

6 Sounding Remembrance, Voicing Mourning

Material, Ethical, and Gendered Productions of a New
“Voice” in Shah Jo Rāg

Pei-ling Huang

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the material aesthetics and ethical understandings of a changing vocal technique in Shah Jo Rāg, a devotional singing tradition in Sindh, Pakistan. Over the last century, a new high-pitched voicing technique has emerged and gained currency within the *rāgī faqīr* devotee community, coproduced through material and symbolic intertwining of the faqīr’s body and their accompanying instrument. Within the discursive circuits of an expanding listening public, a minority of faqīrs came to interpret the intense high vocal sounding as the wailing of women at the Battle of Karbala, which encodes their practice as a way to express Shi’i piety.

Keywords: voice, affect, Shi’i piety, Sindh

Introduction: The “voice” in gendered interpretations of Shah Latif’s legacy

Singing devotees who call themselves *rāgī faqīrs* perform the musico-poetic repertoire of Shah Jo Rāg (SJR or Rāg) at the shrine of eighteenth-century poet-mystic Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689–1752), one of the most venerated Sufi saints in contemporary Sindh, Pakistan. This singing tradition emerged from Islamic conventions of *samā’* (audition) for spiritual elevation at Shah Latif’s commune (Baloch 1973). After the saint’s passing, generations of *rāgī faqīrs* continued orally transmitting the knowledge for performing

his poetry. Accompanied by the *danbūro*, a five-stringed long-necked lute, they sing chapters of verses in front of Latif's mausoleum in the town of Bhit Shah, as services of devotion for their spiritual guide.

A celebrated aspect of Shah Latif's verses in Sindh today is his depiction of female protagonists. The corpus of poetry that *rāgī* faqīrs sing are organized into 31 chapters called Surs. Each Sur contains verses that share a thematic content and is set to a unique melodic formula. Among these Surs more than a third are based on stories drawn from popular folk romances. The verses are often composed from the heroine's perspective, grammatically declined to indicate the speaker's female gender, and describe their actions in the face of hardships while separated from their beloved. Scholars of Islam interpret the figure of heroines as mystical symbolism of the "woman-soul" that strives toward Allah (Schimmel 1997; Asani 2003). This draws on the Indic convention of *virahinī*, a woman who "awaits her beloved or is involved in a long and arduous quest for him" (Asani 2003, 637).

Sindhi intellectuals and activists in the twentieth century engaged with these women-centered verses in a variety of ways. Since the 1850s, a new class of English-educated Sindhis under colonial rule built their identity on an essentialized idea of "Sindhi Sufism" (Boivin 2020; Levesque 2016). Elaborating on this ideology in the mid-twentieth century, G.M. Syed, a pioneer of Sindhi nationalism, interpreted Latif's heroines as representatives of patriotism and self-determination. Since the 1960s, female Sindhi writers turned toward highlighting how Shah Latif had great respect for women and expressed their positive characteristics through these verses (Channa 1960). Subsequently, an increasing number of female scholars interpreted these heroines as models of Sindhi women defying norms in a male-dominated society (Sayed 1988; Hussain 2001).

Social realist stances on the literary voices of these heroines sit somewhat in tension with the fact that SJR is a tradition outwardly exercised by men, in line with patrilineal norms practiced in agrarian Sindh. One point of fascination for urban listeners, however, is the distinctive high pitch that many *rāgī* faqīrs sing in, with the timbral quality resembling a falsetto voice. Many scholars and literati hear this as the male faqīrs "creating or impersonating a female voice" when they sing Latif's poetry (Abbas 2002, xxi, 32). This was an enticing narrative that drew me to focus on questions of "voice" in *Rāg* performance. However, I realized after lessons and interviews with *rāgī* faqīrs that, immediately equating the figure of the female voice as a poetic device with that of a sonic signifier, risks naturalizing ideologies of gender and collapsing processes of change. The *rāgī* faqīrs' lived practices reveal historically contingent changes in the techniques and understandings of their devotional performance.

In this chapter, I complicate the narrative of “male faqīrs singing in female voice” by tracing a history of changing vocal practice in SJR. This draws on and contributes to a growing body of literature that engage with the analytical framework of “voice.” Scholars have drawn attention to the generative powers of embodied voicing and vocal pedagogy in religious contexts that mediate divine presence and shape ethical selves (Eisenlohr 2018; Rahaim 2021; Reissour 2018). Discussions of voice highlight its significance as a nexus for exploring the intersections of material and metaphorical, individual and sociopolitical, in sounding cultural life (Harkness 2014; Kunreuther 2014; Weidman 2014). Examining vocal action necessitates focus on relational, non-unitary, and border conditions through transdisciplinary and reflexive methods (Eidsheim and Meizel 2019; Feldman 2015). I align with these studies in the aim of deconstructing a singular notion of voice equated with an essential inner agency or identity.

Beneath the faqīrs’ descriptions about the high-pitched voicing technique bubble ambivalences and debates about its usage and meaning, after it emerged around the turn of the twentieth century. I am inspired by Katherine Meizel to examine the faqīrs’ changing and multiple “vocalities” as a border zone of “meaning-making social interaction” (Meizel 2020, 16),¹ which generates understandings that draw from and influence the faqīrs’ devotional lives. This chapter argues that an intertwining of material and ethical processes gave rise to the faqīrs’ new high-pitched voicing technique and varying perceptions of its sounded qualities. The gendering of this new voice is a minority discourse within the rāgī faqīr community, a more recent phenomenon that developed in relation to listeners outside this community and often deployed by Shi’i faqīrs in connection with their mourning practices of piety. Due to the above-mentioned popular engagements with Latif’s heroines, the gendered narrative of voice has a particular potency in Sindh today, which additionally opened up new possibilities for women’s visibility in the SJR tradition.

Faqīr narratives of voice

Talking about techniques for different kinds of *āvāz*—voice—emerged as a main subject in lessons with my teacher Manthar Faqir Junejo in 2017 and

1 Meizel uses the term “vocality” to encapsulate “all of the physiological, psychoacoustic, and sociopolitical dynamics” that impact the experiences of the speaker, singer, and listener in vocalizations (2011, 267).

2018.² The standard narrative faqīrs tell is that they use two voices in Rāg: the lower voice, *girām*, and the high voice, most often called *sanhī āvāz* (thin or shrill voice) or *kalī* (flower bud), and less frequently, *mādī āvāz* (female or feminine voice).



Audiovisual Sample 6.1

Excerpt from Sur Mazūrī, performed at the shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai in Bhit Shah, Sindh, Pakistan. Recorded by the author on January 2, 2015.

As I talked with more faqīrs in interviews, some started to tell me that faqīrs in the past only sang in one kind of voice called *las*, which was lower than the current high voice. They attribute the emergence of higher voicing to new materials for danbūro strings that appeared in the markets around the turn of the twentieth century. Makers replaced earlier strings made from the softer zinc or pewter (*jist*) to the stronger steel (*ruk*), which allowed faqīrs to tighten the strings to higher pitches than before. Most faqīrs agree that it was Ibrahim Faqir Khaskheli who started employing a new “thin voice” to sing at this increasingly higher pitch to preserve energy. He was legendary in his ability to sing as high and loud as the train whistle that sounded over the railway tracks. Ibrahim Faqir revolutionized protocols for singing. Following his innovation, unison singing in one voice gave way to new, elaborate rules for faqīrs to alternate high and low voices in the group. Yet, technological change alone does not fully explain why the faqīrs strove to sing as high as their instrument allowed. To do so, I propose, requires examining how the faqīrs’ and danbūro’s bodies are ethically entwined in the process of Rāg performance. Rāgī faqīrs “become” a faqīr through learning to habituate an ethical bodily disposition, which can be sonically manifested through their singing voice.³ Their voice, moreover, is interdependent with the physical construction and spiritual connotations of the danbūro’s body.

2 The Sindhi/Urdu/Hindi term *āvāz* can translate as “voice, sound, or noise.” See Kunreuther (2014, 4) and Rahaim (2021, 42) for various contextual usages of this word elsewhere in South Asia.

3 I use the phrase “ethical bodily disposition” in reference to anthropological work that draw on Aristotelian virtue ethics (e.g., Hirschkind 2006; Laidlaw 2014; Mahmood 2005), sharing similar theoretical lineage with Matthew Rahaim’s more detailed conceptualization of ethical “vocal disposition” (2021, 24–31).

Sounding ethical bodies

Similar to other devotional communities in South Asia, *rāgī* faqīrs enter their practice through love for Shah Latif and the divine. They define themselves through performing regular *ḥaẓrī* (presence) at the shrine, following a weekly schedule to sing *Rāg* at various time slots. *Ḥaẓrī* is an act of worship (*‘ibādat*) that necessitates sacrifice, embodied in the act of sitting down to sing for long periods of time. Regular *ḥaẓrī* can come in other forms. Cleaning the shrine, distributing water and food, and attending shrine rituals are all ways to offer energy in devotion for their spiritual guide (*murshid*). Singing *Rāg* is an offering that requires bodily restraint and internal passion, expressed sonorously through spiritual and bodily techniques learned materially from the *danbūro*.

Many faqīrs invoke the following verse by Shah Latif to explain how the *danbūro* embodies his teachings for devotional discipline:

tan tasbīḥ, man maṇīo, dil danbūro jan
tandūn je ṭalab jūn, vaḥadat sur vajān
“vaḥadahu lā sharīka lahu,” iho rāg raḡān
se sutā’ī sūnhan, nīnḍ ‘ibādat un jī

Body rosary, mind beads, heart is their *danbūro*
 Their strings of passion resound with unity
 “He is one and peerless”, their veins resonate
 Awake in sleep, their very sleep is prayers

from Sur Asa⁴

In this verse, Latif likens the throbbing of veins in one’s body to the incessant strumming of strings on the *danbūro*, constantly chanting *ẓikr*—a Sufi ritual of remembrance through repeating phrases professing the unity of Allah.⁵ In the practice of *Rāg* too, faqīrs consider the sounds (*āwāz*) emitted by both the strings of the *danbūro* and their vocal cords as *ẓikr*. Faqīrs agree that the sounds made by *danbūro* strings sing “tun, tun, tun,” which when played in various combinations, say words including “Allah,” “tūn Allah,”

4 Translation by Mushtaq Ali Shah (‘Abd al-Laṭīf 2012).

5 The symbolism of instrument strings as “veins in the body” is widely shared in conventions of Sufi poetry. For more examples of the musical instrument as devotional body see Sukanya Sarbadhikary’s chapter in this volume.

or “Allah hu hu.”⁶ The sound of the strumming strings possesses power to attract and cleanse the heart of the listener.

Techniques of *zikr* are embedded in every section of the performing sequence. Faqīrs perform Rāg following a set sequence of Surs in a group, individually strumming their own danbūros. During the sequence, each Sur is a unit of performance, starting from instrumental preludes *tand* and *jhaṛ* on the danbūro, followed by solo rounds of *bait* (verse) singing by each faqīr turn by turn. After a few solo rounds, the leader signals to conclude with *vāī*, a group chorus with refrain.



Audiovisual Sample 6.2

Tand and jhaṛ in Sur Husainī. Recorded by the author on January 12, 2015.

A single faqīr plays *tand* alone to start the Sur. At the end of the introductory melody is a phrase similar in all *tands* called “*tūn hī tūn*,” a partly onomatopoetic phrase that means “you, only you.” Upon hearing this, the other faqīrs join in to play the *jhaṛ* section together. The section contains five different combinations for strumming the strings called the five *tasbiḥs* (rosary). This brings to mind Latif’s comparison of body with rosary in the verse above and implies that playing these combinations is similar to the repeated chanting of phrases on a *tasbiḥ* in praise of Allah.

Zikr continues in the vocal recitation. Each faqīr individually starts their turn in singing a *bait* with a melodic phrase called the *saḍ* (to call), which is unique for each Sur. The *saḍ* of every Sur are invocations to Allah, with phrases like “Oh Miān [Oh Lord],” or “Oh Allah.”⁷ Each faqīr ends the *bait* with a melodic phrase called the *hūṅgāro*, which is also unique to each Sur and directs attention back to Allah with phrases such as “Alo miān oh tūn Allah.” In the last section of *vāī*, many of the compositions include the phrase “Oh Miān” inserted between the half-lines. Thus, the remembrance of Allah, an important spiritual practice in the Sufi path, is resounded throughout Rāg performance.

Faqīrs follow the teaching that their bodies should be “empty” like the hollow danbūros. Practically, this involves singing Rāg on an empty stomach.

6 Meaning “You, Allah” and “Allah, just Allah.”

7 The *saḍ* of Sur Ma’zuri in Audiovisual Sample 6.1 is “Oh Mian, Alo, Oh Mian.” Its *hūṅgāro* is “Bhalam Alo Allah” followed by the last rhyming half-line of the verse.



Figure 6.1 Manthar Faqir crafting an unfinished danbūro at home (note its hollow neck and body). Photo taken by author on October 22, 2017, in Bhit Shah.

Philosophically, emptiness resonates with the concept of *faqr* (poverty) from which the term faqir originates. Abstaining from food and other desires was practiced by earlier faqirs at Latif's commune for controlling the *naḥs* (the lower self), an important step in Sufi orders for cultivating the *rūh* (soul). Through these teachings, the body of the danbūro becomes an exemplar for the faqirs to emulate through their own bodies and voices.

Finally, the danbūro is the basis for singing techniques. Faqīrs conceptualize their singing voice in relation to the various “places” (*jāḡah*, *manzal*) corresponding to string pitches on the danbūro. The five strings—*ghor*, two *jārīyun*, *ṭip*, and *zabān*—are tuned to relative pitch heights corresponding to the first and fifth scale degrees.⁸ A common way faqīrs instruct students to sing in tune to the open strings is the expression: “You have to attach your voice to *ṭip*,” or “let your voice meet *zabān*.” When I asked faqīrs why they sang so high, the predominant answer was usually: “Because that’s the place of the highest string *ṭip*, so we have to attach our voices there.” The names of the strings are the sole vocabulary that most faqīrs use to describe the melodic rules for singing. The abstract melodic formulas, as well as the faqīrs’ vocal production, are materially grounded in the musical instrument.

A multitude of names

The most common name faqīrs use for referring to the high voice, *sanhī āvāz*, corroborates the account that this new technique emerged out of physical necessity: to save strength for reaching the new *ṭip* string pitch. Faqīrs are not in the habit of talking about the mechanics of vocal production. Good voices are given by the grace of Shah Latif and Allah, either at birth or as a result of their dedication. Manthar Faqir’s *sanhī āvāz* rings beautifully, although this took him years to master, and not all faqīrs can or desire to sing like him. In Western terminology, he produces this high voice by allowing his vocalis muscle to relax and the ligamentous edges to vibrate (Vennard 1968, 67), letting the sound resonate brightly in the front area of his head.

In faqīr circles, *sanhī* and *thulī*, thin and thick, are adjectives I hear often when they contrast the high and low voices, and when my teacher instructs his students to sing in tune to the high *ṭip* string. Students usually let their entire vocal cord vibrate when singing in the lower range, and struggle to sing beyond their modal voice register. Manthar Faqir would tell them: “Your voice is thick, now make it thinner.” “Making it thinner” could be a way to refer to the muscular transition from modal voice to techniques closer to falsetto, to sing in this new frequency range.

Faqīrs use the word *kalī* interchangeably with *sanhī* as another name for the thin voice. Although they don’t immediately associate *kalī* with its dictionary meaning, that of “a bud, unblown flower, a gill (of fish), or gusset,”

8 Further bolstering the body metaphor, *zabān* literally means “tongue.” Relatedly, some faqīrs refer to the danbūro as a “wooden person” (Chang 2001, 43).

I suspect that this name also emerged as a metaphor for the “thinning” technique. In colloquial usage, *kalī* can refer to the plastic wrapper that covers an object. Both dictionary and colloquial meanings suggest delicate, light, or thin material. Light and heavy are also adjectives *faqīrs* use to describe their high and low voices. Furthermore, while *faqīrs* praise the sweetness (*miṭhī*) or openness (*khulī*) of another’s voice, they try to avoid voices that are *ghārī*, which translates as “a space in a cloth where one or more threads are deficient.” These descriptors suggest a tactile iconicity, linking the sound and felt sensations of singing to thick or thin, light or heavy fabrics, or other material objects. The two names *sanhī* and *kalī* foreground the materiality of the voice.

Other names suggest relational interactions. It was senior *faqīrs* at the shrine of Shah Karim, 80 miles south of Bhit Shah, who first told me this story of vocal change.⁹ In contrast, many *faqīrs* in Bhit Shah did not readily remember this history until I asked them. The *faqīrs* at Shah Karim recall their grandfathers tell the story of when Ibrahim Faqir started singing in the new thin voice. This had incurred anger at Bhit Shah and he was prohibited from singing for several years. In the southern areas of Sindh including the abode of Shah Karim and extending to Kachchh, *rāgī* *faqīrs* call this vocal technique *baccī āvāz* (girl’s voice).¹⁰

Mādī āvāz (female or feminine voice) is a name that evokes ambivalence among *faqīrs* in Bhit Shah. Although I had previously read reports of this usage (Abbas 2002; Hemani 2012), I found that few *faqīrs* used the name proactively and some had never heard of it before. A number of *faqīrs* reject the gender association—that singing high and shrill is somehow “female”—by pointing out the technical reasons for singing this way. Faqir Juman Lanjwani tellingly contradicted himself in the middle of his response when I posed the question: “Some call this *mādī āvāz*...?” After a quick negative reply, he paused and said, chuckling: “Yes ... it’s women’s voice ... men’s voices *are* *girām* ... what is happening now in this world, so let it happen....” During interviews, it was mostly *faqīrs* from the Lanjwani family who advocated for singing in the *girām* chest voice, citing the reason that the high voice obscured the words of the poetry that they were supposed to recite with clarity.

The few *faqīrs* who participate in a discourse on the female voice are either connected to families who have historically lived close to the shrine, or

9 Shah Karim was a forefather of Shah Latif. According to oral history, Shah Latif used to visit this shrine with his followers, cultivating *rāgī* *faqīrs* here. The *faqīrs* at these two shrines remain in frequent contact, as do the hereditary custodians who belong to the same family.

10 See Bond (2020) for the history of *rāgī* *faqīrs* and their practice in Kachchh, India.

elucidated *mādi āvāz* through reference to the queries of non-*rāgi* listeners. I suspect that the *faqīrs*' discourse on *mādi āvāz* arose out of interactions with other musical genres and encounters with listeners outside Bhit Shah after SJR performance expanded to larger publics in the later twentieth century.

There is an inclination for contrasting high and low sounds on an instrument as female and male in a number of musical genres in this region. For example, inside the shrine compounds sits a pair of *naghāra* drums sent as gifts by the Raja of Jaisalmer. When the current player Dargahi *Faqīr* showed me those drums, he explained that the two sides of the drums are called *mādi* and *mard* (female and male) due to their contrasting tones. He told me: "It's like the scream in *Rāg*, the drums also have two voices, thin and thick." Likewise, the *murli* and *alghozo* are Sindhi wind instruments with two pipes that sound high and low pitches, with the higher sounding pipe named *mādi* (Baloch 1966). It could be due to knowledge of these, and other genres such as Hindustani vocal music performed by visiting maestros and courtesans living near the shrine, that the *faqīrs* residing in the vicinity of the cosmopolitan shrine, and those who traveled outside to perform, were more inclined toward explaining *sanhi āvāz* as a female voice when they encountered questions about its sound from outside listeners.

The multitude of names for this high voice supports the story of its relative newness. The lower, full-chested voice is called *girām* among all *faqīr* groups, while different lineages of *faqīrs* are familiar with different names for the high voice, from *baccī*, *sanhi*, *kalī*, to *mādi āvāz*. *Girām* (or *grām*) in the Sindhi dictionary means simply: "voice, sound."¹¹ From these names, I speculate that when the new falsetto-like vocal technique emerged out of the default chest voice (*girām*), it was more readily accepted by some than others, and given varying descriptors in different circles. Even as the high and low voices settled as a dichotomy, the multiple names given to the high voice resist a simple binary between these two voicing techniques.

Gendering the new voice

Even though the majority of *faqīrs* use names that do not gender the high voice, the few who spoke about the meaning of *mādi āvāz* shared similar narratives. They deployed this female-like voice to emphasize their *Shi'i* identity, and some extended this to validate their views on what they consider as

11 Or "the manner or measure of sounds/voices in music/singing," *Jāma' Sindhi Lughat*, edited by N.A. Baloch (Jamshoro: Sindhi Adabi Board, 2007).

women's rights in rural Sindh. Faqīr Qadir Bakhsh told me: "There was a *malang* [mendicant] I met at the shrine fifty years ago. He said that *sanhī āvāz* belongs to ladies. When I asked him why, he told me that this was Latif Sein's 'codeword' for Bibi Zaynab and the women imprisoned at Yazid's court." He was referring to how mourning for the events of Karbala began.

Ritualized mourning for Imam Husayn's sacrifice at the battle of Karbala is a central practice in Shi'i Islam. Shah Latif did not explicitly profess a sectarian identity. In the Bhit Shah area, the majority of local elites and *rāgī* faqīrs came to affirm their identity as Twelver Shi'ah (*asnā'asharīyya*) in the last three generations, shortly after the high voice emerged. Most of the faqīrs who expounded on the female voice emphasized this Shi'i narrative: the high-pitched, crying-like sounds faqīrs produce were "coded" by Shah Latif as a form of intense mourning, just as the female relatives of Husayn did after Karbala.

While Shi'ahs are a minority in contemporary Sindh, practices they consider central to their tradition are widespread in the region. Beginning in the tenth century, Ismaili missionaries from the Fatimid empire introduced Shi'i concepts through vernacular vocabulary (Nanji 1978). This instilled in the Sindhi populace a strong reverence for the Panjtan Pāk, the five holy members of the Prophet's family (Khan 1980). In the mid-eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, the Shi'i Talpur dynasty encouraged mourning practices during Muharram (Pathan 2017). Communities regardless of religious affiliation established spaces called *pīrh* for engaging in Muharram rituals including 'azādārī.¹² Inhabitants of Bhit Shah date the oldest *pīrh* in town to about 200 years old; many more were built during the British rule. Like many others in Sindh, communities continued their Sunni-style prayers in the mosque while embracing a "Husaini ethics" (Ruffle 2011) through 'azādārī during Muharram.

In the 1930s, the hereditary custodian (*sajjāda nashīn*) of Shah Latif's shrine married a lady from a prominent Shi'i family of Hyderabad, Sindh. She popularized 'azādārī and pilgrimage to Karbala at unprecedented levels in Bhit Shah. The custodian's family, as elites of the area, started to organize Shi'i *majlis* (assembly) in the shrine compounds and install Shi'i clerics at the small mosque beside Latif's mausoleum, encouraging other families in the vicinity to actively identify as Shi'ah. The majority of *rāgī* faqīrs in the Bhit Shah area today hail from such families.

One strand of the faqīr narrative on the "crying-like" high voice alludes to women being *mazlūm* (oppressed), a Shi'i model of piety exemplified by

12 'Azādārī refers to mourning congregations that express grief in memory of Imam Husayn.

Husayn and his family. Gulan Faqīr explained to me: “*Sanhī āvāz* reveals the oppressed (*sanhe āvāz men, mazlūm zāhir hoti hai*).” He went on to tell me the story of Suhni, a heroine from Latif’s poetry, how her family wronged her by not seeking her consent in marriage. Sur Suhni is a chapter in Latif’s repertoire based on the famous story in which Suhni, married against her wishes, swims across the river every night to meet her true love Mehar. Expounding on this, Manthar Faqir said that: “Shah Latif noted how women were oppressed in his times, that’s why he composed so many verses on heroines.” He further told me and his daughters when we were learning together that: “Suhni ... brought on a revolution. She was demanding for her rights ... and Shah Latif was compelled to raise her story in song.” Syed Juman Shah, leader of the most respected Thursday night group, explained about *mādī āvāz* that: “Just as in our society women are oppressed, Shah Latif’s verses are also for the oppressed That’s why he changed this voice, to tell the whole world that women can also learn and sing Rāg.”

This interpretation of “female voice” thus functions in dual avenues. On the one hand, it evokes the rich web of symbolism associated with the events of Karbala, commemorating through acts of mourning ideals of ethical action including revolution against forces of oppression. The sound of women’s voices becomes an apt medium for practicing unrestrained grief in the context of affirming the narrator’s beliefs. On the other hand, it opens up new possibilities for women’s visibility in the SJR tradition.¹³

By connecting Suhni and other heroines’ stories in Rāg with oppression and defiance, these faqīrs subtly staked their opinions on women’s rights in marriage, education, and performing Shah Jo Rāg. Since the 1980s, female members of the left-wing political party Sindh Awami Tehrik founded the Sindhiani Tehrik to address issues particular to women in peasantry and upwardly mobile rural classes, including campaigning against forced marriages, honor killings, and advocating for female literacy (Mumtaz 1991). Notably, they used symbols of women’s defiance in Sindhi songs and Shah Latif’s poetry for mobilization (Saigol 2016). Although this movement was not directly active in Bhit Shah, these were similar issues the faqīrs touched on in connection to *mādī āvāz*. Furthermore, they invoked this as

13 That SJR is a predominantly male practice is primarily due to masculine-marked spaces of its transmission and performance, which is more difficult for women to access. Women have learned, performed, or possessed knowledge of Rāg in the past, yet they were not widely publicized. Manthar Faqir taught his school-aged daughters and son Rāg at home, which encouraged me to learn with them. I further explore issues related to women performing Rāg in my PhD dissertation.

a legacy of Shah Latif, thereby sanctifying the sonic presence of women in this male-dominated tradition.

While still framing the issues within patrilineal limits of honor, this was a departure from other *faqīrs*' understandings of Shah Latif's heroines. For example, some believe that they were spiritually powerful women who will bless the devotees that sing their stories. Others follow Sufi understandings of the hierarchical relationship between the Sufi adept and Allah, set up in the patriarchal framework of hierarchy between woman and man. Many South Asian religious communities do performatively subvert the ideology of hierarchical heterosexuality through metaphors of love and figures of heroines, to signal surrender to a spiritual authority, or to realize antinomian ontological ideals (Kugle 2010; Lorea 2018). However, the *rāgī faqīrs*' narrative here suggests another hierarchy: the mediation of the Panjtan Pāk between humans and Allah. Rather than becoming heroines enduring the pain of separation from the beloved, this idea of women's voice encodes an embodiment of Husaini ethics through Rāg as mournful commemoration.

Conclusion

Tracing the emergence of a new high voice and its multiplicity of names, this chapter demonstrated how the *rāgī faqīrs* orient their ethics via bodily practices of voicing and discursive gendering of the voice. As a devotional practice for sounding remembrance, Shah Jo Rāg is an ethical exercise intertwining the body, voice, and *danbūro*. The ethics and changing material conditions for this tradition contributed to new voicing techniques. Tactile names of the thin voice hint at the multi-sensory phenomenology of voicing and its power for intercorporeal affecting, which scholars have explored as "sonorous touching" (Csordas 2008) and "transduction" (Eisenlohr 2018).

The *rāgī faqīrs*' body and *danbūro* move in the practice of remembrance, which entails feeling the pain of separation from the beloved. An increasing number of *faqīrs* today embrace a particular modality of pain—that of mourning—localized bodily through Muharram practices. In this modality, some found in the new high voice a gendered interpretation connecting the Husaini ethics of Karbala to the women symbolism in Shah Latif's poetry. Some *faqīrs* who identify as Shi'ah discursively intersect the affect of mourning with conventions of listening that naturalize high and low sounds in a gendered binary. In this narrative, their figure of the "female voice" both bolsters the exemplary ideals of Husaini ethics and works to justify actual women's voices in SJR performance.

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About the author

Pei-ling Huang is an assistant professor at the Center for General Education, National Taiwan University. She holds a PhD in ethnomusicology from Harvard University. Her current project explores the institutional production of knowledge on "Sindhi music" and how it intersects with changing contexts of Shah Jo Rāg performance. This chapter draws on material from her PhD dissertation "Ways of Love: Self-making and Repertoire Formation through the Musical Legacy of Shah Abdul Latif" (2021).