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Encoding Spatial Experience in Garhwali Popular Music Cassettes

Andrew Alter

The connections between particular sounds and geographically conceived places/spaces are a recurrent feature of many musical repertoires from different parts of the Himalaya. A number of examples exist in which ritual repertoires are linked to pilgrimage pathways, to specific spiritual sites or to an ordering of space in relation to geomorphic realities. Within traditional ritual repertoire from the North Indian region of Garhwal, specific motivic elements are used in a number of ways to enhance the spatial experience of performers and listeners. In popular music idioms, connections between sounds and geomorphically imagined spaces are achieved in ways that borrow from traditional repertoire but also expand the symbolic use of sound through studio enhancement. In conjunction with more obvious regional identifiers, such as language, rituals, deities and costumes,

sounds help construct a shared regional identity amongst listeners that is associated with the physical reality of mountains. This paper examines a selection of popular music songs from Garhwali cassettes from the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s and notes a number of consistent uses of particular sounds that prompt a spatial experience associated with a mountainous landscape.

Keywords: music, cassette, studio, geomorphology, geography, sound effects.

Introduction

The ability of music to reference a regional location through language, musical style, instruments, and other culturally significant symbols is well accepted by ethnomusicologists. Numerous scholars have emphasized the strong connections that exist between musical traditions and their places of origin (Stokes 1994; Barwick, Marett and Tunstill 1995; Whitely, Bennett and Hawkins 2005; Krimms 2007). In short, geopolitical locations, homelands, urban landscapes and villages, as well as the geographic features that define these places, can be deeply meaningful. Such geographies come to hold totemic resonance for musicians who feel a deep connection to particular places.

This paper examines audio cassettes of music from the 1980s through to the early 2000s in the Central Himalayan region of Garhwal, India, and notes the ways in which they encode regional identity and spatial experience, not simply through overt textual and musical symbolic references, but also more subtly through the sonic results of the audio recording itself. The article is intentionally historical, drawing on musical examples from a period when the local popular music industry was first being established—a period when regional identity was critical to commercial strategies associated with the commodification of traditional Garhwali musical repertoire.¹

The study extends observations of musical practice in Garhwal I made during periods of fieldwork in 1999, 2002 and 2015. In particular, I analyze cassettes and other recordings collected during these periods of fieldwork in order to identify passages that reveal particular studio recording practices. My analytic approach is heuristic, identifying sonic elements that are similar across a variety of albums, and thereby theorizing a connection between culturally specific musical concepts and the results of the studio recording process. The songs I select for analysis are chosen because they provide the clearest examples of symbolic sonic features that can be heard on a number of cassettes.

I begin with the premise that a Himalayan geography is a key symbolic reference embedded in the sounds of many of these cassettes. Within traditional ritual events that incorporate live music, the geomorphic reality of a mountainous landscape can certainly be influential (see Greene 2003; Widdess 2006; Alter 2008). This is not surprising. However, what may be less immediately apparent, and what has not been discussed in any studies of the Uttarakhand region thus far, is the way sounds on audio cassettes have frequently been shaped in particular

ways so as to fabricate a Himalayan landscape in the mind of the listener. Greene's (2002/03) examination of *lok pop* genre songs in Nepal identifies a similar approach to spatial ordering in recorded songs from that country. Consequently, this paper outlines a similar approach adopted by producers of Garhwali cassettes. However, in addition to studio production techniques such as echo, decay and reverb, I identify an extended set of sounds, all of which create a sonic spatial experience associated with the Garhwali landscape. Mountains are encoded in the recordings not only through these studio techniques, but also through specifically chosen instruments, sound effects, and traditional motivic material.

Since the subject of this paper clearly addresses ideas of place, space and music, I begin with a brief definition of these concepts and provide a short summary of literature on geography and music as they relate to these concepts. I follow my discussion of geography and music with a discussion of sonic cartographies (musical mapping), and present a brief discussion of particularly relevant literature in this area. Thereafter, I turn more specifically to a discussion of the history of audio recording as related not only to the Garhwali popular music industry, but also to specific technical features that are significant to musical 'space' in audio recording. Finally, I examine a selection of Garhwali cassettes as texts within which the listener is able to hear the geography and landscape of a Himalayan region projected aurally for listeners.

Space, Place, Geography, and Music

The concepts of 'space' and 'place' have been thoroughly examined by cultural geographers and ethnomusicologists alike. Nonetheless, a definition of these two terms is an essential starting point to this paper. Amongst the most coherent definitions of the terms is that presented by Doreen Massey, who defines 'space' as that abstract region around us that is easily 'reducible to a dimension' in order to display different moments in time (2005: 5). To add to this definition, I suggest that 'musical space' incorporates an abstract, but proximal, atmosphere of sound—one that surrounds performers and listeners alike. Venues of performance influence how we hear and create sounds. In turn, the qualities of sounds help us interpret the space/s around us during listening experiences. While listening to recorded sounds we interpret not only the spaces around ourselves, but also the imagined spaces around the recording artists; thereby we are participating in a fictive creation of the imagined spaces that are presented to us by the artists and sound engineers.

As Massey (ibid) suggests further, 'places' in contrast to 'spaces,' are politicized local regions of more intimate meaning. Places hold totemic resonance for groups of people and therefore frequently become contested politically. In the musical examples that I examine in this paper, the state of Uttarakhand, the subregion of Garhwal, as well as individual villages, are all places that hold totemic resonance for listeners in different ways. Mountainous spaces on the other hand—cliffs, echoes, vertical perspectives and a northern snow covered boundary—are equally important in shaping how people hear their environment. However, these spaces are more abstract than local, politically constructed places of totemic meanings.

The topic of music and geography has been discussed at considerable length by ethnomusicologists, some of whom fit comfortably within the academic lineages of ethnomusicology and musicology. Other researchers are more informed by the field of cultural geography. For instance, in his introduction to the fourth edition of the monograph titled *The Sounds of People and Places* published in 2003, George Carney traces the history of research in the geography of music, allying it with the sub-discipline of cultural geography. The association between music and place has of course been of interest to ethnomusicologists for some time. Martin Stokes' *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (1994) is a notable example. In particular, ethnomusicological studies of indigenous groups have explored the significance of geography to musical practice. Amongst Aboriginals in Australia for instance, a host of researchers have shown how songs reveal the intimate connections that exist between groups of people and the landscapes in which they live (Baker 1975-76; Moyle 1986; Barwick, Marett and Tunstill 1995). These ethnomusicological studies reveal a unique conceptual ordering of space and place.

A large number of publications related to space and place in music have been published in the first decade of this century. Notable amongst these are books such as *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (2004) edited by Whitely, Bennett, and Hawkins; *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording: 1900-1960* (2005) written by Doyle; *Music and Urban Geography* (2007) written by Krims; and *Sound Society and the Geography of Popular Music* (2009) edited by Johansson and Bell. Numerous articles during this decade have also contributed to an expanding field (Gibson and Dunbar-Hall 2000; Waterman 2006; Jacobsen 2009; Sutton 2009; Thomas 2010). Suffice it to say that the geography of music is a topic area that has now received considerable attention.

A close analysis of the body of literature associated with Geography and Music, particularly from the past fifteen years, indicates that urban geographies represent sites that are particularly useful for demonstrating connections between space, place, and music. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of these studies have been in the area of popular music. Furthermore, a significant number have focused on the way music is critical in shaping the identities of groups of people in association with specific places. A particularly noteworthy subgroup of studies deal with musical mapping or sonic cartographies (Columbus 1994; Greene 2003; Krim 2003; Sutton 2009; Cohen 2012).

Sonic Cartographies

The physical features of a Himalayan landscape—their geomorphic reality—are an influential spatial context within which musicians in the region work. This is perhaps also true of musicians in other mountainous regions of the world. The emphatic three-dimensional quality of mountains is something that residents are well aware of. Verticality, going up and down, peering over a precipice or hearing an echo from a distant cliff all influence many of the life choices and actions hill residents make. Perhaps this is why in parts of the Himalaya some ritual repertoire is organized in relation to physical landscapes. In Garhwal, for instance, drum repertoire used in ritual wedding processions is tied to particular geomorphically defined places like corners, river banks, river crossings, ridge lines, ascending pathways and more (Alter 2008: 135-168). Elsewhere, as Greene (2003: 205-206) notes for the *Gunlā* festival in Nepal, musicians perform specific pieces associated with particular places along a pilgrimage route in the Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, Widdess (2006: 197-198) considers the meanings embedded in music associated with the *Gāijātrā* festival of Bhaktapur and, amongst other things, identifies the way specific repertoire items change according to the physical context of performance. Many spiritually significant points in the procession require musicians to make specific choices of repertoire. Though the repertoires discussed by both Greene and Widdess have less to do with the verticality of mountains than with spiritual pathways, they nonetheless indicate an approach to repertoire that is related to the physical movement of people across landscapes.

In this sense, these repertoires may be compared to other examples of musical mapping from other parts of the world. Sonic cartographies (or sound maps) allow musicians and audiences to reference particular places that are part of a surface spatiality that is related to various realms of shared experience. Bobby Troup's '(Get

Your Kicks on) Route 66' figuratively takes the listener on a road trip across the United States (Krim 2003). The mythical 'Margaritaville' of Jimmy Buffet remains a potentially real physical location in the imagination of many fans (Bowen 1997). In Brazil's capital city, Brasília, local rock music reflects the built environment of the city (Wheeler 2012).

The Recording Industry in Garhwal

The cassettes from which I draw my examples for this paper are all in the Garhwali language. Almost all are labeled 'Gaḍhwālī Gīt' a label that identifies the language of the songs (*gīt*) as Garhwali, and therefore locates these songs as being from the region of Garhwal. Language, cover images, and the text themes contained in them, are the most obvious symbols of a regional identity associated with a particular place in the Himalaya. Naturally, the industrial context of cassette production in the 1980s and 1990s and early 2000s also directly influenced the sounds that were recorded on tape.

The digitization of the popular music industry in Garhwal, which has occurred over the past fifteen to twenty years, has ushered in new recording techniques based on easily accessible virtual studios with the expanded capabilities of digital filter software/plugins. Undoubtedly, the situation now is very different to only just twenty years ago. By focusing on popular music cassettes recorded during the analog era, this paper provides a snapshot of ideas about sound recording from the beginning of the local music industry's establishment—a time when identity creation was intimately tied to an identity conceived directly in relation to a geographic location. Today, these 'cassette' sounds may seem simplistic, naïve, and/or old fashioned to a contemporary listener. Nonetheless, the sounds heard on cassettes reveal a number of rudimentary examples of echo, delay, and decay achieved through analog techniques. Consequently, the musical analysis presented in this paper provides useful evidence for the kinds of imagined sound spaces that artists and engineers sought to create while the popular music industry in Garhwal was still being established. Significantly, the local Garhwali film industry also had its genesis at this time.²

Manuel's *Cassette Culture* (1993) describes the 1980s in India as a decade when local music industries expanded rapidly into new regional markets. Easily produced low budget cassettes catered to niche markets. Garhwal, for a variety of reasons, was a significant local market for which many cassettes were produced (Manuel 1993: 189). More recently, Fiol has documented a number of critical

features of the Uttarakhand popular music industry, and outlines aspects of its history, the industrial practices from the turn of the century as well as the way cassettes can be analyzed for the social and political commentary they reveal (see Fiol 2010a; 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2014). The sonic features of these cassette tapes—i.e. their audio contents—receive less attention. Nonetheless, these sonic features, when examined in the broader context of popular music recording, are worth considering for the way they reveal things about recording practices and regional identity.

The Garhwali cassette industry achieved its most prolific output during the 1990s and early 2000s. Cassettes were intended for a consumer market, in which consumers wanted to hear songs relevant to their homes. While many cassettes were sold in small urban settlements in the hills, many were also sold to migrant workers living in larger metropolises outside the region. For this consumer group in particular, a cassette provided readily accessible memories of home 'up there' in the mountains.

Greene (2002/03) highlights the emergence of the *lok pop* genre in Nepal, and identifies a number of ideological currents that impact the compositions and sounds heard within recordings from the 1980s and 1990s. He views sound production techniques as one component of Nepali *lok pop* that references a nostalgia for a rural folk identity firmly situated in a mountainous geography (Greene 2002/03: 44). Most notably, Greene's analysis draws attention to particular echo effects used by Nepali sound engineers to bring listeners' minds to the echoes of the mountains. As he states:

... the echoes not only help the listener construct the mental Gestalt of alpine settings and cultures, but also frame the sounds to which they are applied as distant, remote and receding, like a fading memory. (Greene 2002/03: 45)

As will be shown below, the kinds of sounds identified by Greene for Nepali recordings, are also a part of Garhwali cassettes. For the listener, the echo and decay placed on Garhwali cassettes project a nostalgic memory of a distant, but receding, authentic village home that is located between mountain peaks and ridges somewhere back and above the listener. The recording studio is an essential location within which this fictive spatial experience is created.

Fiol (2014) provides a valuable ethnographic description of a studio session for one Garhwali cassette produced in the early part of this century. In his description, he describes how singers, in order to produce a cassette, would have to

travel from the hills to Delhi to make contact with a studio (ibid). If they were lucky, and if they had money to support their own venture, singers could persuade a producer to help them. In turn, the producer would put them in touch with a musical arranger and recording engineer from which point onwards production might begin. Garhwali singers would record their songs, producers would suggest adaptations, and musical directors would organize sessional musicians to provide accompaniment on multiple tracks. Instrumental introductions, drum accompaniment, and filler between verses were commonly added on the advice of a musical director. In production studios where singers, producers, and sessional instrumentalists joined together to compose and record songs, identity was often a matter of negotiation. Different economic and practical circumstances frequently played a significant role in this process (Alter 1998).

Listening more carefully to the audio quality of these cassettes, it is clear that the addition of reverb and echo was extensively used. This is not surprising since most amplified/electronically enhanced songs from the region during this period were liberally ‘deepened’ through this kind of studio enhancement. The heavy use of echo and reverb is a standard part of electronic enhancement, whether in the studio or in live performance. However, in cassettes of the time, one can hear distinctions between the use of echo and/or reverb, as well as distinctions between the level of echo/reverb enhancement that is applied to different tracks and segments. As Greene (2002/03: 56) notes for Nepali recordings, the space between echoic repetitions and the rates of decay are manipulated in ways assumed to reference echoic spaces between peaks and ridges. Consequently, instances of echo/reverb, in and of themselves, are simply conventional practice. However, distinctions between the levels of echo and/or reverb indicate that audio engineers were aware of the effects they were using. At the very least, the echo and reverb used in specific situations with particular musical devices and sound effects seems to have been a conscious way to create spatial ordering associated with the mountains.

In addition, however, a number of motivic devices that are used in parts of traditional repertoire—such as vowel extensions in vocal accompaniment and text repetition—create an additional reference to the spatial experience of disparate echoic experiences in mountainous landscapes. Some of these spatial experiences are a common part of lived experience in the hills. In some cases, these more common/traditional spatial signifiers are used in combination with studio effects to further enhance the regionality of the experience.

Examples from Garhwali Cassettes

A notable feature of all Garhwali cassettes produced in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s is the ubiquitous use of the flute. As an instrument, the flute is assumed to symbolize the mountains. Few people question this connection in spite of the fact that there is limited evidence for actual flute performance in rural musical practice in the region of Uttarakhand (see Alter 2014: 65-79).³ Local epics/stories do, however, make reference to flute playing as a potential musical activity associated with higher altitudes. Invariably, if a flute is played in these stories, its sound is first heard coming from a distant alpine meadow or forest (ibid). The assumption is that the listener is located at some distance on a mountain ridge or in another village, and the sound of the flute travels across the intervening space because its sound can be easily projected across the surrounding geography.

Amongst the 32 cassettes that I have in my personal collection, all of those that were recorded in a Delhi audio studio include a flute as one of the accompaniment instruments. Of these, the vast majority also feature the flute in the introduction to songs. The consistency with which the instrument is included across even this select group of recordings suggests a uniform approach to instrumentation that guided the production of most of these cassettes. The song ‘*Jab main surmā lagādūn*’ [If I Were to Put on Eyeliner], which is the first track on the album ‘*Sāsū kī bāt*’ [In-Law Matters] (Rama 1990, Kiran Electronics, Stereo no. 864) by Mangala Rawat, is a representative example.

The track begins with an electronic keyboard playing a simple slow upward arpeggio sounding the tonic and fifth of the scale. The tone selected is a heavily sustained synthesized bell-like sound with plenty of vibrato. Immediately after this reverberant arpeggio, the flute enters with a rapid upward moving passage in which a four-note figure is sequenced numerous times to reach a high note. The high note is then held for some time. Significantly, heavy echo and reverb are added to the flute to fatten the sound and to let it ring on through the pause that follows the extended high note. While reverb has been added to the vocal parts as well as to some other instrumental parts later in the song, the heavy reverb and echo used for the flute’s introduction is greater than that heard elsewhere on the track. While this description is only of one song introduction, introductions to numerous other songs could be described in ways very similar to this. On this cassette alone, three songs all begin in this manner.

The scalar notes of this song are pentatonic and are drawn from one of the most common pentatonic modes used for

numerous local folk songs. As Fiol suggests:

...the use of melodies in pentatonic modes is a regular feature of Garhwali geet that is rooted in almost all categories of indigenous song... Most studio participants did not have knowledge of Hindustani musical theory, but they freely borrowed pentatonic melodies from rural song traditions and earlier recordings of Garhwali geet. (Fiol 2014: 195)

With regard to the flute, Fiol (2014: 190) makes a further important observation. Although the music director and producer who were interviewed by Fiol both suggested that it would be more ideal to have a flute player from the hills, almost all flute players are from the plains. In this case, the flute player stated that he too agreed that he would be able to play in a mountain style if he had lived there. Without visiting the hills, the flute player admitted that he still needed time to learn the *Pahāḍī* (hill) dialect of flute playing. I would argue that a so-called *Pahāḍī* musical dialect, *Pahāḍī dhun* (tunes), as well as *Rāg Pahadi*,⁴ are all musical entities that are organized within a taxonomy of hill region musical character.

The song titled '*Kalandar (jāgar) paramparik*' [Kalandar: A Traditional *Jāgar*] (T-Series, 1997 SCI: SGHNC 01/36)⁵ sung by Pritam Bharatwan on his album *Taunsa Bau* [My Sister-in-Law Taunsa] offers a different style of song that, nonetheless, uses heavy reverb and echo in ways similar to the previous example. As the title of the song suggests, this is a '*jāgar*' or spirit possession song and is therefore in a style well-known to village residents in Garhwal. As is traditional, Bharatwan is the main soloist (the *jāgariyā*) and he plays the *hurki* drum while a second performer plays the standard *thālī* accompaniment that one would expect to hear in this style. Bharatwan's phrases are more lengthy text segments, each ending with a lengthy vowel 'ā'. The accompanists join him on the lengthened vowel to extend his sound and add resonance to the final notes of each phrase.

This style of accompaniment—called *bhaun*—helps organize the modal/tonal structure of the melody by lengthening the final notes of phrases. Occasionally, other notes such as the note a whole step below the tonic or the note a fourth above the tonic are also sounded this way. The *bhaun*, which is always created through unison singing by two or more accompanists, adds a natural depth to the end of each phrase. Significantly, Bharatwan's voice has heavy reverb added to it, while the accompanists' voices are left with almost none. The contrast between the soloist's voice and that of the accompanists is emphatic because of the reverb. Here there is no echo,

but reverb serves to emphasize the singer's otherworldly character. Perhaps this effect also emphasizes the singer's communicative skills at entering into the space of the unseen supernatural. *Jāgar* ceremonies are always held indoors and therefore there may be little geomorphic reference here. Nonetheless, the reverb serves to create an abnormal depth to the soloist's voice, such that listeners are brought along with the accompanists into his ritual space.

In spite of the absence of geomorphic references in Bharatwan's '*Kalandar (jāgar)*,' the musical device of a *bhaun* is worth considering in a number of contexts because it is a device of sonic extension—the natural elongation of a final vowel, and therefore a device that can be emulated as reverb in the studio. Consequently, a *bhaun* is critical to live and recorded spatial fabrication. The device is not limited to *jāgar* styles of performance and is used in a variety of ways in some of these cassettes. A further example is worth considering here because it provides clues as to how mountain spaces might be fabricated in conjunction with a *bhaun* style accompaniment.

The song '*Serānī ke Bimalā le*' [O Bimala of Serani Village!] from the album *Tilāri Kāṇḍ* (Rama 1992, Kiran Electronics, Stereo no. 945) sung by Attar Singh Dotiyal and Kumari Mina uses the elongated vowel in a way that makes the most overt reference to a mountainous landscape. In this case, the use of female singers as well as the flute are critical. In a style reminiscent of the *jāgar*, Dotiyal leads the singing with texted phrases that end with elongated vowels. In this case, however, there is no *hurki* or *thālī* accompaniment, and the accompaniment singers are female. In addition, when the women sing the elongated vowel (the *bhaun*) a flute is added as melodic adornment. The style is therefore not that of a *jāgar*, but is instead closer to what might be referred to as a *bājuband*. In the traditional setting of this genre style, women, and occasionally men, sing to each other across great distances while collecting fodder in the forest. Each line of text is elongated like a *bhaun* with the specific intent of casting one's voice across a valley or down a slope to fellow workers. The elongated vowel allows the singer to project her/his voice in such a way so as to spatially locate her/himself in relation to fellow workers (see also Fiol, this publication). In this particular recording, the soloist has considerable echo added to his voice while the *bhaun* singers are recorded with less echo. Here I would argue, the *bhaun*—or any similar vowel-lengthening device—are themselves echoic in quality. They are a kind of a natural reverb technique. The elongated vowel on one pitch opens

up the listener's mind-space to other spatial orders. In this case, the sounds—women's *bhaun* accompanied by flute—are themselves echoic. Reverb enhances the space around the singers and the flautist to emphasize the spatial fabrication of a Himalayan forest that includes agrarian activity that is well known to a village listener.

A more playful sonic effect that appears on a number of cassettes from this period is the car horn. One such example may be heard within the song 'Nakoṭ kī Lain' [The Road to Nakot] from the album *Samdhanī Syamānī* [Hello My Close Relations] (Rama 1990, Kiran Electronics, Stereo no. 863) by Dinesh Prasad Daniyal. The text of the song refers to the car horn synecdochically as the car itself. It winds its way towards the town of Nakot. Clearly, the vehicle is passing through Nakot and the singer reminds the listener that it is urgently about to move on. The listener must catch it and find a seat for him/herself in spite of the crowds of passengers already on board. There is no question that the vehicle is a commercial vehicle that will take passengers away from Nakot to some unspecified location. The horn is recorded separately to the other tracks (voice, drums, melodic instrument) and has been enhanced with plenty of reverb in the same way that the voices have. In addition, however, the car horn is enhanced with further echo beyond that applied to the other tracks. The difference is subtle but clear. Not surprisingly, a flute melody is used in the introduction in advance of the car horn itself. In this particular example, the car horn appears a number of times throughout the piece with different rhythmic patterns, some of which fit the overall rhythm of the piece while others are simply random inserts.

The relative frequency of car horns in cassettes of this period is somewhat remarkable. While they are not 'common,' their appearance within a number of cassettes and songs is notable. Amongst my own limited collection of cassettes, in addition to Dinesh Daniyal's 'Nakoṭ kī Lain,' the following cassettes include car horn sound effects:

'*Chalī Bhai Moṭar Chalī*' [It's Gone, the Car Has Gone!] on the album '*Bāwan Gaḍhu ku Des,*' [Land of Fifty-Two Forts] Narendar Singh Negi (Saraswati, n.d., SR 056).

'*He Jī Darebar*' [Oh Driver] on the album '*Didā Ku Byo,*' [Elder Brother's Wedding] Dinesh Uniyal and Mangala Rawat (Rama 1991, Kiran Electronics Stereo 885).

'*Ḍarebarī*' [Driverhood] on the album '*Bārāmāsā,*' [All Seasons] Narendar Singh Negi (Rama, n.d., Rama Cassette Industries, Stereo 904).

Even more significantly, at least two complete albums '*Ḍarebar Bhaijī*' [Brother Driver] (Rama 2001, Rama Super Sound Studios Digital Recording 4258) sung by Santosh Khetwal and Kalpana Ram, and '*Māyādār Ḍarebar*' [Romantic Driver] (Rama 2001, Rama Super Sound Studios Digital Recording 4259) sung by Yogendar Singh Rawat, use the theme of driving as a unifying element to create albums that are somewhat like concept albums.

There could be a number of reasons for the use of car horns and themes of driving in these cassettes. Firstly, it is important to note that Narendar Singh Negi's '*Chalī Bhai Moṭar Chalī*' was the first of these car horn cassettes to achieve the status of a local 'hit.' It undoubtedly inspired later songs by other artists who cashed in on his earlier success. However, travel by vehicle in the hills is an activity packed with a variety of emotions, all of which might be referenced by the sound of a horn. When a bride leaves her natal village—frequently in a vehicle—this is a very emotional time. Similarly, grooms' parties travel by bus to the bride's family's village. Agricultural produce grown in a village must be taken to urban markets by taxi or truck. Migrant workers travel to the plains by vehicle, leaving their villages behind for most of the year. In all of these scenarios, driving is an emotional and dangerous activity. En route, one's vehicle may well fall off the edge of the road.

In this sense, a good driver becomes a heroic figure. In rural communities where four (and more) wheel vehicles are mostly owned for commercial purposes, a driver has a special status—one gained through commercial ownership of a vehicle. He is one level above those living in the village because he has a job associated with the power of modernity and mechanization. In addition, he becomes an interlocutor—someone who must be relied on to get one to their destination safely. Ultimately, he is the one who returns you safely to your home. In other parts of India, and indeed in many places in the world, drivers actively use car horns for a variety of reasons. In the mountains, however, signs regularly exhort drivers to blow their horns while approaching corners. Bus drivers blow horns long and loud to call travelers to the bus stop to get on board. As a vehicle drives along a road, one hears car horns from far away, and the folds of the mountain ridges shape the sound into the physical space in which it is blown. Mountain roads have many corners.

Conclusion: Experiencing Space in Audio Recordings

As texts within which one might hear the regional identity of musicians and their audiences, cassettes are laden with

symbolic references to spatial experience. Language, as well as themes associated with rural life in the mountains, are obvious markers of the totemic resonance that Garhwal holds for its residents. However, the sounds and audio effects that one hears on cassettes provide more than just signifiers of a particular place in the world. As Doyle (2005) has shown with other popular music recording examples, echo and reverb create an effect that helps merge the ontologies of the physical recording with the audio sounds themselves to create a deeper space in which listener and producer fabricate geographies through an audio 'slight of ear.' Like all good tricks, this slight of ear relies on the listener's mind.

Doyle's work discusses the history of specific recording techniques in western popular music during the beginning of the twentieth century. He suggests that echo and reverb emerged as an integral part of popular music recording in conjunction with a variety of imagined landscapes and emotions that drew the listener into the world of the recording. Significant to Doyle's argument is the contribution of Hollywood film genres, such as the 'Western' in the creation of imagined spaces of openness. Similarly, at the same time that the Western film genre was encoding reverb with open space, the electric guitar sounds of artists like Duane Eddy became associated with the rolling surf of an imagined Hawaiian geography (Doyle 2005: 92). Analysis of early recording artists such as Jimmie Rodgers, Frank Hutchison, Robert Johnson and others demonstrates how impressions of particular spatial orders become associated with particular recording techniques. The recorded acoustic features of echo and reverb enhance the imagined space of the performer behind the surface level notes and rhythms. Technicians and musicians play with this aural depth in a variety of ways in order to signify particular things.

In the audio cassettes I examine here, the inclusion of similar technical features help to fabricate a mountainous space in the imagination of listeners. Not surprisingly, the newly emerging Garhwali film industry traces its history to this period of cassette production in the 1980s and 1990s. Even before the advent of Garhwali films, however, the broader Hindi film industry had begun to create links between onscreen images of mountain landscapes and instrumentation associated with mountains; namely, the flute and the *santūr*. When the Garhwali film industry emerged in the 1980s, song and dance sequences helped reinforce a further connection between flutes and mountains. Invariably, if a song was picturized in an alpine meadow, flute accompaniment with heavy echo and

reverb was foregrounded in the mix.⁶ Even more regularly, a plethora of picturizations of songs in VCD format show mountains as backdrops with heavily reverberant flutes in the audio. Thus, Garhwali films and VCDs of the 1980s helped reinforce a connection between heavily reverberant flutes and alpine meadows.

What the Garhwali musical examples discussed in this paper demonstrate is that recording studio practices from the beginning of the cassette era reveal a connection between imagined spaces and studio effects similar to the spatial connections present in recordings from other parts of the world. However, what is specific to a Himalayan space—high peaks, deep valleys, cliff faces, alpine meadows and mountain forests—implies a soundscape that is uniquely associated with the geomorphology of mountains. Undoubtedly, similar studio effects are used by recording engineers today. By examining analog recordings from the cassette era—a period critical to the creation of regional identity through early music commodification—this paper highlights the regular and recurrent use of specific echo and decay that references the geomorphic space of mountains. Specific instrumental aural symbols that are linked to these spaces have been reinforced through filmic productions that regularly juxtapose specially chosen visual and aural features. In Garhwal, even prior to the commodification of music and the advent of films, aspects of traditional practice were organized in ways that referenced this same geomorphology. In cassettes of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, aspects of this traditional musical practice were co-opted into studio recordings to further emphasize the spatial experience of living in the Himalaya.

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2. *Jagwāl* (1984) was the first Garhwali language film (Uttarakhand Cinema: Jagwal). The first Kumaoni film was released a few years later in 1987.

3. In this way, the situation in Uttarakhand appears to be somewhat different to Nepal where flutes are more common.

4. *Rāg Pahāḍī* is not purely pentatonic. Conventional explanations of the *rāg's āroh-avāroha* do not closely resemble hill type melodies. Nonetheless, the *rāg* is largely pentatonic and its structures could easily be confused with melodic structures used in hill tunes.

5. A video version of this song may be found at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8OfBe7sKsM>>. The audio in this digitized video version is from the original cassette recording. Early cassette songs by well-known artists have been digitized on the web. However, many songs by lesser known artists exist only as analog recordings on cassettes.

6. For example, see 'Jai Badri Kedarnath' [Praise to Badri and Kedarnath] or 'Tū Dikhyāṅḍī Janī Juṅyālī' [You Look Like the Moonlight] from the film *Ghar Jawain* (1984) and 'Man Bhar Maige' [My Heart Has Been Lost] from the film *Raibar* (1990).

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