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## Rock to Raga: the many lives of the Indian guitar

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# **Rock to Raga: The many lives of the Indian guitar**

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**Chapter for “Guitar Culture”, ed. Dawe/ Bennett, Berg.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> DRAFT**

## **1. Introduction**

What roles does the guitar play, and what meanings does it convey in India?<sup>1</sup> These are not easy questions to answer, since the instrument has spread into many different musical genres, in various geographical regions of the subcontinent. This chapter is nonetheless an attempt, in response to those questions, to sketch out the main features of guitar culture in India. I see it as a kind of snapshot: partial, blurred and lacking fine definition perhaps, but offering a perspective that more focused and tightly-framed studies could not.

My account is based on a few weeks’ travel in India,<sup>2</sup> concentrating on the main metropolitan cities of Chennai, Mumbai, Calcutta and Delhi – although it also draws on the reports of many inhabitants of these cities who have migrated from other regions, particularly those rich in guitar culture such as Goa and the north-eastern states. In other respects it draws on as balanced a sample of accounts as could be achieved in a short time: those of players from professional virtuosi to rank amateurs, repertoires from Indian classical to rock and jazz, as well as those of makers, retailers and repairers. Finally, this account draws on many years

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<sup>1</sup>By India I refer here to the subcontinent as a whole before independence, and to the Indian state thereafter: the instrument’s later history in Pakistan and Bangladesh, for instance, is not covered here.

<sup>2</sup>From 4 December 1998 to 14 January 1999, my research was conducted in the four metropolitan cities. A list of interviewees and others who have assisted in this project will be found under ‘Acknowledgements’.

studying the music of India – albeit most of those years studiously ignoring the very genres to which, in the winter of 1998-99, I turned my attention.

What I knew of the Indian guitar before my research began included Brij Bhushan Kabra's excellent recordings of North Indian classical music on slide guitar, the first of which date from the 1960s;<sup>3</sup> and those of his successors including Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, who had recently made an international name for himself by recording a well-received album with Ry Cooder. (That album, *A meeting by the river*,<sup>4</sup> had won the pair a Grammy Award in 1994, a fact of which I was reminded in India on many occasions.) I also knew that the guitar was one of many instruments used in Indian film music, where the Hawaiian style of playing had once been prominent, and noticed that imported recordings of rock music are easily found in metropolitan record shops.

That was the skeleton I wanted to flesh out. More importantly I wanted to gauge how the instrument was regarded – as a foreign import suitable mainly for foreign music? If so, how and why had it been adapted to Hindustani classical music?<sup>5</sup> In a society proud of its own musical heritage, how and why had a foreign instrument like the guitar made such an impact? How, in brief, had the dialectic between the guitar as a bringer of global (i.e. largely Euro-American) culture to the world, and its local adaptations and appropriations, panned out in India?

This chapter will emphasise the wide spread of the instrument (at least in urban India) and the range of repertoires performed – in short, the huge popularity of the guitar in contemporary India. The guitar, in its various guises, is also inevitably associated with a variety of other factors, such as the ethnic, linguistic and religious background of players – above all the instrument is associated with the West, with Christianity, and with Goan and Anglo-Indian mixed-race communities. More widely, attitudes to the guitar in India are bound up with

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<sup>3</sup>See in particular *The Call of the Valley*, with Shiv Kumar Sharma, Hariprasad Chaurasia and Manikrao Popatkar. HMV ECSD 2382 (1968), re-released on EMI/Hemisphere 7243-8-32867-2-0.

<sup>4</sup>Water Lily Acoustics, WLA-CS-29-CD (1993).

<sup>5</sup>The guitar has been used rather differently in Carnatic (South Indian) classical music: here, R Prasanna has made a name for himself performing both classical and fusion styles on a 6-string electric guitar.

attitudes to 'Indianness' and 'the West', to conceptions of Indian cultural identity and to notions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' which give a particular local colour to responses to globalisation.

Before discussing the current use and status of the guitar in India, it will be helpful to set this in historical context, since the history of the guitar in India is inextricably bound up with the history of European colonialism and Christian proselytisation.

## **2 Christians, Europeans and Western music in India: a historical overview**

### **2.1 A brief history of the Indian Christians**

One of the themes of this chapter is, unavoidably, ethnicity and identity, and in particular those of the groups described by the labels Christian, Anglo-Indian and Goan. The easiest way to begin an explanation of these categories is with a brief history of Christianity in India. The oldest Christian communities in India are those of the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, often referred to as Syriac (or Syrian) Christian, which were, local tradition has it, established by Saint Thomas the Apostle after his arrival in the year 52 CE. This community was joined by further converts following the conquest of Goa by Portugal in 1510 CE and the subsequent establishment of a string of European trading stations around the Indian coast.<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese always claimed proselytisation to be at least as important an aim of their colonial expansion as trading profit. As a result, according to one estimate, by 1600 there were about 175,000 Christians in India, about 50,000 of whom were in Goa (Pearson 1987:121).

The Portuguese authorities actively encouraged intermarriage, and there was in many respects little discrimination in Portuguese India between Indian Christians, settled Portuguese and *mestiços* (those of mixed parentage). In later centuries these ‘Goans’ were to be found not only in the latter-day Portuguese colonies of Goa, Daman and Diu, but further afield, particularly around the European trading posts and garrisons (see Abel 1988: 9-11), to which they soon began to migrate. According to one recent account, “There are around 730,000 Portuguese Indians, commonly known as Goans or Goanese, about half of whom live in the state of Goa and the others elsewhere in India.” (Library of Congress, 1996: 211).

The term ‘Anglo-Indian’ has been used in a range of senses, but the usage assumed here (and by most of my informants) is that of the Government of India Act 1935, in which an Anglo-Indian is described as a person of European descent in the male line, born in India of parents

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<sup>6</sup>The Portuguese had first landed at Calicut as early as 1498. For a survey of the history of Christianity in south India as it relates to musical performance, see Sherinian 1998:55ff.

who were habitually resident there.<sup>7</sup> ‘Anglo-Indian’ applied in this sense principally to the descendants of British men and their Indian wives – as with the Portuguese, in the early decades of British involvement in India few European women travelled to India, and intermarriage was officially encouraged from 1687 to around 1785, although attitudes changed thereafter. The British colonial authorities were not always so sanguine as the Portuguese about the benefits of missionary activity: nonetheless, both protestant and catholic missionaries were active in British India from the 18th century, and had some success in converting members of tribal, lower caste and dalit (‘untouchable’) groups.

In the British period and latterly in independent India, the status of Anglo-Indians has been famously marginal and problematic – at the risk of gross generalisation, the classic picture describes them as looked down on by the British as ‘half-breeds’ and also mistrusted by Indians who perceived them to be loyal to British rule (Anglo-Indians did indeed play an important role in putting down the revolt or ‘Mutiny’ of 1857). Partly as a result of their rejection by both British and Indian populations, the Anglo-Indians effectively became an endogamous group some time in the 19th century, which they largely remain. They are the only group in India acknowledged as having English as their first language, are mostly Christian and tend to favour Western dress.

The Anglo-Indian population has dwindled since independence as many emigrated (to the UK, Australia and Canada in particular), although a contingent remained behind, largely in urban centres. Estimates for the size of the Anglo-Indian community range from 100,000 to 300,000.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to be at all precise, but as the population of India soars over the billion mark it is unlikely that the combined Goan and Anglo-Indian communities number much more than a million, or 0.1% of the total. The total Christian population was estimated as 20 million, around 2.3% of the Indian population, in the 1991 census. Their significance to Indian guitar culture, however, far exceeds this numerical strength – besides the Goans and

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<sup>7</sup>Abel 1988:8; India 2001: D24. The term includes some but not all ‘Goans’, as well as so-called ‘Domiciled Europeans’, those of entirely European descent who nevertheless had settled in India for several generations.

<sup>8</sup>The discrepancy may be due to some estimates including only those of British descent, and others including also Indo-Portuguese and others. See Gist and Wright 1973:2-3.

Anglo-Indians, the converted ‘tribal’ populations of the north-eastern states have also enthusiastically adopted the guitar.<sup>9</sup>

During my visit in the winter of 1998-99, Christians were in the news in India. Partly because of a strong showing by the Congress Party under Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv’s Italian-born widow, the Hindu nationalist parties decided to turn their attentions from the Muslim minority to the even smaller Christian community. Reports started to reach the press of attacks on missionaries and the burning of churches. Some Hindu organizations stepped up reconversion programmes, and disseminated anti-Christian propaganda. The Nobel Prize awarded to the UK-based economist Amartya Sen was, we were told, part of a global Christian plot to destabilise Hindu India; Christianity and anti-national activity always went hand in hand.<sup>10</sup> While it would be an exaggeration to describe anti-Christian feeling as endemic in India, this effort to portray Christians as an ‘enemy within’ is significant, not least because it taps into wider concerns over India’s national identity and destiny, and its relationship to the powers of the industrialised West.

## **2.2 Western music in India**

The history of Western music in India has hardly begun to be written, but it is known that various forms of Western musical culture were to be found on Indian soil soon after the arrival of the Europeans. Ian Woodfield reports that the “guitar was the preferred instrument of Portuguese and Spanish sailors” in the 16th and 17th centuries (1995:82), and the instrument was certainly imported into Goa: there is no reason to suppose that the presence of the instrument, in its various forms, in the territory has not been continuous since the early 16th century.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The northeastern states are those to the north and east of Bangladesh: Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Most of this area was only integrated politically with the rest of the subcontinent as a result of British expansion in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

<sup>10</sup>Sonia and her Congress Party were indeed defeated in the elections of the following autumn, although it is debatable what part this outburst of anti-Christian agitation played.

<sup>11</sup>For an accessible survey of music in Goa, see Sardo 2000.

The Portuguese banned many forms of indigenous music, while teaching their own repertoires in seminaries and parish schools; church music in particular thrived (Harrison 1975:343-4). As Goans began to migrate to the factories and garrisons of other European powers in the 17th century, they took the guitar with them: Abbé Carré reported in sarcastic fashion from a Dutch factory near Golconda in 1673:

The Dutch employ... among others a fine troop of musicians. These are poor Christians from Kanara, near Goa. They had passed their youth in slavery with some Portuguese nobles, where they had learned to strum a guitar and sing some airs, almost as melodious as penitential psalms. They have become so proud of their accomplishments that, finding nothing to attract them in their own country, they visit the oriental courts, as they think there is nothing more charming and melodious than their music. I had this diversion at all our meals. One tortured a harp, another strummed a guitar, a third scraped a violin, and two others, having no instruments but their voices, joined in with the rest in such a way that one could not listen to their harmonies without pity and compassion. (Abbé Carré, cited by Woodfield, 245).

By the late 18th century, as the British sought to cement and bureaucratise their rule and men began to bring wives over from home rather than marry locally, their households became the site of European-style domestic music-making – as in Britain at that time, the harpsichord was a particularly favoured instrument – as well as public performance, at least in major centres such as Calcutta.<sup>12</sup> It is not clear just how widely used the guitar was in British India in the 18th and 19th centuries, although there is some evidence that it was used as a chamber instrument by Europeans.<sup>13</sup> Since the instrument was popular with women in Europe at the time, it seems probable that guitars were imported in greater numbers as the numbers of European women in India increased in the 19th century.

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<sup>12</sup>See Head 1985, Leppert 1987.

<sup>13</sup>William Hamilton Bird's *The Oriental Miscellany*, for instance, published in Calcutta in 1789, includes arrangements of keyboard pieces for guitar, flute and violin, and a solo guitar arrangement of all the pieces (Gerry Farrell, pers. com.) Head notes an advertisement in the *Calcutta Gazette* of 15 July 1784, offering for sale "Harpsichord, Forte-Pianos, Organs, Guitars, French and Spanish Violins, Violincello, Flutes, Florios, and common Aeolian Harps, Horns and Bassoons, Haut-Boys and Clarinets and all the new music..." (1985:551). The place of the guitar in this list may indicate a prominence in European domestic music-making second only to keyboard instruments.



It is not clear from published accounts at what point Anglo-Indians assumed an important role in the musical history of India. Unlike the Goans, Anglo-Indians (at least those of British descent) do not have an image in India as particularly 'musical' – which may mean simply that they were less inclined to take up music as a profession. Anglo-Indians were prominent within the Army until the late 18th century, when the British authorities became nervous of their presence and drove them out; they may, however, have continued to make up the great majority of military bandmen after that watershed (Gregory Booth, pers. com.).

References to music in accounts of the Anglo-Indian community are generally brief, but tend to confirm the importance of dance and music in the community's social life. Gist and Wright, for instance, reported in 1973 that dance and singing were important forms of recreation for the Anglo-Indians:

Group singing of popular and sentimental songs – invariably Western in theme and music – is a favorite form of informal recreation when Anglo-Indians gather together in a spirit of good fellowship. Teenagers and young adults usually prefer “rock” and other forms of popular music to the familiar melodies which are favorites of the older adults. (1973:147)

This picture is corroborated by the Calcuttan jazz guitarist Arthur Gracias.

Basically the Anglo-Indians are very fun-loving people and very very musical. They have a lot of music, they love fun and frolic and there's music almost every day in most Anglo-Indian homes. They sing, they play guitar, piano... and they love to interact. (Arthur Gracias, pers. com.)

Where the services of professional performers of Western instruments were required, Goans (along with, perhaps, small numbers of Europeans and Anglo-Indians) answered the call. Pearson reports that as many Goans migrated, “in the nineteenth century Goans in British India acquired a reputation as servants, cooks and musicians.” (1987:155). By the 1950s, he continues, “Of [the 80,000 Goans] in Bombay, the main occupations were seamen (37 percent), cooks and waiters (18 percent), clerks, tailors and *ayahs* (each 8 percent) and musicians (2 percent).” (156) This would suggest a figure of roughly 1,600 professional Goan

musicians resident in Bombay, most if not all Christians and performers on Western instruments, and many no doubt employed in the film industry.

### 2.3 The guitar's Indian origins

At ARCE,<sup>14</sup> the invaluable ethnomusicology archive in Delhi, a press cutting caught my eye: a piece from a Hindi newspaper, it suggested that the modern guitar is none other than the kacchap vina, an ancient Indian instrument long since forgotten at home but taken up abroad and popularised by the Americans.

“some Indians and many foreigners labour under the misapprehension that the guitar is a foreign instrument and that its use in India began in this present era. But this is not true.” (Sinha 1998, my translation)

The author of this piece goes on to explain, with reference to musicologist Swami Avanindranath Thakur, that the kacchap (‘tortoise’) vina, whose form is “the same as” the modern guitar, is mentioned in the Samaveda, one of the most ancient and sacred of Hindu texts.<sup>15</sup> His conjecture is that the instrument gradually became more popular in the West whilst new instruments began to supersede it in India; eventually it was lost together with the prabandha songs (precursors of the modern dhrupad) which it had accompanied, while a new type emerged in America under the name ‘guitar’. How had this happened? The guitar must have been taken to Hawaii from India by Anglo-Indians, and from there spread to the rest of the world. A second type of kacchap vina meanwhile spread to Spain, where it became known as the ‘Spanish guitar’. Moreover, the name is actually not गिटार (the usual Hindi transliteration), but गयतार, a contraction of गयत (song) + तार (string or wire), the name given because it was used to accompany songs. [Eds: I can give you the nagari script if you like...]

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<sup>14</sup>Archive and Research Center for Ethnomusicology.

<sup>15</sup>For more on the kacchap or kacchapi vina – which appears to refer most commonly, at least from the 10th century, to a fretless short-necked lute – see Deva 1977:93-94, Miner 1993: 27.

The attribution of Indian origins to anything of perceived cultural value is often mocked and satirised by Indians themselves: a character on the BBC comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me*, for instance, repeatedly tries to persuade his son of the Indian origin of phenomena from Superman to the British Royal Family, with hilarious effect. In some respects the argument cited here is indeed rather far-fetched (to the point of absurdity when, for instance, the author claims that ‘Hawaiian’ is a contraction of ‘Hawaii’ plus ‘(Indi)an’). The idea is of interest however, and not only as an instance of a perceived need to ascribe Indian origins to the guitar before it can be fully accepted. What the author fails to discuss is the more specific point that the technique of playing guitar (or other stringed instruments) with a slide may in fact have been disseminated from India.

The Hawaiian guitar’s origins remain contested, but one story involves Indian influence. Donald Mitchell and George Kanaha report a tale told by the Hawaiian composer Charles E. King, in which he describes an occasion in 1884 when he saw “Gabriel Davion – a young man who was born in India, kidnapped by a sea captain and finally brought to Honolulu”, who had attracted attention for his “new way” of playing guitar with a slide (Kanaha 1979:366-367).

The guitar itself had by this time been known in Hawaii for some decades, having been introduced via north America in the early decades of the 19th century:<sup>16</sup> the motivation for slide playing seems to have been, as elsewhere, a desire to better imitate vocal nuances. This fact was noted by Mantle Hood, who suggested that “The manner in which the text of a Hawaiian song is sung and the manner in which the same song is played on the Hawaiian guitar are very similar. It is difficult to say which influences the other, but since the singing voice was present long before the steel guitar, it is probably safe to assume that the instrument is imitating the voice.” (1983:142-3). As Hood suggests, this strong affinity between voice and stringed instrument is common at least to India and Java besides Hawaii.

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<sup>16</sup>Hugh Davies writes, “Around 1830 Mexican cattle traders introduced the guitar into Hawaii” (1984:207). Other reports speak of Spanish-American or Portuguese cowboys as the agents.

The technique of playing slide guitar was popularised by a Hawaiian, Joseph Kekuku, around the turn of the century (Kekuku was the first to record on slide guitar, in 1909<sup>17</sup>), but Hood is convinced that he was inspired by Davion's introduction of a technique he had learned in India: "Fairly stated, we should say Davion introduced the principal to the Islands and Kekuku developed a Hawaiian version of the guitar that became the steel guitar." (1983:145) This technique is utilised on both the north Indian vichitra vina and the south Indian gottuvadyam, and was probably first used on the ekatantri vina (a single-stringed stick zither), certainly by the 7th century CE and possibly as early as 200 BCE (Hood 1983:144-5, drawing on the work of B. C. Deva).

The international craze for Hawaiian music took in not only America and Europe but also many Asian countries.<sup>18</sup> In India, John Marsden and Charles Kohlhoff report, Hawaiian hit records and movies of the 1930s and 40s enjoyed great popularity. Hawaiian touring groups began to visit India, and also, "a number of Indian musicians began to take up Hawaiian music. (All of these performers were Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Burmese, Goans and Indonesians rather than full-blooded Indians.)" (Kanahale 1979:166). The best known of these musicians was Garney Nyss (1916-1998), who formed his band the Aloha Boys in 1938 and continued to perform Hawaiian guitar for the next 60 years, recording with HMV India and broadcasting through All India Radio.<sup>19</sup>

The sound of the Hawaiian guitar was to remain an important part of the Indian soundscape for several decades, as it became part of the film-music sound-palette<sup>20</sup> and was also employed in other popular genres, particularly in Bengal. Before long, moreover, the potential

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<sup>17</sup>Spottswood 1996: 68-69. For a fuller account of the version of the story which holds Kekuku to be the originator, see Roberts (1926:10-11), who notes the existence of similar techniques in Japan and Africa. The first recordings of slide guitar in the Blues was made in 1923, and that in country music in 1927 (Evans 1977:319).

<sup>18</sup>And African: Gerhard Kubik notes that "In the 1940s and 1950s the Hawaiian guitar attained popularity in southern Africa. This led to a revitalisation of an old instrumental technique: playing on one string by means of a 'slider'... The term Hawaiian has been adapted into the local Bantu languages, hence 'hauyani'." (1984:207). Similar phonetic adjustments have occurred in India: although there is no standard spelling, that favoured by a Delhi music school - 'havion' - is not atypical.

<sup>19</sup>Zachariah 1998.

<sup>20</sup>Miner reports, "Film-music directors have included Western instruments in their orchestras since the early years of sound film in the 1930s. In the first few decades, film orchestras included the accordion, mandolin, Hawaiian guitar, clarinet and conga drums." (2000:347).

of the instrument as a vehicle for Hindustani (North Indian) classical music was recognised. Slide guitar is now widely accepted as a suitable instrument for classical music, and I was fortunate to be able to interview the two leading performers, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya. My account of present-day Indian guitar culture begins with Bhattacharya.

## 3 Travelogue I: Calcutta

### 3.1 The classicist

I found Debashish Bhattacharya's flat after criss-crossing south Calcutta's bewildering residential colonies for what seemed an age. Street signs, let alone maps, are a rarity here, but this is a place governed by human geography – there is always someone around to ask. When I finally arrived Debashish was there at his balcony to welcome me, smartly dressed in blue silk kurta and waistcoat, sending his student down to carry my bags: he was ready for my video camera...

One of the new breed of brilliant classical guitar virtuosi, Debashish Bhattacharya was brought up in a musical family: both his father and mother sang khyal and light-classical songs. The first instrument he touched, at the age of 4, was a 6-string acoustic Hawaiian guitar belonging to his mother. Surprising as this may sound, at the time (Debashish was born in 1963) the Hawaiian guitar would have been a common sight in middle-class Calcuttan households. Apparently the Hawaiian guitar craze was such – his comment was confirmed by other Bengali friends – that it became almost de rigueur for a middle class Bengali girl to learn to play Rabindrasangeet (Tagore songs) on the Hawaiian guitar, a skill acquired largely to help her marriage prospects.

The guitar has been used in Bengal, in genres from theatre music to adhunik gan ('modern songs') for many years. One reason for its popularity in Calcutta, Bhattacharya explained, was that a Hawaiian master named Tau Moe had visited India several times (the first time in 1930) and actually stayed in Calcutta from 1940 to 1947 where he performed regularly at the Grand Hotel.<sup>21</sup> Tau Moe's influence was significant in the burgeoning popularity of the Hawaiian guitar in India. Moe's chief disciple, Calcuttan Anglo-Indian Garney Nyss, had apparently won 2nd prize in an international Hawaiian guitar competition some years back: Nyss had taught a Bengali Christian named Rajat Nandy, and Nandy had taught Bhattacharya.

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<sup>21</sup>The last point is from Arthur Gracias (pers. com.).

Thus, Bhattacharya is not only linked to the Hindustani vocal tradition through his guru Ajoy Chakraborty, and to the nascent Hindustani guitar tradition through Brij Bhushan Kabra, but also to a 60-year old Calcuttan Hawaiian guitar tradition.

The first attempts to play Indian music on the guitar may have been those of Van Shipley, a Methodist originally of Lucknow (latterly resident in Mumbai) who learned from Ustad Allauddin Khan and designed his own 8-string electric guitar back in the 1940s.<sup>22</sup>

Bhattacharya credits the well-known musician and teacher Jnan Prakash Ghosh with playing Hindustani music on 'slide tanpura' on All India Radio broadcasts, and encouraging a Western-style guitarist named Sujit Nath to try to play a little Indian music. Mark Humphrey cites the 1953 film *Ladki* in which one song "opens with a brief meditative slide guitar line reminiscent of a slow *alap*..." (1994:110).

To most Indian classical music lovers however, the guitar is associated most strongly with the name of Debashish Bhattacharya's teacher, Brij Bhushan Kabra. Kabra it was who in the 1960s made the first recordings on guitar as a classical soloist, playing an f-hole archtop with 3 of its 6 strings used as *chikari* – strings tuned to the system tonic Sa, found on Indian instruments such as the *bin* (rudra vina), sarod and sitar, which are plucked repeatedly to provide a high-pitched drone and rhythmic punctuation. Bhattacharya claims to have added extra *chikari* strings in 1978 (thereby freeing up more of the main strings for melodic work), and by the mid 1980s was playing an instrument with both the added *chikari* and *taraf* (sympathetic strings). 'Chikari' or 'tarafdar' guitars (those with *chikari* strings only, or with both *chikari* and *taraf*) can now be bought as standard models from several Indian manufacturers.

The current instruments are by no means standardised however, either in design, tuning or playing technique. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, for instance, currently plays a 20-string guitar (with 8 main machine heads, plus 12 for the *taraf* mounted on a special neck extension), while Debashish Bhattacharya plays a 22-string instrument with just 6 main machine heads, plus 14

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<sup>22</sup>Dale ..., pers. com.

on a neck extension and 2 more at the front (treble side) for chikari.<sup>23</sup> Bhatt favours a vina-like<sup>24</sup> layout and technique: chikaris are placed on the bass side (i.e. closer to the player's body) and played with a thumb pick, while the main strokes of Hindustani instrumental technique, represented by the spoken syllables (bols) da and ra, are produced with picks on the first two fingers of the right hand.<sup>25</sup> Debashish Bhattacharya has moved the chikari to the treble side of the instrument (closer to the audience) and produces da and ra strokes with thumb and first finger respectively, which he suggests facilitates greater speed and produces less stress on the player's body.

Bhattacharya explained to me that the guitar, in its adapted form, is actually an ideal instrument for Hindustani classical music, on account of its tone and impressive sustain – the latter being the main reason all the classical players give for taking up the instrument. The key is that these features, together with the possibility of producing subtle pitch inflections, make it possible to imitate Indian vocal style to an uncanny degree (which of course parallels the story that Blues players took up the bottleneck guitar in order to better imitate the human voice, and may also be the key to its appeal to Hawaiians). It is beyond dispute that in sustain and freedom of pitch modulation, a slide guitarist does indeed have a considerable advantage over, for instance, a sitarist.

The other advantage of the guitar is, according to Bhattacharya, that as a Western instrument it is more easily accepted abroad – and it is clear that he sees his innovations in terms of globalisation.

It is always better to communicate [with] people of the world and of different culture with an instrument which is already popular... the language is already learned by the global people. So if I play Jaunpuri in sursringar, maybe it [would be] a very interesting and very

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<sup>23</sup>5 of the 6 main strings are used for melody, 12 of the 14 are taraf: the other 3 strings are called 'supporting strings', in imitation of Ali Akbar's sarod layout.

<sup>24</sup>I.e. based on the north Indian rudra and vichitra vinas, both plucked stick zithers.

<sup>25</sup>On the sitar these are produced with inward and outward strokes respectively, on the sarod downward and upward plectrum strokes.



rare thing of acknowledgement, but if I play the same raga on *guitar* it will touch people's heart much faster and much deeper.

[The] guitar has its maybe 20, 25 or 30 varieties around the world – who knows, maybe more than that. And it imitates the sound of different culture, all over the world. The world has changed a lot, at this point we are sitting within the globalisation era, the world is becoming smaller and smaller. We have different dialects, different moods, different fooding, different clothing, language eveything. But thanks, guitar all over the world sounds the same, the language is the same. (Debashish Bhattacharya, pers. com.)

Bhattacharya's instrument, whose design he has copyrighted, goes under the name 'Hindustani Slide Guitar': the name is not his own, any more than 'Mohan Veena' is Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's own idea. In fact, Bhatt seemed almost uncomfortable with his instrument's new name: while the renaming might appear to be an overt sign of Indianisation and distancing from the instrument's foreign origins, this motivation was not apparent in either musician's account. Both artists stressed the primacy of the music played on the instrument (and their own role in its popularisation).

This instrument is named as Mohan Veena – Mohan is my middle name... some American recording company and magazine... suggested this name... There was a magazine in which they wrote 'this is a Mohan Veena, not a guitar'... Now a lot of people are coming up after this, and they're following this style of mine and also the instrument I made. There is very good following now, and many young boys, musicians are coming up, they're taking up this instrument as their career.

[The instrument is] a guitar, no doubt about it, the body, everything is of the guitar. It's a modified guitar, so I always write 'modified guitar' – 'Mohan Veena, A Modified Guitar' ... I think the name is not important, it's the work and the music which I play... Guitar is a Western instrument, I know that, and what I play on it is Indian classical music, so I don't think it has something to do with Western music. (V. M. Bhatt, pers. com.)

### 3.2 Calcutta jazzmen

Fascinating and impressive as the Hindustani guitar style of Debashish Bhattacharya, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and others is, the number of such players is very small and the number of adapted instruments sold likewise.<sup>26</sup> India is home to far more players of Western genres such as jazz, rock and pop; in Calcutta I was lucky to meet the city's two leading jazz players, Carlton Kitto and Arthur Gracias.

Arthur Gracias lives in the Anglo-Indian district of Calcutta, around the corner from Mother Teresa's Headquarters. A slightly nervous, but utterly charming man, Gracias was rather embarrassed by the building work going on in his flat: he could only show me his guitar cases, and the corner which normally houses the PC workstation on which he composes film music. Gracias's grandfather was Spanish, his father born in India; his mother was Anglo-Indian. Brought up in a family full of musicians he soon took up guitar and piano, studying classical music through the Royal School of Music in London but above all developing a taste for jazz. After a period playing with Sonny Lobo's big band at the Grand Hotel, Gracias decided it was time to move on:

I thought I should branch out on my own, because I had to have my own identity, and I studied Indian classical music [with] some very good Indian classical musicians... And I thought it would be a very good idea to fuse Indian classical music with jazz, which are both very powerful improvisation forms... So I began researching that, and I was recorded by Humphrey Walden in the early seventies for BBC, and they broadcast some of my music. (Arthur Gracias, pers. com.)

Gracias is one of India's original Indo-jazz fusion musicians: he has performed with a variety of bands working with various combinations of Indian and Western instruments (Gracias himself playing both piano and arch-top acoustic-electric guitar) since the late 1960s. He was the only Anglo-Indian musician I met who expressed a desire to meld musics – far more

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<sup>26</sup>One of Calcutta's (and therefore India's) biggest guitar manufacturers, Gibtone, estimated that the proportion of such instruments sold was less than 1% of the total (Enamul Haque, pers. com.).

commonly Anglo-Indian musicians to whom I spoke expressed disinterest in local musical forms.<sup>27</sup> When I asked him how much interest there was amongst Anglo-Indians in Indian music, in fact, Gracias could speak only of his own experience and motivation:

It depends. *I* thought it was very very impressive from the improvisational point of view, and also meditational values are there, and I thought I could bring about the mix of the two creative forms. Of course today things are moving so much faster, the introduction of computers, the world is much more smaller, you get to interact with other musicians all over the world and I think music doesn't belong to any one person. It's a very free thing, it's a global thing today, it's world music... It's music, it's either good music or bad music, that's it! (Arthur Gracias, pers. com.)

Gracias's neighbour Carlton Kitto, a Bangalore-born Anglo-Indian,<sup>28</sup> takes a rather different line: a jazz purist in stark contrast to Gracias's approach, he told me he argues with Gracias about it, but good-naturedly by the sound of it. Kitto plays at the Grand Hotel with his jazz quartet every Saturday, and teaches about 40 students at the Calcutta School of Music and another 35 privately; he told me that all his students are Bengalis (i.e. not Anglo-Indian), since "the Anglo-Indian youth all want to be Springsteen or Bryan Adams". He cares only for 'pure jazz', and that means bebop in particular, although he played me a selection including cool jazz and bossa nova.

I'm trying to spread the movement of Bebop, and get them to understand pure jazz, you see, rather than fusion and rock- and funk-jazz. ... I think [Bebop] is the greatest thing that has happened to jazz. (Carlton Kitto, pers. com.)

He had taught thousands of students in his time, and was proud that his proselytisation had achieved some success;

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<sup>27</sup>This perception is echoed in Sardo's report of music in Goa: "Catholics neither learn nor perform Indian classical music." (2000:737). Sherinian, however, mentions a Christian performer of Carnatic music on guitar, named M. J. Ravindran (1998:CHECK). The general picture seems to be one of very little interest shown by Christian communities in Indian classical music, but of a handful of notable exceptions such as Gracias and Ravindran.

<sup>28</sup>Kitto's mother was English, and his father Philippino. Both were stationed in Bangalore due to the war, where Carlton was born in 1942. He does not meet the official criteria for definition as 'Anglo-Indian', although this is his unequivocal self-identification.

One of our jazz club members [is] Ajay Ray, he's an authority on jazz... Ajay had gone to one of these remote villages and found a fellow over there playing a solo of John Coltrane, He said 'Good God, where did he pick this up?' Fellow couldn't speak English also. He said 'My Sir taught me this', [Ray] said 'Who's your Sir?', and he said 'Carlton Kitto!'. (Carlton Kitto, pers. com.)

My unavoidable impression talking to Carlton Kitto was of a man out of place and out of time. Kitto spent years teaching himself to play by ear from American records, and avidly reading all he could of Charlie Christian and his peers at the American library. His relatives have mostly moved away to the UK and Australia, leaving him adrift in an ever-shrinking community: he expects to send his three daughters abroad too, but won't himself leave. Kitto complained at the difficulty in obtaining jazz recordings in Calcutta, and the general decline in the music scene in the city since he moved there in the 1960s to be at the centre of the music industry. Perhaps his biggest complaint was that so few people appreciated his music anymore – like many of my interviewees I sensed a barely-contained excitement that someone was, at last, showing an interest. He dismissed any thought of interesting himself in Indian music – “No, no I never heard, I never liked that part of it!” On the contrary, the highlights of his musical life were, unsurprisingly, encounters with jazz greats on their rare visits to Indian shores.

I played here with Charlie Bird, I did a duet with him... that was about 75-76... I played with a lot of greats. I played with Duke Ellington initially, that's where it all happened, you know! He was rehearsing when he came down to Madras, and some of my fans – you know, I was just a beginner at that time, of course I was playing quite a lot of jazz – they pushed me on the stage with a guitar and said 'Go on, play. Here's your chance man!' ... So Duke turned around and said 'Hey, what have we got here... you wanna play son?', and I said 'Yeah, I'd love to!' So Billy Strayhorn went on the keyboard and they [said] 'What do you wanna play?' and I said 'Satin Doll'. He said 'Where did you get our tune from?' I said I knocked it off a record... 'Ok, play!' – they were curious. I played about five tunes with them, they were sort of impressed, they said 'How the hell did you do this on your

own, you mean to say you didn't have any formal studies?', I said 'No, nothing, I'm just a self-taught guy'. (Carlton Kitto, pers. com.)

## 4 Travelogue II: Mumbai

### 4.1 Pepsi Powerblast

On the evening of 12th December I found myself waiting outside the gates of Rang Bhavan, an open-air venue in central Mumbai, for the promised 6.30pm start of the ‘Pepsi Powerblast’ rock gig. The crowd, mostly of college-aged men, many in Iron Maiden or Metallica tee-shirts, gathered and formed an orderly queue – across the street stood a small knot of middle-aged women in short hair and Western dress, whom I took to be Parsis. The scheduled start time came and went, the crowd became understandably annoyed and briefly threatened trouble – but without serious intent, and the early evening passed slowly. Once the long-awaited event was underway, the first of the local cover bands took the stage, a technically able but lacklustre group. “School’s Out!” bellowed one fan, “Play some grunge man!”, “Nirvana!”: they were rewarded with some Led Zeppelin songs, which went down well enough.

My attention wandering to the banners at the back of the stage, I read that the event was “A charity concert in aid of the World Zoroastrian Organisation youth wing for the destitutes” – hence the visible Parsi presence. The Parsi community are descended from Persian Zoroastrian refugees who arrived in India some time between the 8th and 10th centuries CE. They retain their religion, but are nonetheless generally perceived to be one of India’s more Westernised, as well as its wealthiest, community. Despite their tiny numbers (perhaps as low as 80,000 in total) Parsi patronage, as well as a number of talented musicians, have had an impact on both Indian and Western music: many Parsi musicians are employed in the film industry; Zubin Mehta is a Parsi, as is the noted khyal singer Firoz Dastur, as was Freddie Mercury.<sup>29</sup> Locally-made rock is often associated in India with communities perceived as

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<sup>29</sup>The late Freddie Mercury, lead singer of the British rock group Queen, was in most respects a mainstream figure – Western media attention rarely focused on his ethnicity. Nor did I encounter evidence of his being regarded in India as an ‘Indian’ rock star, or indeed evidence of his band being disproportionately popular, for that or any other reason.

westernized – and this includes Parsis as well as the various Christian communities and some middle-class Hindus and Muslims.

Unfortunately I had another date elsewhere that evening and missed the headline act, a local band called Brahma.<sup>30</sup> Looking for their tapes in record shops the next day, I had no success: recordings of Indian rock bands are extremely hard to find. Sales for locally-produced rock music have been negligible, save for a tiny handful of stars such as Remo Fernandes: they are dwarfed by those of filmi and other Hindi (and to some extent Punjabi) language pop and ghazals. The difficulty in establishing a market for local English-language rock is demonstrated by the fact that lately even Remo has abandoned English and started to sing in Hindi.<sup>31</sup> Rock music is not however difficult to find in India. It can be found in the form of recordings and occasional tours by foreign bands (Iron Maiden visited India during my research trip), and also in the local rock scene, mainly on the college circuit.

Locally-produced rock music in India is generally played by ‘college bands’: most play exclusively covers, few record and most disband shortly after leaving college. As one magazine feature put it,

For years, the rock music scene in India has followed a predictable and most unexciting path. A rock band normally starts out playing the college circuit, soldiers on for a few years, becomes disillusioned by the lack of opportunities, ultimately leading to its members hunting for more ‘standard’ jobs. Meanwhile, the latest and the glitziest that the Europeans and the Americans have to offer is gobbled up by an avaricious public.

(Sreenivasan 1991)

Pepsi- and Coca-Cola, in time-honoured fashion, fight over the Indian soft drinks market (in this case in a three-way battle with local pretenders Thumbs-Up). In the best traditions of glocalisation they must tread the fine line between offering the glamour and sex-appeal of Americal popular culture, and appearing to support desi (local) culture and local heroes. In

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<sup>30</sup>Interestingly, Indian rock bands are often named in a distinctively Hindu fashion.

<sup>31</sup>Like most Goans, Remo Fernandes speaks English more fluently than Hindi: since he began singing in Hindi, Indian media coverage has often drawn attention to his (allegedly poor) pronunciation of the language.

the winter of 1998-99 Pepsi stole a march over their rivals by signing cricketer Sachin Tendulkar to endorse their product: all three Cola manufacturers feature prominently amongst advertisers on cable television pop music shows, and here in Mumbai Pepsi threw considerable promotional weight behind what was, effectively, a small-scale showpiece for a handful of local cover bands. If Indian-produced rock is ever to make a commercial impact, it will be surprising if the sponsorship of such multinational corporations does not figure prominently in the tale.

## 4.2 Guitars on film

Also in Mumbai I managed to meet a very popular young music director<sup>32</sup> by the name of Vishal Bharadwaj. I asked Vishal about two of his recent soundtracks, which I'd been listening to in my hotel room: *Satya*, which featured a wide range of guitar styles, and *Maachis*, which largely avoided the instrument.<sup>33</sup> Why did he use it more in some movies than in others? The difference, he replied, was in the setting: the guitar is suitable for a modern, urban situation, which is the case for *Satya* (Truth); *Maachis* (Matches) is set in rural Punjab, where a rabab would be more suitable. *Satya* is a story set in the modern Mumbai underworld, a romance between a young gangster and a girl from whom he must keep his criminal life secret. The opening number 'Badalon se' ('From the clouds...') features the greatest variety of guitar styles, acoustic and electric: Vishal explained that piece is from the hero's perspective – the boy is saying he can't believe he's falling in love. "It was a Bombay, modern character, so...", "So it's modern music?", "It's modern music... and I love guitars!"

The player on that song, Tushar Parte, is a professional session player whose father used to be a music arranger and director in the films. In fact, the family tradition in music goes back a little further: Tushar's grandmother Kamala Devi was a sitarist employed as companion to the Queen of Kolhapur in the 1930s and 1940s;<sup>34</sup> her husband Anantrao Parte, besides being a

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<sup>32</sup>i.e. composer of film music

<sup>33</sup>*Maachis*, Pan Music MPX 5416 (1996); *Satya*, Venus VCDD 753 (?1997).

<sup>34</sup>Kolhapur now lies in Maharashtra state, south of Mumbai and north of Goa.



music lover and patron was the personal doctor to the famous stage and film actor Prithviraj Kapoor. Through the Kapoors, Anantrao was able to introduce his son Jaykumar into the Bombay film industry in the 1940s: Jaykumar Parte became a successful music director and arranger, working extensively with the famous music directors Kalyanji-Anandji. Jaykumar had studied both Hindustani music and piano, on which instrument he took Trinity College examinations.

Jaykumar's son Tushar, then, was brought up in the Bombay film music scene. He has seen the shift from the days of big studios and the big sound – orchestras of 75-100 musicians were not uncommon – to modern studios based on digital hard-disc recording systems where, thanks to click-tracks, there is no need for musicians to actually play together. Tushar, a consummate session man, is at home in this world, moulding his sound to the dictates of his music director. He also, nevertheless, avows a deep love of his family farm in Kohlapur, and of the local lavani songs – his musical diet included such local forms alongside film music and Western styles.

I am from Kolhapur, which has got a tradition of lavani, a different style of Indian music...

“They're Marathi songs?”

Yes, Marathi songs; there's a dholki and a woman dancing... ethnic clothes, sari she's wearing, ornaments, and the tunes are very exciting, they're very beautiful, it's got a different colour.

“So you grew up listening to this?”

Yeah, I'm quite familiar with the lavanis, because this is what we heard. At the same time, I also did a lot of listening, listening to the Voice of America, to the BBC jazz hour or whatever... (Tushar Parte, pers. com.)

Tushar now has a project, called Mythological Wine Music, which involves him playing guitar and emulator, with his wife Suchita singing Sanskrit shlokas, and had been making demos for a Western record company shortly before my visit. Parte was fairly relaxed about

the project: since he can make a good living playing for the films, he has time to indulge himself doing something he wants to do. That also includes, as he demonstrated to me, developing a new style of playing which incorporates – alongside riffs borrowed from Stevie Ray Vaughan – the rhythms of the lavani songs of his native Maharashtra.

## 5 Conclusions: Interpreting the Indian guitar

Although guitars have been played in India since the 16th century – well before the modern six-string standard was developed in the late 18th century<sup>35</sup> – the instrument seems to have had little impact, at least outside Goa, until the early 20th century Hawaiian guitar craze. The fashion for Hawaiian guitar having declined, the instrument is now found in many genres: in Hindustani music, where modified forms of the Hawaiian guitar have been developed; in Western genres such as rock and jazz and in Indian popular music including film songs and ghazals. Professional guitarists have been drawn largely from the Goan, Anglo-Indian and north-eastern Christian communities, although in recent years increasing numbers of Hindus have taken up the instrument.<sup>36</sup>

The guitar is at present amongst the most popular instruments in India, in all senses of the word; if the shops I selected at random are representative, it is probable that more are sold – at least in the metropolitan cities – than any other instrument bar the harmonium. It is used for an incredible variety of repertoires and played in many different styles. But, largely since it is identified as foreign, Western, ‘modern’ and largely Christian, its place in Indian culture is bound to be problematic – especially in times when secularism is in retreat and the politics of religious nationalism have taken root.

The sometimes bewildering array of positions taken up with respect to ‘The West’ is of course not surprising in view of India’s colonial history, and its enduring weakness in economic and strategic terms vis-a-vis the United States and other Western powers. Political, media and not least academic discourse is peppered with references to India’s pride in its ancient cultural heritage and expressions of resentment at the former colonial powers;

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<sup>35</sup>See eg. Turnbull and Tyler 1984:99f.

<sup>36</sup>Enamul Haque, joint owner of Gibtone, told me that interest in the guitar amongst the Muslim community was “almost zero”. Muslim guitarists are to be found in some rock bands, and in the performance of specifically Muslim genres in some areas (see Booth 2000:428, Groesbeck and Palackal 2000:948).

The guitar appears currently to be very much identified as a male instrument in India, notwithstanding the post-war Bengali fashion for girls to play Rabindrasangeet on the instrument, or indeed the earlier feminine connotations of the instrument in European culture. Instrumental performance of Indian music remains largely male-dominated, although this is gradually being challenged by a number of female virtuosi.

meanwhile the country rushes headlong towards industrialisation and urbanisation, and the distant goal of ‘catching up’ with the West. For all the protestations of India’s greatness, the excitement with which any international recognition of India or an individual Indian’s achievement is met – whether the world’s discomfiture at India’s 1998 nuclear tests, Amartya Sen’s Nobel Prize or indeed V. M. Bhatt’s Grammy – is telling. Advertising takes up similar themes: a Calcutta tram proclaims the Bank of Baroda slogan, “Indian roots, International spread”, while a huge hand-painted hoarding in Chennai proclaims “Indian biscuits, International quality”.

Notions of tradition and modernity are of crucial importance to current debates on Indian national identity. For many people in India, ‘tradition’ is assimilated to Indianness and ‘modernity’ to the West: after all, the idea of an ancient cultural heritage is central to most constructions of Indian cultural identity, while technological innovation has largely been seen as imported by Europeans. Set against this simplistic dichotomy are those who would claim the existence, or at least the possibility, of a distinctively Indian take on modernity – described in terms of an integration of the best of India’s ‘cultural heritage’ with an outward-looking, technologically-advanced national consciousness – an idea which resurfaces continually in various forms of discourse. Contestations of the guitar’s status and meaning can usefully be interpreted against this background.

The guitar obviously has the potential to act as a symbol of the West: a foreign instrument which, perhaps, presents a challenge to India’s great musical heritage. The fact that it is largely associated within India with the Christian community, and with a Westernised anglophone elite, makes this all the more likely. And yet this very status makes the appropriation of the guitar a powerfully symbolic gesture, and the Grammy Award to Vishwa Mohan Bhatt unsurprisingly made a huge impact. As Bhatt himself explained to me, since the Grammy, “Now a layman also knows me – not only the musician – but a layman also [will think] ‘Oh, he’s the one who has brought honour to our country’ “.

Moreover, the appropriation can work on many different levels. Not only can the instrument itself be adapted; as the guitar spreads from Westernised, Christian communities to the rest of

Indian society, musicians begin to conceive of socio-musical relationships in terms of the bond between guru and shishya (master and disciple): in this respect it is telling that Tushar Parte speaks of a Mumbai-resident American, D Wood as his 'guru'. Taking this theme even further, Debashish Bhattacharya explained the lineage behind his Hawaiian guitar knowledge; "So I'm the fourth generation. If you want to know more you should go to Bob Brozman: he learned from Tau Moe directly so he is only the second generation". The Hindu tradition that musical knowledge (like other forms of knowledge) was handed down from the Gods to mortal men in the distant past, and that this knowledge has been gradually corrupted and forgotten since that time, still has some currency. To be closer to the source, to have fewer links in the chain and thus have allowed less opportunity for the corruption of knowledge—this is important even where the source is a Hawaiian guitar master.

Mainstream popular culture maintains and thrives upon a dialectic between the local and the global. Hindi songs outsell English songs by some distance on the Indian market, yet their musical accompaniment incorporates the latest sounds and techniques of the (US- and UK-dominated) global pop music industry. India's musical production is not about to abandon its distinctive sounds, but it will continue to absorb and adapt what it can from abroad.

Professional rock and pop musicians in India are always conscious of the West – not least because they have to obtain imported equipment,<sup>37</sup> but also because they understand the paradox that in order to develop an international market they must localize their style. The Indian classical players are doing to the guitar what their predecessors did to Central Asian instruments to produce the modern sitar and sarod – in some respects quite literally, as in the additions of chikari and taraf strings – and proving the same point, that the guardians of Indian culture will only feel totally comfortable with foreign artefacts once they have been fully assimilated to the local mainstream.

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<sup>37</sup>Although Indian manufacturers (most of them based in Calcutta) produce thousands of guitars each year, even the makers themselves admit their instruments' quality is poor - they claim that their main concern is to keep prices very low. Peter Remedios, boss of one of India's leading guitar-makers Reynolds, suggested to me that the local market will not stand the higher prices that improved standards would bring. Professional guitarists all use imported gear (in past years equipment has been brought back from abroad by players on foreign trips; now imported Fenders are available in shops such as his), and they have no interest in slightly improved Indian models: most amateurs have a very limited budget, and it is to these players the local makers cater. (Peter Remedios, pers. com.)

The kacchap vina argument shows how important it is, for some, to demonstrate the Indian lineage of the guitar in order that it can be fully accepted. This story is not widely accepted however, even in India – much more commonly expressed is the view that the guitar is an imported instrument which can be and is being appropriated. For the classical players, the adaptation is justified by the successful results (according to the aesthetic criteria of Hindustani classical music), and moreover since the ploy may be expanding the global audience for Indian music. Indian musicians see themselves as players in every sense, not merely as pawns, in the game of globalisation.

Those players who have mastered Western styles but who do not (unlike most Anglo-Indians and Goans) identify overwhelmingly with the West, face a slightly more subtle challenge – one can see a response to that in Tushar Parte's Mythological Wine Music and his experiments with lavani rhythms, the impulse to bring together guitar technique and a distinctively Hindu, Maharashtrian consciousness. The sense I picked up from many Christian musicians, on the other hand, was of the guitar acting as a link into global networks which hold more appeal than those on offer closer to home. The love of British and American guitar magazines, the devotion to the great jazz masters, the years spent learning by ear from difficult-to-find recordings with no support structure to speak of, all tell the story of the guitar linking its Indian players to the wider world.

When Indians wanted guitars and guitarists, as with other forms of Western music, it was largely Goans and Anglo-Indians who filled that need; the Christian domination of Indian guitar culture is only now being significantly challenged as Hindu Indian boys take up the instrument in large numbers. It is in no way coincidental that this marginal group should be crucially involved in the Indian appropriation of the guitar, an 'intermediate' group acting as intermediaries in the absorption of a foreign musical instrument, a marginal group articulating the conflicts and tensions, but also (albeit often reluctantly) the creative and artistic potential of the meeting of Indian and Western musical cultures.

The story of the guitar also dramatises many of the conflicts and dilemmas facing postcolonial India. The guitar is that instrument which most easily links one to the wealth and

modernity of the West, its consumerism and individualism. And yet it is a foreign infiltrator, a Trojan horse promising glamour and yet bringing with it anti-national, decadent culture. To be made safe it has to be appropriated, adapted, Indianised – and, if at all possible, sold back to the outside world as a proclamation of India’s musical genius on the global marketplace. The dazzling virtuosity of Bhattacharya and Bhatt are a testament to the benefits of this approach, yet it is ironic that to the outside world this brilliant Indianisation, the music of a mere handful of virtuosi, becomes the only visible part of the Indian guitar scene – the remaining and far greater part remains unseen and unheard, since that part which wants to identify with the West is of no interest to the West. The far greater numbers of aspiring Methenys and Springsteens are, to all intents and purposes, invisible. This is perhaps the most telling paradox of all – that while the globally-mediated impinges on each locality, only the locally-rooted stands a chance of success in the global market.

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