Sound, Music and Sonic Experiences: A study of the Religious Spaces of Vrindavan and Mathura in Northern India

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Abstract

Music has the potential to stir strong emotions, particularly feelings of exhilaration and exuberance in religious contexts. However, for music to induce a religious experience, the listener must cognitively appraise the subjective experience as a religious experience. This understanding of music as a religious experience is typically learned through participation in religious rituals accompanied by music during religious services. Over time, music has become intertwined with the individual's mental depiction of these rituals, allowing them to recreate the emotional experiences associated with the rituals across different times and places. Music and religion are strongly linked in a variety of ways. Individuals solace in facing existential fears by aligning themselves with these two cultural symbols: music and religion. These symbols serve as extensions of their belief systems, offering a sense of continuity beyond their personal existence. It is through this idea that the study navigates and explores the idea of religion as sonic expression by re-looking at the religious spaces of Vrindavan and Mathura, two most sacred spaces for Hindus in the northern India. The method undertaken for this study is field study. Two places were considered for the study – Vrindavan and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, India. The theoretical framework referred to here is the soundscape theory by R. Murray Schafer. n religious music and its influence on religious experience. Not much is explored in how secular music can trigger religious experience in secular individuals. This study investigates the incorporation of a more in-depth analysis of universally present musical elements such as monotony, repetition, and simplicity in the religious music of Vrindavan and Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh.

Keywords: music, sonic spaces, Vrindavan, Mathura, religious experience

Introduction

How do sound break and reconnect in distinctive sonic spaces? Can we read sounds? What is sound? Sound is anything that makes us listen. Sounds carry meaning as much as words make meaning. While ocular is something that has always occupied the pivotal position, auditory sounds cannot be deemed as less crucial. The study here attempts to encapsulate the sonic spaces in relation to sonic rhythm and sonic culture and thereby drive home the point that an ethnographic ear is as crucial and as significant as visual observation that is considered as the backbone of cultural anthropology. The devaluation of sound within the academic examination of religion is associated with favoring sight over sound in Western modernity, which diminishes the spiritual significance of hearing (Chidester 1992; Schmidt 2002). Listening is often regarded as the least active of the senses, and musical expression is seen as derivative rather than formative of culture (Chernoff 2002). Veit Erlmann questions the usefulness of continuing to connect modernity primarily with visual experiences (Erlmann 2004, 3–4), especially as contemporary technologies have led to a renewed emphasis on auditory experiences. However, he cautions against advocating for an overemphasis on hearing over sight, instead suggesting that understanding a "hearing culture" offers fresh perspectives on cultural understanding and social dynamics.

The study of religion has recently benefited significantly from a renewed focus on lived religion and materiality (Meyer et al., 2011). This shift urges us to consider how aesthetics play a role in interpreting religious experiences (Meyer, 2009), and it emphasizes the importance of moving beyond beliefs and texts to explore practices and sensory experiences, which in turn raises new questions about religious communication and mediation (Morgan, 2009). Despite the crucial role of sound and hearing in our lives, music and extramusical sound have not received adequate attention in religious studies, reflecting a broader neglect within the multidisciplinary field of sound studies (Keeling & Kun, 2011).

The lack of emphasis on sound in religious studies can be attributed to the historical preference for sight over sound in Western modernity, leading to a devaluation of the auditory as a spiritual sense (Chidester, 1992; Schmidt, 2002). Additionally, listening is often seen as a passive sense, and musical expression is considered secondary rather than fundamental to cultural understanding (Chernoff, 2002). Veit Erlmann challenges the continued association of modernity with visuality, particularly in an age where technological advancements have highlighted the importance of auditory experiences (Erlmann, 2004). However, he suggests moving beyond a complete reversal to an "ear monopoly" by exploring the concept of a "hearing culture," which offers novel perspectives on cultural knowledge and social relationships. While recent scholarship has begun to address the neglect of sound in religious studies, there remains a need for further exploration and integration of auditory perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of religious experiences and expressions.

Analyzing and describing sound—including its creation, perception, usage, and transmission—requires input from a range of disciplines spanning natural, social, and human sciences. Notably, ethnomusicologists, cultural anthropologists, and historians who have pioneered research on acoustic and auditory practices highlight the dangers of isolating specific sound elements from their cultural contexts or imposing Western music frameworks in cross-cultural settings. It's crucial to clarify that studying sound in the context of religious concepts and practices is not necessarily confined to music. Music is defined as culturally organized and meaningful sound or as having structured acoustic attributes (Chernoff 2002; Shelemay 2006; Ellingson 2005). Similarly, just as languages may lack direct equivalents for "music" as understood in Western contexts, they may prioritize other forms of vocalized expression, such as recitation in Islam or the use of instruments like drums in Siberian shamanic traditions. Thus, adopting a broader understanding of sound, as perceived and interpreted diversely, can provide insights into its role in mediating divine presence across cultures (Schulz 2008, 172–3). The objective of this study is to emphasize the fact that auditory semiotics deserves as much attention as visual semiotics in a religious space. When examining sound in its diverse aspects including production, perception, usage, and transmission, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary, drawing from natural, social, and human sciences (Chernoff 2002; Shelemay 2006)). Ethnomusicologists, cultural anthropologists, and historians, in their pioneering work on acoustic and auditory practices, emphasize the dangers of isolating specific sound objects from their social contexts or imposing Western musical paradigms in cross-cultural contexts (Ellingson 2005). It is crucial to differentiate the study of sound in religious contexts from music per se; while music is typically defined as culturally organized and meaningful sound or sounds with specific acoustical patterns, not all cultures conceptualize sound in this way (Schulz 2008, 172–3). For instance, in certain traditions like Islam, vocalized expressions such as recitation hold more significance, while in Siberian shamanic

practices, instruments like drums may be more central than vocal elements (Schulz 2008, 172–3). Adopting a broader perspective on sound, encompassing its varied perceptions and conceptualizations in mediating divine presence, proves more fruitful in scholarly exploration (Schulz 2008, 172–3) in any academic discipline.

Aim

To reclaim the sounds of the religious spaces with specific references to Vrindavan and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, India, whether as objective facts or as they were subjectively heard, interpreted, and imagined by the people in particular historical settings. Moreover, extraordinary and unusual sounds are more likely to be recorded, rather than the ordinary and mundane. Therefore, the study aims to analyze on the range of possible interrelationships between religion, sound, and music.

Objectives

- To explore how sounds, create human bonding and harmony through religious and cultural spaces.
- To understand how sounds, help in recreating and affirming social values and bonding in the context of Vrindavan and Mathura in Northern India.

Theoretical framework

The soundscape theory developed by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer has been applied for this study. The theory examines the relationship between sound and environment and believes that sounds of a particular place can provide insight into the cultural and social values of the inhibited people. Schafer believes that the sounds of a particular place can provide insight into the cultural and social values of the people who inhabit that place. At the same time, the study is concerned with the relationship between sound and the environment. However, acoustic ecology focuses more on the impact of human activity on natural soundscapes, and the ways in which humans can create more harmonious sonic environments. The study of sonic rhythms of place has also been applied as part of this research work as it helps to explain why certain sounds might be perceived as soothing or disturbing and to examine the relationship between sound and geography. Sonic geographers study the ways in which the physical features of a place impact its sonic environment, and how people interact with sound in different geographic locations. It also examines the patterns of sound and silence in a particular place, and how those patterns create a sense of rhythm. This field of study explores the ways in which humans perceive and respond to sound.

Review of Literature

In the realm of religious studies, two scholars have made significant contributions to understanding the role of sound and hearing in religious experiences. Leigh Eric Schmidt's book, Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment, delves into the history of auditory experiences and hallucinations within American religion during and after the Enlightenment (Schmidt 2002). He argues for a broader examination of the auditory landscape in religious contexts, including not just preaching and music but also the diverse range of sounds such as sobbing, psalms, and bells that contribute to the devotional experience (Schmidt 2002). Similarly, in the context of Hinduism, Guy Beck (1993) emphasizes the centrality of sound in Hindu theology and ritual practices, a dimension often overlooked by Western scholars who focus more on visual elements. Beck's insider perspective,

gained through years of learning vocal classical music in India and subsequent academic studies in musicology and religious studies, allows him to explore the significance of sound in Hindu worship comprehensively (Beck 1993, 10–11). He highlights the rich sonic environment of Hindu worship, which includes various musical instruments and vocalizations, echoing the cosmological importance attributed to sound in Hindu scriptures like the Sabda-Brahman and Nada-Brahman across different Hindu traditions (Beck 1993).

Both scholars underscore the need for a holistic understanding of religious experiences, incorporating auditory elements and sonic theology alongside traditional visual and textual analyses, enriching our comprehension of diverse religious practices and beliefs.

Some scholars are shifting their focus from specific musical elements or performers to investigate broader acoustic environments known as "soundscapes" (Schulz 2008). These environments, such as the use of trumpet voluntaries in Christian services or conch-shell trumpet notes in Hindu rituals, play a significant role in structuring spaces and defining boundaries (Ellingson 2005, 6254). Alain Corbin's exploration of how bells functioned as both auditory and defensive markers in nineteenth-century France is frequently referenced in this context. Anthropologist Dorothea Schulz contributes to this discussion by examining the urban soundscape of Mali, where local and national radio broadcasts shape the public arena (Lee 2006).

The concept of the soundscape originates from R. Murray Schafer's work on sonic environments (Schafer 1993), and Emily Thompson defines it as a blend of physical space and cultural perception (2004, 1f.). Schulz (2008) extends this concept to emphasize the interplay between sound production, perception, and religious experience, highlighting how soundscapes create a sense of time, space, and embodiment crucial for religious communication (2008, 185).

A burgeoning area of interest is archaeoacoustics or acoustic archaeology, which explores the acoustic effects of ancient monuments on religious experiences (Scarre & Lawson 2006). These sites, believed to induce altered states or replicate sacred sounds, are now visited by music therapists leading pilgrimages (Hale 2007). This interdisciplinary approach aligns with the spatial turn in religious studies, deepening our understanding of the interplay between sound, space, and spirituality throughout history. Two notable works delve into the experiential aspects of trance, broadening the discussion beyond mere altered states of consciousness. Deborah Kapchan's book Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace (2007) delves into how Gnawa trance music transforms musical and racial identities for the Moroccan people and their global collaborators. Kapchan's analysis encompasses the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of Gnawa possession trance ceremonies, highlighting the transculturation of trance and sacred music more broadly. Ethnomusicologist Judith Becker's work, particularly her book Deep Listeners (Becker 2004), merges scientific and cultural perspectives on music and emotion, focusing on trance experiences. Becker proposes an emotion-based theory of trance, drawing from neuroscience and biology, and draws parallels between individuals experiencing deep emotions through music and those entering trance states during religious rituals.

Recent studies, such as one by Joshua Penman and Judith Becker (2009), delve into physiological responses like galvanic skin response and heart rate among different groups experiencing trance-like

states, such as Pentecostal Ecstatics and Deep Listeners. Moving beyond trance, discussions on religious sounds and music often intersect with healing practices. Scholars like Penelope Gouk (2000) and Peregrine Hordern (2000) explore historical beliefs and practices regarding music's emotional and healing powers. Ethnographic studies, such as those by Barnes & Sered (2005) and Gioia (2006), focus on contemporary communities and their discourses on sonic effects in healing practices, often involving drumming, chanting, and shamanic elements. With the globalization of world musics and the rise of resources like radio programs and websites dedicated to "sound healing," scholars like Timothy Taylor (2007) examine how specific sounds in advertising music symbolize spiritual or mystical ideas, reflecting historical Western perceptions of spirituality in contrast to other cultures. These discussions highlight the multifaceted nature of religious sounds, from their roles in transformative experiences to their therapeutic and healing potentials in diverse cultural contexts.

Research Method

The method undertaken for this study is qualitative field study. Two places were considered for the study – Vrindavan and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, India. Inside these two places, the following spaces were studied for this research – the locations were Prem Mandir

ISKCON Temple, Kesi Ghat near the banks of the Yamuna River, Gopeshwar Mahadev Mandir, and Nand Gaon. A considerable amount of time was devoted after looking for books, articles, magazines, thesis and research in several libraries, bookstores and online libraries to study the history of Vrindavan and Mathura, with a focus on the temples and their respective devotional practices. Vrindavan, located in Uttar Pradesh, is renowned as a sacred city associated with Lord Krishna, and it enjoys direct road connectivity from Delhi to Agra via NH-2, approximately 145 kilometers south of Delhi. The revered Yamuna River, considered one of India's holiest rivers, flows through Vrindavan and Mathura. Notable ghats in Vrindavan, such as Keshi Ghat and Chir Ghat, showcase remarkable architectural features with their construction in yellow sandstone. The city attracts pilgrims throughout the year, serving as a significant pilgrimage site for both Indian and international visitors. Moreover, Vrindavan holds historical significance intertwined with neighboring places in the Braj region, including Mathura, Gokul, Barsana, Govardhan, and Nandgaon (U.P. Tourism Data, 2014). Mathura stands as one of the seven sacred cities for Hindus, alongside Haridwar, Varanasi, Ujjain, Kanchi, Puri, and Dwarka. Situated along the Yamuna River, Mathura holds deep-rooted traditions and historical significance related to the birth and life of Lord Krishna, a revered Hindu deity. It occupies a pivotal role in Brajbhoomi, which comprises two distinct regions divided by the Yamuna River: the eastern side encompassing Gokul, Mahavan, Baldeo, Mat, and Bajna, and the western side including Vrindavan, Govardhan, Barsana, and Nandgaon (Tandon and Sehgal, 2017). An ethnographic study was conducted in Mathura and Vrindavan exploring its streets, ghats, and temples while capturing sounds and videos for documentation purposes. The sound recordings were made during a day-long visit to Vrindavan were encapsulated in the form of a sound documentary project. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the city and its religious practices, extensive readings were consulted that delve into these topics in depth. The research also drew from secondary sources such as scholarly journals, newspaper articles, and reports from various organizations. A primary survey was conducted in different areas of the city to gather firsthand data. The research specifically focused on heritage conservation efforts in the region, utilizing secondary data alongside primary research methods.

Efforts were made to ensure the data collected represented diverse perspectives across caste and community lines among the participants in the region.

Data Collection

During the fieldwork, several crucial steps were undertaken to gather data and insights for the documentation project focused on Vrindavan. Firstly, extensive readings on Devotion and Krishna Consciousness were conducted to establish a foundational understanding. Subsequently, visits were made to explore the urban reality of Vrindavan firsthand. This involved collecting documentation on the temples in Vrindavan and actively participating in conferences, events, and collective bhaktis to immerse in the local religious practices.

A survey of the temples was conducted to understand their significance and layout within the city. Special attention was given to identifying unique elements of the surroundings that hold cultural or spiritual value. Interviews were also conducted with the local community residing and working near the temples to gain insights into their perspectives and to better comprehend the neighborhood dynamics. The research focused specifically on Vrindavan's cultural and spatial aspects, emphasizing city spaces within the temples. Rather than focusing solely on the grandeur of the temples, the goal was to map out the everyday cultural practices and usage of spaces by the general populace. This approach aimed to capture the spatial characteristics and their evolution over time, drawing from accounts and narratives shared by local devotees spanning from the past to the present. Furthermore, the research highlighted the significant role of sound in the process of creating meaning, particularly expanding beyond traditional visual semiotics, in the sacred context of Vrindavan, a revered Hindu site believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna.

Data Analysis

Our auditory sense does not get shut down even when we cover our ears or move our head in the opposite direction to the source of the sound in the way closing the eyes does for our sight. We become keenly aware of it when it comes to our preference for it and get frustrated in the presence of unwanted sounds. Even during our sleep our auditory system keeps working. This tendency to be on constant alert brings its own merit. Our visual sight aids us in detecting an unknown, impending or invisible presence, or tracking and tracing an unknown one- it not gives us access to information provided by our visual sight but can be referred to as a highly accommodative function in its own right, an *alert* system we share with the higher form of animals.

Common emphasis in their exploration of the diverse ways in which sound has been and continues to be crucial to the ideological construction of a unifying postcolonial Indian nation-state, as well as insistent articulations of communal difference and specificity from multiple publics. How is that sense of individual and group belonging—or unbelonging—mediated by the sounds of India, in India, and representing India—from the street to the festival ground to the cinema hall to the mobile phone? How do Indians generate, inhabit, and interact with the multiplicity of soundscapes through which they move? What is the aesthetic, pragmatic, and political choices that artists make when sonically representing Indian culture(s) and national identit(ies) through media? As a discipline, ethnomusicology has roots deeply embedded in the colonial imaginary. Like the colonial fascination with Indian languages, caste structures, and religions, “Indian music” and its exotic instrumentation and system of scales fascinated early travelers to and scholars of the subcontinent and gave way by the

early twentieth century to a late colonial and early Indian nationalist emphasis on the collection and preservation of "classical" Indian music.

That sound or indeed noise is not experienced as a single event, isolated from social context, is a key insight that research participants shared in the sound experiment. Their recollections of the sound composition were accompanied by narratives that contextualized and enlivened their listening experience. The stories that they constructed, in tandem with listening to sounds, thus made them 'disturbed', 'happy', 'annoyed', 'scared' even, 'shaking' and 'feel like turning around' as if 'some of the things were happening right behind you'.

When asked to share their experiences of the sound experiment, a participant depicted the physical settings where she located the sounds listened to. Rather than feeling enclosed and isolated inside the box, focusing on the sound allowed her to put together visual fragments of her everyday life in the city in what emerges as a detailed and fascinating narrative:

> *It sounded like the day was starting. I heard birds chirping. It felt like I was on my balcony, seeing the sunrise, so it was quite pleasant. After that, screaming sounds [laughs]. The buses, the honking, the crowd. Then it felt like I had gone shopping. A Sunday is even more hectic than a working day. You are running around with your family. The hawkers are around, you know. The ladies are window shopping, their words are quite clear.*

Therefore, the communicative power of sounds appears to lend itself to an almost tangible physical quality that engendered emotional, visceral and bodily reactions among participants.

Parallels can be drawn with Rice's research into the impact of the acoustic dimension of hospitals on patients—an 'active soundscape' which is shown to be experienced with particular immediacy, thus rendering more acute the experience of other senses. Sounds evoked images and enabled participants to observe and describe them with intense curiosity—scenes from urban life and natural scenery. To use their own words, people were 'transmuted', 'transported', 'alchemized' in and out of the box, 'visualized' waterfalls, rivers and mountains, and generally felt 'interested'. The sonic dialectic's serendipitous discovery resonates effectively with Ralph Nicholas "serendipitous discovery' of two opposing observances (Gajan and Durga puja) in the Bengali ritual calendar, which together construct a specific form of' regional culture in Indian civilization' (Nicholas 2008, p. 7; Nicholas 2013, pp. 41-42). Through sacred sound production, this culture precisely mediates an orthodox and non-classical form of divinization.

An understanding was made that these chants have distinctly different textural acoustics and rhythms, aligning with the differing moods of Krishna worship. In the former context, generally cognitively distracted audiences require fast-paced, striking rhythms and loud and high-pitched, imposing sounds to attract them to the pandals.

Kirtan and the Power of Sound Vibration: Humans have a long history of engaging in group singing as a form of social bonding and as a way to represent and embody collective harmony and union. Because of sound's ability to resonate within multiple people at once and elicit a sympathetic

response**.** Kirtan is an incredibly accessible way to tap into the power of group singing— for the power of the wider collective to be felt through music and then for that music to ripple out, reverberate, or echo back the power of the collective vibration as call-and-response.

Bhakti Yoga as a movement emphasizes equality and harmony within the community as a path of socio-spiritual practice accessible to all and focused around collective participation. The community that takes part in the *Kirtan Satsang* is known as the *Sangam* or collective. Chanting is often accompanied by clapping and playing of musical instruments such as the harmonium, tanpura, drums or cymbals. The songs, chants, and mantras can be a simple name of an archetypal deity or the recitation of a devotional Sanskrit or vernacular phrase honoring or praising some aspect of the divine.

Healing the Collective through Sound: Synchronizing consists of responding to the call and amplifying the response which is not only heard through the ear, but felt within the body. Feeling the collective pulse brings the mind's attention to the moment, with heart open in receptivity, experiencing the full power of the grace of being in the here-and-now. This master pulse activates the subtle body at the heart chakra, the seat of divine love where one can experience the divine directly through personal relationship and emotional connection, if not by the union of hearts through the union of voices in harmony with each other. The pulsation of divine love is felt as a rippling force of purification, or shuddhi, within the soul of all being.

Listening into listenings

Passing hassles sounds like listening. Hearing is the hassle with the ubiquity and transience of soundscapes; while harkening is the passing of soundscapes, informed by one's social, artistic and moral leanings. It's a matter of deliberation to draw this distinction between hail and listening. One can argue that it's between this hassle and experience that the politics of product, performance and articulation of sounds unfolds. While everyone translates the hassles with soundscapes, furthermore it argues that not all and everyone's experiences– and, therefore, harkening(s) – accord legality to the organization of sounds similar to noise, music and silence.

It's in asking questions, similar as the following, that these forms of politics can be teased out whose gests of soundscapes – that is, listening – are given preference and whose listening is not? how and where is similar harkening asked and demanded? how does the character of space, artistic surrounds, and soundscapes alter and transfigure with assessments of certain kinds of harkening? and what are the ways in which non-recognized listening(s) pollutants in and out of these soundscapes? Drawing upon ethnographic accouterments from my exploration in Vrindavan, this paper tries to unravel some of these politics, by pressing the social, artistic and moral positions which inform certain listening.

The reflections are interesting as they illustrate a qualitative appreciation of associative recollections that come with sound, enabling communication with the city and its dwellers. In light of discussing sound as communication in this section, they describe a liveliness that imparts a sense that 'the city is not empty,' as another participant observed; 'people talking around, life, people singing, street hawkers etc. A city without noises is not good', she went on to explain.

This was an understanding shared by most participants, whose ideal city 'would not be a noiseless' city—'it's quite a comforting sound, that there are people around you', one expressed, thus, experiencing a sense of connection with people via sound.

The above remark exemplifies Cain et al.'s holistic conceptualization of sounds as 'meaningful events' that create a set of expectations and understandings for individuals and communities. In this light, they contend, 'simply removing negative sounds is not enough. The simple elimination of "noise" is not always appropriate and can create anxiety. Symbolisms and meanings were identified as being communicated by sounds—symbolisms that differed depending on a variety of factors. For example, when asked about their views on the intensity, loudness or calmness of sounds that participants had been exposed to, they often related these to religion and religious practices. Whilst several participants, for example, reported using meditation as a means of relaxation and retreat from the city hullabaloo or withdrawing to a temple in order to find acoustic peace, for the rest sound became a marker to identify and distinguish religions and their practices, for instance 'The Sikh temple believes it has the right to be loud, Hindus believe they have the right to be loud. This is wrong'.

In the above examples, sound was used by participants to create distinctions between social status and religion, and identify 'the noisy "other" [as a] consistent rhetoric' which marginalizes, politicizes and moralizes people's narratives and understandings of the self and other.

Whether physical or symbolic, the qualities of sound appear to permeate participants' understandings of identity, their sense and experience of place. People's culture, status, religious orientation, emotional or psychological state and wellbeing, everyday experience of traffic, all permeate and are expressed by sound. This resonates with Chandola's understanding that: Sound is not just a moment of insular and individuated instance of utterance, but derives its momentum from the collisions with the multiplicities that abound these matrices: spatial, temporal, sonic, social, cultural, and political. A listener traverses through these matrices to 'make sense', to hear, to map not by accompanying each sound but by deliberately, unintentionally, and inadvertently leaving most un-listened in. All-pervasive as it is, sound communicates city life, it expresses the 'reactions of the city.' Or one can say, 'Sound passes messages to us, almost subconsciously, without anyone's consent.'

Discussions

On a personal observation, the soundscape of Vrindavan is a unique blend of religious chants, temple bells, and street sounds that create a vibrant atmosphere.

The most prominent sound in Vrindavan is the chanting of "Hare Krishna" mantra, which can be heard throughout the city. It is common to see people walking around with prayer beads chanting the mantra. The sound of bells ringing in the numerous temples adds to the spiritual ambiance of the city. Apart from religious sounds, the streets of Vrindavan are filled with the sounds of vendors selling flowers, sweets, and souvenirs. The sound of rickshaws and motorbikes honking their way through the narrow lanes is a constant presence. There are also occasional sounds of cows mooing, as cows are considered sacred animals in Hinduism, and are a common sight on the streets of Vrindavan. During major festivals like Holi and Janmashtami, the soundscape of Vrindavan becomes even more vibrant. People play drums and other musical instruments, sing devotional songs, and dance in the streets. The sound

of firecrackers exploding in the sky adds to the festive atmosphere. In conclusion, the soundscape of Vrindavan is a unique blend of religious chants, temple bells, street sounds, and occasional festive music that creates a vibrant and spiritual atmosphere in the city. Since the Mantras is flexible in its practice and activation, it can be chanted at any speed, at any pitch, and either by being sung or hummed. During fast humming the consonants of the mantra disappear and only the vowels remain. Because of the meaning of the mantra, its cyclic effect, and its humming nature, the mantra revolves and resounds around and in our entire existence. In a colloquial manner, the mantra and its chanting as being like a cosmic accelerator with otherworldly implications; it takes off from the ground, revolves around the cosmos and then returns. The yogic and physiological effect of humming the Mantras can be compared to the practice of bhrāmari prāṇāyama (humming bee breath). The humming is created during this breath control practice, where the practitioner focuses on the sound vibration itself and on ajña chakra (the third eye point). The Bihar School of Yoga proposes "Bhramari relieves stress and cerebral tension, alleviating anger, anxiety and insomnia, and reducing blood pressure. It speeds up the healing of body tissue and may be practiced after operations. It strengthens and improves the voice and eliminates throat ailments."

Conclusion

Writing a conclusion of such an intense experience is not such an easy task. Indeed, the work behind this documentary has been a professional experience full of human involvement. Exploring a reality like Vrindavan, was not simple. To those who think that there is no hope for Vrindavan, I will reply saying: "The beauty of the devotion of Vrindavan lies in its chaos. If you can't see it, it is probably just behind a crumbling sign." By deliberating on a distinction between hearing and listening, one could see the manner in which encounters with spaces, cultures and bodies translate into experiences informed by sensorial, social, cultural and moral backgrounds. The ears, they never close. And, thus, we are constantly surrounded by, and submerged in, soundscapes. They evoke different emotions, often helping us to find our bearings and, at other times, making us lose them. Sounds, in a somewhat crude articulation, allow us to make sense of ourselves and the spaces we occupy at the same time (Feld, 2005; Feld and Basso, 1996; Rice, 2003). We do not, however, interact with sounds in their measurable embodiment of decibel notes; rather, we interact with a plethora of notes, variously structured as quiet, music, or noise.

Given the pervasive, albeit fleeting, experience of soundscapes, not only are the particularities and peculiarities of sounds organised as silence, music, and noise, but the preference for one kind of sound organisation over another is also reckoned to be a de facto reality, and thus considered apolitical. In non-Western societies, religious belief can be both scriptural (to classical deities) and more instantaneous and spontaneous (to non-classical gods). In both cases, these beliefs are formed and maintained through long-term habit patterns on the specific nature of devotions to these deities. Furthermore, when these devotional habits are intensely sensory in nature, they become more ingrained or sediment more effectively in cultures and bodies. Aurality and the body's sensitivities to sonic influence are crucial in this process.

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