

# Querying ‘Global’ Music History: Significant Geographies between Goswami Pannalal and Queen Victoria

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## Abstract

Global music history projects have become increasingly popular in recent years. Going global has its advantages: it develops conversations between researchers working on disparate regions; it sheds light on larger frameworks that are less evident on smaller scales of analysis; it decentres how we teach music history; and it retraces a global hinterland for music systems that have conventionally been called ‘Western’. At the same time, the global history approach raises challenges for researchers working on the world beyond Europe. In particular, there is the danger of unintentionally reinstating Eurocentrism, either by uncritically exporting research questions based on the European experience to the wider world, or by narrowing our focus onto those musicians and scholars who engaged with European ideas and practices, especially in colonial settings. This work is valuable, but it also comes with risks. This essay considers these problems through a case study: a largely forgotten music scholar, Goswami Pannalal, who travelled and taught across north India in the late nineteenth century. Examining his musicological study in Hindi, the *Nād Binod* (‘Sonic Delight’, 1896), I consider how far asking ‘global’ questions might shed light on his work, and offer an alternative reading based on a ‘significant geographies’ approach.

**Keywords:** global history; music history; significant geographies; Indian music; colonial India

Global music history has been trending in recent years, but often in a haphazard way.<sup>19</sup> The scale and ambitions of new and upcoming projects can vary dramatically. On the one hand, some scholars are now keen to develop resources that follow the model of works which we already have for Western music history: a book on a familiar music topic but examined from the perspective of many different music systems. On the other hand, critics of this approach are wary of formulating a new canon and are anxious to move away from models designed with European experience in mind, and instead hope to investigate a larger variety of ideas and practices relating to sound. However, without a centre, a canon, or a single definition of what music is, where should one begin and how far can one go? At present, relatively few scholars attempt to write histories of music – or, more manageably, a musical style or development – from a total, planetary perspective, as has been attempted, say, for studies of climate change, feminisms, the book, and so on.<sup>20</sup> Instead, we are seeing a growing number of works that examine select case studies from disparate parts of the world to speak to a particular question, analysing them with a sensitivity to local contexts, and then bringing them together through a global framework, primarily via comparative

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I would like to thank Jacob Olley, Fabio Morabito, and Francesca Orsini for their comments on this paper and Allyn Miner for introducing me to Pannalal’s text.

<sup>19</sup>For a critical survey of this trend, see the introduction to this round table by Jacob Olley, ‘Imagined Musical Geographies in a Global Age: Views from Jodhpur, Istanbul and Buenos Aires, c. 1870–1930’.

<sup>20</sup>Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); *The Book: A Global History*, ed. by Michael F. Suarez and H.R. Woudhuysen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a rare example of this approach for music, see Mark Hijleh, *Towards a Global Music History: Intercultural Convergence, Fusion, and Transformation in the Human Musical Story* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

or connected history.<sup>21</sup> However, far more popular are those projects that aim to curate a set of essays, each on a different region, which collectively speak to variety and multiplicity, but might not attempt to make a holistic argument about music from a global perspective *per se*. In such cases, the ‘global’ often appears to be deployed not as an analytical category so much as a way to make the study of music less Eurocentric, and to question the inherited disciplinary bias in music history towards Western art music.

This is valuable work in itself, but it comes with challenging limitations. In his useful discussion regarding the possibilities and problems of global history as an approach, Sebastian Conrad suggested the global turn is ‘also a slogan that is necessary for reshaping the landscapes of knowledge and for revamping institutions of knowledge production. It signals that the past was global – and not limited to American, Italian, or Chinese history alone.’<sup>22</sup> This gestures to one area where music studies arguably differs from other forms of global history, which Conrad frames as a critical response to the heuristic pull of the nation state. If global history seeks to think beyond the logic of ‘container’ history, where historical developments are examined as internal to the nation, this has been less of a priority for global music history.<sup>23</sup> Instead, our current concern appears to be to find a workaround for our disciplinary bearing: many music departments have ethnomusicologists who work on the contemporary, and historians who work on Europe, but far fewer have created positions for music historians of the rest of the world. In other words, global music history seems to be less about thinking in terms of – say – Vietnamese music history through internal, boxed-in, nationalist terms, but rather as an attempt to find ways to include Vietnamese music in the conversation in the first place. Given our starting point, critical global music history often feels aspirational rather than attainable.<sup>24</sup>

In this essay, I suggest we should take a moment to reflect on approaches that seek to explore music history from a global perspective. For context, I am a cultural historian of north India and I work primarily on music and musical literature from c. 1500–1900, under both the Mughal Empire and British colonialism. When I am writing and researching, I sometimes frame my work for readers coming from music and ethnomusicology, and sometimes for those from South Asian studies, especially history. Increasingly over the past few years, I have found myself drawn out of my comfort zone, South Asia, into projects that engage with global music history. In some ways, this has been beneficial for my own practice, and has forced me to question how area studies models have enriched or narrowed my work. At the same time, I recognize the concerns of critics of global history, who have noted the power imbalance between a Western, anglophone centre and scholars working everywhere else in the world (i.e. the assumption that – say – Indian or Japanese scholars should be familiar with theories coming out of the US academy, but not the other way around), and have asked whether bringing very different developments into a single global history limits the scope of possible research and reduces the heterogeneity of music in the world we choose to study.<sup>25</sup>

I begin with reflections on recent and ongoing projects that engage with music history from a global perspective, and consider the opportunities and challenges embedded in our quest for the global. In the second half of this essay, I introduce a case study from northern India at the end of the nineteenth century

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, ‘Introduction’, in *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice around the World*, ed. by Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 1–18 (p. 6). A nuanced and considered example of this approach is Hon-Lun Yang and Michael Saffle, *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

<sup>22</sup>Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 234.

<sup>23</sup>On the challenges of nationalist frameworks in European musicology, see Sarah Collins and Dana Gooley, ‘Music and the New Cosmopolitanism: Problems and Possibilities’, *The Musical Quarterly* 99 (2017), 139–65.

<sup>24</sup>Some of the most ambitious attempts at global music history lay preliminary groundwork driven by a hypothesis, even before amassing a body of evidence, as in Sumangala Damodaran and Ari Sitas, ‘The musical journey – re-centring AfroAsia through an arc of musical sorrow’, *Critical Arts*, 30 (2016), 252–68. Daniel Chua has suggested that global musicology should be post-critical; see Daniel K. L. Chua, ‘Global Musicology: A Keynote without a Key’, *Acta Musicologica*, 94 (2022), 109–26.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Beckert and Sachsenmaier, ‘Introduction’, pp. 8–9; Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, p. 188; Sanjay Krishnan, *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives on Britain’s Empire in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

to explore how one might read a source by attending to its ‘significant geographies’, rather than immediately racing to accommodate it within a global paradigm.

### Bring-your-own-global

Beyond publications, conversations about global music history develop through close collaborations, international workshops and colossal research grants.<sup>26</sup> Relatively recently, Reinhard Strohm’s Balzan Musicology Project, *Towards a Global History of Music* (2013–17), coordinated a series of events over several years, and was especially productive in encouraging collaboration and enabling regional specialists to develop their own workshops and research questions. The results of these workshops were then collated into edited volumes: a constellation of different musical galaxies, tied together by the shared themes of global historiography. For example, *Studies on a Global History of Music* covers broad swathes of the world via close examinations of music in regional settings and has a particular focus on global entanglements in musical ideas and practices.<sup>27</sup> Thus, rather than presenting an encyclopedic digest of music around the world, the reader is presented with intersections between regions. If we wanted to be critical, we might consider how Europe is often the common denominator across the different regionalised sections of the book, suggesting a mobile West and a recipient ‘Rest’. Of course, this problem persists in all kinds of global history, but moving forward, future projects might try to think through ways around this, by examining interactions within the Global South or the specifically regional histories that enabled, transformed, and redacted distantly Western ideas.

However, this large-scale, well-funded approach is not always logistically possible. What of smaller workshops, that last only a day or two? In recent years, I have been invited to several events on music-historical topics that have posed interesting challenges by trying to think globally. Before I interrogate these challenges, I want to say that I am very grateful for these invitations and my comments here come from the place of a ‘critical friend’: rather than dismissing anyone’s efforts, I am trying to think through how we might make global history workshops as productive as possible.

There are many good reasons why global music history is becoming popular, since it can productively intersect with allied concerns, not least decentring music studies in the academy: interrogating Eurocentrism, European exceptionalism, and the category of ‘Western’ music; decolonizing initiatives (including ethical, social justice and restorative justice imperatives); an evolving demographic among students and staff in north-Atlantic music departments; acknowledging the vitality of Western art music beyond the West, especially in East Asia; circumventing the disconnect between ethnomusicologists and European music historians; a general zeitgeist informed by globalization, global communications, and network-thinking; an ideological preference for border-crossing rather than nationalist frames; a curiosity about the life of music in the world, and the worldliness of music; and – more cynically – because ‘global’ sounds bigger and more strategic than ‘local’, so helps to attract funding.

However, these intentions do not always translate into a solid intellectual agenda: instead, well-meaning scholars might design a call for papers that explores their own interests, rooted in discussions happening in Western musical scholarship, and then generously invite scholars working on the world outside Europe. From my own perspective as someone who works in South Asian music history, these calls look like this:

As we all know, the nineteenth century witnessed ABC.

This has been explored already in an extensive secondary literature on the topics DEF.

Now we want to examine this in greater detail, by considering subtopics GHI.

<sup>26</sup>Olivia Bloechl, Katherine Butler Schofield and Gabriel Solis, ‘The Value of Collaboration’, *AMS Musicology Now*, 20 March 2017 <<https://www.musicologynow.org/the-value-of-collaboration>> [accessed 18 June 2022].

<sup>27</sup>*Studies on a Global History of Music: A Balzan Musicology Project*, ed. by Reinhard Strohm (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

The challenge here is that assumptions about music history in Europe are not always compatible in South Asia. Often ABC did not happen there, or we are not yet in the position to definitively say whether it did or not. DEF is routinely about European case studies, and often there is not an equivalent literature for the South Asian context. GHI will consist of research questions that make excellent sense for the direction of travel in Western music scholarship, but without the earlier levels, pose an enormous puzzle for a South Asianist. I think of this as the 'bring-your-own-global' approach: for all intents and purposes, this is a European workshop inviting global participation, if participants choose to make it global in their own terms. Reading the above call for papers, I am left with two options: either I give up and say the premise of the workshop does not resonate with my archives; or I frantically do primary research on ABC, think comparatively with DEF, and then try to develop a response along the lines of GHI. I have done this several times and it has been productive. However, when the day of the workshop arrives, I am often the only non-Europeanist present: not only have the other delegates not had to do this extra research, but the conversation then revolves around developments in western Europe – and usually concentrates (let's be honest) on Paris, Vienna, London and (maybe) New York – and does not engage with the global dimensions of the topic at all.

There is no shame in thinking locally or regionally, and I think many of these workshops would have been more effective if they had been focused on specific areas rather than gesturing towards the global. If convenors do want to invite speakers working on the world outside western Europe, then they should think through precisely why they want to bring in a global dimension. An approach should be spelled out and the rubric of the call for paper should critically engage with a larger, transregional literature, rather than building on the work prepared for European music and projecting it seamlessly onto the rest of the world.

### Opportunities and challenges

Interrogating the history of music from a global perspective can take several different forms, each with its own priorities, possibilities and problems. A core question is: how global should one go? Truly universal histories are currently unpopular, partly because they are impractical (if not impossible) and partly because of their roots in colonial-era thinking. In practice, our global projects are limited by what our colleagues work on, so even if a work suggests planetary coverage, it is ultimately derailed by the north - Atlantic's disciplinary bias towards certain regions, resulting in a stretchy scale of detail or an unevenness between city, nation and continent. Some areas of the musical world are better mapped or considered more accessible to scholars than others; this is also a question of whether there is any work available in English, which poses a serious challenge to projects with global ambitions. In the north-Atlantic context, the academy is held back by the historical neglect of non-European language training in music departments as well as the demise of modern language education in schools. These are not insurmountable problems in themselves, but they do call for a structural rethink about how we embed languages in music programmes, if we wish to cultivate meaningfully global research. And if our students do acquire this kind of training, would it be profitable for them when they reach the job market, and apply for historical musicology jobs implicitly looking for Paris and French rather than Benin and Edo?

Some of these issues can be traced through the archive of editions of the ethnomusicology textbook, *Excursions in World Music* (currently in its eighth edition), which has slowly evolved in content and is increasingly turning towards region and exchange rather than nationalist framings.<sup>28</sup> New regions have been inserted with the development of individuals' careers and expertise, and the popularity of certain regions among students in the US system (as seen in the growth of courses relating to Korean music in recent years thanks to the expansion of the Korean Wave). Would such a textbook format be valuable for global music history? Arguably, yes, so long as the tone of the reference work can be moderated by

<sup>28</sup>*Excursions in World Music*, ed. by Timothy Rommen and Bruno Nettl (New York: Routledge, 2021).

explicit discussion on how the geography of the global has been curated and informed by the current generation's inherited disciplinary biases.

Universal approaches have a problematic, global history of their own, which in English-language scholarship might be traced back to Charles Burney's four-volume *General History of Music* (1776–89), which mapped the history of music in Europe from ancient Egypt to his present, with nation as its organising principle.<sup>29</sup> This inspired later authors, including the Bengali musicologist, Sourindro Mohan Tagore (1840–1914), who published the *Universal History of Music* in 1896.<sup>30</sup> This work was distinctively Indocentric but also navigated the world via the geography of the British Empire: this emerges in how Tagore conceived of and organised different regions, acquired his data from anglophone and colonial scholarship, and framed his study as a celebration of imperialism. Following Sebastian Conrad's argument that global history is a form of world-making (the global is not a 'given' but rather what we choose to imagine it as), we might view Tagore's work as an attempt to author a musical imaginary of the world defined by British colonialism.<sup>31</sup> This perhaps serves as a cautionary reminder to interrogate the worlds we create through our own attempts to embrace the global.

In practice, relatively few projects today attempt to claim universality, since the criteria for inclusion/exclusion (instruments and styles, regions, authors) automatically renders this claim illusory. Far more persuasive are projects which focus on a specific period and theme, such as Stephen Ross and Allana Lindgren's edited volume on *The Modernist World*, which includes essays on music history as part of an interdisciplinary survey of modernisms that speak to specific regions yet also across continents as part of a global development.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the spirit of universalism hovers over many attempts at global history that aspire towards some kind of even – or at least representative – coverage. This concern can lead such to practical questions as, 'Can we think of someone who works on this topic ... but for Africa?' Such hesitations illuminate the discrepancies between regions that are conventionally covered in music history; indeed, a critically 'universal' approach has the potential to push scholars to question what has already been explored and what has been historically neglected.

In lieu of universal histories, seven further approaches are gaining traction: connected histories (we might think of Jesuit music in Japan; or the connections between John Cage, Takemitsu Tōru, Yuuga Jōji and Ichiyanagi Toshi);<sup>33</sup> comparative histories (e.g. the impact of print technology on notated song books, or that of the proscenium theatre on performance practices);<sup>34</sup> circulations (instruments, styles, technologies, concepts);<sup>35</sup> the world miscellany approach (the connoisseur listener in different settings around the world, for example); integrated and entangled histories (how the global hinterland and transregional processes informed something that might sound local or regionally specific); 'unusually

<sup>29</sup>On the longer history of British works on global music, see Bennett Zon, *Representing Non-Western Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), pp. 95–113.

<sup>30</sup>Sourindro Mohan Tagore, *Universal History of Music: Compiled from Diverse Sources, Together with Various Original Notes on Hindu Music* (Calcutta: N.G. Goswamy, 1896). See Charles Capwell, 'Marginality and Musicology in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta: The Case of Sourindro Mohan Tagore', *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 228–43; Richard David Williams, 'Music, Lyrics, and the Bengali Book: Hindustani Musicology in Calcutta, 1818–1905', *Music & Religion*, 97 (2016), 465–95.

<sup>31</sup>Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, pp. 185–204.

<sup>32</sup>*The Modernist World*, ed. by Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>33</sup>Makoto Harris Takao, "In their own way": Contrafactual Practices in Japanese Christian Communities During the 16th Century', *Early Music*, 47 (2019), 183–98; Serena Yang, 'Against "John Cage Shock": Rethinking John Cage and the Post-war Avant-garde in Japan', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 18 (2021), 341–62.

<sup>34</sup>Comparative studies are arguably less popular, especially owing to the decline of comparative musicology as a framework. See Martin Stokes, 'Notes and Queries on "Global Music History"', in *Studies on a Global History of Music*, pp. 3–17. For useful approaches within the comparative method, see Jessica Frazier, "'The View from Above': a Theory of Comparative Philosophy', *Religious Studies*, 56 (2020), 32–48.

<sup>35</sup>See the excellent study of the circulation and transformation of the violin in South Asia in Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 25–58.

cosmopolitan individuals' (people who travelled and engaged with alternative music systems, demonstrating possible but unusual connections);<sup>36</sup> and 'global' as a modern phenomenon or ideology, embedded in the music industry.<sup>37</sup>

Olivia Bloechl in particular has drawn on Sebastian Conrad's useful theorization of global history to promote the study of musical interconnections, advocating an integrated or entangled approach: music in a small village can be studied from a global scale, examining the larger systems and processes that informed apparently local culture.<sup>38</sup> There are distinct advantages to this approach, as it takes us away from what I have called the 'world miscellany' approach – where lots of apparently isolated case studies are lined up as somehow representative of planetary music – and encourages us to think in terms of everyone being subject to global, interconnected forces, rather than making unnuanced generalizations about islanded musical civilizations. In this vein, David Irving and Margaret Walker have asked how a global perspective in research and teaching can challenge our assumptions about the category of Western music and demonstrate how European musical culture was informed by global systems and processes – something that is increasingly taken for granted in other branches of history.<sup>39</sup>

I agree with these arguments, but I am also conscious of a larger risk here: that going global actually reinstates Eurocentrism, especially if we promote global music history as a solution to the Western academy's previous lack of interest and expertise in music systems from the rest of the world. Since the majority of music historians works on Europe, if we are not mindful, we risk making European historiographical concerns normative for the rest of the world; this could have a stifling effect by inviting researchers working on Delhi, Mombasa, or Kyoto to ask questions that were designed for London, Paris, or Vienna. Global perspectives are built on assumptions rooted in familiar archives, so perhaps a ground-up approach is preferable to taking global processes as our starting point? I am especially conscious that when I respond to a call for papers, I am likely to pick historical actors that speak directly to these implicitly European concerns.

For example, in several recent workshops I struggled to find sources that spoke to the themes until I went back to one Bengali scholar, Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay (1846–1904).<sup>40</sup> Compared to other Bengali musicologists, he was highly unusual; indeed, I would class him as an 'unusually cosmopolitan individual'. Bandyopadhyay brought Sanskrit and Bengali musicology into direct dialogue with Darwin, European acoustics and British studies of the voice and music pedagogy, so I knew he had much to offer that would interest my colleagues coming from European music studies. However, he was atypical: if I continue responding to calls for papers using Bandyopadhyay, I will present a skewed account of musical thought in India in this period. Bandyopadhyay is a fascinating scholar and deserves proper attention, but the more representative thinkers and musicians of his era did not engage so closely with the favoured topics of global music history, so risk losing out in future research. In other words, given that we are still in the early stages of mapping certain historical periods in some regions, thinking globally might divert attention away from important musical ideas and practices simply because they were not 'global' enough.

### Significant geographies

These concerns are not unique to music. Scholars of 'world literature' have questioned how far their field can meaningfully engage with global history, beyond diversifying the range of texts that they examine.

<sup>36</sup>Jan de Vries, 'Playing with Scales: The Global and the Micro, the Macro and the Nano', *Past & Present*, 242 (2019), 23–36.

<sup>37</sup>E.g. Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015).

<sup>38</sup>Olivia Bloechl, 'Editorial', *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 17 (2020), 173–76.

<sup>39</sup>David R.M. Irving, 'Rethinking Early Modern "Western Art Music": A Global History Manifesto', *IMS Musicological Brainfood*, 3.1 (2019), 6–12; Margaret E. Walker, 'Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum', *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, 10 (2020), 1–19. See also Zhuqing (Lester) S. Hu, 'A Global Phonographic Revolution: Trans-Eurasian Resonances of Writing in Early Modern France and China', in *Acoustemologies in Contact: Sounding Subjects and Modes of Listening in Early Modernity*, ed. by Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne G. Cusick (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021), pp. 167–200.

<sup>40</sup>Williams, 'Music, Lyrics, and the Bengali Book', p. 484; cf. Sagnik Atarhi, 'Whither musicology? Amateur musicologists and music writing in Bengal', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 26 (2017), 247–68.

Bruce Robbins has suggested that while the older assumption of literature's autonomy – whereby 'great' works stand the test of time and geography and can create their own sense of significant temporality – has been critiqued, especially in a postcolonial context, we are still lacking a new historical model to take its place. He asks whether literary scholars are attending to context by blindly following the frameworks and periodization of social historians, and questions how far studies remain local rather than critically engaging with 'where the global cross-currents and connections come from, what significance they have, for whom, and so on'.<sup>41</sup> This resonates with Saurav Dasthakur's arguments about time and world history in the music and lyrics of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Following Ranajit Guha's argument that South Asian imaginings of the past (*itihāsa*) were co-opted and reshaped by colonialism into a regional variant of European history, Dasthakur argued that Tagore's music can be heard as a protest against a colonial and nationalist framing of time as world history.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, then, the musical-literary work can be read against the grain of our normative impression of historical periods and contexts, asserting, in a sense, an autonomous musical time.<sup>43</sup> On the other, Dasthakur demonstrates how Tagore's resistant sense of the past can indeed be interrogated using the normative techniques of intellectual history, such that Tagore can be read as a product of his age. These essays pose several challenges in terms of methodology. How far should we read musical pasts in terms of the discipline of world history, which has its own paradigms, models and colonial legacies? Having critiqued Eurocentrism, what can we hope to achieve by listening globally, beyond provincializing some art systems and celebrating the diversity of others? How can we attend to the autonomous time of a musical practice, its external environment, and the creative friction between the musical and historical moment?

In a series of interventions, Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini have critiqued the assumptions embedded in world literature and explored alternative possibilities for comparative literature.<sup>44</sup> What, they ask, counts as world literature? Whatever the language, often there is a preference for genres favoured in Europe (especially the novel) and for texts that have circulated at some stage in English or French translation. Literary prizes and publishers act as the gatekeepers of world literature, often foregrounding texts that are compatible with Euro-American tastes. Clearly these issues are underpinned by Eurocentrism and colonialism, and ultimately deprioritize most literary activity. Instead, they propose 'significant geographies' as an alternative to 'world', by which they mean 'the *conceptual, imaginative, and real* geographies that texts, authors, and language communities inhabit, produce, and reach, which typically extend outwards without (ever?) having a truly global reach. In any society and literary culture these geographies are plural'.<sup>45</sup> The plurality of these geographies, in particular, allows one to read through the palimpsest layers of a work, which can produce multiple frames, temporalities and imaginaries.

### The significant geographies of Goswami Pannalal

Taking inspiration from their approach, in the final section of this essay I will map the significant geographies in a Hindi music treatise published in 1896, the *Nād Binod* ('Sonic Delight') by Goswami Pannalal of Delhi.<sup>46</sup> Pannalal was a music teacher and sitar player from a family of Brahmin scholars; he

<sup>41</sup>Bruce Robbins, 'What World History does World Literature need?', in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature and World History*, ed. by May Hawas (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 194–206 (p. 194).

<sup>42</sup>Saurav Dasthakur, "'World-History,'" "Itihāsa," and Memory: Rabindranath Tagore's Musical Program in the Age of Nationalism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 75 (2016), 411–32.

<sup>43</sup>Georgina Born, 'Making Time: Temporality, History, and the Cultural Object', *New Literary History*, 46 (2015), 361–86.

<sup>44</sup>Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini, 'Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies: For a Ground-up and Located Approach to World Literature', *Modern Languages Open*, 2018, no. 1 <<https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.190>>.

<sup>45</sup>Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini, 'Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature', *Journal of World Literature*, 3 (2018), 290–310, (p. 294) (emphases original).

<sup>46</sup>I am grateful to Allyn Miner for first introducing me to this text, which she examined in her path-breaking history of the sitar; see Allyn Miner, *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997).

was appointed at a number of royal courts in northern India across the second half of the nineteenth century and one of his later patrons, Kishore Singh (1854–98), a prince from Jodhpur and the commander-in-chief of the Marwar army, encouraged him to write a book for the general public. Here, I will concentrate on the introduction of this book, which speaks to the challenges raised in the first part of this essay, and consider how far, in a future study, a global approach would productively illuminate the core materials of Pannalal's work.

When I first examined this treatise, the most pertinent geography that I recognised was the landscape of vernacular musical literature, itself embedded in the print industry of colonial north India. The nineteenth century saw the dramatic proliferation of printed primers, treatises and songbooks: Bengali musicologists took the lead first, operating out of the colonial metropolis of Calcutta, and scholars working in Hindi and Urdu followed their lead from the 1850s onwards. Pannalal's book can be seen as part of a larger conversation enabled by print technology, that connected scholars of musicological literature with the embodied knowledge of hereditary performers and new categories of popular reader, many of whom were aspiring amateur musicians. Though relatively unknown, Pannalal can be seen as a precursor to later music reformers who used printed works to standardize the theory and teaching of classical music, most notably Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931) and Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936), both of whom met with Pannalal on their study tours in 1897 and c. 1908–09 respectively.<sup>47</sup> More broadly, this was also a global story of colonial-era print technology engaging with, and ultimately redirecting, the production and dissemination of musical knowledge. However, my initial sense of how to frame Pannalal was the tip of the iceberg. Instead, over a lengthy introduction, he set out his own sense of multiple significant geographies.<sup>48</sup>

Pannalal began by invoking a Hindu sonic cosmology: in the beginning, he tells us, the indivisible Supreme Being manifested Om, from which emanated the seven notes of the scale, which are also the seven syllables resonating along the chakras of the human nervous system, the microcosm of the universe. The Supreme Being then emanated the gods Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma, who created the Brahma-egg of the cosmos and populated it with musical deities and sages. Shiva then taught them the science of primeval sound (*nāda-vidyā*) and the ocean of sound cascaded across the three worlds.

This significant geography (or rather cosmology) gestures to a Vedantic Hindu universe, informed in the details by Sanskrit music treatises and Pannalal's own sectarian (*vaiṣṇava*) background. This geography thus resonates with portions of the music book where he discusses his family's heritage as Brahmin scholars and temple custodians, and the inclusion of digests of scripture within his treatise. It was a convention in South Asian music treatise writing to begin with an explanation of how sound underpinned the entire universe.<sup>49</sup> However, as Hinduism can cover a range of different theologies, each musicologist had their own preference for explaining the divine basis of sound. In the colonial period, this convention could move into new directions. In 1917, the South Indian Christian scholar, Abraham Pandithar (1859–1919) identified primordial sound (*nādam*) as the *logos* ('In the beginning was the Word (Nadam)' (*sic*)<sup>50</sup>) and followed the timeline of Indic cosmology through to Noah and the Deluge, connecting the pre-history of (specifically) Tamil music to Aryanism, Darwinism and the theory of Lemuria as the lost cradle of civilization.<sup>51</sup> Read together, it is evident how sonic cosmogonies can offer malleable significant geographies: although both Pannalal and Pandithar were both writing treatises in

<sup>47</sup>James Kippen, *Gurudev's Drumming Legacy: Music, Theory and Nationalism in the Mṛdaṅg aur Tabla Vādanpaddhati of Gurudev Patwardhan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 24; Sobhana Nayar, *Bhatkhande's Contribution to Music: A Historical Perspective* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1989), p. 69. See also Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2005), p. 144.

<sup>48</sup>The following draws on the material in Goswami Pannalal, *Nād Binod* (Delhi: Narayandas Janglimal, 1895).

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Richard David Williams, 'Playing the Spinal Chord: Tantric Musicology and Bengali Songs in the Nineteenth-Century', *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, 12 (2019), 319–38.

<sup>50</sup>Abraham Pandithar, *Karunamirtha Sagaram* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1984), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup>Weidman, *Singing the Classical*, pp. 168–71; Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 115.

the South Asian tradition of musical scholarship within twenty years of each other, they adapted the invocation of sacred sound to align with their own religious traditions and intellectual horizons.

The sonic cosmology is immediately followed by another significant geography: the British Empire. Pannalal included an extensive eulogy to Queen Victoria, celebrating her reign with English, Sanskrit and Persian epithets, and offering thanks for the happiness of her subjects in ‘Hindustan and Inglistan’. Pannalal went to great lengths to position himself as a loyal and delighted colonial subject, and articulated the well-known, problematic rhetoric of ‘Empire was good because it gave India trains’:<sup>52</sup>

In an instant of an instant, people are talking across thousands of miles by telegram; they rush hundreds of miles by sitting in a train day and night, as happy as a baby in its mother’s womb; and even more, now they sit in balloons and forge paths across the sky – doubtless they will find a sure way to have an audience with God in heaven; the ocean of knowledge is flowing through the printing presses, and water reaches the fields in every place through irrigation canals.<sup>53</sup>

Here we find a geography of particular interest to the topics of global history: colonial modernity, industrialization, environment and the commodification of knowledge. Pannalal presented his own book as a contribution to these processes, pouring the ocean of sound into a printing press. His enthusiasm resonates with many other music scholars in this period, who also relished the possibilities of print and set themselves up as modern music book entrepreneurs.<sup>54</sup>

Pannalal then changed gear, again, by narrating his family history. His ancestors had been devotees of music for between 1000–1200 years. They were originally Saraswat Brahmins from Ucc, near Multan (now in Pakistan). When the Mughal emperor Humayun returned to India from his exile in Iran in 1555, he travelled through the region and brought the family into his retinue. Pannalal boasted to his readers that the Mughal emperors had treated his Brahmin ancestors like Sufi masters, and provided for them through to the end of the Mughal Empire in 1857. This significant geography extended between what Pannalal called Hind and Iran, an imaginary built around Persianate culture that connected northern India to western Asia.<sup>55</sup> To an extent, this geography lay in Pannalal’s past, as he and his family had lost their property and Mughal patrons. Pannalal gestured to the transition in political power, noting that his grandfather received a salary under the emperor Shah Alam and the British commander-in-chief (1801–05) in India, Gerard Lake,<sup>56</sup> but also how, in 1857, the year of the Uprising and the fall of the Mughals, the family lost their salaries and land rights.<sup>57</sup> This account of distress tempered the hyperbolic praise of Victoria and implied that colonial India was not as free of suffering as his panegyric suggested.

Pannalal’s final significant geography was perhaps the most relevant to him: the network of his royal students in Rajasthan and northern India. He maps his credentials by describing how he moved between several courts and patrons, most notably in Jaipur, Jammu and Kashmir, Gaya, Baroda, Kishangarh, Limbdi, Sawar, Mathura, and ultimately Jodhpur, where he worked for the commander-in-chief, who gave him the idea of writing his book.<sup>58</sup> His account plots a network of musical patrons, which recalls the precarity faced by other performing artists in this period, as documented in the memoir of the celebrated

<sup>52</sup>Pandithar made a similar argument; see *Karunamirtha Sagaram*, p. 78. On music and loyalty in colonial India, see Charles Capwell, ‘Sourindro Mohun Tagore and the National Anthem Project’, *Ethnomusicology*, 31 (1987), 407–30.

<sup>53</sup>Pannalal, *Nād Binod*, pp. 4–5 (my translation).

<sup>54</sup>Williams, *Playing the Spinal Chord*.

<sup>55</sup>Pannalal includes Hindustani chronograms that draw direct connections to Persianate conceptions of historical time.

<sup>56</sup>This is my identification; Pannalal Goswami refers to a Governor-General Lik in the Hindi text. None of the governors-general was named Lake or Leake etc.

<sup>57</sup>Securing the continued patronage of the British administration following the fall of the Mughals was a source of anxiety for a range of court artists. A parallel case can be seen in the example of one Assudoolah Khan, a poet whose family was also awarded a pension under Lake, who applied for his privileges to be restored in 1862. National Archives of India, New Delhi, file Foreign/General B/June1862/81.

<sup>58</sup>His patrons included Ram Singh II of Jaipur (ruled 1835–80); Ranbir Singh of Jammu and Kashmir (ruled 1856–85), Sardul Singh in Kishangarh (ruled 1879–1900), Jaswant Singh of Limbdi (ruled 1862–1907) and Ummed Singh of Sawar.

singer Alladiya Khan (1855–1946); this underlined the necessity of travelling in search of patrons and the disappointment of finding a ruler who did not appreciate (or remunerate) musical talent.<sup>59</sup> Pannalal's patrons were spread across western and northern India, but geographical distances were less relevant than the human and professional relationships that connected his clients and their courts. This geography was curated as an instance of his own life-writing, but also resonated with larger developments in Indian society. For example, he warmly described his seven years in Baroda (which would later become a significant centre for nationalist musical projects),<sup>60</sup> when he taught the queen, Maharani Jamnabai Sahiba (1853–98):

A few words in praise of this Maharani Sahiba: she is extremely knowledgeable about religion and piety (*barī dharmmajña*), judicious, accomplished, a model devotee of Shiva the Eternal One, deeply fond of the subject of sound (*nād viśay meñ ati prīti*). She kept this *sadhu* [Pannalal himself] by her side for seven years and took delight in the science of sound (*nāda-vidyā*).<sup>61</sup>

Pannalal tells us that he was also part of the entourage of the princess Kamasahib, the daughter of Jamnabai's brother-in-law and sometime rival in court politics, Malhar Rao (ruled 1870–75). Aspects of this episode recall the experience of other musicologists in this period: Jamnabai also wrote letters of introduction for the music reformer Paluskar (mentioned above), allowing him to navigate a similar courtly network. Although other royal women supported performing artists and developed their own expertise in music in this period, this was often done behind closed doors – quite literally, following the principles of gendered segregation in courts – and rarely discussed openly, given contemporary assumptions that a 'respectable' woman's interest in music was questionable, if not scandalous.<sup>62</sup> Jamnabai was unusually explicit about her interests, which were part of her self-fashioning as a modern, educated woman. In one studio portrait, attributed to Pestonjee Dosabhoy (c. 1874–75), Jamnabai sits proudly beside a pile of books, her hand resting reflectively against her chin.<sup>63</sup> Besides Pannalal, she also appointed a female instructor from the Maharani's Girls' College, Mysore,<sup>64</sup> 'proficient in Muhammadan [i.e. Hindustani] and Karnataka music' to teach her and other women in her court.<sup>65</sup> We also need to critically read this apparently emancipatory project as intersecting with a larger, upper-caste programme to claim custodianship over art music, at the expense of hereditary professionals who were systematically excluded and marginalized.<sup>66</sup> This example indicates how although Pannalal's courtly significant geography appears rooted to the roads between Delhi and the royal houses of western and northern India, in fact the networks of patrons and musical enthusiasts he encountered were part of a far larger arena, one which was entangled in the music and politics of the far south of the subcontinent, as well as in global debates about women's access to education and the arts.

After this lengthy introduction, which served to locate Pannalal and document his credentials, the rest of the book covers his approach to Hindustani music, as developed over a forty-year career. The work explores Sanskrit music theory, the aesthetics of *rāga* systems, notated sitar compositions, and song lyrics. The book therefore offers a snapshot of musical knowledge at that time, a courtly Brahmin music teacher's understanding of the state of north Indian art music on the precipice of the twentieth century, in

<sup>59</sup>Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, trans. by Amlan Das Gupta and Urmila Bhirdikar (Calcutta: Thema, 2000).

<sup>60</sup>Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*.

<sup>61</sup>Pannalal, *Nād Binod*, p. 12.

<sup>62</sup>Richard David Williams, *The Scattered Court: Hindustani Music in Colonial Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023).

<sup>63</sup>Pestonjee Dosabhoy, 'The Maharani Jamnabai of Baroda (1853–98): Prince of Wales Tour of India 1875–76', Royal Collection Trust, London, Albumen Print, RCIN 2701623 <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/2701623/the-maharani-jamnabai-of-baroda-1853-98-prince-of-wales-tour-of-india-1875-6>> [accessed 19 June 2022].

<sup>64</sup>Established by Maharani Kempa Nanjammani Vani Vilasa of Mysore (1866–1934).

<sup>65</sup>British Library, London, Photo 430/41(17) <<https://imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/25128>> [accessed 19 June 2022].

<sup>66</sup>Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

a moment when court music was responding in varied and irregular ways to new audiences, practitioners, colonial technologies, nationalist ideologies and global literatures on music and sound.

## Conclusion

How does Pannalal's Hindi book, produced in colonial Delhi and Rajput Jodhpur, fit into discussions about global music history? How can I, writing in London and responding to calls for papers from a (primarily) anglophone academic community, represent him most effectively? When global history, as practised in the north-Atlantic academy, takes Western music history as its point of origin – intentionally or otherwise – it is naturally tempting to delve deeper into the second (i.e. Victorian) significant geography – perhaps, I suggest, at the expense of other layers which were more immediately relevant and musically meaningful to the author himself. Pannalal does indeed present an insightful case study of how regional systems of musicology responded to a changing political landscape, shaped by global developments, and the possibilities of new technologies of inscription, including notated music and the printed book itself. The book's effusive eulogy to Victoria raises questions that should not be ignored.

However, perhaps the Empress is a distraction. The core musical repertoire here, the actual substance of his lessons to his pupils and readers, was most informed by the other geographies. If, for a moment, we experiment by thinking about the music separately from the musician – that is, the musical practices Pannalal prescribed and described, rather than his cultural and social context – then this book is significant in providing a detailed account of Hindustani music, which was indeed evolving but, in this specific instance, not in response to new sounds and practices learned from the rest of the world. This distinguishes Pannalal from some of his contemporaries, who were more overtly interested in other musical systems.<sup>67</sup> Pannalal's repertoire here (which still awaits in-depth study) fits into conversations about the development of Hindustani music, rather than how South Asian music responded to influences from Europe or East Asia and so on. To grasp those developments requires a nuanced understanding of the musical system, which not all global music historians can be expected to possess. Does this mean that 'the music itself' can only be discussed by regional experts, rather than as part of 'global' conversations?

Clearly, this may feel uncomfortably prescriptive and arbitrary, and is based on problematic assumptions. However, this is not too far removed from the challenges that face those of us who work on non-European musical systems but want to engage with our Western art music-oriented colleagues. Bringing musical material – rather than its social and cultural contexts – into global history is not a straightforward task, and the global approach might not be the most productive. To scrutinize a source requires the insights of regionally specific theories, performance practices, and notation systems and/or orally transmitted architectures for making sense of musical forms and textures. Certainly, some scholars, including Bonnie Wade and Mark Hijleh, have prepared useful resources for thinking through musical material from a 'zoomed-out' perspective which does not attempt to take a single cultural system as its centre of gravity. As Hijleh suggests, this perspective produces a different kind of work from music theories emerging from or tailored for specific music systems, providing instead a set of tools for research on intercultural music making, and 'the accelerating process of synthesis', itself an important historical phenomenon.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the parameters of this kind of project would need to respond to the critiques made of comparative musicology.<sup>69</sup> Are these zoomed-out forms of global comparison always the most useful? While certain aspects of Hindustani music can certainly be critically listened to across oceans and continents (theatre songs in Southeast Asia, Chutney in the

<sup>67</sup>E.g. the aforementioned Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay's primer for sitar, esraj, violin, flute and harmonium. See Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay, *Sahgīt Śikṣā* (Calcutta: P.C. Doss, Day and Co., 1868).

<sup>68</sup>Mark Hijleh, *Towards a Global Music Theory: Practical Concepts and Methods for the Analysis of Music Across Human Cultures* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), p. 3. See also Bonnie C. Wade, *Thinking Musically: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>69</sup>Stokes, 'Notes and Queries'.

Caribbean, the sitar in Brazil),<sup>70</sup> these circulations have specific histories and geographies that did not immediately resonate with Pannalal in Rajasthan, or many other musicians and scholars like him. Of course, Hindustani music, as Pannalal knew it, was hardly provincial or even contained within the Indian subcontinent, but rather the product of early-modern engagements with musicians and influences from West and Central Asia.<sup>71</sup> As we have seen, this longer history resonated with Pannalal himself, who attested to the Iran-Hind connections in his introduction, yet even this context needs to be read in line with the other significant geographies articulated in his work.

How, then, can we include the middle ground, rather than reluctantly divide our sources and questions into either ‘global’ or its other (reductively termed ‘local’, ‘regional’, or ‘indigenous’)? The ‘local’ history of Pannalal’s changing career trajectory, moving from an imperial Mughal pension to seeking out a livelihood as a music teacher in Rajasthan and a book entrepreneur in Delhi, could be said to have had global roots (going back to British colonialism), so these multiple geographies are clearly entangled, but these dimensions need to be seen against the other, layered imaginaries.

Goswami Pannalal’s praise of Queen Victoria is complex, and invites a global historical approach: in particular, one that considers this music teacher’s career in terms of colonial politics, technology and ideologies. However, I am concerned that privileging this aspect of his work amounts to a disservice to his other positionalities and certainly his musical priorities, even if they allow one to readily integrate him into a global history of music. This suggests that our own priorities in this approach require critical reflection.

The significant geographies approach is advantageous because it allows the historian to consider the multiple frames and contexts of a musical moment, idea or practice, and to attend to where these layers overlap, generate friction or become entangled. It recognizes that there are different ways to interpret a source and curate it in response to different historiographical concerns and relativizes the significance of those concerns brought to the table by the historian. In particular, it cautions against the assumption that music becomes global when it responds to a faraway place, or, more problematically, speaks to concerns rooted in the experience of Western art music.

My brief experiment with Pannalal’s text also highlights some of the challenges embedded in this approach that might limit its applicability. Pannalal was unusually explicit about his embeddedness in multiple geographies. It is also worth underlining that this is a literary source, which offers readings that other, less logocentric sources of music history cannot always afford. There is also the challenge that a global music history approach might lend itself more easily to human and material subjects – the musician navigating global forces, the instrument that travels and adapts to new contexts – rather than more strictly auditory or sonic phenomena. Personally, this does not trouble me, but I am still uncertain how meaningfully we can discuss musical sound from a global perspective without being overly reductive or losing sight of historical texture and specificity. However, given the current enthusiasm for global approaches, I hope that as music studies becomes more refined in its engagement with global history, we can find ways to explore these interconnections without losing sight of the less-than-global but nonetheless significant geographies that informed music history.

<sup>70</sup>Kathryn Hansen (2018), ‘Parsi Theatrical networks in Southeast Asia: The Contrary Case of Burma’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 49.1 (2018), 4–33; Peter Manuel, *East Indian Music in the West Indies: Tān-Singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); Nívea Lins Santos, ‘Oriente-Se, Brasil: A Presença da Cultura Indiana no Cenário Musical Brasileiro (1968–2012)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, São Paulo State University, 2020).

<sup>71</sup>See, for example, James Kippen, ‘Mapping a Rhythmic Revolution Through Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Sources on Rhythm and Drumming in North India’, in *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African, and Euro-American Perspectives*, ed. by Richard K. Wolf, Stephen Blum and Christopher Hasty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 253–72.