

The Social Organization of Music and Musicians: Southern Area

T. Sankaran

Matthew Allen

The Tyagaraja Festival

Gender and Invisibility

Caste and Music

Gender, Caste, and Musical Performance

A History of Social Organization in the Tyagaraja Festival

South India has many kinds of music, each socially organized in a different manner. A comprehensive study of this topic would have to consider a myriad of people and situations: Anglo-Indian musicians in the recording studios of the Madras film industry, tribal communities in the Nilgiri Hills, an urban Muslim neighborhood in Coimbatore, a fishing village where the vast Godavari River delta in Andhra Pradesh meets the sea, one of the many Christian churches in the west coast state of Kerala, Kuruvar gypsy musicians who migrate throughout the region, or a folk-dance group sponsored by scholars from a university in Madurai—to mention a few.

This article examines the social organization of musicians in South India as reflected in one event, the Tyagaraja *ārādhana*, the annual death-anniversary celebration in honor of the revered composer Tyagaraja (1767–1847). Thousands of musicians appear at this huge annual celebration, men and women from different social communities and performance traditions. They include performers in the Karnatak art-music tradition—ubiquitous in the concert halls of South India today—as well as two closely related performance traditions sharing the Karnatak musical language of raga and tala: the *periya mēlam* instrumental tradition of Hindu temple ritual music, and the music ensemble (formerly known as *cinna mēlam*) that accompanies the South Indian classical dance form *bharata nāṭyam*.

The dynamic nature of the Tyagaraja *ārādhana*, which takes place over three days each January, in the town of Tiruvaiyaru, Tanjavur District, in Tamil Nadu, facilitates the study of two parameters at the heart of India's changing social organization: gender and caste. Attention to these two central parameters illuminates other aspects of social organization such as the patronage, presentation, and transmission of music, and people's attitudes about music, musicians, and music making. In locating caste and gender relations within the history of the Tyagaraja celebration, this article provides an account of the roles played by two important transitional figures: Sri Malaikottai Govindasvami Pillai (1879–1931) and Srimati (Smt.) Bangalore Nagaratnammal (1878–1952). Their lives and work clearly illustrate changes in the gender and caste organization of South Indian musicians in the twentieth century.

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THE TYAGARAJA FESTIVAL

Madras to Tiruvaiyaru

Departing from Madras's Central Station, the Cōlan Express bound for Tanjavur passes slowly (despite its name) through the hot arid countryside toward the seacoast and the temple town of Cidambaram, the South Indian center of the Shiva Nataraja (king of dance) cult. Passing Cidambaram, the train enters the lush, rice-growing Kaveri River delta, the heartland of South Indian kings from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries.

Once in Tanjavur, a visitor traveling from Madras can see the magnificent Cōla-era Brihadisvara Shiva temple and the Sarasvati Mahal, former palace of the Telugu and Maratha rajas who ruled from 1532 to 1855. A bus then leaves for the brief ride to the town of Tiruvaiyaru, site of the well-known Pancanadisvara Shiva temple. During the festival, thousands of musicians as well as Karnatak music connoisseurs and aficionados (*rasika*) arrive from all over India and abroad, swelling the town's population. The crowds snake down the narrow streets toward the area where the afternoon music performances are about to begin. Sitting on a straw mat, the first-time observer can note similarities and differences between musical performances here and Karnatak concerts (*kaccēri*, from the Urdu 'court of law') such as those of the late-December "music season" in Madras.

The Karnatak concert today

In a typical Karnatak concert, the main artist sits in the middle of a stage, with a melodic accompanist, usually a violinist, to his or her left, and a rhythmic accompanist playing the double-headed *mridangam* 'barrel drum', to the right. A person seated behind the main artist, often a senior student (*śiṣya*), provides the melodic drone (*śruti*) by playing the *tambūrā* 'long-necked lute'; if the main performer is a vocalist, the drone player also often sings in a supporting capacity. The relationship between the performers appears to be quite collegial, but the main artist seated in the middle has the status of first among equals. This person engages the accompanists beforehand, and then onstage manifests a variety of leadership roles, such as determining the compositions to be performed, initiating and concluding the various genres of improvisation, and indicating to the other musicians when their solo turn has come. Concert etiquette requires the violinist and drummer to remain mindful of supporting the soloist, but these musicians take their turns showing virtuosity in raga *ālāpana* 'unmetered exposition of the raga' and *tani āvartanam* 'drum solo', respectively. They also respond to the improvisatory initiatives of the main artist during genres like *svara kalpana*, melodic and rhythmic improvisation using Karnatak sol-fa syllables. The eminent violinist Lalgudi Jayaraman, who has served in both roles during his long career, has published a list of desiderata for soloists and accompanists that is instructive (figure 1).

FIGURE 1 Desirable attributes for soloists and accompanists (Jayaraman 1986:31).

Soloist	Accompanist
1. Mastery over the instrument	1. Pleasant temperament
2. Musical ability	2. Cooperative teamwork
3. Original approach and style	3. Supportive role
4. Creativity	4. Self-control
5. Effortless-seeming presentation	5. Alertness
6. Concert management	6. Adaptability to different styles
7. Leadership quality	7. Restraint
8. Rich repertoire	8. Time consciousness
9. Understanding of the lyric and its mood	9. Interaction

The typical Karnatak concert can give the impression of a wonderful if occasionally strained marriage of devotion and virtuosity. The major genre of Karnatak music, the *kṛiti*, invariably has a devotional text (*sābhitya*), but many connoisseurs feel that the audience should perceive the words and their meaning as subsidiary to the musical virtuosity of the accomplished professional performers.

Performance at the Tyagaraja festival

The festival ensembles in Tiruvaiyaru are identical to those of the typical Karnatak concert in comprising one main artist (occasionally two) flanked by accompanists. Similarly, in both contexts many women vocalists participate, although far fewer women instrumentalists than men. But significant differences are evident as well—in the broader, inclusive nature of the Tiruvaiyaru ensembles, and in the festival's focus not on virtuosity but on devotion. Performers of all ages and skill levels participate, from the greatest concert artists (*vidvān*) to young beginners. Each group of musicians plays only one or two songs (nowadays invariably Tyagaraja compositions) in a brief and straightforward manner, with little of the expansive improvisation or competitive playing in a standard Karnatak concert. Some musicians who have accompanied a solo artist in one performance appear soon after as soloists in their own right.

One of the authors (M. Allen), a young first-time observer of the festival, views the event as a primarily devotional experience and an inclusive, participatory celebration of a great composer. The senior author (T. Sankaran) has attended the Tyagaraja *ārādhana* for over half a century; attending the event still reminds him of the long struggle of women like his own grandmother, Vīna Dhanammal (1867–1938), to achieve full participation in the festival. Festival organizers excluded her on the basis of gender, despite the fact that virtually the entire male musical establishment held her in high regard as evidenced by her inclusion in a 1911 photograph alongside prominent male artists (at that time an extremely rare phenomenon). As an older, native South Indian watching the crowd, T. Sankaran can readily ascertain the social background and religious affiliation of most people at the festival. He recalls relationships between Brahmin and non-Brahmin musicians he has known, and thinks of his wife's grand-uncle, the violinist Malaikottai Govindasvami Pillai, who had to make excruciatingly difficult choices in his desire to honor Tyagaraja. To this veteran observer, musical performance has largely come uncoupled from gender and caste considerations during his lifetime, but strong resonances remain of conflict and cooperation, hierarchy and intimacy, between humans of different genders and social classes.

GENDER AND INVISIBILITY

Women and men from different geographic regions and social communities have contributed to the history of South Indian music, yet Indian women's role both in

music and other expressive traditions remains largely unrecorded (see, however, Post 1989). Fleeting anecdotal references to women affirm not only their participation in music but the strong influence of their artistic excellence and character on their contemporary communities, including their male colleagues. In the sixteenth century, for example, Purandara Dasa desired to see and hear the dance and music of a renowned unnamed *dēvadāsi* 'female servant of god' at Pandarpur, and in appreciation of her talents presented her with a bracelet of rare beauty. In the nineteenth century, the *dēvadāsi* Tiruvarur Kamalam was a renowned dancer, musician, and student of the composer Muttusvami Diksitar (1776–1835), to whom, according to some accounts, she in turn taught dance music.

What little is known about such women usually comes from biographical accounts of the men whose lives they influenced. In some cases scholarship by and about women performers and composers has been published but later deliberately altered, in effect erased. In 1887, Orientalist scholars printed a new edition of a mid-eighteenth-century work by a *dēvadāsi* composer of the Tanjavur court, Muddupalani, entitled *Radhika Santwanam* 'Appeasing Radha'. The publishers, however, omitted the prologue, in which the author introduced herself and discussed her matrilineal descent and her life at the court of Raja Pratap Singh (1739–1763), thus concealing the author's gender. Bangalore Nagaratnammal, a musician of the *dēvadāsi* community, located the manuscript and reprinted it in 1910 in its complete form. Government authorities immediately seized and banned her edition. Clandestine copies circulated until the ban was lifted in 1947. An accurate (and legal) reprint of the 1910 edition appeared in 1952, and yet a team of feminist literary scholars report that they had difficulty locating a copy when preparing an anthology of Indian women writers in the 1980s (Tharu and Lalitha 1991:1–12).

The lack or suppression of documentation on women's participation in music results partly from the particular caste (social class) of virtually all female dancers and musicians in temples and courts from possibly as early as the Cōla period (c. ninth to eleventh centuries) to the 1930s. Young girls who were born or adopted into this caste received training in music, dance, and ritual activities in order to become *dēvadāsi*; they were married to a Hindu temple deity and dedicated to a life of service (Kersenboom 1987; Marglin 1985; Srinivasan 1984). There were two important consequences: first, due to her divine marriage, a *dēvadāsi* could not marry a human husband—though she might have children either with her patron or through adoption; second, because her husband was divine, she could not become a widow—and therefore avoided the profound inauspiciousness of that state in the Hindu world [see WOMEN AND MUSIC].

CASTE AND MUSIC

The state of intercaste relations in South Indian music around 1900 might be characterized as intimacy within hierarchy. This subject is perhaps the most contentious a student will encounter in the study of South Indian music. In the history of caste relations, many individuals have certainly reached across sometimes formidable caste boundaries to form deep and lasting friendships.

In discussing musician castes in South India, a dual scheme of Brahmin and non-Brahmin is a more accurate framework than the overarching four classes (*varṇa*) of Hindu society (Brahmin 'priest', Kshatriya 'warrior', Vaishya 'merchant', and Shudra 'menial'). The primary South Indian musician communities reflect this basic duality of social background, which is in some respects analogous to the dynamic between Hindu and Muslim communities in the social organization of North Indian music (Qureshi 1991).

The non-Brahmin musician community

There are many non-Brahmin social communities in South India; the particular community to which the *dēvadāsi* belonged, comprising two hereditarily linked subgroups, produced the great majority of non-Brahmin musicians and dancers in South India for the last several hundred years. Eminent composers from this community have included Muttuttandavar (seventeenth century), one of the first composers of the *kṛitī* genre, and the four brothers known as the Tanjavur Quartette, a great nineteenth-century family of composers and dance masters (Sankaran 1982).

Up to the mid-twentieth century, people referred to musicians of this community as *mēlakkāran*, a generally derogatory term meaning doer or maker of the musical ensemble (*mēlam*). In 1948, the year after *dēvadāsi* dedication was legally outlawed in Tamil Nadu, the non-Brahmin musician community adopted the new caste name of *Īsai Vēlḷāḷar* 'Music Cultivators'. *Vēlḷāḷar* is the name of a large and well-respected non-Brahmin South Indian caste group that includes many occupational specialties. Many male musicians of the community also appended the *Vēlḷāḷar* caste suffix *Piḷḷai* to their given names.

The performance ensembles of the community's two branches were traditionally known as the *cinna mēlam* 'small ensemble' of temple and court dance, comprising the female dancer, her male dance master, and accompanying musicians; and the *periyā mēlam* 'large ensemble' for temple ritual music, centered around the *nāgasvaram* 'large double-reed instrument' and the *tavil* 'double-headed drum'. According to some scholars, the dance ensemble was named *cinna mēlam* because of the small double-reed *mukhavīṇā* that used to be part of the ensemble, and the *periyā mēlam* took its name from the larger double-reed *nāgasvaram*. Others believe *periyā* connoted a higher, and *cinna* a lower, status (Srinivasan 1984).

In the late twentieth century, both *cinna mēlam* and *periyā mēlam* ensembles perform on the public stage. The *periyā mēlam* has also retained its original temple ritual context, but a social reform movement culminating in the 1930s severed the *cinna mēlam* dance from its temple roots. In a profound social transformation, *dēvadāsi* dancers were replaced by upper-caste women—notably, of the Brahmin community—who had hitherto completely shunned the professional performance of either music or dance. Many eminent male dance masters of the *cinna mēlam* community continued as teachers to these new Brahmin women students (Srinivasan 1984; Arudra 1986–1987; Alien 1997).

The Brahmin musician community

Men from many different Brahmin subcommunities—Ayyars (Smarta Brahmins) and Ayyangars (Vaishnavite Brahmins) are today especially prominent (Jackson 1991:30)—have played a central role in Karnatak music throughout its history, whereas Brahmin women entered the professional practice of music and dance in numbers beginning only in the 1930s. Purandara Dasa and the three men canonized as the "Trinity" of Karnatak composers—Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri (1762–1827), and Muttusvami Diksitar—were all Brahmins. Furthermore countless outstanding composers and vocalists (and some accompanists), have come from Brahmin backgrounds. Young men of this community are traditionally highly educated and enter many professions, outside as well as in the arts.

During the Tanjavur court period, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Telugu-, Kannada-, and Maratha-speaking Brahmin families were prominent immigrants to the Tanjavur region, joining the indigenous Tamil-speaking Brahmins. The Tanjavur rulers, who depended on and valued the priestly, artistic, and administrative expertise of this community, often gave them lands and houses. In addition to providing musical performers and composers, Brahmin scholars developed the theo-

The Brahmin community considered animal skin and saliva polluting substances, and accordingly did not train their children to play drums or aerophones.

retical discussion of Karnatak music in published treatises. This occupational activity continues in modified form today, as most contemporary scholars and critics—as well as patrons—of Karnatak music come from various branches of the Brahmin community (Singer 1972; Jackson 1991, 1994).

GENDER, CASTE, AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, profound changes have taken place in the gender and caste organization of music and musicians. The structure of musical performance in South India is quite different today than it was a century ago, whether a Karnatak concert, the Tyagaraja festival, a *bharata nāṭyam* dance performance, or a *periyā melam* temple ensemble performance.

Women's and men's music

In significant respects, women's and men's musical performance practices in the 1990s are similar: male and female main artists present both vocal and instrumental concerts, and melodic accompanists are of both genders, though now as always women percussionists are few in number. The Karnatak concert repertoire, genres of improvisation, and the on-stage relationship between soloist and accompanists are virtually identical whether the performers are male or female. In the early twentieth century, however, performances by men and women were quite distinct. Male artists engaged in intellectual acrobatics in the *rāgam-tānam-pallavi* genre (extensive melodic and rhythmic improvisations on a brief composed musical phrase) that occupied the major portion of a concert. In the previous century male performances were inevitably competitive; the main artist and his sidemen hurled challenges back and forth, aiming to show up the adversary's weak points.

In the early twentieth century, Brahmin and non-Brahmin male performers in fact measured their musical competence largely by their expertise in the *rāgam-tānam-pallavi* genre. Legendary encounters between an expert court musician (*āsthāna vidvān*) and a visiting challenger made and broke careers. Men sang with different accompanists on different occasions, and group rehearsals prior to a concert were virtually unknown. Available biographical accounts of eminent nineteenth-century musicians testify that although men honed their skills on *rāgam-tānam-pallavi*, they had relatively small repertoires of *kṛiti* compositions compared to their female counterparts.

Around 1900, professional women musicians came only from the *mēḷakkāran* community referred to above, and almost no Brahmin women musicians performed in public before the 1930s. At the beginning of the century, women musicians were mostly singers, with a few instrumental performers, mainly on the vina. They often performed with the same accompanists (frequently their male relatives) throughout their careers (Sankaran 1986). Sisters led many of the famous female groups, mixing unison and octave singing; in the early decades of this century "Dhanam's Daughters"

(Smt. Lakshmiratnammal and Smt. Rajalakshmiammal, the elder two of Smt. Vina Dhanammal's four daughters) and the Enadi Sisters were prominent, and in the next generation, the sisters Smt. T. Brinda and Smt. T. Muktha, granddaughters of Dhanammal, who performed with their violinist sister Smt. T. Abhiramisundari from the 1930s to the 1960s. Such women's performances exhibited cooperation rather than competition. Programs were well rehearsed, and comprised many items including *kṛiti* compositions and song genres from the *cinna mēḷam* repertoire (*padam* and *jāvālī*). Before 1930 few women performed the rhythmically based improvisatory forms in *rāgam-tānam-pallavi*; women musicians did however excel in raga *ālāpana*, a melodic improvisation that introduces and develops raga outside the confines of tala, leading to a composition in that raga.

Caste relations in music

As noted above, members of the two major South Indian sociomusical communities, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, have had long and intimate histories of interaction and have developed profound respect for each other. The composer Muttusvami Diksitar, for example, one of the Brahmin "Trinity," had a long-lasting relationship with the Tanjavur Quartette, the four non-Brahmin brothers to whom he gave musical instruction, and from whom many believe he learned a great deal about dance music. His succession of students (*śiṣya paramparā*), all of whom learned his compositions and passed them down to the next generation, includes both Brahmin and non-Brahmin pupils. A more recent example is the relationship between the non-Brahmin violinist Malaikottai Govindasvami Pillai (1879–1931) and his beloved Brahmin student "Papa" K. S. Venkatarama Ayyar (1901–1972) (see below).

Caste and instrumental specialization

The materials used to make musical instruments were important considerations socially as well as musically in the early 1900s. The Brahmin community considered animal skin and saliva polluting substances, and accordingly did not train their children to play drums or aerophones such as the *kulal* 'bamboo flute' or *nāgasvaram*. Almost all percussion accompanists c. 1900 were thus non-Brahmins. The earliest reference to a Brahmin *mridangam* player known to the authors is a 1915 photograph of the *cinna kaṭci* 'small faction' of Tyagaraja festival organizers, at Tiruvaiyaru (see figure 2). The first great Brahmin *mridangam* player was Palghat Mani Ayyar, born in 1912. The first great Brahmin flutist, Sarabha Sastri (1872–1904), was the disciple of a non-Brahmin flute player, Natesa Pillai, also a renowned *nāgasvaram* temple performer. Such prohibitions did not affect other instruments. Both sociomusical communities have played the vina since the Nāyaka period (1500s) and the European violin since its introduction to South India by the British in the late eighteenth century; gradually the violin became the primary melodic accompanying instrument for Karnatak music. The first two great South Indian violinists were Balusvami Diksitar (1785–1858), brother of Muttusvami Diksitar, and Vadivelu Pillai (1810–1847), the youngest brother in the Tanjavur Quartette.

At the turn of the twentieth century, *periya mēḷam* and *cinna mēḷam* (the *nāgasvaram* and dance ensembles, respectively) were exclusively spheres of non-Brahmin performance, although Brahmins composed much dance music from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and a few Brahmin dance teachers in the nineteenth century have been documented. Brahmins and non-Brahmins did, however, wholeheartedly participate together in the Karnatak court (and later concert-hall) tradition. Performances by mixed-caste ensembles were common, though markers of caste status such as first garlanding Brahmin musicians (even a Brahmin accompanist before a non-Brahmin soloist) were observed. During the twentieth century, the former *cinna*

mēlam dance-music tradition has become *bharata nāṭyam*, a largely Brahmin dance practice, but the *periyā mēlam* has substantially retained its non-Brahmin sociomusical makeup. Saliva and animal skin are no longer barriers to the performance of aerophones or membranophones by any community; however, very few Brahmins have as yet taken up the study of *nāgasvaram* or *tavil*, the instruments of the *periyā mēlam*.

A HISTORY OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN THE TYAGARAJA FESTIVAL

Music in Tanjavur

Tanjavur District, the home of the Tyagaraja *ārādhana*, earned its reputation as the seat of the emergent Karnatak music culture due to the patronage of successive kings from the sixteenth century on (Seetha 1981). Beginning with Sevappa Nayak in 1532, Telugu-speaking governors or viceroys (*nāyaka*) from the embattled Vijayanagar empire in the Deccan (to the north) moved south and assumed the rule of Tanjavur. Many Telugu- and Kannada-speaking musicians followed, their descendants becoming central to the development of Karnatak composition and practice. The Telugu rulers patronized both Sanskrit and Telugu at court, as did the succeeding Marāṭhā rulers from the 1670s to 1855. Marāṭhā musicians who immigrated to Tanjavur at that time also made strong contributions to South Indian music, notably in *bhājana sampradāya* 'group devotional singing', and the immensely popular late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century genre of musical-religious discourse, *harikathā*, performed by Brahmin singers called *bhāgavatar*.

The musical practices that evolved in the Tanjavur district incorporated profound influences from other parts of South India alongside ancient Tamil indigenous musical traditions. The Tamil language received on balance relatively little patronage from Tanjavur's Telugu and Marāṭhā rulers, a situation not addressed directly until the 1940s by the Tamil Isai 'Tamil Music' movement (Nambi Arooran 1980) and the concurrent recognition of such Tamil composers as Gopalakrishna Bharati and Papanasam Sivan. Of the "Trinity" of Karnatak composers, Tyagaraja and Syama Sastri came from immigrant Telugu-speaking families. All three composers were born in the Tanjavur district town of Tiruvarur, yet all three—including Muttusvami Dikshitar, born into a Tamil-speaking family—wrote almost all their musical compositions in Telugu or Sanskrit.

Early years of the Tyagaraja festival

After Tyagaraja's passing in 1847, some of his disciples (*śiṣya*) would come to his gravesite at Tiruvaiyaru on the anniversary of his death each January. The commemorations were at first extremely simple; the disciples would pray, sing some songs, and return home. As Tyagaraja's lineage of students and students' students multiplied, more musicians came to the site to offer their worship. About sixty years after Tyagaraja's death, the commemoration became institutionalized, due to the efforts of two Brahmin brothers from the village of Tillaisthanam, adjacent to Tiruvaiyaru. These brothers, Narasimha Bhagavatar and Panju Ayyar, collected sufficient money and food to feed the Brahmins who would assemble for the rites. Narasimha Bhagavatar, a disciple's disciple of Tyagaraja, also published a major edition of Tyagaraja's *kṛtī* compositions and a biographical account of the composer, in 1908 (Jackson 1991:7–8).

This early commemoration focused on two major activities. The first was *santarpāna* 'feeding Brahmins on a large scale', in which the Tillaisthanam brothers imitated a traditional practice of kings and other patrons who wished to accumulate spiritual merit by acts of charity toward Brahmins. Historically, large gifts such as lands and houses were also common; the well-known Patinaintu Maṅṭapam, a set of

fifteen solidly built houses on the outskirts of Tiruvaivaru, are testimony to this practice, given by a Tanjavur raja to a group of Brahmins that included Tyagaraja's forebears.

The second essential activity in commemoration of Tyagaraja's death was and is the *uñcavritti bhajana*. Since about 1910, male musicians and devotees (women musicians did not participate until the mid-1960s) have met at "Tyagaraja's house" at dawn on the anniversary, and carried a framed portrait of the composer as they walk in procession through the town streets. They go from house to house singing group bhajans and gleaning handfuls of rice as alms, a process called *uñcavritti*. This constitutes homage by imitation, as Tyagaraja is well known for having refused royal patronage, preferring instead to beg for food to support his family and his large number of disciples. After an hour or so the gleaners arrive at the shrine (*samādhi*) where Tyagaraja is believed to have died, and priests perform a series of religious rituals (*pūjā*). In the early years, the assembled Brahmins were then given lunch.

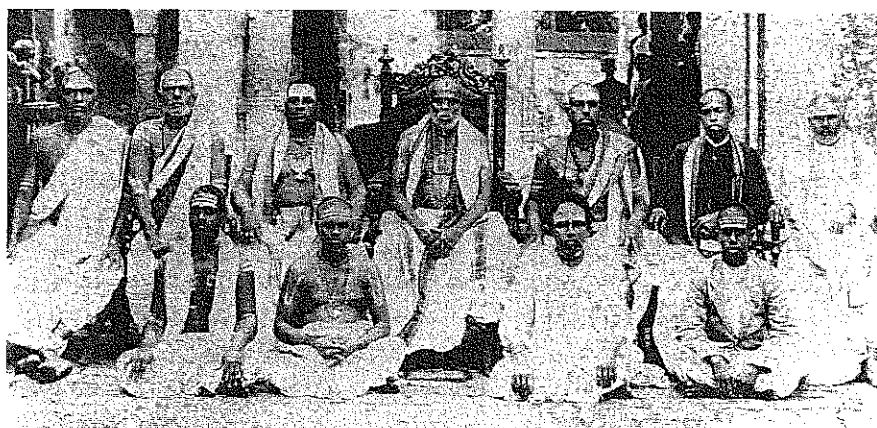
The Tillaisthanam brothers disagreed over financial accounts after the first year's celebration, and split into separate factions (*kaṭci*). The group led by the elder brother, Narasimha Bhagavatar, became known as the *periya kaṭci* 'large faction', while the younger Panju Ayyar formed the *cinna kaṭci* 'small faction' (figure 2). Not until 1939 were the two factions reunited. The *cinna kaṭci* remained throughout its history the exclusive preserve of Brahmin males, but the *periya kaṭci* soon embraced many non-Brahmin musicians, prominent among them the violinist Malaikottai Govindasvami Pillai.

Malaikottai Govindasvami Pillai

Govindasvami Pillai (1879–1931) was born into a family of hereditary non-Brahmin musicians in a small village near the city of Tiruccirappalli (Trichy). His primary guru was Lalgudi Kodandapani Pillai, a musician about whom little is known. By the age of twenty Govindasvami was receiving accolades for his violin technique and musicianship from his fellow violinists. By 1910 he had become a celebrity, the most popular and highest-paid Karnatak violinist of his day, proficient as both soloist and accompanist.

Around 1910 Govindasvami Pillai took over the responsibility of organizing the *periya kaṭci* activities (see above), after its founder Narasimha Bhagavatar passed away. Not only did Govindasvami immediately assume financial responsibility for feeding the Brahmins—which he regarded as the crucial element of the festival—he also changed the dates of the *periya kaṭci*'s five-day celebration so that it would overlap only one day with that of the *cinna kaṭci* (the two had formerly been celebrated over

FIGURE 2 The *cinna kaṭci* (small faction), 1915. President Lakshmanachariar sits in an ornate wooden chair, center back. The faction's founder, Tillaisthanam Panju Ayyar (wearing a diagonal upper cloth), sits second from left, back row. Mylattu Krishna Ayyar, a Brahmin *mridangam* player, sits on the floor, second from right. Photo courtesy T. Sankaran.



The 1930s were a time of both nationalist agitation and fierce, caste-based political debate in Tamil Nadu, a debate that had profound repercussions on the performing arts and on the artists themselves.

the same five days). Thus the assembled Brahmins were now fed for nine consecutive days, instead of five.

Govindasvami Pillai earned great respect in the Brahmin community for his strict observation of the rules of caste decorum, as for example his feeding of the Brahmins and his relationship with his Brahmin student, "Papa" K. S. Venkatarama Ayyar, whom he always fed in orthodox style, unseen and untouched by polluting eyes or hands. He observed the caste rules even though this at times demeaned his own kin, and also meant receiving respect often tinged with condescension.

In his stewardship of the *periya kaṭci*, Govindasvami Pillai consistently acted in defense of prevailing social orthodoxies, which sometimes dismayed and humiliated musicians from his own community. *Nāgasvaram* artists were at that time low on the social scale, and were allowed to perform at the festival standing only. Even a bosom friend of Govindasvami, the eminent *nāgasvaram* player Madurai Ponnusvami Pillai, was refused a seat and left in a huff, feeling insulted. Govindasvami Pillai supported the prohibition on women musicians' participation with equal conviction. How he felt about the tightrope he walked between social communities in his attempts to facilitate the yearly homage to a composer he revered is simply not known.

Govindasvami Pillai handed over responsibility for the *periya kaṭci* to the Tiruvilimilalai brothers (Subramania Pillai and Natarajasundaram Pillai), eminent *nāgasvaram* musicians, in 1930, the year before he died. He had distinguished himself through his music, and his selfless and wholehearted service to the memory of Tyagaraja. In the years after his death, the major outdoor Brahmin feeding became a cosmopolitan feeding for all social communities; *nāgasvaram* artists challenged and struck down the custom requiring them to stand while performing; and women moved by stages into the center of the commemoration activities (see "Developments in the 1960s").

Bangalore Nagaratnammal

Into the history of the exclusively male commemoration of Tyagaraja stepped, in 1921, a woman musician of *dēvadāsī* background, Bangalore Nagaratnammal (1878–1952). Like her contemporary Govindasvami Pillai, Nagaratnammal was a tremendously successful performer who had dedicated her heart and her considerable resources to the Tyagaraja festival. Nagaratnammal was born in Mysore and studied as a child with the violinist Bangalore Munusvami Appa of the Tyagaraja discipular lineage. Her vocal debut (*arangēram*) took place in Mysore in 1892. A catalogue of her performances between 1905 and 1934 lists 1,235 concerts in 116 different cities. Thanks to her spartan discipline, she was able to surmount many hurdles; for example, she designed a portable *tambūrā* for herself and carried it during her many journeys throughout India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

Nagaratnammal built a comfortable house in the Georgetown section of Madras, a neighborhood where many musicians lived in the early twentieth century.

In October 1921 she received a letter from her guru, Bidaram Krishnappa, who had just been on a pilgrimage to Tiruvaiyaru. His heart was torn in two by the ecstasy of *darśan* 'vision' of Tyagaraja's shrine and the agony of seeing the sepulcher's dilapidated condition and unsanitary surroundings. Krishnappa ordained Nagaratnammal to dedicate herself to its renovation. She immediately took the train to Tiruvaiyaru to see for herself the unsanitary ruins maintained by Tyagaraja's worshippers.

Nagaratnammal focused all her energies on the speedy renovation and consecration of a shrine to the composer. At Trichy she met Govindasvami Pillai, who found her a sculptor to make stone images of the composer and of the deity Hanuman for the shrine. Descendants of the last Maratha raja of Tanjavur exchanged their lands at the site with those already purchased by Nagaratnammal, which helped her shape an auditorium with a large seating capacity. Consecration of the newly renovated shrine took place in 1925 (Sankaran 1984:16), and as owner of the land Bangalore Nagaratnammal was in a position to deliver her coup de grace to male chauvinists: "Now we women have a platform to commence singing." The *periya* and *cinna* factions still forbade women's participation at that time, but Nagaratnammal organized and conducted her own "women's faction" until 1939, when the various groups were reunited. Women then began to sing in the music performances during the *ārādhana*, but it was still over twenty more years before women began participating in the *uñcavritti bhajana* and the Tyagaraja *pañcaratna* 'five gems' *kṛiti* group singing as well.

Bangalore Nagaratnammal continued her intimate involvement with the Tyagaraja *ārādhana* until her death in 1952. She established the Bangalore Nagaratnammal Trust to ensure that after her death the property would be maintained properly and cleanly and that observances would be appropriately conducted and open to people of all communities. In her will, written in 1949, she insisted that her mausoleum be positioned close to Tyagaraja's shrine, to enable her always to have *darśan* 'sight' of the composer. The carpenters who build the temporary performance platform for the festival every year obey this injunction by placing it so that Tyagaraja and his great female devotee can have direct visual contact in perpetuity.

Developments in the 1930s and 1940s

The seating of nāgasvaram 'oboe' and tavil 'drum' performers

The 1930s and early 1940s saw several momentous developments in the festival's organization. Non-Brahmin and Brahmin musicians together celebrated Tyagaraja's memory, but markers of caste status remained in place through the 1930s and became increasingly galling to the non-Brahmin participants. This decade was a time of both nationalist agitation and fierce, caste-based political debate in Tamil Nadu, a debate that had profound repercussions on the performing arts and on the artists themselves. In Tanjavur district, the Tamil non-Brahmin politician E. V. Ramasvami Naicker (1879–1973), nicknamed by his supporters Periyar 'The Great One', criticized Brahmin musicians for "monopolizing the field of music" and deplored the "lack of self-respect among non-Brahmin musicians" (Nambi Arooran 1980:255).

A crucial moment for the Tyagaraja *ārādhana* came in 1939, when *nāgasvaram* performers and their *tavil* accompanists won the right to sit during their performances. These musicians had moved beyond the temple ritual context in the early twentieth century and had begun playing concerts, but upper-caste patrons did not allow them to perform seated, sometimes—as in the southern Tirunelveli district—insisting that *nāgasvaram* players perform naked from the waist up as in *periya mēlam* temple ritual performance. T. N. Rajaratnam Pillai (1898–1956), the most famous *nāgasvaram vidvān* of this century, achieved a great breakthrough with his personal

crusade to cross hitherto forbidden social boundaries, when he obtained permission in 1939 to perform on the stage at Tiruvaiyaru in sitting position, after intense negotiations with festival organizers (Terada 1992:260).

The Indian government broadcasting service, founded in 1932 and given its present name, All India Radio, in 1936, began relaying musical programs from the Tyagaraja *ārādhana* in 1939, providing exposure throughout India and eventually abroad. In the same year, the *periya* and *cinna* factions rejoined ranks, agreeing that the newly christened Tyāgabrahma Mahōtsava Sabhā 'Tyagaraja Great Festival Society' would have two secretaries, one Brahmin and one non-Brahmin. After this time, the festival changed from a five-day to a three-day celebration.

Evolution of the anniversary to its current form

In the early 1940s, organizers added a new musical component to the celebrations that quickly became an institution and is now an essential part of all Tyagaraja festivals around the world: the *pañcaratna* 'five gems' *kṛiti* compositions of Tyagaraja. During the 1940 Tyagaraja festival in Tiruvaiyaru, "Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavata [a highly respected singer and religious speaker] told his colleagues that he considered five of the *kṛitis* of Tyagaraja to be *pañca ratna* [five gems] and suggested that steps be taken to present them at the *ārādhana*" (Krishnamurti 1995:4–5). At the time, not all five compositions were well known, and the two secretaries of the united organization, Musiri Subramania Ayyar and Tiruvilimilalai Subramania Pillai, carried out research over the next year to assemble complete texts and skeletal melodic arrangements (*pāṭhāntara*) for the newly constituted set of "gems." At the 1941 festival different groups of musicians sang each of the five compositions; within a few years it became customary for one large group of musicians—until 1964, all male—to sing all five *kṛiti* compositions, in a set sequence.

Once the five "gems" became a staple of the celebrations, the sequence of events on Tyagaraja's death anniversary morning had substantially reached the form in which it endures today. Early in the morning, the *uñcavṛitti bhajana* takes place as discussed earlier, the devotees arriving at the shrine with Tyagaraja's portrait at 8:00 A.M. after walking from the composer's house. Following the decoration of a stone image of the composer and a series of rituals accompanied by *nāgasvaram*, a group of singers and instrumental accompanists perform the five Tyagaraja compositions from 9:00 to 10:30 A.M., seated facing each other in two rows perpendicular to the shrine. *Nāgasvaram* and *tavil* players seated on the dais then perform sacred, auspicious music (*mangala isai*) from 10:30 to noon, at which time all adjourn for the public mass feeding. Around 2:00 P.M. musical performances resume, and continue through the afternoon into the night. The day ends with a final ritual at the shrine and a procession, at about 10:00 P.M., taking the portrait back through the streets of Tiruvaiyaru to Tyagaraja's house. During this procession, which sometimes lasts until the early morning, the group sings Tyagaraja's songs in praise of divine names (*divyanāma kīrtana*), and the *periya mēḷam* musicians provide further sacred music.

Developments in the 1960s

An important encounter took place in January 1961 or 1962 that led to a more equitable relationship between Brahmin and non-Brahmin musicians at Tiruvaiyaru. In previous years, in the morning on the anniversary day, a mostly Brahmin group of vocalists would sing the five *kṛiti* compositions with the *nāgasvaram* performers sitting and listening to them. Immediately following, the *nāgasvaram* musicians would begin playing for the pre-lunch forenoon session, and the Brahmins would get up and leave. Finally, in 1961 or 1962, some of the *nāgasvaram* and *tavil* performers stopped playing and asked the Brahmins to pay them the courtesy of listening to their perfor-

mance. The Brahmins would not stay and listen, so in response the *nāgasvaram* players refused to accompany the evening procession back to Tyagaraja's house, during which *nāgasvaram* music is considered absolutely essential. With no *nāgasvaram* musicians willing to play, the evening procession was canceled that year. However, at the next year's festival—and thereafter—the singers remained seated and listened to the *nāgasvaram* performance after finishing their five Tyagaraja compositions.

In January 1964, a group of eminent women vocalists—Smt. M. S. Subbulakshmi, Smt. T. Brinda, and Smt. T. Muktha—boldly “gate-crashed” the *uñcavritti* and *pañca ratna* groups, in which women had not previously been permitted to perform, opening the floodgates for women's full participation in the future. The Madras newspaper *Hindu*, in its coverage of that year's Tyagaraja festival, printed a large photo showing the women participating in the *uñcavritti* procession with a caption saying simply, “Prominent musicians, including . . . M. S. Subbulakshmi, taking part in the *Uñcavritti Bhajan* procession . . .” In an accompanying article, the *Hindu's* (male) correspondent wrote matter-of-factly that women musicians had joined the *uñcavritti bhajana* and had taken part in the singing of the *pañcaratna kriti* compositions, without commenting on the fact that this was the first time in history they had done so.

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