Preliminary Observations on The Musical Analysis of Afro-Baloch Ritual *Mamaby* Songs

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Abstract

This article is the first study of the musical structure of the *mamaby* songs, an endangered tradition particularly prevalent among Afro-Baloch (AfB) communities along the south-eastern coast of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The data was obtained through direct interviews with Baloch and AfB community members, and by recording and filming musical performances in context. The musical structure of two songs performed by a well-known singer and a chorus from Bahukalat was analysed. The results suggest that although AfB communities have lost their language in favour of Balochi, they have retained some musical traditions closely related to East African music. While this preliminary study has not identified specific songs, it shows that the overall tonal organization of the analysed songs is based on a pentatonic scale, one of the basic features of various music cultures in East Africa (Agawu, 2016), and that the musical style employs a call-and-response system, also characteristic of East African Music (Hopton-Jones, 1995).

Keywords: Afro-Baloch, Baloch, women, songs, melody, East Africa, Iran.

1. Introduction

This article is the first exploration into Mamaby songs, a term coined by Nourzaei (2022b: 167), a rare tradition of songs for conception, pregnancy, and post-delivery prevalent among Afro-Baloch (AfB) communities along the south-eastern coast of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[1] The term Afro Baloch refers to people of African descent who were displaced from Africa to Balochistan. While the communities have lost their original African languages (Korn and Nourzaei 2019), they have retained certain cultural practices, such as healing traditions and, we believe, songs, which have led to the preservation of

1 Nourzaei and Saga's contributions make up the bulk of the research in the paper, while McConnachie, an ethnomusicologist, researched and edited the musical contribution to the paper. Saga and McConnachie worked on the musical analysis of the songs based on Nourzaei's original transcription and translation of the songs, including those discussed in this paper. Maryam Nourzaei completed the remaining work.

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their distinct identity. Unlike other African diasporic communities—such as Afro-Indians and Afro-Americans—who may have forgotten or distanced themselves from their African roots, many Afro-Baloch who identify as *golam* or *nawkar* (meaning servants or slaves), retain some pride in their African heritage. Despite the fact that they occupy the lowest social stratum within Baloch society, live in relative isolation, and have historically intermarried within their own community, their identity remains steadfastly Afro-Baloch and not Baloch (Nourzaei 2024).

Interestingly, Baloch traders and commanders were heavily involved in the Oman-dominated slave trade, across the Gulf of Oman from the site of this research, for the 18th and 19th centuries that bound the Arabian Peninsula to East Africa (Murer 2020). For a period, Zanzibar, now part of Tanzania in Africa, functioned as the Omani capital. In the mid-1800s, individuals from inland regions of Africa were frequently seized and sold into slavery moving through Zanzibar, a major hub of the Indian Ocean slave trade, where tens of thousands of people were exchanged annually. Indeed, During (1997) writes that the, "Baluchis had settled in Zanzibar and in Tanzania since an unknown time". A portion of these captives, often Swahili speakers from areas now known as Kenya and mainland Tanzania, were routed through the port of Muscat in Oman before being transported to Karachi and eventually into Sindh (Ahmed 1989). Others entered Sindh via successive private transactions along the coastal stretch of Makran, spanning parts of what are now Pakistan and Iran. The appetite for enslaved labour in Sindh intensified during the Talpur period, when powerful Baloch leaders and soldiers were rewarded with large landholdings and increasingly sought to emulate elite lifestyles that relied on enslaved domestic workers (Beachey 1976). In the early twentieth century, during the height of the regional trade in dates and pearls, the British navy intensified its efforts to suppress slavery by patrolling the Arabian Sea and intercepting slave-carrying *dhows* (traditional sailing boats) from East Africa. As a result, Balochistan emerged as an alternative source of labour (Hopper 2015: 203–4). At the same time, severe famine in Makran and the neighbouring coastal regions of southern Iran—both predominantly Baloch areas—pushed many people into conditions of slavery. Earlier migration flows, involving both farmers and slaves from East Africa to these areas (Izady 2002: 61), meant that many of those caught in this wave of forced migration were already of partial East African ancestry, even if they arrived in Gulf countries linguistically and culturally Baloch. Thus developed the AfB culture.

The AfB practise a variety of oral traditions, such as folk songs, lullabies, songs of mourning and healing songs, as well as mamabies, which are the focus of this article. The origin of this tradition has not yet been documented, but it is our hypothesis that it is not an exclusively Iranian tradition, and the reasons for this will be discussed below. This ritual practice has largely disappeared, especially those associated with pregnancy and childbirth, and our research shows that mamaby songs are now only performed postpartum and solely in a handful of coastal villages in the area. This limited continuation underscores the urgent need for documentation and analysis before the tradition vanishes completely.

Data from the field work undertaken during the period 2010–2023 shows that the contents of the songs have been assimilated into Balochi and now thematically and

linguistically appear to belong to the culture of this region. However, as the history of the region is known to have African cultural influence, we have come across some intriguing sonic examples that may hint at this distant past. For example, one of the songs we documented entitled *bāgbān* 'gardener', refers to Zanzibar. It notably refers to "perfume made in Zanzibar," suggesting a sensory and symbolic connection to Afro-Oceanic trade networks and diasporic cultural memory.

S1: *kaptōk māhparān-ī šodī otī zambāre zabādã̄ mālī*	S1: The new mother washes her trees of hair; she uses her perfume made in Zanzibar
C: *bāgbān byā ōtī bāgā bōǰ manī kaptōk māhparān-ī šodī ōtī zambāre zabādã̄ mālī*	C: Gardener come [and] open your garden; my new mother washes her trees of hair; she uses her perfume made in Zanzibar.
S2: *māsī gol manī bāgā bōǰ manī kaptōk māhparān-ī šodī ōtī zambāre zabādã̄ mālī manī dastã̄ bastagan čō dozzā manī eml-on wārtagan mollāyã̄*	S2: My dear mother, open the garden, my new mother washes trees of hair; she uses her perfume made in Zanzibar; they have bound my hands like the thief; Mullah have taken (lit eaten) my knowledge
S3: *māsī gol byā manī bāgā bōǰ manī kaptōk māhparān-ī šodī ōtī zambāre zabādã̄ mālī*	S3: My dear mother, open the garden, my new mother washes trees of hair; she uses her perfume made in Zanzibar.

While we cannot draw any major conclusions relating to African influence from this one example, it may be an indication that there once were many more such songs, the lyrics of which have been replaced by new themes and modifications. Interestingly, there is a strong tendency to substitute folk songs with religious songs. The AfB, predominantly Sunni Muslims, exhibit a clear shift in their musical traditions—from songs honoring local saints to those centered on Islamic figures such as the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, his family, and ultimately, God. This lyrical evolution reflects a broader religious transformation within the community, from local spiritual practices to orthodox Islam, and more recently, to a singular focus on divine worship (Nourzaei forthcoming a).

Two significant observations emerged from the musical analysis of the two selected Mamabies. First, both songs are based on a pentatonic scale—a five-note scale that is one of the most widely used melodic frameworks in many African musical traditions, particularly in East and Central Africa (Tracey 1958: 18). The pentatonic scale's simplicity lends itself to oral transmission and communal participation, making it well-suited to contexts such as childbirth rituals where inclusivity and repetition are key.

Second, both songs employ a call-and-response structure. This is a hallmark of sub-Saharan African music, where a lead singer (or cantor) presents a musical phrase that is then repeated or answered by a group of singers (McConnachie 2016). This antiphonal form is more than a musical device—it is a social and communicative tool that reinforces collective identity, shared emotion, and community cohesion. Within the context of Mamabies, this structure allows women to participate actively in the ritual, strengthening social bonds during a transformative moment in a woman's life.

Due to the songs' structural simplicity and their ritual context, they do not exhibit complex melodic or harmonic development. However, some rhythmic nuances are worth

noting as for some the metre appears flexible and free-flowing, closer in form to an incantation or chant than to a metrically regular song. This suggests a performance practice rooted in oral tradition, where rhythm may be governed more by the breath or narrative phrasing than by strict time signatures. It is possible that the original rhythmic structure has evolved or been forgotten over generations, leading to its current, more fluid form.

In contrast, the other songs collected display a discernible rhythmic complexity, with a clear "two-against-three" cross-rhythm—where duple and triple time are layered simultaneously. This kind of polymetric texture is a defining feature of many East African musical systems and is often associated with dance, ceremony, and embodied forms of communication (Cooke 2010). The use of compound time situates the songs within a broader East African rhythmic idiom and suggests that the AfB communities in which Mamabies are still practiced may retain deeper musical connections to East African heritage than previously believed.

Together, these musical elements—pentatonic modality, call-and-response structure and a flexible polymetre—reflect broader African aesthetic principles and performance practices. Their presence in Mamabies highlights both the continuity of African musical traditions and the unique ways in which they have been adapted within the ritual and maternal contexts of Baloch and AfB communities.

1.1 Data and Methodology

The data and information used in the present study were obtained through direct interviews with Baloch and AfB community members from different cities and villages in four counties along the coast, namely Sarbaz, Rask, Dashtiyari, and Konarak, between 2010 and 2023.

Nourzaei and her local team recorded and filmed more than 100 performances of songs, attending several of the ceremonies (some of these sound files have already been archived in ELAR[2]). After recording and filming the songs, 68 sound files were fed into the FLEX and ELAN software for annotation, glossing, and translation (see Nourzaei forthcoming b). For the purposes of this study, we have included only the transcriptions and English translations of two of the songs. Due to the limitations of scope in this study, a full musical analysis of the entire corpus was not feasible. Therefore, two representative songs were selected for detailed examination. These songs were first transcribed using staff notation, after which key musical features were identified through a focus on their melodic and rhythmic characteristics. The analysis included an assessment of the size and quality of the intervals between scale degrees, as well as the general metre and rhythmic organisation of the pieces. These features were then compared to fundamental characteristics commonly found in East African musical traditions, allowing for a contextual understanding of their possible historical and cultural connections.

[2] Endangered Languages Archive.

1.2 Background of the Singers

All the singers were uneducated and between 35 and 80 years of age. They were close relatives and lived in the same villages. Two of the performers, Sarok and Shamsok, are the most famous singers in the region and have been invited to perform in other regions. The rest of the singers perform these songs only in their own communities. The two songs selected for musical analysis, were performed by Sarok and her group.

1.3 Previous Studies

To our knowledge, there is no musical analysis of ritual mamaby songs. Balochis and AfB call these ritual songs *sepet*/*senā*/*šaptākī*, 'praising' (Shad 2016, Badalkhan 1999, Nourzaei and Pasand forthcoming). Important researchers on the regional music include During (1997), who researched African musical influence on Balochi rituals while Murer (2020 and 2022) writes about performance relating to the Baloch Muscat. Shad (2016) published a collection of Balochi folk songs including the *sepet* from Turbat in Pakistan, however, the book is written in Balochi and does not employ a scientific research methodology. Existing investigations on mamaby songs are thus relatively recent. Nourzaei and Pasand (forthcoming) have contributed a brief study on the topic, while Nourzaei (2022a) has documented mamaby traditions and archived associated songs in the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR). Importantly, Nourzaei (forthcoming b) has compiled a corpus of mamaby songs, and a coming book (forthcoming a) explores mamaby traditions within AfB communities.

In the next section, we present the geographical distribution of AfB communities in Iran.

2. The Geographical Distribution of Afro-Baloch Communities

The AfB communities are found only in Balochistan, not in the regions of Khash and Zahedan, or Sistan in Sistan and Balochistan. In other words, they live with the Baloch mainly along the coast and as far north as Iranshar and Sarawan. Some groups also live in Jask in Hormozgan province, Iran (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Location of Afro-Baloch communities (taken from Korn and Nourzaei 2019)

3. Mamaby Traditions and Their Contexts

Mamabies are ritual songs sung by women specifically for expectant mothers during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. Baloch and AfB call these ritual songs *sepet/sena/shaptāki*, which translates to 'praising' (Shad 2016, Badalkhan 1999, Nourzaei and Pasand forthcoming). A ritual, especially in the context of song, refers to a repeated and structured series of actions that carry symbolic meaning, shaped by their formal qualities, stylised expression, and the specific time and place in which they occur (Hoondert and Post 2021).

The songs do not require any special musical proficiency; however, the lead singer must have some singing ability and be able to lead the most striking musical feature, namely the call-and-response structure. Foster (2008) states that call and response is a form of interaction between a leader and audience in which the leader/singer's statements (calls) are punctuated by responses from the listener/audience. The structure of the songs differs for the lead singer and the chorus (for details, see Nourzaei forthcoming a). In some examples, the chorus only follows the main singer by repeating verses (see the highlighted parts of Example 1) while in others, the verses differ for the singer and the chorus, as in Example 3. Both types of songs are performed during postpartum.

Example 1

S: *sepat o sanāyẽ̄ xodā lāek ẽ o rasūl lāek ẽ mã sepat-e ǰanẽ̄*	**S:** God is deserving of praise and worship; Prophet [Mohammad] is deserving [of praise and worship]; I will sing a song of praise.
C: *sepat o sanāyẽ̄ hodā lāek ẽ o rasūl lāek ẽ mã sepat-e ǰanẽ̄*	C: God is deserving of praise and worship; Prophet [Mohammad] is deserving [of praise and worship]; I will sing a song of praise.

Interestingly, in Baloch culture, public singing and dancing are generally restricted for women from higher social groups, reflecting broader cultural norms surrounding gender and public visibility. Instead, such performances are typically carried out by women from lower social groups. Ritual mamaby songs, central to this study, are performed exclusively by groups of women, usually from the AfB or Osta communities. These performances follow specific rules, particularly regarding the number of singers: the chorus must include no fewer than three and no more than ten members. This ensures the lead singer is never alone, as solo performance is believed to bring bad luck both to the singer and to the family of the expectant mother.

These songs accompany key moments in a first-time mother's transition into motherhood. In earlier times, when conception was delayed, women sought help by visiting sacred shrines and singing to saints, asking for their intercession. Children born after such interventions were often named after the saints, at least until the age of three—a practice still found in some remote villages. Once pregnancy was confirmed, typically by the village midwife, women gathered to sing for three to seven evenings. The songs served multiple purposes: thanking their God, preparing the mother emotionally, and, importantly, offering protection. It is widely believed that in the early stages of pregnancy, the woman is especially vulnerable to evil spirits, which may cause miscarriage. Singing these songs was seen as a protective measure and was also used to soothe women suffering from morning sickness. Today, while this tradition has faded, celebratory singing still occurs when a long-awaited pregnancy is confirmed. However, these songs are no longer ritualistic but are considered *nazīnk* ("praise songs"), commonly performed at weddings or on the sixth day after childbirth.

Historically, ritual singing also took place during childbirth, especially in cases of difficult labour. Women would gather around sacred trees or shrines, singing to support the expectant mother through her contractions. This practice has largely disappeared due to increased access to hospitals and trained midwives, though older generations still recall these traditions. Postpartum rituals, however, remain more resilient. Songs are sung during and after the first birth, though they are not repeated for subsequent children unless they are boys. There are cultural taboos surrounding loss: if the baby dies in childbirth or if the mother passes away, the songs are not performed. When a mother or child must remain in the hospital, the songs are typically deferred until they return home and recover, to be performed for one or two nights.

As in many cultures, postpartum for the AfB is viewed as a time of ritual impurity and physical vulnerability. The duration of this state depends on the sex of the baby: approximately thirty days for a boy and forty for a girl. During this period, both mother and child are believed to be at heightened risk from evil spirits. Singing serves both protective and therapeutic functions—it is meant to keep harmful forces at bay, promote healing, and reduce the mother's physical pain. Community support is crucial: the mother and baby must not be left alone, and visitors attend during the day. This is where the music and songs become vital. At night, women stay awake, singing and watching over

them. The new mother remains hidden behind a curtain in a special space known as the new mother's chamber, which is off-limits to visitors.

These postpartum rituals continue in various forms today. In some villages, they are performed only by women from lower social groups, such as the Sedighzahi, while in others, such as Bahukalat, participation spans across social groups. Notably, AfB singers are often invited to perform for higher-status Baloch families. Compensation practices vary; within the AfB community, singing is offered freely. However, when performed for wealthier Baloch families, the mother's family offers payment. Traditionally, AfB groups would attend and sing for their tribal chiefs without invitation. Today, they are formally invited. For instance, during a recent field trip, a man travelled by car from a nearby village to invite the *Sarok* (lead singer) and her group to sing for his wife.

The gifts offered to singers are managed by the lead singer, e.g., the *Sarok*, who distributes them among the group. These may include money, clothing, food, and sweets. In the past, postpartum ceremonies began late in the evening and lasted until dawn, continuing for thirty to forty nights. Today, they are shorter—usually lasting between two and five hours in the evening—and may continue for several days or weeks, depending on local custom. Ceremonies linked to pregnancy confirmation or the sixth day after birth do not include food preparation but feature refreshments such as sweet halwa, milk tea, and water pipes. Songs aimed at remedying infertility are typically performed in the morning or late afternoon, times believed to be most auspicious for invoking the aid of spirits and saints.

The following section provides a brief overview of the origins, themes, types, and prosodic features of these ritual songs (for more details, see Nourzaei, forthcoming a).

4. Origin/Authorship and Themes of the Songs

4.1 Origin and Themes of the Songs

In terms of origin, the songs can be divided into three categories: adaptations of contemporary songs; possible adaptations of legends/stories/prayers; and unknown, for which we have no certain evidence about the composer.

In terms of their themes, mamabies can be grouped into three main categories: religious songs, afterlife songs, and miscellaneous/mundane songs. Each has its own subcategories, although there is a large amount of overlap between religious and afterlife songs.

4.2 Types of Songs

Our data shows that there are two main types of songs: short and long. Each type consists of its own subtypes. Example 2 shows a short song with only one verse. The lead singer (S) and the chorus (C) sing the same verse.

Example 2

S: *sepat o sanāyẽ̄ xodā lāek ẽ o rasūl lāek ẽ mã sepat-e ǰanẽ̄*	S: God is deserving of praise and worship; Prophet [Mohammad] is deserving of [praise and worship]; I will sing a song of praise.
C: *sepat o sanāyẽ̄ hodā lāek ẽ o rasūl lāek ẽ mã sepat-e ǰanẽ̄*	C: God is deserving of praise and worship; Prophet [Mohammad] is deserving of [praise and worship]; I will sing a song of praise.

Example 3 demonstrates a long song. The first two verses are the same for S and C, then C repeats the same verse, while S sings different verses with minor repetitions.

Example 3

S_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ bwānet ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	S_1: Pray and fast because life is short (lit. the world exists a few days).
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ bwānet ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast because life is short (lit. The world exists a few days).
S_2: xodāyā yād kanet dōstān ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	S_2: Oh friends! Pray (lit. remember God) because life is short (lit. the world exists a few days).
C_2: xodāyā yād kanet dōstān ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_2: Oh friends, Pray (lit. Remember God) because life is short.
S_3: šmā nabīye kalemā bwāne ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	S_3: You should say the Prophet Mohammad's testimony because life is short.
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ dāre ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast, this life is short (lit. World is a few days).
S_4: ē gonahkārẽ̄ kotag šōr-e nabī sardār may pēdāgẽ	S_4: These sinners have made a crowd because our Prophet Mohammad is coming.
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ dāret ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast, this life is short (lit. The world exists a few days).
S_4: ē gonahkārān kota šōre nabī sardār may pēdāgẽ	S_4: These sinners have made crowd because our Prophet Mohammad is coming.
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ dāret ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast, this life is short (lit. The world exists a few days).
S_5: koǰant tī bangala māṛī koǰant tī bāg o bāġīča xodāyā yād kanet yād kanet dōstān ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	S_5: Where is your [impressive] building? Where are your gardens?; Pray (lit. Remember God)!; Pray Oh friends because life is short (lit. The world exists a few days).
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ dāret ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast because this life is short (lit. The world exists a few days).
S_5: koǰant tī bangalā māṛī koǰant tī bāg o bāġīča nabīye kalema bwāne ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	S_5: Where is your [impressive] building? Where are your gardens?; Say the Prophet Mohammad's testimony because life is short (lit. The world exists a few days).
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ̄ dāret ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast, because this life is short.

S_4: ē gonahkārān kota šōr-e ē nabī sardār may pēdāgẽ	S_4: These sinners have made crowd because our Prophet Mohammad is coming.
C_1: nemāz o rōčagẽ dāret ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: Pray and fast, because his life is short.
S_6: ǰenek-e bī xodāyā dāt bačakk-e bī xodāyā dāt xodāyā yāt kanet gwārẽ ke donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	S_6: [if] the baby is a girl, God gave [her]; [if] the baby is a boy, God gave [him]; Oh sisters.
C_1: nemāzo rōčagẽ dāret ē donyā čand rōč-eg ẽ	C_1: pray (lit. Remember God) because life is short.

In sum, a notable distinction between the long songs and the shorter ones described lies in the structure of their verses: long songs often contain extended verses, with some assigning a specific theme to each verse. A recurring feature in these longer songs is that performer C tends to repeat the same verse line throughout. This is a preliminary observation and forms one of the emerging findings of the research. However, it highlights the need for further investigation. Specifically, comparative analysis should be undertaken to explore whether similar structural and thematic patterns are present in other Iranian folk songs, as well as in East African song traditions. In what follows, prosodic features are briefly commented on.

4.3 Prosodic features of the songs

In terms of prosodic features, the songs can be divided into six groups, as described below. It must be noted that the prosodic feature that all song types have in common is their reliance on a fixed rhythmic cycle or metre. The six groups are:

I. Songs having only a metre, *wazn*, such as the song in Example 4. The data shows that 80% of the songs have only metre. These songs express the singer's thoughts, and they poeticize what the singer or composer has heard:

Example 4

S: o *kapōt wāšš nālagẽ morg mohammada rāzī kan o byā*	S: Oh dove, sweet voiced bird, satisfy [Prophet] Mohammad and come back.
C: *mohammade rāzī hameš ẽ o mādare hakkā šenāset*	C: To satisfy [Prophet] Mohammad (lit. Mohammad's satisfaction) is for (lit. and) you to recognize the mother's moral obligation.

II. Songs containing a refrain, *radif,* and metre. 10% of the songs belong to this group. The attested refrains contain repeated verbs, nouns, and clauses. See examples 5–7.

Example 5

S: *hazrat belāl hazrat belāl to may maǰede bāngū* ***atay***	S: Prophet Bilal, Prophet Bilal you were our mosque's muezzin.
C: *may maǰede bāngū atay mesle čerāga rōk* ***atay***	C: You were our mosque's muezzin; you were as glorious as the light.

Example 6

S: *may donyāe bāg o bahār en* ***mohammad***	S: [Prophet] Mohammad is our world's garden and spring.
C: *watī omate gamgosār en* ***mohammad***	C: [Prophet] Mohammad is the comfort of his own nation.

Example 7

S: *hazrat solemāne atā tahte rawāne barkatā yā rabb ǰodāī moškel ẽ*	S: [For] the blessing of Prophet Solomon Ata's flowing throne, Oh God, separation [from our friends] is difficult.
C: *ā dōst ke pēšā raptagan dōst menzela pēšā gerã yā rabb ǰodāī moškol ẽ*	C: Those friends who died (lit. have gone earlier), friends will take the place earlier, Oh Lord, separation [from our friends] is difficult.

III. Songs having only rhyme, *ghafiyeh* and metre. A handful of the songs belong to this group, 5%. The attested rhymes are *ār*, *a*, *īyā*, *yā*, and *ān*, as in Examples 8–9.

Example 8

S: *may donyāe bāg o bah**ār** en mohammad*	S: [Prophet] Mohammad is our world's garden and spring.
C: *watī omate gamgos**ār** en mohammad*	C: [Prophet] Mohammad is the comfort of his own nation.

Example 9

S: *har kār-e moškela watī rabbā bekan tawār*	S: Ask your God [for help] for every problem (lit. for every difficult tasks).
C: *dargāhe māleka otī dasta bede šahār*	C: Stretch out your hand towards the door of the owner [for help].

IV. Songs having only internal rhyme and metre. This has been attested in a few songs, particularly in the S verse, which has an internal rhyme that is not in C, as in Example 10:

Example 10

S: *aršā korān-e ātka das kapta may* ***nabīyā*** *wanta may nabīye ǰendā das gepta* ***omatīyā***	S: A holy book came from heaven; it fell in our Prophet Mohammad's hand; our Prophet Mohammad has read it; our Prophet Mohammad himself has taken his nation's hand.
C: *bačakk-e hodāyā dāta ǰenek-e hodāyā dāta wānān mã dorūde tāǰa šahādad mohammedeg ẽ*	C: [If] the baby is a boy, God has given [him]; [if] the baby is a girl, God has given her; I will sing the *Dorud of Taj*; Shahatad [Islamic declaration of faith] is Prophet Mohammad's.

V. Songs with both internal rhyme, metre, and a refrain, as in Example 11:

Example 11

S: *hazrat solemāne* ***atā*** *tahte rawāne* ***barkatā*** *yā rabb ǰodāī moškel ẽ*	S: [For] the blessing of Prophet Solomon Ata's flowing throne, Oh God, separation [from our friends] is difficult
C: *hazrat solemāne* ***atā*** *tahte rawāne* ***barkatā*** *yā rabb ǰodāī moškel ẽ*	C: Those friends who died (lit. have gone earlier), friends will take the place earlier, Oh Lord, separation [from our friends] is difficult.

VI. Songs possessing refrain, rhyme, and metre. These songs make up only a handful (2%) of the data. They are contemporary songs written by poets, as in Example 12.

Example 12

S: *nemāz bewān ke dōzahe dēmpān* ***en nemāz***	S: Pray! Because prayer is the protector from Hell.
C: *dard o dōrānī marham o darmān* ***en nemāz***	C: Prayer is the healing and cure of pains and illnesses.

This categorization shows that metre is the most consistent prosodic feature across all song types, with 80% of the songs relying on it alone, as outlined above. This likely reflects the oral and informal context of song creation, where the focus is on rhythm and pulse rather than complex prosodic structures or melodic development. However, the majority of these and the melodic songs are composed and performed by individuals without formal education, such as Sarok, whose priority is the joy of composition through rhythm and sound rather than adherence to formal poetic conventions. Additionally, the primary audience—often women—value the musical quality over technical prosodic features, which may explain the prevalence of songs with simple metrical structures.

In the following section, we demonstrate an analysis of the musical structure of two songs.

5. Analysis of The Musical Structure and Lyrics of Two *Mamabies* Songs

Before examining the technical musical features of two Mamabies songs (see Appendix 1), it is important to consider their lyrical content, which provides rich insight into the

social, spiritual, and emotional contexts from which they emerge. The lyrics of these two songs reflect central themes of faith, longing, and cultural identity—all expressed through poetic and repetitive language that complements the songs' musical structures.

The first song tells of the believers' arrival and the elevation of Prophet Solomon to paradise, symbolized by his throne of ebony placed "in the garden, paradise and heaven." This narrative, repeated across verses, celebrates prophetic reverence and conveys a sense of communal spiritual fulfilment. The second song, by contrast, takes on a more personal and intimate tone, as the singer calls upon Saint Andari—referred to variously as "God," "owner," or "merciful"—to grant a child. The longing is encapsulated in the recurring image of a child in a "cradle made of teak," a symbol of blessing and continuity. The repetition in both songs reinforces key emotional and thematic messages, allowing the lyrics to resonate deeply with their audiences, who are primarily women in domestic and ceremonial settings.

The analysis below highlights the prominent features of the two melodies, identifying the tonal ranges of the two songs, the intervallic relationship between the notes in the scales, the singing style, and the structure of the musical phrases, which includes their repetitions. One of the goals of this analysis is to ascertain whether there are musical structural relationships between the music of the AfB community and the music cultures in the East African region more broadly.

5.1 Tonal Ranges of Song and Type of Mode/Scale

The two songs analysed in this article were recorded at one session and were performed by the same singers without stopping, and this may explain, at least in part, the singers' move from one to the other without changing the key.

The pitch materials used in both songs together form a pentatonic scale. We use the term scale as it is commonly used in musicology and music theory to refer to "a collection of pitches arranged in order from lowest to highest or from highest to lowest" (Randel 1999: 587). A scale is also characterized by a fixed intervallic relationship between the pitches that make up the scale. The following diagram represents the pitches that are found in the pentatonic scale system that inform the two songs (Figure 2). Note that we write this scale in D flat since the two songs were sung with D flat as the tonal center.

Figure 2: Pentatonic scale used with the degree level of each pitch

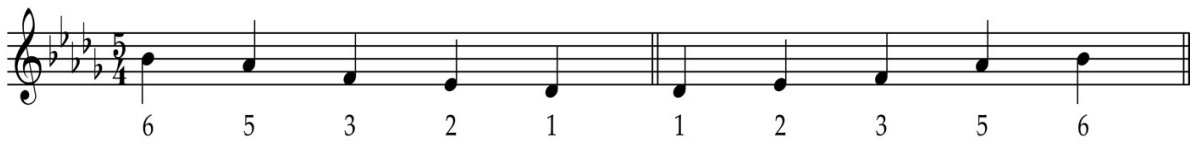
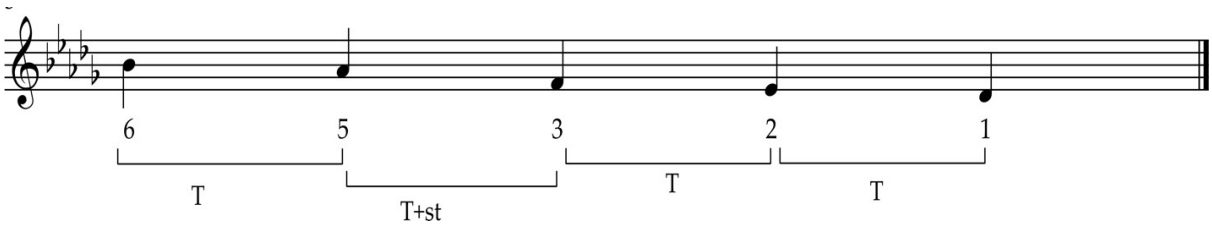


Figure. 3: The Intervals between adjacent pitches in the Pentatonic scale



While both songs utilize the pitch materials from the pentatonic scale on D flat, the lead singer introduces some variations in one or two notes. These variations are significant and, as introduced, by the lead singer, involve bending the first (1), the third (3), or the fifth (5) note in the scale. At some point, this bending makes a note sound half or quarter tone below the original note or could signify the use of micro-tones, prevalent in Middle Eastern and East African music (Kiel, 2012). At other times, the varied note sounds like a wide vibrato (pulsating variation) or a mordent (a rapid variation in pitch between the higher and lower notes). These kinds of alternations have not been shown in the scores of the songs provided in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. However, in the second measure of the second song, the alteration on the fifth note of the scale (5) is consistent throughout the song, performed that way by both the lead singer and the chorus. In this case, the altered note is shown by using a symbol for three-quarter flat: .

The rhythm is presented in a swing 6/8 feel in this transcription, however, there is a tension in the translation from the oral format into the written, which suggests a more complex cross-rhythm and needs further investigation.

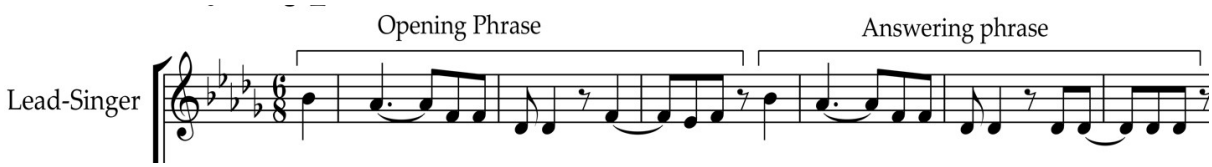
5.2 Song Structure

Throughout the performance of the two songs, the singers deploy a call-and-response singing style, a musical structure often found in a variety of indigenous musical practices in Africa (McConnachie 2016; McConnachie and Thram 2012). In the first song, the lead singer sings the melody twice, and the chorus takes over by repeating the melody. This pattern is repeated until the end of the song. As it has been observed above, although we recognize that this melody is repeated over and over, we also acknowledge the alterations and additions to the structure of the notes that the lead singer makes during her turn. This is not the case with the second song, where the melody is repeated as it is by both the lead singer and the chorus, save only for the altered fifth note of the scale mentioned above.

In both songs, the melody is made up of two musical phrases: an opening phrase and an answering phrase. In the first song, for example, the opening phrase begins on an up-beat crotchet note and ends in the second measure on the second-degree pitch of the scale (2), producing a sense of open-endedness. The second phrase begins on the upbeat of the second measure and ends on the fourth measure on the first note of the scale, the tonal centre, which suggests a sense of finality or closure. In the transcription of the songs,

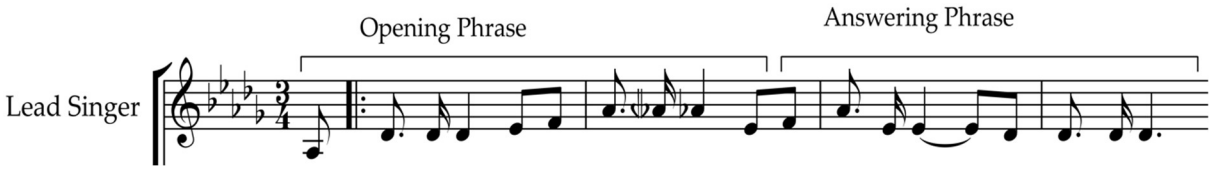
the phrases are indicated using a bracket mark above the staff, beginning from the first note of the corresponding phrase to the last note of the phrase. The texts above these brackets indicate whether the phrase is an opening (antecedent) or an answering (consequent) phrase or the call and then response.

Figure 4 Phrases in the lead singer's segment of the first song



In the same way, the opening phrase in the second song begins on the last quaver note in the measure and ends in the second measure. The opening phrases end with the movement from the fifth (5) to the second (2) note of the scale in the second measure whereas the answering phrase, which begins on the last quaver note of the second measure, ends in the fourth measure on the first note of the scale (1) which is the keynote of the song as shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 Beginning of the second song



Since these melodic phrases in the two songs are of equal length and they are repeated throughout the duration of the song, they create an overall feel of a regular phrase rhythm, that is, a regular recurrence of both rhythmic and melodic segments.

6. General Observations

In general, the above analytical observations concerning the melodic, structural, and rhythmic form of two songs point to the following preliminary remarks concerning the relationship between the music culture of the AfB community and music cultures in East Africa more generally. Although we have not observed any similarities between these melodies and specific melodies in Tanzania (or East Africa at large, a task that would require the collection of a large number of sample tunes from this region), we found a close similarity at the level of a larger musical system of scale in addition to the use of a call-and-response singing pattern. This use of a call-and-response format for the songs is characteristic of East African songs (Hopton-Jones, 1995), and although this is a fairly ubiquitous structure for folk songs, it may be an area that is highlighted for future in-depth research.

Preliminary Observations on The Musical Analysis of Afro-Baloch Ritual Mamaby Songs

The pentatonic scale used in these two songs is another prominent, but not exclusive, feature of the music cultures in East and Central Africa (Nketia 1967, Kubik 1994, Agawu 2016). Using examples from Tanzania and Central Africa, Agawu, for example, discusses the widespread use of pentatonic scales in these regions of Africa and argues that for individual musicians and music groups, the pentatonic scale is a given system or a *modus operandi* through which every member of the respective communities operates. In Agawu's words, the communities and their members use it as "a given rather than an option" (2016: 283). His description of how this pentatonic system is used is also worth noting, as it points to both similarities and some differences with regard to specific uses of this scale in the two songs analysed. He writes:

> The possibilities for intervallic motion include—predictable—all adjacent and nonadjacent intervals: major second, minor third, perfect fourth and perfect fifth. Excluded are semitones and tritones (2016: 283–284).

While Agawu's observations seem to be true in the way the pentatonic scales are used to provide pitch materials for the two songs analysed in this article, it must also be highlighted that the ornamentation or alterations that the lead singer introduces in her segments (repeated variously throughout each song) include some microtonal intervals between some consecutive pitches in the songs. This use of microtones or other pitch ornamentation is also prevalent in East African music but is widely used in the Middle East and other Asian cultures as well (Ruckert 2004). This element of the structure of the music is of interest but requires further investigation before any conclusion can be made.

6. Concluding Reflections

In this article, we have studied the mamaby songs in terms of their contexts, themes and authorship, and analysed the musical structure of two songs. Our research has found that the ritual mamabies are a disappearing genre/tradition and the recordings that we have made give us the opportunity to analyse their origins and current status. The songs are short, repetitive, and performed by a group of women who generally are of African descent. The songs used to be performed at different stages of the pregnancy for an expectant mother and her baby. Today, the tradition is only practised after childbirth in a handful of villages along the coast.

In terms of themes, mamaby songs can be grouped into three main categories: religious songs, afterlife songs, and miscellaneous or mundane songs. Each group has its own sub-categories, although there is a great deal of overlap between religious and afterlife songs.

An examination of the authorship of the songs reveals a significant dynamic of trust between prominent poets—typically drawn from higher social strata—and singers, who are usually members of marginalized or lower-status groups. In these interactions, poets would orally transmit their compositions to singers for public performance. This relationship positions the singer as a cultural intermediary, bridging the poet's ideological messages and the broader community. This practice echoes similar observations made about the relationship between poets and minstrels in oral traditions. However, an important distinction lies in the mode of transmission: whereas traditional minstrels often

received written or recorded versions of poems, the singers in this context—due to limited literacy—internalized select verses through oral means, resulting in partial or modified renditions.

Notably, the singers in this study, such as Sarok, do not possess any formal schooling or literacy skills. Their engagement with poetry and performance is entirely oral and intuitive, shaped by communal memory, repetition, and improvisation. This oral mediation aligns with Bauman's (1977) theory of performance as a site of emergent meaning, where the act of performance itself contributes to the communicative and aesthetic value of the song. Finnegan (1992) similarly emphasizes the fluidity of oral transmission, noting that performers frequently reshape content in response to memory, audience, and social context. Moreover, from a sociological perspective, the dissemination of the poet's work through public performance enables the poet to accumulate symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986), while the singer gains cultural capital by virtue of acting as the vocal agent of elite discourse. Thus, the relationship between poet and singer illustrates a complex interplay of literacy, power, and artistic agency in oral performance traditions.

The results suggest that although AfB communities have shifted linguistically towards Balochi, they may have retained certain musical features that are closely aligned with African musical traditions from East Africa. These preliminary findings point to the need for further research, particularly comparative studies that include neighbouring musical styles not associated with the AfB communities in the region and further interrogation of the performers and their archival memory. The concept of cultural knowledge bearers and musicians who act as living archives is of central interest to our research group (McConnachie 2024).

Overall, the analytical observations regarding the melodic structure of the two songs support initial hypotheses about a possible relationship between the musical culture of the AfB community and broader East African musical traditions. While we did not identify direct melodic correspondences between the Mamabies tunes and specific melodies from Tanzania or the wider East African region—a task that would require a significantly larger and more diverse sample for systematic analysis—we noted broader structural similarities. These include the use of a pentatonic scale, a feature widely documented across East and Central African musical traditions (Agawu 2016), as well as a call-and-response structure, which is likewise characteristic of many regional performance practices.

Although exploratory in scope, this analysis offers preliminary insights that may serve as a foundation for more comprehensive comparative research on musical continuities and transformations between East African and Iranian musical practices, with forthcoming articles offering further insights.

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Abbreviations

-	Clitic boundary
AfB	Afro-Baloch
C	Choruses
S	Singers

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Appendix 1: Texts of the Original Songs

Song 1

S:gwānga ǰant byāet ke momen ātkagan byāe ke momen ātkagan dorrēn solemānā baran	S: Calls; come! Because believers have come; come! Because believers have come; they will take the dear Solomon.
C: dorrēn solemānā baran mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan bāg o behešt o ǰanata	C: They will take the dear Solomon; they put him on his throne made of ebony; they put him on his throne made of ebony in the garden, paradise and heaven.
S: morg-e garībēn gwānga ǰant byāe ke momen ātkagan byāe ke momen ātkagan dorrēn solemānā baran	S: A stranger bird calls; come! Because believers have come; come! Because believers have come; they will take the dear Solomon.
C: dorrēn solemānā baran mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan bāgo behešto ǰanata	C: They will take the dear Solomon; they put him on his throne made of ebony; they put him on his throne made of ebony in the garden, paradise and heaven.
S: morg-e garībēn gwānga ǰant byāet ke momen ātkagan byāe ke momen ātkagan dorrēn solemānā baran	S: A stranger bird calls; come! Because believers have come; come! Because believers have come; they will take the dear Solomon.
C: dorrēn solemānā baran mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan bāg o behešt o ǰanata	C: They will take the dear Solomon; they put him on his throne made of ebony; they put him on his throne made of ebony in the garden, paradise and heaven.
S: morg-e garībēn gwānga ǰant byāet ke momen ātkagan byāe ke momen ātkagan dorrēn solemānā baran	S: A stranger bird calls; come! Because believers have come; come! Because believers have come; they will take the dear Solomon.
C: dorrēn solemānā baran mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan bāg o behešt o ǰanata	C: They will take the dear Solomon; they put him on his throne made of ebony; they put him on his throne made of ebony in the garden, paradise and heaven
S: morg-e garībēn gwānga ǰant byāet ke momen ātkagan byāe ke momen ātkagan dorrēn solemānā baran	S: A stranger bird calls; come! Because believers have come; come! Because believers have come; they will take the dear Solomon.
C: dorrēn solemānā baran mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan bāg o behešt o ǰanata	C: They will take the dear Solomon; they put him on his throne made of ebony; they put him on his throne made of ebony in the garden, paradise and heaven.
S: morg-e garībēn gwānga ǰant byāet ke momen ātkagan byāe ke momen ātkagan dorrēn solemānā baran	S: A stranger bird calls; come! Because believers have come; come! Because believers have come; they will take the dear Solomon.
C: dorrēn solemānā baran mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan mẽ šīššomēn tahte kanan bāg o behešt o ǰanata	

	C: They will take the dear Solomon; they put him on his throne made of ebony; they put him on his throne made of ebony in the garden, paradise and heaven.

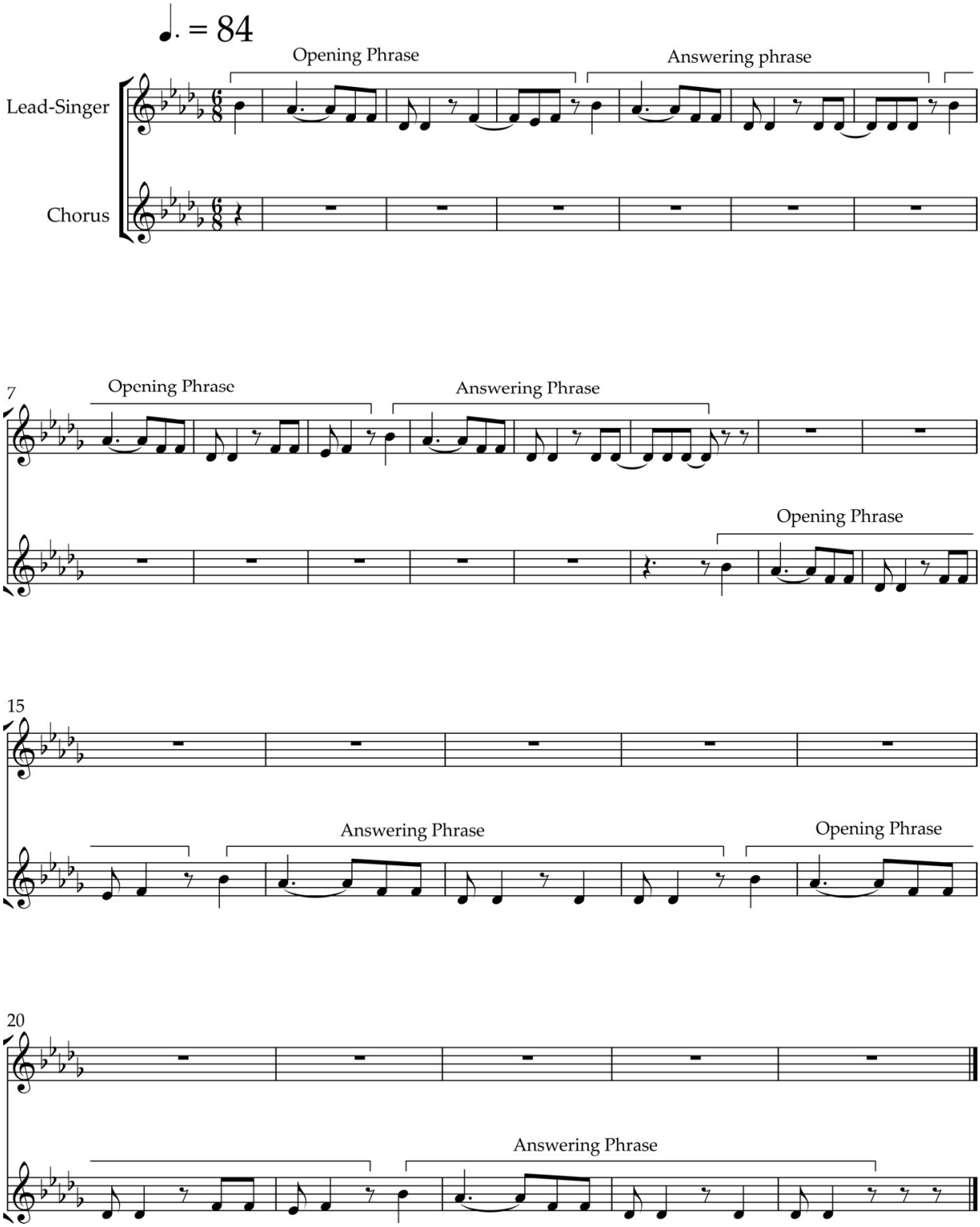
Song 2

S: *pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn allāh mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Come Saint Andari, the God of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagẽ bačča ...gõ šāgēn gwānzaga*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn mālek mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, the owner of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagẽ bačča gõ šāgēn gwānzaga*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn mālek mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, the owner of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagẽ bačča gõ šāgēn gwānzaga*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn mālek mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, the owner of the [holy] shrine; I have come for a wish [to your shrine].
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagẽ bačča gõ šāgēn gwānzaga*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn rahmān mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, the merciful of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagẽ allā bačča gõ šāgēn gwānzagā*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn mālek mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, the owner of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagẽ allā bačča gõ šāgēn gwānzagā*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn allā mã pa morād-e atkagẽ*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, God of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.

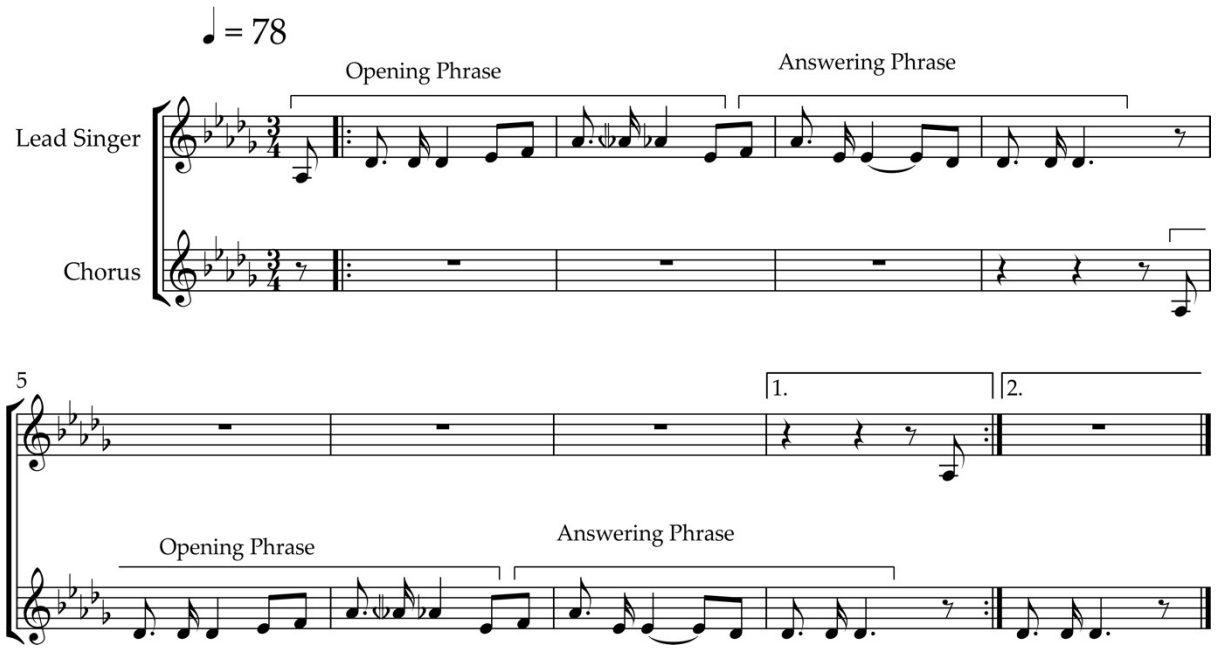
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagã̃ allā bačča gõ̃ šāgēn gwānzagā*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.
S: *ho pīr āndarī byā pīr zyāratēn mālek mã pa morād-e atkagã̃*	S: Oh Saint Andari, come, the owner of the [holy] shrine; I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish.
C: *mã pa morād-e atkagã̃ allā bačča gõ̃ šāgēn gwānzagā*	C: I have come [to your shrine] to make a wish; [I wish that you will give me a] child in (lit. with) the cradle made of teak.

Appendix 2: Musical Transcriptions of the Songs

Song 1



Song 2


♩ = 78
Opening Phrase
Answering Phrase
Lead Singer
Chorus
5
1.
2.
Opening Phrase
Answering Phrase