CASTE, CLASS AND THE CLASSICAL: THE MACHINERIES OF SYMBOLIC POWER IN CARNATIC MUSIC AND ITS FESTIVALS

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Submitted to Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2017

ABSTRACT The tradition of Carnatic classical music has long been imbued with the politics of power, caste and class. Thought of as the preserve of the upper caste Brahmins, Carnatic music is often criticized as exclusive and exclusionary, with no lower caste presence in the production or consumption of music in its signature 100-year-old *Margazhi* festival conducted annually in the South-Indian city of Chennai. In today's age, in which ideologies of meritocracy and egalitarianism are becoming widespread among the rising middle classes, the Carnatic field provides an ideal site to study the conflict between the aspirations to modernity and equality and the structural, restrictive forces of caste. Using Bourdieu's concepts of taste, distinction, cultural capital and symbolic power, this thesis aims to study the symbolic creation of power in the realm of the arts, the institutionalized exclusion it fosters and its use by the Brahmins as a cultural tool of distinction. To do so, the thesis does the following: first, it provides a historicized understanding of the invention of the tradition – and its appropriation by upper caste elites – in a freshly post-colonial climate in which a uniquely Indian identity had to be forged. Second, it employs the case of the three-year-young, still uninvestigated "alternative" Urur Olcott festival, which seeks to democratize the arts by showcasing the classical and the folk, the 'highbrow' and the art forms of marginalized communities on the same platform – in a fishing village in the city of Chennai, far from the hallowed urban concert stages. Drawing from extensive press reportage and social media responses, and using interviews with the organizers, participants and audience members of both festivals, the thesis, in its analysis of the successes and failures of the alternative festival juxtaposed against the exclusive mainstream festival, demonstrates the increasing interest in the diversity of indigenous art forms among citizens of Chennai and reveals a growing dialogue on the subliminal workings of caste, class and gender barriers in what has so far been a static, immutable art form now in the throes of change.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Alexandra Kowalski, for her guidance, detailed feedback and enthusiastic participation. I am also grateful to Prof. Daniel Monterescu, who agreed readily to be my second reader at the very last possible minute. I thank my many informants, who shared my interest in the subject, directed me to available material, spoke to me whenever I needed their input, and with many of whom new, exciting friendships were forged. To all my professors at CEU, whose classes prompted me to read and learn more, I am profoundly grateful, and I am thankful everyday for the constant solidarity, companionship and intellectual stimulation I enjoyed in my incredibly kind-hearted and talented cohort. I owe much to my brother Aparajith, who has more faith in my ability than I ever will. And finally, to my parents, who instilled in me the passion to write, introduced me to the music I love and write of in this thesis, taught me to think critically, and with whom I have shared long, thought-provoking discussions on many a subject – at the dining table, over countless cups of tea, and from thousands of miles away over the telephone – thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

Caste – ascribed and unchanging – and class – acquired and thus allowing for transformation and movement – inform each other in myriad ways in contemporary India, reinforcing ideas of exclusivity and differentiation. The conflict between the aspirations to modernity and equality and the structural, restrictive forces of caste and class is particularly evident in the study of South Indian classical Carnatic music, and the manner in which upper castes employ it as a tool to maintain the status quo. In the past year, the Indian media has been agog with news of a performing arts festival in the southern Indian city of Chennai, which seeks consciously to address and subsequently dismantle the machineries of caste and class hierarchies in the production and consumption of Carnatic music. The three-year-old Urur Olcott Festival may only be in its infancy, but it has been wildly successful in creating impassioned dialogues about discourses of classicism, inclusiveness, tradition and modernity. Here, the classical and the folk, the "highbrow" and the indigenous are showcased on the same platform, in a fishing village on the beaches of Chennai, far from the hallowed urban concert stage. This coexists with – and, indeed, seeks to protest against – a larger annual festival of the classical arts colloquially dubbed the *Margazhi* festival, a month-long, world-renowned series of performances across the city, in which the upper caste Brahmins occupy pre-eminent status (Krishna, 2012). This has led to one of the major current debates surrounding power relations and status in India: the working of caste's subliminal barriers in the realm of Carnatic music. A source of domination and the arena for the exercise of power, culture, it would seem, is far from apolitical, but an expression of politics and power structures.

In this thesis, I study how Carnatic music wittingly and unwittingly fosters the exclusion of certain groups of people through the upper caste Brahmin hegemony that operates in the field. Any

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reflection on the deeply intrinsic symbolic violence and hierarchies in our societal structure requires recourse to history; the study of the trajectory of Carnatic music's rather recent, 100-year old claim to classicism by a nation seeking to establish a sovereign, modern identity in opposition to colonialism and the western classical tradition (Menon, 2011) is integral to analyzing the functioning of caste and class. It becomes imperative to study the annual *Margazhi* festival, which, in its elitism and perpetuation of caste and class boundaries, provides the researcher a microcosmic mirroring of the larger classical arts world. Further, juxtaposing the traditional festival against the *avant garde* Urur Olcott festival brings into stark relief the exclusionary and exclusive character of the classical arts in its present form. Finally, it is evident that the 100-year-old *Margazhi* festival, with its emphasis on convention and classicism, has helped brand the city as the domain of the upper caste hegemon and the seat of the Carnatic tradition, while the new unorthodox festival attempts quite the contrary – it contributes towards a peculiar type of "place-unmaking," hoping to erase the predominance of the upper caste and upper class elite from the image of Chennai. The festival works at using public spaces to make the arts more democratized and accessible, at providing space for diverse artistic traditions, and at chipping away at the otherwise justified image of Chennai's performing arts scene as being controlled by upper caste ideas and interests.

Carnatic Music, Modernity and Tradition – A Review of Existing Literature

Academics have long studied the emergence of classical music as a result of India's colonial encounter. Anthropologist Amanda Weidman posits that the construction of the classical was a "project of modernity" in colonial and post-colonial India by upper caste nationalists, and was, paradoxically, premised on the desire to preserve an "authentic" Indian tradition (Weidman 2006). Carnatic classical music as it is known and performed today was socially and politically constructed, and hardly the timeless, ancient institution thought of as predating colonialism. Sociologist Lakshmi

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Subramanian, one of the most cited authors on the topic of the classical tradition, describes in detail the the trajectory of Carnatic music's deliberately manufactured emergence from its original seat, the provincial courts of Tanjore, to Chennai's concert halls, where it enjoys pre-eminence today. Subramaniam's work, which argues that the tradition was constructed as the bastion of the upper caste Hindus, remains seminal in its argument relating to the Brahminization of music, a phenomenon crucial to the subject of this thesis: there would exist little need to democratize and make more inclusive the classical art today if it did not, in so obvious a manner, continue to remain the stronghold of the upper castes.

Historian Janaki Bakhle, writing about the classical tradition, argues that its construction, which involved "retrieving a dispersed and complex musical tradition and singularizing it in the service of the notional modern nation" (Bakhle, 2005) had significant consequences on the patronage, practice and dissemination of the art form. Of significance is the relocation of the consumption of the practice from various indigenous communities to the middle class Brahmins, in an attempt to construct a cultural history that could be traced to ancient origins. Anthropologists Haripriya Narasimhan and CJ Fuller's work on the Tamil Brahmins and the manner in which they emerged as a middle-class caste in fact devotes an entire chapter to their being custodians of the classical arts – not just as performers but as consumers as well.

The Brahminization of classical music led to the concomitant marginalization of communities previously involved in the production of the now-classical music. Krishna Menon argues that women who were part of the *devadasi* community and men of the Icai Vellalar caste were edged out of the classical project. There was, he argues, a "reinvention of new hegemonic tradition of classical music" (2011) in southern India. In this regard, an institution set up by the elite, upper caste intelligentsia of the city of Madras, the Madras Music Academy, became the rule-making body regarding the restructuring of the classical tradition, and an annual concert and conference series began in 1928

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(Subramanian, 2006). It continues on today as the *Margazhi* festival. It follows naturally, then, considering its provenance located in a self conscious cultural engineering project, that the festival is problematic by virtue of its exclusion of communities and its perpetuation of upper caste hegemony, a detailed study of which this thesis attempts to provide.

The modern, supposedly universal "Indian" classical paradoxically disempowered many, and made the art form exclusive and discriminatory. It is precisely this paradox, which my thesis too will aim to address and reconcile, that the organizer of the Urur Olcott Festival, musician and author TM Krishna attempts to tackle when he criticizes the Carnatic world as a minority space, in which almost all the performers and organizers of events belong to the upper castes. My thesis is based on the analysis of the classical arts through this lens of inclusivity and caste inequality, while also attempting to examine if the new festival is truly successful in dismantling the elitist character of Carnatic music.

Where the literature is wanting in its analysis of Carnatic music is in the study of contemporary performance and the manner in which the classical continues to remain an exclusive domain. While considerable work on the social history of the art form can be found, upon which my argument is based and develops, this is inadequate to understand the manner in which the festivals operate. The festivalization of culture, defined by Négrier as "the process by which cultural activity, previously presented in a regular, on-going pattern, is reconfigured to form a 'new' event" (2015, p. 18) provides the background to the two events I study. Jonathan Wynn's recent work, among other studies on festivalization, sheds light on the ways in which festivals contribute to urban branding, place making, resource mobilization and revenue generation (2015). Festivals are vital not only to the showcasing of art, but to the creation of networks; Comunian (2015) describes how they act as communities of practice, and link artists with cultural managers and organizers (Moeran & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2011). The annual *Margazhi* festival, however, so intrinsically linked to the city of Chennai, is woefully neglected in academic study, receiving not more than a passing mention in most works, particularly

puzzling considering its scale and the international fame it enjoys. The festival mirrors, in a convenient, capsuled manner that enables easy analysis, the larger classical arts domain in the elitism it fosters. This requires deeper study, especially at this time, when a new festival has been born to protest the existing inequalities.

Where I believe my thesis is particularly contributive to the study of the classical is in its analysis of the Urur Olcott Festival, not merely in its entirety, but in juxtaposition with the *Margazhi* festival. The Urur Festival has remained entirely unexplored by sociologists, perhaps by virtue of its very recent origin. It has, however, created a stir in the media – a festival of music, dance and drama in a fisherman's village in Chennai, home to lower castes, is bound to create discussion. The thesis attempts to explore the success of the democratizing aim of a festival that aims to transcend caste and class divides by showcasing all forms of the arts – classical, folk and all others – in an accessible, public space restricted to no group or community. The new festival has spurred huge debate, causing commentators from various realms of life to offer both support as well as criticism. This renewed interest in the exclusionary nature of Carnatic music cannot, I believe, be studied at a more appropriate time or through a more suitable framework than through the combination of the mainstream and parallel festivals it has given birth to.

Research Questions

This thesis aims to engage with two pertinent questions:

(1) How exclusive, discriminatory and Brahmin-focused does the *Margazhi* festival *continue to be* today, in an age of meritocracy and egalitarianism, in which people are more aware and defensive of equal rights? The Carnatic scene is riddled with complexities and inherent contradictions: despite greater awareness of the futility of caste hierarchies and differentiation, concerts today remain dominated by performers belonging to the Brahmin caste. It is necessary, I believe, to study the power

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and control of an apparently retrograde classification system of people – caste – over a population and its artistic endeavours in a society now characterized by modernity, liberal education and progress.

(2) How successful is TM Krishna's Urur Olcott festival, as a counter to the traditional festival, in its goals to ensure inclusivity, openness, better use of public space and the democratization of the arts? To answer this question, many sub-questions may have to be tackled with: one, can an endeavour of this nature be at all useful in altering mindsets pertaining to "highbrow" arts? Two, does the organization of the festival by a particular class of art producers, themselves privileged, lead to a reproduction of inequalities within the new festival??

Research Methods

For this study, apart from referring to literature about Carnatic music's social history, memoirs of musicians, academic articles, media reports and opinion pieces on the *Margazhi* and Urur Olcott festivals, several methods were deployed in primary data collection for the purpose of this thesis. Participant observation was one of the several: in Chennai, I attended the concerts and dance recitals *Margazhi* festival of the performing arts between December 15 and January 2, 2017 everyday. I also conducted several informal but extensive interviews with fellow attendees, seasoned connoisseurs of the arts whom I have known from attending the December season annually since 2005, musicians and a few journalists, all of whom would usually convene in the concert hall's canteen after performances. Using semi-structured interviews with the organizers of and volunteers in the Urur festival in April 2017, I sought to study the perceived implications of the initiative. I also followed the trajectory of the festival on various social media used heavily by the festival organizers to promote its activities, messages and documentation. Here it is important that I make mention of my positionality: a student of music, I have been a regular visitor of *Margazhi* since 2002. In addition, as a performer of a genre

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of devotional music that has its roots in classical music, I base much of my work in this thesis on my knowledge of the networks of individuals involved in the organization, teaching and performance of music, the manner in which *Margazhi* operates, and my association with music aficionados and regular visitors of the festival.

Theoretical Frameworks Deployed and Outline

"The upgrading of culture as a central feature of sociological investigation is a rather recent phenomenon" due in no small part to the growth of cultural industries and the changes in the ways in which symbolic commodities are consumed (Riley, Miller & Pickering 2013, p. 59). It follows, then, that the study of Carnatic culture and its festivals could not be conducted at a more suitable time. In its first section, the thesis explores the trajectory of the South Indian Carnatic music tradition from the late colonial period (late 18th and 19th centuries) to post-colonial times. In the process, I demonstrate how Carnatic music as we know it today is not an age-old tradition that precedes colonialism, but the result of a conscious effort by upper caste and class elites to fashion a tradition that India could imagine itself by, and something using which the cultural superiority of the colonizers could be challenged. Using anthropological and sociological analyses of India's musical system, and drawing on theories of post-colonial studies in India by theorists like Partha Chatterjee and U. Kalpagam, this chapter deals with a new nation's attempt to forge its own unique identity through music. The second chapter offers a historicized understanding of the upper caste nature of the Carnatic music tradition by delving into the manner in which this tradition was "invented," communities marginalized and how the upper and middle classes appropriated the tradition.

Among the Brahmins of south India, Carnatic music is a part of the socialization process. It becomes a set of internalized habits among the upper castes, a naturalized way of life; indeed, it is part

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of their habitus. Consequently, performers come from this caste, automatically making it an elite, minority space (Krishna 2012). Moreover, since, as Bourdieu has said, "nothing more clearly affirms one's class… than tastes in music" (1984, p. 18), spectatorship at the festival becomes a status symbol, one flaunted by the classes possessing this dominant cultural and social artistic preference and aspired to by the "outsiders". The Brahmins, then, use Carnatic music as a mark of distinction, establishing that taste in the classical is a mark of cultural superiority. Using the Bourdieusian framework of cultural capital and taste, in the first part of the next section, i.e. 2.1, I present my ethnographic analysis: I enumerate the many ways in which the *Margazhi* festival is upper caste and Brahminical in character – from its organizers to its audience to the food it serves in its canteens. Chapter 2.2 analyzes the "alternative" to the *Margazhi* festival and provides an empirical understanding of the Urur Olcott Vizha's attempts at bringing the classical and marginalized arts together on one platform. For my analysis of a an art form at the cusp of great change, I believe there cannot be amore relevant area of study than the Urur festival, still dynamic, ever-transforming, eager to effect larger charges, and constantly responding to new criticism, new needs and new challenges. Finally, in Chapter 2.3, I attempt to shed some light on questions that arise about the efficacy, success and failures of the festival through the lens of the organisers, a particular class of middle-class art producers themselves.

PART 1: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1.1. Carnatic Music and the Post-Colonial Project of

Modernity

Study into the social history of Indian classical music demonstrates that the Carnatic "tradition" was a deliberate construction of modernity in post-colonial India, a counter to the apparent cultural supremacy of the British colonizers. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the nationalist elite work at forging a classical tradition that could parallel the European tradition; this the increasingly urban, emerging middle class upper caste Brahmin population did by notating and documenting an otherwise oral tradition and creating a canon of musical texts, modeling their endeavour on the "western classical music with its system of notation, composers, compositions, conservatories, and concerts" (Weidman, 2006). At the same time, the classical had to remain authentic and uniquely Indian. As political theorist Tom Nairn argued, nationalism looks two ways at once: "forwards to progressive modernity, backwards towards the legacy of tradition" (Wade, 1998, p. 3). The new "classical" music was modern in its new stage format and a written repertoire, and new sound technologies, instrumentation, techniques, performances and performers. A new aesthetic was constructed, rooted in a curious blend of modern sensibilities and high tradition (Menon, 2011).

Until the late 19ᵗʰ century, performances took place in royal courts and temples, patronage offered by kings of the princely states and the *zamindars* of various principalities of South India. In the absence of radio, television and other opportunities to consume the arts, music was thus confined to royalty and the most financially-endowed classes. In the early 1900s, however, as India inched towards becoming an independent sovereign nation, the upper castes took it upon themselves to modernize and resurrect Carnatic music, providing the new independent nation its own cultural markers of

identity. The elites were eager to challenge their colonizers' claims of cultural superiority (Subramanian, 2008) and their narrow conceptions of India as still occupying the "waiting room" of history, wherein it was seen as lacking cultural sophistication, and still in the early stages of its movement towards civilization, a civilization that Europe embodied and therefore provided the standard for (Chakraborty, 2008). The narrative of "lack" in the colonies (Chakraborty, 2008), reflecting how legitimacy was conferred upon the colonizers' missions to govern and civilize, was one that Indian nationalists sought desperately to shatter, and the arts provided one of the many vehicles for their purpose.

Carnatic music's modernization occurred in tandem with the emergence of the colonial city and the movement of population to urban centres. Musicians migrated from the homes and courts of their patrons to colonial centres like Madras city to seek networks of protection and support (Subramaniam, 2006) In the cities, the new elite – upper caste, mostly Brahmin, often English language-educated professionals like lawyers, bureaucrats and doctors – became the new patrons and consumers.[1] Thus in the colonial city, music and performance became emblematic of the new discourse on tradition and was "tied up directly with the formation of the colonized elite's selfhood and self representation" (Bakhle, 2005) in which the consumption of music became what symbolized a particular Indian identity.

Along with the rising popularity of a musical theatre form called *Harikatha*, which incorporated music into highly dramatic narration of stories from the Hindu scriptures and sacred texts, the new influx of musicians from older centres to the new city allowed for people to begin listening to and

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[1] Here it becomes vital to reinforce the intermingling of caste and class in the cultural realm. Belonging to an upper caste may not automatically imply membership of a higher class in terms of economic status. Brahmins, for instance, thought to be the gatekeepers, producers and imparters of knowledge, are not necessarily a wealthy class but enjoy high social status. In the case of Carnatic music's invention and propagation, the main actors belonged to an elite that was both Brahmin and enjoyed a good deal of socio-economic power through access to colonial jobs and English-language education. This thesis, when using the words upper caste and upper class interchangeably or together, refers to this stratum of people.

developing a taste for Carnatic music. Just as musicians migrated, many young Brahmin men had moved to the city to study or be employed in bureaucratic positions, and for them, these performances were an "important vehicle of accessing a past that had disappeared in the wake of an altered political and social reality" (Subramaniam, 2006, p.129). There was thus a relocation of patronage to the emerging middle class, important actors in the transformation of Carnatic music. The Brahmin middle class in the city were not only the consumers of the tradition, but also became a part of the modernizing project – they were instrumental in retrieving and printing manuscripts of song texts and biographies of musicians in an attempt to create a single standardized Carnatic tradition which involved a single way to read melodic form and textual content.

Thus what was once sung in temple premises or seen as a source of entertainment in the courts of royals and *zamindars* became now "an art form initially responding to the changing sociology of modern urban performance but eventually to the imperatives of functioning as one of the key emblems of the nation's cultural inheritance" (Subramaniam, 2006). Performances, deliberately formalized in structure and their length greatly shortened, shifted to concert halls in urban centres[2]. This resulted in the emergence of a musical culture in the colonial city of Madras and fostered the need to employ this "tradition" in the nationalists' cultural project to promote Carnatic music as an "authentic" art form that served as a signifier of Indian identity.

The imagining of the nation through music compels an invocation of Partha Chatterjee's proposition that by finding articulations of the nation that did not conform to the teleology of European history, the colonized in India did not subscribe to the European model of nationalism (1996). Chatterjee's division of social practices and institutions into the "material" or the outside and the "spiritual" or the inside is crucial here: the colonized accepted the outside, marked by economy,

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[2] Ariyakudi Ramanujan Iyengar, known as the architect of the modern concert format, in an epoch-making departure from the old concert in both form and content, reduced the length of concerts from five long hours to two and a half, and specified the nature and type of compositions to be performed, as well as the order (Sruti 2012)

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politics and science, as a domain in which western superiority was justified, while the inner domain –
of culture and cultural identity – was where they located their project of nation building. While
Carnatic music modernized itself in form and structure, its primary connection was to its "Indian"
roots; indeed "the greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain […] the
greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture" (Chatterjee 1996, p. 217), a
defining feature of anti-colonial nationalism in Asia. The "classicalness" of music had to be embedded
in ancient (Hindu) origins and yet, through all the reforms described above, denote a modern sense
of orderliness and refinement in opposition to the European notion of chaos and crudity in the East.
Indeed, as Chatterjee argues:

> The colonial state is kept out of the 'inner' domain of national culture, but it is not as
> though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launches its
> most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national
> culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is
> where it is brought into being. (1996, p.217)

Despite the modernization of the *form* of music, the country remained "stubbornly recalcitrant
to colonial forms of discipline" (Bakhle, 2008, p. 262) in the manner in which it organized the *content*
of its classical tradition:

> While modernizers rationalized music—in many instances as a response to colonial
> denigration—giving it a typology, a musicology, and a rational empirical history, Indian
> classical music retained its sub-continental character, never being taken over by Western
> classical chords, orchestration, or harmony. Music also retained its connection to its
> otherworldly roots. For instance, several compositional forms that are considered part of the

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larger repertoire of classical music have mystical, spiritual, and devotional content (Bakhle, 2008, p. 262).

However, it is crucial to point out that instead of engaging with the distinction between India's nationalism and the Western models of conceiving the nation, it is imperative that one engages with *how* a new post-colonial India's imagination of itself was produced and constructed. Carnatic music was central to anti-colonial nation-building, for music seemed to fit neatly into an agenda that stressed the spiritual as a protected confine of the nation's soul. Rather than reflecting a particular identity, it began to be used as something by which an identity could be *constituted* (Frith, 1996). India was thus slowly being imagined through its artistic traditions. Also fundamental to Chatterjee's analysis of the specificity of Indian nationalism is the maintenance and idealization or spiritualization of caste. Caste had to be preserved, reinvented and further entrenched as traditional in the nation-building project (Chatterjee, 1993). It becomes vital, therefore, to emphasize that the orchestrators of this nationalist project belonged to the upper caste elite. The existing realm of music and dance was chiseled and sculpted to give way to a new modern Carnatic form. This had one critical, decisive implication: the resulting form now drew clear boundaries of caste and gender, and became the site of cultural power. In the next section, I explore how the new elitist form systematically marginalized several communities.

CHAPTER 1.2. A Historicized Understanding of an

Exclusionary Upper Caste Tradition

To analyze why Carnatic music is thought of today as purely the preserve of the upper caste Hindu Brahmins, I delve, in this chapter, into the manner in which this tradition was "invented". In the process of retrieving various types of music, singularizing it under the name of Carnatic music, and relocating its performance from courts and temples to urban concert halls, the higher caste elite comprising the upper and now-emerging middle classes in the cities slowly created a musical tradition that excluded women, lower castes, and scores of other communities who earlier participated in the production and consumption of music. The exclusive nature of caste was thus exacerbated by an additional dimension: class. This chapter is crucial to the thesis for it provides the background to understanding why the Urur Olcott festival, described in a later chapter, seeks so vehemently to challenge the upper caste character and exclusionary nature of Carnatic music.

1.2.1. The Role of Caste in the New Anti-Colonial Project of Carnatic Music

Nicholas Dirks, in his 2001 work "Castes of Mind," famously argued that caste became a category for expressing, organizing and "systematizing" India's diverse forms of social identity, community and organizations, and that this was integral to colonial power and knowledge. Of course, caste had existed for centuries, a system of stratification based on the principles of hierarchy and status, wherein caste groups practiced specific occupations. Even if they did not "invent" caste, the British, through enumeration, reified and crystallized otherwise fuzzy communities with little self-awareness of identity, boundary or numbers into "distinct, discrete and mutually exclusive groups" (Dirks, 2001). Reducing groups to numbers made them more knowable, and simplified and contained

messy social realities. Assuming the primary mode of identification as caste, the colonial administrators of census operations cultivated an "oriental empiricism" that functioned as an arbiter between the colonizers and the country, which enabled them to name and organize complex histories under a particular identity (Appadurai, 1994).

Population thus "emerged as a datum or field of intervention and as an objective of governmental techniques" and the progressive introduction of bureaucratic methods of rule and administration allowed the creation of systematic and scientific knowledge of the country (Kalpagam, 2014, p. 9). The modern state's role in the production of knowledge through statistical enterprises, surveillance and census operations compels an invocation of Foucault's literature on governmentality. Foucault's power-knowledge neologism is particularly relevant here: power is premised on and makes use of knowledge, and at the same time, power reproduces knowledge. This is true of the British colony in India, in which control of and domination over the population was preceded by making the colony "knowable," i.e. by collection of information about the groups of people through mechanisms such as the census.

Biopower is marked by "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 1979, p. 140). In the case of many colonies, technologies of govermentality predated the nation state (Chatterjee, 2004). Anthropometry as a form of controlling the tribal populations in India is an example. The resulting categorization and classifications of groups of people continue to be utilized today in all forms of policy-making. Partha Chatterjee, drawing upon the Foucauldian tradition, writes of governance in India:

> postcolonial states deployed the latest […] technical strategies of modernization and
> development, [but] older ethnographic concepts often entered the field of knowledge about
> populations – as convenient descriptive categories for classifying groups of people into

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suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic, or electoral policy. Thus caste and religion in India […] remained the dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy. (2004, p. 37)

This background is critical to provide at this juncture, for the persistence of the system of caste allowed the Brahmins to enjoy power with respect to knowledge production, education and access to employment, and conferred upon them the status and ability, as nationalist sentiments were born, to decide the trajectory nation building would take. Class and bureaucratic order thus both reinforced and dramatized inequalities. As existing elites, Brahmins were the prime protagonists in the manufacturing of the classical tradition.

The construction of the classical involved "retrieving a dispersed and complex musical tradition and singularizing it in the service of the notional modern nation" (Bakhle, 2005). As Subramaniam explains, music prior to the nationalistic project was quite different in its multiplicity of content, musicians of various backgrounds and types of performance spaces.

The interweaving of ritual singing, dramatic practices and devotional music had produced a rich musical conception with myriad expressions and distinct communities of practitioners. A system of melodic entities and a repertoire of musical compositions in a number of languages that fitted the needs of temple ritual, court performance and devotional expression were in circulation. The multiple dimensions of the tradition found expression in its structural organization: ritual temple specialists (*devadasis*) who danced and sang as part of their ritual duties, and specialized in certain musical genres; professional singers attached to courts who had a grounding in musical grammar and belonged to the upper castes, mostly Brahmins, who combined knowledge of the scriptures, Sanskrit with a reading of conventional musical texts; and the peripatetic singer-composers all of whom were part of a

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shared musical culture that was inextricably linked to the social and moral landscape of the

region. (Subramaniam, 2006, p. 127)

The new Carnatic music, however, was quite different, and dismantled this diversity. The codifying of the musical canon was a highly selective process, picking from different existing folk and other artistic traditions, leaving out the traditions of several marginalized castes thought to be "crude" or "overly erotic", and creating a repertoire that would henceforth be referred to as the classical. This construction and codifying was carried out by the upper class elites – mainly the Brahmins – and it is therefore unsurprising that the resultant artistic system was a highly exclusionary and exclusive one, and continues to be thought of as the bastion of the Brahmins today. Classical music was also given a strong link to Hinduism, its repertoire consisting of compositions by Hindu saints and in Sanskrit and high flown Telugu, the language of the priests, the Brahmins. The existing musical canon was "cleansed" and "sanitized" of any compositions that were considered to possess overly "erotic" overtones, or which did not conform to the set standards of "godliness" and religiosity associated with reverence and worship. There was thus a reinvention of hegemonic tradition of classical music, and a relocation of this practice from a variety of communities to the new urban middle class consisting of the Brahmins and other dominant groups who enjoyed high social status.

Music and religion today are thought of as inextricably linked to each other. Subramaniam explains how the Madras elite slowly began partaking of a new tradition and a new "moral sensibility deemed properly Hindu and adequately spiritual" (2006, p. 129). Music, for the upper caste middle class population, was a pivotal tool to imagine their identity and the emerging Indian nation by, especially because "[a]s an integral part of religious experience and devotion, it was easy to identify with music as an essential component of their selfhood, which had to reconcile with the fact of colonial subjugation in the public domain" (2006, p. 130). The Brahmins attached great "symbolic significance" to listening to Carnatic music, which contributed to their building a sense of community "with

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exclusivist overtones" (Narasimhan and Fuller 2014, p. 201). Thus, there was a slow but sure Brahminization of classical music – in its codification, patronage, production and consumption.

1.2.2. The Marginalization of Communities

The simultaneous marginalization of communities previously involved in the production of the now-classical music is significant in the exploration of Carnatic music's increased and obvious Brahminization. For centuries, Carnatic music had two important communities as participants. The *devadasis*, women attached to temples, performed regularly, and non-Brahmins – the community of the Isai Vellalars – played the wind instrument *nadaswaram*. In the early 1900s, the royals lost their power, and the *devadasi* system was abolished. The *nadaswaram*, a loud instrument that did not lend itself to amplification or to the new concert format in which the vocalist was the central actor of the performance, could not be incorporated into the urban concert stage format. Women who played the *nadaswaram* were caught in a double bind: they were women and played an instrument that had no place in this new, rigid, increasingly standardized musical system (Weidman, 2006). The inherent paradox of this modernization of Carnatic music was the fact that in the "name of empowerment it actually disempowered a whole caste of people who were traditional performers (Menon, 2011). Lower caste women were thus doubly disadvantaged – their art labelled crass, unrefined and distasteful even – and upper caste men did not merely become prime performers, but the gatekeepers of the new music; they determined the boundaries and limitations of "classicism" and the new South Indian aesthetic. The eradication of compositions sung by and instruments performed subaltern communities was a clear move towards Hinduizing and Brahminizing the musical canon.

Menon summarizes the trajectory of the classical tradition's reinvention succinctly, highlighting the contradiction that emerged: the modernized classical in fact disempowered and disenfranchised women and lower castes, and made the art form far more exclusive, bounded and

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discriminatory than it was earlier. Carnatic music, it seemed, lay at the intersection of several modes of domination – of class, caste and patriarchy:

> The emerging discourse of the nation-state legitimized the construction of a new nationalist musical paradigm that could claim to be universal. The universal however was typically less than universal, hiding within its folds the agenda of the newly emergent middle class, English educated, upper caste men of Madras who sought to define the universal. (Menon, 2011)

Thus by "elevating" the existing indigenous and folk traditions through various routes of codification, cleansing and aestheticizing, the upper caste discourse began to allow for Carnatic music to be thought of as pure, unsullied by bodily connotations (especially those of women) and crudity of form and content (of art performed by non-Brahmin communities). The confiscation of a province of taste by this educated middle class group had a two-pronged impact: one, it meant a certain symbolic transformation that spiritualized and purified the musical tradition and two, it implied a structural process of reinforced and increased inequality.

1.2.3. New Nationalism's Ideal Femininity and the Carnatic Project's Exclusion of Women

No analysis of how the Carnatic tradition slowly edged out marginal communities would be complete without understanding how women, once important producers of the arts, were excluded from the new system. In this highly charged period of nationalism in the late colonial period, women's bodies became, unsurprisingly, the sites of great policing among the upper class elite, and they were edged out of the production of the classical arts of which they were an integral part. As Chandra Mohanty argues, a complex local history becomes important to understand why women were excluded (1984), and it is this history that I aim to provide before I delve into the elites' relationship with women and their anxiety about their moral and sexual conduct within the realm of the classical arts.

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The Carnatic project ensured that the contribution of the *Devadasi* community, referred to briefly earlier, to the classical arts was effectively erased from public consciousness. These women, often young, dedicated their lives to the worship of the gods and sang and danced in the temples. Also (often married to and) patronized by royalty, *devadasis* were said to be women of great erudition, knowledge and artistic prowess – they were, in many ways, the true custodians of many artistic traditions adopted by the classical system today. The *devadasi* women enjoyed many privileges that women in other communities did not – the tradition ensured a right to education, full inheritance, the right to perform funerals and to adopt children, most of which were otherwise rights accorded to men. However, it is also a fact that the *devadasis* were subject to a great deal of exploitation by priests and patrons, their bodies susceptible to violations and violence.

The fact that the repertoire of compositions that the *devadasi* women performed was high in erotic content[3] created a sense of anxiety among upper class elites who were looking to "modernize" India. The opposition between mind and body has long been equated with a dichotomy between male and female, with the man thought of as synonymous with the mind and spirit, rationality and reason, and the woman considered to be ensnared in associations with the body; women are "*more biological, more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men*"* (Grosz, 1994, p. 14), a division that feminist theorists challenge with vigour. Western philosophical thought has, historically, contained an inherent gender component regarding the dichotomy between the mind and the body, which has been validated by several world religions: the body of the woman is positioned as shameful and in need of concealment, and even blamed for the breakdown of any "relationship between humans and God" (Besley and Peters 2007, p.65). This association with corporeality is, in fact, also an important characteristic of colonized bodies, especially those of women, and of those belonging to lower classes (McClintock,

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[3] *Devadasis* performed *padams* and *javalis*, compositions in which the prevailing sentiment is eroticism and which describe acts of "divine love"

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1995 & Alcoff, 2006, 103), and was particularly noteworthy in the case of the *devadasis*. Victorian notions of morality did not permit an acceptance of the lives and practices of these women, who were stigmatized as promiscuous and immodest, and not conforming to the ideal of a woman's proper place in society – the home. The same anxiety, in fact, prompted many legislations in the guise of "saving" the *devadasis* from their morally corrupt lives once the kings, patrons of the arts, lost their power. Suddenly the *devadasis*, who so far had believed they were leading normal lives, "had to be rescued, rehabilitated and integrated into respectable middle-class lives" (Kannan, 2013, p.221). This lens of victimhood through which the *devadasis* were seen, a lens appropriated by the colonizers as well as Indian nationalists, homogenized them all into a common community with common experiences when they were, in fact, a group of communities under a common tradition. While it is true that these women had very restricted agency over their bodies and sexual lives, this lens of victimhood is reminiscent of Mohanty's critique of the third world woman being seen as universally oppressed, subjugated and robbed of agency (1984). For the new upper class elites, the abolition of the system was a part of the civilizing mission, in which backward customs had to be modernized.

Here, in the context of the prevailing sentiment of the colonizers about the *devadasi* system, I revisit Chatterjee's conception of the inner and outer domains of life that are utilized differently for the nationalistic project; in addition to the "outer" being economy and politics over which the colonizer had control and which therefore had to be subverted by the inner spiritual, there was a secondary division. The nation building project assigned the outer, material world to men and the inner, spiritual to women. The need to protect and strengthen the inner for the project of nationalism against the backdrop of deeply embedded patriarchal norms led to the idea of a new, Indian women – one who was modest, spiritually "pure" and was responsible for her family and therefore the cohesiveness of social life. This new "social responsibility" bestowed on women seemed temporarily to empower them, but it in fact "repressed women by binding them to a sphere out of which they

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were not allowed to emerge" (Kannan, 2013, p. 221) except in specific contexts, i.e. by confining women to the management of bodily functions and domestic spaces, all recast as "spiritual" or honorable, women were further subjugated. The common woman, then, was seen as "coarse, vulgar . . . sexually promiscuous . . . maidservants, washer women, barbers, peddlers . . . prostitutes" (Chatterjee 1993, p.86). The perception of *devadasis* was that of women whose bodies had to be controlled by the morally superior upper castes (Kannan, 2013).

The new classical music movement, by slowly excluding *devadasis*, appropriated colonial ideas of sexual propriety and an ideal femininity that commanded respect: this they began identifying with true "Indian" culture. By defining the boundaries of the common, undesirable woman, the nationalist movement, and in turn the Carnatic project, defined the feminine ideal. The middle class woman – so spiritual and modest that she was distanced from her body and removed of her sexuality – only helped further the colonial narrative of *devadasis* being sexually promiscuous and even "prostitutes" – a perception that soon spread among all Indians.

All of a sudden, the *devadasi* woman was stripped of her associations with divinity and her role as a custodian of music and dance; she was merely an embodiment of her sexual impropriety. By default, the Brahmin woman became the feminine ideal: she was pure, (ideally) married and religious. In this context, it becomes vital to visit the story of a musician who is considered Carnatic music's greatest: MS Subbulakshmi. The great reverence with which she is spoken of is not restricted only to her extraordinary singing ability, but the fact that she depicted an ideal. MS, as she was known, wore the Brahmin *madisaar* (the traditional nine-yard sari worn rarely today) and the customary diamond nose pin, wore with pride her obvious symbols of marriage, sang with piety and devotion believed to be unmatched by any singer after or before her, and has often been hailed the truest and purest symbol of religious devotion (Krishna, 2015). She bestowed upon Brahmin women performers (earlier confined to the private realm of the home) respectability and the license to perform in public. MS,

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however, married to a Brahmin man of great power and influence in Madras, orchestrated her meteoric rise to greatness with inordinate precision and some cleverness. Her sartorial and career choices were not as organic as one was wont to believe (Krishna, 2015). She was, in fact, a *devadasi*. Almost no connoisseur of Carnatic music remembers – or wants to dwell on – the fact. She remains the epitome of Brahmin womanhood.

1.2.4. *Madras as an Artistic Centre and the Professionalization of Carnatic Music*

Colonial centres bore a particular burden: they were products of imperialist governance and economic practices, but they were also responsible for reflecting and promoting the indigenous and national culture. Madras city, being a site of colonial administration, possessed the resources to support the arts, which it did through its educated and politically aware middle-class population and its *sabhas* (O'Shea 2007, p.147). Two institutions played a significant role in institutionalizing the newly re-crafted art form oriented towards serving as a marker of Indian identity and establishing Madras as the primary artistic centre for Carnatic music and dance: The Madras Music Academy and Kalakshetra.

The Madras Music Academy was founded in 1927, and conducted an annual conference of the arts, alongside which a series of concerts were performed, the genesis of the now-popular annual *Margazhi* festival of classical music and dance. The Academy had the final word on the list of performers, and its powerful verdicts on true classicism not only made or broke an artist, but specified which composers, what type of compositions, their treatment, idioms and schools of singing could truly be considered "Carnatic" by the artistic field. The Academy, according to Subramaniam,

> rapidly emerged as the principal association of music lovers and self-professed musicologists and reformers. It collaborated closely with practising musicians *with whom they shared common affinities of caste and ritual identity*. This close collaboration […] did not extend to other

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segments and communities in the tradition like devadasis and oduvars, whose repertoire was conveniently appropriated and suitably classicized for performance purposes. (Subramaniam, 2006, p. 134; emphasis mine)

How, however, was a distinct Carnatic identity ensured, and what was truly classical? The "interpretation of melodies had to conform to limits endorsed by the expert Committee of the Academy, the correct reproduction of compositions as transmitted by specific lineage of families, and the adoption of a concert format that reflected the performer's training and subscribed to the new aesthetic articulated by the Academy" (Subramaniam, 2006, p. 135). Establishing the "Tanjavur school,[4]" of music as the accepted style, the Academy began consolidating what it called the "pure" Carnatic style by standardizing the attributes of melodies permitted in a decided-upon concert format, choosing the repertoire's texts and weeding out content not adequately classical. This they did through their conferences and journals that engaged in debates about theory and practice. The ability of the Carnatic field to claim cultural legitimacy thus came with "the affirmation of the primacy of form over function, of the mode of representation over the object of representation" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 8). The Academy also ran, and continues to run, a college of music, which, with its graded system of instruction, in turn imparts its ideals of classicism.

The second important body that led to the institutionalization of the arts was Kalakshetra, the bastion of Carnatic music-related dance. Started by a Brahmin woman, Rukmini Devi Arundale, the school rapidly grew, defining through its instruction the boundaries of "classical" dance. Related closely to the "sanitizing" project of Carnatic music explained above, the school cleansed existing dance forms of eroticism and bodily connotations, purified and codified it to fit an upper caste idea

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[4] The Tanjavur school referred to the lineage of the composers from the region of Tanjavur and involved a particular interpretation of melody and particular assemblage of compositions that was passed on to students of the style/ *bani*

of religiosity and purity (Menon, 2011).

Both Kalakshetra and the Academy were instrumental in the professionalization of the Carnatic arts (O Shea, 2009). At this juncture, it is key to explore how professionalization allowed, in Bourdieusian terms, for the creation of an autonomous field of cultural production. The standardization of the arts by the two institutions, combined with the termination of the arts' dependence on patrons like the kings, led to the creation of an autonomous artistic field through the establishment of a "socially distinguishable category of professional artists less inclined to recognize rules other than the specifically intellectual or artistic traditions handed down by their predecessors, which serve as a point of departure or rupture" (Bourdieu 1984, p.2). This occurred alongside the expansion of a network of erudite, educated art critics and journalists who functioned as brokers between the arts and the consumers, who now included the increasing numbers of upper caste men and women that formed a new urban middle class (Subramaniam, 2008). The rules and criteria of evaluation of classicism set down by the two academies led to the autonomization of Carnatic music. According to Bourdieu,

> the autonomy of a field of restricted production can be measured by its power to define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products. Thus, the more cultural producers form a closed field of competition for cultural legitimacy, the more the internal demarcations appear irreducible to any external factors of economic, political or social differentiation. (1984, p. 5)

The two academies consecrated the field of Carnatic arts with cultural legitimacy in two significant ways. First, acting as museums of sorts, they preserved and conserved the symbolic value of the Carnatic tradition through their conferences and concerts through the years. Second, their educational wings "ensure[d] the reproduction of agents imbued with the categories of action,

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expression, conception, imagination, perception, specific to the 'cultivated disposition'" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.12). The instructive role of the music colleges in the two academies is of particular importance for, through their imparting of agreed-upon compositions and styles, they further legitimized the tradition's cultural importance by reproducing the distinction between the "purely classical" and not. Till today, performing at the two venues is an artist's greatest validation of his or her adherence to classicism and authenticity.

Cultural legitimacy achieved thus functioned as an element of social distinction, allowing for the Carnatic field to establish itself as an autonomous field of the production of a very specific form of music learnt, taught and performed by specific actors. However, this cultural importance that is endowed upon the musical form is a "function of the unequal distribution of the conditions underlying the acquisition of the specifically aesthetic disposition and of the codes indispensable to the deciphering of works belonging to the field" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 11). Individuals who learnt or performed the Carnatic tradition could only do so if they were already in possession of certain symbolically significant markers, i.e. they were already Hindu, members of dominant castes, and belonging either to the elite or the emerging middle classes in the new colonial city.

In summary, the invention of the Carnatic tradition meant the following: first, from a musical system that comprised the Brahmins, the Icai Vellalars the *Devdasis* and many other communities, Carnatic music became the bastion of the Brahmins. The upper caste male was now the gatekeeper of the musical tradition, and if a woman was permitted to perform, the unwritten rule was that she had to come from a "respectable" viz. upper caste family. Second, music and dance, earlier frequently performed together, were severed from each other, and performed separately, and the vocalist acquired primacy in the concert set-up. Third, music, co-opted by the anti-colonial movement, was codified, notated and standardized to create a tradition that could compare to the western tradition. At the same time, Carnatic music had to be projected as "authentic" with roots in the ancient Hindu

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texts and in a glorious Indian past. To "establish distance from the orientalist stereotypes of sensuality and debauchery" (Kumar, 2016) all associations with the physical were removed, and the repertoire was made spiritual. Concert repertoires that earlier included compositions with much greater erotic content were now whittled down to consisting primarily of songs with high devotional content, making the links with religion stronger.

The Carnatic tradition is thus no system dating back to the ancient past, but one that has its roots in a time in which anti-colonialist nationalism was growing among the urban upper castes. Most importantly, however, the preoccupation with ridding the system of anything impure, which included women who were considered morally deviant and lower castes whose art was thought of as unrefined, led to a system which mimicked the hierarchies and inequalities present in the Indian society – one that was exclusive, exclusionary and deeply caste and gender-discriminatory. The Carnatic project thus became, for the middle class, and especially the Brahmin elite, a significant symbol of taste, a vital cultural resource and a new pedagogic pursuit (Subramaniam, 2008). In his 1980 book "Logic of Practice", Bourdieu writes of the practical concerns or conditions of daily life that impact the transmission of social or cultural forms and the manner in which they operate. In the case of Carnatic music, four "logics of practice" seem to be in operation: class, caste, gender and the professionalization of the musical form. The tradition, in its fresh incarnation, was the product of the coming together of different systems of domination – class, caste and patriarchy – which complemented and reinforced each other in a particular period of great macro-historical social change. These forces, combined with the recent professionalization of the practice, led to a curious combination of the reformation as well as maintenance of symbolic and material power within the elite.

PART 2: EXCLUSION AND SYMBOLIC POWER IN CHENNAI'S FESTIVALS

CHAPTER 2.1[5]. Madras and its *Margazhi*: The Brahminical nature of the December Season

Every year, Chennai hosts India's largest festival of classical music and dance, funded almost entirely by corporate sponsorship, and spread over a period of 45 days with close to 3000 performances in over 75 concert halls big and small (Ramanan, 2015). Crucial to the "December season," as it is colloquially called, is the role of *sabhas*, organizations reminiscent of clubs to which membership is obtained, which host these concerts in one or multiple halls across the city, each with a fixed schedule of performances through the season. Artists perform at various *sabhas*, the most prestigious undoubtedly being the great citadel of the classical arts, the Madras Music Academy, a performance slot at which could decide an artist's career. The Academy became for me a crucial ethnographic site to understand the inherent elitism, class boundaries and caste hierarchies present in the *Margazhi* festival, representative of the larger field of the Carnatic arts in Chennai. If one were to make an argument for Carnatic music being exclusively Brahminical, one needn't move far from the premises of the Academy; I attended 2016's festival[6]at the Academy with the express purpose of discovering the markers of *Margazhi's* elitist nature, which I enumerate in this chapter.

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[5] This part contains two sections, one that includes observations from the mainstream *Margazhi* festival made in December 2016 and one that focuses on the alternative Urur Olcott festival, whose organizers and volunteers I interviewed in April 2017. In both, I attempt to use the Bourdieusian framework of culture and power.

[6] I have attended the *Margazhi* festival regularly since 2002. In 2014, 2015 and 2016, I also performed a genre called "semi-classical" music (never considered "real" classical music by the purists) as part of the season, albeit as part of "alternative" movements – in chamber concerts and newer, smaller sabhas which encouraged diversity of genre and musical styles. Before 2002, I attended the festival sporadically as a child, accompanying my parents who attended regularly.

Figure 1. The hallowed Madras Music Academy, the grand fortress of the classical arts[7]

The elite use Carnatic music as a tool to differentiate themselves from the other lower castes; social stratification is then maintained on the basis of taste and aesthetic preferences, both of which, as Bourdieu's writings on distinction emphasize, are dependent heavily on social origin. In the coming paragraphs, I attempt to analyze the interlacing of caste, class, cultural capital and competence in the field of Carnatic music and the manner in which the producers and consumers of the art form deploy it to depict and maintain their status.

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[7] 7 Photograph from the official website of the Madras Music Academy, http://musicacademymadras.in/

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2.1.1. Bourdieu's Habitus, Capital and Field: Taste as a Marker of Status

Despite us living in an era of social mobility and much-valued equal opportunity, elite classes continue to preserve and reproduce their social privileges and high status. In order to understand how domination and social hierarchy persist over generations without being resisted, one must, as Bourdieu held, "explore how cultural resources, processes and institutions hold individuals and groups in competitive and self perpetuating hierarchies of domination" (Swartz 1997, p.6). Analysis of the manner in which powerful groups maintain their position and use their lifestyles and choices to separate themselves from other groups requires delving into the cultural and symbolic creation of power and the manner in which it is constantly re-legitimized. Pivotal to this process is, among other concepts discussed below, habitus, "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005, p. 316)." Habitus, then, refers to a set of dispositions – often deeply internalized through socialization – that govern behaviour, is formed according to each actor's position in social space, and can change or be altered. Bourdieu utilizes habitus to reconcile agency with structure – an individual's behaviour is neither completely socially and structurally motivated, nor is it a rational, careful, autonomous choice, but is driven by an interplay of the two.

Individuals' everyday behaviours are driven and oriented by certain aesthetic sensibility, which serves as a marker of membership to a certain class or group of people. "Through the minutiae of everyday consumption, in other words, each individual continuously classifies him- or herself and, simultaneously, all others as alike or different" (Weininger, 2005, p.133). Taste, then, or aesthetic preference, provides an individual with "a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place,'", for it directs the individual to "social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or

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goods which befit the occupants of that position" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466). Bourdieu further asserts that these practices of consumption, which represent symbolically a particular "style of life" form "status groups" by creating symbolic boundaries between individuals who occupy different positions in the class structure. He defines taste as "acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate' . . . to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction" (1984, p. 466).

According to Bourdieu, the position of an individual in a particular class is dependent on the types of capital he/she possesses, i.e. the amount and distribution of capital determines one's position in social space. Economic capital refers to material resources, social capital to group memberships and connections within networks of people, and cultural capital the "knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications" (Bourdieu, 1991, pg. 14). Cultural capital could refer to cultural objects, institutionalized capital in the form of degrees or certificates, or embodied capital, inherited and acquired through socialization. This is crucial to power relations in society, providing "the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste" (Gaventa, 2003, p. 6). Symbols of cultural capital, which may either be in the form of cultural objects or embodied, legitimize the domination of the members of the class that possesses and displays it. Importantly, cultural capital can be inherited, and is responsible for the reproduction of the distribution of individuals across class locations over several generations, since "the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245).

A "network of positions which are systematically related to one another in terms of the distribution of cultural and economic capital across occupational locations," (Weininger, 2005, p. 137) a field, according to Bourdieu, is a heterogeneous socio-spatial arena in which individuals constantly struggle and compete with each other in the pursuit of resources. Where an individual is located in the field is an outcome of the interaction between his/her habitus and the capital he/she possesses.

Relatively autonomous fields – of art, music, science, etc. – are located within larger fields of power and class relations, but each field is itself highly hierarchical and stratified, a site of power struggles.

Thus the prevailing social order is inscribed in the minds of societal actors because of socialization through systems of education, language, existing modes of classification, lifestyles, etc., which leads to an unthinking, unquestioned acceptance of hierarchies and of the position that one occupies in the social system (1986, p. 471). In this manner, social actors give strength to and reproduce systems of domination and may not even consider the possibility of alternate power relations within a field. In the case of the custodians and consumers of Carnatic music, social and cultural capital play particularly important roles in bestowing upon the group members symbolic power stemming from symbolic capital, which Bourdieu calls "the reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability…" (1984, p. 291). Linguistic capital too plays a crucial role: the fact that Carnatic compositions are predominantly in Sanskrit, the language of the priests and the intellectual elite, means that enjoyment or understanding of lyrical content is often restricted to a certain audience, apart from the fact that it is this capital that allowed the Brahmins to construct the tradition in a certain way in the first place. Since social position limits or provides access to the language of a field, knowledge of Sanskrit magnifies the Brahmins' symbolic power.

The classification of society into groups becomes a route by which a group is conferred with honour. Accustomed to viewing others in terms of the status they enjoy, it is possible that people misconstrue differences of economic and social capital as differences of honour. When this happens, these forms of capital function as symbolic capital (Weininger, 2005, p.145). This occurs, as I elucidate in this chapter, among the producers and consumers of Carnatic music due to its status as a "highbrow" art, the social capital possessed by its upper caste/class actors, and the reproduction of hierarchies within the field since its very inception.

2.1.2. Indicators of Elitism (1): The Connoisseurs and the All-Important Sabha Canteens

Carnatic music's inherent inequalities are best understood through the study of "intellectuals, their key role as specialists of cultural production and creators of symbolic power, their position to class structure and relation to politics" (Swartz 2012, p. 6). This was explored in the previous chapter, in which the role of the Brahmins in cultural production was elaborated upon. It is also essential to understand the manner in which this class of people consume Carnatic music as essentially their own. Bourdieu premises his writing on the fact that social groups are formed in the area of consumption. The consumers of *Margazhi*, then, represent how shared aesthetic preferences or similar lifestyles serve as markers of distinction. At the Academy, and other popular *sabhas*, members of the audience are reputed figures in the arts – music, dance, filmmaking, acting – or well-known industrialists, powerful editors, lawyers or bureaucrats familiar to Chennai's stiflingly small and intimate social scene. These figures occupy the notoriously expensive and difficult to procure ground floor seats of the three-storied auditorium, spotted easily on the seats marked "donors" or "patrons,"[8] and comprise the cream of the audience. A quick, sweeping glance at the audience, one I was familiar with for over ten years as a concert-goer, quickly reminded me of the elitist nature of the Academy. Dressed in their finery, they treat the *sabha* as an exclusive club, and pleasantries and friendly waves are often exchanged between concerts. It is evident that these members possess economic and social capital – in terms of the occupations they profess, networks they are part of, and elite circles they are seen in. No formal dress code is specified, yet custom requires that the visitor dresses up as a sign of respect to the art and the religiosity that is intrinsic to the art form.

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[8] "Patrons" and "donors" are two categories of audience members who have, or whose families have, contributed to the running of the academy financially or have been artists/teachers of the arts. They do not pay for their annual tickets. This is an example of the reproduction of domination across generations: some families enjoy high social status and cultural capital because their ancestors invested in the arts at some point in the past

Figure 2: Audience members are dressed in their finest, and sabhas often become sites for networking among the elite[9]

Many of these patrons, whose family members at some time had donated large amounts of money to the organization, received their tickets in the mail. Lineage, and which elite family of erstwhile Madras one belonged to, it seemed, had its privileges. For the rest of us, coming into possession of a ticket was a Herculean task in itself. As I stood, at six in the morning in the long, snaking queue to buy my season pass – one among the more affordable balcony seats, I must clarify – I noticed, with unsurprised amusement and some outrage, a number of personal drivers and housekeepers standing in line to procure the tickets for their employers[10]. The Academy only seemed to make it easier for its elite space to remain elitist. It is crucial to point out that this audience profile

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[9]Image retrieved from
http://www.kutcheribuzz.com/gallery/imagegallery/image?view=image&format=raw&type=orig&id=5649
[10] Rajendran, personal chauffeur of a family friend, and whom I am well acquainted with, has stood in this very queue for the last five years. He introduced me to others, also chauffeurs, whom he had befriended over the waiting period. Myself a regular in the queue, I am familiar with many who wait alongside me; the queue is often the site of many an annual reunion.

is similar in most of the city's big concert halls. Clearly, then, social and economic capital are indispensable in the formation of cultural capital. A connoisseur of music cannot remain one simply because of his disposition, habits and aesthetic preferences related to his status group, he also requires time and money. [11]Accurately summed up,

> the petty bourgeois exhibits a lifestyle born of the combination of an aspiration to the bourgeois lifestyle, on the one hand, and insufficient economic or (especially) cultural capital to attain it, on the other. Its members […] commit themselves to activities intended to achieve cultural self-betterment. (Weininger, 2005, p.135)

Thus, while *sabhas* do not discriminate overtly, they become confines of the privileged. Tickets are limited, expensive and difficult to procure. Spectatorship at the festival is a status symbol aspired to by members of the non-dominant classes. Taste in the classical has long been considered a "social weapon" used by the high to distance itself from the low, and the upwardly socially mobile who enjoy greater affordability and buying power than their ancestors belonging to the same castes are likely to see attending the festival as a sign of cultural empowerment. Here it would be useful to invoke Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, in which he posits that "individuals emulate the consumption patterns of other individuals situated at higher points in the hierarchy" (Trigg, 2001, p. 99). The consumption of this status symbol, and this conscious desire to acquire cultural capital among the other classes and castes, has begun to be practised to gain acceptance and approval and to enjoy social status – it is increasingly fashionable today to be seen at the *Margazhi* festival. It is thus evident

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[11] Yet, the curious interplay of caste and class in the Hindu context could mean that a man with very little economic capital enjoys high social status. An example is that of a priest in a temple – he is a Brahmin with knowledge of the scriptures, a close association with God, and enjoys great respect. He may, however, have little economic capital. The same could apply to a well-respected, upper caste regional-language journalist or writer who enjoys great social and cultural capital, but lives a modest life. The Indian situation of the overlapping of caste and class boundaries throws up interesting contradictions.

that the Carnatic world tacitly establishes dominant aesthetic preferences, and consequently, consumer practices.

Figure 3: Performers (and audience members) dress in expensive kanjeevaram weaves, the same way they would attend a wedding. This, they believe, is a sign of respect to the art and to the divinity inherent in Carnatic music.[12]

Apart from the fact that *Margazhi* draws the elite of the city to its many halls in troves, it also perpetuates an exclusively Brahminical image of itself. Many halls, like the Academy or the equally famous Narada Gana Sabha or Krishna Gana Sabha, house small stalls in their verandahs and common spaces. Apart from one or two shops that sell the banal – like potato chips or phone subscriptions – or items of interest to the music lover – such as electronic pitch-setting gadgets for students of music or audio records – many hawk various religious items ranging from incense sticks (with accompanying advertisements of a traditional-looking *saree*-clad woman steeped in religiosity, hands folded and eyes

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[12] Image retrieved from http://www.deccanherald.com/page_images/original/2014/11/24/443536.jpg

closed in worship, the enduring symbol of upper caste femininity) to books and CDs relating to the Hindu scriptures. That the makers find these spaces suitable venues to sell their products shows that the audience they target – the upper-caste Hindu – frequents the *sabhas*. It did not take much prodding for the salesman at the Giri Traders stall ("Shop here for Religious & Spiritual items, Books, *Pooja* (worship) Items, Idols", the poster screamed) to reveal that sales were always high and his stall always crowded.

Next to the music, one of the most important dimensions of a *sabha* is its canteen. Thousands of canteens spring up in the month of *Margazhi*, and "canteen-hopping", in which different menus are sampled in a day, is as crucial to the season as concert-hopping is. I have been part of several conversations which involve weighing the pros and cons of various *sabha* canteens, numerous newspaper articles are written about the year's canteens, and caterers vie for the position of the best of the season, each outdoing the other with his extensive menu and admirable service. Considering that food and caste have long been inextricably tied to each other – certain foods and cooking and consumption practices are very commonly associated with the cultural practices of particular castes, canteens are crucial to the analysis of the Brahminical nature of the *Margazhi* season. The caterer at each canteen is Brahmin, and the food served is very typical vegetarian Brahmin fare, sometimes even served on the traditional banana leaf instead of a plate. There is a socio-linguistic element too; the waiters and the cooks speak a Tamil that is decidedly Brahminical in its choice of words and use of particular coinages. While it may be a gross generalization, or an exaggeration at the least, to attribute this to the fact that Brahmins traditionally never touched the food of other castes or food made by the lower castes because it would be inherently "polluting"[13], it may not be too far-fetched to conclude that these canteens are intended to allow the audience member and the visitor to feel "at home" and

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[13] Traditional Brahmin households even today employ cooks from within the Brahmin fold itself

eat comfortable and familiar food. This is not to say that visitors would shun food that is not typically served – the exotic may well be welcomed – but it is is likely to raise an eyebrow. As my otherwise non-conservative 76-year-old music teacher said, when he saw a menu offering *pav bhaji*, popular street food of western India's Mumbai, "*idhu namba saapadu illa*" ("this is not our food"). How audacious, he exclaimed, "*adthadhu meen serve pannapaapangu*"(next they'll try to serve us fish)![14]

Figure 4: Sabha canteens allow for audience members to interact with each other, artists and organizers, and food is mostly Brahminical[15]

Many practices and ceremonies observed by the *sabhas* during *Margazhi* point to the conscious – and indeed proud – perpetuation of its belief in its purely Hindu Brahmin character. At the Academy,

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[14] To the orthodox Chennai Brahmin, non-vegetarianism is equated with blatant disrespect to tradition, custom and religion. For him or her, it would indeed be blasphemous for a *sabha* to serve anything that strayed away from the confines of what constitutes Brahminical food – vegetarian food in preparations that could even be specific to sub-caste, community or region.

[15] Image retrieved from http://www.thehindu.com/migration_catalog/article12422335.ece

for instance, as I waited for the very first concert of the season to begin, I watched as the secretaries of the *sabha*, prominent Brahmin men – an editor, a musicologist and an industrialist – inaugurated the 2016 series of concerts with a prayer and the lighting of a lamp, a common Hindu practice. Most halls have on their wood-panelled walls pictures of Hindu goddesses and saints garlanded with fresh flowers everyday, and perched on the decades-old emblem of the Music Academy is an icon of the Hindu Goddess of Learning, Saraswati. The Music Academy's main hall, TT Krishnamachari Auditorium, is named after a prominent industrialist of Brahmin origin, who funded the construction of the building in the 1930s. Its smaller hall is called Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Kasturi was the founder-editor of *The Hindu*, southern India's most venerated newspaper. He was, it goes without saying, a well-respected and wealthy Brahmin.

2.1.3. Indicators of Elitism (2): Profile of Artists and Sabhas

Practice and paraphernalia may well be written off as accident of habit or as an unthinking following of tradition, but what of the people involved? Names are unfailingly accurate indicators of caste, and a quick survey of the organizers of the *sabhas* in the city revealed that almost every *sabha* secretary was a Brahmin. That the performers are almost always Brahmin comes as no surprise to a listener of Carnatic music; it is common knowledge and an oft-joked about stereotype that every Brahmin family ensures that its children, both boys and girls, be trained in the art form from a very young age; this they do with the same seriousness – or nonchalance, if you'd prefer – with which they'd enroll their children in formal schooling. Carnatic music is integral to the socialization process of a child of a Brahmin household, is taught in the home, private tuitions, and colleges of music, and becomes a part of their habitus; indeed, the view that Carnatic music is vital to their lives becomes **doxa**, a truth taken for granted. At the Academy canteen, the site of great annual reunions, spirited debates about the state of the arts, and much casual gossip, banter, and some serious (and often

successful) matchmaking, V Ramnarayan, editor of India's premier magazine on the performing arts '*Sruti'*, sitting with me at a table, asked a young girl moving to California if she would continue learning music once she relocated. Her mother replied with admirable swiftness: "We've found a music teacher. Did that even before we decided on her school!"[16] Performers, consequently, tend to come from upper castes because they are initiated into the art so early on. Almost every major Carnatic musician today is Brahmin. Some accompanying artists like violinists and percussionists may come from different communities, but this too is a rare phenomenon. The Isai Vellalars, a community that performed Carnatic music, have gradually disappeared from the concert stage (Weidman, 2006). If one were to use the *Sangeetha Kalanidhi,* a title annually conferred upon veteran musicians for excellence in musical pursuit given out by the Music Academy, as a marker of the predominance of Brahmin musicians, one would not be disappointed. Out of 90, 72 were given to Brahmins (Rammohan, 2015), a community that, one must be reminded, constitutes, according to census data, less than 5 per cent of South India's population.

Exclusion is not restricted to performers alone. As Carnatic musician TM Krishna, who has written prolifically on the exclusionary nature of the arts, writes in a blog post,

> [t]raditional spaces determine the audience's texture, who can attend or not, although there is no 'not allowed' board; there is a cultural habituation created by a certain kind of people who have been going to the *sabhas*, kind of like a club and makes one who doesn't belong to the club a little uncomfortable. (2016)

This exclusivity became evident to me in the Academy's series of morning lectures, in which artists give scholarly presentations on a particular aspect of the arts. This takes place in the mini-hall, which allows for a fairly intimate audience and for the audience to ask questions, and this is where the

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[16] Learning Carnatic music is integral to the socialization process of a child of a Brahmin household

Academy often betrays its elitist nature. The microphone, handled by one of the *sabha* secretaries, is only passed around to the already-known – artists themselves, or powerful lawyers or journalists – many of whom have enduring personal relationships with each other. For years, I have seen a man, clad in a cotton vest and trousers and speaking broken English, attend the lectures unfailingly and raise his hand to ask questions. He is rarely allowed to speak. When he is, he is often dismissed, or spoken down to among much tittering and head-shaking. While it is true that the gentleman is wont to make comments that are obvious, unnecessarily provocative or seemingly uneducated, the blatant disregard for his waving hand does not go unnoticed. As a journalist friend of mine disgustedly remarked[17], "Why hold it in public at all? They can have their little back-scratching sessions in one of their houses. Or in a party hall. Don't involve us when we're clearly not intelligent or erudite enough to be seen asking you questions!" *Sabhas* seem only to see people belonging to a particular educated middle class as acceptable – or desirable – members. They become, then, exclusive areas in which select people who belong to a social class and exhibit a particular aesthetic preference congregate.

Perhaps the crudest – and most backward – outwardly display of adherence to Brahminical custom, married with deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, came in 2012 after the death of the husband of a popular Carnatic vocalist, Nithyasree Mahadevan (Peter, 2012). A month after his very public suicide, Mahadevan returned to the stage to perform, although more soberly dressed, her usually extravagant display of jewellery toned down. A section of the Brahmin community was aghast by her audacity to be seen in public and, worse still, perform, now that she had been robbed of the respectability that came with married status, reactions reminiscent of pre-colonial anxieties about

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[17] In an interesting conflict of interest, my journalist friend is not only a dancer whose *guru* was a member of the venerated section of the audience that was given the microphone on many occasions, but also works in the same organization that one of the Academy's secretaries is director of, a newspaper joked about by the public as the high standard of Brahminism – *The Hindu.* This is a small example of how upper caste elite circles often collide in Chennai.

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widows banned from participating in public life. Comments on videos and articles lauding her fortitude included obvious outrage: "this is a crass denigration of our great Hindu culture" (2013).

Many of these exclusionary practices are, as I demonstrated in my previous chapter, vestiges of the ways of life in the colonial city of Madras, and continue to be followed in a city that the elite still prefers to call – perhaps out of nostalgia or by habit – by its British name, Madras. What images does the word "Madras" conjure up, then? The sea, the city's Hindu temples, the English-language newspaper *The Hindu,* and the *Margazhi* season, one would find.[18] Indeed, "as cities transform into postindustrial centers, […] culture can crystallize city identity and, conversely, a city's identity can crystallize its culture" (Wynn, 2015, p. 26). Chennai, however, is not only Madras. It is not only its upper class, English-educated, Brahmin elite. Chennai is as much its non-English speakers, its slums, its scores of other caste populations, its working-class groups, its *Dalits*, and its fishermen. The fact that the city is still associated with upper caste, upper class activities has made it difficult to see beyond the glitz, glamour and admittedly great art of *Margazhi*; and this is precisely what the Urur Olcott festival, attempts to do. In my next chapter, I provide an empirical understanding of how the festival attempts to subvert the great Carnatic tradition by critiquing hierarchies of caste, class, gender and status.

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[18] I asked some acquaintances this question informally and received these answers.

CHAPTER 2.2. What is the Urur Olcott Festival?[19]

In April 2017, I walked along Chennai's Elliott's beach under a merciless sun, making my way to a place I'd never visited before. Urur Olcott fishing village was not difficult to find; it had merely been, so far, invisible to the elitist eye. With its one-room tenements and narrow roads, it looked like any other slum, except Urur Olcott *Kuppam* was different. It was suddenly Chennai's most talked-about settlement, its name on the lips of every culture-loving citizen. I asked a young girl if I could speak to the village head.[20] "Oh, you're from the media!" she exclaimed, knowingly, before I could explain my mission. "Our village is very famous now!" She navigated the milling crowd confidently, beckoning impatiently for me to follow.

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Festivals may be viewed through two lenses. The Bourdieusian lens treats festivals as sites for the "exploitative deployment of symbolic capital" (Delanty, Giorgi & Sassatelli, 2011) and as instruments that reproduce existing domination. A Habermasian view, however, would allow for festivals to be seen as sites of interaction and communication of cultural forms and ideas, spaces in which aesthetic horizons may be broadened. It is vital that I establish here that I deploy the former to study the *Margazhi* festival. The Urur Olcott festival, which I describe below, however, lends itself to analysis through the second lens; it seeks to brand itself as a festival that is democratic and democratizing, where ideas are exchanged and all art enjoyed equally.

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[19] I analyze the festival from the point of view of a particular class of art producers whom I interviewed, many of whom came from within the field of Carnatic music itself and chose to protest against the hierarchies in their field. Their existing privileged positioning in their fields permitted them to initiate and run a counterhegemonic festival of sorts.

[20] I was unable to speak to the village head. I believe a conversation with him could have allowed for an entirely new perspective on the festival, and hope to provide this if I were ever to expand on this analysis.
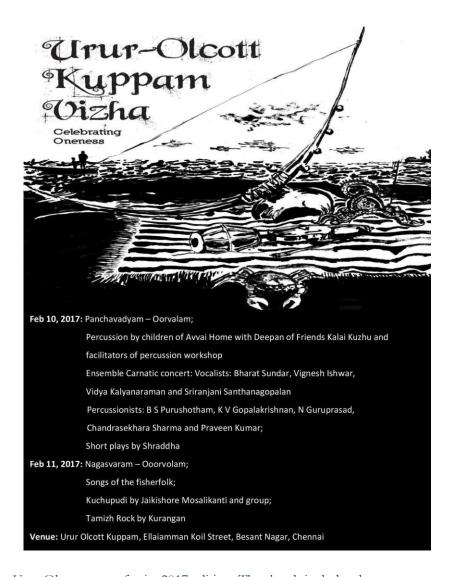
Figure 5: The Urur Olcott poster for its 2017 edition. The sketch includes the sea, a mat on the beach, classical percussion instruments, and a bow-like instrument used in folk storytelling[21]

In 2015, TM Krishna, one of Chennai's most celebrated Carnatic musicians, created a stir when he opted out of performing at the *Margazhi* festival; he criticized the Carnatic world as an exclusive, minority space (Srinivasan, 2015). He likened the *sabhas*, organizations that hosted the events, to "upper-caste private clubs" and "closely-held private precincts" (2015), which effectively intimidated

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[21] All images of the Vizha, i.e. figures 5-14, are courtesy the Urur Vizha Facebook page and used with permission. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/Urur-Olcott-Kuppam-Vizha-Celebrating-Oneness-700902283357977/

and excluded other sections of society instead of being welcoming public spaces. Carnatic music, he said, perpetuated and reinforced caste inequalities. In a critique of Brahmin hegemony, Krishna conceptualized the Urur Olcott *Vizha*, a crowd-funded festival of music, dance and drama in a fisherman's village in Chennai, home to many marginalized groups. The festival aims to transcend caste and class divides in that it showcases all forms of the arts – classical, folk and all others – in an accessible, public space open to all, restricted to no caste or class. Krishna and his supporters claim to want to attempt to "recalibrate ideas of culture" (Jayaraj, 2016) and cultural superiority, recognize the vibrant artistic heritage of other classes and castes and make the field of Carnatic music accessible, open and inclusive. The festival promotes itself thus on social media:

> [the arts] fall prey to divisions created by man. With artists and the audience seeking comfort in the homogeneity of class, caste, race or creed, art begins to lose its ability to communicate and build bridges across the vast and wondrous diversity of people and places. The art and the artists stop growing.[22]

By showcasing traditional folk, working class and lower caste musical and dance forms, mostly alien to the public of Chennai, on the same stage as Carnatic music, the festival intends to dismantle the socially constructed barriers between the high and low. Even more alien to Chennai's elite is the venue of the festival – the Urur Olcott *Kuppam* (village). Environmental and urban activist Nityanand Jayaraman suggested to Krishna that the festival be conducted at the Urur *Kuppam*, a 130-year-old settlement with a population of 4000, the majority of whom are fishermen of the Pattinavar caste, and others migrant workers from all over the country (Ramanan, 2016). It is located close to one of Chennai's poshest, most expensive residential neighbourhoods, Besant Nagar, but remains virtually

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[22] The Vizha's facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Urur-Olcott-Kuppam-Vizha-Celebrating-Oneness-700902283357977/

unknown. Worse still, despite being one of the oldest settlements in Chennai, it is thought of as a slum that is obscure, ridden with poverty and criminal activity, and therefore unsafe and avoidable. Selecting it as a venue was an attempt to shatter these negative stereotypes and introduce people to the richness and diversity of its fishing heritage. According to Jayaraman,

> the story of Chennai is not the story of Besant Nagar […] alone. It is also about Urur-Olcott Kuppam. Being neglected by history has repercussions on the present. Fishing villages are under-served by the local body despite their vintage. Newer, better-off localities are better served. The festival is about equalizing spaces using arts, and vice versa. (Nath, 2017)

Figure 6: A makeshift dais and chairs set up against the backdrop of the sea

With an organizing committee comprised of several young volunteers – students of music, ordinary college-goers, artists, activists – the festival is publicized heavily on all platforms of social media. Krishna writes of the manner in which the relocation of the performance to the beaches helps serve the purpose of democratizing the arts:

> Organically built into this framework is the possibility of rejection. When an art form remains within its own fiefdom, it is permanently secure. If we strip art of this safety bracket, it is in free fall. And real art happens in free will, when rejection is also a distinct possibility. When art and receivers are completely open, there is an aesthetic tension that exists. It is from this place that empathy and understanding evolve. Classical artists are not used to this kind of rejection; at the Urur Vizha, this is entirely possible. And for the marginalized art forms, this space gives cultural strength and forces the privileged to feel beyond sympathy; it forces them to recognize, respect and embrace. (2017)

The media, it must be noted, acted as important brokers of culture, intermediaries between the festival organizers and the public; apart from numerous reports, articles and opinion pieces written for the mainstream and alternative press and digital media, social media was abuzz with talk of the festival – pictures were posted, views shared, news tweeted. Most importantly, the festival used these platforms to inform the public of its aims, activities and motivations. I analyze Krishna's blog posts and comments in and to the media in an analysis of how the press worked to transmit the need for cultural appreciation of the marginalized groups. A semiotic analysis of Krishna's statement above reveals he sees the existing art world as paralleling a sort of feudal set up, in which prevailing power structures allow for it to remain secure. He speaks instead of the need to construct an art world in which the feudalism is challenged, in which there is innovation and change. By referring to "free will", he invokes political ideals of liberal society as opposed to older, oppressive regimes, which he believes

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should be translated into the realm of the arts. By calling for revolution, he asks for a reinvention of the old and for a modernization of the arts. When Krishna calls for change in order to prevent the arts from stopping to grow, he engages in symbolic speculation of the growth of cultural capital in the field of music. This talk of risk-taking and innovation comes from a man who has accumulated a high level of symbolic capital already: Krishna is not only a well-educated upper class Brahmin who went to one of Chennai's elite schools, and routinely offers his opinions on culture and politics in the English-language press, but a man who enjoys respect and following as a Carnatic musician. He occupies two important positions: that of a person of privilege in terms of class and caste, and that of a professional in the field. Taking recourse to ideals of democracy as a tool and an expressive device, Krishna calls for greater inclusivity and equality in the arts.

> The problem lies with the presumption that artists come together in wonderment of aesthetic beauty, irrespective of its originating social and cultural address. We also ignore the fact that audiences are deeply divided, conditioned to receive only with tinted lenses. Every art, its artists, and the community that constitute its environment collapse on to each other, establishing an inseparable dependency, becoming a socio-cultural flagship. If art is to play a role in social transformation, it can only happen if in the curation of art there is a conscious intention to break pattern-determined norms. (2017)

Here, Krishna reveals he is aware of how taste has its origins in "social and cultural address," that habitus plays a big role in conditioning how audiences react to art, and that the producers and consumers of the arts are linked to the community they come from in an "inseparable dependency." His clarion call for social transformation through art, then, seems to demand a delinking of music from its origins and class and community boundaries. How successful this could be is a looming question – Bourdieu maintains that the link between aesthetic choices and class is a strong one. The

symbolic value assigned to Carnatic music by virtue of its practitioners and history is undeniably responsible for its its consumption. Perhaps, then, consciously assigning value to the "lower" art forms by a man in possession of great cultural capital could result in acceptance of these forms by the upper classes, for Krishna validates these forms as worthy of attention.

Bourdieu writes of how the economic capital of the working classes is often so low that "authority to speak for the class—to articulate its history, political opinions, needs, and demands— must be delegated to a group of professional spokespersons" (Weininger, 2005, p. 148). These representatives maintain the boundaries of the class, mobilize its members and are the voice of the people. In the case of the Urur *Kuppam*, the "authority to speak for the class" lies not with representatives of the village, but has been coopted by Krishna, Jayaraman and their colleagues, who belong to the dominant social classes. Krishna and his team are, effectively, creating a counter hegemony of sorts, attempting to slowly dismantle consent among the marginalized populations regarding the dominance of the upper castes, and call for dominant classes to recognize the cultural value in the marginalized groups' art forms.

2.2.1. The 2016 Edition: The Chennai Flood and the Urur Vizha

In its first year in 2015, the Urur *Vizha* did generate some discussion, but it was in the second year that it truly became a harbinger of revolution. In December 2015, Chennai witnessed a massive flooding that took a huge number of lives. The fishermen played a big role in rescue efforts and helping clean up the streets and beaches after the week-long submersion of the city in water. Jayaraman believes that floods acted as a great leveler and equalizer, and reminded the citizens that the city's fate was a shared one; this provided the *vizha* unexpected validation and renewed purpose. Krishna echoed him in an interview he gave to the media. "During the floods, we all forgot our addresses and helped each other irrespective of where we were from. We felt that the festival should address that" (Bhatia,

2016). They arranged for a temple with a highly orthodox Brahmin board of trustees to confer upon the fishermen a "temple honour." The festival also worked towards raising money for "musicians from modest backgrounds who had lost their instruments in the deluge" (Bhatia, 2016) and for whom the floods proved an impediment to earning their livelihoods. By recognizing the role of the fishermen and acknowledging the economic differences in the background of Carnatic performers, the festival garnered great visibility and appreciation.

It was with some curiosity, then, that I attended the *vizha* in February 2016. One part of Elliott's Beach, otherwise teeming with evening walkers, couples and families on outings, had been transformed. Blue plastic chairs were lined up neatly in rows on a large striped rug and a makeshift stage was set up against a brick wall with colourful graffiti, flanked by large speakers. Children from the village and from underprivileged backgrounds in other parts of the city used *villupaatu*, a stylized form of storytelling, to talk about the floods, and sang in a choir. There is art in the fishing villages, the festival proclaimed, showcasing the songs of the fishing community.

Representing the "classical," Vijay Siva, a reputed Carnatic musician, performed several *Tamil* compositions, and the riot of colour, intricate costumes, and vivid storytelling in dancer Sheejit Krishna's recital drew a curious audience. Both, however, presented what purists would call "watered down" versions of the classical form. This begs the question: is this aesthetic innovation for social change or a form of condescension, in which the "popularized" and "light" artistic forms are thought of as more palatable to the working classes?

Figure 7: Graffiti on the walls by children of the village and volunteers

Figure 8: An aerial view of the *Vizha* with a folk performance underway

Figure 9: Children perform *villupaattu* at the Urur *Vizha*

Two incidents remain etched in my memory: one, an elderly fisherwoman asked a volunteer with some trepidation if she could actually sit and watch, and when the young man insisted she did, hesitantly sat on the ground instead of the chair he offered – an illustration of symbolic violence, in which the woman held the superiority of the obviously more elite people around her as natural and self-evident. Second, a woman named Hamsa told me she didn't quite enjoy the concert. "It's nice, but we don't understand your stuff!" she said, laughing. The incidents demonstrate that the fisherfolk have internalized a sense of inferiority to the city folk, and that taste is cultural, acquired and cannot be imposed – even on a willing audience – overnight. Aesthetic is deeply cultural, as Bourdieu's habitus tells us, and Hamsa's reaction was not the only proof. A performance of an indigenous folk art called *kattaikoottu* saw the city folk get up and leave (Mathews, 2015); it was evident that the audience, unacquainted with the form, were less inclined to stay and watch. Similarly, street theatre was admired but not always enjoyed. A resident of Besant Nagar and a regular at Carnatic concerts told me: "The

aesthetic is so alien to me; it seems crude, loud… but I know it is a fantastic form and requires just as much knowledge, preparation and ability to perform as something I am more acquainted with. I just don't enjoy it, even if I appreciate it." The real test of the festival, then, lies in its effectiveness in disassociating taste from social inculcations, to expand horizons of artistic enjoyment beyond one's socialization. If, as Bourdieu has argued, habitus can be transformed over time, perhaps it is possible that several years of this festival – and many such inclusive festivals later – an upper caste individual's aesthetic preferences naturally include artistic genres that do not have their origin within his class or community.

Figure 10: Renowned classical dancer Sheejit Krishna performs on the beach as children from the village mill around

Figure 11: A choir of young girls from the fishing village

There is thus a double process at work in the Urur *Vizha*: enrichment of the repertoire of the "classical" by introducing "lower" art forms; and a kind of gentrification of the festival in the village – where the under-represented and classical art forms are showcased side by side. The next day, I read in the papers – and watched on the *vizha's* Facebook page – that the night ended with a fusion rock band, and that the audience – organizers, volunteers, classical music aficionados, curious passers-by on the beach, fishermen, women – danced. It did seem to be a victory. The *vizha*, for that one evening, had managed to bring a range of people together to simply enjoy music and dance divorced from debates of form, status or roots, and with ties of caste, class or community loosened, if only temporarily.

2.2.2. The 2017 Edition: Inverting the Spaces of Higher and Lower Arts

A crucial aspect of our experiment is that the art forms that belong to the fisherfolk's spaces are presented on an equal footing. Due to this levelling, the nature of our reception changes. 'Higher' art becomes informal, natural and accessible, while the 'lower' become serious, valuable and respected. This inversion demolishes artistic walls and creates uninterrupted access for all sides. (Krishna, 2016)

Krishna is known for his ability to articulate ideas and dazzle with rhetoric. He does so with regards the *vizha* with as much élan, but the public has not been immune to some of the shortcomings of the experiment. Why, for instance, were the folk arts not being taken to the elite concert spaces? That, they maintained, was the true test of the experiment. Krishna's team was quick to respond to criticism. This year, the festival spilled over to a reputed concert hall in an orthodox, predominantly Brahmin neighbourhood. Performances of *Silambattam*, a 3000-year-old martial art, were conducted, and a concert held of *marana gana*, or funeral songs, music alien to the audiences of Chennai, especially within a concert hall that usually resonated with compositions from the Carnatic repertoire. Explaining his decision, Krishna wrote of the need for the classical to be "stirred and shaken," which is why the the non-classical and marginalized art traditions were presented "for the first time in a classically tagged space," inverting the "sociocultural positions occupied by people and art forms" (Krishna, 2017). He also attempted to use public space to showcase the arts – a choir of children performed at the Central Railway Station, and a relay-style concert of various genres was organized on a popular public bus-route (Padmanabhan, 2017). "Stirring and shaking" the classical environment also meant that performers and audience alike were no more expected to be dressed in their finest best, but in casual t-shirts, cotton *sarees* and other everyday wear to remove the associations of undrawn but understood boundaries relating to status, class, dress code and admission.

Figure 12: TM Krishna in concert on the beach. He is clad in T-shirt as opposed to the grand-looking traditional *kurtas* performers usually wear.

2.2.3. Critiquing Caste and Gender Exclusions

The Urur festival made a conscious effort to break caste boundaries imposed on Carnatic music. Performances of *Nadaswaram* and *Tavil*, instruments used commonly in temple rituals, street processions and other accessible ceremonies and performed by non-upper castes, were included in the agenda, perhaps challenging the purist Carnatic repertoire that didn't have place for them. A group of artists performed *Paraiaattam*, a dance and percussion genre traditionally performed by Dalits at funerals (Sharma, 2016), drumming on the buffalo hide membrane of their instruments, This, they hoped, would popularize the genre and de-link it from its caste associations and its ties with death.

In a challenge to sexual and gender boundaries that exist within the Carnatic realm, the Urur *vizha* organized a concert of the music of the *Jogappas*, a subaltern community of transwomen "possessed" by, and therefore married off to, the goddess *Yellamma*. They are, paradoxically, both holy (since they are associated with the divine) as well as deviant, owing to their gender-fluid identity, and overlooked by the state, particularly susceptible to injustices (Ramberg, 2011). Additionally, young schoolgirls were taught to play and perform in a *Pancha Vadyam* procession, a percussion ensemble that traditionally disallowed women from participating, and village girls asked to coordinate and compere the events. Children were given cameras and asked to tell stories of village custom and life. All these efforts, Krishna's volunteers insist, helped bring art into and out of the fishing community, subvert traditions involving gender and caste, and introduce to the elite of Chennai a world of art that they had so far been blind to.

Figure 13: The *Jogappas*, transwomen from Karnataka, perform in a "classically tagged" space, a famous *sabha*

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Figure 14: Parai-attam, usually associated with Dalit funerals, performed at the Vizha

Another thing the *viẓha* did differently was to actively promote the Urur Olcott fishing

village as a site of great culture and heritage. The revitalization of the space by generating interest in

it was crucial to highlighting the art inherent in the space. This they did by organizing a Living

Museum with a walking tour and arts and crafts installations – pictures, models, multimedia

installations and demonstrations – to allow the viewer to understand the ways of life, art, history and

cultural forms of the village (Vargese, 2017). Volunteer Pooja Kumar believes this was one of the

biggest successes of the year's edition. "For people who thought fishing was just about going on a

boat and coming back, the skills and life or death situations faced at sea were completely new

information," she says. "Learning about a 200-year history by visiting those very spaces being talked

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about was a very powerful experience." Thus, in addition to learning of the art present in the village, individuals of higher classes were introduced to the culture – the rituals, beliefs, behaviours – of an alien community, as opposed to the official, socially legitimized culture brokered to individuals via academies and schools.

CHAPTER 2.3. The Shortcomings and Successes of the Urur

Vizha

How successful is the Urur Olcott festival in its goals to ensure inclusivity and better use of public space? The *vizha* was undoubtedly effective in being the first ever initiative to bring a mix of art – both the classically tagged and the subaltern forms – on to one forum, and allowed for a diverse audience to consume the art, thereby pecking away at barriers of caste and class. It also introduced the fisherfolk to Carnatic music, as volunteer Pooja Kumar points out:

> Because they (the fishermen) haven't had any exposure to this before, there has been no interest. In the first year when Unnikrishnan (famous Carnatic singer) sang, the whole area just emptied out, they've never been exposed to Carnatic before, which automatically meant zero interest. That has over the years improved, we have far more people listening to a TM Krishna or a Vignesh Eashwar (also Carnatic musician) than three years ago. (Kumar, 2017)

Photographer Ram Keshav, who taught the village children to use cameras, believes the festival helped demonstrate that there was great artistic ability in the village. "Their perspectives are unique," he says, "and their familiarity with the customs, play times, fishing rituals and activities of the villagers led to some fantastic photos." The pictures, exhibited during the festival, proved for him that art could emerge from anywhere, and was truly class and caste-agnostic. All one needed, it seemed, was access to opportunities and skills. In this respect, the *vizha* has delivered on its promise: to expose the fishing people to Carnatic arts and to actively encourage and showcase their artistic skills: both traditional, like the songs they sing or the dances they perform as part of their cultural practices, as well as learnt – like the skills they acquired and cultivated in photography and percussion in the festival's workshops.

Importantly, the *vizha* seems to have led to awareness of the diversity of art forms the southern region of India is home to, has created an interest in them among the otherwise classical-consuming audience, caused great dialogue and debate – in the press, on social media platforms, and even among classical musicians themselves, on the working of caste and class in the realm of the arts[23]. With regard the *vizha's* aim to make the arts inclusive, Parshathy Nath, journalist and volunteer at the *vizha*, writes in an article (Nath, 2017) of how the planning and organizing process was emblematic of a true public sphere in which the organizers from elite backgrounds, the participants from the fishing village and the volunteers from all over the city worked together harmoniously, treating all suggestions with equal interest and respect. All in all, the *vizha* seems to have begun its process of informalizing the "higher" arts and conferring value on the "lower" forms.

2.3.1. The Reproduction of Elitism within the Alternative Festival

Not everyone, however, is entirely uncritical of the festival's ways. Rithvik Raja, Krishna's student, star performer and member of the core organizing committee of the Urur festival, is skeptical of how inclusive and democratic it really is when it is the more powerful people calling all the shots – deciding what forms are to be showcased, when, what to tell the press, and which songs or dance form to teach the village children. Among the revolutionary generation, he is symbolic of the formation of a further revolutionary fringe. With the creation of such counter-ideas, art's transformation as an autonomous field is guaranteed. "Look at the décor itself," he says. "Right from the marigolds to the lamps and the choice of background for the stage, it is all *our* aesthetic that is imposed on them. They may want to have plastic flowers, or use the sails from their fishing boats, or paint the wall that

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[23] Between August 2016 and February 2017, 57 articles were published on 6 selected online news fora (this figure was retrieved using the Google Alerts feature). This number excludes social media activity – a huge number of Facebook shares, tweets and retweets, and Instagram posts.

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comprises the stage background in another way. They may not like the handloom cotton *sarees* draped on stationed vehicles and on walls to be part of the décor. But we control that, even if we ask for their participation."

The spatial rituals associated with festivals, such as decorating the venue and opening up otherwise restricted spaces have a particular purpose: to disconnect one from the everyday world. A festival can temporarily establish different rules, become accessible to everyone, irrespective of background, and be emblematic of something new (Falassi, 1987). While the Urur *Vizha* succeeds at this to some extent with its graffiti-filled walls, casual seating, and handmade banners, it slips up in some respects, as Raja enumerates above.

All urban festivals modify local space in such a way that certain social arrangements and identities are promoted and some inhibited. Festivals, through their use of liminal spaces, are capable of reinforcing existing hegemonic control. Physical and temporal bounding in fact disciplines behaviour in accordance with existing hegemonies (Ravencroft and Gilchrist, 2009). The "apparently liberated, transgressive atmosphere of festivals […] reproduces existing hierarchies of class, race, and gender, and tends to privilege the consumptive gaze over active engagement" (Stevens and Shin, 2012). This is crucial to examining whether the Urur Olcott festival in fact only perpetuates existing elitism by attracting the same audience that attends the traditional festival, which consequently inhibits members of different socio-economic communities from participating as freely. Raja wonders at the composition of the audience. "Many audience members are Krishna's fans, eager to do as he does, or Jayaraman's activist-friends, who feel the need to be part of this huge movement," he says. "Or you have fashionable members of the elite who want to consume this new event just as they do all events." He seems to point to the fact that the major part of the *vizha*'s audience remains elitist, and that it has led to a reproduction of the same inequalities and hierarchies. Krishna is not unaware of this: "It is true, he writes, "that environments where most of these initiatives take place are kosher to the more

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dominant and culturally legitimized art form. This makes the experiment intrinsically a feel-good event and at times an exercise in sympathetic condescension" (2017). In the case of the *vizha*, the utilization of the festival as a status marker – people who attend want to be seen and known as being a part of an intellectual and politically-aware elite and consuming a new cause– causes one to wonder if the effect of the class of art producers who organized this movement is only "sympathetic condescension," in which the dominant groups use the exercise to display their status as change agents in – or participants of – the arts. Yet festivals of this nature undeniably create an informal space in which a "multiplicity of identities can be expressed and negotiated" (Stevens and Shin, 2012), which is precisely what the Urur Olcott festival hopes to capitalize on in its endeavour to allow for a diversity of art forms and audiences.

2.3.2. Place-unmaking and Place-remaking: The Urur Kuppam's New Image

It is vital that analysis of the *vizha* be juxtaposed against Henri Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city (1968), in which he stresses the importance of not only inhabiting the city, but taking part in social life with opportunity for integration and participation. In the case of the residents of the Urur *kuppam*, who so far have been deprived of the right to even be seen as integral to the cityscape, the *vizha* offers a chance for them to enjoy respect, visibility and involvement in urban life. This notion is expanded upon by David Harvey; urbanization, he says, has led to an urban restructuring through displacement and "accumulation by dispossession" (2012) – this is particularly true of marginalized populations whose lands and homes have been taken away, and whose powerlessness and voicelessness are further amplified by decreasing space for them in urban life.

Significant then is the festival's success in the slow erasure of unjustified negative stereotypes about fishing villages being the seat of crime and poverty. Not only do *sabha* regulars come to the festival, if only out of curiosity about a celebrity famous for his opinions, lay people on the beach may

be drawn to the performances. The festival has been particularly successful is in allowing for the city to look at an otherwise-neglected fishing community as an important part of their cityscape. Kumar believes this to be the greatest victory. "This year, we saw *Paati Thaathas* (the terms used to refer to elderly, outwardly conservative Brahmin men and women) who would otherwise consider this fishing village a slum walk in with great energy," she says. More importantly, she says, though this remains unsubstantiated by the fishermen, the festival has given the villagers a renewed sense of identity:

> The *vizha* brought with it a sense of importance and equality to a community that is already struggling with self worth. It brought with it the realization that the songs their people sung while mending nets and hauling fish has virtue, just like a TM Krishna song. (Kumar, 2017)

Kumar believes that the residents of the fishing village now feel a relationship and sense of camaraderie with those they wouldn't otherwise have interacted with – outsiders, the richer city people. She noticed how the villagers became more confident about voicing their opinions and needs and developed bonds with the organizers, and also saw that interactions with people from outside the village was now accompanied with pride and stories of their homes and livelihood told with a strong sense of belonging.

Where concrete change was effected by the festival was in the mundane area of garbage collection. Before the festival's success, only one door-to-door collector was allocated for every 300 households, as opposed to the three it required. Now, however, the festival's visibility has forced the private contractor to ensure that garbage is collected regularly. This has been an accidental consequence of the festival, but one that has improved significantly the villagers' lives. In a way, by making the village more visible, attractive and accessible, the festival contributed towards allowing this space to become integral to the cityscape and rebranding the city as more inclusive.

Most importantly, the festival allows for pluralism of opinion about art, artists, and the organization of the festival itself, and for dissent. Jean-Louis Fabiani writes, in his analysis of the Avignon Theatre Festival, of how "factional divisions are part of the game and to some extent provide the festivals with increased symbolic significance" (Riley, Miller & Pickering 2013, p. 73.) Nevertheless, the Urur *Vizha*, allowing for artists and audiences to mix and interact, and employing volunteers who feel a sense of identity with the festival and its cause, creates a sense of community and involvement that may be lacking in the *Margazhi* festival.

CONCLUSION

The word "tradition" conjures up in most minds images of something old, possibly dateless and immutable, enduring and revered. The performing arts in India are particularly susceptible to this image; the associations of Carnatic music to Hinduism's sacred texts confer upon it a certain sanctity that is seldom challenged. Detailed study into the social history of Indian classical music, as the first part of this thesis demonstrated, offers a curious alternative: the emergence of the Carnatic "tradition" was, in actuality, born in a crucible of nationalism, modernity and post-colonialism, appropriated by the upper caste elites and deployed as a cultural tool of distinction. Carnatic music, therefore, is an artefact of modernity, a resultant product of a conscious project of identity formation. That the tradition does not predate colonialism is not its only defining characteristic – Carnatic music is ridden with the hierarchies of caste, class and gender: the "national" musical project, in its construction, excluded women and lower castes who earlier participated in the production and consumption of music, becoming a highly exclusive field. Today, in a coexistence of liberal values of egalitarianism and the uniquely Indian structural boundaries of caste, Carnatic music continues to be the arena of the complex interaction of restrictive societal boundaries as well as an autonomous professionalized field of production, performance and consumption.

Despite its long history, the *Margazhi* festival has rarely been the object of sociological study, and the Urur Olcott *Vizha* has received little academic interest. Ethnographic study of the 100-year-old *Margazhi* festival demonstrates the ways in which the Carnatic realm remains a heavily Hindu, Brahmin-dominated field in which performers, organizers and audience members belong to upper castes, food served is Brahminical, the best clothes worn are worn in a display of wealth, and access to tickets limited. Membership to this realm, then, is determined by one's class and caste status. It is evident that the consumption of the art form continues to be a symbol of status and taste by the elite;

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lifestyles choices truly are, as Bourdieu argues, inseparable from social provenance, and the internalization of the superiority of this music by "lower" communities points to the operation of symbolic violence. Conspicuous consumption of the classical by non-dominant communities is also clearly an attempt to accumulate symbolic capital through the conversion of economic capital, and points to the perceived authority of the classical.

It is as a counter to this that the alternative Urur Olcott festival, the second site of this thesis' study, positions itself, deploying the rhetorical tools of "democratization" and "inclusivity" to appeal to people who subscribe to liberal, progressive values. Run by members of privileged classes, the festival's attempts to subvert tradition by conducting its performances in the fishing village and promoting indigenous art may well be considered patronizing, yet successes include generating true interest among the city's people about the arts of marginalized communities, introducing the "highbrow" Carnatic music to the fishing village's residents, and showcasing the arts in a way that is free and unrestricted. Inadvertent consequences include the revitalization of a space thought to be associated with slums and criminal activity, and new interest in the heritage of the fishing village. However, the festival also reproduces hierarchies by attracting more or less the same audience the mainstream festival attracts, replicating inequalities (the organizers are upper caste/class and possess great cultural capital), and one questions if thrusting the "highbrow" on the lower castes presumes cultural superiority on the part of the organizers. Another important dimension is the role of the media, both press and digital: its brokerage of the culture of the subaltern to the educated consumers and its functioning as the vehicle of opinion and dialogue about the existing hierarchies in the classical arts have been pivotal to the success of the festival.

The study of the classical and its "subordinate" forms receives new significance in an age in which social stratification is seen to be in obvious dissonance with values of modernity. The simultaneity of continued historical exclusions of the classical realm with the revolutionary efforts of

actors from within the same realm to expand the boundaries of the art form throws up many avenues for further research. How, for instance, do practicing musicians reconcile their participation in the classical as a professional activity with their efforts to effect social change, considering this participation could antagonize the powerful members on committees that schedule concerts? Continued analysis of the ever-evolving Urur *Vizha* would also prove interesting; it is possible that it leads to either the expansion of the Carnatic repertoire or the increased interest in the classical among the subaltern communities, or both. While this thesis has focused on the *Vizha* from the perspective of the organizers, it would be interesting to delve into the attitudes of the villagers themselves: do they feel like they are the objects of charity (Ramanathan, 2016), or are their aesthetic horizons altered and lives truly transformed? Also, "festival audiences don't necessarily jibe with the local population" (Wynn, 2015, p. 35); the relationship could well be a contentious one, and this prompts deeper analysis.

Most importantly, while my analysis has focused on the exercise of power through class and caste, an analysis of the festivalization in music from the lens of urban sociology is desperately lacking: considering the strong associations of Carnatic music with Chennai, an analysis is required of the contribution of *Margazhi* to the economic growth of the city, proliferation of *sabhas*, and to branding the city as Brahminical. Perhaps this thesis could stimulate deeper investigation into how place-"unmaking" operates in the case of the Urur *Kuppam* – from "unsafe" and invisible, it has been rebranded a place of heritage. The revitalization of public space through art is, of course, a much larger issue, but one that could be explored in the context of Chennai, in which enjoyable public spaces are notoriously few, unsafe and inaccessible.

Limitations of this study include the fact that it could be construed a one-sided analysis in two ways. Taking into account the views of participants of the *Margazhi* festival and the Carnatic world who do not believe that it is purely upper caste or exclusionary, and some who believe it is exclusive with good reason, would have provided insight into the reason behind the hierarchies being hitherto

unchallenged. Second, the study of the attempt at democratizing the arts does not include the voices of the subaltern communities who consume the assortment of art presented to them at the festival. Also, drawing parallels between cultural nationalism in India and the use of music to crystallize national identity in the west would have made for interesting analysis. Nevertheless, the thesis, I believe, invites reflection on the continuing power struggles in the field of Carnatic music and the revolutionary efforts required to dismantle generations of symbolic power. Importantly, it raises questions about the persistence of backward hierarchies and resulting inequalities in an area – art – otherwise commonly thought of as transcending the petty injustices of material life.

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