aamad Khan’s family to bury his body quickly and quietly, which they did without ceremony. The next day, Bariyam Khan inquired further about his brother’s death, having seen lacerations and dried blood on his body before burying him. He was then told that Aamad Khan had been killed for making musical mistakes during his Navratri jaagaran performance. Could it be true that a Manganiyar
musician had been murdered for making musical mistakes? Were there other motives for his murder that involved village politics, religious differences, or caste issues? If so, why would his jajman have lied? When members of the family went over the jajman’s head and approached Dantal Village’s panchayat (local self-governing council) with questions about the nature of Aamad Khan’s death, they were met with silence and grew suspicious of the panchayat, whose elected officials included their jajman.

Only when Bariyam Khan began to carry out his own investigation in the days after his brother’s murder did he learn that their jajman was involved in and perhaps responsible for the murder of Aamad Khan. Bariyam Khan knew the weight of the political power their jajman wielded in Dantal because he was an high-caste Hindu Rajput and an important panchayat official. Likewise, Bariyan Khan was aware of his family’s political powerlessness as low-caste, Muslim village musicians who historically served at the beck and call of their jajman. Without his jajman’s protection and support, Bariyam Khan’s only way to find answers about his brother’s death was to turn to the Merasi Samaj (Artists’ Society), the overarching social and political organization of the entire Manganiyar community. When Bariyam Khan threatened his jajman with taking the case public, the jajman offered him a small amount of money to keep the matter quiet, which Aamad Khan’s family refused. What amount of money could make up for the death of a husband, father, and the family’s main breadwinner?

Aamad Khan’s family made the long journey to Jaisalmer City to visit Bax Khan Gunsar, an outspoken member of the Manganiyar community. He is recognized by the community as the founder of the local organization called Gunsar Lok Sangeet Sansthan (Gunsar Folk Music Organization; “Gunsar” is the name of his Manganiyar subcaste) and as a community organizer with connections to local politicians, the cultural tourism industry, and well-known international Manganiyar performing artists. After arriving in Jaisalmer, Aamad Khan’s relatives were directed to the organization’s headquarters, located in the Kalakar Bhawan (Artist Building; the Manganiyar community center). Located next to the Jaisalmer Kalakar (Artist) Colony neighborhood where most of the Jaisalmer City–based Manganiyar families live, the Kalakar Bhawan sits on a piece of government land donated to the Manganiyar community and today is home to both Bax Khan’s organization and the Merasi Samaj’s headquarters. Bax Khan suggested that Bariyam Khan not only seek answers to questions about Aamad Khan’s murder but also justice for his death. With Bax Khan’s support, Aamad Khan’s family decided to not settle the matter through the usual routes of
nejmans or village panchayats, both of which have been proven to be prejudiced against low-caste communities and Muslims. Instead, the family reported the murder to the Jaisalmer District superintendent of police.

With the support of the larger Manganiyar community, Jaisalmer District officials had Aamad Khan’s body exhumed from its makeshift burial site. An autopsy revealed that he had died from trauma inflicted on his body—not from cardiac arrest, as suggested by the jajman and the panchayat in their statements to the police. A week after Aamad Khan’s murder, Ramesh Suthar, the low-caste bhopa present at the Navratri jaagaran, was arrested for the murder of Aamad Khan, and a warrant was issued for the arrest of the bhopa’s two brothers, who had absconded. Fearing retaliation from their jajman for this transgression, the entire Dantal Village–based Manganiyar population (over two hundred people) sought refuge in Jaisalmer City, where they were temporarily housed at the Kalakar Bhawan, in the hope that the government would give them land in the city where they could settle permanently.

Using his media savvy and social connections, Bax Khan ensured that Aamad Khan’s death was reported by local news sources. However, he could not have predicted the unprecedented national and international media attention paid to the murder and its aftermath, most of which reported the case as part of a larger issue of communal strife between Hindus and Muslims in Rajasthan. Most news sources did not call the Manganiyar community by its specific name but referred to its members as “the Muslims,” pitting them against Hindu village authorities (Firstpost Staff 2017). One reporter went so far as to link Aamad Khan’s murder to the lynching of a Muslim cow trader by a right-wing Hindu cow protection vigilante group in another part of Rajasthan (Ibid.). Another added the case to a list of Hindus killing Muslims with the headline “Mapping Killings That Make Rajasthan ‘Hate Crime Capital of India’” (D. Roy 2017). Aamad Khan was Muslim, and those responsible for his murder were Hindu. However, the case was appropriated for larger national religious and political causes that had little to do with the specific circumstances of the murder: localized rural religio-caste politics (entanglements of religion and caste) in the Thar Desert.

Protests by Manganiyar activists continued for more than a year after Aamad Khan was murdered. Perhaps taking a lead from the media, which had appropriated the murder to make national religious and political arguments, Bax Khan and others from the Manganiyar community ingeniously drew on religious rhetoric to bolster their case of community-wide marginalization and victimization. By conceding that Aamad Khan’s murder was simply another in a
long line of religious hate crimes in which high-caste Hindus kill Muslims, they were able to continue to draw attention to a case that was by then over a year old.

Most of the Dantal Manganiyar families settled informally in a basti (unofficial settlement) on the outskirts of Jaisalmer City. They completely severed their ties with their jajman: return to Dantal was not an option. Some performed music in local hotels and at desert safari camps for Indian and foreign tourists. Others supplemented the meager income they received performing in the seasonal tourism industry with work as manual laborers building and repairing local roads. They continued to regularly visit the Jaisalmer District Collector’s Office to ask the city to give them land. Ramesh Suthar was convicted of murdering Aamad Khan and sent to prison, even though he was most likely a scapegoat for the more powerful, high-caste, Rajput jajman. Ramesh Suthar’s two brothers and supposed accomplices were not found.

In 2018, the year after his death, Aamad Khan’s family members did not celebrate the Hindu festival of Navratri because their celebrations had always been directed at their Hindu jajman in Dantal. No bonfires of lachila or burning demon effigies were found in their basti in Jaisalmer City. In their new urban life, they were no longer living in fear of their jajman or the Dantal panchayat. They were grateful to the Manganiyar community for coming together to support them and hoped that the government would give them land to settle on in Jaisalmer. They were resilient. The situation in Dantal Village was quite different. By the time of Navratri 2018, Aamad Khan’s former jajman had invited a Hindu Dholi family of musicians to settle in Dantal to replace the Manganiyars who had left. The practice of traditional patronage in the Thar Desert, it turns out, is also resilient.

**TEXTURES OF RESILIENCE**

I was not in India when Aamad Khan was murdered, but I did observe the media frenzy via social media as the story made local, national, and international news. Manganiyar musicians posted pictures and videos on social media of Aamad Khan’s exhumed body, his family, and the protests that followed the murder. As I scrolled through social media posts at home in the United States, it became clear to me that these members of the Manganiyar community, many of whom I had known for the past twenty years of my ethnographic research, were enduring drastic changes in community lifestyle and position.

I made a short field visit to the Thar Desert in 2019 to learn more about Aamad Khan’s murder and its aftermath. I met with his family members in Jaisalmer.
City, who were adamant that his murder was not the result of a simple religious dispute as reported in the press. Instead, they told me that localized and complicated religio-caste struggles had plagued Dantal Village for years. The Dantal Manganiyar families had for several years been trying to escape religious persecution and overt casteism in their village, striving to achieve social freedom and societal respect. Aamad Khan’s relatives interpreted his murder as a threat (the last and most drastic in a long line of prejudiced infractions directed against them), intended to convince them to remain in their submissive low-caste position as Muslim village musicians. According to one of Aamad Khan’s family members, they had not been forced to leave Dantal because of Aamad Khan’s death. They believed that Aamad Khan had blamed the bhopa’s lack of devotion rather than his own musical ability for the bhopa’s not going into a trance on that fateful Navratri night in 2017. Because they had questioned Aamad Khan’s death and had not subserviently followed their jajman’s and panchayat’s advice to leave the matter alone, they had been forced to leave Dantal.³

Aamad Khan’s murder was extreme but only the latest in a long series of acts of prejudice, abuse, and neglect against Manganiyar musicians by their jajmans and larger society. Aamad Khan’s family’s search for justice not from their jajman or the panchayat but from a governmental entity like the police demonstrated a change in approach for the Manganiyar community. It triggered unprecedented reactions in the Manganiyar community against traditional jajmans, village panchayats, and broader religio-caste norms in the Thar Desert. It ignited a debate among members of the Manganiyar community about how best to exert their rights and balance traditional patronal relations and village dynamics with nonpatronal performances and international recognition.

I spoke with Bax Khan during my field visit and asked him why he had advised Aamad Khan’s family members to take their case to the Jaisalmer District superintendent of police. Bax Khan told me that he was aware that the police force is often corrupt and unjust, as well as arguably more prejudiced against low-caste communities and Muslims than Hindu high-caste Rajputs and village panchayat members. Perhaps more poignantly, he knew that the act of going to the police would sever the family’s centuries-old ties to its jajman. Bax Khan told me that although severing traditional patronal ties would cause the family to lose its musical livelihood and societal place in Dantal Village, it was time for the Manganiyar community to make this move away from traditional patronal relations when they do not serve the musician. He spoke about patronal relations in terms of dependence: “Since independence, we have continued to follow the
old system, which keeps us dependent on our patrons. We do not have anything of our own and are completely dependent on our jajman for everything. If they are good to us, things are good. But if they don’t treat us well, things are bad. It is not good to be so dependent on others. There should be a logical link between the time and labor we give and the wages we get, but that does not exist in our community. This needs to change.”

This book grew out of an attempt to grasp the basic terms under which members of the Manganiyar community desire to lead respectable and successful lives through the textures of resilience, as recounted through stories of my fieldwork experiences and experiences related to me by interlocutors. I seek to understand the structural and community-wide upheavals that have utterly reshaped contemporary life for Manganiyars. I follow the concept of resilience through different sites, spaces, and temporalities to explore how some Manganiyar musicians came to search for and find economic, cultural, and community resilience through music. While the focus of the book is on Manganiyar musical practice and those musicians who have been considered by the larger Manganiyar community to be resilient, I tangentially engage with those members of the community who are not considered to be resilient, those who are not performers (nonmusician men and women), and their audiences (jajmans and nonpatronal audiences).

What does it mean to live a life that is resilient? How does a person or community muster resilience—that is, where and how do they find it? Who defines resilience and with what authority? What does undesirable resilience look like, when, for example, the practice of patronage is beneficial for high-caste Hindu jajmans, but is life-threatening for Manganiyars?

There are several reasons why resilience is a compelling concept with which to understand Manganiyar music. First and foremost, the language of resilience pervades everyday Manganiyar life. Seen and heard throughout the Thar Desert in the context of local NGO (non-governmental organization) projects, large-scale canal and water irrigation schemes, international tourism, and neoliberal development, resilience is touted as not just a survival tactic, but a strategy for thriving. Throughout my many years of conducting fieldwork in the Thar Desert, lachila was a common trope invoked by Manganiyar musicians to relate their state of prospering as traditional patronal musicians and taking advantage of new and innovative performance opportunities.

Second, resilience, far from being unique to the Manganiyar community, may be one of the most salient terms of our time, invoked in moments of intense struggle to describe people’s actions, survival, and humanity in the face of dev-
There is an aesthetic pleasure in stories of resilience and overcoming. Narratives of resilience inspire people to find their own inner strength and develop capacities for survival. Most recently at the time I was writing this book, resilience was contextualized in relation to the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements in the United States, caste and class uprisings in India, increasing turbulence in the natural environment, complexities in human engagement with technology, and uncertainty in contemporary world financial systems. Resilience has been championed as a descriptor of artists in all corners of the world who are historically enmeshed in local performance contexts and are increasingly working in global performance situations while grappling with anthropogenic climate change, postindustrial economics, and drastic political regime shifts.

Third, resilience is a multifaced term that, when explored in all its dimensions, reveals power dynamics. During my 2019 field visit to the Thar Desert, I realized that what haunted me the most about Aamad Khan's murder and its aftermath was not the violence that was inflicted on a Manganiyar musician on that 2018 Navratri night in Dantal, but the stubbornness of the practice of patronage itself, even at the cost of human life. Aamad Khan's jajman's sense of entitlement to traditional patronage and his unerring position of power despite the egregious act of murder displayed a different kind of resilience. Lord Ram's lachila in the Ramlila performance of Navratri, symbolized by the burning effigies of Ravana throughout Jaisalmer and surrounding villages, came to mind as I decided to use the concept of resilience as this book's analytical framework. However, the stories of resilience I tell are not the black-and-white tales of good conquering evil seen in the Ramlila. Resilience is not found only in winning as opposed to losing. Resilience does not always look like prosperity, and it does not always result in redemption.

RESILIENCE AS A TRANSDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK

A traditional Marwari saying advises: “Ghoda kije kaath ka, pind kije pasaan; / baktar kije lohe ka, phir dekho Jaisan” (Turn your horse into wood, make your body rock-like; / Wear clothes like iron, then only can you see Jaisalmer). At the heart of this couplet is resilience. I made my first field visit to the Thar Desert and met my closest Manganiyar interlocutors in August 2003. The monsoon rains that flooded and wreaked havoc in other parts of the subcontinent that year produced only a few minutes of rain in the desert. I remember my first
afternoon at the homestead of the world-famous Manganiyar kamaicha (bowed lute) player, Sakar Khan, in Hamira Village. I sat with his son, Ghewar Khan (a renowned kamaicha player in his own right), discussing Manganiyar music inside a small brick shack in the desert summer heat. As sweat ran down my face, Ghewar Khan made a fist and said to me in Hindi, “You have to have lachila to be a Manganiyar musician. Life is difficult in the desert. It is very hot, and it is very cold, never in between. We work hard all day long tilling fields, playing music for our jajman.” The lachila Ghewar Khan spoke of reflects the resilience seen and heard in Manganiyar lives and their music.

“Lachila” is a term that most likely is derived from Urdu but is now used throughout the Hindi Belt to mean flexibility, elasticity, and pliability. It is often used in reference to bodily flexibility in dance. Its use in the Thar Desert to mean resilience relates to the human body but is often used at the community level. For the Manganiyar, the rhetoric around resilience is as important as the act of being resilient: speaking about resilience has consequences for musical aspirations among the community. To shape this book, I also draw on the English word “resilience”—which derives from the Latin “resilire,” to remove oneself from an agreement or pull out of a legal contract. “Resilience” has been used as a framework to explain human and natural actions across diverse disciplines since the fifteenth century. From its earliest uses in relation to recoiling or echoing (Bacon and Rawley 1670) and the elastic or springy reactions of gases, liquids, and solids to imposed pressure (Gott 1670), resilience has been most closely associated with the physical sciences to describe the capacity of materials to withstand disturbances (Baho et al. 2017).

Perhaps resilience’s most salient application has been in the field of ecology. The Canadian ecologist Crawford Holling (1973) applied resilience to the natural environment, defining it as the time needed for an ecosystem to return to the stability of its predisturbance condition after a disaster. Holling was the first ecologist to apply resilience to climate change, and his notion of an ecological system’s persistence as a measure of its resilience applied for decades in ecology (Pimm 1991). By the early 2000s, however, predisturbance ecological conditions were viewed no longer as being stable but rather as constantly changing and adapting (Gunderson 2000; Gunderson, Allen, and Holling 2009; Walker and Cooper 2011). Resilience became associated with a sustainability change model, in which there was no predisturbance static formation (Folke et al. 2010). Instead, resilience was viewed as the capacity to adjust to shocks and the ease with which natural systems transition to new temporary stabilities.
It is from this last ecological application of resilience that scholars adapted resilience as a concept to bridge disciplinary boundaries. Scholars from diverse disciplines applied the ecological conception of resilience to people, communities, and objects (Bhamra, Dani, and Burnard 2011). Resilience has been used in psychology to “show interest in the issue of regaining individual and social psychological stability, with the emphasis on recovery from war experiences and catastrophes” (Hellige 2019, 33) (for an example of resilience’s applications in psychology, see Bonanno 2005). In anthropology, resilience has been applied to community-wide recovery after catastrophic events (Adger 2000). The word has made its way into business studies to describe how businesses strategize and predict future conditions to ensure the use of best practices (Hamel and Välikangas 2003; Linnenluecke 2015). In music studies, resilience has not yet become a pervasive concept, although it has been applied to the examination of music’s philosophical ties to racism and sexism (James 2015) and American Black music in the face of systemic racism (Lordi 2020), and in music therapy (Letwin and Silverman 2017).

Ethnomusicologists have skirted around the concept of resilience, applying instead the frameworks of sustainability and ecology to music culture. The metaphorical trope of ecology has been applied to music and sound to study the “effects of the acoustic environment or soundscape on the physical responses or behavioral characteristics of creatures living within it” (Schafer 1977, 271). Daniel Neuman (1980, 18) referred to the way a Hindustani musical system “continues to maintain its integrity and autonomy in a world so vastly changed from that which gave it birth.” Based on Schafer’s definition, Steven Feld (1994) coined the term “echo-muse-ecology” to describe a different engagement with sound and its relationship to the environment. More recently, literature on sustainability in ethnomusicology has explored relationships among people, the environment, and music (Feld and Basso 1996; Schippers and Grant 2016; Titon 2009a, 2015, and 2018), also known as social ecological systems. Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists of sound have given the name “ecomusicology” to studies of sustainability in music and sound, which address the complex and adaptive networks that link people to nature and view people as part of a broader definition of nature rather than being detached from it (Titon 2009b). Using this approach of including humans as a part of nature, Jeff Titon proposed an ecological move towards preservation, which he called “stewardship of musical resources” (Titon 2009a, 5).

While sustainability continues to be used as a guiding principle in ethnomu-
sicology, its application has been criticized as having shortfalls. First, ethnomusicologists have cautioned against making a direct analogy between ecological sustainability and diversity in music cultures, fearing that such a move could easily turn into a neocolonial enterprise of salvage ethnomusicology (Erlmann 1996; Stokes 2004). Second, sustainability has been applied to music culture only in positive ways. Can unsustainability guide ethnomusicological studies of music used in negative terms? Third, discussions of sustainability in music studies tend not to engage with the influence of technology on music and instead pay more attention to connections between music and the natural world.

In response to these critiques of the applicability of sustainability in ethnomusicology, Titon has proposed that the term “resilience” be used to refer to the capacity of a system to recover and bounce back from a disturbance. His use of the term acknowledges the pervasive influences of technology on traditional cultures, allowing cultures to “use whatever means necessary to develop its music now and in the foreseeable future” (Titon 2015, 157). Here, the same connections between music, culture, and nature are woven together through an activist lens of social justice (Allen and Titon 2019; Allen, Titon, and Von Glahn 2014).

This book can be read as being in conversation with readings of musical sustainability, ecology, and resilience. While resilience has been criticized for its universalization of individual experiences and overuse in scholarly contexts, the case of the Manganiyars creates space for a broader interpretation of resilience as an anchoring concept to meld perspectives from a variety of disciplines (for discussions of resilience’s disciplinary overuse, see Bahadur, Ibrahim, and Tanner 2013; Carpenter et al. 2001). While I use Titon’s model of resilience in terms of positive thriving to provide a framework for understanding the ways Manganiyar musicians are prospering as musicians outside of traditional patronal contexts, it is not enough to build resilience with the single goal of sustaining a culture (Titon 2016). A multifaceted conceptualization of resilience can help us understand why music culture persist and change. Throughout this book I draw on three different dimensions to resilience.

The first dimension of resilience explored in this book is “wicked” resilience (Rittel and Webber 1973). Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber formulated the concept of “wicked problems” in the context of design theory. Wicked problems are societal problems that are resilient, meaning they are complex, always shifting, and do not have one simple solution (ibid.). In this dimension, resilience is not always a positive condition. In some cases resilience can be stubborn or undesirable. In other cases, resilience can be positive for some but negative for

Introduction 11
others. Examining resilience in all its forms reveals its interconnections with persistent, recurrent problems for which there are no perfect solutions (Churchman 1967). Patronage itself can be considered a resilient practice in the sense of a wicked problem for which there is no simple answer. While many members of the Manganiyar community have prospered because of traditional patronal relations, others have been subjected to marginalization and discrimination and live in poverty because of their traditional patronal relations. While resilience acknowledges the very real feelings of hopelessness resulting from such wicked problems, it also offers a foundation for adjusting social capacities and finding ways to cope with wicked resilient problems (Kolko 2012).

The second dimension of resilience that I explore is psychological resilience, viewing it as a means of recovery after loss and trauma. If resilience means leaving a previous state behind, it also means not being able to return to that previous state. This liminal state of trauma and the realization that a past normality is gone create vulnerability (Shaw et al. 2016). It is in moments of vulnerability when people's lives are most precarious (Snehashish Bhattacharya and Kesar 2020). But it is also in this vulnerable state when people have the capacity to make changes, accept them, and grow (Arnold 2013; Butler 2016).

An example of the second dimension of resilience, psychological resilience, can be found with Aamad Khan's family members who were vulnerable without the protection of their jajman and village panchayat. Without their traditional support network, they became neoliberal subjects and were expected to recover from Aamad Khan's death and its aftermath by fending for themselves through innate coping strategies. (Bracke 2016, 59).

It is here that we can approach a third dimension of resilience: neoliberal resilience. Resilience is a characteristic and enabling force of the contemporary Indian neoliberal economic regime that continues to trap the Manganiyar community in poverty. Rather than a process or externally imposed state of being, resilience is presented as a personal property or attribute—the mental state of being able to withstand stress, the capacity to recover quickly, and resistance to being affected by the shocks of future disaster (Lentzos and Rose 2009, 242). By positioning subjects as resilient, the state can further promote neoliberal forms of governmentality; encourage political passivity; and step away from state-led initiatives to help shelter subjects from social exclusion, marginalization, and poverty. In this way, resilience becomes a governmental strategy that grants the “illusion of autonomy” and the “reward of freedom,” even though it is a disguised form of top-down market-based disciplinary action (Joseph 2013, 47).
The result is a shift from the state as provider to the state as promoter of self-reliance. The neoliberal state can withdraw support for its subjects and stop being responsible for them while still capitalizing on their overcoming. Resilience becomes a celebration of the abdication of social and political responsibility. Neoliberal subjects are expected not only to survive but to prosper through individual determination. Those who succeed are considered heroic and resilient, and those who do not are considered failures and unresilient. For Aamad Khan’s family, the moments after his death were ones of intense vulnerability. It was in this traumatic vulnerability that they realized their safety and freedom were more important to them than maintaining their centuries-old patronal relations with their jajman. They made the decision to leave their village and traditional patronage behind.

I take the concept of resilience in all these diverse contexts to heart, and throughout this book I show how these diverse faces of resilience exemplify the Manganiyar community’s striving to contribute to and adapt a musical life in a constantly changing world through ethnographic moments of destabilization, precarity, and vulnerability. Through a pursuit of resilience, Manganiyar musicians are not just rupturing and resisting their subaltern history of being subjugated caste musicians chained to traditional patrons through duty and necessity. Rather, they are embracing this history and using it as a catalyst to create new Manganiyar futures of musical livelihood.

SOUNDS AND HISTORIES

At the heart of the Manganiyar community is a historical and environmental continuity that links the contemporary interlocutors in this book with their ancestors, local contours of geography and environment, and histories of patronage and subjugation. The Manganiyars, who number close to twenty thousand people, are a hereditary community of professional musicians. Their professionalism stems from music as their main means of sustaining a living and supporting their families, while the hereditary nature of their profession refers to musical practices passed down from father to son and kept within tightly knit extended family units (figure I.1).9

Manganiyar families are tied to jajmans, hereditary patron families. Manganiyar musicians provide jajmans with family genealogies, oral histories, and ceremonial music mostly at life-cycle ceremonies. In turn, jajmans remunerate Manganiyar families with payment in the form of money, land, animals, grain,
Figure 1.1 Sakar Khan (right) playing kamaicha, with his son Firoz Khan (left) playing the dholak, at a jajman function. Hamira Village, 2006. Photo by the author.

Figure 1.2 Manganiyar dhani on the outskirts of Sanawara Village, 2010. Photo by author.