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SPACE, SOUND,
AUSPICIOUSNESS, AND
PERFORMANCE IN NORTH
INDIAN WEDDING
PROCESSIONS

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of music and musicians in the wedding processions (*baraat*) of northern India. I am concerned specifically with the contemporary dominant processional ensemble, the brass band, and with the ways the ensembles, musicians, and repertoire contribute to these processions. Muslim, Sikh, and Jain families often ‘take out’ *baraats* (as the process is described in Indian English); some of the fundamental ideologies and practices of *baraats*, however, have a fundamentally Hindu orientation, especially with regard to the use of sound and the production of auspiciousness. In the conclusion, I will suggest that changes in the meaning of processions are evidenced in contemporary processional performance practice.

This study occupies a position of multifaceted liminality in a volume focused on religious processions in South Asia. Wedding processions are liminal, public components of private rituals; they are explicitly rituals of passage in which ‘the protagonists are members of the community’ (Freed and Freed 1998: 3). They ritualize the physical movement and transitions that come as part of the patrilocality of traditional Indian marriages. As the externalized component of the wedding, the *baraat* is a ritualized journey that maps out the new relationships between the two families involved and in which various emotions and social identities are explicitly acted out. As he leaves his family home, a groom is in one sense incomplete or not fully adult. His behaviour is an example of Turner’s (1969) liminal figure: of all the performers

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in a *baraat*, the groom is the most passive. He sits quietly in his carriage or on his horse; he rarely smiles or interacts with the excitement going on around him. Once the marriage ritual and accompanying festivities are completed at the bride's family's home, the groom embarks on a second procession, returning to his home with his bride, for whom he is now responsible. At this point he is, at least in theory, the head of a new household; when his bride finally enters her new home, she too is transformed, into an adult daughter (in colloquial usage) of that house.

Processional musicians' socio-professional lives also show signs of liminality; their work begins and ends at the borders between the inner, private world of family homes and the public world of the streets; their performances help construct the ritual process of transition between those worlds. Although participants sometimes make those transitions by literally walking through a human gateway of musicians, the bandsmen themselves never cross those boundaries, especially not in Hindu weddings (Booth 2005). The marginal class and caste status that most bandsmen occupy exacerbates the impact of their exclusion from the inner, ritually pure space. Bandsmen's liminality often takes on a professional aspect as well in that most are seasonal or part-time workers, located only partially in the world of the musical profession. Before considering *baraats* specifically, however, some general consideration of music and musicians in the context of South Asian religions and processional practice is necessary.

Religious variables

Making sense of processions is especially challenging, as Kratz (1994) suggests, because of the multi-dimensional aspects of the procession as event and as practice. Limiting my focus to the role of music and musicians in processions narrows the field of enquiry; but these roles may change significantly depending on which kind of procession is considered and in response to the variety of ways in which South Asia's various religions conceptualize music. Although my focus is on Hindu processions, bandsmen will play for anyone who hires them (as did many pre-brass processional musicians as well); bandsmen participate in Sikh and Muslim (as well as Hindu) wedding processions, and in Sikh, Jain, and Hindu religious processions as well. The interaction of religious ideologies and processional practices produces a wide spectrum of musical-processional results.

At one extreme is Islam's well-known problematization of music in any terms: 'in the Islamic tradition music is associated with worldly pleasures and sanctioned as dangerous and unlawful.' In contrast, 'religious music is conceived of as vocal adornment of a religious text and thus escapes theological censure' (Qureshi 1972: 15). South Asian Muslims respond to the traditional sanctions in a range of ways that combine individual attitudes with local and pan-Islamic ideologies. Wolf (2000), for example, describes

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the importance of drumming in the processional rituals associated with Muharram in South Asia. He simultaneously demonstrates the complexities of interpretation in notions of music found among South Asian Muslims.

In organizing their wedding processions, most Muslim families respond to local community understandings of what is appropriate. Many do include processional music in their rituals; others choose to abjure music for religious reasons. As a general rule, more flexible and musical interpretations of permissibility are found in southern and sometimes central India and in the more marginal sects. In some northern cities, a predominantly Muslim local population may represent a weakened market for processional musicians, as in the famous (in the band world) instance of Rampur, in Uttar Pradesh state, a city whose high population of relatively strict Muslim families (local residents estimate between 70 and 80 per cent of the population is Muslim) forces entire bands of processional musicians to travel considerable distances to work in other cities that have larger non-Muslim populations.

Sikh religious practice is intensely musical in both ritual and didactic ways, although this topic has yet to be studied in depth. Sikh processional behaviour revolves around commemoration of the birth and sometimes the death of the Sikh Gurus. Following, perhaps, Sikh theology that privileges the community of the faithful or the pure (the Khalsa Panth), Sikh processions are often mass movements, expressions of community devotion enacted on city streets. Large numbers of brass bands and other musical ensembles are dispersed throughout the length of what are often very long processional formations; they help define the even larger numbers of processional devotees. 'Music, order, and movement draw individuals together, transforming a huge throng into an ensemble' (Brown and Regaldo 2001: 131).

Hindu and Jain processions are extremely musical events. Bands may sometimes help ritualize the appearance and procession of an important *murti* (image/idol) outside the confines of the temple; they may also be part of rituals of intensification, such as those that are sometimes part of Ram Lila, Siva Ratri, or other calendric festivals. In contrast to these explicitly devotional processions, *baraats* occupy a more ambiguous place. They are pan-religious in practice and marginally religious in cultural understanding. Nevertheless, historical pre-eminence, together with demographic preponderance, allows me to suggest that music's fundamental ritual importance in the wedding procession derives from a Hindu understanding of music and of processional ritual. From this perspective at least, the three elements that begin the title of this chapter define the Indian procession.

Processions are by definition movements through space; musicians as physical beings and producers of sound play a crucial role in mapping out physical space in social or cultural ways and in the construction of specifically processional space. Sound, in addition to its alliterative properties in the context of my title, is more appropriate than music in this context. In a *baraat*,

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however, music may take on a set of meanings that are somewhat distinct from the sometimes specifically devotional meanings that songs may express in religious processions. Their contribution, as sound, is aligned with the pragmatic and celebratory goals of processional behaviour by means of its intensity and volume and by appropriate instrumentation; that contribution can also be understood in terms of the specific songs (or types of songs) that bandsmen may perform at specific transitional points in the processional ritual. Finally, auspiciousness is the concept that specifically, if tenuously, connects notions of processional music practice to the broader concept of religion. These will be the focus of the rest of this chapter.

Space

When a *baraat* proceeds down a road from one village to the next, or from one urban neighbourhood to the next, the procession frames and marks out space. The procession may actually traverse the entire space between two family homes. In response to the difficulties imposed by extreme distances or by traffic and so forth in large modern cities, however, the traversal may be more symbolic: a *baraat* might begin on foot, transfer itself to a bus and, after a ride of minutes or hours across a large city or region, arrive at a different neighbourhood or city where the foot procession is resumed.

Space takes on ritual meaning at specific significant transitional points, but also as a pathway connecting those points. In the first of these senses, the particular points of transition, from private/inside to public/outside, are the most important.

Starts and finishes can be ‘dangerous’ places for the groups involved in a procession, since assembly and dispersion points are liminal. They represent borders between the law of ‘normal’ everyday spaces and places and the law of the parade and its route. They can also be thought of as passages from one law to another; they are themselves outside either law and are therefore dangerous.

(Ashley 2001: 17)

In *baraats*, music and musicians mark these points of transition, which are specifically the entry and exit points to and from public space: the appearance of the groom outside his home and the entry of the *baraat* into the bride’s home. The performances at these points, and sometimes the repertoires as well, are often distinct from the music performed during the actual procession. Usually it is its text (although not sung) that makes a song appropriate.

The two family doors are boundary points that also enclose a particular geography. Just as governmental and civic processions in Imperial British Indian cities ‘demarcated a “sacred geography” of the city, a set of holy spaces that connected [the city] with the larger history of the Raj and its

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transcendent values' (Haynes 1990: 503), the music of the *baraat* and its movement through space marks out the pathway, the road between two houses and the families who live in them. Traditionally, these new pathways were blazed, in effect, by the musicians who led the processions. In contrast to some rites of intensification, in which the same space is marked repeatedly by annual or cyclical processional behaviour, however, wedding processions are always mapping new ritual space as they trace the paths between the new pair of households that are being joined through marriage. *Baraats* and wedding bands are processual and musical signs of the new relationships being established through marriage.

It is important to emphasize here that wedding processions in much of India were originally circular; once the procession reached the bride's family home and the wedding itself was completed, the procession (although sometimes with fewer participants and less ritual) retraced its steps to the groom's home, carrying with it the new bride. Again, the transitional points (the departure from the bride's family home and her arrival at her new home) were marked by musical performance (e.g. Henry 1988). It is not clear, however, whether the return procession was also accompanied by music. Generally, it appears that in many regions there was less pomp and excitement in this return event until the procession reached the place from which it had started. These questions are largely historical because the return procession appears to have been completely de-ritualized. In contemporary urban India neither the return procession itself (if there is one) nor the bride's arrival is commonly marked by band music. Although this effectively reduces the symbolic importance of *baraats* and wedding musicians as framing factors in these spatial rituals, the historically circular structure of the processional ritual helps explain its role in marking family space and spatial relationships.

Processional space

In addition to the framing and mapping of local or regional space that takes place in the context of a *baraat*, processions also frame processional space, the constantly moving ten, twenty, or thirty metres of the space that the procession occupies on the street. Pre-brass processional ensembles and early brass bands as well did literally lead from the front, at the head of the procession, followed by the groom and his male relatives and friends, who were in turn followed by his female relatives. In contemporary practice, however, processional space is physically shaped by bandsmen, who routinely form themselves into two long columns that enclose the groom and his family and friends. Bandsmen are configured as bodies to define processional space. The size of processional space can change radically, as can the ability of a band to actually encompass that space. Brass band parties are usually hired in standard sizes. The smallest usually numbers twelve men; but more 'standard'

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sizes are twenty-four and fifty-one men. The largest commonly found formation is 101 men. The addition of an extra unit is common practice in India and is considered lucky or auspicious.

Although baraats are never completely organized events, there are conventionally three somewhat distinct areas of processional space in many of them. Ironically, in contemporary practice, the front end of a baraat, so to speak, is often the least prepossessing and the least musical. A band's banner or other signage and the first few files of the double column of bandsmen begin a procession. This is often the quietest section of the procession; it is a space for day workers and for younger, less experienced band masters. This phenomenon is observable across a range of regions and social groups; it challenges the notion of a band as 'leading the way'. It is a change that overtook the ritual use of music in wedding processions over the span of the twentieth century, and largely the result of bandsmen's collective responses to changes in processional practice. These changes are observable in the middle section of the processional space.

Behind the somewhat unspectacular first section, and sometimes literally separated from it by crowd and noise, is the main processional space, which – in contemporary baraats – is also performative space. Contemporary participants express the happiness that a baraat is understood to represent through dancing and other ecstatic gestures. The groom's unmarried friends and relatives reflect the impact of the cinema in their attention to their dress and their enthusiasm for exhibitionist and individual dancing. In the procession, they are more or less followed by the elder males of the family, although the separation of these 'groups' should not be understood as consistent, expected, or consistently discernible. The elders dance as well, but I have often had the impression that their dancing was something they considered an expectation or duty rather than something in which they engaged by choice.

This portion of the baraat is predominantly male and is encompassed by the double column of bandsmen. The double column usually disintegrates into a line or cluster of bandsmen at the rear that totally or partially closes off this section of the processional space. If the band is using an amplified sound cart (as many do), it usually comes in this enclosing rear portion of the formation, surrounded or immediately preceded by the band's drummers. It is thus the rear of this middle section of the procession that is the loudest and the most exciting musically.

The groom himself, theoretically the centre of the procession, is sometimes enclosed within the band, but may also be found following behind, almost an apparent afterthought. Following him often come the women of the family, who are thus frequently outside the encompassing columns. In contemporary practice at least, women often also choose to dance, usually with each other and usually in the style of women's group folk dance. If they do choose to dance, they move up into the enclosed, most musical space.

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The physical and sonic importance of brass bandmen in this context is central to their ritual role in these processions as markers and controllers of space. Not only does a baraat frame the space between the two family homes, it constitutes an actual moving physical and ritual frame – structured by the files of bandmen (and lights if the procession is at night), and by the sound of the band – as the procession moves through space and time.

The behaviours of baraat participants are sometimes at the edges of social acceptability. Liminal rituals, after all, are ‘betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and convention’ (Turner 1969: 95–96). In many baraats the men of the family are well intoxicated before the procession begins. While the groom’s friends may dance simply out of happiness, their elders often require a bit more encouragement.

The notion of women dancing in the streets is, of course, antithetical to normal behaviour, as is public intoxication for middle-class, middle-aged males. Hence the importance of music as an amplifier of the unusual ritual nature of the baraat. Turner argues that much standard social structure is weakened in liminal rites and that such events produce a sense of ‘relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community’ (Turner 1969: 96). This sense of unity, and specifically family unity in this situation, is enacted through such collective public dancing by family members who would normally not engage in any of these behaviours. The processional space is ritualized by the physical organization of the band and by the sound. The nature of the event, reinforced by the physical presence, sound, and music of the band, authorizes this behaviour.

Sound

In general, the sophistication of Hinduism’s theological conceptualization of musical sound, which ‘arose and developed in the midst of an aura of cultural symbolism’ (Rowell 1992: 38), and the historical and cultural depth of the links between music, sound, and the divine, exceeds those of other religions in India. Sound is the subject of considerable attention in the scriptures of Hinduism from the *Rig-Veda* onwards; it is ‘a continuum of vital force and latent energy’ (Rowell 1992: 35). Hinduism conceptualizes sound, music, and performance itself as manifestations of, entertainment for, and expressions of devotion towards Hinduism’s deities. Some ritual music is specifically meant for ‘divine, rather than human consumption’ (Tingey 1994: 2).

On another pragmatic level, and in direct opposition to Islam’s concerns for music’s power to distract worshippers from devotional behaviour, in Hindu processions music is a tool that drowns out distractions and that channels worshippers’ thoughts toward the divine, as Babb (1975) implies. In what might be seen as an extension of the language of classical Hindu ideology, volume and intensity of sound do help construct an alternative reality

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within the processional space. They do help drown out the sounds of traffic and of everyday life, making possible the performances of *baraat* participants that would be so unusual in other circumstances. Many contemporary bands offer various portable amplification systems that are conveyed on large carts or wagons and usually called *teli* or *teliya*. These help them more completely to dominate the processional space, and are located at the rear of the band columns just before the groom.

Sound can mean music; but music, in the context of a procession, can sometimes be reduced to its component elements with no deleterious effect on the procession or the efficacy of the music as sound. It is the *sound* of the *shahanaï* (the conical double-reed oboe traditionally part of processional music in the north) and more recently of the brass band itself that is meaningfully associated with weddings. The importance and desirability of sound, large quantities of it, are routinely demonstrated when a procession involves more than one ensemble; both often perform at the same time (in completely different musical tonalities, styles, melodies, and so forth) and in such proximity as to make comprehensibility difficult at best. Because sound, as physical vibration, is a structural component of processional ritual, such apparent difficulties are not, in fact, problematic. It is sound more than music that marks out processional space. In modern India space for processional ritual is also marked out by means of loudspeakers and recorded music (see Greene 1999) or by combinations of recorded and live music.

Bandsmen organize the sounds of the *baraats* in response to the needs of their customers, as I have noted above. The two columns of the standard formation are composed of rank and file bandsmen playing trumpets, euphoniums, and valve trombones, and less commonly saxophones and clarinets. They play in unison sections, and act as the 'response' section in call and response passages. They provide the musical unity, in other words. Soloists, usually bandmasters, move up and down within the two columns; but as noted, they and the drummers tend to cluster together around the dancers and the amplified sound system at the rear. Bandsmen often work quite hard to ensure their music is suitable and likely to encourage their customers to dance. Some bands attempt to extend their sonic control of space and improve the integration of amplified and acoustic sound by adding a secondary speaker tower. While the *teliya* itself remains at the rear of the band, the speaker tower – connected by a long electrical wire – is placed at or near the front of the procession.

Auspiciousness

'Auspiciousness is a divine blessing – the general state of well-being, encompassing health and happiness, peace and prosperity – that Hindu householders hope to be blessed with during this life' (Tingey 1994: 3). In at least one understanding of *baraats*, auspiciousness is the purpose for which sound and space

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are manipulated in *baraat* practice. The Hindi term *lagan*, which means ‘an auspicious occasion’, is often used by bandsmen and their customers to mean wedding or even *baraat*.

In linguistic terms, the Hindi/Sanskrit word *mangli* means ‘auspiciousness’; but many Indians use the word ‘happiness’, rather than ‘auspiciousness’, when speaking in English. In their ethnography of village festivals, Freed and Freed appear to replace both ‘mangli’ and ‘auspiciousness’ (a term they do not use at all) by the English word ‘well-being’: ‘a major festival theme concerns the general well being of the individual and family’ (1993: 3). The English term ‘happiness’, which I have heard most frequently, acts as a junction point, so to speak, between two different religious concepts of music. This is because any family from any religious background can suggest music is a producer or symbol of happiness, without implicating themselves in a specific religious construct. Hindu families appear to be translating ‘mangli’ in this context since most use that term when speaking in Hindi. In the admittedly few instances in which Muslim families have explained their use of music in Hindi (or Urdu), the term they have used has been *khushi*, which does indeed mean ‘happiness’ (and perhaps even ‘auspiciousness’), with many of the connotations that Tingey suggests above. ‘Mangli’ and ‘khushi’ carry the connotations of Hinduism and Islam respectively, but both are explanations for the importance of music in processions.

Loud music, performed on processional instruments, not only helps define public space, but is also understood as a positive (and sometimes ritually necessary) processional element. It is clear, however, that auspiciousness exists ambiguously on the borders of religion. In one sense, the notion is a lesser colleague, so to speak, to the more fundamental, if explicitly Hindu, concept of ritual purity. Although purity is, in part, a matter of heredity in Hindu terms (with a range of mitigating factors), anyone has the potential to be in an auspicious state some of the time. Purity’s hereditary components make it a potentially permanent state, unlike auspiciousness, which is inherently transitory in humans and must be regenerated. Finally, ritual purity is, within the bounds of cultural logic, empirically demonstrable. Demonstrations of auspiciousness, on the other hand, often bear a difficult resemblance to material or personal success.

The distinction between things that are auspicious in religious, ritual terms and things that are prestigious in purely socio-economic terms is not only difficult; it interacts directly with processional practice. If music as sound has auspicious qualities, as it may sometimes do, then more bandsmen and/or amplification equate with more sound, which means more auspiciousness. Nevertheless, having a large band and sound-amplification cart is also a sign of wealth, and hence socio-economic prestige.

Processional musicians are thus at the heart of the ambiguity surrounding the matter of auspiciousness. Tingey, who has studied processional music and musicians in Nepal, notes the important and diverse distinctions

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between processional musicians (who belong to the ‘untouchable’ Damai/tailor caste) and processional music: ‘the Damai themselves are sometimes referred to as being saguni, “auspicious signs”. Their music in general is mangal, “auspicious”’ (1994: 4). Thus, both processional musicians and their music may be signs; but only music itself can be said to actually *be* auspicious. The musicians may make the music; but the music is auspicious, it is that which produces auspiciousness in others. Tingey notes that this is the case despite the non-sacred or non-ritual nature of the music that is played (Hindi film tunes, in most Nepali and Indian baraats). And, while music is permanently auspicious, individuals and family need to rely on auspicious things, such as music, if they wish to also be (temporarily) auspicious.

The management of three interacting factors – space, sound, and auspiciousness – are at the heart of traditional South Asian processional practice and music’s role in that practice. I have already intimated, however, that traditional explanations are not entirely satisfactory in contemporary terms. Those changes are most clearly expressed by changes in processional performance. I conclude this chapter with a brief examination of this issue.

Performance

Baraats are performances by processional musicians, family members, friends, the groom, and a range of helpers. Brass bandsmen, who are formally recognized (and paid) as performers, belong to the same kinds of low-status social groups that produced the music Tingey discusses for Nepal. As performers, bandsmen’s traditional role was the production of auspiciousness, which was understood to result from their performance of processional music. Contemporary discourse by baraat participants and bandsmen concerning matters of auspiciousness and processional music has changed, however, especially in India’s central and northern cities. Notions of ritual economies, purity and impurity – matters at the heart of Hinduism as a religious and a social system – have merged into notions of prestige, class, and economics. Ironically, perhaps, I have recently spoken to a few northern bandsmen (Muslims themselves) who argue that global politics are driving an increasing awareness of music’s problematic role in fundamentalist Islam that is actually discouraging Muslim families from including music in their baraats.

Despite this possible (and probably limited) trend, processional practice, baraats, and music/musicians’ roles therein are all viewed from an increasingly secular perspective by both participants and bandsmen. Because the size of the band and the volume of sound being produced are already located at the intersection of notions of auspiciousness and prestige that I describe above, the distinction that Tingey makes (above), between musicians as a sign of auspiciousness and music as actually being auspicious, is no longer

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made by most families. Music itself has become the sign of a remarkable secular notion called family happiness; the musicians are simply the hired servants whose performances produce that sign.

Bandsmen's performances, however, also provide the musical and spatial contexts for more explicit performances of this new notion of auspiciousness (called family happiness), performances undertaken by family members. It is these performances that represent the clearest change in the processional practice of *baraats*. Instead of being producers of auspiciousness, wedding processions have become, in more secular terms, 'an expression of the interaction between personal [in this case family] aspiration and assessment by others' in which the family publicly 'burnishes the image of self for the consumption of others' (Pitkin 1993: 98). The production of these images of the self has come to focus on the reappearance of dancing in *baraats*. Historical accounts of seventeenth-nineteenth-century *baraats* sometimes mention dancing by courtesans, or other women whose socio-professional identities included public dance performance (e.g. de Thevenot 1976). The employment of courtesans to dance in *baraats* was still relatively common at the beginning of the twentieth century; but in contemporary practice, instead of being undertaken by paid public dancing women, dancing is now undertaken by family and friends of the groom. Oral accounts suggest that this practice developed from roughly the middle of the twentieth century. The *baraat*, with its built-in motivators for family happiness and/or the production or enactment of auspiciousness, gradually has come to be a public stage whereon families often choose to act out the happiness and unity they possess (or are expected to possess).

The changed meaning of dance performance and dancer identity has been enabled, in my view, by the unprecedented rise to cultural dominance of the Hindi cinema, which took place during the period in which families began dancing at *baraats*. Bands had played popular songs from all sources (recordings, musical theatre, folk songs) before the advent of sound films and their songs; but film songs were more popular and much more widely disseminated than any previous repertoire. Film songs represent nearly 100 per cent of most contemporary bands' repertoires.

The songs that bands played were songs to which the cinema's heroes and heroines danced. I have no doubt that *baraat* dancing interacts with issues of masculinity as constructed by actors who were routinely shown dancing in cinematic streets (e.g. Shammi Kapoor, Kishore Kumar, and so forth), whose dancing constructed a suitably modern and ecstatic masculinity. Since it appears that *baraat* dancing was a masculine performance practice when it first began among families, I cannot help but wonder whether a gendered, imitative process was what initially led to the custom of dancing in wedding processions. Images in the cinema did more than provide a model for masculine dancing in public; they also developed an idealized

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image of the family and family relations. Kakar (1989) and Mishra (2002) are among the many film scholars and commentators who have examined aspects of family relationships among the conventions of the Hindi cinema. Speaking of one (admittedly extreme) cinematic family, Kazmi writes, 'in this world every individual occupies his/her assigned position, performs his duties and lives his role in accordance with the station he occupies within the hierarchical social order' (1999: 139–140). More generally, I argue that the Hindi cinema was a hegemonic purveyor of idealized images of happy extended families, solid family relationships, and obedient children (see also Rao 2006, for a more contemporary reflection of the importance of cinematic images of gender, family, and marriage). In other words, an idealized image of family, constructed or perpetuated by the Hindi cinema, encouraged dancing by family members: men first, perhaps, in concert with cinema-inflected performances of masculinity, but eventually children and women as well. Baraat dancing became an expression of happiness, instead of a producer of auspiciousness, and an idealized public performance of the riotous happiness and collective unity that is appropriate to the occasion and to their views of how they see themselves and wish others to see them.

For bandsmen, this new 'purpose' for their music (the accompaniment of family dancing) has been somewhat problematic (as it can be in any event, see Booth 1993). In the accompaniment of dance and the production of a mood of ecstatic happiness, their performances must now demonstrate 'the bedrock techniques in the musical generation of intensity – the increase in tempo and increase in volume' – that so many Indian folk and devotional forms share (Henry 2002: 36). This is a rational strategy for the support of explicitly ecstatic dancing but requires a suitably intended or reasonably flexible repertoire.

The rather odd processional formation I described above, in which the core of the band and its sound is found at the rear of the band columns, is part of this transformation of meaning. Unlike the historical practice, in which sound led the way, the front end of a contemporary baraat, as I have described it, is a kind of vestigial growth, a hangover from an earlier time. At many baraats that I have attended, the front of the ensemble has been literally cut off from the main section by the cluster of family, friends, and onlookers participating in or watching the dancing going on in the middle section.

Change is ongoing, of course; but these particular changes appear to move processional practice in baraats further from its tentative connection to religion via auspiciousness. Contemporary wedding processions are rituals indeed; but the connection to religion is now clearly severed in practice and in the minds of most participants. They are now purely secular ritual representations of family unity and happiness.

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