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Adaptation of the Harmonium in Malaysia: Indian or British Heritage?

Introduction

The historiography of the harmonium in Malaysia was not given much attention by Malaysian musicians and scholars who lived before the mid twentieth century.¹ Similarly, British historiography does not say much about British colonial music in vogue in Malaya.² In contrast, in India, local and foreign scholars and musicians have extensively documented information on Indian music, its interdisciplinary studies and literature in the same period. S. M. Tagore's 1874 book *Harmonium Sutra* was the first devoted to the playing techniques of the Indian hand-pumped harmonium, just before the innovation was made widely available by the Dwarkanath Ghosh Company in 1875.³

The first harmonium, patented by a French inventor in 1842, has two rows of free reeds and a foot bellows.⁴ According to Matt Rahaim, naval chaplains, camp meeting organizers, and travelling missionaries used foot-bellow harmoniums to accompany hymn-singing in India. It is unclear where these harmoniums were first played and which models. Rahaim sees that the primary distinction of foot bellow harmonium was its lower price, durability and mobility in comparison to other keyboard instruments.⁵ The foot bellow harmonium might have been easier to transport compared to piano or church organ which were probably considered as more appropriate for Christian religious practices.⁶ For the first time, a modified hand-pumped portable model for use in Hindustani music was manufactured by a Calcutta

¹ Malaya, consisting of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, became independent in 1959. 1963, the two northern states of Borneo, Sabah and Sarawak, joined the Malayan Federation, that was later renamed Malaysia after Singapore left the Federation.

² Irving, D. R. M. (2011): *The British Historiography of the Malay Music in the Nineteenth Century*: 1. Retrieved on 20, September 2012 from <http://www.thinkcity.com.my/penang-story/images/stories/images/irving-penang-paper-for-proceedings.pdf>.

³ In 1874, S.M.Tagore published *Harmonium Sutra*, a guide for playing the harmonium using K.M. Goswami's notation system; Kobayashi, Eriko (2003): *Hindustani Classical Music Reform Movement and the Writing of History, 1900s to 1940s*. PhD dissertation. Austin, University of Texas at Austin: 68; Rahaim, Matt (2011): *That Ban(e) of Indian Music: Hearing Politics in the Harmonium*. The Association for Asian Studies, vol. 70, No. 3: 675.

⁴ Rahaim, Matt (2011): *That Ban(e) of Indian Music: Hearing Politics in the Harmonium*. The Association for Asian Studies, vol. 70, No. 3: 662.

⁵ Rahaim, Matt (2011): *That Ban(e) of Indian Music: Hearing Politics in the Harmonium*. The Association for Asian Studies, vol. 70, No. 3: 662.

⁶ Ibid.

instrument maker named Dwarkanth Ghose in 1875. Ghose's version was simplified to be more durable, cheaper, and easier to repair; he also added drone stops for accompanying classical music.⁷ However, these innovations could not meet the main requirements of north Indian classical music. The harmonium's piano-like keyboard is incapable of producing the glissandi, oscillation, occasional microtones and diverse melodic nuances which are fundamental in producing north Indian melody. Nevertheless, the harmonium was widely used in India even though it was publicly criticized and officially banned from Indian radio from 1940 to 1971. Rahaim writes that the ban was enacted not only because of the instrument's incompatibility with Hindustani ragas but also because of various political issues.⁸

Even though the social status of the harmonium in India was and is a subordinate one due to its foreign origin and musical incompatibility with Hindustani music, many or most eminent Hindustani classical vocalists prefer harmonium as an accompanying instrument in their performances. At the same time, professional dhrupad singers strictly do not incorporate harmonium in traditional renderings due to their concern with accuracy of intonation and the gamut of Hindustani ragas. Due to the fact that using one's foot in producing sound on a musical instrument is considered as being irrespective and insulting to music as an art according to Hindu ideology, all musical instruments even those which have been adopted into Indian classical music were played without using feet and by sitting on the floor. In Indian classical music tradition, for example, musical instruments from Europe such as violin, guitar, and clarinet were played while sitting on the floor. Moreover, Indian classical musicians find it is more successful and respectful to perform by sitting on the floor rather than sitting on chairs or in standing position. These two reasons may also have been essential for Hindus to prefer the hand pump harmonium. They could play it while sitting on the floor and using one hand to pump rather than using their feet like Europeans. The popularity⁹ of the Indian harmonium led its spread throughout many countries in Asia as well as to Trinidad, Guyana, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa and Suriname, initially

⁷ Ibid. See also Kraig Brockschmidt, Satyaki (2003). *The Harmonium Handbook: Owning, Playing, and Maintaining the Devotional Instrument of India*. Nevada City, Crystal Clarity: 19.

⁸ Rahaim comments: "The harmonium, after all, is caught between two conflicting forms of nationalism. The first, central to the project of anti-harmonium activists located in the margins of India and Europe, is a centrifugal nationalism—it reinforces a sense of national singularity by asserting an essential, canonical sonic difference between India and Europe. The second, so crucial to the project of educationists who were well-disposed toward the harmonium, is a centripetal nationalism—it reinforces a sense of national unity by teaching a standard repertoire, so that the nation may 'sing one song'." Rahaim, Matt (2011): *That Ban(e) of Indian Music: Hearing Politics in the Harmonium*. The Association for Asian Studies, vol. 70, No. 3: 679.

⁹ Based on portability, durability, affordability, learnability, and availability.

through trade and migration of Indians as a labor force in various British colonies and later through the travels of Parsi¹⁰ theatre and Hindustani music practitioners. Manuel (1999) describes the position of the harmonium in the Indian Diaspora in Trinidad, where East Indians were brought by the British as indentured workers between 1838 and 1917; these Indians brought the harmonium along with them. There, the harmonium has been popularized in temple bhajan sessions, neo-traditional local classical music and film song practices.¹¹ In Malaya, although the harmonium was later replaced by the accordion due to preferences within certain new genres, musicians and admirers still assert that the harmonium is the ideal instrument for rendering ghazal compositions related to the ghazal Johor tradition practiced in Johor, a state situated in the south of peninsular Malaysia.¹²

Origin and Evolution of Harmonium and its Practices in Malaya (later Malaysia)

The main music genre in present day Malaysia which includes the harmonium is therefore the ghazal Johor, which is believed to have originated through the migration of musicians who came from north India. Possibly, the harmonium was first used in Malaya in ghazal practices which spread throughout the southern part of Malaya. Due to the lack of historiography available on the harmonium in Malaysia, the assumptions about its origins rely on indirect information found in multifarious documents.¹³ Before the arrival of ghazal in Malaya, there is no clear evidence that any kind of keyboard instrument was being used in Malayan music.¹⁴ Malayan music practices were accompanied by

¹⁰ Persian.

¹¹ "Harmoniums are imported from India, and idiosyncratic playing techniques are taught in the numerous Indian music schools and classes throughout the region. The instrument is considered indispensable in temple bhajan sessions, neo-traditional local-classical music concerts, and film song renditions". Manuel, Peter (1999): *The Harmonium in Indian and Indo-Caribbean Music: From colonial tool to Nationalist Icon*. Free Reed Journal, vol. 1: 55). There was a debate on declaring steel drum as national instrument in Trinidad in 1994, and the head of Hindu organisation (SDMS) insisted be granted equal support to the harmonium which is most popular instrument in Trinidad (Manuel, *ibid*: 56).

¹² That appearance of *Ghazal* seems closely connected to the celebration of Muslim culture through the Johor Sultan and his associates.

¹³ Newspaper articles, programme notes, postcards, and photographs, some academic literature such as Tan Sooi Beng (1997): *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera*. Penang, Asian Centre.

¹⁴ Among the non-Muslim communities, reed organs were known through Christian missionaries working along the west coast of peninsular Malaya, in Singapore, and in large settlements in Sarawak and Northern Borneo. But this rudimentary knowledge, mostly gained secondhand, did not influence the Muslim Malays and Indians who practiced *ghazal*.

*gambus*¹⁵, drums (*rebana, marwas*), gong, later also violin (*biola*), and especially by dancing (*zapin, joget*). The harmonium was most welcome among the upper middle class and the nobles. It was an important instrument adding sound rather than substituting other melodic instruments, as had been the case in Hindustani music. Later, the harmonium was imported from Calcutta for emerging music groups in urban contexts. In other functional contexts, the accordion was preferred for urban entertainment due to its mobility¹⁶, especially on the west coast. While the *zapin* dance was long performed as a Muslim cultural and religious event developed into its current shape within the Muslim community of Malaya, and *joget* as well as some other dances were developed in the context of adoptions and transformations from foreign cultures such as the Portuguese or Javanese, *ghazal* was something completely new to the growing urban population of the prospering South of Malaya. To the Malays, *ghazal* must have been seen as a courteous art as it is performed sitting on the floor. As Regula Qureshi explains, “Islamic tradition generally proscribes secular music but permits religious musical expression as an adornment of religious texts”.¹⁷ In Malaya, *ghazal* might be appreciated by the Sultan in Johor since it is a poetic as well as a musical idiom, developed through Islamic religious practices. *Ghazal* was thus practiced as chamber music in Johor for an exclusive audience.¹⁸

Yet harmonium was not only found in *ghazal* or in the south, but also in other parts of Malaya and in other genres. On the west coast of peninsular Malaya, the Malays as well as other ethnic groups welcomed new cultural arrivals from other countries: the Islamic bureaucracy could not dominate its culture due to the diversity of people and ideas found there.¹⁹ The Malaysian urban theatrical

¹⁵ Jähnichen writes on the use of *maqamat* in Malay traditional music and says that it is played “mainly Hijaz, which gave its name to the modernized *gambus*, the ud-like instrument marking strongly a Malay musical identity. Jähnichen, Gisa (2012): *Maqam in Peripheral Cultures*. Paper presented at 8th Symposium of ICTM Study Group MAQAM in Sarajevo, 2012.

¹⁶ The accordion allowed for sitting on a chair or standing while playing. The harmonium required sitting on the ground, thus requiring all musicians to sit on the ground. in Malaysia this playing arrangement is seen only in *ghazal* performances of Johor, where *ghazal* is not played for dance but for listening.

¹⁷ Qureshi, Regula (1981): *Islamic Music in an Indian Environment: The Shi’a Majlis*. Ethnomusicology, vol. 25, No. 1: 41–71.

¹⁸ Mohd Anis MdNor, Meddegoda, Chinthaka Prageeth, Jähnichen, Gisa (2012). Personal communication, 17 May, 2012, University Malaya. Serdang: UPM Music Department, ARCPA 1553.

¹⁹ Jähnichen, Gisa, Rahman B. and Loke Xiaoyun (2012). Personal communication, 30 December, Kuala Lumpur. Serdang: UPM Music Department: ARCPA 2064. Meddegoda, Chinthaka Prageeth, Omara bin Hashim, Gisa Jähnichen and Halim Ibrahaim (2012g). Personal communication, 9 December 2012. Serdang: UPM Music Department ARCPA 2065, 2066.

and operatic form called *bangsawan*, the principal indigenous theatrical form that developed on Penang Island on the west coast, was much different from traditional Malay theatre genres such as *makyong*, *jikey* or *menora*. It was highly inspired by Parsi theatre coming from north India. Referring to Edrus (1960: 63), Tan states, that “the first known *bangsawan* ensemble consisted of the harmonium and *tabla* which were used in the *Wayang Parsi*²⁰ from which *bangsawan* originated”.²¹ As an accompanying instrument in music of Parsi theatre, harmonium held a central position in early *bangsawan* as well.

Bangsawan was an important platform to integrate different music cultures, a process which is often transparent in “Malay music” practices.²² In Penang, *bangsawan* developed its own characteristic style and from here the genre spread to the rest of the Malay Peninsula, to Singapore, and to some of the Indonesian islands. Inspiration and influences from *bangsawan* resulted in the creation of indigenous styles of operatic theatre in the Indonesian islands as well as in Thailand. All of these forms retain the essential stylistic features that characterize both *bangsawan* and Parsi theatre, which the Persian minority who lived in northwest India brought to India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and the Malay world.

These Persians were a minority in India since the 9th century. Being later known as the most “westernized” of Indian minorities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, they preferred to embrace western cultural forms rather than being dominated by Muslims and Hindus.²³ As Zoroastrians, their minority religious status in India made them ideal middlemen for British and other European powers in their economic dealings with the local population.²⁴ Perhaps for this reason, these Persians might have not hesitated to extract repertoires of stories and costumes from various religious and ethnic groups, and the British did not censor Parsi theatre in India or abroad.

The *bangsawan* dramatist Rahman B. asserts that there were no large-scale cultural entertainments events in Malaya’s northwest coast at the time that Parsi theatre was first performed in Pulau Pinang, and therefore Malaysians

²⁰ *Wayang Parsi* is the Malay term of Parsi theatre.

²¹ Tan Sooi Beng (1997): *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera*. Penang, Asian Centre: 73.

²² Tan writes “most significantly, *bangsawan* departed from Malay traditional theatre in that performers of different ethnic origins were recruited. These performers lived together, learning elements of one another’s culture. This contributed directly and obviously to cultural and musical interaction, absorption, and synthesis.” Tan Sooi Beng (1997): *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera*. Penang, Asian Centre: 72.

²³ Cohen, Matthew Isaac (2001): *On the Origin of the Komedie Stamboel – Popular Culture, Colonial Society, and the Parsi Theatre Movement*. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 157, No. 2: 315.

²⁴ *Ibid*: 315, 316.

from all kind of social classes and ethnic groups enjoyed it.²⁵ People in Penang likely received Parsi theatre well because of their diverse mind sets, which differentiate them from other Malaysians. As Rahman B. recalls, the hand-pumped harmonium was played to accompany Hindustani songs performed by Indian actors during extra turns²⁶ in bangsawan performances. Later, these numbers were replaced by big bands and western dance music. But the music of early Parsi theatre was composed and provided by Hindustani musicians and the hand-pumped harmonium was an indispensable instrument throughout the whole production. Elements from various Hindustani music genres such as dhrupad, khyal²⁷, thumri, dadara and ghazal were included in the musical repertoire of Parsi theatre, which was dominated by the Hindustani culture initially preferred by its Indian audience.

The hand-pumped harmonium was and is widely used in Malaya and later Malaysia, and it is still considered a dignified music instrument since it was used in the ghazals that originated in Indian Muslim religious events and thrived with the patronage of the noble society that lived in Malaya's South during the British period. One can assume that the foot-bellow harmonium arrived in Malaya during the same period when it was brought to India by naval chaplains, camp meeting organizers, and traveling missionaries for the purpose of accompanying hymn-singing. However, the foot-bellow harmonium is presumed to be from Europe in both countries, given that both were under British rule nearly in the same period.

Foot-bellow harmoniums are still preserved in Malaysia in churches and private homes of wealthy people who are proud to own antique music artifacts from Europe, although they are rarely used. These harmoniums were only used for Christian religious music, and thus were designed for a small minority of non-Muslims rather than for secular music practices in Malaysia. It is still debatable whether this instrument was replaced or subordinated to the hand-pumped harmonium in Parsi theatre. In Sri Lanka, both foot-bellow and hand-pump harmoniums were used but nobody can prove which version of the harmonium was used in the Parsi theatrical piece called "Indra Sabha"

²⁵ Jähnichen, Gisa, Rahman B. and Loke Xiaoyun (2012). Personal communication, 30 December, Kuala Lumpur. Serdang. UPM Music Department: ARCPA 2064.

²⁶ "This term was used in *bangsawan* advertisements to describe entertainment between acts. The term is still used today by *bangsawan* performers." Tan Sooi Beng (1997): *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera*. Penang, Asian Centre: 58. In *bangsawan* "music serves both structural and dramatic functions. Structurally, it serves as a curtain raiser by way of a musical overture, and as a turn (referred to as extra turn) between acts to cover for long stage scenery changes" Nasuruddin, Mohamed Ghouse ([1989]2007): *Traditional Malaysian Music*. Kuala Lumpur, DewanBahasa Dan Pustaka: 184.

²⁷ Khyal is a classical music genre that emerged in North India. See Wade, Bonnie C. (1985). *Khyal: Creativity within North India's Classical Music Tradition* (Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology) XXI, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 11-33.

which was first staged in 1877.²⁸ However, later both foot-bellow and hand-pumped harmoniums were used interchangeably. It is plausible that these theatre groups might have transported the foot-bellow harmonium to use in Parsi theatre as it was portable and more compatible with other instruments that existed in India. The Parsee Elphinstone Dramatic Society travelled to Singapore as early as 1862, while the Parsi Curzon Theatrical Company of Calcutta later toured Burma, the Malay Straits, and Penang.²⁹ In that period, the hand-pumped version of the harmonium was not yet invented, so the foot bellow harmonium might have been one of the instruments used, given that Europeans and their cultural forms were welcomed in Parsi theatre production. However, they might have not used any piano-like keyboard instrument in Parsi theatre, so that the hand-pumped harmonium was added only later.³⁰

It is certainly possible that north Indian musicians could have introduced Indian ghazal in Malaya, including harmonium and *tabla*. In order to extract maximum economic benefits from the colony, the British brought south Indians to Malaya as laborers on rubber plantations, as well as a small number of north Indians³¹ who worked as government servants, clerks, policemen and office workers.³² Matusky and Tan, citing Abdullah bin Mohamed and Adiban Amin,³³ present two theories on the origin of Malayan ghazal practice. The first theory is that in the 19th century, Indian traders introduced ghazal to the Malay Archipelago, where it was developed by the Malay nobility living in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate; later the Malay ruler Temenggung Abu Bakar, who had been in Singapore where ghazal was developing, brought it to Johor Baru. The second is that, with the arrival of Parsi theatre (Wayang Parsi) to Johor in the early 20th century, military officers such as Colonel Musa, Colonel Yahya and

²⁸ Jayawardana, Ruwini (2009): 'Nurthi, the Living Art'. Daily News. Last retrieved on 22 August 2013 from <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2001/pix/PrintPage.asp?REF=/2009/04/29/fea 24.asp>.

²⁹ Kulke, E., (1974): *The Parsees in India; A minority as agent of social change*. München, Weltforum; Ali, A. Yusuf (1917): '*The Modern Hindustani Drama*'. Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, 35:70-99; Cohen, Matthew Isaac (2001): *On the Origin of the Komedie Stamboel – Popular Culture, Colonial Society, and the Parsi Theatre Movement*. Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, vol. 157, No. 2: 313-357.

³⁰ As locally-made portable harmoniums became increasingly available and affordable, they also soon became entrenched in urban theatre music (for example, parsi theatre) and in various kinds of folk music. Manuel, Peter (1999): *The Harmonium in Indian and Indo-Caribbean Music: From colonial tool to Nationalist Icon*. Free Reed Journal, vol. 1: 48–59.

³¹ Compared to south Indians.

³² Jähnichen, Gisa (2010): *Indian Community Cultures and their Present Situation in Malaysia*. Journal of the Indian Musicological Society, vol. 40: 43.

³³ Matusky, Patricia Ann and Tan Sooi Beng (2004): *Music of Malaysia*. Aldershot: Ashgate: 351, 352.

Major (Pak) Lomak³⁴ were taken with ghazal music, and learned harmonium and *tabla* playing from the Persian theatre groups. They practiced ghazal with traditional pantun³⁵ verses set to ghazal melodies, and added *gambus* and violin to the ensemble. Jähnichen (2012) assumes that Parsi theatre performed in a local Indianized style might be the first mediator of ghazal in Johor and other places throughout Malaya, though few sources discuss how it might have been produced and perceived in the Parsi theatre.³⁶ The onset of using hand pumped harmonium in Malaysia might be ascribed to the musicians who came from India, though it is still debatable whether these musicians came with Parsi theatre or as ghazal performers.

The harmonium was thus adopted in Malaya and included in music and dance repertoires that already existed, such as asli music and kroncong, practiced among the Malay and Indonesian speaking populations. According to Chopyak (1986), orchestration for asli songs can vary in different regions, though a few instruments are common in all kinds of asli ensembles³⁷, such as gendang, a knobbed gong³⁸, violin, and sometimes a harmonium. He states "The two most common alterations to be found are the substitution of an accordion for the harmonium, and the addition of a flute. A combination of these instruments can be considered a traditional asli group. It is true, however, that nearly any combination of instruments can still play an asli song even though they do not make up an asli group".³⁹ Harmonium was also used in other interrelated traditional music ensembles. For example, in the traditional or village setting, zapin performances may include the harmonium to follow the vocal melody.⁴⁰ The harmonium was also added into the

³⁴ Norihan identifies major Lomak as Pak Lomak – see 01550 ARCPA, UPM.

³⁵ Pantun is a quatrain used in most of traditional vocal genres. It divides songs into four or two double lines and shapes the song structure. Jähnichen, Gisa (2009): *Renovation versus Formalization in Zapin Music? Some Remarks on the Recent Meaning of Maqam in the Malay World*. Proceedings of the 6th ICTM Study Group Meeting Muqam – Urumqi 2006. Edited by Jürgen Elsner and Gisa Jähnichen. Urumqi, Xinjiang Art Photography Publishing House: 213.

³⁶ Jähnichen, Gisa (2012): *Maqam in Peripheral Cultures*. Paper presented at 8th Symposium of ICTM Study Group MAQAM in Sarajevo, 2012: 2.

³⁷ Chopyak, James D. (1986): *Music in Modern Malaysia: A Survey of the Musics Affecting the Development of Malaysian Popular Music*. Asian Music, vol. 18, No. 1: 111–138.

³⁸ Slightly more than one foot in diameter.

³⁹ Chopyak, James D. (1986): *Music in Modern Malaysia: A Survey of the Musics Affecting the Development of Malaysian Popular Music*. Asian Music, vol. 18, No. 1: 116.

⁴⁰ Matusky, Patricia Ann and Tan SooiBeng (2004): *Music of Malaysia*. Aldershot, Ashgate: 128; see Zapin Kamarulzaman in Jähnichen, Gisa (2009): *Renovation versus Formalization in Zapin Music? Some Remarks on the Recent Meaning of Maqam in the Malay World*. Proceedings of the 6th ICTM Study Group Meeting Muqam – Urumqi 2006. Edited by Jürgen Elsner and Gisa Jähnichen. Urumqi, Zunjiang Art Photography Publishing House: 222.

traditional setting of *dongdang sayang*⁴¹ in which the accordion frequently replaces the harmonium and takes over a harmonium playing style.⁴²

Ghazal-like practices in Malaysia take two main forms: ghazal Johor and ghazal Parti. The accordion is used in ghazal Parti, which connotes a music genre, a repertoire, and the event itself in the Malay language, while the harmonium is preferred in ghazal Johor, which connotes a music genre and a repertoire. The accordion can be assumed to have been introduced into Malay music by modern entertainment, such as that encountered during the Hajj in Saudi Arabia or by missionaries who were involved in proselytizing in Asia.⁴³

Playing Techniques in the Indian and Malay Harmonium Traditions

Hindustani khyal, thumri or ghazal is in fact incomparable with Malay ghazal practiced in Johor. Both types of music are different from each other in many ways such as structure of music and lyrics, musical elaboration of melodic lines, social functioning, and the role of musicians. However, harmonium playing is comparable since both cultures use the same hand-pump harmonium which originated in North India. Therefore, the following musical analysis only focuses on harmonium playing techniques used in general and its musical texture.

The hand-pumped harmonium of north India is used mainly as an accompanying instrument for vocal music. In light classical genres, ghazal, and other folk-cum-classical genres, a singer accompanies himself or herself and an additional harmonium player may also be included. At times, the singer does not play at all, but only a harmonium accompanist. Khyal singers usually employ a melodic accompanist rather than accompanying themselves.⁴⁴

⁴¹ "The phrase *dong dang sayang* means 'love song'. In *dong dang sayang* performance a singer sings a pantun of four lines and another singer answers the first singer with an appropriate pantun [...] The *dong dang sayang* ensemble consists of one violin, two rebana drums and a knobbed gong. Today the harmonium or accordion, guitar and tambourine are also used". Matusky, Patricia Ann and Tan Sooi Beng (2004): *Music of Malaysia*. Aldershot, Ashgate: 333, 334.

⁴² With mostly melodic paralleling of the vocalist and rare use of chords. Compare: Matusky, Patricia Ann and Tan SooiBeng (2004): *Music of Malaysia*. Aldershot, Ashgate: 334.

⁴³ Abels explains that accordion the was not welcomed in Hindustani music since it was known as a sailor's instrument and also used for the purpose of proselytizing. Compare: Abels, Birgit (2010): *The Harmonium in North Indian Music*. New Delhi, New Age Books.

⁴⁴ Some Hindustani classical singers play *sur mandal* (an Indian zither) while singing. But it does not play the same role as harmonium and *Sarangi* in classical vocal performances. Some *khyal* and thumri singers prefer to play *tanpura* while singing but it provides stable drones which cannot be considered as a melodic accompaniment similar to that of the harmonium or *sarangi*.

In north Indian music, heterophony in the context of vocal music accompanied by a harmonium connotes the practices of *sangat*⁴⁵, *surdena*⁴⁶, *falo karna*⁴⁷, and *sur bharna*.⁴⁸ This usage of heterophony differs from other kinds of music traditions in which heterophonic lines or echoing melodic lines are employed. The musical content of this phenomenon mostly known from western music applying harmonic progressions is, however, not expressed through the western meaning of heterophony in Hindustani music. Napier (2006: 88) succinctly describes the role of the accompanist in Hindustani classical music: “in the most general terms, the melodic accompanist imitates or doubles the singer's lines, either completely, in outline, or with some degree of variation, and continues playing whilst the soloist is not singing”.⁴⁹ This statement is applicable not only to Hindustani classical genres, but also more or less to semi-classical and light classical genres, too.⁵⁰ In the case of a singer accompanying himself or herself during traditional north Indian ghazal performances, the vocal renderings are played in a like fashion as far as is possible on the harmonium. According to my observation, north Indian ghazal predominantly includes basic intonation shapes such as *kan*⁵¹, *murkhi*⁵², *khatka*⁵³, or

⁴⁵ Musical collaboration of instrumentalists with a soloist in Hindustani music.

⁴⁶ Supporting the singer by providing another tune or tones.

⁴⁷ Melodically following the musical renderings of the soloist.

⁴⁸ Filling in with musical tones, especially the gaps, to maintain the continuity of the flow.

⁴⁹ Napier, John (2006a): A Failed Unison or Conscious Differentiation: The Notion of Heterophony in North Indian Vocal Performances. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 37, No. 1: 88.

⁵⁰ The terms such as classical, semi classical, light classical and folk refer to common typology or taxonomy in Hindustani music genres used by scholars to ease the understanding of the repertoire in general, though these terms might be arguable. Manuel names *khyal* as classical genre and *ghazal*, *thumri*, *dadara* and *tappa* as semi-classical genres. He puts less improvised *ghazals* as light classical (Manuel, 1989:96, 100, 102, 104, 110). Van der Meer describes the music genres other than classical as semi-classical, light, folk and film-music (Meer, 1980:79). Further references can also be found in: Qureshi (2000:813, 823, 827), Zadeh (2012:3,4,30,32,43,44).

⁵¹ The term *kan* refers to a grace (or shadow) note having a lesser duration (and usually intensity) than that of the note being ornamented, and it can lie either above or below the decorated pitch. In the case of vocal music, it is produced by an inflection of the voice.

⁵² *Murkhi* is the fast ornamentation around the principal tone and it consists of a number of elided tones. It is a short, sharp figure of more than two tones so uttered that they occur within a short span of time and wrap around the central tone, i.e. they are on either side of it. It is, therefore, heard as a quick, light trill.

⁵³ *Khatka* is a melodic embellishment in which a cluster of notes is quickly and forcefully produced prior to the tone most important in that particular cluster. According to some, two synonymous terms are *gittakadi* and *murkhi*.

less often, *meend*⁵⁴, *andolan*⁵⁵, and *gamak*.⁵⁶ Producing the latter three kinds of melodic shapes falls outside of the organological possibilities of the harmonium. Mostly, expert musicians who sing ghazals in north Indian music are accustomed to playing harmonium while they sing and they also attempt to execute melodic shapes from the vocal lines (like *meend*, *andolan* and *gamak*) by omitting glides but manipulating the harmonium's keys, producing at most an approximation of the vocal renderings. The following transcription of a ghazal excerpt (figure 1) shows the typical similarity of harmonium and vocal melodic lines where the vocalist accompanies himself on harmonium, as is traditional.⁵⁷ The vocal portamento is made to correspond with the harmonium by applying pitches which are only approximate. Intervals and chords are played on harmonium at the ends of vocal lines, which implies that they are mostly employed when singing is omitted and on sustaining tones of the melody.

Chopyak (1986) explains that the harmonium in Malaysia acts as a drone in *asli* songs, so that "traditionally there is no harmony in the Western sense. The harmonium's role in ghazal mainly emphasizes counter melodies and occasional major and minor thirds [...] but never full chords".⁵⁸ However, I find that chordal harmony is used in Malaysian harmonium playing today. Tan and Matusky (2004) affirm that western major and minor diatonic scales are commonly used together with a mainly Malay linear musical texture, and that Western harmony results from the accompanying instruments in practice.⁵⁹ Early writings on Malay music do not emphasize much musical involvement of harmonium in Malay music practices, even when they describe

⁵⁴ *Meend* is somewhat similar to the portamento of western music. This is a slide from one tone to another; it can be between two tones in the same octave or in two different octaves; the rate of progression can be irregular.

⁵⁵ *Andolan* is a gentle swing or oscillation that starts from a fixed tone and touches the periphery of a different tone. During these oscillations, it touches the various microtones that are present between the notes.

⁵⁶ *Gamak* is a fast-paced oscillation or shake between two tones repeated twice or more at a moderately fast tempo and distributed with intentional vigor. *Gamak* is easily distinguishable from *andolan* because of its fast speed and very distinct beginning and end points. While the oscillations in *andolan* are microtonal, the oscillations of *gamak* are oriented with intervals corresponding to those in Western scales.

⁵⁷ "In many cases, the two sub-genres may be differentiated by their instrumentation: the traditional *ghazal* is generally accompanied by tabla and sarangi and/or harmonium, while the pop *ghazal* may be backed by a large ensemble of Western and Indian instruments". Manuel, Peter (1989): *A Historical Survey of the Urdu Ghazal-Song in India*. Asian Music, vol.20, No. 1: 102.

⁵⁸ Chopyak, James D. (1986): *Music in Modern Malaysia: A Survey of the Musics Affecting the Development of Malaysian Popular Music*. Asian Music, vol. 18, No. 1: 118.

⁵⁹ Matusky, Patricia Ann and Tan Sooi Beng (2004): *Music of Malaysia*. Aldershot, Ashgate: 352, 353.

the events where harmonium is commonly employed. The new generation of harmonium players in Malaysia often plays chords on the accordion and most of them are familiar with music in popular media that employs Western harmony; therefore, most harmonium players in Malaysia today tend to play full chords, either intentionally or unintentionally.



7/8  = 240



Figure 1: Example of Hindustani ghazal: harmonium (Ghulam Ali) and voice (Ghulam Ali) in Kabhi Aha Lab. Transcription by Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda.

4/4  = 180

The image shows a musical score for a Malay ghazal. It consists of four systems of music. The top system shows the Harmonium and Vocal lines. The Harmonium part is in the upper staff, and the Vocal part is in the lower staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with 'A' and 'B' in circled boxes, indicating specific passages. The vocal line is marked with 'A' and 'B' in circled boxes, indicating specific passages. The score is transcribed by Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda.

Figure 2: Example of Malay ghazal: harmonium (Salleh Arshad) and vocal line (Wahid Tasmir) in ghazal Pak Ngah Balik (Transcription by Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda).

It is very rare to find professional ghazal singers in Malaysia playing harmonium while they sing, whereas almost all Hindustani ghazal singers prefer to do so. To them, harmonium acts as a tool for executing graceful and complex vocal renderings that might be too complicated to produce with the voice alone. To the Malay Ghazal singers, playing harmonium while singing seems to be complicated given that Malay ghazal demands different melodic lines on harmonium rather than parallel melodic lines which would be more convenient for singers to play along with. This seems to be one of the major reasons for which Hindustani musicians playing harmonium while singing ghazal, whereas Malaysian ghazal singers do not prefer to play harmonium while singing.

Before the harmonium was adopted in Hindustani ghazal practices, the *sarangi* was used to melodically accompany the singer but it was not played by the singer. This feature applied also on khyal and thumri, which might have been quite similar in the way of how they were melodically accompanied. It is crucial to consider the general musical behaviour within Hindustani classical music practices and the difference between Hindustani and Malay ghazal styles given the assumption that “ghazal Johor” originated from early Hindustani ghazals. Napier summarizes the role of melodic accompanist in north Indian classical music practices as “though the singer holds musical primacy in the construction and direction of the performance, the accompanist presents an individuated voice, and performance becomes a site of subtle contestation, without its viability being compromised. Accompanists take temporary control over the performance during passages when they play

alone, and may also present subtle but consistent variations of the vocal lines in their replication. Though no single paradigm of authority may be shown to dominate, the manner in which authority is being negotiated within, and may be apprehended from, performance, is clarified. The paper validates the individual authority over the music system demonstrated by accompanists even within their subordinate role".⁶⁰ Comparing this statement with Malay ghazal transcriptions, it can be implied that harmonium players in ghazal Johor is not as musically subordinate as Hindustani melodic accompanists.

4/2 $\text{♩} = 70$

Figure 3: Example of *thumri* performance: harmonium (Shankar Rao Kapileshwari) and vocal line (Abdul Karim Khan) in *Jamuna ke Tira Kanha* in Rag Bhairavi (Transcription by Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda).

An extract of a *thumri* transcription shows how the accompanist anticipates melodic shapes and musically follows the vocal renderings. The ghazal Johor transcription shows that the accompanist tends to be musically more independent from the vocalist. Through these transcriptions, the main similarities in melodic accompaniments can be seen as they cause continuous playing throughout the performance perhaps due to the preference to hear a steady drone which is fundamental in Hindustani classical music. Also,

⁶⁰ Napier, John (2007): The Distribution of Authority in the Performance of North Indian Vocal Music, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 16, No. 2: 271.

melodic shapes such as *kan*, *murkhi* and *khatka* are found in both harmonium playing styles as illustrated in figure 2 and figure 3, some Hindustani melodic shapes can be found in both Malay *ghazal* and *thumri* transcriptions; “A” indicates *kan*, “B” indicates both *khatka* and *murkhi*⁶¹ and “C” indicates *gamak*. Figure 3 shows how a harmonium player manipulates tones in executing *gamaks* which were sung. Collectively, these transcriptions suggest that some playing techniques on harmonium are similar in both Malaysian and Hindustani melodic accompaniment.

Conclusion

Considering both the literature and the practice of music in Malaysia, it is evident that the harmonium currently used arrived there via India, even though it has a European heritage. When the foot-bellow harmonium was brought by the British, they also brought hymn singing, which was affiliated with protestant missionaries. North Indians were not attracted to its music, even though the instrument may have been attractive to them. It is plausible to assume that Parsis might have utilized foot-bellow harmonium in their theatre practices, although we do not have the data to confirm it. The harmonium was later adapted by Indian musicians who transformed it into a hand-bellow instrument, shortening the height and making a few other changes. This innovative new harmonium allowed Indian classical musicians to play in a seated position, to employ both hands in producing monophonic intonation, to save time from tuning regularly, to learn it without much effort and to transport it conveniently. The Indian harmonium mostly replaced the stringed *sarangi* in its accompanying role due to aforementioned factors (although the *sarangi* still holds a preeminent position in Hindustani music for its ability to execute necessary melodic shapes and microtones) and it is now widely used in Hindustani music practices. The Harmonium was probably transported to Malaya through the Parsi theatre, in which *ghazal* was performed as well as *thumri*, *dadara*, and other music practices from north India.

Malaysian musicians must have absorbed at least a fraction of Hindustani music along with the Indian harmonium, though they did not fully inherit the music repertoire. When Malaysians were in the process of adapting the Hindustani *ghazal*, they might have ignored some Hindustani musical practices in order to achieve a Malaysian *ghazal* sound. Also, few were interested in long term training and in creating an appropriate cultural environment for Hindustani music practices. *Ghazal* from north India could be easily transferred into the Malaysian context, since it was not performed with

⁶¹ Hindustani musicians have diverse understanding about *khatka* and *murkhi* as their intonation is quite similar. Therefore, it is not necessary to consider their difference for it is not crucial in this context.

the drone usually found in Hindustani classical genres. Rahman B. states, “I would say that to anyone who asks, our people (orang kita) like to imitate; they take from others and make it ours”.⁶²

Today’s Malaysia is a multiethnic and multi religious country. All groups carry out their own culture rather than formalizing one single culture that could be called Malaysian. Malays possess their own cultural features, which are distinctive from others, and they have adopted imported cultural features and ways of thinking. The Indian harmonium, *tabla* and ghazal were appropriated into Malay repertoires, but the history and musical systems of the transmitting Hindustani musicians were not. These musical instruments and genres are seen as foreign elements, even though they have left few traces of “foreignness” in Malay repertoires.

	The object travelled detached from its repertoire and its users	The object travelled with its repertoire and its users	The object substituted local instruments due to certain advantages	The object was added to local ensembles due to certain advantages	The object took part in founding a new musical practice	The object was fully appropriated	The object is considered foreign
India	x		x			x	
Malaya/ Malaysia		x		x	x		x
Trinidad		x		x			x
Sri Lanka		x		x	x		x

Figure 4: Immigration of the Harmonium – Table comparing some selected features in the migration process of the harmonium.

Figure 4 provides a comparison of observations made during this research and summarizes the outcomes. In short, the harmonium is clearly an Indian heritage in Malaysia. The British part in the story of Malaysian harmonium is limited to the efforts undertaken to bring north Indians to another colony.

⁶² Jähnichen, Gisa, Rahman B. and Loke Xiaoyun (2012b). Personal communication, 30 December, Kuala Lumpur. Serdang: UPM Music Department: ARCPA 2064.

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