



Tellings and Texts

Music, Literature and
Performance in North India

EDITED BY FRANCESCA ORSINI
AND KATHERINE BUTLER SCHOFIELD

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To Aditya's memory, once again

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16. Patterns of Composition in the Seventeenth-Century Bengali Literature of Arakan

Thibaut d'Hubert

*vādyā kavilāsa ādi yantra sulalita |
keha keha susvare gāhe gīta | |¹*

Alaol, *Sikāndarnāmā* (1671)

*ānchi ū naw ast u ham kuhan ast
sukhan ast u darīn sukhan sukhan ast²*

Nizami Ganjavi, *Haft paikār* (1197)

The divorce between music and poetry is a fairly recent phenomenon and naturally not recognised by all, but it is usually widely accepted that poems are first and foremost texts that demand to be understood with the tools of textual analysis. In the case of premodern Bengali literature, however, neglecting the fact that texts were performed leads to a misunderstanding, not only of the way poems were composed, but also of the dynamics at work in the formation of the literary tradition as a whole. The texts I am dealing with in this article are *panchalis*, a

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- 1 “Some gracefully [played] the *kavilāsa* and other instruments, while others were singing songs with their beautiful voices”. The *kavilāsa*, also called *kapinasa*, is a stringed, probably plucked, instrument (Sk. *tata-*) which does not seem to be clearly identified by specialists. It is mentioned very often in Bengali and Assamese premodern literature as well as Sanskrit treatises (e.g. Shubhankara, *San̄gītadāmodarah*, ed. by Gaurinath Sastri and Govindagopal Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1960, p. 51). Sukumar Sen gives the following definition for this term: “a kind of lute. Ts. Lit. poetic performance. Ts. (**kavilāsa*) or sts. (**kavilāsyā*); cf. *kavilāsikā*. Pada”; *An Etymological Dictionary of Bengali, c.1000-1800 A.D* (Calcutta: Eastern Publishers, 1971), p. 115.
 - 2 “What is both ancient and new is speech, and in this speech dwells another speech”.

type of Bengali narrative poem. Though the exact origin of the term remains unknown, *panchali* refers more to a kind of public performance than to a literary form or a genre.³ In this paper I propose to study the various levels of performance that shaped the compositional pattern of the Bengali *panchali* author Alaol.

Alaol lived in the kingdom of Arakan, in modern Myanmar, in the seventeenth century. His œuvre is constituted of translations from Awadhi (an eastern form of Hindavi) and Persian narrative poems and treatises. Short poems called *padas* have also been collected from several anthologies compiled in Chittagong in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴ Even though Alaol had a deep knowledge of Hindavi, Sanskrit, and Persian literary cultures, his poems follow the rules of traditional Bengali literature, and all of his translations are *panchalis*. Born in what is modern central Bangladesh, he was brought by Portuguese corsairs to Mrauk-U, the capital of the kingdom of Arakan. He became a royal slave, enrolled in the cavalry, and was finally noticed by Muslim dignitaries for his intellectual skills. He then became a central figure of the artistic milieu of Mrauk-U and worked under the patronage of various dignitaries between 1651 and 1671.⁵

Major changes in the context of the composition and the performance of Bengali poetry occurred in the gatherings (Ben. *sabhā*) attended by Alaol in Mrauk-U. These took place in the houses of the Muslim dignitaries of the capital and, as the poet describes them in his prologues, were informal gatherings in which the etiquette of the court was partly reproduced. The hierarchy was less pyramidal than in royal courts and beside the patron who hosted the assembly, other individuals of similar

3 See *infra* for a discussion of the origin and meaning of the term *panchali*.

4 See Alaol, *Alaol racanāvalī*, ed. by Muhammad Abdul Qayyum and Razia Sultana (Dhaka: Bangla Academy), pp. 607-10. Some *padas* (e.g. *pada* n. 6, 9, 10) found in the anthologies of Chittagong are also present in Alaol's narrative poems (*Padmāvati* and *Saptapaykara*). These *padas* were first edited by Ahmed Sharif, 'Rāgatālanāmā o padāvalī', *Sāhitya Patrikā* 71 (1370 BA), 1-48; see also Yatindramohan Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālāra vaiṣṇavabhāvōpanna musalmāna kavira padamañjuṣā* (Calcutta: Kalikata Vishvavidyalay, 1984), pp. 38-42. For a study of Alaol's short poems inserted inside the narrative texts, see d'Hubert, *Histoire culturelle et poétique de la traduction. Alaol et la tradition littéraire bengali au XVIIe siècle à Mrauk-U, capitale du royaume d'Arakan* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2010), pp. 284-351.

5 For a presentation of Alaol's life in English, see Satyendranath Ghoshal, *Beginning of Secular Romance in Bengali Literature* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1959), pp. 63-65. For a reappraisal of the data available on his life and historical context, see d'Hubert (2010), pp. 99-149.

ranks were present, such as other Muslim dignitaries or religious men. After Bengali, the regional culture language, Persian seems to have been the second language of communication.

Alaol's texts contain several references to the audience that is strikingly present as compared to previous and contemporary *panchalis*. In the traditional *panchali*, the audience does not play an active part in the performance, whereas in Alaol's poems it is clearly considered as a component of its complete realisation. The central feature of this common endeavor is speech (*vachana*) and the unfolding of its meaning. Thus the *panchali* provides more than a narrative: it conveys a speech that calls for "another speech". Resettled in the context of the Indo-Persian assembly or *majlis*, the Bengali poetical speech (Pers. *sukhan*) became a subject of speculation and discussion (*suhbat*).

The topic of this article can be summarised in a comment pronounced by Alaol, before performing a scholarly digression on *sangita* (lyrical arts)⁶ found in his translation of *Padmāvat* (1540), the Avadhi poem of Malik Muhammad Jayasi. Worried about his reputation, Alaol declared:

alapa nā kahō yabe / baliba paṇḍita sabe / ei kavi saṅgīta nā jāne | |

If I don't give a short explanation [of this passage], scholars will say:
"This poet doesn't know anything about lyrical arts!"

In this verse, the poet uses some key terms—*kavi* (poet), *paṇḍita* (scholar), and *sangita* (*saṅgīta*, lyrical arts)—that will set the tone for our reflection on poetry and public performance in Alaol's texts. We shall see that, through the explicit use of the Sanskrit theoretical knowledge expounded in the *sangitashastras* (*saṅgītaśāstras*, treatises of lyrical arts), he provided his readers/auditors with analytical tools that allowed them to think of the compositional pattern of the existing regional literary tradition that lacked proper theoretical literature.⁷ The literary self-awareness

6 My translation of *sangita* as "lyrical arts" rather than "song" or "music" (e.g. the entry 'Saṅgīta' in the *Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary*) is based on the definition of this term given by the theoretical literature studied by Alaol. See below.

7 The first treatise on poetics that was written in Bengali was probably the *Rasakalpavallī* (1673) by Ramagopal Das. Though a treatise on poetics and aesthetics mainly based upon the works of Rupa Goswamin (*Ujjoalālīlamanī* and *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*), the author also quotes from Shubhankara's *Saṅgītaḍāmodara* (see below) regarding topics as central as *bhava* (sentiment) or *nayika-bheda* (the types of heroine). For an overview of the history of technical literature on poetics in premodern Bengal, see Ramagopal and Pitambar Das, *Rāmagopāla Dāsa-viracita Rasakalpavallī o anyānya nibandha, Pītāmbara Dāsa-viracita*

displayed by Alaol is also accompanied by the broadening of the traditional paradigm of performance towards more textuality, a central place given to “speech” (*vacana*), and the metadiscourse it may induce.

Performance and Authorship in Premodern Bengali Literature

Premodern Bengali literature was meant to be publicly performed, and performance shaped the very idea of literary composition and authorship. The *Caryāgītis* (c. eleventh century), allegedly the oldest texts of Bengali literature, were poems meant to be meditated and commented upon. The potential for speculation in the *charyas* is attested by the very sophisticated Sanskrit commentaries that were written on them. But they were also sung, and legends about their authors often provide a setting in which the poems have been originally composed.⁸ The manuscripts of the *Caryāgītis* contain indications about the *ragas* or musical modes and *talas* or rhythms used for musical performance. Similarly, the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* (c. fourteenth century CE) which, after the *Caryāgītis*, is considered the oldest Bengali text, was recited with specific *ragas* and *talas* and contains lots of theatrical features.⁹ We could go on like this up to the nineteenth century and even further, because modern *palagan* singers and *patuyas* are perpetuating this

Aṣṭarasavyākhyā o Rasamañjarī, ed. by Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay, Sukumar Sen and Praphullacandra Pala (Calcutta: Kalikatha Vishvavidyalay, 1963), pp. 8-10.

- 8 See Abhayadatta, *La vie merveilleuse de 84 grands sages de l'Inde ancienne*, trans. from Tibetan by Djamyang Khandro Ahni (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), and compare with the *mise en scène* of the poetical compositions of the *ashtachhap* in Hariraya, *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*, ed. by D. Parikha and G. Shukla (Mathura: Shri Govardhana Granthamala Karyalaya, 1970).
- 9 See Wakil Ahmed, *Bāmlā kāvyera rūpa o bhāṣā* (Dhaka: Khan Brothers & Co., 1994); Kshudiram Das, *Bāmlā kāvyera rūpa o rīti* (Calcutta: Desh Publishing, 1994); Selim Al Deen, *Madhyayugera bāmlā nāṭya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy 1995); Chaya Chatterjee, *Śāstrīya Saṅgīta and Music Culture of Bengal Through the Ages* (New Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 1996), pp. 32-40; and Saymon Zakaria, *Bāmlādeśera lokanāṭaka: viṣaya o āṅgika-vaicitrya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2008), pp. 5-15. For the text and a translation of the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana*, see Baru Chandidasa, *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana*, ed. by Vasantaranjan Ray Vidvadvallabh (Calcutta: Vangiy Sahitya Parishat, 1361 BA), and *Singing the Glory of Lord Krishna: The Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana*, trans. by M.H. Klaiman (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1984).

tradition and provide living examples of how premodern literature could have been performed.¹⁰

The Bengali literature that was produced after the fourteenth century may be formally divided into short and long versified texts.¹¹ On the one hand, we find the *padas*—short poems composed on a variety of metres—that include the two foundational corpora just mentioned, and on the other hand there is the voluminous amount of versified narrative texts called *panchalis*.¹² The lyrical and even dramatic dimensions of short poems or *padas* are systematically referred to by specialists of this literature, but the long narrative poems we are concerned with here are usually not thought about in their performance context by scholars. Yet it is vital to think about narrative texts in performance if we want to comprehend the way they have been composed and transmitted.

10 See France Bhattacharya, 'A propos d'une représentation du Caṇḍi Maṅgal au Bengale Occidental', *Adyatan "d'aujourd'hui"* 3 (1984), 7-26; Philippe Benoît, 'Quatre chansons de paṭuyā du Bengale sur le Rāmāyaṇa', *Bulletin d'Études Indiennes* 10 (1992), 53-87 ; and Zakaria (2008), pp. 37-40.

11 We find this dichotomy in Sen's general definition of "ancient Bengali literature" (*purāno bāṅgālā sāhitya*). Though he first makes the distinction between three formal types, he finally reduces it to only two: *pratham gītikavitā, dvitīya paurāṇik geya athavā pāṭhya ākhyāyikā, tṛtīya a-paurāṇik geya kavita-ākhyāyikā. śeṣ dui dhārār racanār rūp vā pharm prāy ek-i rakam evaṃ se pharmer nām-o 'pāñcālī'*. "First, there is lyrical poetry, second, come the stories drawn out from the *Puranas* that must be sung or read aloud, third, are the narrative poems meant to be sung. The last two trends of composition or forms are almost the same, and the name of this form is 'panchali'" (Sen (2000), Vol. 1, p. 103).

12 The *panchali* type of representation assumed various forms through history. As regards prosody, the main features of a *panchali* are the alternation of narrative parts in *payar* verse and descriptive and more lyrical parts in *tripadi*. A *panchali* may also contain other shorter poetical forms such as *git* ("songs" composed on a variety of metres), *baromasis* (songs of the twelve months), or *cautishas* (acrostic poems based on the letters of the Bengali alphabet). The word *panchali* is found in several narrative poems to designate the text itself or its form. The actual features of *panchali* performances and the way they changed over time are not well known. The original *panchali* would have included puppet dance and would have afterward developed towards modern *yatra* representation (Shambaru Chandra Mohanta, Chandra, 'Panchali', in *Banglapedia* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2006), CD ROM). But the clear demonstration of this evolution is still lacking. See Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅgālā sāhityera itihāsa* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2001), Vol. 1, pp. 103-04, Vol. 2, pp. 2: 6-8; see also Ahmed (1994) and Al Deen (1995), pp. 77-82; for contemporary *panchali* representations, see F. Bhattacharya (1984) and Zakaria (2008). About *panchali* as a model for *jarigan* performances, see also Mary F. Dunham, *Jarigan: Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1997), pp. 45-46 and 330.

Narrative texts were, and still are in some places in West Bengal and Bangladesh, recited by professionals called *kathak*, *pathak*, or *gayen*. Each term stresses one aspect of their style of recitation: the two first terms refer to a musically tuned reading-cum-commentary, and the second more specifically to singing.

In many cases the poet is presented as a kind of original performer rather than an “author”.¹³ For instance, a common motif in *mangalkavyas* regarding the creation of the book is that of the “inspired poet”.¹⁴ One day the poet, usually a Brahmin, while attending to his everyday affairs, or in a dream, sees the Goddess appear before him. She then gives the order to compose a poem whose text she will fully provide, or for which she will bestow the boon of eloquence on the poet who presents himself as ignorant and unfit to fulfill such a task.¹⁵ This primeval inspiration originating from the Goddess herself is afterward reinitiated through the performance by the ritual gesture of the *gayen* before he starts the recitation of the text. Before the performance begins the *gayen* grasps a *chamar* (flywhisk), and it is from this moment only that he remembers what he will have to recite during the next several hours.¹⁶ In this creative process absolutely no place is left for the poet’s role as a composer. He is first and foremost presented as a devotee, and it is through an act of devotion, represented by the holding of the *chamar*, that the poem will

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- 13 On the subject of authorship in premodern South Asian vernacular literature, see J.S. Hawley, ‘Author and Authority in the Bhakti Poetry of North India’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47.2 (1988), 269-90, and Ali Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia* (London: Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002), pp. 82-99. For a discussion about the author and the performer of oral poetry, see Paul Zumthor, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), pp. 209-27.
- 14 *Mangalkavyas* are narrative poems about the spread of the worship of a goddess among human beings. Regarding the inspired poet and performer see Y. Bhattacharya (2007), p. xi and F. Bhattacharya (1984), p. 8. For instances of “divine inspiration” see Krittibas, *Kṛttivāsī Rāmāyaṇa*, ed. by Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 2002), pp. 4-5; Ketakadas, *Manasāmaṅgala*, ed. by Akshaykumar Kayal and Chitra Dev (Kolkata: Lekhapad, 1384 BA), pp. 5-7; and Heyat Mahmud, *Kavi Heyāt Māmud*, ed. by Mazharul Islam (Dhaka: Agami Prakashan, 2009), p. 299.
- 15 The commissioned poet shows a similar humility in order to obtain the “compassion” (*kṛpā*) not from the divinity, but from his mundane patron. See also David Shulman, ‘Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literary Legend’, in *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 63-102, and T. d’Hubert, ‘Reading Persian Poetry in Seventeenth Century Arakan: The Sāqī as a Guru and the Figure of the Patron in Alaol’s Bengali Translation of Niẓāmī’s Sharaḥnāma’, in *Patronage in Indo-Persian Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, forthcoming).
- 16 See Bhattacharya (1984), pp. 10-11.

come into existence. In terms of representation of the literary activity, it is not only that performance is the main way to share the content of a written text; rather it means that no text is ever able to come into existence without a setting of ritual performance.

The Bengali poetic tradition does not openly stress the poet's skills as a composer. But the performer who recites the poem is expected to be able to provide commentary and improvise new elements, either in verse or prose, in order to highlight a special point regarding the characters' behaviour, to add humorous elements in due time, or to beautify a specific episode.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this part of the performance, which is known from the observation of modern *palagan* representations, was not written down. As a consequence the only reminders we have of this metatextual practice appear here and there through the numerous variant readings found in the manuscripts of very popular texts. The best example in this regard may be Krittibas's *Rāmāyaṇa* (c. fifteenth century) that has proved to be an unsolvable philological puzzle due to its countless variant readings and fragmented transmission.¹⁸

Bengali literary texts were part of a larger performing tradition that included music, dance, and dramatic improvisation. The production and transmission patterns of literary texts were thus totally dependent on the way they would be performed. This close connection between performance and literary composition appears clearly in the first adaptation into Bengali of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* by "Kavindra" Parameshwar Dasa. Kavindra's patron, Paragal Khan, Sultan Husain Shah's (1493-1519) officer in charge of the Chittagong area, made the following request regarding the composition of the text:

ehi saba kathā kaha saṁkṣepa kariyā | dīneka śunite pāri pāñcālī baliyā | |

Summarise this story and tell it, so that I can listen to this *panchali* in a few days.¹⁹

17 Zakaria (2008).

18 Regarding the manuscripts of the *Kṛttivāsī Rāmāyaṇa* see Amiya Shankar Chaudhuri, 'Kṛttivāser puthi saṁvād', in *Kavi Kṛttivāsa saṁkalana grantha* (Phuliya: Kavi Krittivasa Smaraka Grantha Prakashak Samiti, 1989), pp. 183-201. For an attempted critical edition by Nalinikantha Bhattashali, see *Mahākavi Kṛttivāsa viracita Rāmāyaṇa, Ādikāṇḍa*, ed. by Nalinikantha Bhattashali (Dhaka: Shrinath Press, 1936).

19 Kavindra Parameshwar Das, *Kavindra-Mahābhārata*, ed. by Kalpana Bhowmik (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999), p. 332.

The point here was not only to shift from the Sanskrit to the Bengali literary tradition but rather to provide Paragal and his courtiers with a more performable version of the story, which in its original form and in this court milieu, was hardly fit to be publicly performed.²⁰ What should also be kept in mind is that, unlike Sanskrit texts, Bengali *panchalis* were not at first linguistically sophisticated. Unlike Sanskrit *kaavyas*, they were not “ornate” (*alamkrita*), and no commentary was needed to unfold the meaning of the verses and release the *rasa*. The aesthetic pleasure derived rather from the performance as a whole. *Panchalis* were heavily narrative, and it was the theatrical setting that provided the ornamentation.²¹ That is why, textually speaking—and, as I suggested before, through the relative absence of the figure of the author as a craftsman of speech—the story was central, not the word. We will see that things seem to be different in the case of Alaol.

Performance in Alaol’s Texts

What material do we have to study performance in Alaol’s poetry? To answer this question we need to make a distinction between three kinds of sources that the Bengali poet’s texts provide: the description of the *sabha* (assembly), paratextual indications, and the *mise en abyme*, inside the story narrated in the poem, in which performance is present. *Mise en abyme* indicates a formal technique in which an image contains a smaller copy of itself. Often applied to paintings that contain a smaller image of

20 One of Kavindra’s techniques was to drop the secondary stories found in the Sanskrit recensions, thus reestablishing the linearity of the narrative, which was one of the important features of the composition of Bengali *panchalis*. See the comparative tables given in the introduction of K. Bhowmik’s edition; Kavindra Parameshwara Das (1999), Vol. 1, pp. 129-308.

21 This approach is aligned with what P. Zumthor wrote about oral literature and the fragmentary nature of the text (1983, p. 56). The complete aspect of poetry is what he defines as the “œuvre”: “L’œuvre, c’est ce qui est communiqué poétiquement, ici et maintenant: texte, sonorités, rythmes, éléments visuels ; le terme embrasse la totalité des facteurs de la performance”; (1983), p. 164. In his article on Bengali and Maithili plays composed in Nepal, Brinkhaus makes the same comment regarding the poor literary value of those courtly dramas; Horst Brinkhaus, ‘On the Transition from Bengali to Maithili in Nepalese Dramas of the 16th and 17th Centuries’, in *Maithili Studies: Papers Presented at the Stockholm Conference on Maithili Language and Literature* (Stockholm: Department of Indology, University of Stockholm), pp. 67-77.

themselves, I use it to denote the description of performance inside the text (see also Miner, Orsini, and Busch in this volume).

Descriptions of the *Sabha*

Alaol included many contextual features in his poems, such as descriptions of the assemblies he attended, or his patrons' interventions during the reading of his poem. The first we notice is that poetry is presented as one pleasurable activity among others in the society parties organised by the Muslim notables of Mrauk-U. According to Alaol's account, *sabhas* were held at night and included a dinner, games, dances, music, and discussions on various topics related to some books that had been previously read aloud to the audience.²² The poet seems to have performed his own poem, and there is no mention of professional storytellers in his prologue. He does mention dancers and musicians, though not in relation with the poem he is about to declaim. Alaol does not give any details regarding the precise setting of the *sabha*, such as the way people were seated, the presence or not of a stage,²³ etc.

Paratextual Elements

The paratextual elements found in the manuscripts concerning the musical modes (*ragas*) do not leave any doubt regarding the musical aspects of the

22 This matches the usual organisation of *majālis-i shabāna* as described in Mughal sources, where poetry and music often came late at night; see 'Abd al-Sattar ibn Qasim Lahori, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, ed. by Riza Allah Shah 'Arif Nawshahi and Mu'in Nizami (Tehran: Markaz-i Pizhuhishi-i Mirath-i Maktub, 1385S). Theatrical performance in the neighbouring kingdom of Bhulua also took place at night after dinner (Raghunath 'Kavitarkik', *Kautukaratnākara*, ed. and trans. by Dulal K. Bhowmik (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1997), pp. 25-6. In Alaol's case, the succession of the dinner and the recitation of poetry is the occasion to pun on the various meanings of the word *rasa*—"juice, savour" and "aesthetic emotion"; Alaol (2007), p. 457; see also Pellò and Schofield in this volume.

23 According to Zakaria (2008, pp. 38-39), performances took place directly on the ground and it is with the advent of the *yatra* in eighteenth century that stages were built. Gautier Schouten, who visited Mrauk-U in 1660, seems to suggest that stages were built to perform dramas: "Ensuite, le soir étant venu, les spectateurs finirent la journée en faisant des danses sur des théâtres; on y joua des comédies: on y fit entendre de la musique; et une partie de la nuit se passa dans ces festivités". Unfortunately, this short account does not allow us to ascertain whether these were Bengali *panchalis*; see G. Schouten, *Voyage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes orientales. Commencé l'an 1658 et fini l'an 1665* (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1708), p. 194.

recitation. Another clue furnished by the *panchali* tradition itself is the *bhanita*, that is the poet's signature line marking the end of a narrative section or a song. These can contain a short praise of the patron and the name of the poet, and sometimes they are used to introduce questions and comments made by the poet or even the patron about the episode that was just narrated or on some point of vocabulary.²⁴ The *bhanitas* hint at the performed dimension of Alaol's texts because they address the audience directly and help structure the narrative sequences of the poem.²⁵ They provide a lively tune to the recitation, and it is not rare to find copyists who, carried away by the flow of the poem, added their own *bhanitas* where they deemed it appropriate.²⁶

Performance also surfaces in Alaol's texts in the *mise en abyme* that mirrors the actual recitation of his own poems in the *sabha*. As compared to his models, Alaol lays special emphasis on the episodes that involve some kind of performance. This is often an opportunity for Alaol to provide his knowledgeable audience—the *gunigana*—with very precise technical information (see also Miner in this volume).²⁷

Among the topics Alaol discusses, *sangita* and its subsidiary sciences are particularly important to define the poet's view of artistic composition. Moreover, fragments of what seems to have been a treatise on music composed by Alaol are found in later works called *Rāgamālās* and *Tālanāmās*.²⁸ The fragments of Alaol's *Rāgatālanāmā* partly deal with the myth of the creation of *ragas*, *talas*, and musical instruments.²⁹ The work appears to be framed around the story found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* about the origin of Drama, combined with elements of Puranic stories such as the birth of the Ganga (the river Ganges), but it does not match exactly with

24 See for instance Alaol's comments in *Padmāvati* on the terms *kākanucha* (phoenix) and *gamanā* (new bride) (2007), pp. 43-44, 127-29.

25 The subject of the preceding or following section is often mentioned by the author in his *bhanitas* and helps the audience to follow what is going on in the poem.

26 See for instance the suggestions made by Kshudiram Das concerning the interjections that may have been added by later performers in the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana*; quoted in Ahmed (1994), p. 8.

27 On music and courtly aesthetics in the Indo-Persian courtly culture, see Schofield in the present volume.

28 These fragments have been edited by Ahmed Sharif, 'Rāgatālanāmā o padāvalī', *Sāhitya Patrikā* 7.1 (1967), 16-17, 81-82, 92-93; and have been reprinted in Alaol (2007), pp. 595-606.

29 These treatises are to be understood in connection with the development of *ragamala* paintings in Indo-Persian courts treated by Miner in the present volume.

any version known to me.³⁰ Alaol also provides lists of the *kalas*, *ragas*, *raginis*, *talas*, and *talinis*, the way they may be combined as well as the directions, colours, and, for the four *kalas*, the elements—fire, earth, wind, and water—they are associated with.³¹

In the *bhanitas* of this technical text the Bengali poet often addresses the assembly in different ways from his narrative poems and he never refers to the name of any of his patrons.³² This suggests that the fragments were parts of the teaching he delivered to the children of the local elite.³³ Alaol clearly states that he is using the *shastras* in order to explain the science of *sangita* when he states:

avagata pāiyā śāstra-pustaketa |
bhāngiyā kahiba saba bujhaha paṇḍita | |

I learned in the books of the treatises
And I will explain everything, so that you, knowledgeable audience,
may understand.

30 About the origin of theatre in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, see Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *Poétique du théâtre indien* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1991), pp. 53-59. The author of the *Saṅgītadāmodara* summarises the myth in this way: "In this regard, we hear that in ancient times, Brahma made the fifth Veda from the [other four] Vedas on Indra's request; that is to say that it was a secondary Veda, because the Vedas are said to be four by the Tradition. Then, Shiva [declared] to Brahma that this secondary Veda is called 'Gandharva'. After that, he taught it to Bharata who spread it in the mortal world. That is why its instigators are Shiva, Brahma and Bharata". The first two chapters of the *Pañcamasārasaṃhitā* of Narada deal with the spread of *sangita* from heaven to western Bengal (Radha) by the descendants of Bharata; Damodar Sen Narada, *Pañcamasārasaṃhitā and Saṅgītadāmodara*, ed. by Guru Bipin Singh and trans. into Hindi by Lalmani Tiwari (Calcutta: Manipuri Nartanalaya, 1984), pp. 1-4.

31 Alaol's use of the term *kalā* differs from the *Saṅgītaratnākara* and seems to refer rather to the non-lexical syllables (commonly called *nom tom*) used as an aid to articulation in *dhrupad alap*, which are often imbued with esoteric meanings and power; see R. Sanyal and R. Widdess, *Dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 152-57. The fragment of *sangita* treatise bearing Alaol's signature elaborates on the inner significance of *kalas*, their location, their *dhyanas* (cf. Miner in this volume), and their cosmological associations; the cosmological associations show a clear link with Shaiva tantric teachings, and templates for such cosmological associations can be found in early modern Bengali Qalandari Yoga treatises; *Ālāol Racanāvalī*, ed. by Muhammad Abdul Qayyum and Razia Sultana (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007), pp. 598-99; I am grateful to Allyn Miner for pointing me in the direction of *dhrupad*.

32 The expressions he uses are *sabhā madhye*, *sabhā praṇāmiyā*, *sabhā sambodhiyā*, *sabhāra ālae*; Alaol (2007), pp. 597-98, 600-06.

33 See below for reference to his teaching activity in *Sikāndarnāmā*.

raciluma ei kathā ādye lekḥā pāi |

I composed this discourse *after obtaining [the knowledge] from the scriptures.*

āgama vicāri kahe hīna Alaola | |

The humble Alaol speaks *after reflecting upon the treatises.*³⁴

Alaol, like other Bengali poet-translators, used the verb *bhāṅgiyā kah-*, which literally means “saying after breaking”, to talk about the process of translation. Without going into the details of Alaol’s approach regarding translation, let us just notice the didacticism of the poet, who presents himself as an intermediary between his source and the audience. We shall see that he was not only an interpreter of texts, but also of the performance in its various artistic dimensions. In this case it seems that his source-texts were Sanskrit *sāṅgītaśāstras*.³⁵ The didactic dimension of these fragments further appears in Alaol’s answer to the audience:

hīna Alaole kahe śuna gaṇigaṇa |

*uttarera padduttara śunaha ekhana | |*³⁶

The humble Alaol says: “Listen connoisseurs!

Listen to the answer I now give to [your] question”.

Shāstras and the Panchali Tradition

We saw that performance is present in Alaol’s texts through conventions connected to the *panchali* tradition. Yet by writing a treatise he also expressed a more specific interest in *sāṅgīta* (lyrical arts). What did the term *sāṅgīta* mean for the poet and his milieu? We will see that this technical term borrowed from Sanskrit treatises provides the relevant epistemological tools to define Alaol’s paradigm of performance.

³⁴ Alaol (2007), pp. 593, 603, and 606.

³⁵ In his narrative poems, Alaol explicitly names three of them: Shubhankara’s *Sāṅgīta-dāmodara* (c. fifteenth century), Damodara Mishra’s *Sāṅgīta-darpaṇa* (c. 1625) and Narada’s *Pañcamasārasaṅgīta* (c. sixteenth century); see Alaol (2007), pp. 109 and 252. The editors of the texts mistakenly read *sāṅgīta pañcama svāra nārāde kahila* for *saṅgīta pañcamasāra nārāde kahila* (compare with the text of the manuscript given in Alaol, 2002, p. 302) and *Samkṣipta-darpaṇa* for *Sāṅgīta-darpaṇa*.

³⁶ Alaol (2007), p. 606.

Shubhankara, the author of the *Saṅgītadāmodara*, one of the explicit sources of Alaol on lyrical arts, gives the following definition:

tālavādyānugaṃ gītaṃ naṭībhir yat tu gīyate |
nṛtyasyānugataṃ raṅge tat saṅgītakam ucyate | |³⁷

The song performed by female artists accompanied
by rhythmical instruments³⁸
and dance is called *sangita*.

The term *sangita* provides the widest artistic paradigm—it contains the arts of instrumental music (*tala-vadya*), dance (*nṛitya*), and *gita*. *Gita* is further divided into two elements, *dhatu* and *matu* (music and text), providing another useful theoretical tool.³⁹ *Dhatu* and *matu* also appear in another important definition, that of the *vaggeyakara* (the author and composer).⁴⁰ It is worth pointing out that by using shastric technical terms to talk about performance, Alaol did not demarcate a “high” tradition separate from that of the regional *panchali* but rather applied the science taught in Sanskrit *shastras* to the regional artistic domain.⁴¹

37 Shubhankara (1960), p. 16. On Shubhankara, his place in the history of *sangitashastras*, and the reception of his work, see Nijenhuis (1977), pp. 19-20.

38 The compound *tālavādyā* can either be translated “rhythmical instrument” or “rhythm (*tāla*) and [melodic] instruments (*vādyā*)”.

39 See the definition given in the *Saṅgītadāmodara*: *dhātumātusamāyuktaṃ gītam ity ucyate bhudhaiḥ | tatra nādātmako dhātur mātur akṣarasamcayaḥ | |* (What contains *dhatu* and *matu* is called *gita* by wise men. In this concern, *dhatu* is made of sounds and *matu* is [the result of] a combination of syllables); Shubhankara (1960), p. 16.

40 For a Persian definition of the *bayikār* (< Sk. *vaggeyakāra*), see Ghunyat-ul-Munya: *The Earliest Known Persian Work on Indian Music*, trans. by Shahab Sarmadee (Bombay: Asian Publishing House, 1978), pp. 129-30, and for the Persian text *Ghunyat'ul Munya: The Earliest Persian Work on Indian Music*, ed. by Shahab Sarmadee (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2003), p. 109. The *Lahjāt-i Sikandarshāhi*, another Persian text composed in an Afghan Lodi milieu in the second half of the fifteenth century, gives a complete definition of the *vaggeyakar* that closely follows the *Saṅgītaratnākara*; ‘Umar Sama’ Yahya al-Kabuli, *Lahjāt-i Sikandarshāhi wa laṭā’if-i nā-matnāhī*, ed. by Syeda Bilqis Fatema Husaini (Mumbai: Alhyat Research Center, 2001), Vol. 1, pp. 146-47. On the figure of the *vaggeyakar* in Braj literature during the Mughal period, see Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye, *Tānsen et la tradition des chants dhrupad en langue braj, du XVIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III, 1990), pp. 127ff.

41 This contrasts with South Indian Dravidian literary traditions in which the epistemological frameworks of Sanskrit had been adopted and adapted very early; Sheldon Pollock, ‘The Cosmopolitan Vernacular’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1 (1998), 6-37, and *The Language of Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit Culture and Power in*

We therefore witness the rapprochement of the regional Bengali medium with the Sanskrit epistemological framework in the context of performance. This move becomes clear when Alaol states it himself in the digressions that follow some of the performance scenes depicted in his poems. Damodara in his *Saṅgītadarpaṇa* (Bnf Sanscrit 771, f. 32a) provides the following definition of the author and composer:

*vāgvarṇasamudayas tu mātur ity u[cya]te budhaiḥ |
geyaṃ dhātur dvayoḥ kartā prokto vāggeyakārakah | |⁴²*

The combination of the letters of words is called *matu* by wise men, what ought to be sung is *dhatu*, the one who composes both is called “author and composer”.

According to this definition, Alaol was a *panchali vaggeyakar*, a *panchali* author and composer. Even if he used the regional medium for his compositions, he declared himself a specialist of lyrical arts as taught in contemporary Sanskrit treatises, and he analyzed his own activity of Bengali poet with the tools provided by the Sanskrit tradition. Hence it is legitimate in his case to study his poems using the terminology of the Sanskrit treatises he was familiar with.

I will now try to demonstrate that the above-mentioned performance paradigm obtained from the definition of *sangita* and *gita* can help us define the three kinds of poetical performance present in Alaol’s texts. The first kind of performance combines instrumental music, dance, and singing, the second one is the musically tuned declamation of a narrative part, and the third kind of performance is the commentary on a text that has been previously read to the audience in the *sabha*.⁴³ These three categories are referred to by Alaol himself when he declares that he taught *patha* (reading), *gita*, and *sangita* to the children of the nobles

Premodern India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Even sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Brajbhasha literature openly integrated Sanskrit scholarship when reflecting on its own tradition; Allison Busch, ‘The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/Riti Tradition’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East* 24.2 (2004), 45-59. But this was not the case at all in premodern Bengali, which was largely autonomous in its aesthetic and prosody from the prescriptions of Sanskrit *shastras*.

42 Damodara, *Saṅgītadarpaṇa* (MS Bnf Sanscrit 771), f. 32a.

43 This should be compared with the definitions given by Zumthor (1983, p. 164) of *texte*, *poème*, and *œuvre*.

of Mrauk-U.⁴⁴ According to this paradigm, the musical aspect (*dhatu*) dominates in the text or in the various episodes contained in a *panchali* when, for example, a *gita* is inserted inside a narrative section, while the textual element (*matu*) will be dominant in highly ornate sections, such as the *nakha-sikha*, and even more in scholarly digressions. The bulk of the narrative parts constitute the middle of this paradigm in which the text is central but requires a musical tune when performed. Here is a pattern using this framework and the technical terms used by Alaol himself to designate the lyrical, narrative, and speculative dimensions of his literary compositions:

Table 16.1: The performance paradigm of Alaol's poems

<p>[<i>dhatu</i>, music]</p> <p><i>lacari</i> song</p> <p><i>katha/vrittanta/vivarana/prasanga</i> tale, narrative, description, episode</p>	<p><i>sangita</i></p> <p>text/music/dance</p>	<p>Traditional <i>panchali</i></p>	<p>Alaol's <i>panchali</i></p>
<p><i>bakhana</i> commentary</p> <p>[<i>kavyarasavakya/tattvakatha/nitishastrakatha</i> on <i>kavya</i>, knowledge, ethics]</p> <p>[<i>matu</i>]</p>	<p><i>gita</i></p> <p>text/music</p> <p><i>patha</i> reading</p> <p>text</p>		

The terms used in this Table are found in Alaol's technical vocabulary. Similarly to any other *panchali*, it includes both the *sangita*, involving text, music, and dance, and the narrative part characterised by a musically tuned declamation. Alaol adds the scholarly digressions and other sophisticated parts in which he stresses eloquence and technical aspects of "speech". *Bakhana* means "commentary", and the three compounds indicated underneath are the three main themes of the refined discourse as conceived by Alaol—on the savour of poetry, the essential principals, and mundane ethic.

44 Alaol (2007), p. 313.

Mise en Abyme of Sangita: Alaol as a Gandharp

In Alaol's texts we find illustrations of the three kinds of performance of *panchali*: complete theatrical performance, narrative performance, and technical speech or didactic discourse. By analyzing one description of a *sangita* performance from Alaol's *Padmāvātī*, we will see how the poet blurs the limit between the performance that is depicted in the story and the *panchali* that is actually taking place in the *sabha* of his patron. In this *mise en abyme*, Alaol also plays the role of an artistic mediator between the show and the audience. In the following passage in *lachari*, that is to say a song composed in the *tripadi* metre which is accompanied by dance steps performed by the *gayen*, Jayasi's text is the model for Alaol's poem and gives the Bengali poet the opportunity to describe a *sangita* performance:

| | *rāga dīrgha chanda lācārī* | |
tabe rājā ratnasena / vicāri bujhiyā mane / vaśya maraṇa āche tattve |
yedina ānande yāya / jīvana suphala pāya / sukhabhoga bhālamanda śarte | |
bhavitavye thāke yei / avaśya haiba sei / vidhi-bale nāhika eḍāna |
ajñāne bhāvaya dukha / [jñānete bārība sukha]⁴⁵ / sadānanda [sārete] pramāṇa⁴⁶ | |
eteka bhāvīyā citte / ratnasene ānandite / rājadvāre raci nṛtyaśālā | 5
haraṣita sarvajana / nācaya nartakīgaṇa / pañcaśabde kari eka melā | |
chaya rāga hāṅkāriyā / chatrīsa rāgiṇī laiyyā / madhusvare kaila ālāpana |
dakṣiṇā[ty]a aṅga bālā / nānā kāce nāce bhālā / sādhanā hastaka sulakṣaṇa | |
kahite nṛt[y]era kathā / bahula bāḍaya pothā / nā kahile śānta nahe mane |
alapa nā kahō yabe / baliba paṇḍita sabe / ei kavi saṅgita nā jāne | | 10
maneta kariyā kalpa / kahimu kiñcita alpa / bujhaha rasika dhīra jane |
rasasindhu guṇīśvara / śrīyuta māgana vara / ājñā pāi Alaola bhaṇe | |⁴⁷

Then Raja Ratnasena intensely reflected
upon the undeniable power of death.

When time passes in joy and bliss, one plucks the good fruits of life;
the experience of pleasure depends on the good and bad things [that we do].
What is part of our destiny will surely happen;
there is no way to escape the power of Fate.

45 The editor Debnath Bandyopadhyay reads: *janmite barība sukha*.

46 Bandyopadhyay reads: *sāhase*. The reference here is to the *Vedāntasāra* of Sadananda (c. fourteenth century), a handbook that exposes the basics of Vedānta philosophy. This short text was widely read and has been commented upon by several authors; see Theodore Aufrecht, *Catalogus Catalogorum: An Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit Works and Authors* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1891), Vol. 1, p. 607.

47 Alaol (2002), p. 300.

One worries in ignorance, whereas knowledge increases happiness;
 testimony lies in Sadananda's [*Vedānta*]sāra.
 Thinking thus in his mind, Ratnasena in order to enjoy his self
 built a dance hall at the door of the royal palace. 5
 Everyone was cheerful and the dancers danced
 accompanied by the festive harmony of all kinds of instruments.
 Striking up the six musical modes with their thirty-six *raginis*,
 they started singing the prelude with sweet voices.
 Beautiful young women from the South skillfully danced in various fashions,
 displaying their mastery of hand movements.
 If I talk about dance, the book will expand too much,
 If I don't, I won't find peace in my mind.
 If I don't give a short explanation, scholars will say,
 "This poet doesn't know lyrical arts!" 10
 Hence I decide to explain all this briefly;
 O wise connoisseurs! Listen carefully!
 Alaol speaks on the order of this Ocean of sensibility, the master of all qualities,
 the noble and excellent Magana!

In these lines, Alaol exposes various aspects of an artistic performance—from the motivations of the patron to set up a *nrityashala* to the critical preoccupations of the court poet who must show his erudition in order to remain credible in front of the assembly.⁴⁸ Again, Alaol slips from text to context. The courtly performance described in the poem mirrors what is actually taking place in the *sabha* of Mrauk-U. The shift from the narrative to the lyrical form, or from *prasanga* to *sangita*, concretely takes place through the metrical change from *payar* to *lachari tripadi*; thus when a

48 Actually the whole argumentation regarding Ratnasena's attitude is Alaol's comments. The Avadhi text only has: *tabahū rājā hiē na hārā / rāja pāvāri par racā akhārā*; Jayasi, *Padmāvat*, ed. by Mata Prasad Gupta, 2nd edn (Allahabad: Bharati Bhandar, 1963), p. 437. Alaol translated the first and last words of the *caupai* (*tabe rājā ratnasena / [...] rājadvāre raci nr̥tyaśālā / l. 1-5*), and glossed the Avadhi expression *hiē na hārā* (lit. "did not lose in his heart"). The additional "philosophical" explanation that Alaol gives may be understood as advice to encourage the patron to play his role of supporter of the arts even in difficult times. Compare with *Satī-Maynā Lora Candrāṇī*, when Alaol describes Lora's pleasures in the Mohara kingdom: *raciyā udyāna ghana / puṣkarīṇī upavāna / tathā [sajjā] kari [nr̥tya]śālā | gīta nāṭa raṅge ḍhaṅge / candrāṇī loraka saṅge / paricaryā kare kulabālā ||* ("He made a complete pleasure garden, pools and groves where he adorned a dance hall. In the amusements of chants and dramatic performances, Chandrani with Lorak were served by well born young girls"); Alaol, *Satī-Maynā Lora Candrāṇī*, ed. by Muhammad Abdul Qayyum (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1992), p. 90. I have slightly amended Abdul Qayyum's text *śayyā* to *sajjā* and *nitya* to *nr̥tya*. These were obvious mistakes in the rendering into modern Bengali of the spelling found in the manuscripts.

sangita performance is described in the poem, it is also actually performed in Alaol's *sabha*.

The evocation of dance in the original poem impels Alaol to intervene and provide the assembly with his comments. This attitude is a specific feature of the *gandharva* (Sk.) (>*gandharp*/*gandharb* in Pers.), a key figure of artistic performance dealt with somewhat differently in Sanskrit and Persian treatises.⁴⁹ For instance, in the *Saṅgītaratnākara*, composed by Sharṅgadeva in the thirteenth century, one of the most influential treatises on *sangita* frequently referred to by the *Saṅgītadāmodara* and the *Saṅgītadarpaṇa*, the *gandharva* is briefly mentioned as one type of *vaggeyakar* (author-composer) who masters both *deshi*, i.e. regional, mundane technique, and *marga*, i.e. eternal, divine technique. No further precision is given regarding his role in the *sabha* during the performance. The definition of the *gandharva* as a knowledgeable intermediary between the performers and the audience is furnished by the *Ghuniyat al-munya*, a Persian treatise on Indian music and dance composed in fourteenth-century Gujarat.⁵⁰ Though Alaol never refers either to the function of *gandharva/gandharp* or to this treatise, typologically speaking this definition seems to match perfectly Alaol's function in the *sabha* as it transpires in his poems:

mu'arrif-i surūd ki ānrā gandharp gūyand ; wazīfa-yi ū ān ast ki har rāg u surūd u raqṣ ki maṭlūb-i ṣāhib-i majlis bāshad, istifsār kunad, wa bar⁵¹ ṭawā'if-i mazkūr baḡūyad, wa dar athnā-yi surūd u raqṣ chūn bāngī yā shaklī nīk ṣādīr shawad taḥsīn kunad, wa nām-i ān bāng u shakl baḡūyad ki īn rā īn chunīn gūyand—ū bāyad ki bar majmū'-i anwā'-i surūd wa ashkāl-i raqṣ muṭṭala' bāshad.⁵²

49 See Sharṅgadeva, *The Saṅgītaratnākara of Śārṅgadeva with the Kalānidhi of Kallinātha and the Saṅgītasudhākara of Siṃhabhūpāla*, ed. by S. Subrahmanyam Shastri and V. Krishnamacharya (Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1959), p. 153, and the *Saṅgītaśiromaṇi*, ed. and trans. by Emmie te Nijenhuis (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 484-85. The *Lahjāt-i Sikandarshāhī* does not elaborate on the topic: “dar bayān-i gāndharb wa ānchunān ast ki har ki mārg u desī rā bā badānad, ān rā gāndharb nām khwānand... sabab-i īn ma'nī niwīshita nashud tā kitāb dirāz nagardad”. (“On the exposition of the word *gandharb* and its meaning: anyone who knows perfectly and completely the *marga* and the *deshi* is called a *gandharb*... I do not write anything about the reason of the meaning [of this word], so that the book does not become too long”); 'Umar Sama' Yahya al-Kabuli (2001), see below for the definition of the *Ghuniyat al-munya*.

50 Regarding musicological literature and patronage in the Sultanate of Gujarat, see Delvoye (2000).

51 I suggest to read *ba* instead of *bar*.

52 *Ghuniyat al-munya* (2003), Persian text, pp. 109-10, translation slightly modified from that given by Sarmadee (1978), pp. 130-31.

He is the conductor of music,⁵³ also called *gandharp*. The duties assigned to him are to inquire about the specific *raga*, the type of music and the type of dance the Master of the Assembly desires to have, and to tell the above mentioned group [of musicians and dancers]. In the course of song and dance when any tonal flourish or a beautiful dance-figure is accomplished, he approves it and specifies [what has been performed]. He is expected to know everything about all forms of song and all figures of dance.

Now let us come back to the excerpt of *Padmāvati* quoted before. The poet says he will highlight some topics related to *sangita*, and in the verses that immediately follow he provides a detailed exposition of technical features related to the subject. The first thing he mentions is the organisation of a performance with its inaugural benediction and the invocation of Ganesha and other deities. He also indicates that the name of the musical mode should be pronounced (*rāga ucāriyā*) and the various things performed described by their name (*yateka sādhanā hena kahi nāma laiyā*).⁵⁴ One cannot fail to recognise here the figure of the *gandharp* defined in the fourteenth-century Persian treatise from Gujarat. This is not an isolated case: Alaol does a similar exposition regarding *sangita* in *Saptapaykara*. There again he uses the pretext of a dance performance in the narrated story to display his mastery of the subject and fulfill his function of *gandharp*.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Alaol's care in displaying his knowledge on *sangita* shows that the topic was an unavoidable part of the courtly culture of his time. In this essay I have argued that thanks to the context in which Alaol's poems were performed, the paradigm of performance and composition of his texts extended simultaneously towards greater textuality and increased attention to the lyrical parts. One of the consequences of this move was the insertion of scholarly comments by the author. The author acted as an intermediary between the audience and the text performed. This

53 The term *mu'arrif* usually means "herald". He was the individual in charge of announcing anyone who would come to the Sultan's court. See the article 'Mu'arrif', in Dihkhuda (2002).

54 Alaol (2002), p. 300.

55 Alaol (2007), pp. 252-53.

feature is salient in the scenes of *sangita* performances that occur inside the story Alaol is rendering into Bengali.

In the broader historical and cultural context, this interest in the technical aspects of *sangita* in a court milieu promoting vernacular literature was not restricted to Mrauk-U. Two leads have to be further explored in order to understand the cultural atmosphere in which this literature came into existence. The first one is the Jaunpur and Indo-Afghan courtly cultures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. More than any other branch of Sanskrit knowledge, *sangita* was actively investigated by the scholars of this period who worked at royal and secondary courts. The *Lahjāt-i Sikandarshāhī* is a good example of the thorough scholarship of Indo-Persian authors in the field of lyrical arts. Similarly, Jaunpur became a major centre of patronage during this period. In the Awadhi romances from the same eastern region that were composed from the early sixteenth century, like Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* (1503), performance was an aspect of the poetry itself, and the authors frequently included passages in which the technical vocabulary of *sangita* was used.⁵⁶ Alaol testifies to the continuity and transformations of this literary tradition. He went further into the explanatory details and he cited his sources. The treatises mentioned by the Bengali poet of Mrauk-U are extremely relevant in the context of the courtly culture of the regional kingdoms of Northeast India. To mention just a few examples, Shubhankara was quoted very often by authors in Mithila, Nepal, Assam, and Bengal, and Narada's *Pañcamasārasaṃhitā* is said to have played a central role in the formation of the lyrical tradition at the court of Manipur in the late eighteenth century. The king of Orissa Sarvajna Jagannatha Narayanadeva (r.1648-1664) also quoted from both treatises in his *Saṅgītanārāyaṇa*.⁵⁷

The next step will be to observe how the poets put the content of these technical texts into practice and combined the Sanskrit ethos with their regional tradition. The technical literature circulating in the regional courts was very specific, and it is possible to identify this corpus with great accuracy. In Alaol's case we saw how one can describe the pattern

⁵⁶ See Miner in the present volume.

⁵⁷ See Emie te Nijenhuis's comments in the introduction of Delvoye et al., eds. (2010), p. 40.

of composition of his poems with the technical vocabulary provided by the handbooks available to him. The complex relation between the content of the Sanskrit treatises, the fragments of Alaol's own technical texts, and the information provided by his poem still await further study.