

Contextualizing South Indian Performance, Socially and Historically

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WOMEN AND MUSIC: THE DE VADÁS/ AND HER COMMUNITY

To begin, a question. When listening to the main piece *Kaligiurife* (CD tracks 13-17) did it strike you as significant that the main artist—choosing the repertoire, initiating all the improvisational forms, making key decisions at every stage about the progress of the concert—is a woman? As recently as seventy years ago, this scenario simply could not have taken place because women's and men's performance traditions were quite distinct at the beginning of the twentieth century.

There were many women musicians in South India around 1900—mostly vocalists, some performers of the chordophone *vino*, and a few violinists and percussionists. But women who performed Karnatak music in public were not from all classes of society; they belonged almost completely to one particular social community. As early as the Cola dynasty in South India (ca. ninth through eleventh centuries A.D.), and perhaps much earlier (Figure 4.1), a class of women famous for their music and dance skills was attached in hereditary service to both Hindu temples and the royal courts. Called *devadasi* (literally, servants, *dasi*, of god, *deva*), young women of this community were ritually married to the god of a particular Hindu temple. For the more artistically promising girls, this marriage and their artistic *aravigeram*, debut, came at the conclusion of a period of training in music and dance. In temple service they performed both artistic and specifically ritual functions, and particularly accomplished *devadasis* often performed in the court setting

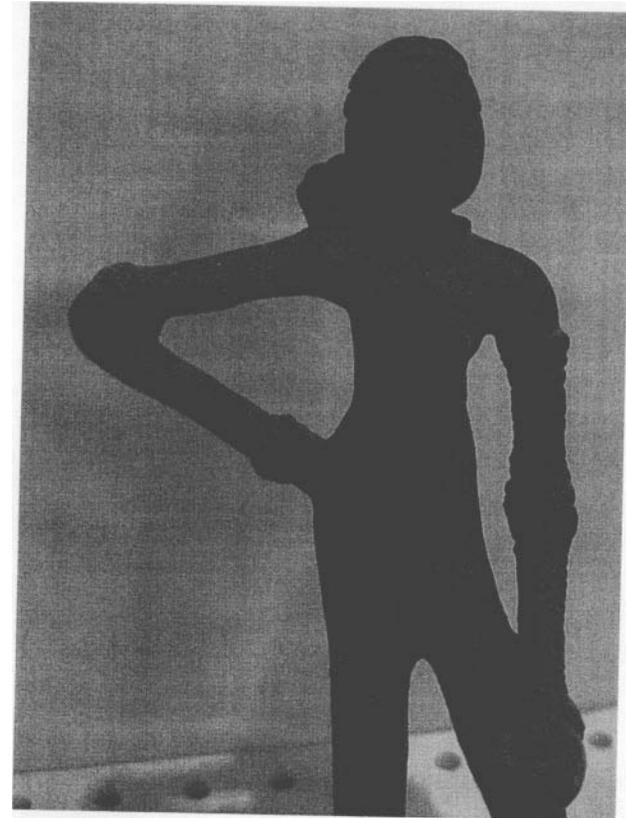


FIGURE 4.1 Replica of bronze statuette (10.8 cm in height), Mohenjo Daro civilization, circa 2500 B. C. Original in National Museum, Delhi. (Photograph by Matthew Allen)

for the king and royal family as well. Because of their marriage to god, they were considered *nityasumarigalT*, "ever-auspicious" women, because unlike human husbands, gods do not die, so *devadasis* avoided the traditionally inauspicious state of widowhood (Kersenboom 1987). In temple service *devadasis* had a set of ritual responsibilities only they were qualified to perform. Many *devadasis* were literate, having a level of education that women of higher social status were denied. *Devadasis* lived outside of the institution of human marriage and bore children by patrons who in many cases were lifelong companions. Many owned

considerable property and are mentioned in historical sources not only as great dancers and musicians but as authors and philanthropists as well.

During the nineteenth century, when the British consolidated their control over India, *devadasis* were still attached to temples and remaining courts throughout the South. They were particularly renowned for their performance of dance in a style called at that time *sadir* or *nautch* (an Anglicization of the Sanskrit *natya*, "drama-dance-music"). In 1799 the British took control of most revenues from the kingdom of *Tafijavtir* and in 1855, upon the death of Raja Sivaji II without male issue, assumed direct rule. This accelerated the decline of the system of patronage that had supported *devadasis* and other temple service castes since the *Cola* period. By the beginning of the twentieth century, no indigenous royal house remained to support the temples, which had provided *devadasis* with housing and food. Many *devadasis* lost their livelihood and homes, some turning to prostitution. Because of this, *devadasis* were viewed in general as prostitutes by the Victorian-educated Indian middle and upper classes, and their dance was seen as degraded, not fit for respectable company.

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The death of the *devadasi* and the "revival" of her dance in a new social milieu. *In a profound early twentieth-century social transformation, women of the hereditary community almost completely gave up dance in favor of professions not tainted by social stigma (performance of vocal music offered one such outlet). The temple dedication of young women as devadasis was prohibited by law in Tamil Nadu in 1947, ending a social and cultural tradition over a millennium old. The devadasis' dance was renamed bhārata nācyam (loosely translatable as the "complete theatrical art of India") and repopulated, primarily by women from the Brahmin community (Allen 1997, Meduri 2001).*

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Women's Public Performance Circa 1900. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, women of *devadasi* community background were the only women performing Karnataka music in public. Their performances were distinctly different in form and content from those of men. Women's performances featured the presentation of many corn-



FIGURE 4.2 Sisters T. Brinda (holding *tambara* across her lap), T. Muktha, and T. Abhiramasundari (with violin), 1942. (Courtesy of T. Muktha)

positions and relatively little improvisation except for *alapana*. Women were known as repositories of *kritis* and also genres from the dance repertoire such as *javalis* and *padams* (examples on CD tracks 18 and 22). Concerts by women singers stressed harmonious ensemble performance rather than the jousting improvisational back-and-forth affiliated with improvisation and gendered as male musical behavior. Embodying the idea of a close-knit ensemble, sister duets or trios were common. T. Brinda's aunts Rajalakshmi and Lakshmiratnam performed in their youth as "Dhanam's Daughters," and Brinda herself performed for many years with her younger sisters, vocalist T. Muktha and violinist T. Abhiramasundari (Figure 4.2).

Social attitudes of the time discouraged women from performance of improvised music and from mannerisms considered male, such as

the keeping of talc on the thighs: In the words of Brinda's grandmother Vina Dhanammal, "Women should not be slapping their thighs like men!" It was also a common perception that women's voices retained their naturally sweet character into maturity, while men's became "hardened" by strenuous *svara* singing.

Loss and Recovery of a Woman's Work. Despite women's participation in artistic life from time immemorial, written accounts of South Indian music and literary history have tended to concentrate on the contributions of men. When work by or about women musicians, authors, or composers has been published, in some cases it has been deliberately altered, in effect erased and suppressed. The life of Muddupalani, a *dEvadasi* poet at the Tanjavur Court during the reign of Raja Pratap Singh (1739-1763), is a striking case in point. Among her Telugu works is an epic poem, *Radhika Santwanam*, "Appeasing Radha," her own telling of a story known to all Indians, the romance of Radha and Krsna. While scholars agree that her work is a sophisticated and polished piece of poetry, something else makes it especially remarkable to literary historians Susie Tharu and K. Lalita:

What strikes us today is Muddupalani's remarkable subversions of the received form. Traditionally in such literature, the man is the lover, the woman the loved one; Krishna woos and makes love to Radha. Though Radha is invariably portrayed as longing for him, the narrative has as its focus his pleasure. Not so in *Radhika Santwanam*, where the woman's sensuality is central. She takes the initiative, and it is her satisfaction or pleasure that provides the poetic resolution. With a warmth unmatched in later poetry, Muddupalani celebrates a young girl's coming of age and describes her first experience of sex. . . . What makes the work so radical today, if not in its own time, is the easy confidence with which it contests the asymmetries of sexual satisfaction commonly accepted even today, and asserts women's claim to pleasure. (Tharu and Lalita 1991:7)

Muddupalani's poem was published in 1887 by Venkatanarasu, an associate of the Orientalist lexicographer C. P. Brown. He excised not only verses he found objectionably erotic but also Muddupalani's prologue in which she introduced herself and discussed her literary lineage through her grandmother and aunt, themselves poets. The author's gender as well as her lineage were thus concealed.

Bangalore Nagarathnammal (1878-1952), the most popular woman vocalist of the early twentieth century, an accomplished Sanskrit scholar

and proudly self-proclaimed *crevadasi*, first heard of Muddupalani while reading a commentary on the Tanjavur period of Telugu literature. Her interest was piqued by some extracts from the poems, and she began a search for *Radhika Santwanam* that eventually led her to a copy of the original manuscript. After comparing it with the 1887 edition, she decided to publish a new edition, restoring all the verses that had been left out. In her introduction to that edition she wrote: "However often I read this book, I feel like reading it all over again. . . . Since this poem, brimming with *rasa* [flavor, emotion] was not only written by a woman, but by one who was born into our community, I felt it necessary to publish it in its proper form" (in Tharu and Lalita 1991:2-3).

Nagarathnammal brought out her new edition of Muddupalani's poem in 1910 through Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrulu and Sons, one of the oldest and most reputable publishers in Chennai. To the amazement and consternation of Nagarathnammal and the publishers, several prominent social reformers denounced Muddupalani as an adulteress and her work as scandalous, leading the British government to seize all copies of the book and ban its publication. All petitions by Nagarathnammal and the publishers, including one to have a Telugu-speaking judge review the case, were dismissed. Clandestine copies circulated until the ban was lifted in 1947, the year of India's independence, and a new edition was published in 1952.

"Now We Women Have a Platform to Commence Singing"—Bangalore Nagarathnammal and the Tyagaraja Festival. The recovery of Muddupalani's work was only one of many philanthropic activities of Nagarathnammal. In 1921, her *guru* Bidaram Krishnappa sent her a letter saying how distraught he had been to see the dilapidated condition of Tyagaraja's shrine on a recent visit to Tiruvaiyaru, and asking her to dedicate herself to its renovation. She immediately took the train to Tiruvaiyaru and brought her considerable financial resources to bear on the situation. She found a sculptor to make stone images of Tyagaraja and the deity Hanuman for the shrine. Descendants of the last Raja of Tanjavur exchanged their lands at the site with nearby properties purchased by Nagarathnammal, enabling her to construct a new auditorium with a large seating capacity; it is used to this day during the Tyagaraja *aradhana* celebration. Consecration of the newly renovated shrine took place in 1925. As owner of the land, Nagarathnammal was in a position to insist that women, not previously allowed to make a musical offering during the Tyagaraja festival, participate alongside men. She declared: "Now we women have a platform to commence singing."

Nagarathnammal continued her intimate involvement with the Tyagaraja celebration until her death in 1952, establishing a trust to ensure that after her death the property would be maintained properly and that observances would be open to people of all social classes. In her will she insisted that her own mausoleum be positioned close to Tyagaraja's shrine to enable her always to have *darśan*, sight, of the composer she revered (on the importance of *darśan*, see Eck 1998). The carpenters who build the temporary performance platform for the festival every year obey her wish by placing it so that Tyagaraja and his great female devotee can have direct visual contact in perpetuity (for a summary of Nagarathnammal's life, see Jackson 1994:145-163).

Bangalore Nagarathnammal as a Performer. It was Bangalore Nagarathnammal's successful career as a singer and recording artist that made possible her philanthropic work. A catalogue of her performances between 1905 and 1934 lists 1,235 concerts in 116 different cities (Sankaran and Allen, in Arnold 2000:392). When George Walter Dillnutt of The Gramophone Company of India, Ltd, recorded her singing the *javali* dance composition "*Didn't I Tell You Not To, Girl/Vaddani?*" (CD track 18) in Bangalore in late 1921, she was at the height of her popularity (the recording was released in March 1923; Michael Kinnear, personal communication December 9, 2002). Like most women of *devadasi* background in the early twentieth century, the women in her family had stopped dancing; performing as a singer remained a route open to these women to gain a living with less social censure. And as with many other women singers of *devadasi* background in the 1920s and 1930s who made 78 RPM recordings, many of Nagarathnammal's recordings are of dance music compositions.

ringara Bhakti: *Being in Love with God.* The dance music genres *javali* and *padam*, dealing as they do with the myriad varieties of love in separation, are excellent vehicles for the portrayal of the *Śringara rasa*, erotic sentiment, in dance. These genres were at the heart of the performance repertoire of women from the *devadasi* community. Most of the texts are constructed around a triad of characters: the hero (usually truant or otherwise absent), the heroine (usually pining, often with a barely concealed subcurrent of righteous anger), and the *sakhi*, the heroine's female friend and confidante (who sometimes ends up in the arms of the hero to whom she has gone on the behalf of the heroine) or female relative. A study of thirty Tamil language *padams* by co-author Allen found that in almost half, the heroine addresses her confidante about her separation from the hero. Translations of the *pallavi* sections of six such *padams* are given here.

Spoken by the heroine to her friend:

Who will carry my message to him? Can I find a trustworthy confidante?

Wherever he has gone, my friend, he must still be thinking of me.

Oh friend, which woman could have poisoned his mind against me?

From now on, between him and me there can be no reconciliation—go, friend!

Without understanding, I fell in love with him—but what result did I see?

Oh my friend, can I ever forget his deceit? But at the same time, how can

I not think of our sweet embraces? (Allen 1992:298)

In a smaller number of songs, the rhetoric of address is different: The confidante speaks, either to the heroine (as in the *javali*, CD track 18) or to the hero on behalf of the heroine; and very occasionally, the heroine addresses the hero directly. For a dancer, who in the course of a performance uses her *abhinaya*, mimetic gesture language, to bring to life all three characters—heroine, confidante, and hero—these songs are extremely rich in interpretive possibilities (Figure 4.3). In performance a dancer often improvises multiple interpretations of individual text lines



FIGURE 4.3 Photograph of bharata natyam dancer Lakshmi Shanmukham Knight with T. Viswanathan, flute; John Suter, tambura; Jody Cormack Viswanathan, voice; Douglas Knight, mridangam. (Courtesy of Jody Cormack Viswanathan)

so that in concert a *padam* or *javalī* may last easily fifteen minutes, much longer than the recording on CD track 18.

One of the major ways that Hindu *bhakti* has been expressed throughout the centuries is through the dynamic of lover-beloved, the human devotee falling hopelessly in love with the deity (Cutler 1987:1). While the hero of most *padams* is identified as a deity—Kṛṣṇa and Murugaṅ (one of Siva's sons) are most often invoked—and thus these love songs are considered allegories for religious devotion, many *javalīs* are addressed to human patrons. In *padams*, the tone of the love relationship is therefore generally considered more decorous than in *javalīs*, which are often extremely direct in the portrayal of the relationship between lover and beloved (Ramanujan et al. 1994). Historically, *devadāsī* dancers performed these songs both for the deities in the temples where they served and in salons or courts in front of human patrons. Their always passionate, sometimes quite earthy and direct, texts served both to make these songs extremely popular and, by the late nineteenth century, to draw down upon them and their human practitioners the venom of social reformers.

In Activity 4.1, first study the text, in which the confidante (her friend, or perhaps her mother?) counsels the heroine, and then rewrite it from the point of view of one of the two other protagonists—the wronged heroine or the allegedly duplicitous hero. As you compose your lyric, keep in mind that a text that is too literal and detailed leaves little room for creative interpretation by a dancer; make your text sparse and suggestive rather than lengthy and descriptive. The structure of both *padam* and *javalī* is identical to *kṛitī*, each having the same three sections: *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, *caranam*.

ACTIVITY 4.1 Text and Translation of "Didn't I Tell You Not To, Girl/Vaddani?" (CD Track 18)

Composed by Mysore Venkatarama Sastri (nineteenth century)
Raga: Kapi; Tala: rīpaka (three-beat cycle); Bangalore Na-
garathammal, vocalist; violin and mridarigam, unknown

Pallavi (begins at 0:00)

Vaddani rthwutini ga vāni
(*Tani*) *fah niku celi*

Didn't I tell you not to, girl?
Not to have anything to do
with him?

Anupallavi (begins at 0:43)

Sadayu masa ne
VadevatanO jerinade

He pretends to be nice, but look
He's already involved with
someone else

Caravan' (begins at 1:36)

Cukkapu doravalenu cola
vakkanaga mataladucu
Nakkavinayamunu le:se
takkariti5 sahasatnu

Like some slick lord, he
talks politely
But he goes and acts just
like a fox; don't get involved
with a rogue like him.

[Translated from the Telugu by Phillip B. Wagoner]

Like the *bhajan* (CD track 1), "Didn't I Tell You Not To, Girl?" (CD track 18) is set to Kapi raga. Refresh your memory on the structure and important phrases of this raga by referring back to CD track 9 and Activity 2.9. This composition is set to a very brisk three-beat *rapaka* tala. Before listening to CD track 18, recite the first line of the *pallavi* (Activity 4.2) while keeping the clap-clap-wave pattern of *rapaka* tala. Notice that this line is three cycles of tala in length; as you listen to the complete recording, notice the different number of cycles of tala taken by different lines in the *anupallavi* and *caranam* sections. A detailed listening guide to CD track 18 is available at <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Faculty/MatthewAllen.html>.

ACTIVITY 4.2 Recitation of first line of Pallavi of "Didn't I Tell You Not To, Girl/Vaddani?" in Rapaka Tata (CD Track 18)

1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
clap	clap	wave	clap	clap	wave	clap	clap	wave
vad	dani	ne	nan	tini	ga -	-	ni	

Listening through the Static: The Rise of Audio Recording. How can one enjoy music that sounds so scratchy, indistinct, and faraway? The

first commercial gramophone recordings, manufactured on ten-inch plates, were being sold in India by 1910. In the 1920s 78 RPM records became the norm, and in the early 1930s the new electrical system of recording came to India from the United Kingdom. Recorded in 1921, CD track 18 certainly sounds far from high-fidelity to our twenty-first century ears. Once you have practiced reciting the *pallavi* line together with the raja in Activity 4.2, our next suggestion is to get involved in the performance by clapping the cycles of *rupaka* tala with hand gestures as you listen—the cycle begins right at the singer's first syllable *vad*. The (unidentified) drummer's accompaniment is bursting with energy and is extremely creative; listen, for example, to how his crisp cadences resolve at the beginning of particular tala cycles. As you clap, close your eyes and try to visualize the musicians playing. See if this begins to pull you through the haze of time into their presence, seated in front of a microphone one day over three quarters of a century ago.

The singer, Nagarathnammal, also adds many individual touches to this particular performance that can draw the listener in. You may have noticed how she introduces the first line of the *pallavi* into the *anupallavi* and *caranam* sections—anticipating the return of the *pallavi* section and in effect blurring the distinctions between the three parts of the song. Her fast *brikka* passages up and down the scale of the raga (from 1:53 to 2:06) are a clear demonstration of the skills that made her such a popular singer. And it is quite remarkable to hear Nagarathnammal perform *alapana* for the last twenty seconds or so of the recording! This inversion of the normal sequence—where *alapana* precedes the composition—was necessitated by the recording format. After drastically curtailing their performance to fit the limitations of the technology, just over three minutes per side, musicians sometimes finished a composition with a few seconds to spare and opted to fill the remaining time with a brief spontaneous *alapana*.

MEN AND MUSIC: FROM TEMPLE AND COURT TO PUBLIC AND STATE PATRONAGE

At the beginning of the twentieth century the world of courtly patronage was nearly gone. Some Rajas—in South India, at Pudukkottai, Travancore, and Mysore—retained titles, palaces, and a retinue, although not political power. Some wealthy *zamindars*, landowners, tried to emulate a courtly style of patronage in their private salons. But crucially,

new performance contexts and patrons were emerging—especially the public concert, open to the public by paid admission, and the state, primarily through the new medium of the radio.

Men's Performance in Precolonial South India. Quintessential male performance in the old courtly context was *manOclharma sangra*, improvised music. Male musicians from both Brahmin and non-Brahmin social classes gained formidable reputations for their improvisational skills. The musical genre par excellence was not the heavily texted devotional *kriti* but rather the *ragam-tanam-pallavi* (often called simply *pallavi*), consisting of several improvisational genres spun in sequence around a brief composed core theme—usually just one line of text. The first part of the *ragam-tanam-pallavi* consisted of extensive *raga alapana*. Musicians' reputations were built on the rendition of particular ragas: A musician associated with a particular raga might acquire it as a nickname, and stories tell of performers in dire circumstances in effect mortgaging the cherished raga they were best known for, agreeing not to perform it again until a debt was repaid. In the world of court patronage, improvisation served as a primary vehicle for male musicians to show their skills and to compete with opponents for musical and financial glory (For a colorful description of such a courtly contest, see Allen 1998:38-40.) Male performers typically did not rehearse or discuss the contents of a program in advance. They would meet on the stage platform a few minutes before a performance, something like a "pickup" group in jazz, ready to compete with each other to see who would come out on top.

The Hereditary Male Temple Service Musician. Hindu temples have long supported groups of ritual and artistic specialists, ranging from priests to female *devadasis* and groups of male musicians. In Siva temples, male singers called *ecluvars* perform devotional *tOveram* hymns (Peterson 1989). And a patriarchal social community with some kinship links to women of the *devadasi* community has for centuries provided musicians for an instrumental temple ensemble known as the large or great ensemble, *periya melam* (see the photograph on the book cover). The ensemble features the long double-reed aerophone *nagasvaram* and double-headed membranophone *tavil*, supplemented by *sruti petti* drone box and small hand-held cymbals called *talam*. Unlike the *devadasis*, whose temple dedication was banned in 1947, the *periya melam* tradition continues today inside and also outside of temples—for a range of domestic ritual observances and on the concert stage as well.

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Generation of auspiciousness by musicians and dancers. In 1948, the year after India's independence and the banning of devadasi dedication, prominent representatives of periya melam and devadasi families constituted themselves as a new legal-social entity under a new name, Igai 'farmers of music' (Irschick 1986:215). In taking the name Vellalar, they associated themselves with the respected Sudra agriculturalist caste of Tamil Nadu and distanced themselves from derogatory caste names by which they had previously been called. Just as devadasis had been uniquely qualified to perform auspicious dance and ritual activities for the deities of a temple and for the king, the male musicians of the periya melam were, and remain today, specialists in mangala auspicious music. Their music is considered absolutely essential for a variety of settings inside temples and outside, for example, at weddings (for which in the past devadasi dance was also an essential component). At the moment in a wedding when the bridegroom ties the tali, a thin cotton necklace, around the bride's neck, the periya melam ensemble plays loudly so as to drown out and drive away inauspicious noises or forces.

Periya melam music is today a vital marker of virtually all important ritual occasions, including opening and closing ceremonies of music festivals (although nagasvaram performers are rarely given prime concert slots during the major festivals). To many South Indian Hindus, the sound of this music means temple. When Tamil emigrants to Malaysia and Burma, where there were no Hindu temples, first heard nagasvaram music over the radio in the late 1930s after decades living outside India, many reported that they felt they were hearing the Hindu temple, an intense emotional experience.

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The context in which nagasvaram performers have the opportunity to show their musicianship to the largest public is during annual temple festivals. Portable images of the deity are brought out of the temple and

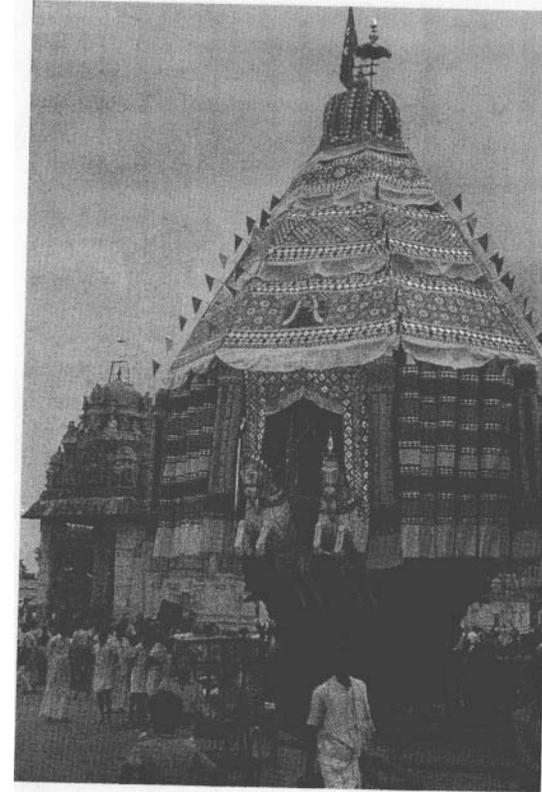


FIGURE 4.4 Temple car preparing to go in procession, Kumbakonam, 1969. (Courtesy of David Sanford)

taken in tars, large wooden-wheeled carts (Figure 4.4), through the streets around the temple, returning inside only at dawn. The musicians have expanses of time in which to develop their improvisations—¹imagine starting to play around nine o'clock in the evening with the knowledge that sometime around sunrise you might be getting close to ending your performance!

The "Emperor of Nagasvaram": T. N. Rajarattinam Pillai. The outstanding nagasvaram performer of the twentieth century and one of the greatest performers of Karnatak music on any instrument was Tiruvavadurai Natesa Rajarattinam Pillai (1898-1956). He was born into

a family of musicians in a small village in Taftjavar District. His father, a *nagasvaram* musician, died soon after his son's birth. Rajarattinam was adopted by his uncle, also an excellent *nagasvaram* player, who died of cholera in 1903 at the age of only twenty-eight. Raised then by his maternal grandfather, Rajarattinam was given training in *nagasvaram* from eminent members of his community and in vocal music from the respected Brahmin violinist Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar. When he was about twelve years old, Rajarattinam was appointed as a *nagasvaram* musician to a local religious monastery. His name spread as he gained a reputation for his flawless intonation, his ability to play *brikka* fast speed passages with great accuracy, and the depth of his musical imagination.

As his fame grew Rajarattinam used his influence to raise the status of *periya melam* musicians. They did not suffer the same degree of social censure as *devadasis* but were still perceived and treated as an inferior social group by the higher castes (Terada 2000). Rajarattinam made it a point of honor to perform only under the same conditions as Brahmin musicians. *Periya melam* musicians had for generations performed barechested and standing. He was the first *nagasvaram* musician to perform wearing a Western-style silk shirt instead of barechested. At the Tyagaraja festival in Tiruvaiyaru in 1939 Rajarattinam insisted that his group perform seated on the platform instead of standing. This was allowed after lengthy negotiation with the festival organizers. In processions during annual temple festivals, Rajarattinam began the practice of *periya melam* musicians performing seated in an open truck rather than walking and performing standing (both practices are observed today).

"The Audience Would Not Be Satisfied If He Did Not Play This Raga". Nagasvaram players in the early twentieth century were appreciated above all for their skill at elaborating ragas in lengthy *alapana*. As a mature artist this was Rajarattinam Pillai's special love. Of all the ragas he performed he is remembered most for his performance of To-di (Terada 1992:247). A scalar summary and some phrases of Todi raga are given in Activity 4.3 (CD track 19; also see CD track 24 for another example of Teidi). As you listen to the ornamented scale and then the phrases, write down your perceptions of which *svaras* take particular types of ornaments and which are rendered without ornament. Then, listen ahead to Rajarattinam's *alapana* in CD track 20—can you hear the phrases identified by Viswanathan occurring in the music of the

nagasvaram? All in all, which *svaras* seem to fulfill important functions in Todi? If you were writing a treatise on raga, which would you designate as the "life-giving" *jiva svara* of TOP

ACTIVITY 4.3 Scalar Summary and Phrases in Tadi Raga (CD Track 19)

Are' hapa (*ascent*)

sa	ri	ga	ma	pa	dha	ni	ga.
C	Db	4	F	G	Ab	13i	C

AvarOhana (*descent*)

^g a	ni	dha	pa	ma	ga	ri	sa
C	B.	Ab	G	F	4	Db	C

Some phrases at the beginning of Rajarattinam Pillai's alapana, sung by T. Viswanathan (times refer to when phrases begin in CD track 19):

1:00 sa sa ri ga , ma , pa pa pa ma ga

1:09 ni ni dha dha , ni sa ri **ra** sa sa

1:17 sa ri ga ma dha ni 11. ga fi ni dha ma ga ri ri

1:22 a dha ni sa ri ga ma pa dha ni *ga*

1:27 *ga'* fira , g-a n ni dha ma ga ri ri

1:32 ri ga ma dha **ninga, ganni** dha ma ga ri ri

1:36 ga ma dha ni n ni dha ma ga ri ri

1:38 ga ma ga , ri , sa

Alapana in Tkli Raga (CD Track 20). Relatively early in his career, in 1934 Rajarattinam Pillai recorded a double-sided 78 RPM disk of *alapana* in Todi raga, playing only with drone accompaniment, without supporting *nagasvaram* or *tavil* drum. Just as Nagarathammal shortened her rendering of *Vaddani* to fit the three-minute 78 RPM format, Rajarattinam had to perform *alapana* for one of the most majestic Karnatak ragas in a tiny fraction of the time available in concert. In CD track 20, the second side of the double set, we begin listening at the halfway point of his recorded *alapana*. Having already introduced the

low range of the raga in the first side of the set, he is beginning to play fast passages throughout its entire range. His incredible control is evident—each *svara* is rendered clearly even at high rates of speed.

In the latter part of his career, Rajarattinam moved to concentrate more on musical lyricism than on speed, and he adopted a larger, lower-pitched *nagasvaram* that gave his music a warmer, rich tone. Rajarattinam's style of playing was tremendously influential not just on other *nagasvaram* performers but also on most all of the major Karnatak vocalists and instrumentalists of his day—something akin to the revolutionary influence of Charlie Parker on jazz in the early days of bebop.

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Give me the microphone! The fall of pitch level and the rise of "crooning." *The lowering of pitch level by Rajarattinam was part of a general trend in the early mid-twentieth century, by instrumentalists and vocalists, to lower the Sruti, pitch level, of performance. The average male and female singing pitch dropped as concerts began to be amplified. Stories abound of musicians in the days before the microphone whose high, powerful voices projected over formidable distances. With the advent of the microphone came a phenomenon disparagingly called "crooning" by its detractors—the singer huddled close to the microphone, using its power to amplify the sound rather than singing with a full head and chest voice.*

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A NEW WORLD OF PERFORMANCE: CONCERT HALLS, MEDIA, AND AUDIENCES IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The *kriti*, which today forms the foundation of Karnatak concerts, played a relatively small role in the world of court and temple male professional performance a century ago. What is now considered "traditional" in Karnatak music performance is only just over a half century old. The new urban audience generated for music listening in the age of the public concert brought different aesthetics, standards, and desires to the concert hall than the royal or elite merchant patrons of old. Many of the new listeners had little knowledge of Karnatak music and found the ex-

tended, intellectually challenging improvisations of the older generation of musicians impossibly esoteric. The new media of radio and recording demanded short, concise performances. And in the cities to which South Indians from small towns and villages were migrating en masse, rickshaw drivers, office workers, and high court judges alike had to be at work early in the morning. Performances lasting many hours were gradually replaced by shorter concerts containing a new "mix" in which compositions—with tuneful melodies and texts on which musical neophytes could focus—became much more central and improvisation was attenuated (Catlin 1985).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, music lovers in Chennai and other South Indian cities began to form organizations to sponsor public performances, called *sabhas*. These were the germ of what became by the 1930s a thriving network of concert halls. In 1927 an "All-India Music Conference" was organized in conjunction with the Indian National Congress party meeting at Chennai. The unexpected success and surplus proceeds of the conference led to the founding of the Music Academy of Madras, which became more than simply a *sabha* by sponsoring not only concerts, but scholarly conferences and dance and music classes as well. By the early 1930s the Academy began holding its music conferences in the latter part of December each year, with morning academic sessions followed by afternoon and evening concerts. Today its conference is at the heart of the annual December "Music Season" and its *Journal* is the major scholarly publication on South Indian music.

The Development of Radio. In the burgeoning urban metropolis of Chennai, public concerts, gramophone recordings, and radio all evolved simultaneously, although influenced by different commercial and ideological forces. While commercial recording companies were almost wholly owned by European entrepreneurs, Indian businesspeople—many of them dedicated Congress party activists—quickly gained considerable influence over radio as it developed, using it both to advance the nationalist cause and to provide employment opportunities for musicians. The Madras Radio Club was founded in 1924. In its first days a speaker was set up along the oceanside Marina Beach in Chennai, a popular place for weekend promenades, and programs were broadcast on Sundays to the strolling weekenders. Madras Corporation Radio was formed in 1930, and soon phonograph records of popular artists were being broadcast to large crowds that would gather specifically to hear the music. In 1938 the Madras Corporation Radio was incorporated into

the expanding national network, All India Radio. With India's independence in 1947, All India Radio quickly became a major force in musical patronage, hiring slates of musicians to become "staff artists" at each of its many stations around the country (see Neuman 1990:172-186 on All India Radio's patronage of North Indian musicians). Today stations around the country supply regular employment for hundreds of male and female staff artists, and major concert performers record broadcasts for the radio as well as for Doordarshan, the national government television network.

The Recording Industry: Commodification and Resistance. The overwhelming majority of early discs were by women *dr̥vadasi* singers, whose sweet voices, recording companies found, sold more discs than male artists. The leading male musicians came to recording slowly and reluctantly. The revolutionary if de facto privileging of one fixed rendition of a song—mistakes and all—frozen on a 78 RPM disc, as "the" authoritative version, confronted Indian and non-Indian musicians alike with one of the most profound conceptual changes in the history of music (half a world away and at this exact moment, cultural theorist Walter Benjamin would pen his influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1935/2002]). For musicians who had been given their *guru's* repertoire during a long and arduous period of musical apprenticeship, this was their livelihood. A strong reason for their reluctance either to record or to broadcast their music was an intuitive apprehension that these unknown new technologies could reduce their direct control over the reception and consumption of their art—who could listen to it, under what circumstances, and what listeners could do with that music. Some were also opposed to recording because they felt that when people heard the recordings in the future, their style might be mocked as dated and old-fashioned, so pride as well as apprehension kept musicians away from the studios, despite exhortations for "masters of the art" to overcome their reluctance. Early voices of dissent notwithstanding, however, the recording industry grew and prospered in parallel fashion to radio, and by the 1940s almost all major concert artists, male and female, were recording on 78 RPM discs and multiple-disc sets.

"The Effect of the Performance Should Be Such As to Keep the Listeners Spell-Bound." The musician who best sensed the mood of the newly evolving listening public, and who is given credit for formulating a concert format that would appeal to that new public without losing sight of core musical values, was singer Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Ayyangar (1890-1967). Called simply "Ariyakkudi"—the name of his

family's ancestral village—by his many admirers, he came from a Brahmin family background. Ariyakkudi studied music in a disciplinary lineage of teachers and disciples leading directly back to Tyagaraja (Figure 4.5).

Tyagaraja (1767-1847)

Manambuccavadi Venkata Subba Ayyar (cousin or nephew of Tyagaraja; nineteenth century)

Pattanam Subramanya Ayyar (vocalist, composer; 1845-1902)

Ramnad "Pucci" Srinivasa Ayyangar (vocalist, composer; 1860-1919)

Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Ayyangar (vocalist; 1890-1967)

FIGURE 4.5 *Disciplinary lineage of Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Ayyangar (chronologically progressing left to right—teacher to student).*

Ariyakkudi's performance at the Tyagaraja festival in Tiruvaiyaru in 1918 was a major coming-out event for the talented young artist; by 1920 he was performing regularly around Chennai and was soon one of the most sought-after performers in South India. During his half-century performing career he received the highest honors in Karnatak music, including in 1938 the title of *Sangita Kalanidhi* ("crest jewel of music") from the Music Academy, the most coveted award to which a musician can aspire. His success was in no small measure due to a keen psychological sense of how to please an audience and an architect's eye for shaping performance, both clearly evident in a speech given probably in the late 1950s:

A performer must be deeply conscious of his strengths and weaknesses. The effect of the performance should be such as to keep the listeners spell-bound, making them stay on to the very end, thirsting for still more. *Sruti* sense [a good sense of pitch], earnestness, a proper conception of *raga-svarapa* [raga form], and good *laya-jriana* [sense of timing]—without these, it is impossible to perform entertainingly.

The concert should begin with a *varnam* [etude-like piece] to be immediately followed by a few fast-tempo *kritis*. A short and crisp *ampāna* of two or three of the ragas of the *kritis* to be sung may be rendered. *Svara kalpana* must be limited and proportionate, and restricted to a few pieces, after a reasonable measure of *niraval*. The pieces selected should be of varied *tālas*, and no two of the same *tāla* need be sung consecutively. . . . The singer should enlist the cooperation of the accompanists all through with the object of making the concert a success. (Ramanuja Ayyangar 1990; text in brackets added)

The words peppering this *passage*—*immediately, fast, short, crisp, limited*—give a clear picture of the essence of his philosophy: Don't lose the listener! The improvisational forms that were the lifeblood of court competitions and are still central to all-night temple performances are here, but reduced to "short and crisp" *alapana*, "limited" *svara kalpana*, and "reasonable" *niraval*. To keep the audience's attention, Ariyakkudi left hardly any open spaces during a concert. When one song finished he immediately began the next, and within songs he left no pause at the conclusion of one section before starting into the next section. His focus was on keeping the concert moving. He found that a mixture of medium and fast tempo pieces elicited the best response from listeners. Ariyakkudi dramatically increased the number of compositions in a concert (Figure 4.6). He usually sang between five and seven *kritis* in the first part, then in "Part II" another half dozen or more miscellaneous shorter pieces, many of them dance music *javalis* and *padams* learned from women musicians.

Ariyakkudi's concerts lasted on average between three and four hours, and the format he evolved remains the organizational basis of most concerts today. While some concerts in Chennai are as brief as two and a half hours today (the length allotted for major recitals at the Music Academy), concerts presented by the South Indian community in

Varnam, etude-like piece that warms up the voice
(8-10 minutes)

Several *kritis* in medium and fast (contrasting) tempi, performed in alteration

(3-5 *kritis*, total 30 minutes)

Main *kriti*, about an hour into the concert, with first (short) drum solo

(30-45 minutes)

One or two very short *kritis*

(5-10 minutes)

Ragam-tanam-pallavi, with second (shorter) drum solo
(30 minutes maximum)

Part II: miscellaneous shorter "light" pieces including *padams* and *javalis* from the dance repertoire

(5-8 pieces, 45 minutes to 1 hour)

FIGURE 4.6 *The concert format of Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Ayyangar (progressing left to right through a performance).*

the United States and Europe tend to be longer, not infrequently three and a half or even four hours in duration.

Men Scripting and Singing Women's Inner Feelings. Padams and javalis are songs intended for interpretation by women in dance and giving voice to women's most intimate feelings and conversations. Yet almost all known composers of these songs were men, the majority of them Brahmin, some of them patrons or life-partners of particular *&evadeIsis*. Further complicating the gender history of these genres, while women often sing these intimate texts today, men often sang for women dancers in the past and, in the early days of the gramophone, recorded large numbers of *padams* and *javalis*. As part of his emphasis on presenting many compositions in concert, Ariyakkudi learned *padams* from co-author Viswanathan's grandmother Vina Dhanammal (1867-1938), the most highly respected woman musician of the early twentieth century (Figure 4.7). He also learned *padams* from one of his vocal students, Mylapore Gowri Ammal, a renowned *devadasi* dancer dedicated to the

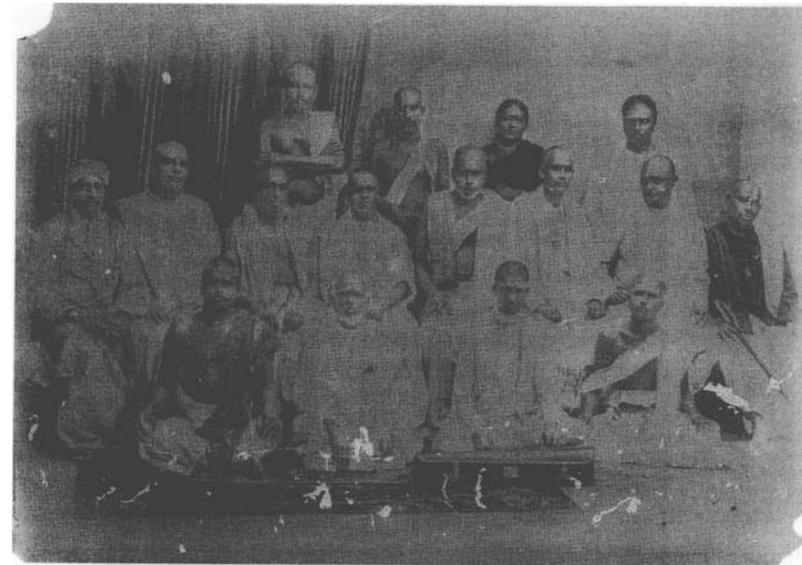


FIGURE 4.7 *Photograph showing Vina Dhanammal, the sole woman in the company of a group of eminent male musicians. Taken at the wedding of the daughter of Munuswamy Naidu (seated at left edge, in turban), secretary of a Chennai sabha, 1911. (Courtesy of T. Sankaran)*

Kapalivara temple in Chennai. In November 1932 the Odeon recording company released Ariyakkudi's recording of a Tamil *padam* he had learned from Vina Dhanammal, "No Matter How Often I Tell You/Ettanai connalum" (CD track 22). It is set in the magnificent raga Saveri, one of the ragas most closely associated with Dhanammal and her family tradition.

A scalar summary and some phrases of Saveri raga as sung by T. Viswanathan are given in Activity 4.4 (CD track 21). Write down your perceptions of which *svaras* take particular types of ornaments in Saveri, which are rendered without ornament, also which *svaras* seem to be emphasized and to fulfill important functions.

 **ACTIVITY 4.4** *Scalar Summary and Phrases in Saveri Raga*
(CD Track 21)

ArOharia (*ascent*)

sa	ri	ma	pa	dha	
C	DI	F	G	Al	C

AvarOhana (*descent*)

sa	ni	dha	pa	ma	ga	ri	sa
			G	F	E	DI	C

 *Phrases from the padam "No matter how often I tell you" (CD Track 22), sung by T. Viswanathan (times refer to when phrases begin in CD Track 21)*

0:58 pa dha ni i'i sa ni dha
1:04 sa ri ma pa dha ni dha pa ma ga , ri
1:13 sa ri ma pa dha ni dha pa ma ga , ri
1:18 pa ni dha pa dha ma pa dha
1:21 pa dha dha pa ma ga , ri
1:26 sa ri ma pa dha ni dha ma ga ,, ri sa ri ga ri
1:33 sa ri ga ri ri ,, ga ri sa ni dha
1:41 ma dha ri , ma dha ri , ri ma dha , dha pa ma ga , ri
1:51 sa ri pa ma dha pa dha ma ga ri
1:55 sa ri pa ma ga , ri , sa ri ga ri ri sa
2:01 sa , ri ga ri sa ni dha pa dha , sa

In singing "No Matter How Often I Tell You/Ettanai Connalum" (Activities 4.6 and 4.7) (CD track 22) Ariyakkudi voices the address of a mother to her wayward daughter. Even as she castigates the headstrong girl, the mother sees her own personality clearly reflected in the child's behavior and attitude. The song manifests a sharp wit, augmented by the use of colloquial Tamil expressions such as, "Fighting is milk and fruit to you, girl!" (the third line of the *caramam*), which Ariyakkudi chooses to stress via repetition in this performance. In comparison to the performance of the javali (CD track 18), where many lines of the brief text are repeated many times, the text of this *padam* is quite lengthy and dense, leaving Ariyakkudi accordingly much less time for repetition. A detailed listening guide for CD track 22 is available at <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Faculty/MatthewAllen.html>.

ACTIVITY 4.5 *Text and Translation of "No Matter How Often I Tell You/Ettanai Connalum" (CD Track 22)*
Composed by Vaidisvarankoil Subbarama Ayyar (ca. 1830-1880)

Raga: Saveri; Thla: ddi (eight-beat cycle); Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Ayyangar, vocalist; violin and mridangam, unknown

Pallavi (begins at 0:03)

Ettanai connidunt teriyada

avar udan

En pinangi kolvay mahale

No matter what I tell you,
you don't understand me
Why do you continue this
relationship (with him),
my daughter?

Anupallavi (begins at 0:48)

Attanai alitta kumarecar

vaittalum enna

The generous lord Kumaresar
(Murugan, son of Siva) who
gives so much, even if he
scolds you or ignores you,
what of it?

*Attirap paduldray pen puttiyale,
anbulla pi)" du kebain irukkum
men mere*

You become distressed and
angry because of your
woman's mind; when

*Rātin ramayanam kēṭṭum appale,
ramarukkuc eitai murai enna
enbadu pale*

someone loves you, it's also natural that he will sometimes get angry. After listening the whole night to the Ramayan a, you still ask, "What relation is Sita to Rama?" (i.e., you could listen to the Ramayana all night and still not know how the hero and heroine are related to each other!) (No matter what I tell you . . .)

*Carawa^y (begins at 1:49)
Kondavar nayattilum mayattilum
colluvar*

Your husband (Murugan) subtly weaves a web of illusion, saying to you, "Oh girl, why do you feel so upset?" (What is the big deal? Why is this a surprise to you?)

*Kadaiye pottukkondur panadu
ennadi*

Quarreling and fighting are just like milk and fruit to you, girl; you'll ruin our family!

*Candai unakku palum palamadi
kudi kedi*

You'll take your mother's name just perfectly; you'll torture my name very well (the mother realizes that her daughter is hot-tempered and impetuous just like her)

*Tay per eduppay vehu nerttiyahave
tan*

Oh beautiful fish-eyed girl, why this insolence? You're no bigger than a tiny little finger! Why this persistence?

*unakka inda tudukku,
viralattanai undu en inda
mudukku*

*Nan orutti idarkku ella m pada
vittal tadukku, nanum oru
enru ?IT kulukku vay adakku*

If a woman like me doesn't put a stop to all your foolishness (if I don't cover up your defects), you'll say "I'm also a lady!" strutting around and putting on airs. Shut your mouth! (No matter what I tell you . . .)

[Free translation from the Tamil by T. Viswanathan and Matthew Allen]

A HEREDITARY MUSIC FAMILY

This final section examines the environment in which sisters T. Brinda and T. Muktha (Figure 4.2) grew up and learned music and their pivotal role in developing a new performance persona for women. They were born into a large and distinguished hereditary lineage of musicians and dancers tracing their ancestry to the city and court of Tanjavur, leading many in the family to prefix the initial T. to their given name (Figure 4.8).

When Brinda and Muktha were girls, the human focal point of the extended family was their grandmother, the unquestioned family matriarch Vina Dhanammal. A vocalist and performer on the stringed instrument *vino*, Dhanammal achieved a level of respect from male musicians unparalleled by any other woman musician of her day, and her first recordings in 1932 (at age sixty-five) were heavily promoted (Figure 4.9). Dhanammal was renowned for her unmatched repertoire of *kritis* (especially those of Muttusvami Dikshitar), *padams*, and *javalis* and for her masterful, slow-speed style of rendering ragas. Most major musicians and dedicated connoisseurs in South India made the pilgrimage more than once to the Friday evening music sessions at her house in Ramakrishnan Street in the Georgetown section of Chennai, where "pin-drop silence" ruled as she would play for friends and acquaintances who would gather.



FIGURE 4.8 Photograph of Vina Dhanammal and family, 1936. Bottom row, left to right: T. Viswanathan, S. Bhagyalakshmi, T. Ranganathan, S. Kalpakambal, S. Vasudevan. Second row: T. Brinda, T. Kamakshi, T. Lakshmiratnam, Vina Dhanammal, T. Rajalakshmi, T. Jayammal, T. Muktha. Third row: T. Kothandaraman, Srinivasan, T. Soundararajan, S. Minakshi, T. Balasarasvati, T. Abhiramasundari, T. Sankaran, T. Vijayakrishnan. Fourth row: T. Govardhanan, S. Sivaraman, T. Varadan. (Photograph by G. K. Vale. Courtesy of Jody Comack Viswanathan)

A Dual Musical Enculturation and Education. The young women seated at opposite ends of the second row in Figure 4.8 were pioneers. Together with a handful of other women including M. S. Subbulakshmi (b. 1916), D. K. Pattammal (b. 1919), and M. L. Vasanthakumari (1928-1990), T. Brinda and T. Muktha would lead the way for women to begin performing in the new concert format (Figure 4.6), which combined compositions with a variety of improvisational genres previously only performed by men. Their education involved both the absorption of their own family tradition—from their mother Kamakshi, aunts, and grandmother Dhanammal—and a period of rigorous training with a male *guru* from outside the family. As young girls Brinda and Muktha were sent to study with and live in the family of the master musician Kancipuram Nayana Pillai (1889-1934), renowned for his huge repertoire of

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(Extract from the "Ellada" dated the 6th December. 1992

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FIGURE 4.9 Newspaper advertisement for Vina Dhanammal's first recordings. The Hindu, Chennai, December 16, 1932. (Courtesy of Matthew Allen)

Tyagaraja's *kritis*, his skills at singing *ragam-tanam-pallavi*, and his arrangements of the fifteenth-century composer Arunagirinadar's *tiruppugal* hymns, a genre of compositions set to long and complex talc cycles.

Like Ariyakkudi, Nayana Pillai was one of the early male musicians to add more *kritis* into his concerts. He attached extensive improvisation, especially *svara kalpana*, to his performance of *kritis*, and was renowned for his mastery of the rhythmic aspects of music. For rhythmic accompaniment he typically had seven percussionists, a phenomenon unique in South India and known as the "full bench." Nayana Pillai regularly stumped this august assembly by playing *svara kalpana* improvisations that they were incapable of following and by springing on them his settings of *tiruppugal* hymns in complex rhythmic cycles (for example, the hymn *kadi mach* is set to twenty-one beats, divided 3 + 3 + 5 + 2 + 4 + 4). The criticism his concerts received for being too rhythmically oriented was felt in his family to be motivated by jealousy (and fear!) because few musicians—drummers or otherwise—could challenge his rhythmic expertise.

It was therefore not just to any teacher that their mother Kamakshi sent Brinda and Muktha for training. She chose for them a *guru* legendary for what was at the time a quintessentially *male* form of music making—about as different from their family style as could be. Nayana Pillai was extremely proud of his young students and decided, flying in the face of prejudices and stereotypes of the day, that they were capable of doing anything a male musician was. He found in the elder sister Brinda in particular the perfect vehicle to combat what he saw as many of his colleagues' pervasive *an garvam*, "male arrogance."

"I Am Going to Snub These Male Chauvinists." The following passages are taken from interviews conducted by co-author Allen with Dhanammal's grandson T. Sankaran (Figure 4.10). A capable singer who never trained formally with a teacher, Sankaran eschewed music performance as a profession, but his two primary careers, as director of All India Radio stations throughout India (1938-61) and director of the *Tamil Isai Sangam* Music School in Chennai (1961-85), involved extensive daily contact with musicians. He was a deep repository of Karnatak music history, with a generous spirit, sharp wit, and acute powers of observation. He knew all the major musicians of South India and counted among his friends many Hindustani musicians as well. He published dozens of articles and a book of Tamil biographies of South Indian musicians and served as a consultant for many South Indian and foreign scholars during his "long innings," as he would put it. Sankaran passed away in January 2001 at the age of ninety-five.



FIGURE 4.10 T. Sankaran. (Courtesy of Jody Cormack Visvanathan)

His concert was called the full bench. There'll be nine people on stage. And to manage this many people, his sense of rhythm must be . . . he must be very clear-headed. [M. A.—And all these percussionists, they must have rehearsed together a lot?] No no no: no rehearsal! It's a competition—how could it be rehearsed? This is not a situation for rehearsal. Because, otherwise, how can he shine in a competitive setup? Nine people. It was called the full bench. It was called the *nava grahas* [nine planets].

He saw in Brinda and Muktha a chance to snub the male chauvinism. See, in those days only the men sang *svara kalpana* and *ragam-tanam-pallavi*, never females. Girls were never *taught* those things, in the first place. But this Brinda's sense of rhythm and receptivity was something remarkable. And then, it was difficult to approach our grandmother Dhanammal for lessons. She'll just snub you. So my aunt took these girls to Nayana Pillai. When he heard about it, Bhairavam Pillai the *mridangam* player headed a delegation to Nayana Pillai's home to urge him to give up teaching the girls. "They are *already* Dhanammal's granddaughters. It's . . . fire! You want to add a storm into that? This is like fanning the fire with a hurricane! *Please* don't teach them." He and other like-minded gentlemen were afraid of fostering competition between the sexes. But Nayana Pillai turned a deaf

ear to his pleas. He said, "No no no, we are one family. They have come. They are certainly not starving for music, but they have come to me. I must teach them." And he said, "I am going to snub these male chauvinists. I'll get these girls to sing everything."

And at another time, Abdul Karim Khan was here in the South; he was a great Hindustani musician. He had *absolute* contempt for Karnatak musicians. He will say, "You don't have any sense of *ṣruti* [pitch, intonation]." When Nayana Pillai and Govindaswami Pillai [violinist and close friend of Nayana Pillai] and all these people went to listen to him, he unleashed a *tirade* about these Karnatak musicians. "You fellows have no *ṣruti*, you cannot. . . ." Govindaswami Pillai couldn't speak—his eyes got bloodshot. Nayana Pillai had taken Brinda with him; she was just a teenager. He whispered to Govindaswami Pillai, "He is challenging us. Let him face this girl, who will just take up the challenge." He said to Abdul Karim Khan, "Alright. You sing whatever you want." And Brinda sang *svaram* for everything Abdul Karim Khan initiated. Whatever he did, she transcribed in *svaram* [i.e., she imitated his *alapana* perfectly, voicing the correct solfege names of the *svaras* as she sang]. That put the lid on that fellow. He got snubbed.

That's how Brinda loved to sing *svaram*, which was never allowed by my grandmother. She would never encourage ladies to sing like that. She thought it was unwomanly, to just beat your thigh like that [slaps his thigh] and sing. She always insisted on women strumming the *tambura* and singing. Nayana Pillai taught Brinda to sing everything, but before he could complete it he died. (T. Sankaran, personal communication, December 31, 1987, and January 5 and 13, 1988; text in brackets added)

Music and Gender Today. Brinda and Muktha, together with a handful of other women, began performing full concerts including every kind of improvisation and received many awards during their career as a duo and subsequently as solo artists, Brinda eventually receiving the Music Academy's highest honor, *Sarigra Kalanidhi*. Today it is no longer a shock or even a novelty to see a woman leading a group on stage, although attitudes expressed by some male musicians and critics are still sometimes ambivalent towards women's capabilities.

On the one hand, concerts by women artists are at least as numerous as those by male artists today, women students far outnumber men in the numerous music colleges, and there seems to be continuing consensus that women have more attractive voices than do men. The story of one early twentieth-century private *sabha* run by Tirumalayya Naidu, who spent the then-princely sum of twenty-five *rupees* every month for

concerts by "ladies only" at his house, was recounted by T. Sankaran: "I have attended one or two when I was about ten or twelve years of age. His dictum was: 'Even if it is for braying, it should be by a she ass, never a jack ass'" (personal communication, December 10, 1991).

On the other hand, some male accompanists still avoid playing for women, even the top female artists. There is a lingering perception in some circles that women are not as well equipped to handle the intellectual or mathematical aspects of music as are men. T. Sankaran characterized the following attitude as "tardily dying" as of 1988: "The males used to say, 'Who is this woman? She simply sings . . . she has got a beautiful voice; she is trying to boss over us. She is just a parrot, learning a few songs and repeating them'" (personal communication, January 5, 1988).

SUMMARY: AN ANCIENT AND MODERN TRADITION OF MUSICAL-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

This chapter has presented a social and historical context for the understanding of contemporary Karnatak performance, in the process implicitly developing two notions that may now be stated explicitly: "Tradition" can be simultaneously ancient and thoroughly modern, and music is constantly in interaction with the society in which it lives.

Chapter 2 illustrated, among other things, the antiquity of the discourse on Karnatak music—the fact, for example, that *raga* has been discussed, debated, and treasured in India since at least the ninth century A.D. The discussion of *KaligiyurN* in Chapter 3 demonstrated how in South India today, composed music can be quite flexible and improvised music quite structured. This chapter has shown how the balance between these elements has changed in the last century. Karnatak music, far from being a "timeless" static unchanging system, has developed through specific social and historical circumstances, shaking off old attributes and taking on new ones at every stage of its growth. No matter how fixed it may seem at first glance, like so many other traditions, Karnatak music is always evolving in response to musicians' creativity and to changes in society.

Karnatak music today is perceived as an elite art music tradition, both by the relatively small portion of the population that is its core audience and the much larger public whose preferred listening music is that of the cinema and "Bollywood" (see Chapter 5). How did this come to be? To arrive at an understanding of contemporary Karnatak music,

the histories and perspectives of a group of musicians and social commentators, diverse in terms of gender and social class, were profiled in this chapter. The lives of these individuals illustrate how developments in musical repertoire, style, and thinking are nested within social and historical forces and processes. Musical developments reflect, but also affect, these forces. South Indian music and dance performers played important roles in both local and national cultural politics in the twentieth century, together with the scholars and critics who developed and disseminated a discourse that sees Karnatak music and *bharata natyam* dance as South India's great "classical" arts (Allen 1998:22-52). As these forms left the courts and temples to become concert arts comparable in their presentation to European classical music or ballet, they came to play a role on the national *stage*—*bharata natyam* in particular, seen by many Indians as the country's "national" dance—in the Indian independence movement, and then in the nation-building project of "integration" that followed.