

CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION: Classical Music in Contemporary India and the Diaspora

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The categories of community, nation, tradition and modernity were for nationalist musicologists critical issues that cropped up in the course of their reflections on cultural inheritance as a key basis for nation building. The reconstruction of music, especially classical music, I have argued,² was an integral part of a self-conscious cultural project that helped frame the contours of a national heritage with all its material and symbolic artifacts. The present paper is an attempt to push the story in time and space – and is more in the nature of an agenda for future research and hopes thereby to link up the consumption and representation of the performing arts with the cultural landscape of globalization and the diaspora. I will, in fact, try and see how the assumptions and dynamics of the brave new world of global culture and cosmopolitanism, of diasporic imaginings and subjectivities³ interfaced with Nationalism to produce a complex paradigm for the representation and consumption of culture, and wherein the tropes of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ assumed a new inflection.

The paper is part of an ongoing work in which I have been engaged and which relates to the reconstruction of musical traditions and practices in modern and contemporary India. In my earlier work published in 2006, I looked at the changing context of consumption and patronage of music as it was relocated from the outer world of ritual and entertainment to the inner world of feeling, how this became constitutive of the

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² Lakshmi Subramaniam, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music academy: A social history of music in south India* (O.U.P., Delhi 2006).

³ Sandhya Shukla, *India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Post War America and England*. Princeton University Press, 2003.

regime of expectancies of respectable/classical music of the middle class and how this affected the art form and its practitioners.⁴ Theoretically, it drew heavily from the historical scholarship on modernity and nationalism, which provided the context in which older musical practices were reconstituted.

Music, Modernity and Nationalism

Recent scholarship on the social history of music in modern India has squarely located the subject within an understanding of public space, as it emerged from the late nineteenth century and which provided the institutional and social context for a new mode of engagement with cultural practices on the part of the middle class elite. Janaki Bakhle's work⁵, as well as mine and more recently Amanda Weidman's work⁶ on the violin, focus on the making of a classical tradition in modern India. The process of classicism involved the rewriting of the content and style of music as well as reconstituting the social context of patrons and performers. Underwriting these changes was a critical shift in the structure of audience expectations and in the importance classical music assumed as a marker of elite identity and national imagining.

The results were momentous – from viewing music as one type of entertainment among several others in princely courts, it became marked as a high art form initially responding to the changing sociology of modern urban performance but eventually to the imperatives of functioning as one of the key emblems of the nation's cultural inheritance. The practice and consumption of the reinvented art form was relocated among the middle class, which decided to author its history restoring it to very ancient origins and framing it within a long textual lineage that answered early colonial critiques of native deficiency. The project of cultural reconstruction not only appealed to the incipient nationalist imagination, it also gave the nation state an agenda of sorts for self conscious cultural engineering that provided its citizen subjects and its diaspora with a concrete set of markers to invoke images and imaginings of the nation. What the

⁴ Lakshmi Subramaniam, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy* O.U.P. Delhi, 2006

⁵ Janaki Bakhle, *Two men and music Nationalism in the Making of an Indian classical tradition*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2005.

⁶ Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern The Post Colonial Politics of Music in South India*. Duke University Press, 2006

latter chose to do with these was predicated on other contingencies that were not related to a simple formula of long distance nationalism. The commercialization and secularization of music and performance, such as its inclusion as a valuable add-on to the tourism industry, were facilitated by the mechanical reproduction of art in, for example, the cassette revolution. Such significant developments not only transformed the reception and circulation of music but facilitated new modes of creativity and self reflexivity in the nation and overseas.

Looking afresh at the Diaspora

The growing academic interest in the South Asian diaspora as a cultural zone for various formations of identity and discourses of the nation has in recent years produced interesting insights on the construction of a diasporic sensibility mediated through a variety of inputs. A major input has of course been pedagogy and the teaching of Indian cultural practices like music and dance. Important questions have been raised regarding the methodology for teaching Indian music and the extent to which this has reinforced older methods of teaching and transmission and more significantly, the structure of gender relations within the family and public spaces. While T. Vishwanathan and Mathew Harp Allen have made a tentative attempt in addressing these issues⁷, the subject remains under-explored. I am hoping to develop and expand it. On the other hand, in a different context, there have been a number of writings specially concerned with music and performance in the diaspora centered primarily around the issue of marginal survivals – the possibility that trans-nationally dispersed communities in order to preserve cultural practices tend to maintain traditions more rigidly than in the homeland.⁸ Almost diametrically opposite of this view is the formulation of Sandhya Shukla who argues that a careful reading of text, image and performance reveals a diasporic sensibility that is not simply an outgrowth of the nation state. In fact, she suggests that in diasporic realities, the potentialities of displacement and replacement naturally create constitutive longings and imaginings. Whatever the conceptions underlying such experiences of distance, the very fact of distance is endowed with a greater potential for imagination, which allows highly fragmented and overlapping senses of belonging to multiple places and spaces. The relevance of such models to the

⁷ Viswanathan T. and Mathew Allen, *Music in South India: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. O.U.P. New Delhi, 2004.

⁸ Helen Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad Songs from the Indian Diaspora* Chicago, 1998.

consumption of culture, especially classical music, that even in India remained tied up with notions of elite status and taste, is part of a larger question that I will explore especially in the context of the Indian diaspora in the United States.

Culture and its custodians in the Nation and Overseas

My study will largely focus on the Carnatic tradition (the classical music of southern India) and its principal patrons, notably the Brahmin professional elite which dominated the urban public space in Tamilnadu from the latter decades of the nineteenth century and who migrated to the United States in large numbers from the 1960s. So far, my work has focused on the representation and reception of music in the context of colonial modernity and the making of a nationalist cultural project. It is only now that I am tentatively considering the larger implications of some of the more recent works on globalization and its cultural landscape on diasporic imagination and on the modalities of reception, consumption and representation of classical music in these new imaginative spaces.

Let me first begin by identifying some of the major emphases that have become influential in the study and understanding of globalization and its cultural dimensions. Since the 1980s, a complex series of economic, social, technological and political transformations, subsumed under the umbrella term globalization, have led to the interpretative and performative becoming key conceptual tools in cultural theory to grapple with what has been seen as the threat of homogenization and commodification. Scholars working on modernity and the cultural dimensions of globalization have focused on what they see as the central problem of today's global interaction, namely the tensions between the tendencies of cultural homogenization and the processes of cultural heterogenization. Arjun Appadurai resists the reading of globalization as producing homogenization arguing instead that global culture produces simultaneously sameness and a difference. In his understanding, what the homogenization argument fails to consider is that forces from metropolises are adapted, accommodated and modified so that the new global cultural economy becomes a complex, overlapping and disjunctive order. As a way of examining these disjunctures, he suggests a framework of

“scapes” to look at the relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow.⁹ Scapes reinforce perpetual constructs based on the different locations of the agents and actors like nation states, diasporic communities and multinationals. These then become building blocks of what he calls multiple imagined worlds – the diasporic space, where a trans-nationalization of culture is fostered. In his words, “An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them” . In other words, the cultural politics of globalization has important implications for the cultural agenda of the nation state.

Appadurai’s formulations find predictable resonance in a number of writings on culture, identity and heritage that have endured as important categories in the understanding of nationalism as well as that of the diaspora and globalization. Michael Kelly Connors’ work on the hegemony and politics of culture in Thailand, for instance, examines the antecedents and dynamics of how cultural forms and multiple ethnic identities can be used to articulate a Thai-ness for a new global age. In his words, “ In earlier periods, Thai-ness served the projects of modernization and security by promoting the emergence of productive and nationally identifying citizens. With Thailand now facing the emergence of a more open society at home and a borderless world of communication, the alchemists of identity within the Ministry of Culture face the task of shaping the Thai-ness so that its hegemonic qualities remain intact” .¹⁰ In a similar vein, one may locate the classicization of dance forms like that of Kandyan dance in Sri Lanka where the state since the 1950s has been the key patron of Kandyan dance, incorporating it into the school curriculum, sponsoring dance tours abroad, funding numerous dance troupes and establishing a variety of aesthetic teacher training institutes. Underpinning these efforts is the powerful appeal of a cultural economy in the making of Nationalism, the recognition of the ways in which state ideologies and

⁹ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, *Theory, Culture and Society* (7) Sage, London, 1990.

¹⁰ Michael Kelly Connors, “Democracy and Nationalism in Thailand”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. May 2004.

notions of the nation are replicated through educational and cultural practices mandated by the state. Was the state's version entirely static and without nuance? For Sandhya Shukla, it was only in the multi-sited diaspora that multiple imaginings were possible.

The discourse on music and classicism

Where does this framework leave us with the specific case of music in the context of Nationalism and the articulation of a nationalist cultural project and subsequently its changing location in the context of globalization and the diaspora?

The construction of a discourse for classical music from about the closing decades of the nineteenth century, positing a basic separation of the world of music into classical and non-classical categories was seen as instrumental and central in the making of a nationalist cultural project. Music, dance and the performing arts were integral elements in this project as it related to the inner domain of the nation, one that captured its inalienable essence and one that necessarily became a major building block in the imagination of the community. Consequently the discourse that developed around the performing arts in South Asia came to play a vital role in the nationalist movement, presenting a vision mediated by its elite spokesmen, of India's great artistic traditions, rooted in antiquity and authenticated by textual conventions.

Three strands distinguished the nationalist-classicist discourse for the performing arts in the twentieth century. One was, as mentioned before, the separation of music into classical and non-classical or light classical categories, which were not necessarily strictly informed by artistic considerations of merit or training. The term non-classical or light classical was in fact a catch all term for diverse practices and traditions associated with artistic activity.¹¹ Secondly, the discourse was predicated on a set of meanings assigned to the consumption of culture by new patrons for whom the appreciation of music was refracted by their engagement with modernity as a subjective experience. It is here that the role of imagination becomes important – how an auditory habit became suffused with new meanings that helped the community of listeners

¹¹ Mathew Harp Allen, 'Tales Tunes tell Deepening the Dialogue between "classical" and "Non Classical" in the Music of India', *Yearbook for Traditional Music* Vol.XXX, 1998, pp.22-52.

experience a shared space of habit, practice and aesthetic taste.¹² Thirdly, it was tied up with the larger agenda of social reform and modernization, which in the case of music and dance was double edged.

The question of modernization and transformation had simultaneously an emancipatory and disempowering connotation for practitioners of music and dance. Even as the newly and largely self appointed custodians invoked tradition to embark upon a modern project of defining a classical style, they remained willfully oblivious of the consequences of their project on traditional and hereditary practitioners whose presence was inconvenient and contradicted all notions of modernity. It is in this context that Partha Chatterje argues that the idea of contra-modernity was developed by the colonial western educated elite. It enabled them to reinvent a tradition, but by an alternative indexing of the categories 'tradition' and 'modernity'¹³. For the performing arts, this project spearheaded for the most part by the educated elite drawn primarily from high castes, involved at one level, the relocation of the performing arts within a new secular space of pedagogy and entertainment and which in turn resulted in a complex process of social engineering. On the other hand, the project celebrated the imaginative and affective space of solidarity constituted by a particular reading of religion and the sacral dimensions of performing culture but one that was necessarily tied up with a Brahmanical reading of the same. This was particularly true in southern India, associated with an influential branch of classical Indian music, which in its social organization had always been organized on the basis of caste and gender.

A number of factors were constitutive of the social context in which the discourse was framed. One was the changing networks of consumption and changing networks of patronage that fore-grounded the educated elite of colonial India and their engagement with the imperatives of modernity and nation building. Significantly, there was also the development of a new auditory culture in cities, where the urban elite responded to music not merely as consumers and connoisseurs but as spokesmen for the nation in whose service the national music of the country had to be properly preserved and

¹² Lakshmi Subramaniam, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy A social history of music in south India*. O.U.P., Delhi, 2006.

¹³ Partha Chatterjee, "Two Poets and death. On Civil Society in the Non-Christian World" in Timothy Mitchell (ed.) *Questions of Modernity*. University of Minneapolis, Minnesota Press, 2000.

nurtured. The emergence of a new class of such patrons and listeners transformed modes of consuming and listening to music and reflecting upon the art form- its presentation, preservation and interpretation- and set in motion what one may call the reinvention of tradition.¹⁴ The making of the modern classical music tradition in India was, in other words, an act of staging and of representation that depended on a particular mode of reflecting on the more immediate inheritance they were left with. Recast thus, the tradition of music and performance became dependent on new forms of exchange and patronage networks which rested nevertheless in deeply pervasive and culturally patterned conceptions of power and authority. The process did not go uncontested for it inevitably undermined the position and status of traditional performing communities whose status and repertoire did not quite adhere to the changing moral economy of the nationalist cultural engineers. Nor did these communities have access to resources that enabled them to stake a claim in the changing public space of modern India.

Other voices: Dissent and Consensus

The assertion of linguistic nationalism, combined with lower caste social reform movements in southern India, touched briefly on the question of culture, on the definition of what was classical and on how the nationalist classical project was an exercise in exclusion, perpetuating the marginalization of lower castes and their histories. Inspired by the Madras Orientalists who espoused the autonomy and importance of Tamil as a Dravidian language which could legitimately command classical status at par with Sanskrit. The devotees of Tamil nationalism put forward their claims for an autochthonous music tradition that had its own reference terms and musical language and a composition repertoire in the Tamil language. The tussle for custodianship of the classical went on for about two decades after independence. National institutions and state sponsored academies as well as those that represented the nationalist version of the classical like the Madras Music Academy held out against the challenges posed by the Tamil Isai Sangam which had the specific endorsement of the state government that rested on the advocacy of a subaltern anti caste platform. The

¹⁴ Mathew Harp Allen, 'Rewriting the script for South Indian dance', *The Drama Review* 41,3, 1997 Pp.63-100.

reasons for the failure of the Tamil Music movement, as I have argued elsewhere, lay in the fact that for its advocates, the consumption of music and dance did not have the same expressive potential for solidarity.¹⁵ However, this is not to suggest that the nationalist version of the classical tradition went uncontested or that the official version of *the tradition* remained intact over time and space. It is in this context, that it may be pertinent to look at the South Indian diaspora, and whether contestations of language and content and interpretation came to be factored into the diasporic imagination of south Asians for whom Indian music was both part of an older inheritance as well as a resource to be deployed in new musical improvisations. How did the technology of cultural practice replicate existing tropes of tradition and modernity, of the sacral and the secular, of the nation and the region? How was it same and different and how did the mutual effort of sameness and difference cannibalise one another?

The formation of the South Asian and more specifically the South Indian diaspora may be traced to the late 1960s after the passing of the U.S Federal Act of 1965 that partially relaxed controls over immigration. Most of the immigrants happen to be professionals drawn largely if not entirely from high castes who retained strong connections with India especially in relation to matrimonial arrangements. The centrality of music – its practice as an art form in a secular space but redolent with interiority and personal spiritual identification – for high caste elites in Madras was transplanted in the United States but with some important differences. Joseph Getter’s thesis would suggest that the graft was facilitated by the earlier Theosophist inputs which had created a fertile field for Indian ideas on spirituality, religion and yoga.¹⁶ While admittedly, the influence of the Theosophists in Madras was important in providing a strategy for the Tamil Brahmin to negotiate with the schizoid demands of tradition and modernity, its subsequent incarnation would appear to be more complex and layered. At one and possibly the most obvious level, the patronage and practice of music was part of a socializing tendency, a tactic of the kind Certeau talked about, that gave the community a clearer sense of social identity. Here the experience was almost entirely drawn from older formations of social identity expressed around music sabhas in Chennai. In

¹⁵ Lakshmi Subramaniam, “Contesting the Classical: The Tamil Isai Iyakkam and the politics of Custodianship”, *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 32(1) 2004 pp.66-90.

¹⁶ Joseph Getter (1998) ‘One Music, many Meanings’ from his M.A. thesis *Saraswati’s Journey. South Indian Karnatak Music in the United States*. Available online at: <<http://jgetter.web.wesleyan.edu/thesis.html>>

nineteenth century Madras, a specifically urban oriented musical culture¹⁷ had been developed by the Madras elites who recast the musical tradition of Southern India along lines that they saw as modern and classical. This was done through associations that were specifically oriented towards the promotion of music as well as towards musical reform, both of which they saw as a critical adjunct of their self description as custodians of personal/community cultural resource and of the nation's heritage. This was replicated almost in its entirety in the U.S. through the Carnatic Music association of North America (founded in 1977). As President Subbiah observed in his address to the Annual general Body Meeting of 1997,

“ we can see the growth of the organization as well as the growth of the entire Indian community and the community of the Carnatic music rasikas. Twenty years ago, the Indian community was young and trying to find a foothold in this country. At that time in order to carry on that culture, many groups were founded in order to give Indians a sense of familiarity and belonging. As part of this general movement, a small but ardent group of Carnatic music lovers led by Dr. P. Rajagopalan founded the Carnatic music association of North America. These last twenty years have not only brought a gradual evolution of CMANA, but also a gradual evolution of the South Indian community in this region. We are not the small struggling community we once were. In fact, we have grown into a visible and formidable community’.¹⁸

The observations are telling. The enjoyment of music and the patronage it had to be accorded was tied up very intimately with the self-definition of the community. As an emblem of an inner life and interiorized cultural experience, Carnatic music as it had been recast in the late nineteenth and twentieth century was an important signifier of status, taste and of inner needs. In fact, it would appear that the advocacy of music enjoyed a sharper edge among the diaspora and here, as Joseph Getter has argued, the music concert became the major instrument in the forging of a collective identity. As an

¹⁷ L'Armand and L'Armand, “One hundred years of music in Madras. A Case Study of Secondary Urbanisation” in *Ethnomusicology*, 983, pp.411-430.

¹⁸ Joseph Getter, *One Music, many Meanings*.

exalted secular space that enabled the articulation of an inner, affective experience the concert kept the listening community connected with their roots in Madras and even set the stage for organizing annual music festivals around celebrated composers whose status was both artistically iconic and morally inspiring. The Tyagaraja festival was especially important – organized around the birth centenary of the most celebrated composer of Karnatic music – Tyagaraja (1767-1847), whose song texts and music had been central to the project of creating a modern classical tradition for South Indian music. It had been initiated in India in the mid 1930s and had become an event to celebrate the richness of the musical tradition and the authentic spiritual values that he represented.

Studying the Tyagaraja festival celebrated in the United States affords us an excellent site for exploring the making of the diasporic imagination; the way it is organized, the changes in its structure and orientation over time, the connections it has renewed with India in recent years and the reception it enjoys in Indian televised spaces yield interesting insights. Celebrated in a number of cities in the United States from about the late 70s, the festival In Ohio, Cleveland remains the most important and best exemplifies the symbolic importance of music as a cultural resource for the South Indian community. Like their predecessors in late nineteenth century Chennai, it was not just the question of listening to music, immersing one self in it as an aesthetic experience but locating within the aesthetic experience itself a shared set of values that were as material as food and as non material as faith. Indeed, the urgency would appear to be even more explicit, for somehow in their self definition as successful immigrants who had overcome their anxiety about professional success and material advancement, it was critical to reiterate their commitments to spiritual values, which were best expressed and fulfilled in music. Thus the construction of the idealized community of listeners and patrons around an event was even more explicit than its original counterpart in Tiruvayur in India.

In around the late 1930s, the festival had originated as a deeply felt need on the part of musicians to pay their homage to the saint composer and thereby to renew their engagement with a musical conception that seemed to fulfill their aesthetic convictions as well as their inner reflections on faith and belief. As a musician whose life was spent in devotion to his deity and who remained unmoved by prospects of material gain and

reward, the saint became an icon in a matter of decades, drawing a huge community of devotees to renew their commitment to the music and ideals he stood for. Started by the celebrated singer Bangalore Nagaratnam, the festival soon became a state and national event, that was as much a ritual event as a cultural one. The celebrations combined religious and scriptural chants with congregational singing of select compositions and enacted a collective endorsement of the values that the community had attached onto Karnataka Sampradaya Sangeetam or traditional music.¹⁹ In the case of Tyagaraja festivals overseas, initially the same sentiments would appear to have prevailed with the significant omission of having practicing professional musicians lending the weight to the event in the manner that they did at Tiruvayuru. In fact, the celebrations were not seen as concerts. As the Hindu reported in 1995 on the occasion of the 19th annual Tyagaraja festival at Chicago:

“It strives to broadly reflect our culture as exemplified by the saint’s life. The traditional rituals at the altar of Tyagaraj, the music, the socialization, the fragrance of incense sticks, the aroma of typical South Indian cooking and the glittering clothes blend to create an ambience reminiscent of the old country.”²⁰

This was admittedly a little removed from the original orientation of the festival in India where the emphasis had been on a public and visible reiteration of a commitment to a classical mode of performance. In fact, in the 1940s the urgency of having to perform in the festival suggested its association with artistic prestige and became a subject matter of satirical observation. The noted writer Kalki Krishnamurthi in his weekly piece on music and dance reviews in the magazine *Aananda Vikatan*, commented on this phenomenon in his inimitable style:

“A friend came running to me asking me to find a way to learn Carnatic music in 24 hours and whether I knew somebody who could do so. I wanted to know whether it should be 24 hours or 26 minutes.

¹⁹ William Jackson, *Tyagaraja and the renewal of Tradition Translations and Reflections*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994.

²⁰ *The Hindu speaks on Music* Hindu Publications Madras, 1999. Pp.449-450.

“ Please hurry up. I need to become a Vidwan by tomorrow evening,” (he was flustered).

I replied “ Why the hurry” ?

My friend replied: “ You know there is going to be a festival in Thirumayuri in honour of Ayyarval. They would charge you only half the price if you travel by first or second class I hear.”

“Yes I know of this. It was in the Mahotsava notices too.”

“ But only musicians can avail of this privilege. That is why I too want to become a Vidwan.”

(At this point he spotted a music teacher and ran after him)²¹

On the other hand, integral to the festival was the idea of a community feeding and a commitment to an efficient way of managing the event. Kalki in 1941 even while lampooning the ambitions of wannabe vidwans, was full of praise for the way the celebrations were organized and how immersed in the event the mammoth crowd was. Musicians young and old sang and the concerts went on for days making the celebrations a festivity cum pilgrimage. The emphasis was on the devoted singer and the devoted listener both of whom were brought together in a space that they revered and which was an extension of their personal inner ideals. The concerts were packed affairs and ‘the audience sat through to the end unmindful of minor and major discomforts, cramped limbs, missed meals and so on’²². Furthermore, in spite of such mammoth crowds, there was not a single loss of property with major responsibilities being assumed by musicians like Musiri Subramania Iyer and patrons like N.Y.Krishnaswamy an I.C.S officer.

Transplanted to the diaspora, the Tyagaraja festival acquired new dimensions and inflections. The Cleveland festival in Ohio started out in the 1970s, as a small gathering, grew concomitantly with the community and soon became a major event in the annual calendar. It drew on local support and invited musicians from within the U.S

²¹ Kalki, ‘Aadal Paadal’ Aananda Vikatan, 1935.

²² Ibid.

and occasionally from India to sing in the celebrations thereby reinforcing the connection with Chennai, the cultural centre, and also creating a distinct interface within the diasporic culture in the United States. It set great store by its efficient organization that enabled the community to meet and converge in Ohio and thereby renew its connections through a shared cultural experience that combined music, patronage and festivities.

Part of the shared experience was an abiding commitment to musical standards that was understood as being coeval with tradition. The festival, predictably became over time a site for debating standards especially as invited musicians and local organizers publicly endorsed the festival as being more authentic than the original one and how the commitment to musical values was even more sincere in the diaspora. Over time, the festival has in fact become a major source of patronage for traditional music centered in Chennai, with its principal organizers ratifying the mainstream classical version.

This has meant that the issues that have distracted and contested the mainstream version in India have remained relatively absent in the diapsora. For instance, the issue of language and music was a contested one in India in the late 1930s, but resolved by the late 1940s. It did not surface in the diaspora whose advocacy of a classical repertoire remained untroubled. The core of the repertoire was constituted by Telugu and Sanskrit song texts while the musical discourse continued to be framed in English, which was seen as the language of modern knowledge. By incorporating visits from senior Indian musicians to lend weight to the event and thereby ratifying the mainstream version of the modern classical, the festival now feeds into the televised spaces of the nation with musicians and senior artists expressing their appreciation of the overseas venue, how this is even more redolent with the ambient atmosphere of devotion to the art form and to the values it represents. In fact going by the interviews that are held with performing musicians from Madras on a range of questions from the technical aspects of the tradition to composition and to the audience in question,²³ it would appear that this profile of the diapsora directly and decisively consolidates the nationalist version.

²³ Jaya TV in fact has emerged as an important cultural agent and televises the Tyagaraja Utsavam

Pedagogy and Tradition in the United States

In contrast to this realm of performance as a mode of celebrating identity and affect, is the space of modern pedagogy in the University system in North America. Here, the formation of a distinct school of teaching South Indian classical music around the lineage of a celebrated family of traditional artists in Wesleyan college is striking, especially in constituting a sub culture of authenticity. Producing a different constituency of listeners, enthusiasts and researchers, whose academic orientation was towards ethnographic practices that focused on the non textual, ritual performing traditions and whose musical disposition and training fitted into the requirements and paradigm of world music, a parallel musical tradition was posited and which in its intention and emphasis simultaneously distanced itself from the mainstream version while collaborating with it.

UCLA provided the first home to higher education for Karnatik music instruction in 1958; in 1961, Wesleyan University offered courses on South Indian music and in 1971, Trichy Sankaran and Jon Higgins established a programme in South Indian music at York University, Toronto. Resident artists at these institutions were brought from India to teach in academic settings and at this stage were not necessarily members of a large immigrant community. Rather they appear to have responded to the American interest in Indian culture and spirituality. What made T. Viswanathan's experiences even more special was that he came from a special family that had been hereditary practitioners of music and interacted with non-Indian enthusiasts who were experimenting with diverse traditions of music. This not only enabled him to develop a special method of notation and to experiment with other forms of music but also freed him from the shackles of a convention that had been put in place in Madras by the first quarter of the twentieth century. Thus he was able to retain his family style which was known to be complex and difficult and which had a favourable reception in the United States. In an interview, he mentioned that in America he had been able to maintain his family's style which may not have been possible in India, where audiences demand a more accessible style.²⁴ The construction of an alternative authentic tradition and its integration with diverse musical traditions was undoubtedly a consequence of the way one of the sub groups in the

regularly.

²⁴ T.Viswanathan *The Hindu* January 4, 1998.

diaspora interacted with the changing cultural concerns of Americans to produce a parallel classicism.

It was around the 1970s that the construction of the Dhanam style as the authentic and classical version of Indian music cohered in the United States, which was thereby able to respond somewhat from a distance to the mainstream version that the Madras Academy had put together over a span of three decades. RangaRamanuja Ayyangar the veena player and a life long advocate of Veena Dhanam and a virulent critic of the Madras Academy and the ideals it stood for, was an important figure – as he mentioned in his memoirs, he remained faithful to the veena technique that he had learnt from Dhanam in all his overseas tours. In 1972, he was invited to Jefferson College, Michigan to put together a course of study. The effort culminated in three public recitals “ T.J.C Carnatic ensemble” by an all American group with five veenas, clarinet, cello, flute, vocal music and Konakol accompaniment for rhythm. What was interesting about the recital besides the fact that it was, according to Ayyangar, extremely popular, was the manner it was framed around the principles of Hindu religion, spirituality and yoga that was in contrast to the more immediate, prescient and material ramifications of the NRI discourse as expressed in the context of the Tyagaraja Birth Anniversary celebrations.²⁵ Clearly for them, music as the central component of Indian culture was part of a large network of socialization to create a subculture that remained closely connected with the one they had left behind while for other groups, including non-Indians who formed part of a transnational culture, it was both a means of accessing a different and complex music system as well as a route to notions of Indian spirituality that had taken root in America in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

Thus religion and tradition, reworked in multiple ways as modes of experience and representation, within the diaspora have remained central to the understanding and circulation of music, especially classical music. The complexities embedded in these processes and sites need to be historically contextualized before we can make a clear case of singular or multiple identities. There is also the question of how the diaspora feeds into the imagination of the nation and its citizen subjects. This is important

²⁵ Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, *Musings of a musician. Recent Trends in Carnatic Music*. Wilco Publishing House, Bombay 1977, pp.67-68.

especially if we consider how substantive the NRI investment has been in the cultural politics of the Madras Music Academy and also how the North American representation of the Dhanam style has kept alive the negotiations between versions of the 'classical'. In fact, the intervention and inputs of the Wesleyan connection have continued to contest the notion of the classical as set out by the nation state and its votaries.

It is not my intention here to draw any conclusions or even general propositions from these preliminary observations. The point that I would like to make is the fluidity and complexity that characterizes the reception and representation of classical culture and the importance that is assigned to its consumption and custodianship. Here the nation's imaginings and fashioning of its culture may only partially correspond to those in the Diaspora, where the dynamics of consumption self-fashioning go through different temporal and spatial rhythms.

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