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Editors' Note

The current issue is composed entirely of papers presented at the Second Bi-annual Asian Studies Graduate Conference at The University of Texas, held October 1 and 2, 2004.

The conference gathered students working on original research projects across disciplines and traditional academic divisions of Asia to present their work. It provided graduate students with a dynamic forum in which to present their work and benefit from a scholarly exchange of ideas.

Presenters included graduate students from The University of Alberta, The University of Chicago, The University of North Carolina, The University of California at Berkeley, and Cornell University, as well as many from here at The University of Texas at Austin. The keynote speaker was Veena Das, the Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology at John Hopkins University.

The conference proved to be a very successful event, with lots of lively discussion among participants, faculty, and attendees. It was a great opportunity for graduate students to interact across geographic and disciplinary boundaries, the primary goal of this journal. The Editorial Board is very excited to have the opportunity to publish those papers from the conference that address matters related to South Asia and hopes that the publication of these papers will foster further such interdisciplinary interactions.

The Asian Studies Graduate Conference was sponsored by the Department of Asian Studies, the South Asia Institute, and the Center for East Asian Studies in conjunction with the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin.

The papers by Spencer Johnson and Michael Korvink were written specifically for presentation and appear here almost exactly as presented at the conference. The other papers, by Nathan Tabor, Mathangi Krishnamurthy, and Neil Dalal, are larger papers, from which their conference presentations were drawn. The editorial board chose to publish the larger papers since there is considerably more detail in those versions.

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INTRODUCTION

Muslim music and Islamic religious identity in South Asia are still ripe areas for scholastic inquiry in ethnomusicology and musicology. Up to this point, little has been done to examine the complex relationship between communal tensions, state patronage, and performance. Given on-going communal strife in modern India and the complex and often tenuous relationship between audiences, performers, and patrons, we need to begin questioning the complex social and musical structure of South Asian performance genres and Muslim identity. In particular we need to open an area for a particularized Muslim voice. By this, I do not mean pointing to aspects of South Asian performance cultures as being inherently Muslim or Hindu; we do not need to communalize musical performance. Instead, we ought to begin rethinking performance as positioned within a complex political and socio-economic terrain where such influences govern how we listen to and produce musical meaning.

In this paper I hope to reveal how some of these processes work in my interpretation of three *qawwali* performances. While this discussion is not designed to give an encompassing account of *qawwali* repertoire and performance practice, the following examples and the discussion will illustrate some of the complex issues that go into repositioning musical performance, text performance, and improvisation within the religious and political complexities of modern South Asia. In the case of *qawwali*, we ask ourselves, what does it mean to perform in the Islamic context of South Asia and what does it mean to listen?

ISLAMIC THEORY OF LISTENING

Qawwali, defined as Muslim devotional music, is a good textual and musical example that demonstrates that improvisation is a form of communication. To understand how meaning is transferred in *qawwali*, I believe we must take

into account how improvised musical utterances fit within the larger milieu of social, religious, and political discourses. In order to discuss the interpretive possibilities of *qawwali* performance, there are three directions we will go. The first is towards improvisation. I will present a brief discussion on improvisation in *qawwali* focusing on improvisatory texts. *Qawwali* problematizes improvisatory processes because of the importance of text and the social context of the performance event. Secondly, we need to discuss the poetic ideology of the *ghazal*, namely the tropes peculiar to the *ghazal* form which have strong bearing on the poetic import of *qawwali*. Lastly, we need to align the improvisation of the text and ideology of the *ghazal* within a Sufi theory of listening as outlined by Ghazzali and Simnani as they tackle the more global debate on music in Islam.

IMPROVISATION AND POETIC TEXTS

Improvisation is hard to talk about. Ethnomusicologists have tended to see it within the context of musical *composition* (Nettl 1974, 1998). Whether we discuss improvisation in terms of its connections or disjuncture from music composition, such approaches do not allow us to study improvisation for what it really is: a mode of expression in and of itself. Similarly, other studies have attempted to frame improvisation in terms of jazz or conversations, focusing on improvisation as a shared space of creativity (Monson 1996 and Sawyer 1996, 2002). Though both approaches are extremely useful to conceptualize improvisation in the West and do shed some light on interactive processes, both the compositional and conversational models are limited in that they favor Western creative processes. Interactional models such as Sawyer's and Monson's inflect improvisation as discourse, but rely on an assumption that all players speak on equal terms. Instead, I'd like to expand Sawyer's interactive model and talk about improvisation as a shared discursive space where both musicians and listeners create musical meaning based on the tensions of social striation.

Thus, improvisation is a discursive form of musical communication capable of making statements about religion, social injustice, and political leanings. In order to understand meaning in improvised performance traditions I advocate that we interpret performance holistically, taking into account how the utterances of a performance fit within the larger milieu of social, religious, and political discourses. More specifically, we need to ask how the performance of improvised music communicates the discourses of society. In part, I use interactional sociolinguistics and discourse theory to look at how *qawwali* is a discursive form of textual improvisation (Gumperz 2001 and Tannen 1993). I propose examining the *qawwali* performance genre

as a highly discursive performance realm. The textual and musical elements of *qawwali* cannot be examined as separate, bifuricated realms, but must be taken as parallel and interconnected threads of a dynamic musical text. Gumperz's notion of contextual cues elucidates the improvisatory gestures of *qawwali* (Gumperz 2001), but I expand the notion to also account for socio-religious cues characteristic of Islamic expressive traditions (Ernst and Lawrence 2002, Naim 1999, and Sherzer 2002). Specifically, the process *qawwals*—the people who perform *qawwali*—use to tie knots of textual meaning in the course of performance is known as *girah bandi*, literally tying knots. This musical and poetic ability, of course, relies on the contextual importance of a localized performance. It is a musical form relying heavily on a complex textual tradition, i.e. the *ghazal*. Therefore, we have to question how the locality of performance becomes implicated within the larger religious discourse on Muslim identity in the subcontinent.

In the ongoing discussions on improvisation, ethnomusicologists have attempted to account for both structural and processual approaches to creating improvised music (Bailey 1992, Keil 1987, and Slawek 1990, 1998). As of yet no one has come up with a unified theory on improvisatory processes because of the wide variance in musical traditions. The closest is Edward Hall's model that takes improvisation as "an acquired multi-level process" depending on high-context or low-context settings whereby performers communicate in terms of explicit or implicit knowledge (Hall 1992). In South Asian musics, musicologists have tended to favor linguistic models whereby musical style and musical phrases appear to be shaped according to a performance grammar (Powers 1980, 1976, Qureshi 1994, and Slawek 1987, 1998). These approaches are very useful for conceptualizing how we imagine improvisatory process as both highly structural and highly fluid forms of communication as people make musical statements based on a linguistic paradigm.

In any discussion of *qawwali* one cannot avoid Regula Qureshi's monumental and complex piece *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context, and Meaning.* Her approach to *qawwali* binds meaning to only the performance event. Her approach wonderfully elucidates the performance practice of *qawwali* within its own context. One of the main ideas Qureshi presents us with is a structural interpretation of *qawwali* performance practice based what she calls a "context sensitive grammar." By this, she means *qawwals* reconstruct the performance context by shaping their *qawwalis* to heighten spiritual ecstasy through *sama'* or the achievement of ecstasy through listening, and bring monetary gain to themselves.

The ability of the *qawwal* to construct *sama'* depends on his or her ability to interpret the performance event, respond to it, and construct a song

interpretation or a *qawwali* piece that best suits the environment. A major idea we can take from Qureshi is the importance of status and identity. These social categories show us that agency in the process of the *qawwali* performance lies with the listeners and the performers. The singer relies on positioning each of the listeners present at the *qawwali* event within a defined area. There are labels and definitions, which position a listener and a performer at the *mehfil* or *qawwali* gathering. Labeling the participants is a way of giving their existence meaning to the *qawwali* event. There is a complex cast of personae creating the *qawwali* experience. Hence, the idea of the *role* as Qureshi discusses it has particular significance given the complexity of identity and hierarchy in India. Qureshi uses the term to define the position of a musician's role, the role of the text, the music, the song, and the context. The term appears throughout her work in various usages, but there is a central idea that she is working with. The idea of *role* in *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan* is much greater than the common usage connotes. Qureshi is dealing with an Indian cultural trope and contextual musical element that has profound implications, for it reflects a social confluence of listener interpretation and improvisatory decisions. Thus, given the above discussion of some improvisatory models, Qureshi's take brings us back to the agency of the people involved in listening to and performing *qawwali*.

It appears Qureshi's interpretation of the social in *qawwali* harmonizes with our own concern for political/economic areas as well as the religious aspects. She writes, "[i]ssues of spiritual and socio-economic priority, of dominance and submission, of hierarchical order and individual assertion, of conformity and creativity, are being negotiated audibly, in the language of music, throughout a *qawwali* performance" (Qureshi 1994, 231), and further, "[*q*]*awwali* articulates the ideology of Sufism and conveys the meaning of both its structure and dynamic. That meaning is built into the very structure of *qawwali* music" (Qureshi 1994, 228). She proves these two statements in her work and we have no choice but to agree with them. The sound structure of the performance event parallels the social structure of its context (Feld 1984).

But this approach is reductively bound by the ethnomusicological reliance on context. Qureshi does show the religious significance as well as the economic significance of improvisation in *qawwali*, but does so only within the almost anti-historical cage of a contemporary ethnography. She reveals that the fundamental performative agency rests on the people involved in receiving and producing *qawwali*. Her approach does have a wider applicability to musicological inquiry, but to add to her ideas, in part, we need to look at the parallels between musical improvisation and poetic forms of speech play and how those connect with the larger interests of Islamic and

social discourses in South Asia. Thus, we can extend Qureshi's very thorough examination into text and religion and into the historical significance of *qawwali* as a performance genre in postcolonial South Asia.

In the next section I shall attempt to bridge the sociological inquiries of Qureshi's take on improvisation with the more textual concerns of Urdu and Islamic poetic practice. In addition, I shall pair improvisation with a more global discussion on Islamic views on music and listening.

To begin this discussion, we can look to the confluence of poetic and religious concepts as typified in the *Quran*. Perhaps the best illustration is in the Urdu word *bas*, meaning "enough." The *Quran* begins with the word *bismillah* and ends with the letter *sin*, the only two letters found in the word *bas* when written in Persio-Arabic script. Between these two letters falls all of the *sunna* or all of Allah's teaching as heard by the Prophet Muhammad and all that is enough, *bas*.

Perhaps we can carry this idea over into poetics as well when we look at Annemarie Schimmel's discussion on the importance of the *Quran* to Persian poets (Schimmel 1992, 55). As she discusses in her chapter on "Koranic Themes," the *Quran* in Persian writing was a large source of inspiration and transference of religious knowledge into aesthetic and poetic experiences. Schimmel's discussion reveals how poetics re-route religion. A poetic experience can be a form of religiosity and the teaching, stories, and theological ideas of the *Quran* are part of a larger poetic experience framing Islamic poetic tropes.

Towards the end of the chapter she discusses the confluence of the religious and the poetic down to the words themselves. Poets play between the romantic ideas of the Urdu/Persian traditions and the religious emotions of the *Quran*. She illustrates this with the word *qiyaamat* literally meaning "resurrection" but often connoting the tumult on the Day of Judgment. Poets play with the religious idea of the *qiyaamat* by pairing it with the word *qaamat* often used in poetry to refer to the "stature" or beauty of the beloved (Schimmel 1992, 82). For our purposes, we need to bear in mind the congruence between the religious and the poetic whereby art forms, performance structures, and their interpretations structurally reflect each other. The social manifests itself in an art object or a performance through, in our case, musicians poetically manipulating the religious and political tropes of their society.

Improvised music is highly bound by its system and, according to previous models, musical meaning constructs itself internally. Adding a poetic or textual tradition to this approach complicates the idea of improvisation further. As a text based performance practice, *qawwali* as musical communication presents us with certain problems when addressing

improvisation. Musicologists have consistently noted the importance of text in Muslim or Islamic performance traditions in South Asia (Manuel 1989 and Qureshi 1969, 1981, 1987, 1990). In addition, a performed text or a performance tradition such as *qawwali* that heavily relies on a poetic tradition further complicates our notion of improvisation. Based on the poetic tropes of the *ghazal* and some of the Islamic ideas on poetic performance practices, I would like to offer a dialectical conceptualization of text based musical improvisation. As we know from our discussion on musical improvisation, the music generated during the course of performance is bound by certain rules on musical and stylistic acceptability. Improvisation is new and spontaneous, but it is not aleatoric. In *qawwali*, musicians and listeners rely on the conventions of a poetic and religious tradition while using musical conventions to carry the religious effect of the text. To understand how improvisation carries social and political message in *qawwali* we have to understand the poetic relationship of the text and the music.

A common trope in the aesthetic tradition of Chishti Sufism comes from a caveat by Amir Khusrou, a 13th century poet, musician, and devotee of a Chishti saint, Nizamuddin Auliya. He said, when asked about the importance of music and poetry, that poetry is the bride and music is the jewels adorning her. Whether or not Khusrou actually said this is not important, for he is credited with all kinds of achievements, but instead we have to question the ideas stemming from this saying. Again, Qureshi stresses the importance listeners and musicians give text in Islamic performance traditions in South Asia (Qureshi 1990). In addition, Virginia Danielson relies heavily on the importance of quranic recitation in her work on Umm Kulthum (Danielson 1987). There is clearly a strain of thinking in Islamic performance tradition that puts prime importance on the elocutionary transference of "the word." While we ought to focus on the import of words, this trait is not endemic to Islamic performance traditions alone, but does reveal something of the direction from which we can venture towards text based performance traditions in South Asia.

In the Urdu poetic tradition, the most sought after form, prized as the mode of expression par excellance, is the *ghazal*. There is not one word which can describe the *ghazal* and the nature of its artistry. The *ghazal* is an ambiguous genre of poetry which often transposes earthly love with spiritual love, sex and devotion, violence and satiation. Within one *ghazal*, one meaning can be interpreted in multiple directions. One of the most famous of *ghazal* writers was Mirza Ghalib (d. 1869). He wrote:

mai(n) ne cahaa thaa ki andvah-e vafaa se chootoo(n)
voh satamgar mare marne pe bhii raazii na ho

I wanted that I might escape the sorrow of [my] fidelity,
But that tyrant was not content with only killing me.[1]

This *ghazal* will give us a glimpse into the painful pleasure of the *ghazal* ideology. By fidelity, Ghalib means the fidelity of the lover to the beloved, which the lover demonstrates by waiting out all night for the beloved. But the beloved never arrives and the lover experiences continual torment and suffering, a reality worse than death. We find these examples throughout the canon of Urdu literature where the lover is always yearning after an unattainable beloved. The above *ghazal* could also be taken to mean the believer, in continual devotion, always suffers, longing to be united with God in death. Meaning can be read in many different ways along the lines of love and spiritual devotion, hence the ambiguous *ghazal* aesthetic is central to understanding the poetics of *qawwali*. The song form of *qawwali*, however, re-routes meaning in the *ghazal* by omitting lines and unifying the fragmentation of the *ghazal* vis-à-vis musical setting. In addition, the *qawwali* genre complicates the *ghazal* aesthetic by rerouting its meaning into a profoundly Islamic context. It would appear that such an approach would also narrow the scope of interpretation.

Because both of these genres have an oral element to their reception and performance we need to rethink the idea of text in *qawwali* and *ghazal*. The ambiguity of the *ghazal* champions the structural nuances of the poem; the word-play and the poetic manipulation of words and ideas are instead central to the transference of an aesthetic experience in the course of performance in the *ghazal* or *qawwali*. While the content of the *ghazal* relies on quranic themes and uses the cultural capital of Islam, we cannot view poetic expression as a voice for Islam alone. We know from Islamic poetic traditions and performance traditions in the subcontinent that humor and playfulness are a central aspect of Muslim expression (Naim 1999, 17). In *qawwali* and the *ghazal* poetic forms, we judge a performer's merit by her ability to play with and manipulate the conventions and motifs of her performance tradition. In Urdu poetic terminology this is called *Mazmun Afrini*—recasting the tropes of performance to create something new or to reroute convention. Thus, the use of religious tropes in the *ghazal*, the *sher-ashob*, the *qawwali*, or even the Shi'a religious epic, *marsiya*, are parts of the

[1] All translations are my own.

palette Urdu poets have at their disposal. The sense of religiosity in the *qawwali* setting can be read as another performative aspect, another poetic trope to be manipulated and recast to create new meanings and associations. I advocate we pecularize Islamic identity within the *qawwali* tradition, but ideology has to be re-routed. In religiously inspired performance genres, we cannot allow the ideology of religion to be the main focus of our analysis and examine how the social is continually played with and contested (Veer 1992). That is, the creativity and musical expression cannot be explicitly linked to a monologic conception of Islam. Instead we have to question the different conceptions of Islam being cast in a poetic text and how the manipulation of those poetic tropes on religiosity creates social commentaries.

Because the *qawwali* form takes liberties with the *ghazal*, the ability to improvise and construct new meanings and associations lies in the agency of the *qawwal* or the musician deciding what to sing and when. A *qawwal* implies unity in the *ghazal* form by using his musical setting to construct cohesiveness between *ghazal* lines. The process is known as tying knots or *girah bandi*. The *qawwal* inserts lines according to his assessment of the overall flow of the performance and according to his audience's reactions. His ability to tie knots or *girah* is important to consider for its gives the *qawwali* song a unidirectional push where the *ghazal* can go in any direction because of its ambiguousness. Similarly, the conventions of the *ghazal* tradition complicates what it means to be playful in *qawwali* because the performers engage in this careful dialectic between the freedom of expression and the stricture of form. The *qawwal* interacts with his audience, deciding which lines will be best suited for their aesthetic and ecstatic experience; se has the knowledge of his tradition—he knows the compositions and how to manipulate them; and he has direct connections to the conventions of the *ghazal* aesthetic and Islamic cultural tropes.

As we have seen, *qawwal* use poetic and Islamic themes to reify the fabric of their social setting. This has long been a favorite topic in ethnomusicology. To account for the social in music culture, ethnomusicologists Thomas Turino and Steve Feld talk about parallels between sound structure and social structure (Feld 1984, 1990 and Turino 1999). Namely, these models rely on the iconicity of sound and musical performance to symbolize social structure. Iconicity, as opposed to metonymy, relies on participation within a closed system creating a monologic symbol of society. The musical icon for social interaction is autonomous in that it silences heterogeneity by creating a unidirectional relationship between expression and society. Both Feld's and Turino's work relies on ethnographies of insular societies where they can draw neat parallels between cultural representation, cosmologies, and performance. In short, they

advocate approaches where sound structure and social structure have an iconic relationship based on internal cohesion.

There are two problems with this model. While their work is groundbreaking and an important step in using semiotics and linguistic modeling to describe the cultural values system, we need to move beyond explanations that rely on monologic and insular conceptions of culture. Turino's work relies on a Piercian semiotic model, stressing what he refers to as the iconicity of sound (Turino 1999). Feld makes a similar move by stressing the ways performance genres become metaphors for how people view their world and surroundings (Feld 1984). This is a good starting point, but these conceptions account for only dominant epistemologies in a given society. We need a model that accounts for multiple conceptions of reality, disjuncture, and social inequalities—a model to approximate heterogeneity.

To account for heterogeneity and disjoint social conditions, we should rethink how people create musical meaning by interpreting it according to their own systems of thought. People do not assign values to music performance arbitrarily based on an imposing social structure, and each person has a different experience perceiving a musical event. Thus, calling music purely iconic stresses the bounds of social structure, but does not allow human agency to bridge the gap between the perception of a performance and the formation of a value system about it, or the perception of a social or sound-environment and the construction of a musical system.

Iconicity also leaves out marginalized and alternative viewpoints for constructing meaning in a musical system. We need to move beyond iconicity to account for the striation of experience, the conflicting interpretations of an aesthetic experience, and the social tensions as they appear in a performance tradition.

Metonymy is a poetic device where one word or sign is used to stand for another. Charles Boiles discusses this in terms of creating continual chains of referents in his semantic process (Boiles 1983), Turino calls it "semantic snowballing" (Turino 1999), and for Lacan it is the psychological process of creating a shifting web of signifiers. By metonymy, I aim to re–posit musical communication within a system that continually re–assigns values and experiences, creating conflicting and disjointed interpretations of a musical performance. In short, we need to place the agency of interpretation on all levels of society and on all possible viewpoints. We need a metonymic model of musical interpretation that can account for individual agency.

To approach a metonymical model, I would like to ground interpretation within Islamic thought of music. Two theorists, Jahangir Simnani Ashraf and Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, present us with interesting ideas for conceptualizing interpretations of improvised, musical utterances in South Asian Islamic

musical forms. As we know from the previous discussion, the process of governing expectation and surprise in *qawwali* concerns unifying the *ghazal's* religious metaphors. Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali's conception of the metaphor in his work *The Alchemy of Happiness* elucidates the connection between music making (improvisation) and Islamic spiritual or social expressions. Throughout the work, al-Ghazzali leans heavily on the idea of alchemy as a metaphorical process that transfers knowledge between material states (al-Ghazzali 1991). For him music is part of that process. *Sama'* or ecstasy is an alchemic process, a metaphorical process, for transferring earthly knowledge of the self to the spiritual knowledge of God. So to understand how improvisation of textual and musical forms becomes a socio-religious process, we need to think of it as al-Ghazzali does: an alchemic or metaphorical process where improvised passages express specific Islamic religious ideas. al-Ghazzali's idea on alchemy gives us the process of creating musical metonymy. Social messages are converted into musical meaning through poetic manipulation of existent tropes.

Jahangir Simnani Ashraf, in his *Lata'if-i Ashrafi,* elucidates how a metonymic process, as opposed to an iconic representation, accounts for a more heterogenic interpretation of musical expression. Simnani quotes an anonymous saint from a Chishti order in Uttar Pradesh, "*Sama'* is the attempt by Sufis to understand the meaning that arises from different voices" (Ernst 2002, 43). Simnani's inclusion of this quote in his work stresses the importance of the interpretation of multiple realities. Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence qualify the quote by stating, "like all his predecessors, Simnani stresses that there are variant levels of understanding that correspond to the variant capacities (and intentions) of the listeners" (Ernst 2002, 43). Simnani interprets the perception of improvisation by relying on al-Ghazzali's levels of listener intent, but adds a polyphonic element. According to Simnani's approach, *qawwali* is a metaphorical performance mode that encompasses multiple voices and viewpoints. The act of performing then becomes a way to transfer religious knowledge to the listener (al-Ghazzali's alchemy), allowing her to interpret the musical and religious ideas being expressed according to her own spiritual and social intentions. The listener defines the music she listens to by bringing intentions, desires, and knowledge to the listening process. The play and joking that happen through improvising with sound and poetic structure is relevant in that the *qawwal* is deeply connected with the socio-religious reality of Islam and with the larger form of musical expression in South Asia. Music is a metonymic relationship between sound structure and social structure and such a model keeps musical expression embedded within social and religious practices by revealing connections as opposed to representations between musical utterance and the social.

QAWWALI AND THE ALCHEMY OF MUSIC

An important step in actualizing the alchemy of music concerns textual improvisation and the internal consistency or parallelism between the poetic motifs of the *qawwali* and the "musical" or structural elements of the composition. Linguist Roman Jakobson uses the word parallelism to refer to the internal consistency of poetic forms (Jakobson 1987). In addition, Jakobson's structural approach links a linguistic investigation of poetic forms to their performance. In this first example, we witness the parallelism between the poetic tropes of the *qawwali* and the musical structure. Each phrase builds upon the previous,culminating in a musical climax. I compare this particular phrase to the humor or joking quality of the *tihai*. It is very playful and illustrates ways in which *qawwals* employ *mazmun afrini* when creating playfulness, intensity, and internal cohesion. In brief, a *tihai* is a tripartite rhythmic formula that culminates on the *sam* or down-beat of a rhythmic cycle or *tala* cycle. Musicians use *tihais* for creating internal cohesion by supplying a repeated motif, which reduplicates, thereby creating tension or intensity. The beauty of the *tihai* is the way it begins in sync with the beat of the cycle, leaves it, then returns, ending on the down beat as a kind of rhythmic cadence.

karam karam ya khvaajaa
jaba tum na karoge to karam kaun karegaa
Jholii merii tumhari sivaa kaun bharega
…
jaalii tere rauze kii nagiine kii tarah hai(n)
ziinah bhii teraa 'arsh ke ziine kii tarah hai(n)
khaadiim tere har ek shahanshaah kii tarah hai(n)
khvaajaa tera ajmer madine kii tarah hai(n)
isii vaqt karam kar do yah vaqt-e karam hai
ya khvaajaa abhii tumko mohammad kii qasam hai

Mercy, mercy, Oh Master
If you will not grant me a blessing, then who will?
Who besides you will fill my bag?
…
The network of carvings on your tomb is like jewel.
The steps to your shrine are like the stairs to highest heaven (God's thrown).
Every attendant of yours is like the lord of the world.
Master, your Ajmer is like Medina.

This the time of blessing, so give this very blessing.
Oh master, you have to, now, in the name of Mohammad.

Though this example is not an explicit poetic *tihai*, it does have a tripartite form that cadences both poetically and musically on the final verse. First, the *qawwals* present us with the *jaali* work of the shrine, then the stairs that lead up to the shrine and how it is like entering the Kingdom of God. Thirdly, each of Khwaajaa's servants is a lord of the world. The last line carries the most poetic and religious importance for the performers and listeners and the *qawwals* singing in the Moulana Ziyauddin shrine were wise to include it at the end of the four verse structure of the song. By stating the home of Mouiiudin Chishti's *dargah* in Ajmer is akin to Ajmer, the *qawwals* align the importance of South Asian Islam with the larger Arab world. The prophet's tomb is located in Medina as is Mouinuudin Chishti's rouzah or tomb. The verse parallels the bringer of Chishti Sufism with the prophet as the bringer of God's message—both are messengers of Allah, and India's religious significance becomes enmeshed with the larger cosmology of Islam.

As a song, the verse is obviously a popular one in the shrine culture of North India. They were not singing in Ajmer, but in Jaipur at the *dargah* of an early 19th Century popularly known as Moulana Ziyauddin. The verse has great significance in the specificity of Ajmer Sharif, the shrine of Khwaja Mouinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, but also in the broad context of performative Sufi traditions in South Asia. Both the religious significance of the *girah* and the fact that it is a recognizable tune reinforces the improvisatory nature of what the *qawwals* attempt to construct in a performance. Their performance culminates multiple realities and interpretations of India, Islam, and Sufism in a playful tension.

We have to then question the peculiarities of these commentaries. The parallelism between textual intensity and musical intensity is important to consider in light of the religious commentary being made. The *qawwali* invokes a Sufi idea about paradise and the unification with God, but within a very South Asian interpretation of Chishti listening. Bruce Lawrence discusses the importance of Indianized interpretations of the Sufi idea of *sama'* (Lawrence 1983). For him the Chishti lineage represents the emergence of the South Asian take on *sama'* or listening for the divine. As he reveals, Islamic theorists on music, listening and being affected by music is fundamentally a social one (Lawrence 1983 and Robson 1938). From Simnani, we know the intent of the listener governs how the music is to be received. Any *qawwali* performance and any *qawwal* is indebted to the Chishti ideology on listening. Given the social and religious significance of Mouiuudin Chishti as the progenitor of the South Asian tradition of *sama'*, we can see

how current *qawwali* still relies on acknowledging the philosophical and therefore social conditions of listening.

In the second example, notice the way Abdul Hamid Sabri interweaves common Islamic tropes on light and sustenance both musically and poetically in the course of the composition. I recorded these examples in Jaipur at the Moulana Ziyauddin Dargah on *Juma-e Raat* in the summer of 2003. Abdul Sabri is the leader of a two-person group. He plays *dholak* and his partner plays harmonium.

khalik ne apne nuur ka jalvah dikhaa diyaa
sab nuur ko milaakar Mohammad banaa diyaa
jab hue pedaa mohammad mustafaa
god me(n) lekar ke yuu(n) daayavi maa(n) ne kahaa
shakal-e bashar me(n) nuur-e khuda aap hii to hai(n)
sal-allahu ‘alayhe wa sallam
koun makaan me(n) jalvah numa aap hii to hai(n).
sarakaar-e madina
‘aarab ke duulhaa
shan-e khuda nishan-e khuda aap hii to hai(n)

When the creator revealed the luster (radiance) of his light.
Mohammad was made by uniting all the light.
Thus, when the great prophet Mohammad was born his nurse, taking him into her lap said,
“In the form of humanity you and you alone are the light of God.”
May God bless him and bestow peace upon him
“In all of creation only you are presented as the radiant bridegroom.”
The Master of Medina
The Bridegroom of Arabia
Grace of God, the sign of God, it is you (he) alone.

In this *qawwali* we have several poetic juxtapositions united around the idea of light and form. In the first line, Qawwal Abdul Hamid Sabri comments on the simultaneous creation of the world with God revealing the luster of his light. The idea of light in the Sufi cosmology is that it is an all penetrating all encompassing presence and can be found in each atom of God’s creation, the *kaun makkan*. The *nur-e Khuda* is the purist and most potent connection to God. In the next line the light becomes hyper-concentrated in the form of the prophet. All the light, all the radiance of God, was brought together creating Mohammad. This powerful image of God’s radiance converging into the

prophet is then subverted into the very tangible and real experience of Mohammad's birth. God's joy in creating Mohammad with his light parallels the joy of birthing a child. The nurse or mother taking Mohammad into her lap to nurse him realizes simultaneously the joy of God in the creation of the prophet and the joy of motherhood. When she speaks the lines, "You and you alone are God's light in the form of humanity," it could be interpreted that the child in her arms brings her joy in her immediate home or that he, the child prophet, brings the light of God itself into the world. Similarly, by taking the child Mohammad into her lap, she intends to nurse him, providing the child nourishment. A common trope in Sufism is that the light of God provides spiritual nourishment for the believer. In revealing his light to the world, God nourishes all of existence by providing it in the form of Mohammad.

Sabri chooses *ghazal* lines that would not normally be taken together, but through the improvisation of tying textual knots, *girah bandi*, he unifies the *qawwali* around the *nur-e khuda*. The light of God both literally and metaphorically penetrates the *qawwali*. Words like *nur*, *jalvaa*, and *numa* all connote the radiance and luster of God as imbued in Mohammad and specifically the act of its manifestation. The *qawwali* plays with this trope in the *ghazals* he chooses; he imbues each of his *ghazals* with the idea of spiritual nourishment in the form of God's light and therefore the prophet. Here we see the alchemic process at work. As listeners we engage in the metaphor of light through Sabri's improvisation.

He takes his topic, the *mazmun*, and develops it much in the way one would develop a *raga* by adding variations and notes. It begins with the locality of the birth of the light, which spreads from the room and the house of the prophet's family, to the city, to the country, the earth, and finally the universe at the end of the *qawwali*. These particular knots that the *qawwal* ties highlight both the nourishment as well as the omnipotence of the *nur-e khuda*, the radiance or luster of God. In addition, the *girah* tie the textual improvisation with the musical improvisation. The two men singing this *qawwali* interrupt and anticipate each others lines throwing invocations and praise to continue with the poetic trope of light already begun.

By improvising these lines, by actively appropriating them for a performance, Sabri uses the problematized *ghazal* to metonymically embed light within the performance, thereby transferring it to his listeners in a religious experience. The manifestation of God's light is now performed in that the musical material parallels the continual manifestation of the *nur-e Khuda* in each of the verses. Light and form narrate further illumination in that as the *nur-e khuda* enters and illuminates the forms the prophet and the creation of God, it also enters the song form itself. The song is the alchemy, imbuing the listeners with *nur-e khuda* vis-à-vis the *qawwal's* musical setting.

When paired with the musicality of the *qawwali* we get a true sense of what the *girah* means. The poetic and musical threads of the song intertwine through the repeated line "*aap hi to hai*." This *radiif* is a kind of polyphonic marker that ties the *qawwal's* voice with the wet-nurse's, transposing the musical reality of the performance with the poetic reality of the narrative. I see three levels revolving around the use of *aap* in this song. One is that it is a form of reported speech. The *qawwal* as musician and poet is quoting what was being said to the prophet. Secondly, as the verses develop the speech becomes a longer soliloquy of praise for the prophet sung by the nurse where *aap* becomes a second person marker referring to the baby she cradles in her arms. Lastly, in the Urdu poetic traditions *aap* is also the third person pronoun for the prophet. So when we hear *aap* sung the words also become the *qawwal's* praise of the prophet.

In the next example we see a similar pattern. The Akhtar Ziya Qawwali party, again another group of *qawwals* that play at the Moulana Ziyauddin Dargah, uses the nationalist trope of the Indian earth to glorify the nation in terms of the *khwaja* or saint.

jiskii zamiin zamiin nahii(n) aasamaan hai
duniya me(n) mere khvaja ka bhaarat mahaan hai(n)
o mere khvaajaa ka bhaarat
bhaarat kii sar-zamiin se hai duniya kii iftakhaar
aadam ne sab se pahalaa khadam is jagah/jahaan rakha
jaarii huaa yahii(n) se mahobbat ka silsila
bhaart me(n) bhii rahataa hai vah bhaagvaan hai
duniya me(n) mere khvaajaa kaa bhaarat hai(n)
jiskii zamiin zamiin nahii(n) aasamaan to hai
peda huii hai(n) gautam naanak hastiya(n)
guunjii hai(n) is me(n) chishti saramat kii vaaniya(n)
sii(n)caa hai kaliidaas tulsii kabiir ne
haasil hai(n) har dharma kii sar parastiya(n)
is gulastaan me(n) khaar bhii gul ke samaan hai

Whose earth is not the earth is the sky.
In this world my (beloved) master's India is truly great.
Oh the India of my master
From India's lands comes the world's glory
Adam stepped in this place/world first.
This tradition / lineage of love flows from this very place
Who ever lives in India is fortunate.

In this world my (beloved) master's India is truly great.
Oh my (beloved) master's Bhaarat
Whose earth is not the earth is the sky.
Goutam and Nanak people of their fame were born (here)
Our voices echo throughout the chishti shrine.
Kalidas, Tulsi and Kabir have tended this garden
The patronage of every religion originates here.
In this garden even the thorns are roses.

The *qawwals* of this party transpose the earthly paradise with the heavenly paradise, comparing Hindustan with a rose garden and at the same time invoking a kind of all-inclusive nationalism. What is most striking about this particular *qawwali* is the way the *qawwals* juxtapose Islamic ideas about the earthly and heavenly paradises with nationalism. They simultaneously allude to India as the origin of that nationalism that somehow through its religious history and lineage of love the greatness of India as a nation-state always existed. Each line is tied together with the idea of earth, hinting at a kind of *bhuumi-puutr* (Sons of soil): "who ever lives in India is fortunate" and thus linked to the earth of Bhaarat. The identity invoked in this *qawwali* stems from a *silsilah* of love that somehow always originates in India. Not only is it the place where the highest creation of God, Adam, stepped into being, but it is simultaneously the origin of Indian nationalism. In the song, the chorus and the main singer contest if Adam is to be stepping in the *jahan* (the world) or this *jagah* (this place, i.e. India). Because the lineage of love stems from this *qawwali's* conception of India and India's land glorifies the rest of the world, the nation stands out, shining as a distinct set of boundaries from the rest of the world, populated by great and religious men. Bhaarat, as opposed to Hindustan or India, becomes the earthly paradise of a pluralized nationalism.

The reduplication of the line *Oh mere khvaajaa ka bharat* simultaneously praises the Sufi saint and Bhaarat. The *qawwals* use the musical form to reinforce these ideas through repetition. Certain lines are pared down further and sung with other lines, looping *girah* after *girah* around the musical and poetic theme of both the saint and the nation. The musical setting of the chorus is the most important structural element in the song for it centers on the *khwaajaa* and Bhaarat. The strength of this *qawwali*'s alchemy is that is performs nationalism and praise together.

The improvisational play *mazmun afrini*—the playfulness of manipulating poetic tropes—in the *girah bandi* of the *qawwals* signifies the religious and social experiences of *qawwali* as an Islamic and Sufi institution. Music itself is an alchemic process, but the idea of the spiritual alchemy of music and text is useful for elucidating the Islamic performative aspects as

well. The process of *girah bandi* and improvisation becomes part of the metaphorical process for carrying the listener to *sama'*, or spiritual ecstasy. The importance of this is that it no longer frames improvisation as a purely structural achievement of musicians, but instead casts it within a web of meanings and discourses that can be interpreted according to socio-religious values. Notably, improvisation by tying these knots of musical and meaning in *qawwali* are a form of *tawajud* or achievement of ecstasy through outward means, again the alchemy so central to Islamic conceptions of music.

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Outsourced Identities: The Fragmentations of the Cross–Border Economy[1]

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Business corporations are interesting units of analysis in that they are positioned at and dialogue with transnational trajectories of geography, purpose, and process. The mechanisms of creation and distribution of value are concretized through ever–changing strategies of increased productivity, cost–cutting, and profit maximization. One such mechanism that has of late been much discussed and debated in public space is outsourcing or offshoring.[2] Outsourcing, as a business strategy, refers, at its most reductive definition, to the breaking up of business activities into modules or interlocking blocks each of which can be performed, created, and delivered by geographically disparate, non–intersecting units as per a centrally defined logic or set of rules. By itself, the process is but another rendition of flexible capitalism with increasing amounts of work being sub-contracted across continents and corporations. However, what distinguishes outsourcing is its ability to create an independent organized visible service economy in the

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[2] Outsourcing is the technical term for when services are contracted to a completely different concern, whereas offshoring is the term for when the business itself creates a new facility in another geography to perform related tasks. This paper is primarily concerned with the workforce who tends to be uniform across both of these business models and hence will use "outsourcing" in an undifferentiated manner. The human resource management techniques tend to differ but the manner of work remains more or less uniform.

countries that compete for these contracts. I study this process through its most publicized manifestations, call centers in India. My paper is interested in the "cultural logic" of outsourcing as manifested through the everyday processes of call center workers. I examine the critical adjustment processes engendered by call center work, arguing for workers' identities as shaped by as well as constitutive of the conditions of globalization. The study of this site is thus a modest attempt to overcome the "inherent temporal lag between the processes of globalization and their conceptual containment" (Appadurai 2001, 4).

My research examines Indian call center employees to determine the effects that call center work has on their identities as Indians as well as consumers and citizens of the global economy. I am specifically concerned with the large, skilled, cost–effective, English–speaking workforce in this industry in India. These employees—a majority of which fall between the ages of eighteen to twenty–five—work night–shifts attending to inbound and outbound communication from consumers in the United States and other major markets. They are trained to cultivate signifiers of Western popular culture (accents, slang, sports, news, weather, etc.) and maintain comfort levels with American and British consumers. In a manner of speaking, employees navigate two alternate worlds, each characterized by different spheres of existence, placed at varied points on the axes of modernity, postmodernism, and post–colonialism (Crapanzano 1991, 434). The visible effects of this navigation include high burn–out rates and labor turnover, disillusionment with family and friends, confused linguistic registers, and social inbreeding within the call center community. My research studies these effects as manifestations of an urban reality inscribing global capital in tension, collusion, and coalition with the practices of the local.

This paper is based on a preliminary ethnographic investigation of the call center industry in India conducted over the summer of 2004. This phase involved in–depth, unstructured interviews with customer service associates between the ages of eighteen and twenty–five and also personal interviews with human resource personnel, call center trainers, and entrepreneurs in an effort to determine the daily working procedures of call centers. Call center work in my analysis comprises voice–based processes in corporate organizations on the Indian subcontinent, simultaneously inscripted in Indian and international media as messiah and false prophet. Media reports in India either extol call centers as employment avenues for otherwise unemployed English–speaking graduates or vilify them as seditious work spaces disrupting tradition, adolescence, health, and sanity. International media in the United States and United Kingdom pick up on similar strands of time–space compression, cost–savings, and labor conditions and dichotomize, arguing

either for the benefits of the global market or railing against the loss of jobs within local economies. Between the corporate view of outsourcing as a "...strategic initiative optimizing technological advances and the human capital available offshore to fundamentally restructure an organization's operating model"[3] and its populist rendition as callous indifference to "... the loss of our colleagues' jobs, our friends' jobs, our neighbors' jobs,"[4] I look to call center employees themselves as bodies on which these contradictory debates are played out and concretized. In them I seek instances of "agentive moments" (Daniel 1997, 191) and their possibilities. I use "agentive moment" as opposed to "agency" as there is neither a central rubric of power nor well–defined forces of rebellion. Agentive moments are thus staccato bursts of re–configuration and re–orientation; mechanisms of habit–change or adjustment that often have very little to do with the outlined dichotomies of emancipation and regression, acquiescence and rebellion. I define the rate of attrition as an "agentive moment" and try to develop the factors influencing the same as symptomatic of and directive towards a particular moment in the trajectory of globalization in India.

The call center industry has risen as part of the growing tertiary sector within the Indian economy. Globalization within the current Indian economy can be traced to liberalization in the early nineties, which replaced a former frugal, subsidized, and protected system with increased amounts of foreign investment and correlative consumerism. The GDP in the Indian economy has seen increasing contribution from the tertiary or service sector, and as yet there is little ethnographic work done on workers in this sector. Call center workers are positioned both as producers and consumers in this economy of consumption. They are recognized as an important driving force behind the consumerist wave, with an average salary equaling two and a half times as much as salaries in other job openings. A recent consumer and retail study also classifies youth between the ages of twenty to twenty–five as "Impatient Aspirers" whose population will surge to sixteen million across the next ten years. This study predicts that "BPOs[5] and retail will not only be the new income avenues... ," but also that "their top five spend areas will be eating out, books and music, consumer durables, apparel, movies, and theaters" (Mookerji 2004, 2).

I seek to investigate this phenomenon through case–studies of call center employees. The case–studies I use for the purpose of this paper are of youth

[3] http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/092403_ss3.html
[4] http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/07/26/cnna.nader/index.html
[5] Outfits engaged in 'Business Process Outsourcing' are often referred in popular media as BPOs.

identified by their association with call centers in Pune. I restrict these to Pune as this was the city where I spent maximum time on field, accompanying informants through their daily lives and schedules. The eighth largest city in India, Pune's population stands over 3.5 million with a literacy rate of over 75% (Population Census, India 2001). Once referred to as the "Oxford of the East," the city abounds in graduate and post–graduate institutions, with students from all parts of India vying for admission to the many prestigious colleges. The city also has created a network of support structures to accommodate its student population. This includes hostels, dormitories, paying guest accommodations, lunch homes, coffee–shops, shopping complexes, multiplexes, etc. A formerly sleepy city that also used to be known as the pensioner's paradise has been transformed with the Information Technology (IT) boom into a bustling near–metropolis. The city also currently boasts around ten to fifteen call centers, each employing anywhere from 100 to 3,000 employees and vying for infrastructure and attention along with various other IT outfits. The city has seen concurrent leaps in lifestyle with the proliferation of employment opportunities in the IT sector. The increase in call centers has also led to widening of the employee pool as the minimum requirement for employment in a call center is fluency in spoken English. English is taught on par with indigenous languages in most urban areas of India which, as mentioned earlier in this paper, is a very particular outcome of policies of language prioritization. Thus, based on their fluency and communicative ability in English, students now have either part–time or full–time jobs and can depend on these to tide them through expensive lifestyles and future savings. Predictably, there has been an upsurge in the number of retail outlets, entertainment complexes, and restaurants in this city of former Osho fame. Shopper's Stop, Piramyd's, Bombay Brasserie, Contemporary Arts and Crafts, and FabIndia, all sister concerns to their precursors in Bombay and other Indian metropolises, have opened shop here. In India the retail market is large with sales amounting to $180 billion and accounting for ten to eleven percent of the GDP. India has the largest retail outlet density in the world with close to ten million outlets. Retail also is the second largest source of employment after agriculture (Jhunjhunwala and Sood 2002). It is therefore no surprise that retailing has cropped up as an aftermath to the economic boom.

The irregular pace of development, though, has material ramifications. There are unfinished seams, unmanned infrastructure, and unplanned growth. Roads waver and meander, and movement is unrestricted by rules and lanes. Public transport here is fickle and sparse; most Puneites own two–wheelers, either motorbikes or un–geared scooters. Pollution rates are hence high and increasing by the day. Basic resources like electricity and water are

mismanaged and seasonally inaccessible. The city is at a crossing–point, a flux, trying to manage an old economy set–up with the accelerating pace of the new. Call centers are part of this juncture, this economic and infrastructural in–betweenness.

I meet most of my respondents at Barista outlets in Fergusson College Road and Mahatma Gandhi Road, the two areas that come closest to being classified as downtown. Activity areas however are not very starkly segregated and retail outlets, malls, coffee–shops, dental clinics, ophthalmologists, residences, and business offices all co–exist in coalitional harmony. Barista is the flagship brand of the Barista Coffee Company and refers to a chain of coffee–shops that have opened up all over India. The branches of Barista in both these areas are constantly full of a large number of young college students. The coffee shop has become a meeting place, parallel to the college parking space and canteen. Some try to study, but most just hang out and talk, flirt, and gossip. Unlike the college canteens which sell food and drink starting at prices of Rs. 5 ($0.1), the cheapest item here is Rs.20 ($0.5) and an average meal would cost Rs.100 ($2.5). This chain of coffee shops is generally crowded but maintains the policy of allowing patrons to occupy places for long periods of time even if they do not place an order. This is a novelty, especially in busy areas of the city where space is at a premium. What is also ironic is that a number of these have taken over the space formerly occupied by Irani cafes, the latter often fondly ridiculed for displays warning against loitering or spending long periods of time without ordering food. This then is my field site and this is the geographical space within which my protagonists weld, shape, and deploy their identities.

My first case–study is of an informant called Carmen. This is the name by which she used to be known at her workplace. It was not her first choice, she preferred Roxanne, but doesn't show much distress over either the inability to control this choice or the alienation of an undesired name. She refers to her American name as "hilarious" her only complaint being that "Carmen" was difficult to convey over the phone. Carmen worked at a call center for ten months beginning in the April of 2003 at the age of twenty–one. She had graduated right then and had nothing else to do. Along with friends of hers, she applied to an organization that had advertised through drop boxes around her college. All she says about her understanding of call centers is, "We just knew it was some kind of a telephone operator job. We were trying to be 'goody–goody,' we somehow got through...I think all the people who went there got through" (Carmen 2004). Carmen has been off the job for about six months when I interview her. She shows no trace of any American accent, if anything it has traces of regionality, albeit upper class. Other informants also talked about the de–emphasized accent modules during training and the

trainers only ask employees to concentrate on removing what is called Mother Tongue Influence (MTI), the ways of speaking English that are peculiar to certain regions of India. Carmen's company though, did stress the American accent as she was on a American–based process. "You are required to maintain that accent when in class and when on the job. In the beginning, we tried because it was exciting," she says (Carmen 2004). But she also claims that none of the training, either voice and accent or cultural acclimatization, is of much use on the floor or on live calls since the only thing that exists as of that moment is the business problem and ways of resolving it. Her time on the floor was stressful and disorienting. It also caused her health problems and emotional turmoil. Her first day was probably the worst with no amount of training allowing her the ability to understand the varied accents and problems.

What Carmen leaves unsaid is that the cultural imbalance is one of the reasons that process work proves stressful. The inability to understand different ways of speaking English, customer recognition that the calls are being answered in India, and the resultant dissatisfaction with service which translates onto the aforementioned factors and aggravates dissonance are all directly reflected onto the customer service person and his/her identity as a call center worker in India. As a result, the employee is made to face added responsibility in his/ her role as spokesperson for a company taking away jobs from the United States. In asking that the employee bear the company's name, the company also adds onto his/her new identity the burden of organizational baggage. Carmen responded to the stress by changing shifts from the night to the day and reducing her hours from eight to four. The part–time job caused her much less anguish. However, due to continuing health problems and increased stress, she left the industry in March 2004.

My second informant bears the professional moniker of Ray Marshall. He was nineteen years old when he started working in a call center. He is now twenty–two. Glib, confident, and aggressive, he revels in being an "outbound" telemarketing person in every call center that he has been employed with. Outbound callers or callers who solicit customers are expected to be aggressive and display an extroverted personality. He sleeps less than five hours a day and seems to personify the brand category of "Impatient Aspirer." He is polite, well–mannered, and well–networked. He is also an involved employee with opinions on every aspect of call center work, including the country that he deals with. In his opinion, America "is a completely different country altogether... You have to sound different. If you don't sound American, they'll never buy anything from you. If they know you're Indian, they start abusing you" (Marshall 2004). Yet, there is no accent that carried forward into our conversation. He does not worry about friends

teasing him when he slips into an American accent. According to him, "People say that you're showing off, but it's not showing off. If people tease me, then I don't care. I am being paid for my voice and accent. Who cares?" (Marshall 2004) He doesn't own his accent any more than he owns any other. Language to him is instrumental and he declares that "Nobody has a mother–tongue" (Marshall 2004). We talk about the system of credit ratings in the United States and how such a system might do India good, flirtatious customers, lonely callers, weird instances of persistent stalkers, and other such things. Ray enjoys talking and is a natural performer and salesman. All his cultural characterizations are made within the framework of the salesman–customer relationship. He believes that "America started out by wanting to be different, now they have become different" (Marshall 2004). Some of his comments I would consider downright racist, but I do not know what sense he makes of these outside the sales pitch or if they even extend into his structures of meaning in a culturally disparate milieu. For example, he says, "If you can sell to a US customer, you can sell to anyone. But if you can sell to an African American, you can definitely sell to anyone" (Marshall 2004).

Ray used to party a lot earlier in his call center career, but has now shifted from large crowds to more intimate gatherings of friends. He is single and the last girlfriend he was serious about was three years prior to the interview. He takes his work seriously and has been often able to go out of the suggested script to bring around irate customers. He hands over part of his income to his family and spends the rest on a cause that he did not want to talk about. He is considered successful within his family and has already begun to receive marriage offers. He is not interested in studying beyond his graduate degree. As of my interview date, he continued to work with the call center industry but is open to any other interesting offers. He wants to go abroad before the age of twenty–seven, but is not particularly enamored by American culture. His wish to travel, he claims, has more to do with an adventurous spirit than a particular predilection.

These are but two of my varied case studies and they are characterized as much by their different social backgrounds as by their orientation to call center work. Carmen belongs to an upper middle–class family and was in the industry until such time as being able to figure out what education or career to pursue. She detested the job and was highly affected by it; she was also encouraged by her parents to quit as and when she pleased. Ray belongs to a lower middle–class prosperous family with a business background. He joined the industry for a lark and stayed on because of the outlet it provided for his performative personality and also the social success that came with it. Both however had uniform image formations of the customers they served. They

reported having to deal with calls from "lonely crazy Americans" who "talk too much and will buy anything" and dealing with "polite Britishers" who "do not abuse as much as the Americans," "hardly talk" but "never buy anything." Across the board, they also identified their primary motivation as the money and the ability to work without having to satisfy the bourgeois rigmarole of post–graduate education. It is apparently the easy access and the high returns that form the crux of motivational factors to the call center industry.

I am interested in the hybrid registers of identity in these employees' varied roles within and without the physical space of a call center. In this instance, I engage with identity as part of a processual analysis, "a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the positions to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and perform these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time...." (Hall 1996, 14). I use the idea of identity being lodged in contingency to connect to its performativity, the notion of "...not 'who we are' or 'where we came from' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (Hall 1996, 4). I also follow Hall's contention that even though constructed in a fantasmic field, this processual understanding of identity "in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity" (Hall 1996, 4).

I identify this processual understanding and potential to contingency within the rate of attrition in the call center industry. Labor turnover is a defining problem faced by call centers in India; the official rate admitted to is between 30–40%, and the unofficial figure is estimated at 70%. I use attrition or the "act of leaving," as a decisive force that shapes and is shaped by multifaceted processes of identity formation and its management. My research identifies the individual's stance and bargaining power in the process of leaving the organization as "agentive moments." I analyze attrition in the following ways; as a sign of labor mobility, manifestation of cultural discomfort, and the outcome of an inherent paradox in the process of recruitment.

Identity in this research project is as embodiment of an ensemble of fragmented/fragmenting social relations and processes that are affected by and affect work in geographically and temporally disparate zones of production. I ground this analysis of identity in an understanding of its ability to weave between disorienting discourses of liberalization to forge mechanisms of habit change, one of which is manifested in the rate of attrition. I argue that disorientation engenders adjustment as opposed to outright rebellion. The adjustment must not be read as either opposition or interpellation but a state of constant movement in a shifting field–site. I am thus interested in the

appropriation and articulation of fragmenting conditions into visible forces of alignment. Attrition in this case is an "agentive moment" that must be deconstructed in terms of the ability of labor to be mobile. The characteristics of such mobility form a key part of my study.

Attrition has also been connected to the visibly "alarming"[6] effects of the call center job. These are usually described within the general category of health (physical and mental), personality changes and societal degeneration. Besides the implications of such views in local media projections, employees are also directly affected by international media outpourings and political propaganda (specifically those in the United States and the United Kingdom) that decry the practice of outsourcing as detrimental to their local economies. These views have immediate effect on employees in their having to handle abusive customer calls that place responsibility on individual workers as representatives of a predatory nation deploying insidious invasive tactics to further economic ends. It also has other effects, with the subject position defined not only by call center work but also the circulation of discourse. My research understands these discursive practices as symptoms of a larger cultural discomfort or a cultural hysteria. Even as I follow Showalter's definition of hysteria as "a form of expression, a body language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel" (Showalter 1997, 447) and as "a cultural symptom of anxiety and stress" arising from conflicts that are "genuine and universal" (Showalter 1997, 449), I use this diagnostic in an attempt to provide a theoretical framework to understand this site of the urban India landscape as an emergent entity within globalization.

Attrition is also strongly connected with a striking paradox in the logic of recruitment. Recruitment advertisements for call centers have common themes such as invocations of work culture in its gregariousness, openness, and flexibility. This or some variation of it is the opening gambit, further waxing eloquent on the minimum skill requirements and the luster of monetary awards. The employment need, that is, the need to deliver a particular kind of service within a tightly rule–bound environment is monologic, while the invitation, aiming to convey an impression of non–demanding work schedules and disproportionately high rewards carries within itself a notion of dialogism. My informants are well aware of the strenuousness of work as also the superficiality of "fun." Thus for them, the central communication message remains obscured between flippancy and opportunity. There is an

[6] "Alarming" in this context is in keeping with the apocalyptic tone of most public discourses that veer towards a negative assessment of call center work.

inherent paradox in demanding professionalism from workers hired on the incentive of "fun." The very existence of a large pool of homogenous workers paradoxically seems to contribute to the labor turnover. There is increasing demand for trained workers that also has begun to have effect on the salaries and incentives, resulting in a slow increase in labor costs. Human resource management personnel are constantly evolving ways to prevent customer service representatives from leaving as this entails considerable loss in having to replace a trained employee. They try and engage attention, temporarily relieving work stress through constant efforts at heightening the "fun" nature of the job. These include regular partying, outings, in–house games, incentivized competition, and other such diversionary moves. These token gestures do not however take away from the inherent monotony and demanding nature of the job and there are implications in the high labor turnover.

Within the eight hours that the employee is within the confines of the call center, he/she is subject to the rules and regulations of the outfit. These include not talking in any language besides English, adhering to time regulations, and following a dictated script while interacting with customers. Transgressions are often dealt with by middle and senior management through warnings and, very rarely, dismissal. Calls are recorded and monitored and quality teams often barge into calls while they are in progress. No personal calls or computerized communication are allowed while at work. Employees are also advised on optimizing output in spite of working on time schedules that contrast with normal body clocks. Working through the night demands a certain kind of discipline including food intake, regulation of activity schedules in the day time to compensate for lack of sleep in the nights, and a willingness to renounce social contact with networks outside of call centers.

Employees thus function within the limited scope offered within these structures of governance. The call center voice process might not be about a lived, physically confrontable identity as much as about a "voice on the phone," a disembodied service representative. But the service of the disembodied voice is considered to be a viable project only within the controlled framework of a "self" that acts and reacts in homogenized, rule–based, instrumental ways. The worker's presence must be appropriated and this appropriation is the object of trade as much as the service that it is trained to provide. Call centers are configured as modern–day portals aiming to orient workers into a different time and space while asking them to temporarily leave behind the reality of another. Bewilderment and disorientation are assuaged by high incomes and "upscaled" lifestyle benefits.

What workers are confronted with are antithetical tongues, contrasting the "professional" and "fun" aspects of the work, the former often greatly

outweighing the latter. The multiple voices here are not only the media, the nation and international opinion, and the guardians of tradition, but the work and the workers themselves. This then is the point where attrition manifests itself. Attrition is prime witness to their tendencies, indeed willingness, to leave. Employees shift between call centers for myriad reasons ranging from incentives, to work conditions, to something as arbitrary as a friend shifting to another call center. The entry barriers are low and horizontal mobility high.

Call center workers are articulate, confident, and aggressive in the manner of youth that do not have much at stake in any particular call center. They are uniformly of the view that the position of customer service executive is temporary at best and expedient at worst. They don't see themselves lasting in the same position beyond three years. Their motivation is mainly money, incentives, and ease of entry. There are also easy ways of maintaining a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption. A month at a call center can thus afford not only a better looking range of dating choices but also better brand of cell phones. However, motivations of call center workers cannot be reduced to the rhetoric of conspicuous consumption which I argue is a necessary but not sufficient understanding of structures of intent on this field–site. The work and incentives are but pit stops before moving on to higher education or better positions within the industry. The money that they earn helps them support themselves for a limited period of time and spend on a range of categories including clothes, books, investments, savings, further education, charity, and family support.

I extend my analysis of these practices to follow the argument that relates the logic of consumer capitalism itself to questions of identity. Shifting the framework to consumerism as a primary register of consumer capitalism, I ask for consumption to be recognized as an integral part of the same social system that accounts for the drive to work (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, viii). Consumption decisions, it has been argued, are the "vital source of the culture of the moment" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, 37). In "Shopping for Identity" Marilyn Halter follows the same thread by stating that modern identities are constructed through ever–malleable consumption, rather than through place–based production (Carveth and Carveth 2003, 445). Taking a cue from this location of modern identity formation in consumer capitalism, I link consumption patterns followed by workers and seek to relate these to their stints in call centers.

> *My analysis though is guided by an understanding of consumption as the very field that reorganizes the space of power and conflict.* I contend that the consumption trajectories of these workers are "ruses or interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by

> the systems in which they develop" (de Certeau 1988, xviii, italics mine).

In their constructions as consumers, they continue to draw skewed lines of consumption and refuse to conform to media constructs of debauched, alcohol–swigging young upstarts. The industry is but a stepping stone to their individual configurations of identity and desire. Ultimately, outside of these mechanisms of output, income, and spending, there is always the final option of either transferring or leaving.

My narrative stops at the point where the employee stops working. I have not followed their lives into schedules and aspirations much beyond the industry. In a sense, it is a kind of death, a non–narratability that challenges my framework. I have barely touched on the questions of class and gender. Even in the absence of these critical factors, I argue for the understanding of different registers of identity that work from within and without the physical premise of the organization and thus assert themselves as being able to live and leave national and international time and space. In the very in–betweenness of the call center, I conclude, is engineered the space of maneuver. My study thus problematizes call centers as economically viable transnational entities in which to reimagine globalization through the lens provided by this paradox and disjuncture.

My study is interested in the negotiations of identity that must be made to survive and flourish in this stereotypical site of global capitalism. My research is an attempt to understand call centers as part of a larger urban reality formed within a complex hieroglyphic inscribing urbanization, globalization and global capital in tension, collusion and coalition with the practices of the local. I classify my field–site as transnational while simultaneously acknowledging its situatedness in a particular geography. The assumption of culture as embedded within the nation–state as an immutable entity with a specific history and set of practices is inherent within the widespread agreement on "worldwide integration being accompanied by cultural and collective disintegration" (Benhabib 1997, 28). Identity politics or reengineered emphasis on the locality of identity and claims for its recognition are almost always argued within this matrix. On the other hand, reductive notions of culture also feed into the adjustment mechanisms of transnational investment, arguing local culture in terms of deterrent and obstacle to optimal and efficient output.

My research attempts to problematize all of the above. I contest the veracity of current strains of discourse for and against globalization—the former in terms of economic viability and long term sustainable development and the latter in terms of cultural schizophrenia and societal breakdowns. My

research is concerned with identity in this field–site as not only lodged in "contingency" but also formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways that it is represented and claimed. My field–site has the potential to re–imagine a radically different politics of engagement with the processes of transnational labor and global capital. The position I argue here is not encroachment and resistance but negotiation and contingency seen through the metaphor of "the world as a coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse" (Haraway 1988).

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Advaita Vedānta and Recent Debates Over Mystical Experience

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The emerging centrality of religious experience, and particularly mystical experience, is evident in traditions ranging from the Pentecostal movement to Tibetan and Zen Buddhism. Mysticism and mystical experience have evoked a variety of responses in the world's religious traditions. For some, it is the pinnacle of religious practice and the ultimate goal. For others it is a radical challenge that threatens doctrinal beliefs. The role of mystical experience may fall in many other categories; in some way however it is always addressed. This is also true for the modern study of religion which has attempted to define mystical experience, its causes and effects, its roles in different traditions, whether it is universal or not, its truth claims, and many other similar questions.

During the past few decades scholars of religion have taken a sharp turn in their perception of mystical experience. This is partly due to a seminal essay by Steven Katz in 1978 entitled "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." Katz effectively dismantled popular conceptions of mystical experience as the common universal of all traditions by arguing that all experience, including mystical experience, is mediated by one's cultural and religious background. The Katzian view quickly became the dominant understanding of mysticism within the academy, other scholars however, most notably Robert Forman, have offered critiques and exceptions to Katz's publications.[1] These primarily consist of deconstructing Katz's epistemological framework and/or claiming that a specific type of mystical experience, the "pure consciousness event," is a unique exception to Katz's claims. Both sides have labeled the other with (somewhat) accurate, yet

[1] This discussion has been addressed repeatedly in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

slightly pejorative, labels. Forman has been labeled as an "essentialist," while he has labeled Katz as a "constructivist."[2]

In this article I attempt to view the positions of both Katz and Forman through the epistemological and metaphysical framework of Advaita Vedānta. How does Advaita Vedānta's understanding of liberation (*mokṣa*) fit into the contemporary debates and theories surrounding the interpretation of mysticism? And is it proper to include Advaita Vedānta within the larger group of mystical traditions after examining its understanding of consciousness and liberation? After summarizing the constructivist, essentialist, and Advaitin views, I will compare the three in order to address the above questions. My intention is not to validate or invalidate Katz, Forman, or Advaita Vedānta, but rather to engage in a meaningful dialogue. Advaita Vedānta's dialogues should not be confined only to other Indian philosophies, for Western scholarship tends to dictate predominant modes of analysis. Stepping into a different system of epistemology can reveal unexamined axioms and presuppositions and offer potentially useful alternatives. This process works in both directions, illuminating prevailing Western theories and clarifying ambiguous issues in Advaita. Unfortunately, both generally stand in isolation and are taken for granted by their respective adherents.

THE CONSTRUCTIVIST POSITION

Defining "mystical experience" is notoriously as easy as defining "religion." Thus, it is not surprising that Katz does not attempt to define mystical experience. (Nor do I.) However, in "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" he unequivocally states his understanding of mystical experience, and does not deviate from this position in later articles.

In his essay, Katz states his primary thesis, which is worth seeing again.

> *There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences*. Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, *all* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. The notion of unmediated experience seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty (Katz 1978, 26).

[2] I am not sure whether Katz himself coined the term "essentialist" nor have I found him specifically responding to Forman's critique and using that term.

Katz believes that scholars should not simply use the background of a mystic, comprised of beliefs, worldviews, and practices, to understand the mystic's interpretation of the experience, but also recognize that the experience is informed, created, structured, and limited by the background. He writes:

> The Hindu mystic does not have an experience of x which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e. his experience is not an unmediated experience of x but is itself the, at least partially, pre-formed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman (Katz 1978, 26).

The constructivist thesis is a direct refutation of earlier scholars such as Rudolf Otto, W.T. Stace, R.C. Zaehner, and Evelyn Underhill, who believed in varying forms of perennial mysticism based on common cross-cultural phenomenological descriptions.

According to Katz, the failure to understand the specific cultural, historical, and religious backgrounds of individual mystics leads to distortions and false conclusions. Even though mystics may use similar terms to describe their experience, such as ineffable, paradoxical, and sublime, their experiences cannot be identical or have a common core (Katz 1978, 46). Katz argues that assuming a common core results from a superficial and distorted reading of this language without recognizing its specific contextual meanings. These descriptions are meaningless and empty when removed from their context. Furthermore, descriptions of mystical experience are so broad and vague that they can easily fit into different types of experience. Because the mystic's experience is dependent on prior concepts, images, symbols, and values that are unique in his or her life and tradition, the experience itself is also unique. Thus, mystical experience cannot be said to be the same for different mystics in different contexts.

Katz's belief that culture determines human experience leads him to a staunch pluralistic position. His emphasis is to carefully study specific mystical traditions in all their complexity without reducing them to fit into comparative or comparable categories. According to Katz, his method respects the richness of the traditions and avoids the reductionism of equating terms like "God," "*nirvana*" and "*Brahman*" (Katz 1978, 66).

Katz believes that mystical experiences cannot be truly verified and thus no veridical propositions can be based on them. Furthermore, the experience itself is not capable of asserting the nature of truth or reality, or a specific theological idea (Katz 1978). Katz does not deny that these experiences can and do occur or that their claims may match reality, nor does he wish to

reduce these experiences to "mumbo jumbo" or projected psychological states (Katz 1978, 23), but, in his opinion, questions about reality cannot be decided by the experience itself (Katz 1978, 22).

The logical implication of Katz's arguments naturally undermines and invalidates the truth claims that mystics make about their experience even though this may not be his intention. Many mystics claim that the object of their mystical experience is known without the imposition of their personal mediating conditions. To concede that the limited knower has shaped and constructed not only the perception of divinity or absolute truth, but also the very object, undermines the mystic's truth claim. For the object, by the mystic's definition, may be transcendent and untouched by the individual.

Katz accepts the fact that subjects have mystical experiences; however, he makes an important exception to the possibility of mystical experiences when he denies the occurrence of "pure" consciousness. He writes, "There is no substantive evidence to suggest that there is any pure consciousness *per se* achieved by these various, common, mystical practices, e.g. fasting, yoga, and the like" (Katz 1978, 57). This exception is the primary point of contention for the essentialists.

THE ESSENTIALIST POSITION

In 1990 Robert Forman edited and published *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*. This volume contains articles by various scholars, including Forman, and posed significant challenges to the constructivist view. Though they are not unified in their views, there is a general agreement that the constructivist model is inadequate and problematic. These articles cover a variety of topics such as western theories of epistemology, metaphysics, phenomenology, as well as varying mystical traditions in the East and West. Their arguments against constructivism in general, and against Katz in particular, can be divided into two broad categories: 1) Finding positive exceptions, namely pure consciousness events (PCEs), to Katz's strict and all encompassing thesis. 2) Attacking the explicit or implicit epistemological presuppositions of Katz's argument, and searching for contradictions, circular arguments, and other inconsistencies.

As the title suggests, one of the primary thrusts of the volume is the argument that the PCE is sensible and plausible. A PCE is basically a state in which one is awake and conscious though without any content. In this non-dual experience (otherwise known as *nirvikalpa samādhi* in Patañjali's Yoga) there are no concepts, thoughts, or memories, etc.

The first section of Forman's volume explores the PCE phenomenon in Meister Echart, Yogācāra Buddhism, Sāṅkhya Yoga, and Jewish mysticism.

Forman argues that the PCE is commonly reported in different traditions and scholars should give some respect and benefit of the doubt to the experiences that mystics claim to have. Even disregarding that benefit of the doubt, the PCE stands up to rational inquiry and must be accounted for in any theoretical analysis of mysticism. If the PCE is possible, and Forman certainly believes it is, then how can there be any cultural background constructing and informing the experience during the experience itself? Forman, Stephen Bernhardt, Philip Almond, R.L. Franklin, and Anthony Perovich all argue that there can be no mediation during the PCE because there is no differentiation that can make use of patterns, symbols, language etc. Even though the PCE may be considered the ultimate experience, as a state it is absolutely simple and lacks the complexity involved in constructed experience. The PCE is directly opposed to Katz's argument that every mystical experience is unique and constructed by prior concepts, and effectively negates him if true.

Although Katz does write that his model is Kantian,[3] his critics claim that he does not justify his epistemological stance or adequately explain it. He also does not show how mystical experience is constituted by a particular mystical tradition. What are the specific things that cause a specific experience and how can we verify that causal relationship? Is the relationship between expectation and experience necessary? Does a change in one's background effect every experience or just some? In fact the background of an individual is so broad and inclusive that it becomes indefinable and therefore trivializes the constructivist epistemology (Almond 1990).

The uncritical acceptance of a neo-Kantian model has led the constructivists to overlook the claims of mystics. In fact they also prejudge and invalidate those claims (Rothberg 1990). This is criticized as an "imposition of recent Western cultural assumptions upon those of other cultures and other epochs" (Rothberg 1990, 180), and is inherently contradictory to Katz's pluralistic study to see the differences in the traditions themselves.

Another problem the essentialists find is the constructivist's emphasis on the reconditioning nature of mystical traditions. According to constructivists, the tradition itself, in the form of scriptural texts, oral teachings, rituals, etc., supplies beliefs and practices that are formative and shape the mystical experience, thus no experience can occur prior to or outside of one's belief system. Perhaps most relevant for this study is Katz's understanding of language as a tool for reconditioning. This again is based on specific Western

[3] "The roots of my thinking on the nature and conditions of experience are Kantian, not Wittgensteinian" (Katz, 1988. p.757)

theorists (such as Derrida) and does not account for the way various traditions use language, as well as prescribe other activities, as a means to decondition and deconstruct culturally held notions.

Forman argues that the structure of Katz's argument is intrinsically flawed for he assumes what he sets out to prove (Forman 1990). His argument and evidence from different traditions is based on his *a priori* assumptions and thus does not establish them. In addition he does not account for many other exceptions. How do we explain the surprise mystics have over their experiences? Why do people have experiences that appear to contradict the expectations of their religious tradition? Why do people who are not involved with a tradition have spontaneous mystical experiences? Occasionally the experience itself produces the drive to engage in a religious practice and not vice versa.

The term "essentialist" is a slightly pejorative term that equates itself with earlier perennial universalists; however Forman and friends are proposing various forms of a more sophisticated theory of quasi universal mysticism. The PCE may not be common to all traditions, nor even the goal of them, yet it is found in some and therefore transcends the boundaries of cultural context. They do not all entirely disagree with Katz, but feel that his understanding is a set of assumptions that dismisses some vital aspects of mysticism. In doing so, not only does he end up in faulty reductionism but also does a disservice to these traditions (despite his effort to enrich them) and overlooks potential truths found through mystical experiences.

ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

In the following section I briefly explain some of the basic ideas of Advaita Vedānta relevant to the debates surrounding mystical experience. These are divided into three general areas: 1) The Advaita understanding of consciousness as the truth, ground, and reality of both the individual and empirical phenomena. 2) Some relevant topics of Advaita's epistemology. 3) The means the student uses in the pursuit of Self-knowledge. In each of these sections I highlight issues that reflect, reinforce, or reject constructionist or essentialist ideas.

Advaita Vedānta is a body of knowledge and a corresponding teaching methodology that unfolds the nature of reality. According to Advaita, the truth of the individual and the surrounding universe is a substrate non-dual

reality whose essence is pure consciousness (*cit*)[4] and existence (*sat*). This reality, termed *brahman*, is immanent in all forms but also transcendent and not limited by forms. *Brahman* is infinite (*ananta*), not contained by time and space, one without a second (*advitīya*), outside of any causality, and the totality of all existence.

Unfortunately, every individual is ignorant of this absolute reality. Due to ignorance (*avidyā)* the individual believes he or she is a finite limited being. The sense of limitation and mortality leads to a pursuit of wholeness, yet the solution is impossible through any activity. All actions are by nature finite, and thus cannot produce unlimited and infinite wholeness. Advaita Vedānta offers a radically different solution. No one can "become" infinite, but that is not necessary, for one's true nature already is, was, and will always be infinite *brahman*. The means is simply to remove ignorance through proper knowledge. This is done by differentiating one's self from the finite limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*) such as the mind and body and by revealing the non-dual nature of the self.

In response to the question "who are you?" one may reply "a student," "son," "husband," "a Hindu," "an American," etc, but these are simply relational identities. Just as defining a lamp as "that object in the corner" does not explain the luminous nature of the lamp, so too are these terms ineffectual at defining the person. A primary reflective process Advaita students undertake, in order to separate the self (*ātman*)[5] from the identification with the mind and body, is the "discrimination of the seer and the seen" (*dṛgdṛśyaviveka*). Advaita accepts the fundamental logic that in perception there is a duality between subject and object. The subject must be other then the object for it is illogical for the subject to share the same locus with the object during the same time.

Applying the subject/object duality to cognition, the student understands that whatever is objectified is other then the self. This is self evident in the perception of a table, for (almost) no one believes "I am the table." However this wisdom collapses towards the body even though I perceive my body. In contemplating this dilemma the student is reminded that the body changes yet the sense of self remains constant. Even if a body part like an ear or an arm is

[4] I prefer to use *cit* or *caitanyam* in place of consciousness (or awareness), for the English words have various connotations not present in the Sanskrit terms. Intentionality and the use of consciousness as thought are primary examples. For the sake of simplifying the discussion I will use the English term.

[5] In Vedanta *ātman* and *brahman* are synonymous. Usually *ātman* is used from the perspective of the individual while *brahman* is used from the perspective of the total universe. Ultimately they are identical.

lost, the self is not lost with it. The discrimination is then applied to the sense organs and the body's physiological processes. Ultimately the self is reduced to the mind, but in contemplation the student finds that all cognition, memory, and emotion is known and thus the mind is also an object. Therefore the subject must be other then the mind.

Through this process of negation, false identities are stripped away until only the subject, the true self, is left. This self, according to its true nature, by definition never exists as an object and simply stays as the witness consciousness (*sākṣin*). Through this process, the student is able to appreciate the mind as an object and also recognizes that the true subject is nothing but pure consciousness, the ground and basis of all experience. The Advaitin's understanding of the *sakṣin* comes from numerous areas in the Upaniṣads as well as Kṛṣṇa's explanation of the field (*kṣetra*) and knower of the field (*kṣetrajña*) in chapter thirteen of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. One example in the *Kena Upaniṣad* is the following:

> Since He is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the Life of life, and the Eye of the eye, therefore the intelligent men after giving up (self-identification with the senses) and renouncing this world, become immortal (KU 1.2).

Before proceeding to the importance of the *sākṣin* in the larger metaphysical and epistemological vision of Advaita Vedānta we should note some basic differences with Katz. For Advaita Vedānta, consciousness exists independently and is something other then the mind, consisting of the intellect, thought, memory, and the sense of "I." In fact (as we will see) the Advaitin's concept of mind is wholly dependent on consciousness. Katz would clearly find this an unacceptable position, and his epistemology itself must rule this out on *a priori* grounds.

The process of *dṛgdṛśyaviveka* is specifically designed to decondition the student from longstanding self identities. In doing so the student steps outside of her culturally conditioned box. Advaitins do not consider this reconditioning as Katz does, for it is a process of negation rather then a positive accumulation of identity. One may argue that moving one's identity from the mind and ego (*ahamkāra*) to the *sākṣin* is a form of reconditioning; however this misunderstands the nature of Advaita's *sākṣin*. The *sākṣin* is present as the ground of experience at all times and this includes the experience of the mind as one's self. *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka* does not introduce the *sākṣin* to the student as a new entity, but rather indicates what has always and necessarily existed as the subject. In the disassociation of identity there is also a parallel deconstruction of cultural constructs. For those constructs

require an identity as a locus to cling to. The process is to be viewed as negative rather then positive conditioning.

The *sākṣin* has a unique epistemological status, for even though it can never be objectified because it is always the subject, it is also never unknown. It is illogical to question whether one exists, for one must exist in order to question. Yet the existence, which is pure consciousness, is not objectifiable. If pure consciousness were to be known by something else, or needed a second awareness in order to be illumined, it would pose an unsolvable problem, for that second awareness would also need a third awareness for its luminosity, and the third, a fourth, leading to an infinite regress. This is not a dilemma for the Advaitin, who understands the self to be self-luminous (*svayam jyotiḥ* or *svayam prakāśaḥ*).[6] Śaṅkara, the famous Vedāntin from the seventh or eighth century, writes the following in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*:

> Whatever is perceived is perceived through the light that is Brahman, but Brahman is not perceived through any other light, It being by nature self-effulgent (B.S.Bh. 1.3.22).

Consciousness reveals both the object and the cognition and does not need its own existence revealed. Therefore its existence is self-evident and does not require a proof to be established. Just as consciousness is self-evident, it is also self-existent because it does not depend on anything else.

The self-luminous nature of the self is a defining feature of the Advaitin's epistemology. Whenever a thought arises in the form of a mental modification (*vṛtti*) it is immediately known. A cognition does not require another for its revelation. If so, then the second would require a third, leading to an infinite regress. The *sākṣin* simply illumines cognition without becoming a cognition itself. Advaita delineates two major processes in knowledge. The mind first encompasses and takes the form of the object. This is called *vṛtti vyāpti*. The thought modification is then illumined by the *sākṛin* on the screen of the mind, an event called *phala vyāpti*.

As Bina Gupta writes, "*Sākṣin* in other words, is a form of apprehension that is direct, non-relational, nonpropositional, and nonevaluative in both cognitive and practical affairs. It is the basis of all knowledge" (Gupta 1998,

[6] The nature of the *sakṣin* and its self-luminous nature is explained in numerous places by Śaṅkara. One example is *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.7

5).[7] The immediate illumination of cognition and the fact that another cognition is not necessary show that at a certain point there is no mediation in knowledge. If we posit mediation as an intrinsic aspect of knowledge it will fall to the fallacy of an infinite regress. The *sākṣin* contradicts Katz, not only as pure unmediated consciousness, but also as the fundamental principle underlying and illumining cognition in an immediate, direct, and unmediated way.

The fact that the *sākṣin* is other than and illuminating the mind is further explained by *cidābhāsa* (the reflection of consciousness). The mind is considered incredibly subtle (*sūkṣma*). This is evident is its transparency, flexibility, and its ability to quickly and easily take the shape of different objects. Due to the mind's nature it appears to reflect the luminous nature of the *ātman*. For example, on a sunny day there is sunlight everywhere, but only a special surface like a pond or a mirror reflects the light of the sun. A dull rock also is in contact with sunlight but does not reflect it in the same luminous way. In reality, the light reflected in the mirror is completely dependent on the sun, but not vice versa. Similarly, the mind's special nature as thought reflects the light of consciousness and is completely dependent on consciousness.

In the process of understanding the Vedāntic vision, the *sākṣin* provides only a temporary understanding of one's self. The concept of a "witness" is built upon the duality of subject and object, a duality that is literally antithetical to Advaita. The challenge for the student is to understand how pure consciousness is the reality of all names and forms and how the duality of experience is ultimately false.

Through a variety of explanations (which are beyond the scope of this paper) Advaitins conclude that the existence of any object is actually independent from the form of the object. Existence itself is an independent reality not subject to space or time and therefore cannot be objectified as an object. This sounds similar to pure consciousness because they are in fact one and the same. Because the self is self-evident and self-existent it cannot be broken down into anything else. If the self is self existent, it is also outside of change. Change cannot exist by itself for it is an effect that requires a separate cause. If the self is independent of change it is also independent of time. Advaita Vedānta considers time and space to be co-dependent entities, so what is outside of one must be outside of the other, thus the *ātman* is also independent of space. It is for this reason that the self can never be

[7] See Gupta 1998. She gives a detailed explanation of the *sakṣin*, its importance in Advaita's epistemology, as well as its potential importance for Western philosophy.

objectified, for it is not in a specific place and never has any form. *Ātman*, as pure consciousness and existence,[8] is all pervasive, not only as the content of all form, but at the absolute principle that "contains" space and time.[9]

The earlier analogy of the pond and sun fails to explain the all-pervasive nature of consciousness. Here Advaita Vedānta gives the example of the space within a pot. For practical purposes one can talk of the space in one pot as separate from the space in another pot. But what separates the space in the pot from the other spaces? Anything causing a separation is also within space. In reality there is only one non-dual space, which we choose to identify in different locations for practicality. Similarly one can speak of an individual's consciousness rather then pure consciousness, but in reality consciousness is still all-pervasive.[10]

Advaita Vedānta does not intend the discussion of consciousness to be an interesting attempt at speculative philosophy or a simple set of unverified beliefs. The tradition holds a pragmatic and deep commitment towards liberation (*mokṣa*), a goal that is synonymous with self-knowledge. In terms of knowledge, the Advaitin's conception of consciousness poses some apparent paradoxes. How can one know that which by definition is never an object? Śaṅkara is adamant that "Brahman's relation with anything cannot be grasped, it being outside the range of sense perception. The senses naturally comprehend objects, and not Brahman" (B.S.Bh. 1.1.2).

Advaita distinguishes six valid means of knowledge (*pramānas*), and does not propose any other legitimate spiritual or empirical *pramānas*. The six *pramānas* are perception, inference, comparison, postulation, non-cognition, and word (or sound).[11] Perception requires that the subject, within a dualistic framework, objectifies an object. *Brahman* is non-dual and cannot be known as an external object; therefore, self-knowledge cannot be gained

[8] From this discussion it should be evident that consciousness and existence are not two separate attributes of the self, but rather the nature (*svabhava*) of the self by definition. In this understanding they both collapse into the same absolute principle.

[9] From the stand point of *brahman* there is no inside or outside or containing, but space and time have a dependent (*mithyā*) reality on *brahman*.

[10] See Śaṅkara on B.S.Bh. 1.2.6. for an example of his use of the space in the clay pot analogy.

[11] It is important to note here that these are the only means of knowledge. Advaita does not accept any other forms of yogic or mystical knowledge. This is at least true in Śaṅkara's writing as well as those of other major figures in Advaita Vedānta's history. One may argue that in the legends of Śaṅkara for example, there are stories of special Yogic powers of knowledge. Even if we take these into account (though it is problematic to accept legends that may have been created for reasons other then explaining the knowledge), they are still useless as a means for knowing *brahman* for they are based on knower/known duality.

through perception. Inference, comparison, postulation, and non-cognition all depend on perception as their source of primary data and are thus dependent on perception. If there is no perceptual data of *brahman*, then inference and the other *pramānas* cannot reveal *brahman*.

The only other *pramāna* left to consider is *śabda* (word). According to Advaita Vedāntins the *śabda pramāna*, in the form of the Vedas (otherwise known as *śruti* or *śāstra*) is the source of knowledge for *Brahman* and the identity between one's self and *brahman*. As Śaṅkara comments:

> The realization of Brahman results from the firm conviction arising from the deliberation on the (Vedic) texts and their meanings, but not from other means of knowledge like inference etc. (B.S.Bh. 1.1.2).

Advaita Vedānta considers the Vedas, including the later portions, the Upaniṣads, to be revealed texts that are unique for their knowledge leading to liberation. The Vedas are also a source for different rituals and their results. Using words to reveal the nature of *brahman* sounds even less likely then the use of perception, especially when Advaita says words can only denote characteristics such as species, attributes, actions, and relations. *Brahman* does not fall under any of these categories and must logically be outside the range of words. The Advaita teacher resolves this dilemma by skillfully wielding the words of the Upaniṣads to unfold the nature of *brahman*. This special use of language as a teaching method is perhaps the most important (and unfortunately often overlooked) feature of Advaita Vedānta.

The teacher wields words in a number of specific ways in order to help the student understand. These include *adhyāropa* (superimposition) and *apavāda* (desuperimposition), *neti neti* (negation), and various forms of *lakṣana* (implication) (Rambachan 1991). Negation is an important part of the methodology, and examples of it abound in the Upaniṣads. The *Bṛhadāranyaka* expresses this:

> This self is That which has been described as "Not this, not this." It is imperceptible, for it is never perceived; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it is never attached (Bṛ.U. 3.9.26).

Negation is used to remove superimpositions of the self from various *upādhis* as in the *dṛgdṛśyaviveka*. It is easy to falsely assume that Advaita Vedānta's method is only a process of simple negation (*neti neti*). However, negation is not used alone. Negation should not be viewed as a simple process, but rather as a complex one which incorporates all the other methods. As Michael Comans comments:

> It is true that for Śaṅkara the Upaniṣads culminate in the statement "neti neti" which negates all superimpositions in their entirety. But the negation itself functions in the context of *lakṣaṇā*, for our ignorance of something cannot be removed without pointing out the nature of the thing about which there is ignorance (Comans 2000, 289).

Negation alone can lead the student to the *sakṣin*, but this is not enough. *Neti neti*, if misunderstood, can also lead to absolute nihilism. Along with, and as an intrinsic part of *neti neti*, *lakṣana* is necessary to indicate the nature of the self through secondary and implied meanings of words. This is accomplished by employing forms of verbal juxtaposition to remove incorrect meanings and assumptions, while allowing the correct ones to remain.[12] An example of *lakṣana* is Śaṅkara's interpretation of the verse in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.2.1: "Brahman is reality, knowledge, and infinite" (*satyam jñānam anantam brahma*). Knowledge, when equated to *brahman*, is implied to be eternal, pure consciousness, and does not refer to the division of knower and known. In this verse, the Upaniṣad immediately follows knowledge with infinite to show the implied meaning and negate the possible misconception that knowledge is the limited knowership of a person or a finite modification of the intellect.[13]

Through using these various verbal means, the Upaniṣads give knowledge of the *ātman* as the infinite self-luminous *brahman* and remove all the superimpositions obstructing the student's understanding. An important point to note is that this knowledge is possible because *brahman* is not a distant object. *Brahman* is immediate (*aparokṣa*) and shines as one's own self. By removing ignorance, all the false superimpositions are also removed, and the self is directly known in its fullness. Technically the knowledge does not "light up" *brahman*, but removes the ignorance that has a positive existence. If *brahman* were not naturally immediately self evident then it would forever remain unknown as an unobjectifiable entity.

A crucial topic in Advaita Vedānta's soteriology is the role of experience in gaining knowledge. According to Śaṅkara, experience has no place in

[12] See Comans 2000, 288-300 for a detailed discussion of *lakṣana*. Also see Anantanand Rambachan, 1991.

[13] Another classic example of *lakṣana* is Śaṅkara on the verse "tat tvam asi" in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7

knowledge.[14] Experience is a form of action, and actions can be divided into four types. They can produce, modify, obtain, or purify something. However *brahman* cannot be produced, because all products are subject to change, and thus are impermanent. If *brahman* is produced it is impermanent, and would not exist before its production. Nor can *brahman* be modified or purified for it stands outside of change. The individual cannot gain *brahman*, for this presupposes a subject/object duality. *Brahman* would then be finite for it would be other then the individual.[15] Gaining one's own self is an illogical proposition.

One may object that the above argument is not dealing with experience, for experience is in relation to the individual and not *brahman*. This is still problematic, for "experience" in English has implicit intentionality and always presupposes duality.[16] With reference to the individual, Advaita makes a clean distinction between action and knowledge. When the *pramāna* is correctly aligned with the object, knowledge automatically and immediately takes place. Action may be necessary to properly align the *pramāna*, but this is separate from the knowledge itself. For example, in viewing an object there must be light and the object should be lined up with the eye without any obstructions. If the eyes are healthy and open the knowledge of the object simply takes place. The actions of opening the eyes, wearing glasses, turning the head, etc. are not knowledge, nor do they create knowledge, but help knowledge take place by properly setting up the apparatus for knowledge. The important feature here is that for Advaita Vedānta, knowledge does not depend on the person (*puruṣatantra*) but on the object itself (*vastutantra*). Śaṅkara writes:

> Options depend on human notions, whereas the valid knowledge of the true nature of a thing is not dependent on human notions. On what does it depend then? It is dependent on the thing itself. For an awareness of the form, "this is a stump, or a man, or something else," with regard to the same stump cannot be valid knowledge. In such a

[14] Recently there has been some debate over the role of experience for Śaṅkara, primarily because of his use of the word "*anubhava*" in his commentary of the Brahma Sūtras (see B.S.Bh. 1.1.2). I believe Śaṅkara, as well as his disciples Padmapāda and Sureśvara unequivocally rejected experience as a means of knowledge (though this issue is a little ambiguous with some later Advaita Vedāntins). See Comans 2000; Rambachan 1991; Rambachan 1994; and Halbfass 1988.

[15] Śaṅkara explains these problems in his commentary on Brahma Sūtra 1.1.4. Also see his introduction to *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.3.

[16] When Śaṅkara uses the term "*anubhava*" he is referring to direct and immediate knowledge where there is no intentionality.

> case the awareness of the form, "This is a man or something else" is erroneous, but "This is a stump to be sure" is valid knowledge; for it corresponds to the thing itself. Thus the validity of the knowledge of an existing thing is determined by the thing itself. This being the position, the knowledge of Brahman also must be determined by the thing itself, since it is concerned with an existing reality (B.S.Bh. 1.1.2).[17]

The dependence of knowledge on the object excludes mental activities like meditation (*dhyāna*) or *upāsana* as an independent means to knowing *brahman* (Rambachan 1991). Vedānta places a strong emphasis on meditation as a means for gaining mental purity (*antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi*) but not for knowledge. *Antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi*[18] is a necessary prerequisite for allowing self knowledge to take place. Without it the mind is unable to comprehend the *śāstra*. This is analogous to attempting to hold hot coals with newspaper rather than a metal container. The student may incorporate a number of methods in order to achieve mental purity, including *Hatha Yoga*, *prānayāma*, forms of meditation, ritual worship, and even psychotherapy in the modern context. These mental processes (or bodily processes which effect the mind) are strictly for aligning the mind towards knowledge and are other than and subservient to knowledge. The actual knowledge occurs when the *vṛtti* is illumined by the *sakṣin*, an event that is considered intransitive and nonintentional.

Self knowledge occurs through a special cognition called the *akhaṇḍa ākāra vṛtti*.[19] The *akhaṇḍa vṛtti* does not objectify *Brahman*, but objectifies the meaning of the *śāstra*. In this cognition the *vṛtti* pervades the *lakṣaṇa* meaning of the *Upaniṣads* (specifically a *mahāvbākya* like "*tat tvam asi*"), that the knower/known difference is really just pure consciousness. Unlike other cognitions, there is no *phala vyāpti*, where the *vṛtti* is illumined by the *sakṣin*. This is a unique case where the *vṛtti's* content cancels out the knower. The content of the *akhaṇḍa vṛtti* is not an object, but is simply the self so the subject/object duality of the witness is cancelled at the same time.[20] There is no necessity to illumine ones true self, as one might illumine a pot in

[17] Also see B.S.Bh. 3.2.21.
[18] *Antahkaraṇa śuddhi* is a necessity for gaining the qualification for knowledge (*adhikaritvam*). *Adhikaritvam* consists of *viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śamadamādiśatkasampattiḥ*, and *mumukṣutvam*. Assimilation of values, non injury, empathy…etc. are also all included.
[19] See Vedānta Sāra 170-180.
[20] See Pañcadaśī 7.91-94.

perceiving a pot, for the self is naturally self luminous and shining in all experience and cognition.

COMPARISON

In the preceding section I have outlined some important issues in Advaita Vedānta's understanding of consciousness, the role of consciousness in liberation, and the means for gaining self knowledge. The brevity of my explanation has left many important topics explained inadequately, but my main points are to emphasize the importance of language as a means of knowledge, the crucial differentiation between knowledge and experience, and the necessity of self-luminous awareness to hold together the entire epistemological framework. It is among these issues that the Advaitin would have some minor points of agreement and some major points of contention with both the constructivist and essentialist paradigms.

In Katz's earlier work he does not deal explicitly with Advaita Vedānta, and tends to include it with other traditions. This can be problematic at times, however in a recent article he demonstrates more understanding of Advaita's use of language (Katz 2000). Here he notes the importance Śaṅkara places on exegesis, the use of implied language (*lakṣaṇa*), and the use of paradoxes as a teaching tool with certain coherent and logical functions (Katz 2000, 48-50). Katz's effort to see exegetical traditions on their own terms affirms one of the benefits of a pluralistic method. While a Advaitin might appreciate this effort, he or she would still militate against Katz's underlying understanding, for the *śabda pramāna* is not designed simply to recondition or build new contexts upon older ones; rather it is designed to remove false superimpositions. Ultimately language cannot positively shape self-knowledge, for the self is not an object. This conflict with Katz is not surprising, for the Advaitin's use of language is built around the ontological and epistemological constant of the self-luminous *ātman*, a principle that is not part of Katz's epistemology.

At other times Katz makes some strong statements about Śaṅkara's exegesis that I believe are overstated. In the context of Śaṅkara (as well as others) he assumes:

> While these esoteric modes of interpretation are made to yield many exotic theological fruits, speculative flights of metaphysical and transcendental reconstruction, and even, on occasion, deviant and revolutionary religious teachings, the inner drive, that which generates and compels their applications, is a profound desire to maintain the authoritative, original revelation of the (diverse) traditions (Katz 2000, 25).

With reference to Śaṅkara, how does Katz make these assumptions? How is his exegesis "exotic?" Certainly many people do not agree with his interpretation of the Upaniṣads, but this is a thorny issue to take sides. Which aspects of his metaphysics are speculative flights? And how is Śaṅkara deviant or revolutionary? Śaṅkara himself refers to his own teacher and the long lineage that came before him. His intention is not to deviate but to pass down what was taught to him. It is certainly true that Śaṅkara and the Advaita tradition places heavy importance on maintaining the tradition and the necessity of studying with proper teachers. Otherwise the student will not receive the *śabda pramāna*. The words may still be there, but the words become hollow and inefficacious when improperly explained. What may appear to be subtle nuances to the outsider are actually obvious usages for the insider. It is for this reason that Advaita Vedānta stresses the need for accurate transmission of the tradition, otherwise the tradition will become diluted and empty. One may argue that the tradition holds the Vedas and the teaching methodology sacred (and even deifies people such as Śaṅkara) simply for the sake of perpetuating rigid orthodoxy. This may have some truth in it, but misses the importance that Advaitins genuinely place on words as a specific source of knowledge and the corresponding teaching method as the only means of liberation, rather than a means of defending the tradition.

It is also problematic to assume in the context of Advaita Vedānta that in order to defend a text, exegetes "find 'higher' meanings in the text, and in its accompanying tradition, than a cursory or literal reading would reveal" (Katz 2000, 25). This is a sweeping negation of verbal teaching techniques in Advaita Vedānta and also would render much of the Upaniṣads as gibberish, for how could one interpret and unfold the many apparent paradoxes in the texts? Relying solely on "cursory" and "literal" meanings of texts is an oversimplification of reading texts. Despite Katz's avowed pluralistic position, he tends to still make broad generalizations about the relationship between the world's traditions and their sacred texts and their interpretations of the texts.

The question of experience is perhaps most important for the present dialogue. Advaita Vedānta is not necessarily averse to all mystical experiences. In fact it is possible, even likely, that many Advaita practitioners undergo mystical experiences. The various forms of meditation, *upāsana*, chanting, ritual, fasting, and difficult ascetic practices may lead to a variety of experiences. These experiences may be quite helpful and lend inspiration in the arduous path of a spiritual pursuit. At the same time, Advaita Vedānta is careful to separate these experiences from knowledge. This separation includes the pure consciousness event (PCE), otherwise known as *nirvikalpa*

(or *asamprajñatā*) *samādhi* in Patañjali's Yoga philosophy. From the Advaita Vedāntin's view they would agree with Katz that "no veridical propositions can be granted on the basis of mystical experience (Katz 1978, 22).

Advaita Vedānta, in no way, equates the PCE with self-knowledge.[21] Unfortunately the *akhaṇḍa ākāra vṛtti* has lent itself to some significant misunderstandings of Advaita Vedānta. In describing the nature of the event, one can say that this cognition destroys the mind or cancels out the knower, or that the tripartite distinction of knower, instrument of knowledge, and known, all collapse into one non-dual consciousness. These statements are quite accurate, but they refer directly to an epistemological understanding and not necessarily to a phenomenological experience. Śaṅkara always describes liberation as a cognitive understanding and not an experience or state of mind. Furthermore, I believe that at no time does Śaṅkara describe his own phenomenological experience. This is true not only because the Indian traditions in general value the authority of a sacred text over the personal experiences of an individual, but more importantly because Śaṅkara does not understand liberation to be an experience. His statements are either referring to the epistemological or ontological status of the *ātman*. In fact both these standpoints tend to coalesce into one another.

As noted earlier, Śaṅkara asserts the futility of mental action, such as meditation, to experience or cognize *brahman*. There is no contacting the divine in the form of *brahman* (as Otto or Eliade might claim). Against this, one may argue that the PCE is not an action for there is no duality or intentionality during the event. In response, the Advaitin will question how knowledge can then occur. He may admit that *nirvikalpa samādhi* is the most exalted accomplishment within normal means and ends, but is not *mokṣa* because no proper means of knowledge is working. The duality of knower and known collapses during deep sleep. Even between each thought there is a silent gap where there is no duality, but people do not gain knowledge by sleeping or from the gap between thoughts.

As in natural slumber and *samādhi* (asorption in divine consciousness), though there is a natural eradication of differences, still owing to the persistence of the unreal nescience, differences occur over and over again when one wakes up (B.S.Bh. 2.1.9).

If ten people have the same *samādhi* experience they will arise from it still ignorant of *brahman*. They will also simply interpret that experience

[21] The Advaitin's issue with the PCE is still an issue. Of particular importance is the necessity some neo-Vedānta systems place on *nirvikalpa samādhi*. This has placed them at odds with Śaṅkara and the Advaita tradition. For a more detailed discussion see Comans 1993, n.1.

according to prior beliefs (a type of partial interpretive constructivism). If these interpretations are different and/or mutually contradictory, then how can one make truth claims based on the experience? Extinguishing thoughts is only a temporary state of mind. At some point thoughts will resurface in the mind and the experience will be over. Advaita Vedāntins consider all states or experiences impermanent, and therefore they do not constitute liberation. The point is that one need not suspend structures of reality and experience, but should see through these structures with knowledge. An example is the rising and setting sun. We understand that the earth is actually rotating, but even with this knowledge the sun still appears to rise and set. We do not require the felt sense of the earth rotating in order to comprehend the sun's lack of movement. In the same way, the mind can be "destroyed" or "collapsed" through knowledge without the mind ceasing to function. For Advaita Vedānta, there is no need to transcend the mind, empty the mind, or allow it to settle into a perfectly quite state of non-duality, for the self as the nature and ground of experience is always self-shining regardless of one's mental state and is understood as the essence of every thought.[22] At the same time Advaita Vedānta does not occlude the occurrence of the PCE, which could occur as a result of meditation practices or perhaps as a byproduct of self-knowledge. In fact *nirvikalpa samādhi* is a wonderful event and requires incredible discipline, control, and mental purity.[23]

Advaita Vedānta accepts the possibility of the PCE and thus supports the essentialist's primary objection to Katz's position. The possibility of an unmediated non-dual state in which by definition there cannot be any background or cultural constructs contradicts the constructivist position. Advaita Vedānta also accepts that this can occur for different people from divergent traditions. The PCE however, only has secondary importance in Advaita, and a student can understand *brahman* with total clarity without the PCE. In other words, the PCE has no noetic value. Considering this issue, I believe that while Advaita Vedānta does agree with Forman that the PCE is a counterexample to Katz, Advaita Vedānta should not be included among other mystics without stipulations. Unfortunately, Śaṅkara is repeatedly considered a recipient of mystical experiences along with Sufi, Yogic, and Buddhist

[22] See Śaṅkara on *Kena Upaniṣad* 2.4. pratibodhaviditaṃ matam amṛtatvaṃ hi vindate, ātmanā vindate vīrya vidyayā vindate 'mṛtam.

[23] *Samādhi* can be considered the highest human accomplishment by independent means, but (infinitely) lower then self knowledge which is directly received through the Vedas. It is not a problem to work for *samādhi*, but it has to be understood properly. For Advaitins there is the danger of accomplishing *samādhi* and confusing that with self-knowledge. Not only is one still in *samsāra* then, but has deceived one's self and undermined the entire pursuit.

mystics. Forman writes in his introduction: Such authors as Eckhart, Dogen, al-Hallaj, Shankara, and Saint Teresa of Avila (when she describes nonsensory union) exemplify "mysticism" as I intend it (Forman 1990, 7). Even though this is not necessarily inaccurate (we do not know whether Śaṅkara had such experiences) and Forman does not claim that the PCE is the goal of all traditions, still, his assumption points to basic misconceptions with reference to Advaita soteriology. In fact, I would go so far as to question whether Advaita Vedānta would even consider itself a "mystical" tradition. Perhaps in the Advaitin's opinion there is nothing mystical at all about self-knowledge. To Katz's credit, in a recent work he does recognize that Śaṅkara is not dealing with experience but knowledge derived from exegesis (Katz 2000, 37), however in his earlier influential studies he does not make this distinction and repeatedly refers to the "experience" of *brahman*. The essentialists can use Advaita Vedānta to back their claim that pure consciousness exists, but should do so only from the ontological standpoint divorced from any phenomenological claims.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the fundamental level, Advaita Vedānta is opposed to Katz's view because the Advaita's understanding of non-dual consciousness is unacceptable to Katz. Advaita Vedānta supports the essentialists, for pure consciousness exists and PCEs are viable experiences independent of their respective traditions. Katz is correct in focusing attention on Śaṅkara's exegesis and away from experience, but Advaita disagrees with his belief that language can only construct and condition experience. Instead, Advaita supports the essentialist view that language can decondition through various verbal methods. In the context of self-knowledge there are no set structures or limiting parameters that create an expected knowledge. Knowledge is not a creation, but the removal of ignorance, which is in the form of covering the *ātman's* true nature and projecting the superimposition of one's self on to the mind and body. Nor are there expectations of knowledge that create an experience (except for the misinformed), for self knowledge is inconceivable outside of itself and there are no phenomenological descriptions of the knowledge event. Advaita Vedānta's separation of knowledge and experience removes the importance of the PCE and supports Katz's refutation of the noetic quality and truth claims of mystical experience; however Katz would probably argue that Advaita Vedānta's truth claims are also false. Like the essentialist, the Advaitin polemicist would probably question the fundamental tenets of Katz's Kantian episteme and consider the *a priori* refutation of pure consciousness as fallacious reasoning. The underlying difference falls upon

the self-luminous nature of the *ātman*, which is the axis of Advaita Vedānta's epistemology and their use of language as a *pramāna*. Any phenomenological, epistemological, or exegetical comparison attempted without recognizing the importance of this constant principle is fundamentally misconstrued.

From following this dialogue we find that we cannot only compare anecdotal accounts of mystical experience, nor can we simply analyze a tradition's use of their sacred text or view another tradition without questioning our own presuppositions. Perhaps more importantly, we require a careful analysis of the metaphysical and epistemological issues that each tradition addresses. Of course this leaves us in a grand (though not original) dilemma, for how can we find a common method to look cross culturally? While my paper suggests the importance of philosophical pluralistic inquiry, if we drop the comparative pursuit we fall into radical cultural relativism. Perhaps one temporary solution to maintain fruitful comparative work is to engage in a dialogue where the scholar accommodates or (even better) steps into the "other" tradition's framework to gain the insider viewpoint as well as a reflexive understanding of one's own position. Though this approach limits the scholar to a small number of traditions it is still both intellectually honest and enlightening.

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Yama's Contemporary Influence in Some Regions of Rājasthān and Uttar Pradeś: Yamarāj kī jay

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For several years now, I have been extremely interested in the history of the deity Yama, a god of the dead. Although never one of the most important Indian deities, he is a god who has survived through at least four thousand years of India's constantly evolving religious thought and philosophy. By examining the history of this deity through texts ranging from the *Vedas* to the *Purāṇas*, a scholar is able to illustrate how this deity has changed over time and suggest various reasons for the changes which have occurred in both his character and function (reasons such as the influence of Buddhism, the gradually increasing importance of Kṛṣṇa in Indian religions, etc.), but some major questions are left unanswered.

What do people think of Yama now? In the modern age, does he continue to wield any significant influence within the general Indian mind?

Because little attention has been paid this deity in contemporary scholarly works, I once thought that perhaps Yama was a god soon to follow his subjects to the grave. C. J. Fuller's *The Camphor Flame*, a text on popular Hinduism, only mentions that Yama governs an inauspicious part of the day which "is not necessarily taken very seriously" (Fuller 1992, 242). Diana Eck's famous *Banaras: City of Light* repeatedly mentions Yama as the "frightful" god of death who is not allowed within the borders of Banaras (Eck 1982, 24, 193, 229, and 325). Strangely, Eck then mentions that the festival of Yam Dvitīyā is celebrated in Banaras, and Appendix Five of her book lists a possible Yama temple within the Yama Ghāṭ of Banaras. While Yama certainly isn't the topic of her book, her disinterest in the god is common within many texts related to modern India. Rare comments about Yama generally tie him to some inauspicious event or time and mention this in passing. Such infrequent and brief comments about the god of the dead give the reader the impression that Yama is no longer a deity of much influence within modern India.

But after spending almost three months of the summer of 2004 in Jaipur and the surrounding regions, I learned that this is not the case. Yama, Yam, Yamrāj, or Dharmrāj, is still very much alive in various Indian traditions and amongst various types of people. He exists not only in films and jokes but also in *bhajans* and religious handbooks, and in some places people continue to pay respect to his images and request aid at his temple. Yama, more commonly known as Yam, remains an important figure in modern Indian religious thought.

This is not to say that all the Indians I encountered in the Jaipur/New Delhi area were fond of Yam. Some people were quite offended that I would even mention his name. In the Juneja Art Gallery, I asked a young man if I might find a Yam image or temple in Jaipur. His response was quick and laced with disgust: "This is India," he said, "Not Sri Lanka." Such a response was actually quite common in Jaipur. Several people claimed that southern Indians and Sri Lankans praise the *Rākṣasa* king Rāvaṇ and so naturally worship the sometimes frightening god of the dead as well. To be fair, I never did find a Yam image or temple in Jaipur, but the opinions of various people were enough to show that his influence remains strong even among those who offer him no worship.

Of all the people I questioned about Yam (including those who didn't respond at all, perhaps several hundred people), only one did not instantly know who the deity is a very western, Christian-raised Indian by the name of Nigel. Among the rest, calm, emotionless responses were rare. The majority of people initially expressed amusement that some white westerner would approach them asking about the god of death. Within minutes of speaking, though, as they attempted to steer the conversation toward other topics and I tried to keep it focused upon Yam, they often became unsettled or irritated.

It was common for a shopkeeper to ask my companion or I to please quit mentioning Yam, sometimes politely, often brusquely. Even in the Paharganj section of Delhi, a group of four men on the street asked us to quit speaking about Yam because the police would find our discussion "noisy." Anyone who has ever spent the evening in Paharganj knows a conversation between six people about some deity is the least of the police's concerns.

Other shopkeepers, rickshaw drivers, and people on the street were much more blunt with their requests. A young man in an Udaipur shop said I would find nothing depicting Yam in any stores because the presence of such a thing would bring bad luck. An elderly puppet maker in Mt. Abu actually cursed us and asked one of his co-workers why we would want to know anything about the god of the dead (although I've been asked as much by American scholars as well). There was the common perception among many people that the simple mention of Yam might attract the god's attention and lead them to an

early grave. After the first couple weeks of such responses, I began to wonder if the terrifying, Purāṇic vision of Yam truly is the only concept of the god remaining in the general Indian mind of this area. What I soon learned is that this view is far from the most common one. While some people fear or disregard Yam, other continue to worship and respect him.

Devotional booklets focused upon Yam could be found in most large bazaars in places such as Jaipur, New Delhi, and even Udaipur. Usually titled *Śrī Dharmarāj Vrat Kathā*, *Dharmrāj's Religious Story*, these books all equate Yamrāj with Dharmrāj. In epic literature such as the *Mahābhārata*, Yama was granted the title Dharmrāj. As the concept of hell became more common in religious literature, Yam became the judge who decides which people deserve such punishment. He knows what is proper and so gained the title King of Dharma. In the devotional booklets, the names Yam and Dharmrāj are used interchangeably, and the deity is depicted in Yam's classic form of a man on a buffalo. Though a couple people insisted that the two are different deities, the majority of shopkeepers, people on the street, *sādhus*, and *pujārīs* agreed that they are the same. Sometimes they would claim the god is called Yam when he punishes people and Dharmrāj when he assists the righteous, but the two were equated nonetheless.

Smaller booklets usually consist of a story explaining why Yam worship is necessary (to prevent an afterlife in hell) and a few *bhajans*. The contents of more elaborate Dharmrāj/Yamrāj booklets typically include a story explaining why *pūjā* for Yam should be done, instructions for how it should be done, a few *bhajans* to sing, and a story about the scribe of Yam, Citragupta. Sometimes they also contain a story explaining the origins of the Yamdvitīyā festival, a tale in which Yam's sister, Yamunā is included. Shopkeepers claimed that the books are popular though I never saw anyone else buy one, and several people whom I asked about these (mostly AIIS employees) did not know they existed. Some people on the streets claimed only *sādhus* and *pujārīs* purchase such booklets, and eventually, these were indeed the people I found using them.

Still, for these booklets to be found in numerous markets in various cities of Rājasthān and Uttar Pradeś, a significant number of people must be buying them. I visited Ravi Prakāśan Mandir in Mathurā, the publishing company listed on one of the booklets. I could find no one in this tiny, alley warehouse who could give me exact numbers concerning the number of books printed and distributed to various cities, but large stacks of the booklets were wrapped in plastic and prepared to be sent out. Printings are done weekly, the employees claimed.

Through questions about Yamrāj, Dharmrāj, and these booklets, I gradually began to build a list of possible locations of Yam images and

temples. Due to a lack of time (I was supposed to be studying Hindi with AIIS) and money, I could not reach every location to verify the existence of such things, but what I did find gave me hope. In Pushkar, one can find both a strange Dharmrāj image and a *pujārī* named Istu. Located within the main gate of the Varāha (Viṣṇu) temple, this large Dharmrāj statue resembles some sort of obese, queerly shaped blue snowman with red finger and toenails, large red lips under a charcoal like drawn-on mustache, and a strange red cap. Istu claims the object is about five hundred years old. Whatever its age and strange design, this image has attracted numerous supplicants over the years, as attested to by the donation plaques surrounding it. Despite these plaques, when asked how many people come for Dharmrāj (the *pujārī* equates him with Yam) *pūjā*, Istu claimed he had no idea but the numbers are few. His mother, Kamlā, explained with some irritation that people give little money to Dharmrāj—perhaps two to four rupees, with a ten rupee maximum. Though she may have been looking for some sympathy, Kamlā and Istu seemed straight enough with us that I believed her when she said most people came bearing money for Viṣṇu.

Though not as popular as Viṣṇu, Pushkar's Dharmrāj illustrates the fact that Yam worship continues to this day. People made donations for the plaques and contribute small but significant amounts to the *pujārī* and his family. Istu does his daily *pūjā* for Dharmrāj and knows some of the *bhajans* from the Dharmrāj booklets. He also guided us to several small silver images he claimed necessary for Dharmrāj worship: a small figure supposedly depicting Yam, a round face depicting the god, and of course, a tiny ladder signifying the ascent to heaven. The merchant we purchased them from did not have many of these objects, but he was not surprised or offended when we arrived asking for such things. Though we saw no one approach the Dharmrāj image during our half an hour visit, nor did anyone come paying homage to Viṣṇu. It seems obvious that the disdain many Jaipur residents feel for the god of the dead is not shared everywhere in India. Dharmrāj worship continues to a significant degree in Pushkar, and despite Kamlā's claim that there are no other Dharmrāj images or temples in all of India, Yam's worship continues to an even greater degree elsewhere.

One of the rumors which came up concerning the possibility of a Yam temple or image was passed on by Upma Dixit, one of the AIIS instructors in Jaipur. Though never having been there herself, relatives of Upma claimed a Yam temple exists in their hometown of Mathurā. At first, I hesitated to venture this way as I have little interest in the area of Vṛndāvan and had heard numerous tales of Mathurā's “cleanliness,” but in the end, my curiosity, thankfully, pushed me forward.

A Yam temple does in fact exist in the Viśram Ghāṭ section of Mathurā. The Viśram Ghāṭ is an area littered with Yamunā temples, and Yam shares one temple with his sister. The entrance is an ornate, silver archway somewhat out of place in the grungy alleys of Mathurā. A large sign advertising the deities within hangs above the arch, and a smaller, yellow sign outside the temple clearly equates Dharmrāj with Yamrāj. Once inside, it is quite obvious that people are worshipping the same Yam whom so many others in Jaipur fear. Though the temple is small, as a person enters, their only option is to step through a door to the left, through which they can see one entire wall covered by a cloth depicting numerous scenes from the hells. Divided into small sections, the cloth illustrates demons slicing open the stomachs of nude women, beasts in the river Vaitaraṇī devouring people, and nude men strapped to a table and tortured by a demon and a giant circular-saw type contraption. At the top center of the cloth presides Dharmrāj being honored by an old man and a young couple.

To the right of the cloth and at the front of the temple stand two black-skinned, almost human-size images of Yam and Yamunā. Each has large oval eyes and a slightly grinning, red mouth. Yam holds a long rod in his left hand, and Yamunā raises her right as if in greeting while the other hands are extended outward to hold garlands of flowers and other such things. Daily, the temple *pujārī* dresses each image in fine robes. Jewelry is abundant, and each deity wears an enormous headdress matching their robes.

As with the Dharmāj image in Pushkar and as in various other temples, many floor tiles are engraved with the names of donors. Unlike the Pushkar image, the temple in Mathurā continues to bring in a steady flow of money. A low table separating the worshippers from the images holds a large black donation box which is given much attention by the crowds of people who pass through.

As we spoke with the *pujārī*, a flow of people constantly entered, rang the bell hanging from the ceiling, bowed or lay upon the floor, spoke a short prayer to Yam and Yamunā, and left. As with Istu, this *pujārī* claimed that these are the only Yam temple and image in all of India. Unlike Istu, the Mathurā *pujārī* also claimed that twenty *lakhs* of people visit the Yam temple each day. While certainly untrue, a great number of people did pass through the temple during our three visits. The ages of entering people varied from young adults to the elderly, with no particular age group dominating the crowd. People began entering the temple from the time it opened in the morning, at 0500, until it closed at night, at 2100. The temple was occasionally so full that people waited outside for space to clear.

Curiously, the number of women entering the temple seemed to largely outnumber the men. The *pujārī* agreed that more women than men visited the

shrine, and when asked if perhaps they came only for Yamunā, he instantly rejected any such idea. He said they came for both Yamunā and Yam, and this seemed to be the case. Women offered prayers to both deities just as the men did. Many passing people outside the temple would also briefly pause before the silver gateway and offer a "Yamunā kī jay, Yamrāj kī jay" before moving on.

Standing within the temple speaking to the *pujārī* or outside simply observing the people enter and leave, the occasional worshipper asked what our purpose was in being there. These people were, naturally, not offended by discussing Yam, but they also had little to say about the deity. They came to the temple for two primary reasons: they wanted to make sure that their death would be peaceful and easy, and they did not want to go to hell. Repeatedly, one or both of these reasons were given by worshippers to explain their visit to the temple. As noted earlier, one of the major focal points within the temple is the gigantic canvas depicting numerous scenes of torture in the hells. In fact, these torturous visions greet a person before one has the chance to see the images of Yam and Yamunā. None of the people we spoke with were particularly nervous when discussing Yam, but clearly the primary reason for worshipping the deity was to make sure they did not end up in hell.

When asked for some stories about Yam, the *pujārī* recited one quite similar to a common tale in some of the more elaborate Dharmrāj booklets. He explained that at one time, Yamunā fed her brother a fantastic meal, and in return, Yam offered her a boon. Yamunā requested that anyone who bathed in her river would be freed of all sins and so the punishments of hell. While Yam was not exactly eager to fulfill this request, the boon was offered, and he obliged. For the *pujārī* and the common worshipper, Yam is closely tied to hell, and the temple serves as a means of preventing a horrible afterlife. Several people commented on the fact that they are quite lucky to live in Mathurā where, according to them, the only Yam temple in the world exists. They do not need to fear hell because Yam is with them, and through honoring him and his kindly sister, they are guaranteed a heavenly afterlife.

Although I once wondered if Yama no longer has much of a role in modern Indian religions, a few weeks in the Jaipur and New Delhi regions proved this false. He is a deity common in jokes and derided by many middle and upper class westernized Indians, but among the general populace, it seems he remains a legitimate deity to be honored and sometimes feared. Contemporary worship of Yam does exist. In most of the cities I visited, booklets containing detailed instructions for *pūjā* are sold. In Pushkar, a Dharmrāj image continues to draw in donations and prayers. The Yam and Yamunā temple of Mathurā is flooded with worshippers daily. Though these brief examples certainly do not illustrate the mindset of Indians all across the

subcontinent, they serve to show that, though rare, Yam worship continues in India.

Also, the discovery that Yam is still influential in modern India opens the door for numerous other questions concerning the god of the dead. How many other Yam or Dharmrāj temples and images continue to receive attention today? When asked where other temples might be found, people frequently mentioned cities along the Kumbha Melā route such as Allahabad, Ujjain, and Nasik (though Hardwār was never mentioned), as well as places like Banaras and Ajmer. Are there in fact functioning temples in these cities? Where else does Yam worship take place besides the temple? Several *sādhus* mentioned cremation grounds of course. They would give no descriptions, referring to the worship as an "old" and "secret" thing, but they also spoke of Yam worship in the home. Are there people who do Yam *pūjā* in the home? If so, is it for the same reasons people visited the Yam and Yamunā temple in Mathurā (avoid hell and receive a peaceful death) or are there other goals?

Why is the name Yam somewhat taboo in modern India while the name Dharmrāj perfectly acceptable, even among people who claim they are the same deity? Does Śani, the frequently mentioned brother of Yam, tie into Yam *pūjā*? What reasons are there for worshipping inauspicious deities?

All of these questions arose as I learned, through my discussions with people on the streets of Jaipur and various other cities, that Yam is a deity who continues to impact the beliefs of many people. Not everyone may be fond of or wish to speak of him, but they know who he is, and, based on nervous and fearful reactions, they believe that he, at the very least, might have some impact on their afterlife. The idea of Yam continues to shape people's beliefs about death and what might follow. Some people deal with this by ignoring the deity and others choose to worship him, but regardless of and despite the silence of scholarly texts, Yam's influence remains significant after four thousand years of transforming Indian religion.

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The Linear Hierarchy in the Indus "Fish"

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In recent years there have been a number of challenges to the Dravidian Hypothesis, which carries with it the notion that the Indus script most likely conveyed a proto-form of Dravidian. The reevaluation of this hypothesis is not simply due to the lack of results in such studies; rather, firm linguistic studies deny Dravidian's place in the Indus region during the time of the Harappans (Witzel 1998). Consequently, the previous Dravidian-based methods employed to approach the Indus script (Fairservis 1992, Mahadevan 1986, Parpola 1994) are no longer viable. A cold positional-statistical approach divorced from language is a more meaningful alternative (Korvink 2004). In this type of study, sign patterns and frequencies are compared in hopes of segmenting signs and finding structure in the script. Meaning, with a positional-statistical approach, unfortunately is denied. Yet until a bilingual inscription is revealed, regardless of the approach, attempts to discover meaning rely on pictographic transparency, and are thus *ipso facto* speculative.

The current essay employs a positional-statistical study of the so-called "fish"[1] characters in the Indus script. These curious signs, having minor graphic variations, comprise ten percent of the total inscriptions. Hence a sufficient sample size is available to do a positional study.

A relative linear order in the fish signs will be demonstrated in the following essay, making the placement of these fish signs not as flexible as scholars previously believed. Those inscriptions that are not in agreement with the pattern will be treated on an individual basis.

The five fish that commonly occur together are:

[1] The quotations from this point will be dropped.

By examining the frequency of pairwise signs, one can see that some of the fish signs take priority in right-hand placement in the pair. In other words, there is a rather consistent pattern where some fish signs occur before others. Studying all pairwise fish combinations of the above five signs is the first step to achieving meaningful results. These are listed below:

Pair	Pair Frequency	Pair	Pair Frequency
	44		28
	24		14
	11		8
	7		6
	5		4
	4		4

Figure 1: Pairwise Combinations of the "Fish"

If one were to remove the three pairwise combinations,  ,  and  (roughly 6% of the all pairs), one could order the remaining pairs (roughly 94%) on a positional grid:

Pairwise Combinations					Frequency
					← Fish in positional order
					44
					24
					28
					11
					14
					6
					8
					7
					4

Figure 2: Positional Order of the "Fish" Signs

Those instances where three or more fish signs occur in sequence are also addressed in the above chart. For example, the sequence  ,  , and  , seen on one inscription, remains in agreement with the above grid (Mahadevan 1977, inscription 7220).

Now let us turn to the pairwise combinations that do not conform to the above grid:

Pair	Frequency
	4
	4
	5

Figure 3: Pairwise Frequency

A problem in viewing only pairwise combinations is that one necessarily examines the fish signs apart from the context in the inscription. It should be noted that the frequencies of these three pairwise combinations (4, 4, 5) are the lowest totals of all of the pairwise frequencies of the fish. Let us now look at the four inscriptions where the first pairwise combination in question occurs: 

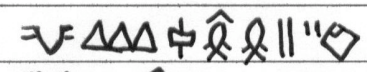
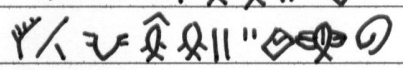
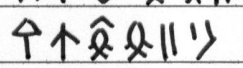
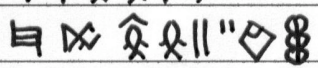
Inscription #	Inscription
2054	
4269	
2034	 (damaged)
2019	

Figure 4: Four Inscriptions Containing

When one examines fish signs in their contexts, an interesting pattern occurs. In all four inscriptions above,  and  occur in pairwise combination. Let us focus on these two signs. An examination of their positional breakdown will prove helpful:

Sign		Sign	
Solo	18	Solo	1
Initial	36	Initial	147
Medial	309	Medial	199
Final	18	Final	18
Total	381	Total	365
Frequency of the Pair		67	

Figure 5: Positional Distribution of  and

One notices that both of these signs exhibit a high frequency in the medial position. Moreover, the pairwise frequency comprises a significant portion of their individual frequency. Hence these signs are worth further investigation.[2] Let us examine some inscriptions to isolate the pair as a separate unit of information (Mahadevan 1977, inscription 1551):

Terminal	Medial	Prefix
		

Figure 6: Inscription 1551

If one were to remove the terminal and prefixing signs, one is left with the pair in question. Taking this into consideration along with the frequency of the pair in relation to their individual frequencies, one can infer that this is a separate unit of information. It is likely that  gives qualification to  .

Granted this, another question arises: Is this pairwise combination a member of the ordered fish class discussed above, or is it separate from it? It can be inferred that, with the tools of strong and weak bonds, and the process

[2] Note that the initial and final occurrences are due to the lack of a prefix or terminal respectively.

of elimination,  is in fact a separate idea from the other fish signs. Thus, the signs  and  are misleading due to their presentation outside of the larger inscription's context. *Without* taking into account that is a separate idea, one could segment an inscription in the following way (Mahadevan 1977, inscription 2054):

Terminal	Medial	Medial	Medial	Prefix
				

Figure 7: Inscription 2054

However, with this pair now extricated as a pairwise combination, one can *reexamine* this inscription and segment it in the following way:

Terminal	Medial	Medial	Medial	Prefix
				

Figure 8: Inscription 2054

This being stated, and in pairwise combination should not be included in the positional grid. The remaining two non-conforming pairs present a greater problem and may not be explained so easily. Below are these pairwise combinations in their original context:

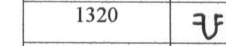
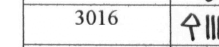
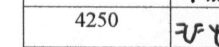
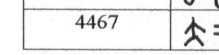
Pair :		Pair :	
Inscription #	Inscription	Inscription #	Inscription
1320		3074	
3016		2578	
4250	 (damaged)	1155	
4467		1088	
		4005	

Figure 9: Fish Pairs Not Conforming to the Positional Grid

There are no pairwise combinations, such as the one above, that would cause the pairs to be misrepresented. Hence they must be taken at face value and so remain in disagreement with the proposed positional chart.

Another interesting question can be asked: Was there geographic and temporal variation in the Indus inscriptions? While it is still not possible, given the available concordances and excavation reports, to organize the inscriptions stratigraphically, it is interesting to think about a possible cultural variation here.

From the above information, one can conclude that a positional order to all but two pairwise combinations,  and  , can be seen. These two pairs, exhibiting the lowest frequencies of all the pairwise combinations, together make up approximately 6% of the total. Thus 94% of the fish pairs can be ordered consistently. For now, the two pairs not conforming to the grid must be left aside for future investigation.

Such a fixed order to the fish inscriptions may give us insight to whether or not the script can be logo-syllabic—a stance currently advocated by many scholars. It is known that logo-syllabic (word-syllable) scripts operate by piecing together syllables to yield phonetic representation of the words. To use a hypothetical example, let us take the phonetic pieces "res" and "car." One could combine them to form a phonetic representation of the phrase "race-car." These pieces may, in turn, be reversed to yield the word "caress." Hence, in a logo-syllabic script, one would expect to see various phonic pieces prefixing and suffixing other signs. If one studies the terminal, medial, and prefixing signs, it is clear that there is a fixed order to those signs in the script. Hence the alleged phonic pieces can only be used in a set position in relation to others.

One might raise the point that a strict linear placement of some signs in relation to others signs may very well be seen in languages. For example, a language may allow "dṛ" and "ta" to form "dṛta," but may not allow the reversal "tadṛ." This aspect of the language could then be reflected in the placement of signs in the script. However, with the medial "fish" signs, for example, five signs may be seen in a set relative order. Having five signs rather than two (e.g. dṛta) in a hierarchical order complicates the suggestion that this may be reflected in language. Let us say that the letters below represent a fixed order of syllabic signs in hypothetical script X:

A B C D E

If we assume that the signs in script X are sound syllables and have a fixed positional order, language X would be quite strange. One could, with "A," make the combinations AB, AC, AD, and AE. However, with "D," one could only make the combination DE and *never* DC, DB, or DA. Furthermore, *no* phonetic combinations of "E" with A, B, C, or D would be allowed. Such an

ordering of sound syllables is difficult to imagine in a language. It has been suggested, based *solely* on the number of signs, that the Indus script is logo-syllabic. Hence a conflict arises for logo-syllabic signs that also has a fixed order. Trying to determine the nature of a script based on the total number of signs is a helpful tool. Yet it is, at the same time, speculative. Examining the positional pattern of the signs, as stated above, allows one to minimize speculation. Thus if the Indus fish have a fixed order the fish most likely did not have a syllabic value.

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