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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: JNHST-123

Title : Epistemologies of Sacred Sound: Oral Transmission and Performance Practice in TārtamVāṇī.

Recommendation:
Accept as it is .....
Accept after minor revision.....
Accept after major revision .....
Do not accept (*Reasons below*) .....

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity		✓		
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: **JNJST-04**

Reviewer's Comment

The manuscript presents an interesting study of TārtamVāṇī as both a sacred textual corpus and a living tradition of devotional musical performance. Its central argument—that oral-aural transmission and performance are not merely supplementary means of preserving the written text but are integral to its interpretation and continuity—is relevant to the study of devotional music, religious knowledge and intangible cultural heritage. The article's particular strength lies in bringing textual interpretation and musicological analysis into a common framework. The two selected compositions, "Gun ketekahūṁ mere piu jī" and "SāthJīJāgiye," provide different but complementary perspectives on the relationship between devotional language, melodic expression, rhythmic organisation and performance. The manuscript is also commendably cautious about the limitations of recordings and the need to distinguish a particular rendition from the wider living tradition. A few clarifications would further improve the precision and scholarly presentation of the article.

The first point concerns the title and the scope of the argument. The expression "Epistemologies of Sacred Sound" is engaging and gives the manuscript a broader theoretical orientation. However, the article primarily examines two compositions through textual interpretation and the analysis of one recorded performance. The authors should briefly clarify what they mean by "epistemologies" in this

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context. In particular, it would be useful to explain how knowledge is produced, acquired and transmitted through listening, imitation, repetition, memorisation and performance, rather than using the term only in a general sense of musical learning. A short clarification in the introduction would establish a stronger connection between the title, the central argument and the actual analytical work undertaken in the article.

The introduction provides useful background on the NijanandSampradāya and the place of TārtamVāṇī within its devotional tradition. The references to its multilingual character and the reported corpus of 18,758 verses are relevant, particularly because the article seeks to examine the relationship between textual and oral forms of transmission. The authors appropriately acknowledge that these details derive from community-published sources. It would be helpful to maintain this distinction consistently and, if possible, identify the particular edition or community publication supporting the numerical and linguistic information. The authors may also briefly explain the relationship between the names TārtamVāṇī, Kuljam Swaroop and TārtamSāgar, so that readers unfamiliar with the tradition can understand whether these terms refer to the same corpus or to different aspects of its textual and devotional identity.

The literature review identifies three relevant strands of scholarship: oral transmission in Hindustani music, the relationship between music and religious experience, and the wider question of musical transmission and cultural change. This provides an appropriate foundation for the study. However, the research gap could be stated a little more directly. The manuscript argues that TārtamVāṇī has received attention in relation to its religious significance, textual corpus and historical identity, while the processes through which musical knowledge is learned and enacted have received less attention. The authors could make this distinction more explicit and explain how the combination of textual analysis and performance analysis addresses that gap. This would help readers understand the particular contribution of the article without requiring an extensive expansion of the literature review.

The methodology is appropriately presented as a qualitative, interpretive case study, and the authors are transparent about relying on supplied textual materials, musical notes, metadata and a publicly available recording rather than original ethnographic fieldwork. This is an important clarification. The methodology would nevertheless benefit from a little more information about the selection and verification of the materials. For example, the authors could explain briefly how the two compositions were selected, identify the textual source used for "Gun ketekahūṁ mere piu jī," and provide the recording details for "SāthJīJāgiye," including the performer, arrangement, source and duration where available. The article already identifies Shravan Dhital in connection with the latter performance, but a fuller recording reference would make the source easier to locate and assess. It would also be useful to

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clarify whether the transcriptions and musical descriptions were independently checked against the recording or are reproduced from the supplied notes. These additions would improve methodological transparency while retaining the existing research design.

Section 5, on oral transmission as embodied musical knowledge, is an important part of the manuscript. The discussion of śravaṇa, imitation, abhyāsa and the guru–śiṣya relationship successfully explains why musical knowledge cannot be reduced to written notation or textual preservation. The table on pages 4–5 is also useful because it distinguishes guru–śiṣya instruction, family and community settings, and written and digital resources, showing how each may contribute differently to continuity. The authors could strengthen this section by making a clearer distinction between the general principles of oral transmission drawn from the literature and the specific transmission practices documented within the NijanandSampradāya. Since the present study does not include interviews or participant observation, this distinction would help avoid giving the impression that all the described learning arrangements have been empirically established for the particular community under examination.

The analysis of "Gun ketekahūṁ mere piu jī" in Section 6 provides a useful illustration of how devotional language and musical expression may reinforce one another. The interpretation of "piu jī" as an intimate devotional address and "gun ketekahūṁ" as an expression of the limits of language is particularly interesting. The discussion of atiśayokti and indirect praise also offers a useful literary perspective. The authors should, however, provide the complete relevant textual passage or a slightly fuller excerpt from the composition, together with its source, so that readers can follow the interpretation more independently. The discussion of the linguistic mixture of Hindustānī, Braj and other devotional vocabulary is also worth retaining, but the authors should ensure that the identification of individual words and dialectal forms is supported by a reliable textual source. The manuscript itself acknowledges this need, and a brief clarification of the textual basis would make the analysis more secure.

The musicological interpretation in the same section is appropriately cautious, particularly where the supplied notes identify a C tonic, a Kalyan-associated melodic framework and Keharwatāla. The authors correctly recognise that the identification of a rāga requires more than an isolated phrase or descriptive label. The discussion could be improved by distinguishing more clearly between the musical features reported in the supplied material and those independently established through examination of the composition. The interpretation of the reported mīṇḍ on "kete" and the arrival on "piu" is interesting because it attempts to connect musical gesture with devotional meaning. A brief indication of the relevant

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phrase or musical passage would make this connection easier to assess. The authors should also standardise the spelling of Keharwa/Keharwatāla throughout the manuscript.

Section 7, which analyses "SāthJīJāgiye," is arguably the most distinctive part of the article because it provides a relatively detailed account of a particular recorded performance. The discussion of the opening sargam, the sthāyī, instrumental interludes, antaras and returning refrain gives the reader a clear sense of the composition's formal organisation. The performance timeline on pages 8–9 is particularly useful, as it identifies the approximate duration and function of the different sections, including the sarangi passages and the keyboard interlude. The authors should ensure that the timings and musical descriptions correspond accurately to the linked recording. Since the manuscript itself notes that the swara notation and rāga attribution require verification, a final check of the opening sargam, octave markers and the distinction between shuddha and komal Gandhar would be advisable. This is especially relevant because the authors identify the notation of both forms as important to the discussion of Rāga Jog.

The treatment of the instrumental interludes is also worth retaining. The manuscript distinguishes the sustained, gliding melodic contribution of the sarangi from the contrasting timbre of the keyboard, while appropriately avoiding unsupported claims about the keyboard's harmonic role. The suggestion that a brief "NiṠa Dha" sequence may recall Rāga Nand is similarly qualified. The authors should maintain this cautious approach and ensure that any reference to rāga-miśra or secondary-rāga influence is presented as a possibility requiring fuller melodic evidence, rather than as a definitive identification. These qualifications are important because they demonstrate an awareness of the difference between describing a musical passage and establishing its formal classification.

The discussion of Dādrātāla in Section 7.5 is another useful component. The explanation of the six-mātrā cycle and its division into two groups of three provides sufficient context for readers who may not be familiar with Hindustani rhythmic terminology. The authors also make a valuable distinction between the reported 3/4 time signature and the six-mātrā structure of Dādrā. This distinction should be preserved. It would be useful, however, to clarify that the 3/4 value and tempo of 116 are taken from the supplied recording metadata unless independently measured. The article already indicates this, but the source and status of these values could be stated more explicitly in the table or accompanying text.

The discussion of digital circulation in Section 8 is relevant to the article's broader concern with the safeguarding of sacred musical knowledge. The distinction between documentation and prescription is particularly important: a recording preserves a particular performance, but it should not automatically become the definitive standard against which all subsequent performances are judged. The

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recommendations concerning performer attribution, date, location, repertoire identification, permissions and restrictions on circulation are appropriate. The authors could develop this point slightly by explaining how community participation in documentation and decisions about access can help prevent the digital preservation of sacred material from becoming detached from its devotional context. This would strengthen the connection between the article's analysis of oral transmission and its concluding proposal for community-oriented safeguarding.

The conclusion appropriately returns to the central argument and acknowledges the limitations of the study. It is particularly useful that the authors identify the need for further interviews and comparative recordings before making definitive claims about stylistic norms, rāga identity and performance practice. The final paragraph could, however, state the article's principal contribution a little more explicitly: namely, that it demonstrates the analytical value of studying sacred texts through the interaction of language, melody, rhythm and embodied performance, rather than treating textual interpretation and musical practice as separate domains. This would give the conclusion a stronger sense of closure.

Finally, the manuscript requires a careful editorial and bibliographic review. There is an obvious typographical and spacing problem in Section 6, where the sentence beginning "The textual analysis" appears as a merged expression ("The texual analysisidentify"). This should be corrected. The spelling and spacing of TārtamVāṇī, Tārtam Vāṇī, NijanandSampradāya and other recurring terms should be standardised throughout. The reference list also contains entries that do not appear to be cited in the main text, including Coward, Gaind-Krishnan, Grey and Overbey, Noone, Poudel, Tallotte and Treitler. The authors should either connect these works to the relevant discussion or remove them from the bibliography. There are also duplicate or overlapping entries for the NijanandSampradāya and Padmavatipuri Dham websites, as well as a duplicate entry for Noone's 2020 article. These should be consolidated. The bibliographic details of the 2026 reference by Dabke and Dash should also be checked for completeness and consistency. A final proofreading pass would improve the overall presentation.

Overall, the manuscript offers a worthwhile contribution by bringing together the study of oral transmission, devotional textual interpretation and recorded musical performance in the context of TārtamVāṇī. Its two case studies provide a useful basis for examining how devotional meaning is shaped not only by written words but also by melody, rhythm, repetition and performance practice. The article is also appropriately cautious about the limitations of its documentary sources and the need for further community-based research. The suggested revisions are primarily clarificatory and editorial: improving the explanation of the research gap and source selection, distinguishing reported musical information

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from independently verified analysis, refining a few textual and musicological interpretations, and correcting the references and terminology. These changes would strengthen the manuscript without requiring a change in its overall argument or research design.

Final Recommendation

Decision: Accept with minor revisions.