# Gender and Politics in India

*Edited by*

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# Note from the General Editors

Teaching of politics in India has long suffered because of the
systematic unavailability of readers with the best contemporary
work on the subject. The most significant writing in Indian politics
and Indian political thought is scattered in periodicals; much of
the recent work in contemporary political theory is to be found in
inaccessible international journals or in collections that reflect more
the current temper of Western universities than the need of Indian
politics and society.

The main objective of this series is to remove this lacuna. The
series also attempts to cover as comprehensively and usefully as
possible the main themes of contemporary research and public
debate on politics, to include selections from the writings of leading
specialists in each field, and to reflect the diversity of research
methods, ideological concerns and intellectual styles that characterize
the discipline of political science today.

We plan to begin with three general volumes, one each in
contemporary political theory, Indian politics and Indian political
thought. A general volume on international politics and specific
volumes of readings on particular areas within each of these fields
will follow.

RAJEEV BHARGAVA
PARTHA CHATTERJEE

# 5 ⊗ A Writing Lesson

MUSICOLOGY AND THE BIRTH OF THE COMPOSER

The scriptural operation which produces, preserves, and cultivates imperishable "truths" is connected to a rumor of words that vanish no sooner than they are uttered, and are therefore lost forever. An irreparable loss is the trace of these spoken words in the texts whose object they have become. Hence through writing is formed our relation with the other, the past.
—Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*

The birth of writing (in the colloquial sense) was nearly everywhere and most often linked to genealogical anxiety. The memory and oral tradition of generations, which sometimes goes back very far for peoples supposedly "without writing," are often cited in this connection.
—Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

In the mid-1980s a scandal swept through the Karnatic music world. S. Balachander, the flamboyant, self-proclaimed "veena virtuoso," published a booklet entitled *Eḻutiṉār Puttakattai! Kiḻappiṉār Pūtattai!* (He wrote a book . . . and . . . kindled the genie!), in which he argued that the nineteenth-century composer-king of Travancore, Swati Tirunal, never existed and that the compositions attributed to him were really composed by others.[1] Through the 1980s Balachander elaborated his arguments in various publications and open letters, spinning a lurid tale of fake notations, lost books, sequestered palm-leaf manuscripts, and mistaken identity. The arguments that swirled around the case went far beyond the figure of Swati Tirunal himself, bringing into question not only the reliability of notation but the very notion of the composer and the way modern musicology should be conceived.

The debates quieted down with Balachander's unexpected death in 1992. Swati Tirunal was reclaimed as a true composer, and those who doubted him were deemed to be part of an unruly faction with ulterior motives. Yet the Swati Tirunal issue had inserted a kernel of doubt into the firmament of Karnatic classical music. For at the very scene of composing, the original moment of authenticity that made Karnatic music classical, Balachander had posited a scandal. If one composer could be discredited by the historical probing Balachander suggested, couldn't any composer presumably be shown to be a fake by similar methods? What constituted authorship, and what guaranteed authenticity? What order of things made the assertion that Swati Tirunal was a fake appear scandalous?[2]

Issues of authorship and authenticity that reemerged in the Swati Tirunal debate bring into focus the shifts in musical institutions and ideas about music that occurred in the twentieth century. At stake in the Swati Tirunal debate was the boundary between the written and the oral—which had greater authority, and exactly how should the boundary be crossed? The vexed nature of these questions is apparent in the conflicting ideas about the role of notation. Notation was seen both as a site of resistance to the encroachment of Western classical music and as a space of progress. It was imagined both as a guarantor of literacy (and therefore classical status) *and* as a transparent and legible representation of essential orality (and therefore Indianness).[3] In spite of its promises, however, notation was also viewed with ambivalence. The desire to capture the voice in writing was bound up with the fear that the voice could be lost precisely by being completely captured by writing.

At another level, the Swati Tirunal debate brought into question the relationship between theory and practice, text and performance. If theory was meant to provide a structure, or system, underlying the music, how did one determine where basic structure ended and embellishments began? How much of a musical work was original, and how much was added on? Where did one draw the line between composition and improvisation? Such questions point to the intimate connection between the notion of the authorship of the composer and the authority of a system of rules about structure.

## A Composer Is Born

Balachander began an open letter to the musicologists of Madras in 1989 with the statement that the Swati Tirunal question was not just a musical issue but also a musicological one.[4] His letter, which summarized what ne had already presented in a fifty-page thesis at a press conference in Madras in April 1989, emphasized not merely musical knowledge but the production of that knowledge. First and foremost, Balachander's letter was a

statement about the necessity of doing music history, of consulting written sources. In the proceedings for the 1887 jubilee of the *Madras Gayan Samaj*, a musical organization with branches in both Pune and Madras, he had found the first reference to the musical activities of a certain Kulasekhara Perumal, a musical king of Travancore (r. 1829–1847) who would later be known as Swati Tirunal. This original mention of Kulasekhara Perumal provided the source for all later references used by the Swati Tirunal scholars but had been completely unacknowledged. The reason for this, Balachander stated, was that the reference contained "incriminating evidence" showing not only that the *name* "Swati Tirunal" did not exist in 1882 but also that the composer-king to whom that name was later assigned may also never have existed.[5]

Balachander demonstrated the truth of his assertion using the *Madras Jubilee Gayan Samaj Proceedings*. He began by situating the proceedings historically, amid the late-nineteenth-century revival of interest in Indian music, a revival that focused on standardizing and preserving Indian music. At the center of this revival was the Gayan Samaj, established in Pune in 1874 with the decidedly nationalist purpose of training young boys and girls in their "national" music. In 1883 a branch of the organization was established in Madras. Balachander noted that between 1880 and 1915 the publication of music books with notation was gaining "special attention and momentum."[6] Several musicologists, in fact, had made use of the print media to publish music books with notation. The late nineteenth century, Balachander maintained, was a "transition period" in which the old guru-sisya *parampara* (lineage, tradition) was dying out and being replaced by books with notation and institutionalized teaching methods. In capital letters Balachander trumpeted the first bit of his damning "evidence": "AND, HERE CAME THE IMMEDIATE NECESSITY FOR MUSIC BOOKS WITH 'NOTATION,' FOR USE EVERYWHERE, FOR SALES EVERYWHERE, FOR HOMES AND INSTITUTIONS EVERYWHERE, FOR DOMESTIC USE AND ABROAD."[7]

*Balachander proceeded* with a close reading of the Gayan Samaj proceedings' account of the 1882 visit to Pune of the then maharaja of Travancore. His analysis hinged on the maharaja's lack of voice in the text. For surely any maharaja—especially one whose close ancestor was a composer-king—who visited a newly established music institution would surely speak a few words of appreciation and encouragement. Yet this maharaja, Balachander commented, merely had his Dewan read a short reply, which perhaps implied that the maharaja had not been so musically minded after all or that he had not even been there. Such speculations were only con-

firmed by the maharaja's replies to a series of questions asked by the members of the Pune Gayan Samaj. For Balachander, the very fact that these questions and the answers to them were written (not spoken) implied that the maharaja himself could not answer them or was not present to answer them. The questions, submitted as a written memorandum, received a written reply only three years later. The content of the answers, Balachander argued, showed that there was little musical life in Travancore during the so-called composer-king's reign.[8] In answer to the question of whether Hindustani music was practiced in Travancore, for example, the maharaja appeared to reply that primarily Karnatic music was practiced and that, too, "at an indifferent level." To a question regarding whether a particular song had been composed by Kulasekhara Maharaja (presumably Swati Tirunal), the reply should have been a "plain and simple" yes or no, Balachander asserted; a composition (and this shows the late-twentieth-century assumptions under which Balachander was operating) should have had a single, unambiguous author and date. Yet the reply instead obfuscated the matter, saying that it was impossible to date the composition, "as every year His Highness produced lots of them."[9] The last answer, as far as Balachander was concerned, was an "open confession." In answer to a question about music schools in Travancore, the reply stated that there were none and that music was not taught under any system of notation.[10] With this evidence, Balachander proceeded to flesh out his account of the twentieth-century invention of Swati Tirunal.

According to Balachander, the reference to the composer-king Kulasekhara Perumal in the Gayan Samaj publication triggered the imaginations of those in Travancore in the 1920s and 1930s who were interested in positing a Kerala school of Karnatic music that would equal the Tanjore tradition. The compositions that were eventually attributed to Swati Tirunal were actually composed, he maintained, by the musicians employed in the Travancore court. For example, the composer Irayaman Thampi, who had been employed in Swati Tirunal's court, had apparently published a book of the lyrics of his compositions as early as 1854, but this book had been conveniently "lost," Balachander suggested, and many of Irayaman Thampi's compositions had ended up being ascribed to Swati Tirunal. Furthermore, Balachander continued, the royal family of Travancore had appointed musicians to supply notations for compositions by the court musician Tanjore Vadivelu as well, then printed them in their own printing press.[11] These compositions were published in 1916 as having been composed under the royal command of "H. H. the Maharaja of Travan-

core." Yet several years later, Balachander wrote, these same compositions were claimed as the sole work of "Kulasekhara Perumal."[12] Such a name, which referred more to a lineage than to a particular person, could not satisfy the modern demand that a composer be a single distinctive individual. How could one Kulasekhara Perumal be distinguished from the next? And so, Balachander wrote, the "perpetrators" of the hoax decided to invent a new name: "Yes! They decided to create a new person with the novel star name" of Swati Tirunal, and then claimed this form of naming was a centuries-old ritual convention.[13]

In 1939 a music college by that name opened in Trivandrum, and Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar, who had been responsible for "rediscovering" and notating Swati Tirunal's compositions, was appointed principal; in the same year, under the direction of Muthiah Bhagavatar, a comprehensive collection of Swati Tirunal compositions was published under the auspices of the Swati Tirunal Academy of Music (K. V. Ramanathan 1996, 18). Balachander stated that as it was the custom for the court musicians to compose in the name of Padmanabha, the tutelary deity of Trivandrum, the perpetrators of the Swati Tirunal hoax conveniently decided to make "Padmanabha" Swati Tirunal's *mudra*, or composing signature.[14] Thus, the newfound composer appeared to have an enormous number of works to his name. In 1940 a portrait of Swati Tirunal was hung in the Madras Music Academy next to the portraits of the trinity to signify his status as a great composer (K. V. Ramanathan 1996, 20). Balachander closed his letter by claiming that the Swati Tirunal question was a problem of naming, of writing—in short, a historiographical issue—and expressed the hope that his own publications and letters would see the fake composer to his rightful end.

Balachander's assertions challenge certain common assumptions about authorship and authority, suggesting that in the twentieth century, older practices in which different principles of authority operated were overlaid by the modern institution of authorship. Publishing compositions "under the command of" the maharaja of Travancore evokes an older form of patronage in which authority lay with the patron, not necessarily with the "original author" of a particular work. The fact that the same compositions were published several years later as the songs of Swati Tirunal suggests an entirely different set of values, one in which authority and authorship are tightly linked; publishing demands a single author who can be named and distinguished from his ancestors. In a similar vein, the idea of a mudra in the lyrics of a composition, now taken as evidence of authorship, may have

originated as a very different concept. Mudras, formulaic phrases generally incorporated into the last line of a composition, are now commonly thought of as the composer's "signature" (Peterson 1984, 167–68). The term *mudra* itself has a range of meanings: distinguishing mark, stamp, brand, impress, royal seal, emblem, badge, and mark on a ballot paper (Winslow 1862, 881; Subramaniam 1992, 844). While we might think of such things as signifying an "author" just as a signature does, there is an important difference. Royal seals, emblems, and badges are not just identifying marks but material objects which are themselves endowed with authority precisely because they are standardized and alienable from the figure of authority. Someone who wears a royal badge or stamps a royal seal thus does not *claim authorship* or originality for himself but *invokes the authority* of a king or deity through a standardized or formulaic sign.

Certain composers, such as Thyagaraja, seem to have used their own name, so that many of Thyagaraja's mudras, in the context of compositions addressed directly to the god Rama, translate as "Thyagaraja entreats you" or "May Thyagaraja be your servant"; the author's name is itself incorporated into the lyrics. Other composers' mudras, however, were not their own names but those of the deities in whose name they composed, suggesting a different locus of authority and a different set of ideas *about* authority as well. In his examination of the colonial encounter of Dutch Calvinist missionaries with Sumbanese ritual speech in Indonesia, Webb Keane has suggested that one of the problems that ritual speech posed for the missionaries was that its authority was based on the idea that the words did not originate with the speaker. Contrary to the notion of the sincere speaking subject, the power of ritual speech lay in its capacity to portray the speaker as "someone who is *not* their author or the agent of the actions they perform. . . . The signs of power are conceived to be generated by a source that remains distinct from the bodily individuals who wield them" (Keane 1997, 680). In using the name of a deity, then, a "composer" might be not so much "signing" his work as using the name to invoke or call the deity or king. Instead of referring to the authorship of an absent composer, "Padmanabha" might be a sign that effectively makes the authority of the deity, or the king who worshipped him, present. Indeed, Balachander suggested that it was precisely this latter strategy that nineteenth-century court musicians employed when they composed "in the name of" the tutelary deity of Trivandrum.

In 1982, just before Balachander had come out with his case against Swati Tirunal, K. P. Sivanandam and K. P. Kittappa, descendants of Tan-

jore Vadivelu, wrote an article for the popular Tamil journal *Kumutam*, in which they argued that Vadivelu and his brothers had merely translated the Telugu songs they had composed for King Serfoji of Tanjore into Sanskrit and inserted the name Padmanabha to make the songs suitable for Swati Tirunal's court.[15] The article brought issues about originality and composers' integrity to the forefront, suggesting that ideas about these subjects in the late twentieth century were different from the logics of authenticity that operated in the royal courts of the nineteenth century. Whereas composing in the late twentieth century carried connotations of originality and individual work, such ideas could hardly have existed in the milieu of the royal courts, where musicians were commissioned to produce songs for their kings and regularly moved between courts. Indeed, when I discussed the Swati Tirunal issue with a musician in Madurai in 1998, he asserted that in those days musicians couldn't have had the same concerns about originality and authorship.[16] They circulated around the courts of South India, composing in the name of whoever happened to be their patron; it didn't matter who composed the pieces as long as they were attributed to the person in power. The life of Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar was a good example, he argued. Living at the time of the transition from royal courts to music institutions, Muthiah Bhagavatar, like many other musicians who were samasthana vidwans in courts, got an academic position in a music college when those courts folded. While at Mysore, he composed in the name of Mysore's tutelary deity, Chamundiswari. As head of the Swati Tirunal Academy of Music in Travancore, however, he took on the job of notating many of the "neglected" or "lost" Swati Tirunal kritis. The situation of the nineteenth-century musician situation, my informant declared, could be compared to that of a man with a double-bordered veshti: if he wore it on one side, the border would be red, but the next day he could wear it on the other side and have a purple border.

Such speculations about the nature of composing in the nineteenth century seem logical enough. But taking them to the extreme by asserting that *all* the songs attributed to Swati Tirunal were really composed by his court musicians would "lead to chaos in South Indian Karnatic music," declared the violinist V. V. Subrahmanyam. In a small book entitled *Satyameva Jeyate* (Let Truth Reign), Subrahmanyam offered an impassioned refutation of Balachander's allegations. Yet although he was arguing against Balachander, both were waging their battles in a field determined by similar assumptions: art for its own sake, originality, and the sole authorship of the composer. In response to the allegation that Swati Tirunal's songs

were really composed by Vadivelu of the Tanjore Quartette, Subrahmanyam noted a story about how Swati Tirunal would not allow his court musicians to compose in his name, insisting that music should be only for god and therefore in the name of the deity. "While the Maharaja has prohibited his courtiers to sing in praise of him will he allow other kritis to be published in his name?" Subrahmanyam asked (1986, 6). Here, he equates Swati Tirunal's prohibition of songs in praise of the king with the idea of art for its own sake, free of political motivation, putting a decidedly twentieth-century spin on a nineteenth-century practice.

Yet there are many ways in which even the twentieth-century practice of Karnatic music militates against such notions of authorship and the composer. The same composition sung by two different people might be almost unrecognizable when sung with different *sangatis* (variations) or elaborated in different spots. The twentieth-century composer Papanasam Sivan, it is said, could hardly recognize his own compositions when they were sung by other musicians (K. V. Ramanathan 1996, 20). The possibility of change to the point of unrecognizability seems to threaten the very idea of original compositions and the authorship of the composer. Subrahmanyam conceded that it was possible that many of Swati Tirunal's compositions would have been greatly embellished by his court musicians when they were sung. But the "framework," he insisted, would remain the same (Subrahmanyam 1986, 8). At stake in the idea of an "essential structure" or "framework" of a composition were the agency and originality of the composer, indeed, the very notion of the composer. The definition of a composition depended on the idea that any song had an essential structure which was laid down by the composer and subsequently varied by other musicians who sang it. Structure implied the use of notation, a method by which the basic structure could be laid out and made permanent. As Balachander alleged that Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar and his successor at the Swati Tirunal Academy of Music, Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer, had composed the tunes for found lyrics and then attributed them to Swati Tirunal, the controversy moved from discussions of composers' motivations to the definition of composition itself and the proper way to do musicology.

In a response to Balachander, Brig. R. B. Nayar, a musicologist from Kerala, claimed that it was wrong to say that Muthiah Bhagavatar and Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer (popularly referred to as Semmangudi) had dug up lyrics and composed new tunes for them, thus inventing Swati Tirunal's repertoire. Rather, they collected what were already complete composi-

tions with specified ragas and talas, "not just a bunch of lyrics found on palm leaves" (Nayar 1997, 24). The absence of exact notation, in Nayar's view, pointed to another, perhaps even more authoritative oral tradition by which the kritis had been preserved in their "pristine form": the court musicians known as Mullamoodu Bhagavatars. In the court of Swati Tirunal they had sung in a style known as *Sopanam*, a style peculiar to Kerala, characterized by a slower pace and less ornamentation and improvisation.[17] "Unadulterated" versions of these kritis could have been collected with the help of the last generation of Mullamoodu Bhagavatars, claimed Nayar. Through an oral tradition preserved by court musicians native to Kerala, who had no ulterior motives and were permanently bound to Swati Tirunal's court, *the original compositions could have emerged into notation*. Proper musicology, in Nayar's 1990s vision, would have required listening to the aging Mullamoodu Bhagavatars and painstakingly recording, through notation, exactly what they sang, no more and no less.

The Muthiah Bhagavatar-Semmangudi team, however, worked with a decidedly different notion of what it meant to do musicology. The Dewan of Travancore state, C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, had proposed in 1937 that the musical compositions of Swati Tirunal were a great contribution of the state to culture and should therefore be revived (K. V. Ramanathan 1996, 18). At the request of the royal family, Muthiah Bhagavatar, newly appointed as the principal of the Swati Tirunal Music Academy in 1939, began the task of collecting and notating Swati Tirunal's compositions. His son, H. M. Vaidyalingam, who assisted him, recalled the process: he and his father went to different places in search of elderly people who might remember songs. Muthiah Bhagavatar "reduced" the songs to notation and then "polished" them (*alakupatuttu*: literally, "to make beautiful") (ibid., 19). What was involved in this polishing? Apparently it was a process of making the kritis conform to the sound of Karnatic music, rather than to the "original" Sopanam style. Brigadier Nayar states that instead of preserving the songs as they had been sung by the court musicians, Muthiah Bhagavatar and Semmangudi reinvented them, increasing the tempo and adding sangatis that were reminiscent of other Karnatic composers, so that the songs would sound like Karnatic music and please audiences in Madras (1997, 25–26). In the case of compositions where only lyrics were available, Muthiah Bhagavatar and Semmangudi "retuned" the lyrics. Their object seemed to be not recovering an original sound, but instead creating music that was plausible, and pleasurable, to their own ears.

Muthiah Bhagavatar would identify the raga and tala which seemed appropriate to him vis-à-vis the lyrics and sketch the music for them. Semmangudi would then work on them further. When [Muthiah Bhagavatar] felt satisfied with the outcome, both would go to Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bayi who was highly knowledgable in music. She would listen to the song as . . . reset to tune and rendered by the young research assistant. She might suggest a change here or there but, once she gave her seal of approval, the composition would be considered ready to be released. (K. V. Ramanathan 1996, 18)

Thus, the process of recovering lost music in the 1940s seemed to involve retuning lyrics to the preferences of one's own ear. The newly composed music, when approved by the requisite number of ears, would then be agreed on as the true composition. In this process, the notation was the origin of the composition, the act that brought it into being. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, such a process could not have passed for true musicology.[18] As Balachander's allegations and the refutations of V. V. Subrahmanyam and R. B. Nayar show, musicology at the beginning of the twenty-first century has a decidedly different set of assumptions. Notation, in this new order, refers back to an authoritative act of composition by a single composer: an original act occurring prior to the composition being recorded in written form. Thus it is only through *the positing of a voice before* writing, an authoritative oral tradition, that the notion of the composer becomes possible. Looking at this shift in the order of things between the 1940s and the 1980s, one can see that the notion of an authentic "oral tradition" and the authority of writing to represent it emerged simultaneously.

*Nation and Notation*

We fear we must defer the prospect of a universal language of music till the millennium arrives.
—Sourindro Mohun Tagore, "Hindu Music" (1874)

In 1874 the newly founded Pune Gayan Samaj put out a statement of its rationale, which included, among other things, providing an arena in which Indian music would be respected and preserved.[19] After detailing the numerous activities that had been planned in this regard, the statement read, "Lastly, the Samaj will be instrumental in preserving our nationality

in the sense of our possessing an indigenous art of singing, which, unlike English music, has challenged all its attempts at being reduced to writing" (Gayan Samaj 1887, 34). A sense of pride in Indian music, according to this statement, followed from the fact that it could *not* be written in notation; this recalcitrance, in fact, was precisely what made it Indian and kept other music from influencing it. Music, in India, was to be kept Indian by being kept away from writing. The Gayan Samaj, in keeping with its spirit of good relations with the British, invited Lord Mark Kerr, whose "vocal powers were of the real indigenous type," to become a member. But Kerr, apparently troubled by the attitude toward notation, replied with a piece of advice.

> You imply, I think, although all possible musical instruments are to be welcomed to perform at the Gayan Samaj, that science can have no place there, for the music to be performed has hitherto challenged [it]. I presume you will continue to defy all attempts to put [your music] in writing. Now without a science, that is to say, knowledge without the power of writing your music, so as it can be made a study of . . . , you can have no art. . . . I, very seriously, invite you to do what, against your opinion, I maintain is very possible, namely—put on paper—put into writing all the quaint and melodious airs that I have heard sung by your children, Mhotvallas, and others. Let this be arranged with care and good taste, and, I repeat, put into writing what has hitherto defied you (35).

Kerr's admonition apparently had its effect. By 1879 the Gayan Samaj was singing a different tune entirely. Its main object had become to convince the Indian intelligentsia and the West that Indian music was an object worthy of study, possessed of "a science . . . such as will vie in its nicety with the Sanskrit grammar, which is recognised as almost the perfection of deductive logic" (Gayan Samaj 1887, 20). The problem, however, was that there was no way to represent this logic. "It is musical notation which we want. . . . It is true we have a musical notation we can claim as our own, but we think it is not sufficient nor elegant enough to mark the various graces of Hindu music with the rapidity of a phonographer" (20). The idea of preserving the Indianness of music by not writing it down had given way to the fear that a lack of notation was causing Indian music to "fade away." The Gayan Samaj announced its plan: "We think the English system of music [notation], such as it is, cannot be adopted by us without making necessary changes; this we mean to do ere long" (20).

Accordingly, during the fateful visit of the Travancore maharaja to Pune in 1882, the members of the Gayan Samaj, headed by Capt. Charles Day, included in their list of questions about music in Travancore a request for "airs written correctly in the European notes" (Gayan Samaj 1887, 23). The reply included a lengthy meditation on the difficulties of putting "Hindu music" into European notation. They went beyond the problem of finding someone who was conversant with both systems of music. How was one to represent the quarter tones, "infinitesmally minute and delicate shades as in a painting by a master artist"? How could one capture the "unbroken easy flow" of a vocalist over half a gamut? Indeed, how could one convey the concept of raga itself? The problem, concluded the writer, was one of "translation" (27). He vowed to have the task attempted by one of the Nayar brigade and, "if it is possible," to have it sent to Captain Day.

Putting Indian music into European notation, then, was not merely a matter of adding extra signs to show the peculiar features of Indian music. It instead involved translation, putting the music into a kind of circulation between two languages. The Bengali musicologist Sourindro Mohun Tagore feared that with such translation Indian music would come to occupy a strange territory, neither properly Indian nor properly Western. In 1874, the same year as the opening of the Gayan Samaj, Tagore was involved in a dispute with the inspector of schools in Bengal, Charles B. Clarke, who had written an article for the *Calcutta Review* advocating the use of staff notation (Farrell 1997, 68). In his lengthy reply, entitled "Hindu Music," published in the *Hindoo Patriot* in 1874, Tagore wrote, "Every nation that has a music of its own has also its own system of notation for writing it. Whether that system be an advanced one or not, it cannot be correctly expressed in the notation of another nation, however improved and scientific it may be. . . . Anglicized as we have become in many respects, we confess we prefer our national system of notation for our national music" (1874, 366). Notation seemed to mark a kind of last frontier, a space of resistance to the encroachment of Western sounds and ideas.

Whereas a few years earlier the preservation of Indian music seemed to depend on the absence of writing, the reverse was now argued; the question of the need for notation was quickly eclipsed by the question of which notation was best for Indian music. Tagore argued for an Indian notation on the grounds that it was simpler and more "natural" than the European staff notation. Whereas European notation required eleven lines to accommodate the different clefs, the Indian system required only three lines. Moreover, in the Indian system, the three lines marked the natural divi-
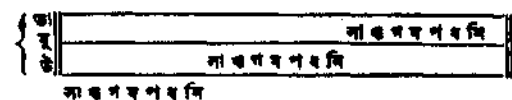
Now mark the contrast in the English notation. Here is a diagram of eleven lines.
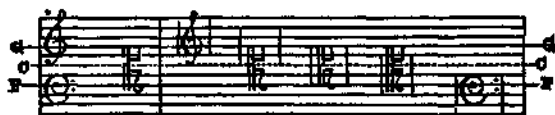
20 Text explaining that Indian staff notation requires only three lines. In S. M. Tagore, *Hindu Music* (1874).

sion of the voice into chest sounds, throat sounds, and head sounds (Tagore 1874, 367). Whereas Clarke had argued that European staff notation was so transparent that a Bengali who knew no English might simply look at the notation and play a piece of Western music, Tagore argued that this was not only impossible but misguided. In contrast to Clarke's vision of a universal notation for all the music of the world, Tagore envisioned a veritable Tower of Babel: the supposedly sufficient staff notation would have to be adjusted and augmented by so many new signs that it would become unrecognizable (382). By contrast, each nation had perfected a system of notation that was transparent to its own musical system, he maintained. In fact, it was so transparent that "in advocating the national system we are simply following reason, truth, and history" (387).

*Love at First Sight*

Tagore had argued for an Indian system of notation on soundly nationalist grounds. Yet the idea of a universal musical notation so legible and transparent that it could overcome linguistic and national differences held a lingering appeal. The prospect of such notation became the consuming passion of A. M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, a Tamil Christian and superintendent of the Madras Secretariat (Raghavan 1961, 1). With a master's in Latin and music from Madras University, and a deep interest in English literature, Chinnaswamy Mudaliar was convinced that European staff notation was the best means of representing and preserving Karnatic music. In 1892 he began a monumental project, the monthly journal *Oriental Music in European Notation*, in which the work of "every composer, living or dead" in South India would be notated in a special adaptation of Euro-

pean staff notation (Chinnaswamy Mudaliar 1892, iv). He and his brother printed the journal with their own press. After finishing the music of ·South India, Chinnaswamy proposed to notate North Indian music; the music of China, Burma, and other parts of the East; and national anthems from around the world. He also planned to publish a comprehensive dictionary of musical terms, a history of Oriental music and musicians, and a comparative sketch of international music. In an essay in the introductory issue, "The Regeneration of Oriental Music in its Classical Form," he wrote that "any amount of foreign admixture and interpolation is introduced . . . so that the magnificent indigenous system invented by the children of the soil is threatened with prospects of speedy annihilation in the immediate future" (viii). The first step to counteract this was the "reduction" of Karnatic music to staff notation while the second was the explanation of the "fundamental principles of the science, not only in the principal Vernaculars but also in the English tongue, which now bids fair to be the one universal language of the world" (viii). The reduction to staff notation involved not only a translation into English but also an insertion of the music into history: "It is absolutely essential to obtain complete historical records regarding the date and authorship of every piece of music" (ix).

A potent politics of visibility ran through Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's arguments. Never short of metaphor, he characterized the purpose of the notation project as "[bringing] forth into the open air that which lay concealed and neglected like the ruins of an ancient city buried in subterranean vaults; it is hoped that the debris will soon be cleared and beautiful structures underneath exposed to the public gaze" (1892, xii). Indeed, the unveiling, or revealing of Karnatic music before the eyes of the world was the dominant metaphor in Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's writing. It is significant that he included about forty-five pages of introductory explanation before getting to the notations themselves, as if he needed to ensure that the notations would be seen in the right way. He hinted at what he meant in a section called "Difficulties to be Surmounted"; just as it was not possible to express every thought in written language or to convey every quality of the speaking voice, it was also impossible to fully capture music in notation. "No notation however complete can fully or accurately delineate those magnificent foreshadowings . . . which fill the imagination of the composer; not a millionth part of what he then feels can be put down mechanically on paper; but when this has been done, the interpretation given of this skeleton by even the most . . . skillful artist necessarily differs from the rough outlines sketched by the author; how widely it must di

verge from his original ideal need hardly be mentioned" (2). He thus conceived of writing, or notating, as a "mechanical" process, opposed to the "feeling," "foreshadowing," and "imagination" of the composer. Yet notation could function as a kind of consolation for the loss of the original, a stylized likeness.

> Nevertheless, as it is considered to be some consolation, in the absence of a person esteemed, to possess his photographic likeness, and as an oleographic portrait taken from a photo is found to be still more acceptable even if it really lacks many a grace and perfection of the living original, so musicians of the land ought to be content with selecting the clearest and most expressive of all existing symbols used in musical language, although those cannot reproduce with absolute precision the extremely subtle ideas of their brains or the deep pathetic emotions of their hearts. (2)

As a kind of consolation for a lost original, notation worked best not according to the logic of the photograph, which claimed to represent what really was, but rather according to the logic of the portrait, a kind of stylistic likeness. The portrait represents by using certain recognizable conventions, by highlighting some things and erasing others; it orders the image a certain way so that it might be recognized, providing a "convincing likeness."[20] Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, similarly, intended his notations to be more prescriptive than descriptive, more like portraits than photography, designed to allow for the future "reproduction" of musical ideas.

The staff notation, Chinnaswamy Mudaliar argued, was better equipped to fulfil this role than Indian notation because it was a "pictorial notation." By taking advantage of the visual medium, he maintained, the staff notation did away with the need for a teacher or reference books; anyone "tolerably conversant" with the principles of staff notation could sing or play "at first sight" what was written. This was because staff notation portrayed the intervals between notes as spatial relations on the staff. By contrast, the Indian method of using the letters that denoted the pitches of the scale (sa, ri, ga, and so on) were written on a straight line, "without any indication to the eye as to whether they ascend or descend in the scale" (1892, 2). Moreover, he continued, in staff notation the pitch of the note and its duration were represented by one and the same symbol, in contrast to the cumbersome method of lengthening syllables to show duration in Indian notation. Finally, Indian notation presupposed a knowledge of the raga; it had no way of showing, for example, whether ri-1 or ri-2 was to

be used without requiring background knowledge of the raga in which the composition was set.[21] All in all, Chinnaswamy Mudaliar stated, "The adaptation of alphabetical characters and numerals for the extremely complicated requirements of music will thus be seen to be a clumsy expedient, as unsatisfactory as it is antiquated. A separate language with suitable symbols is absolutely necessary to ensure the required precision" (3). With staff notation, there would be no necessity to refer to books or teachers; everything would be apparent "at a glance," leaving "no room for doubt, conjecture, or hesitation of any kind. . . . The symbols [would] present readily to the eye every detail which in other methods has to be retained in the memory" (4). "One great advantage," wrote Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, "is that Oriental music will be placed permanently before the *eyes* of the whole world, instead of being addressed in transitory form as at present to the *ears* of a few listeners . . . in other words it will become universal and will no longer remain exclusive" (4). In such a move from ear to eye, he implied, the music was freed from the musicians' memories and allowed to enter the realm of history. Others saw in this newfound visibility a greater potential for originality. One reviewer, commenting favorably on Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's project, wrote that "at present the Hindu has to first hear a tune, and be taught like a parrot before he makes it his own. By the help of the European notation, he will be able to sing hundreds of his national airs without ever having heard them before" (203).

*Ornament and Order*

Chinnaswamy Mudaliar did note that in order for staff notation to be fully effective, certain symbols had to be added to represent gamakas, the "trills, shakes, slurs, and glissandos" that were typical of Karnatic music. As long as these symbols were standardized and not haphazardly assigned by individual printers, the system of staff notation would leave no room for doubt (Chinnaswamy Mudaliar 1892, 8). Yet the process of notating Karnatic music was not entirely straightforward, he admitted. Where the notation ended and the use of ornament symbols began was problematic; a simple turn could be written out or merely indicated by the symbol ~. The notator had to be able to "discriminate the more important and essential parts of a melody from what may seem its superfluous ornamentation," and thus use the notation and symbols accordingly (7). The symbols, as he demonstrated, left quite a bit of room for doubt as to their actual execution. One could choose instead to write everything out, thus expelling

(i) The sign — called a Turn or *Gruppetto* is executed with the note above and a semitone below. The plain and inverted Turns are distinguished by a change in position; but the turn between two notes or on the dotted note is executed in several ways, as shown in the margin though the difference is not very perceptible. In several cases, however, exact notation would express much more clearly the composer's real intentions; e.g., who could possibly divine that the abbreviation used in the subjoined example was really meant to represent the dreadfully complicated execution shown opposite to it.

Abbreviation.   Execution.
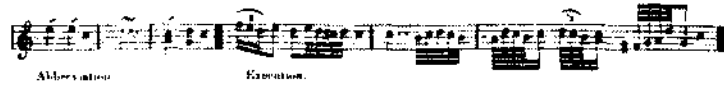
21  Text explaining notation for ornaments. In A. M. C. Mudaliar, *Oriental Music in European Notation* (1893). Courtesy of Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

doubts. But then one ran the risk of obscuring the "essential structure" of the music.

In Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's logic, the relationship between ornament and structure was analogous to that between "spurious" and "original." The goal of his work, he stated, was to "reproduce the compositions of the great masters with all the accuracy and authenticity that can be secured" (1892, 33). However, Karnatic musicians had a tendency to make up variations (sangatis) which the composer had not intended and "tacitly pass them off as genuine" (33). "It becomes therefore a matter of no small difficulty to discriminate between the spurious and the original, and the attention of all educated classes ought to be directed to this point; otherwise there will be nothing which can be recognized as the classical music of the country" (34). Thus, the very idea of classical music depended on the assumption that music had a basic structure as distinct from its ornaments, an original as distinct from later additions. With the help of these distinctions one could also begin to imagine Karnatic music as historical: "What ought to be recognised as genuine originals will be clearly distinguished from additions believed to have been made by later authorities" (34).

The problem of the ornament, which was to appear repeatedly in discussions of notation and musicology, also, for Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, explained the problem of Europeans' distaste for Indian music.[22] Indian music, like Indian architecture, dress, and religion, were distasteful to Europeans at first because they could detect no sense in the profusion of ornaments. "The numerous incisions made on the face of an Indian woman and the saffron paint with which it is commonly daubed are objects of horror to him at first sight, but sooner or later he finds them to be not so despicable after all. . . . The rules enjoining most of the semi-

religious observances of the country are readily stigmatized as superstitious and insensate, but are found on close inspection to be some of the best sanitary and hygienic laws ever framed by human legislation" (Chinnaswamy Mudaliar 1892, 8).

A certain politics of visibility was at work here. For anything to be properly available to the European gaze, especially "at first sight," a certain structure or order had to be discernible beneath the surface. To such a gaze, the surface appeared as a kind of mask of insensible repetitions and embellishments. "It is so with Indian music, which lies under a mask at present. Hitherto it has never been written or explained in a form which the Westerner can read or understand. When a kriti is sung before him, he does not see on what principle or in accordance with what postulates the repetitions occur" (Chinnaswamy Mudaliar 1892, 8). To European ears, such repetitions gave way to a feeling of "monotony," because they could not locate a vantage point or a structure within the music. For the Indian, by contrast, repetition was the source of musical enjoyment: "Every Indian . . . knows when and where to expect repetitions and variations during the recital of a melody. . . . The listener understands why and wherefore the repetitions occur, and is moreover entranced by the meaning attached to the words so often repeated" (9). Notation, Chinnaswamy Mudaliar suggested, would turn Europeans' distaste into pleasure; not only would it do away with unnecessary repetition, but it would also give them the sense of structure they so craved. Moreover, it would give them an idea of what to expect, a first glance that would eliminate the possibility of surprise and monotony from their listening experience. In the process, by juxtaposing a written, "permanent" notation to an oral, "transitory" performance, it would give the impression that the "original" lay in what was written, rather than in the performance.

After a lengthy description of the "peculiarities of Oriental music," the journals published by Chinnaswamy Mudaliar included about 120 pages of notated compositions. For each composition, the first words of the song were given in English letters at the top, with Telugu and Tamil underneath. Underneath that, he indicated the original language of the composition. At the top left, the mode (*melakarta*) of the raga was given, then the raga and tala. The top right indicated the composer's name, as well as advice on how to count, with a tempo derived from the metronome. Beneath was advice on the "style of execution," usually in Italian: *staccato, allegro, dolce, con spirito*, and so on. The first line of notation showed the *arohanam* and *avarohanam* (ascending and descending order) of the raga scale in staff nota-

22 South Indian composition in staff notation, with words in English, Telugu, and Tamil. In A. M. C. Mudaliar, *Oriental Music in European Notation* (1893). Courtesy of Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

tion (transcribed in the key of C for the convenience of keeping the notes within the staff), with the Indian note names written underneath. The composition itself was written in continuous fashion, with each variation marked off by a repeat sign. The lyrics were written beneath the staff, in English, Telugu, and Tamil characters respectively, and were repeated with each variation. In general, Chinnaswamy Mudaliar eschewed symbols for gamakas, instead writing them out note by note.

What kind of order did such a representation produce? First, it made the compositions clearly visible in English; the other languages, placed underneath the English characters, appeared secondary. Meanwhile, although groupings of measures were marked out by repeat signs, the continuous progression of the music across the page, as well as the injunction to count by individual notes (or "quavers"), suggested that the measure, not the tala cycle, was the main unit. The tala, as an organizing principle, was thus effectively made invisible. Whereas a musician using sargam notation would most likely arrange the notation by having one tala cycle per line, or one line of the composition's lyrics per line, the run-on quality of Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's notation gave the impression that the music followed not the structure of the tala or the lyrics but the staff itself. Indeed, whereas a Karnatic musician might end each section of the composition with an improvised flourish—something that would be hard to capture in any form of notation—Chinnaswamy Mudaliar neatly resolved the end of the pallavi to the tonic, C, providing precisely the kind of ending that those accustomed to looking at staff notation would find understandable.

Timothy Mitchell has discussed this idea of a homogenous, empty structure that orders space and time as an essential element of the colonial gaze and the modern production of knowledge. In such a gaze, which he characterizes as "enframing," the appearance of order depends on the illusion of a structure apart from the things themselves, the division of space and time into exact and precisely repeating units that seem to exist independently of what they contain (Mitchell 1988, 85–86). Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's notations, with their profusion of notes placed in the uniform spaces provided by the staff, gave the impression of order, of exactness and completeness. Minimizing the presence of the tala as an organizing principle, he effectively substituted a disembodied unit of time, the repeating measure, with each measure being the same as the one coming before and after it. While one might argue that tala, as a repeating cycle of defined

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units of time, provides just this sort of enframing structure, there is a crucial difference that emerges in performance. While tala might look like an abstracted, empty structure on paper, in practice it is deeply embodied. Musicians "keep tala" using a variety of finger counts and claps whose purpose is ostensibly to make the tala (or where one is in the tala cycle) visible to others; yet the finger counts and claps are also, and more primarily, ways of embodying or feeling where one is in the cycle. Musicians learn to associate the *feel* of a finger count or clap with a particular place in the cycle and thus with a set of musical possibilities that can begin at that point. Far from being an enframing structure apart from its contents, then, tala, when embodied in performance, intimately connects form with content.

Meanwhile, the very idea of "notes," as implied by the staff notation, was considerably different from the Indian term *swara*, which conveys not so much a note as a kind of placeholder that might in actuality include several notes.[23] For instance, when a musician sees the swara *pa*, he does not just sing the fifth note of the scale but a combination of several notes which focus on or approach *pa*, using his knowledge of the raga. In other words, a musician using sargam notation employs it as a clue, to jog the memory or to inspire the singing of a spontaneous variation; the notation is not regarded as a sufficient record in itself. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's notations, by contrast, placed themselves in quite a different relation to the musician's memory. In his vision, the notes arranged on the staff could replace the musician's memory; they would represent the entire composition, leaving, as he often emphasized, "no room for doubt or hesitation."

The liberation of the musician from the limits of his memory, in Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's logic, would produce not only musical but also social progress. In a long footnote to his explanation of the "Peculiarities of Oriental Music," he railed against the secrecy and competition among Indian musicians, and the money-mongering of gurus: "In India it is with the greatest difficulty that a professional musician is ever induced to impart to others the music he had learnt. . . . 'Teach music to none but your son, your guru's son, or to him who gives you wealth incessantly' is the rule observed by most musicians. . . . In India all the knowledge and proficiency acquired by each connoisseur is kept a profound secret" (1892, 29). If notation could effect a liberation from such "gurus," it might also prove a way for respectable women to learn music. In 1884 A. Govinda Charlu wrote in the *Mysore Herald* that with the use of notation "some of our lady pupils may become original composers" (ibid., 209). The staff notation was "per-

fected" compared to the "crude and clumsy" Indian notation; through it, "songs could be mastered from the mere books." In this way, respectable housewives could learn music without having to learn from their social inferiors. Meanwhile, they could keep their husbands happy and occupied: notation was the "solution [to] the much talked of Anti-Nautch Girl question" (209).

Although Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's project folded after several years due to lack of financial support, his ideas about staff notation were echoed by others in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among these was H. P. Krishna Rao, who published his ideas about notation in 1906 in *First Steps in Hindu Music in English Notation*.[24] "Hindu music is very ancient, scientific, and interesting," he wrote in his preface. "But the sad want of a method for committing musical ideas to writing has left the fine art stagnant and unfamiliar. The seven notes, *Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha,* and *Ni,* do not, as now written, represent the pitch or time accurately, and thousands of compositions of great authors are therefore either being lost or mutilated. To serve as a means for making permanent records of musical compositions, and to enable students to learn them in the absence of a teacher, this little book has been written" (1906, 3). Krishna Rao began by showing how the notes of the Indian scale were to be placed on the staff. The transposition was metaphorical as well as literal. Once transposed onto the staff, a raga appeared as "a melodious combination of particular notes" (9), rather than a set of phrases or motifs employing certain gamakas. Moreover, staff notation introduced elements that were never conceptualized in Karnatic music, such as rests and dynamics. This is not to say that such things did not exist in Karnatic music but that they were not considered a specifiable element of music to be written out and consciously learned.

Krishna Rao's book demonstrated the way the transposition to staff notation thus radically reconfigured Karnatic music, even as he insisted on total translatability from one musical system to the other, and, in the process, to the English language. Even as Krishna Rao argued for the transparency of the notation such that "a knowledge merely of the English alphabet is enough to enable a student to understand the work," his method showed how staff notation and its foreign symbols propelled a translation of Karnatic musical terms into English (1906, 3). For instance, *tala* was translated as "time," *avarta* as "measure," and the particular tala of a composition was equated with the "time signature" in staff notation. *Gamaka* was translated as "grace," and the individual names for different kinds of gamakas were given English names like "slur," "merge," "shake," "trill," and

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ABBREVIATIONS AND EMBELLISHMENTS.

A composition is sung in a *Raga* (Chapter III.), regulated by *Thala* (Chapter V.), and embellished by the following *Gamakas*, or graces:—

**Jaru, or the Slur.** 30. The curved line ⌢, called a slur, placed over two or more notes, shows that they are to be played in a connected style. The first note alone is struck, and the others are lightly sustained for their full value. When only two notes are connected by a slur, the intervening notes, if any, are gently slid over. When a slur connects two or more notes of the same name, the first is sustained during the value of all the notes.

**Linum.** 31. When a note merges slowly and gradually into another higher note, the symbol ⌒ called *Linum* is used.

**Kampitam.** 32. The symbol ⌐, called *Kampitam* (shake), placed over a note, shows that the note and the note above it in the *sthayi* are to be alternately repeated in quick succession.

| Written. | Played. | Pronounced. |
|---|---|---|
| N | N S N S N S N S | *Ni-i-i-i-i-i-t.* |

**The Symbol** 33. The symbol — placed over a note shows that the note and the note above it in the *Raga* are to be alternately and equally repeated each twice in the time-value of the written note, thus—

| Written. | Played. | Pronounced. |
|---|---|---|
| P | P D P D | *Pa-a-a-a.* |

**Anuswara, or the Grace-Note.** 34. In order to produce a sweet effect two notes are sometimes blended together; one of the notes is the principal note and the other the grace-note. The grace-note is written smaller. It retains its pitch, but borrows its duration from the principal note. A grace-note preceding a principal note assumes the name of the latter in singing, and gives it only an additional vowel sound; but when it succeeds it, the order of pronunciation is reversed and the grace-note is sung as a vowel,—

| | P N D | | D P N P D N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Written | | Played | |

the pronunciation in singing being as *Pa-a, Ni-i,* and *Dha-a.*

**Humpitam.** 35. When a line is drawn through the stem of a grace-note, it is played *with the utmost rapidity*, and the principal note hardly loses any time. The small note shows the point from which the principal note darts.

**Emphasis.** 36. When a note is preceded by a grace-note immediately above it in the *sthayi*, and of the nature described in paragraph 35, the note is emphasized as M and D in *Sankarabharana* in the ascent.

**23** "Abbreviations and Embellishments." In H. P. Krishna Rao, *First Steps in Hindu Music* (1906). Courtesy of Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
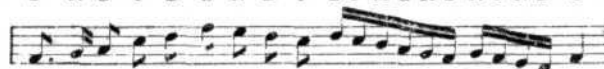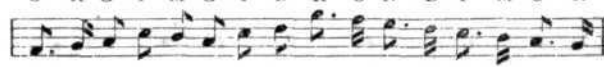
(iii.)   *Raga = Bilahari,* ♮R, xG, ♮D, xN. *Thala = Audhi,* $\frac{1.5.7}{8}$

S  R G  P  D  S  N D  P  DPMGRS RSND  S

S  R G  P  M G  P  D  R  S  N  D  P  M  G  R
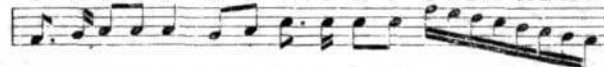
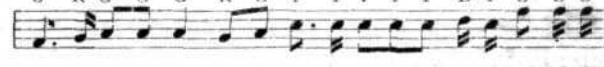GPDRSSS  GGG  RRR PPP MGGRSS RSND 1.

S  R G G  G  R G P  P P P  P  MGRS

S  R G G  G  R G P  P P P  SNDPMGRS
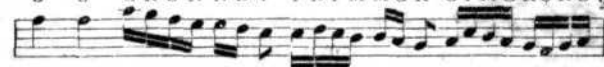
S  R G G  G  R G P  P P GRSNDPMGRS

S  R G G  G  R G P  P P P P  DP S  SS

S  S  GRSNNDP  PDPMMGR GPMGRSRG 2.

PPP RRR GPMGG  GPMGMGRS RGRS S
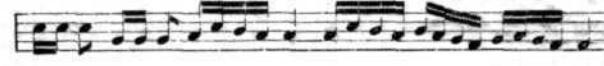
**24** Composition in raga bilahari in sargam and staff notation. In H. P. Krishna Rao, *First Steps in Hindu Music* (1906). Courtesy of Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

"grace-note." The effect of such translation was that the Karnatic musical terms seemed to fit seamlessly into the syntax of an English sentence about music: "A composition is sung in a *Raga*, regulated by *Tala*, and embellished by *Gamakas*, or graces" (38). Such a statement not only assumes a one-to-one correspondence with the English terms *scale, time signature*, and *graces* but also fits these three elements—raga, tala, and gamakas—into a hierarchy of importance. For Krishna Rao, the excesses produced by the process of transposition, it seemed, could be effectively tamed by translation.

### A Picture for the Ear

If in 1874 the argument had been over the question of whether Indian music could be notated at all, by 1916 the need for notation was taken completely for granted. The debate now centered around the question of which notation, the staff or the Indian, was best suited to representing Karnatic music. Yet this idea of representation had taken on a different cast. No longer did it refer only to the representation of sounds by written symbols; it now also implied a representation of Indianness. In statements made at the first All-India Music Conference in 1916 at Baroda and after, it was argued that notation was related to music as written language was to spoken language.

Ten years after he had eloquently illustrated the benefits of European staff notation, H. P. Krishna Rao appeared at the Baroda conference with an entirely different message. In a short section of his lecture, entitled "Notation and Music," he declared that the Indian sargam notation was superior to staff notation. "Every kind of language must have its own notation" (1917, 27). His view of language was quite expansive; it covered "word-language," "sign-language," and "sound-language." If the alphabet was the notation for word-language and painting the notation for sign-language, musical notation was the notation for sound-language (27). Indian sargam notation was much more suited to the task of representing Indian music, he argued, since Indian notation allowed the musician to see the note name and its pitch simultaneously, which gave it an advantage over staff notation. It kept notation in the domain of language, instead of necessitating a detour through visual symbols; an Indian musician's response to sargam notation was, he maintained, as simple and automatic as a "reflex." "Musical instruction begins with singing the notes Sa, Ri, Ga,

Ma, etc. By constant practice a reflex action is established in the brain, by which the mere remembrance of the letter Sa or Ri takes the voice at once to its proper pitch, and an Indian singer displays, therefore, a wonderful capacity for singing songs by means of the names of the notes only . . . and not the dumb syllables 'La, la, la,' as done in the West" (28). The note names, Krishna Rao argued, were motivated by years of practice, until they literally spoke for themselves, whereas staff notation remained "dumb." He illustrated his point with an explication of the "psychic processes that take place when we see a note Sa, Ri, or Ga written on paper. The image of the letter is conveyed to the brain through the optic nerve; by simple association its name is ascertained, and the impression is transferred to the nerve controlling the vocal chords, and then the correct pitch of the note is sung" (28). The psychic processes involved in reading staff notation were far more convoluted: "(1) The image of the note is conveyed to the brain, (2) an enquiry is set up as to the name of the note with reference to the clef and the key signature, (3) association of the name, (4) reflex action of the remembrance of the name of the note and its pitch" (28). Reading staff notation thus involved "an extra psychic feat," because it made the note names invisible. It was like translating from a foreign language; an additional step was required to make the staff notation speak. Not only that, but staff notation constantly, by mere displacement of a note, threatened to become illegible, since "the same symbol represents seven different notes." Krishna Rao's lecture took on the tone of a colonial official disgruntled by the evasiveness of the natives. "The crotchet is the chameleon on the hedge. It changes its colour, form, and its name. The staff notation is therefore seven times as difficult as the Indian notation" (28). The sargam notation, by contrast, was so legible that the viewer hardly had an impression of reading at all; it was as if the notes spoke to him from the page. "The native notation," Krishna Rao concluded, "is a picture for the ear; while the staff notation is for the eye" (29).[25]

The idea that Indian notation spoke for itself contrasted with the idea that staff notation was a transparent, universal medium, capable of representing any music. M. S. Ramaswamy Aiyar, a musicologist and superintendent of police in Madras, published an impassioned argument for Indian notation as an appendix to his biography of Thyagaraja, in which he condemned the "staff mania" of people like A. M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar (1927, 185). He began his argument with the same question Chinnaswamy had raised: "Can we, who see unmistakable signs of progress in all

other directions, suffer ourselves to be blindfolded in the matter of preserving music for the ages?" (182). Yet for Ramaswamy Aiyar, the danger of losing the music was equaled by the danger of becoming too Westernized. According to him, the way to "resuscitate our fallen music" was to use sargam notation. There was, he wrote, a direct fit between Indian music and Indian notation, much like the relationship between a language and its alphabet (179). To illustrate his point, he refuted the argument made in 1921 by "an educated Indian lady with University honors." In making a case for staff notation, she had written, "With staff notation, our music will be studied and appreciated by the Americans, the English, etc; and there is the chance of Indian music becoming universal and popular and still Indian. If we wish to be recognised as a nation, we must make others see the greatness and the superiority of all that we possess. How did our great religion find its way to the United States of America? It was through the common medium—English" (189). Such a logic, Ramaswamy Aiyar maintained, was akin to asking that Indians forget their own languages and only speak in English. "True," he wrote, "Swami Vivekananda employed English in the United States of America to assert the superiority of Indian religion. But did he ever ask the Indians to forget their own vernaculars in favour of English?" (191–92). Adopting staff notation for Indian music had already been attempted by A. M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, Ramaswamy Aiyar remarked, but it had not been very popular. "For aught I know, the Europeans discarded it because there was Indian music in it, and the Indians equally discarded it, because there was the staff in it" (192). The point was that "different races possess different auditory faculties and hence different systems of music came rightly into existence" (192). Notation may have been only the outward sign of this difference, but it had the capacity, like the words of a mother tongue, to travel inward through the ear, to activate the voice. Ramaswamy Aiyar brought his point home by locating the notation question within the metaphor that dominated the language politics of Madras at the time: "Inasmuch as the mother's milk of the Indian notation is plentiful for the Indians, why should a foreign doctor hoarsely cry and unduly praise to the skies the unnecessary Mellin's food of the staff notation?" (193).[26]

For Ramaswamy Aiyar, the effectiveness of Indian sargam notation lay in the fact that, whereas staff notation was a "visual" method, sargam notation was "visuo-aural," appealing not only to the eyes but also to the ears (1927, 186). Sargam notation had the power to effect a peculiar simultaneity of sight and sound: "If, with a [raga] given, an Indian note *Ga* is written on a piece of paper, the ear—as soon as the eye is directed to the note—rings within itself the sound peculiar to *Ga*. But if a European crochet is written, you cannot at once give it its proper sound. . . . Some more ceremony has to be performed on it" (196). Such statements about the conversion of written notation into sound reveal a supreme confidence in the power of notation and the necessity for it. Notation was not only deemed superior to memory; it was now also absolutely necessary in order to be able to hear and understand music. Ramaswamy Aiyar illustrated the superiority of sargam notation with a story from real life.

> "But you have no such thing as Sargam or any Indian notation at all," may retort the puffed advocates of the staff. So indeed was Mr R (a Hindu musician) taunted some ten years back at Baroda by Mr F (a Portugese musician); and their further conversation which actually took place may be of some interest to the reader.
>
> Mr R: Is not the object of notation to preserve a song, and if need be, to reproduce it?
>
> Mr F: I should think so.
>
> Mr R: Suppose I preserve your song by recording it in my notebook and reproduce it whenever required; will you then grant that we do have our own notation?
>
> Mr F: Surely.
>
> Forthwith Mr F sang a snatch and Mr R reduced it to his sargam notation and even reproduced it. But Mr F would not be satisfied and thought that Mr R wrote in his notebook some nonsense but correctly reproduced the song by the strength of his memory. They therefore parted for the day but met again the next morning. At once Mr F took Mr R to a lonely place and challenged him to reproduce, if he could, the song sung the day before. To Mr F's utter disappointment, Mr R reproduced the song admirably enough. The table was now turned. Mr R challenged Mr F thus:
>
> "Now, sir, I have reproduced your song and thus proved that we do have our own Indian notation. I shall sing for you a Hindu air and let me see how and when you will reproduce it."
>
> So saying, Mr R sang a well-known kriti of Tyagaraja's in Bhairavi. Mr F trembled before it, just as Arjuna did before Lord Krishna's Viswaroopa, and confessed:
>
> "O! It is all Greek to me. I cannot in the first place conceive your song, much less can I reduce it to my notation." (203–4)

If notation had emerged, by the 1920s, as necessary for the proper understanding of music, it was based on the idea that memory alone was no longer equal to the task of perpetuating a classical tradition. One thing that advocates of the staff notation as well as the sargam notation could agree on (even the likes of Mr F and Mr R) was that it was not memory but the ability to write and read notation, and to traffic easily between the oral and the written, that made the musician. This conviction explains the efflorescence of music books, song collections and manuals, that began to appear at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1895, his eyesight suffering from years of notating and casting the type for his *Oriental Music in European Notation*, A. M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar began a correspondence with Subbarama Dikshitar, the grand-nephew of the composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar. Subbarama Dikshitar was then serving as the asthana vidwan (court musician) at the court of Ettayapuram, a small princely state south of Madurai known for its patronage of the arts. Between 1895 and 1899, Subbarama Dikshitar made several long trips to Madras to stay with Chinnaswamy, teaching him the compositions of Muthuswamy Dikshitar and confirming the correctness of Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's staff notation (Raghavan 1961, vii). In 1899, however, literally blinded by his love of staff notation, Chinnaswamy Mudaliar found himself unable to carry out the printing and publication of these works. He therefore made a trip to Ettayapuram and appeared before the maharaja himself to convince him that the samasthanam should take up the task of publishing, if only in the old Telugu notation, Subbarama Dikshitar's entire repertoire. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar had appealed to Subbarama to put down in writing and notation everything that he knew, "without hiding anything" (ibid.). In the English preface to the original version of the monumental work that resulted, published in 1904, C. Nagojee Rau wrote that Subbarama, "though unwilling at first to part with what he naturally regarded as a precious heirloom to be jealously guarded and retained within his family, yielded in the end to the wishes of his master and patron, the Rajah. . . . The stores of music literature in his possession would, in the course of nature, have been lost to the world in a few years if this work had not been published now" (ibid, viii). Indeed, the publishing of the notation seemed to perform precisely the effect of wresting it from the hands of death: Chinnaswamy Mudaliar passed away in 1901, as the

printing was getting started, and Subbarama passed away in 1906, a mere two years after the *Sangīta Sampradāya Pradārṣini* was published (ibid).

The *Sangīta Sampradāya Pradārṣini*, in its original Telugu version, published in 1904, came to a staggering 1,700 pages. Its compass was decidedly encyclopedic: not only did it contain notations of 229 Muthuswamy Dikshitar kritis, as well as works of other composers, but it also contained biographies of musicians and authors of musicological treatises, an exhaustive tabular list of ragas with their characteristics described, a descriptive guide to the gamaka-signs and tala-signs employed in the notation, and notes on the problem spots in the rendering of the works vocally and instrumentally (Raghavan 1961, viii). The work exuded systematization; indeed, it was later taken as a model by V. N. Bhatkhande in his calls for a systematization of Hindustani music (ibid, ix). The notations were arranged by the seventy-two melakartas, a system of classifying ragas based on the notes they used. Eleven different symbols were used to convey different types of gamakas, as well as symbols for sharp, natural, and flat signs to convey pitch and lines above the notes to convey tempo.

The simultaneous emergence of notation and printing technology at the end of the nineteenth century led to another genre: the music manual or self-instruction book. If notation was beginning to be seen as a form of writing which could replace the musician's memory, it was also seen as being able to replace the guru, or teacher. At the same time as debates about notation were emerging, the Taccur Singaracaryulu brothers, well known in the music world of Madras as teachers, published a series of graded textbooks on Karnatic music in Telugu. The first of these books, *Gāyakaparijatam*, appeared in 1882. In the English preface to a later book of the series, Swami Vidyananda Paramahamsa recalled how the Taccur brothers had recreated the musical world of Tanjavur in Madras by hosting Sunday concerts at their house in George Town, which served as a gathering place for musicians from Madras and elsewhere (Singaracaryulu 1912, 26–27). He claimed that the publication of the *Gāyakaparijatam* began a "musical revolution," unlike music books published before it, which were "miscellaneous compendia" of songs. In these previous books, "the teacher was absent"; there was nothing but "a veneer of abstract notes . . . for the songs" (ibid., 8). The innovation of the Taccur brothers was to provide notation not only for gitams and varnams, but also for kritis; for "[previously] the notes to be applied to these pieces were merely sealed property. . . . The rule was always to hear and learn" (ibid., 17). Of the *Gāyaka*

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XXVIII.

A TĀNA VARNA IN HONOUR OF
His Highness

Raja Jaga Vira Rama Venkatesvara Ettappa

Pandiya,
*Rajah of Ettayapuram.*

**25** Typical page of notation from Subbarama Dikshitar's *Sangīta Sampradāya Pradārṣini* (1904). Sargam notation is in Telugu script, employing symbols for gamakas and sharp, flat, and natural notes, with words in Telugu under each line of notation.

*Siddhanjanam,* the fifth book of the series, Swami Paramahamsa wrote that "it really was the unguent for clearing the eyes of the world of music; the kirtanas which were mere words now became invested with their respective accompanying notes" (ibid., 18). The Taccur Singaracaryulu brothers carried out their work despite the outrage of professional musicians, who apparently felt that their secrets were being betrayed and that they would lose earnings from having the knowledge so cheaply available through books. But their objections were "altogether silenced by the uproar of the lay public and the relief and joy especially of the self-instructors of music" (ibid., 18). The triumph of these books was that they placed musical progress in the hands of the student; "any person," Paramahamsa wrote, "can become a musician by dint of self-help and perseverance" (ibid., 20). After a beginning course with a music teacher, he maintained, "the use of the *Siddhanjanam* is enough for making a musician, and a finishing touch can be acquired by a few months' apprenticeship under some renowned master" (ibid., 18).

How did the Taccur brothers endow their music books with so much teacherly authority? First, they claimed a direct connection to Thyagaraja through the Tanjore court; indeed, the elder (*pedda*) Singaracaryulu was a younger contemporary of Thyagaraja. Second, the idea of a graded series of books implied that there was a logic or progression to them, a process of learning that should be the standard for every musician. Rather than confronting the reader with a miscellaneous collection of songs, the books dispensed musical knowledge according to degrees of difficulty.[27] The introductory book, *Svaramanjari,* began with an explanation of the notes of the scale and a table of talas in Karnatic music. It then introduced the sarali varisai, the most elementary exercises, and a number of gitams, short, easy compositions meant to show the fundamental aspects of raga, tala, and sahityam (lyrics). The second book, *Gāyakaparijatam,* provided twenty more gitas of a more difficult variety, as well as twenty-seven varnams (a genre akin to an etude which explores the possibilities of a raga). After the varnams were about eighty notated compositions by various composers. The third book, *Sangīta Kalānidhi,* included the method of classifying the ragas by the 72-melakarta scheme, a classification and description of different kinds of gamakas, and the aspects of tala. A separate section dealt with the theory of rasa and the essentials of abhinaya (facial expression) and gestures used in the "nautch dance." The last part contained 143 notated kritis as well as other varieties of composition, such

as padams, *thillanas*, and javalis. The *Gāyakalōchana*, the fourth book, began with a discussion of the origins of music (in the Vedas). It then provided an exhaustive survey of ragas, including the suitable hours for each one, concluding with an alphabetical list. An exhaustive treatment of tala, showing the permutations that led to hundreds of different talas, was followed by more than 200 notated compositions of all varieties. The fifth book, *Gāyaka Siddhanjanam*, contained notation for another 210 compositions, as well as for about fifteen Hindustani compositions. A long chapter discussed the method for developing alapana in sixty of the most popular ragas of the day. The final book, *Ganendu Sēkaram*, contained lakshana gitams for all seventy-two of the melakarta ragas and derived ragas, followed by *tanams* (improvised patterns of notes sung in semi-free rhythm sometimes following the alapana). In addition to more notated kritis, as well as notations for English notes, there was a list of the pallavis sung by masters in the past.

The Singaracaryulu brothers' books did what no other book since the ancient treatises on music had done: they provided, in written form, a discussion of a body of music theory and showed how the theory related to the practical art of music. Yet unlike the treatises, which were in Sanskrit, these books were in the vernacular; unlike the treatises, which were available only in palm-leaf manuscripts, these books were printed in mass quantities and sold for a nominal fee. Moreover, the books provided notation for many more compositions than a single musician could ever know or sing in a lifetime. The profusion of notation in the closely printed pages of the books gave the reader nearly a thousand compositions from which to choose. The possibility of possessing so many compositions in notation, compositions which one might never have even heard before, must have been quite revolutionary in a world where (as I was told by several older musicians) a musician might have previously had a repertoire of only twenty songs which he would sing over and over again. A hint of this change in attitude toward repertoire appears in a review of A. M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's project in 1894, in which the author suggested that "twice or thrice" the number of kritis should have been included: "Old 'Kritees' are sung over and over again to a tiresome extent, and the absence of novelty takes away from the very charm of music. Thyagayya's store alone is so vast, that to those who wish there is an inexhaustible Ambrosia that may be drawn out of it" (Chinnaswamy Mudaliar 1892, 208).[28] With the monumental notating projects of Subbarama Dikshitar and the Singaracaryulu brothers, the concept of musical repertoire was completely changed; it now referred to a vast store of musical compositions, each of which claimed its status as a "composition" precisely by being notated.

## Total Translatability

The Singaracaryulu brothers' books provoked a flurry of publications on music in Tamil in the early twentieth century. The earliest of these was D. Narayanaswamy Mudaliar's *Tamil Sungeatha Surabooshany*, "for those who are learning music." Published in 1900, it contained the usual beginning exercises, sarali varisai and alankarams, as well as notations for gitams and varnams, a list of the melakarta ragas, and an explanation of tala. The notation, highly condensed, is divided by note groupings rather than divisions of the tala, while the layout of the book (its small size, the fact that pages must be turned in the middle of compositions) suggests that it is meant less for the eye and more as a reference book. On a much grander scale was T. C. R. Johannes's *Bhārata Sangīta Svāya Bōdhini* (Indian music self-instructor), published in 1912. It included chapters on every aspect of music, from the theory of rasas and the 72-melakarta scheme to an explanation of the metronome and the intricacies of konnakkol, as well as notation for numerous compositions (including English notes). As its title and the layout of the notation indicate, the book is meant to be self-sufficient, capable of teaching, instead of serving as a mere reference. Each notated composition includes the murchana, or characteristic ascending and descending pattern of the raga, the sahityam, written above, and uses lines to indicate tempo and dots to separate the music into phrases. The beginning exercises, like the sarali varisai and janta varisai, were furnished with Tamil sahityam so that the learner could, in effect, know how the music was supposed to sound merely by seeing it on the page. That is, the learner could associate the sound and rhythm of a language he already knew with music in order to make that music less foreign.

Around the same time, the Tamil doctor and musicologist Abraham Pandithar was busily composing and notating hundreds of Tamil gitams and kritis for the benefit of Tamil children who, he felt, needed music in their mother tongue. These were eventually published in 1934, at Abraham Pandithar's own printing press in Tanjore, in the form of a primer entitled *A Practical Course in South Indian Music*. The book did away with complicated descriptions of ragas and systems of classification. The page design was clearly intended to appeal to the eye, presenting the notation neatly divided into the quantities specified by the tala, with the whole

**26** A sample notated composition in raga kedaram from T. C. R. Johannes's, *Bharatha Sangīta Svāya Bōdhini* (1912). Words are in Tamil with sargam notation in Tamil script below.

thing enclosed in a tastefully bordered box. The didactic quality of the book lay in its carefully ordered presentation: for each composition, first the swaras only were given, then the same swaras and their corresponding sahityam, and then the sahityam only. The copyright emblem on the title page showed two men sitting on a river bank in the manner of guru and disciple, suggesting that the authority of the book's notation was guaranteed by the authenticity of oral transmission. Ironically, however, Pandithar was a self-taught musician who used the medium of notation not to record music that already existed but to invent and popularize his own compositions. In effect, it was only through notation, not through an oral tradition, that his compositions came into being.

While music manuals in Telugu and Tamil eschewed staff notation, those written in English in the 1930s included both sargam and staff notation, as if to appeal to a wider audience. However, the purpose of including both types of notation was no longer to debate the merits of one or the other, as it had been earlier. The implication now seemed to be that staff and sargam were equally valid ways of viewing the music and that the music remained the same no matter how one chose to picture it. Here, one can note a crucial shift: notation, instead of being regarded as central to the way music was conceptualized, was demoted to the status of a "mere" representation, incidental to the content that it represented. Nota-



**27** A sample notated composition in raga senjurutti from Abraham Pandithar's *A Practical Course in South Indian Music* (1934). The upper half of the page includes just the sargam notation in Tamil script for the three sections of the composition. The lower half of the page repeats the sargam notation with the lyrics in Tamil below each line of notation.
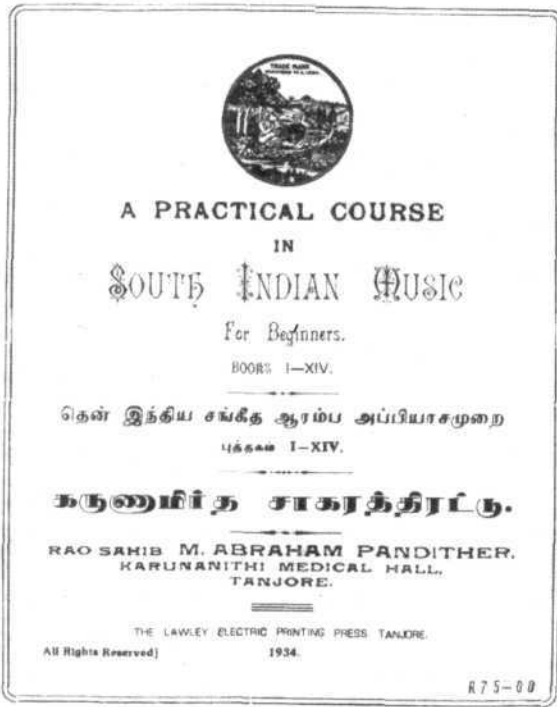
28 Title page of Abraham Pandithar's *A Practical Course in South Indian Music* (1934).



**29** Sample of notation from C. Ganghadar's *Theory and Practice of Hindu Music* (ca. 1935). Sargam notation is provided in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada, and English (below the staff notation).

tions were regarded as interchangeable because they merely represented a prior, authoritative voice.

C. Ganghadar's *Theory and Practice of Hindu Music and the Vina Tutor* (ca. 1935) illustrates this new role for notation. Ganghadar provided descriptions of the different types of gamakas, as well as the usual beginning exercises, in sargam notation in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada, with staff notation underneath. The process of getting used to seeing music written in different forms was part of the education provided by the manual. As if to bring home the staff notation, a version in English sargam syllables was provided underneath. The progression from what was presumably one's native language, through other languages, to staff notation, and finally to the syllables transliterated into English gave the impression of total translatability, the idea that one could move from language to language, even from one musical system to another, without losing anything.

This fantasy of total translatability was what motivated P. Sambamoorthy in his writings on Karnatic music. Prolific in his works, which ranged from a five-volume history of Karnatic music to a multivolume

practical course in music for schools, Sambamoorthy was on the cutting edge of the new field of music education. In 1961, during his tenure as head of the Department of Indian Music at Madras University, Sambamoorthy published a small book entitled *Elements of Western Music for Students of Indian Music*. A knowledge of Western classical music and staff notation was required for students in the Indian Music department and the purpose of the book was to provide them with this knowledge. In his explanation of the symbols used in staff notation, he took care to translate each one into an Indian equivalent, interspersing the text with the visual symbols of staff notation. The effect was that Karnatic music and Western classical music appeared as two discrete yet equivalent systems, each capable of translating the other. Only in a small paragraph did Sambamoorthy mention the problem of representing gamakas in staff notation, but he concluded that

DURATION OF THE NOTES.

The crotchet ♩ might be taken to be equivalen

to one aksharakāla, the minim 𝅗𝅥 to two aksharakālas

and the semi-breve 𝅝 to four aksharakālas. The

duration of a quaver (a crotchet with a tail on its stem)

is half aksharakāla ♪ and that of a semi-quaver

(a crotchet with two tails on the stem) one-fourth akshara-
kāla and so on.

A dot placed next a note increases its duration by half

its value; for example ♩. = 3 aksharakālas

and ♩. = 1½ aksharakālas.

The total duration of ♩♪. is 2 aksharakālas

A tie or bind is used to unite into a continuous sound.
notes of same or varying values.

30 A sample page from P. Sambamoorthy's *Elements of Western Music for Students of Indian Music* (1961).

1. "VARA VĪNĀ"
Mohana Rāga – Rūpaka Tāla

GITA

Va - ra vī - ṇā   mṛu - du pā   ṇi   va - ṇa   ru - ha - lo   cha   su   rā___   ṇi

su   ra   chi   ra   bam   ba   ra   vē   ṇi   su   ra   ṇa   'ta   kal   yā_____   ṇi

ṇi   ru   pa   ma   su   bha   ga   ṇa   lo   lā   ṇi   ra   ta   ja   yā   pra - da   ṇi   lā

va   ra   dā___   pri - ya   Raṇ-ga   nā___   ya   ki   vā   ṇ   chi   ta   pa   la   dā_____   ya   ki

ṇa   ra   ṇi   jā   ṇa   ṇa - ja   ṇa   ṇi   ja   ya   ja   ya   ja   ya   va - ṇa   vī - ṇā
Indian Melodies

31 A sample notated composition from P. Sambamoorthy's *Elements of Western Music for Students of Indian Music* (1961).

they could, with the use of additional symbols, be "rendered faithfully and according to tradition" (1961, 8). The last half of the book consisted of Karnatic compositions in staff notation, compositions that every student would know, but stripped of gamakas entirely. The idea seemed to be that the student would see that the staff notation made sense by being able to hear the song in her head while she saw it on paper.

The idea of total translatability, for Sambamoorthy, thus did not stop with the easy transposition from one notation system to the other. It also characterized his notion of the relationship between the oral/aural and the written. In his *A Practical Course in Karnatic Music for Schools* (ca. 1960) and in a manual written for music teachers in 1966, Sambamoorthy laid great emphasis not just on notation but on making the boundary between the oral/aural and the written disappear. He prescribed numerous exercises to this effect, such as sight-singing and musical dictation. Students should write down phrases and then sing them in a raga, "provided the phrases so sung form a *hearable* passage" (1966, 63). "Musical dictation," he explained to future teachers, "helps the students to acquire a keen sense of hearing" (ibid., 64). Meanwhile, learning to write music with facility would "greatly help the student in the art of musical composition later in life" (ibid.). After students had become proficient enough at converting

heard music into notation and vice versa, there were sample exam questions aimed at a more virtuosic level: a notated composition, without information about the raga, was provided, and the student, merely by studying the notation, had to indicate what the raga of the composition was (Sambamoorthy n.d.a, vol. 3, 207). For Sambamoorthy and his students, the skill in reading notation was the ability to take something written and convert it into a piece of music believable to the ear, to make it conform to a voice that one had already heard before.

Sambamoorthy's ideal of easy translation between the oral/aural and the written was precisely that: an ideal. In prescribing so much practice for it, he effectively acknowledged that, contrary to the simple straightforwardness of his directions, going from the oral/aural to the written and back again was not a simple, mechanical process but a complex maneuver. What his exercises suggest is that one does not simply progress toward greater accuracy but rather practices the skill of convincing oneself of the equivalence between the oral/aural and the written. That this requires a suspension of disbelief not necessarily shared by musicians from older generations is demonstrated by my own experience of learning compositions. In long afternoons with my teacher, much of the time I spent "learning" a new composition was actually devoted to creating a notation for that composition. As she sang, I would scribble a first impression in sargam notation and then sing my version back to her, revising my written interpretation until we arrived at a notation that both of us agreed on. Yet the agreement was always only a temporary truce; I would come back the next day to find her singing the composition in a way that contradicted the notation we had agreed on the previous day. When I pointed out the inconsistencies, she would often become irritated, remarking that the same notation "said" her version as well as mine. Our disagreement about what constituted acceptable variation in the interpretation of written notation marked a contrast between two ways of viewing notation. While I was attempting to create a notation that would act as an authoritative text (an idea ingrained in me by years of training in Western classical music), she used the notation as more of a trigger for memory. Like a palm-leaf manuscript, notation in this second sense is not meant to be sight-read but studied and then interpreted. This way of using notation acknowledges the impossibility of total interchangeability between the oral/aural and the written; it considers the gap between oral/aural and written as productive rather than problematic. In admitting that notation is not perfectly legible, it acknowledges its profoundly mediating role.

## The Order of Things

Yes, I think our music will, in the very near future, become something quite universal and embrace everything . . . , the system becoming as elastic and world-wide as the British Empire itself.
—A. M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, "Saraswatia Redux" (1893)

As notation gained prominence in the twentieth century, the project of determining a basic structure that would serve as the "theory" for Karnatic music became important.[29] For if notation literally raised the problem of determining the "basic structure" of a piece as opposed to the "embellishments," it also raised the problem of finding structure in the profusion of ragas and talas now available in written form. Thus, at the same time as music manuals with notation appeared, there also appeared books on the structure and classification of ragas, as well as raga dictionaries: books that would enable a student not only to sing a raga but also to find its place in the order of things. Notably, this order did not consist of aural memories, typical phrases, or associations with a particular raga, but rather in a hypothetical table that made the scalar structure of ragas visible.

At the heart of this project of classification was the 72-melakarta raga scheme, originally devised in 1660 by Venkatamakhi, a Telugu Brahmin in the court of Vijayaraghava Nayaka (r. 1633–1673) at the king's behest.[30] Although a translation of the original work was not published until the twentieth century, almost every book of Karnatic music notation, including Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's work, the books of the Singaracaryulu brothers, and the *Sangīta Sampradāya Pradārṣini*, mentioned the scheme at great length. In his introduction to a small book on the subject, Sambamoorthy called the 72-melakarta scheme a "modern classification of ragas" that, "based on the genus-species system . . . is the best system of raga-classification that human genius can conceive of" (1961, iii). In the system, ragas were classified on the basis of only the notes or scale that they used. By means of different combinations of the twelve pitches in the Western chromatic scale, 72 *melas*—"parent scales" or "root-ragas"—were specified. The first and second of these seventy-two melas were differentiated only by one note, the second and third by one note, and so on, keeping *sa, ma,* and *pa* (the first, fourth, and fifth degrees of the scale) constant, until all the possibilities of combining the notes were exhausted. After the first thirty-six melas were arrived at in this manner, the *ma* was raised and the second thirty-six melas were produced.[31] The exhaustiveness of the table

of ragas thus produced, and its patterned regularity, were signs of its scientific validity.

The idea of a system or table that could capture the possibilities of music for all time seems to have thrilled Venkatamakhi as well as his twentieth-century counterpart. "So great was Venkatamakhi's joy when he formulated the scheme," Sambamoorthy wrote, "that he declared in his immortal work that even Lord Parmasiva could not devise a scheme containing one more or one less than the 72 melakartas" (1961, 10). Most of these melakarta ragas remained in the realm of pure theory; only nineteen of them did Venkatamakhi find to be in use (10–11). The point, however, was that any raga, past or future, could now find a place in this universal table of scales. "The great use of the scheme," wrote Sambamoorthy, "consists in the fact that once the number of a melakarta raga is known, its lakshana (i.e., the characteristics of its swaras) can be told at the next second" (13). He demonstrated how the system worked: by locating a raga within its chakra (group of six ragas) and then locating its chakra within the symmetrical spatial organization of the table (13–14).[32] The 72-melakarta scheme, according to Sambamoorthy, was what made Karnatic music adhere as a modern system. "Viewed in the light of mere permutations and combinations, the scheme might appear at first sight as an artificial and dry process. But . . . every musical sound and interval has its exact number of vibrations and ratios. The melakarta scheme is highly comprehensive and systematic, and includes within its fold all the modes used in ancient as well as modern systems of music of the world. . . . It is a complete and exhaustive scheme evolved by simple and natural combinations" (17).[33]

The 72-melakarta scheme represented a kind of natural history of music, that is, a principle of order that encompassed history by acting as the be-all and end-all of musical possibility. To musicologists in twentieth-century South India, the idea of such an order was appealing precisely because it kept change and its more political counterpart, history, in check. Meanwhile, it gestured toward the kind of universality that classical music needed, by showing how scales or modes similar to the idea of scale in Western classical music were operative in Karnatic music; it became evidence that the two "systems" of music were "of the same family."[34] And finally, it provided an order based on underlying structure rather than on gamakas or phrases or anything else that had come to be regarded as nonessential.

This shift in the way ragas came to be classified is apparent in music manuals in the early twentieth century. A Tamil music theory book from 1902, *Cankīta Cantirikai*, provided several methods of classifying ragas, of which the 72-melakarta scheme was only one. The groupings seemed to depend less on underlying structure and more on literary or social convention. One grouping placed ragas together by the suffixes in their names, another by the sentiments they produced, another by the times of day and night for which they were suited (Manikka Mudaliar 1902, 116–29). By the time of the publication of Chitti Babu Naidu's *A Key to Hindu Music* in 1925, however, the 72-melakarta scheme seems to have taken first place among other modes of classifying ragas. Chitti Babu Naidu commented on the efforts to classify ragas "according to one's own experience," remarking that such efforts, which mistook the musician's individual experience for objective truth, were "all evidently the feeble attempts made by people who do not understand the fine system of Indian ragas and their genesis" (1925, 9). A distinction had to be made, Naidu implied, between this system of genesis and more subjective bases of classification.

Just what does such a system exclude? As a survey of these manuals shows, coexisting with the official musicological system of classification are other ways of classifying ragas that have dropped out of musicological discourse. These modes of raga classification show the difference between the concept of a raga and the concept of a musical scale in Western terms. Ragas exist somewhere along a continuum between scales and melodies; they are often characterized by particular phrases and orders of ascent and descent through the scale they use. Unlike a scale, a raga can be thought of as a set of potentialities, realizable only through temporal development; one cannot write out a raga, in this more complete sense, on a page. Not only particular phrases but pauses and repetitions are essential to the elaboration of a raga. Developed in performance, ragas gain associations with particular places, musicians, and feelings. For instance, one musician explained to me that two ragas like kamboji and yadukulakamboji, which are in the same mela, or family, according to Venkatamakhi's system and differ only by the presence or absence of a single swara, nevertheless differ in the cuvai (taste) and unarcci (feeling) they evoke. Kamboji is associated with *kampīram* (grandeur, pomp) while yadukulakamboji, lacking the swara *ga*, evokes *tuyaram* (sadness) and *manrātutal* (pleading).[35] The metaphors of orality and embodiment at work in these metaphors of cuvai and unarcci contrast greatly with the decidedly visual order of the 72-melakarta system, which strips ragas of their evocative contexts and places them in a chart arranged to be understandable to the eye.

In the mid-twentieth century, the 72-melakarta system assumed a

prominent place in the curriculum of university music departments. As it gained the status of "theory," it came to be seen as essential knowledge for the proper rendition of any raga, replacing other ways of ordering ragas with a mode of classification deemed more properly musicological. Starting in the 1940s, the matter of the derivation of janya ragas from their "parent" or melakarta ragas became a prime topic of debate year after year in the Madras Music Academy. There it was argued that knowing the parent raga affected one's elaboration of the janya raga; it determined the notes one paused on, how one constructed phrases, which notes were considered "foreign," and so on. The derivation of a raga according to the 72-melakarta system was often cited as an authoritative answer for questions of "correct" or "incorrect" usage (Sambamoorthy 1961, 26). In this view, if only musicians observed the rules, theory and practice would become a single rational system.

The idea of a standardized scheme of ordering ragas was deeply connected to the use of notation and the concept of the composer. K. Ramachandran's *Sri Daksinaräga Ratnäkaram* (Characteristics of Carnatic ragas), published in 1949, provided its readers with the classification of 1,044 ragas according to their melakarta group, the number of notes each one used in its ascent and descent, and a list of compositions in each raga. The idea was that the proper approach to a raga was determinable not only by finding its location in an ordered table of ragas but also by observing its behavior in different compositions, analogous to a naturalist's observation of animal behavior. The natural history of ragas produced by the 72-melakarta system was thus conceptually related to the observation of raga behavior. In this type of musicology, the composition was endowed with a new type of authority; it was now deemed absolutely necessary to know compositions in a particular raga before one dared to claim any knowledge of it. Compositions became the locus of authority in a musicology that now thought of raga as something able to be almost completely described and rationalized.

## In the Realm of Musicology

In 1932 the Annamalai University published an English translation of the *Svaramēlakalānidhi*, a sixteenth-century music treatise by Ramamatya, with commentary by M. S. Ramaswamy Aiyar. The twentieth-century musicologist saw an analogy between his own endeavor, reconciling music theory with practice, and the Vijayanagar king Rama Raja's injunction to

his court musicologist in 1550: "The science of music has, both in theory and in practice, degenerated into conflicting views. . . . Reconcile all [the conflicting views] and write a new science . . . embodying therein [music's] theory and practice" (Ramaswamy Aiyar 1932, xv). Reviewing several other treatises, Ramaswamy Aiyar remarked that a similar note of complaint had been sounded by other treatise-writers. "A question, therefore, naturally arises, namely, 'Why should the musical views conflict, at all, with one another?' To put the same question sarcastically: 'Why should the harmonious music produce disharmony amongst its votaries?'" (xvi). Ramaswamy Aiyar's answer to this question, which occupied the seventy-three pages of his introduction, overshadowed his translation of the treatise itself. The excessive length of the introduction hints at the disjunction between the kind of answers Ramaswamy Aiyar expected in the twentieth century and those that Ramamatya had provided.

Ramaswamy Aiyar began by differentiating the interests of musicology from Ramamatya's apparent interests. Ramamatya had begun his treatise by giving the pedigree of the king who commissioned it, a chart showing the descent of Rama Raja from none other than Vishnu and Brahma. Ramaswamy Aiyar contrasted this with a genealogy by the colonial historian Robert Sewell, taken from epigraphical records, which "gives Rama Raja his proper place in the royal line of Vijayanagar" (1932, xiii). Placing his own musicological endeavor on the side of written records and "history," Ramaswamy Aiyar remarked that "Ramamatya's description of Rama Raja's pedigree is more fanciful than real and betrays the mentality of a flattering court poet rather than that of a responsible State officer" (xiii). Moreover, whereas for Ramamatya the pedigree of the king was an essential part of the treatise, for Ramaswamy Aiyar it was a mere distraction from the real matter of the work: "I digressed . . . to warn the reader against blindly accepting unhistorical, and therefore untruthful, statements" (xiv). The twentieth-century musicological treatise belonged in the genre of historical and rational writing and not poetry.

The main task at hand, as Ramaswamy Aiyar characterized it, was to understand the process of musical change: to understand how an "old order" of music could give rise to a new one. Understanding this was tantamount to reconciling theory and practice; one had to look for a principle that governed these shifts (1932, xvi). Ramamatya's answer to his king's request that he reconcile musical theory and practice had been to suggest the principle of *lakshya*, the idea that practice could change theory. Ramaswamy Aiyar's translation of his words on the subject went thus:

"The Gandharva-music is ever employed in conformity with the (inflexible) rules of its theory. But if the violation of any of these rules . . . do not lead to any absurdity; and if, again, the contravention of any of the rules of practice does not give pleasure, but jars to the ear; then the practice of music shall be preferred to its theory" (xix). Here, theory and practice were loosely related; they were under no obligation to reflect each other. Indeed, the gap between them was acknowledged. Music theory, in these older treatises, was an intellectual discipline in itself which may have had closer ties to philosophy and poetry than to actual musical practice itself.

Yet such a state of affairs seemed vaguely unsatisfactory to Ramaswamy Aiyar. For him, as for other twentieth century musicologists, musicology was a science which had no place for philosophical or poetic discourse. He claimed that music could be called a science by virtue of the fact that there were two types of science: "exact" and "inexact" (1932, xvi). Whereas the rules of exact science (like chemistry, he suggested) were unchanging, the rules of an inexact science could change from time to time. The slowness of this change was what gave music its scientific status: "Mark! I said 'from time to time' and not from day to day. For if music, like dream, changes from day to day, surely, like dream, it will be labelled as mere phantasy and treated as such" (xvi). For music to be a properly historical subject, it had to outlast the impermanence of fantasy; it had to be able to be written down and pass from generation to generation. Essential to this writeability was a systematic, scientific approach, a standard that itself never changed (xxx). Ramaswamy Aiyar imagined this standard to be locatable in underlying "characteristics," which had to be discerned by the modern musicologist. To illustrate what he meant, he contrasted Ramamatya's description of ragas with Venkatamakhi's 72-mela system. Ramamatya had merely described "the ragas in vogue at his time"; he specified the names of twenty melas but gave no principle on which they were based or ordered. "Evidently he did not care to deduce his twenty melas from any kind of principles," Ramaswamy Aiyar remarked (xxxv). Yet Ramamatya's very use of the concept of mela showed that he was at least working toward some principle of classification. Such a system of classification distinguished modern musicology from an "antiquated" approach.

Ramamatya rightly discarded the antic and antiquated method of deriving Ragas from the complicated system of Grama-Moorchana-Jati, as well as the later puerile method of bringing them under the fanciful system of Raga-Ragini-Putra. . . . He had the genius to discover unity in variety, that is, a unifying principle in the variety of Ragas that came under his notice; and he therefore felt that the old *cataloguing* method of enumerating the Ragas must give way to the *classifying* method of reducing them into what might be called the Genus-Species system. (lx)

With such a taxonomy at his fingertips, the modern musicologist, according to the demands of the "present revival of musical taste, in India, on rational lines," could begin to elucidate "the various *Terms* occurring in the Science of Music" (Ramaswamy Aiyar 1932, lxiii). Rather than being misled by "mere names," the modern musicologist could discover the real meaning lying underneath. As a "test case," Ramaswamy Aiyar took the perennially confusing terms *mārga* and *dēsi*. Such terms, he stated, had been used so variably and contradictorily to describe ragas that they had lost all meaning and become mere names (lxiii). He quoted Sarangadeva, author of the sixteenth century treatise *Sangīta Ratnākara*: "Music is of two kinds — Marga and Desi. That was called Marga which was sought after by Brahma and other gods and practised by Bharata and other sages in the presence of Siva and which would yield everlasting prosperity. That kind was called Desi which consisted of the vocal-instrumental-dance music and which pleased the people of different countries according to their different tastes" (lxiii). This long, "tiresome" description of the terms could not satisfy the questions of the modern musicologist, as Ramaswamy Aiyar stated them. "What were the essential characteristics of Marga and Desi? In what way could they be unfailingly recognised as such?" (lxiv). The modern musicologist's approach to such a problem was to trace the history of these terms and to identify them with particular musical practices: mārga referred to the practice of chanting the Vedas, while dēsi referred to the Hindustani and Karnatic practices. Thus, the "essential characteristic" of each term was now determinable: mārga music was confined to four notes, while dēsi music made use of all the notes of the scale (lxix). Each music had its own principle: "The marga-music followed the principle of lakshana [grammar] and therefore became less and less pleasant, till at last it degenerated into a dry, monotonous, and sing-song style of singing, while desi-music followed the principle of lakshya and has therefore acquired a more and more fascinating style of singing" (lxxii). Notably, while Ramamatya discussed mārga and dēsi in terms of their contexts of audition, Ramaswamy Aiyar searched for the essential characteristics, separable from such contextual factors, that could be used to define them. Finally, he gave his own English gloss to these terms. "The word *marga* has come

to mean whatever is old and *out-of-date*; while the word desi has come to mean whatever is new and *up-to-date*. . . . Just as I called Marga, *Vedic Music*, so, I shall call Desi, *Modern Music*" (lxxiii).

For modern music a modern musicology was necessary. In 1939 another attempt to reconcile theory and practice came in the form of C. Subrahmanya Ayyar's *Grammar of South Indian Music*. Instead of revising or critiquing the ancient treatises, he disregarded them entirely. "The present thesis," he wrote, "purposely does not refer to the more ancient theoretical works on music in Sanskrit. It is based entirely on my musical experience with a little knowledge of modern Physics, and of musical comparisons suggested by a musical ear. . . . I feel the paramount necessity for the correct perception of microtones by all artists, vocalists, and instrumentalists alike, for their clear exposition of the Raga Bhava [emotion]" (1939, 1). The idea was that music could be best understood through the lens of a scientific musicology that had no recourse to ancient texts but that relied instead on the human ear and on modern measuring instruments like tuning forks. Subrahmanya Ayyar's project was to understand the "microtonal changes" used in gamakas that made them so effective (37). The point was to understand—to be able to express in words and numbers—"what the voice actually does" (48). How did the same note in two different ragas give a different impression? How did a listener differentiate between two ragas when, strictly speaking, they used the same notes? For Subrahmanya Ayyar, these were the kinds of questions modern musicology had to answer. Such a musicology, he implied, would close the gap between the voice/ear and notation; the minute numerical ratios and lengthy descriptions of ragas that he provided would effect a true reconciliation of theory and practice.

## The Problem of Writing

The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.
—Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

To close the gap between theory and practice, for a modern musicologist like C. Subrahmanya Ayyar, writing itself had to disappear, in a very literal sense. If, for Ramaswamy Aiyar, the ancient treatises represented a mass of writing that had to be translated somehow into good sense, for Subrahmanya Ayyar they were an impediment to the proper practice of musicological science. He instead aimed to convey his theory through the eloquence of numbers and their aural counterparts; the true musicology

was a science that, unswayed by the vicissitudes of writing, could determine "what the voice actually does."

Notation was important in this respect because, ideally, it aimed for the literal disappearance of writing; notation was supposed to serve as a set of signs for music that would somehow escape the ambiguity of writing, its potential to give rise to multiple interpretations. This was why advocates of the staff notation thought it necessary to have a nonalphabetic notation; the symbols of the staff notation were said to enjoy a closer relationship to the eye precisely because they supposedly bypassed language. For proponents of sargam notation, the disappearance of writing was achieved by the way it provided a picture for the ear, made of signs so legible that they became audible, disappearing off the page to sound the voice of the composer.

The disappearance of writing thus came to convey a certain sense of authenticity: the notion of a true composer or author behind the written signs. The composer became, in the twentieth century, the one figure who was endowed with the authority to move from the oral to the written. The concept of an oral tradition implied an absence of writing that kept musicians in the realm of memory and improvisation. The composer, however, by creating fixed compositions, transferred music to the realm of history. In the politics of music in twentieth-century South India, it is these latter terms—*composer* and *history*—that are the privileged signs of Karnatic music's classical status. As compositions have become authored, they have become repositories of authority, almost like a dictionary or guidebook of acceptable phrases for those who are improvising.

The desire to "fix" compositions in notation at the turn of the twentieth century was not only about fixing the composer's voice; it was also part of the project of showing that Karnatic music obeyed a system of conventions and rules, that there was a structure beneath, or within, the music. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar was confident that notation would show the difference between Karnatic music's structure and its embellishments, the reason behind the music. Meanwhile, musicologists used the 72-melakarta raga scheme to show, similarly, a separate conceptual realm in which the rules of music were fixed for all time. This conceptual realm or structure came to be known as "theory," a realm which stood in the same relation to practice as structure did to embellishments, or as the written did to the oral. Inhabiting the conceptual realm, the 72-melakarta system stood apart from the music as a representation of its pure structure. In this order of things, notation was thought to represent an authoritative version of

a composition, a version that could stand apart from various future renderings. Only by losing its arbitrariness, by appearing to be completely motivated by the voice of the composer, could notation be properly authoritative.

The scandal of the Swati Tirunal case was that it made the problem and power of writing reappear. Where the authoritative voice of the composer should have expelled any doubts, Balachander's allegations pointed to a proliferation of possibilities, of questions concerning motivation. For, in Balachander's argument, the notation of Swati Tirunal's compositions, as well as the historical work of musicologists concerning his life, became not efforts to determine the truth but problems of writing. Motivation here referred not to a seamless relationship between sign and meaning but to the proliferation of ulterior motives that, once revealed, threatened the legitimacy of what was written. Like the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss among the Nambikwara, Balachander wondered whether the Swati Tirunal authorities were motivated by a true composer or if they had simply realized the power of writing, of notating compositions and publishing them; the distinction between artistic motivation and political motivation threatened to become indecipherable in writing. Only the composer had the authority to control the movement of music between the realms of oral tradition and writing, a movement that otherwise threatened to operate in a considerably less authorized manner.

It is the suspension of these possibilities, the disavowal of the problem of writing, that makes the "composer" and the "composition" possible, at the same time as it allows the persistence of the idea that Karnatic music (or Indian music in general) is, despite its notations and treatises, essentially an oral tradition. There is a contradictory logic at work here; the anxiety that the voice will be lost *if not captured* by writing coexists with the anxiety that the voice could be lost precisely by being *completely captured* by writing. The way in which these anxieties are intertwined suggests that it has become impossible to imagine the voice, or oral tradition, without writing. It is only from within the scriptural economy, as Michel de Certeau might suggest, that certain notions of and values attached to orality can emerge. It is writing that lends authority, in the literal and metaphorical senses of the word, to the idea of an oral tradition.

Importantly, it is not just any writing that is at stake here, but English writing in particular. Writing metaphors associated with English—"punctuation," "paragraphs," "essays"—are now commonly used to describe Indian music. For example, in 2000 the musicologist Raghava Menon said of

the late Alla Rakha's tabla playing that "there was a sense of commas, explanations, and full stops. He played with punctuation" (Dugger 2000). Punctuation is thus equated with authorly intention and meaning, as well as the sense that music is understandable and graspable inasmuch as it obeys the conventions of writing.[36] More than fifty years earlier, P. Sambamoorthy had encouraged his students to think of raga alapana as an "essay" or "exposition" composed of a short sketch of the raga as a first "paragraph," with the following "paragraphs" as development (1944, 40). He had thus suggested that a method of writing associated with colonial education could be employed, by analogy, in Karnatic music. English writing provided a stable, permanent structure, a way of presenting—or rather *representing*—Karnatic music. The silent but visible authority of English guaranteed that the voice of Karnatic music came through properly; it would see that the oral tradition passed, unhindered, from musician to audience and from generation to generation.

Perhaps it is not coincidental that, in Amit Chaudhuri's recent novella *Afternoon Raag*, another kind of representation of Indian music in English, the image of writing is used to explain the essential difference between Indian music and Western music.

The straight, angular notes of Western music, composed and then rendered, are like print upon a page; in contrast, the curving meends of the raag are like longhand writing drawn upon the air. Each singer has his own impermanent longhand with its own arching, idiosyncratic beauties, its own repetitive, serpentine letters. With the end of the recital, this longhand, which, in its unraveling, is a matter of constant erasures and rewritings, is erased completely, unlike the notes of Western music, which remains printed upon the page. (1999, 151–52).[37]

While English writing—and thus Western music—is associated with print and stands for permanence, standardization, and legibility, Indian writing—conceived, of course, as handwriting—bears all the traces of orality: idiosyncrasy, illegibility, repetition. Importantly, however, this is an orality that can only be conceived on analogy with writing, and described in English.

Chaudhuri's "longhand" stands for excess; it bears the traces of the hand, of embodiment, and of orality that print banishes. The novelist and the musicologist share the same musicological assumptions, ones whose foundations are laid by modern musicology. They recognize that within the problem of representing music there is a much larger problem: the

translation of musical experience into words, the determination of "what the voice actually does" to those who listen to it. Musical terms become objects fit for translation precisely because there is another register of musical experience that lies outside their purview, a realm that moves but is untraceable. This realm—an excess figured variously as essential orality, or as the sublime, the inexpressible, the ineffable—is neither prior to nor external to modern musicology but produced by it.[38] After all the notations and minute calculations—indeed, precisely *because* of them—music appears to defy explanation. For the modern musicologist, however, this sense of ineffability is elaborated with reference not only to the divine—in this case, perhaps, the Hindu notion of ultimate Brahman—but also to the interiority of the modern listening subject.[39] "You are all aware that music moves us, and we do not know why," C. Subrahmanya Ayyar told a Bombay audience in English in 1939 (1941, 19). "We feel the tears, but cannot trace their source."

## 6 ⊗ *Fantastic Fidelities*

Guru, face to face, shows the marga [way]. The sisya has to make the journey to excellence. How is that excellence purveyed? . . . There is a message that voice leaves in the listener's soul, a memory like the ubiquitous murmur of surf, long after the particular sangatis of a rendering have been forgotten. . . . [Today] music is treated all wrong, as though it were a mere science, a matter of arithmetic, of fractions and time intervals.
—Raghava Menon, quoted in *The Hindu*, December 1999

The possibility of sound reproduction reorients the practices of sound production; insofar as it is a possibility at all, reproduction precedes originality.
—Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*

Music lives a curiously double life. It is associated with the technical—the musicological terminology of notes and intervals, the acoustic terminology of frequencies and amplitudes—and with the sentimental—meaning, emotion, and a sense of the ineffable. In fact, the coexistence of these discourses and their essential incommensurability seem somehow constitutive of "music" as we know it. On one side, to paraphrase Raghava Menon, is the meaningful: message, memory, murmur; on the other side, the mathematical: arithmetic, fractions, and time intervals. The way in which these discourses are pitted against one another reflects a mode of thinking about music that is, I would argue, peculiar to modernity and, indeed, to a particular postcolonial predicament.

In postcolonial South India, music, particularly Karnatic music, is constituted as a practice and subject of discourse in part by the way these seemingly incommensurable discourses are mapped onto India and the West. Talk about classical music in South India is dominated by ideas about the primacy of the voice and the importance of oral tradition. "Voice" and "oral tradition" have in the twentieth century become more than merely

Southern Madurai), located far south of the present southern tip of India, which is Kanyakumari. Ten-Madurai was eventually swept under the ocean and its literature lost, but the Third Tamil Sangam, centered in Madurai, from which the now published literature came, represented the continuation of the great civilization, its last survivors (Ramaswamy 1999, 97). The founding of the Fourth Tamil Sangam at Madurai in 1901 was intended to stand as the beginning of another golden age for Tamils. The idea of an ancient, vast, now lost Tamil land was crystallized in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discourses on Lemuria, the sunken continent. The legend of Lemuria and its destruction by the ocean allowed a glorious past to be imagined out of the straitened circumstances of the present, thus allowing for the possibility of a return or resurgence. This kind of "catastrophic consciousness," suggests Sumathi Ramaswamy, "is very much a response to (colonial) modernity, a form of resistance to its totalizing and homogenizing knowledge claims. Catastrophic historical consciousness enables the recuperation of all those necessary and fabulous knowledges of the ancient past cast out of a world rendered increasingly disenchanted through the work of the modern sciences" (98). Yet, as she demonstrates, the re-creation, or the re-enchantment, of the ancient past is often achieved through a thoroughly modern scientific discourse. In this case, modern discourses of philology and musicology made the twentieth-century enchantment with ancient Tamil music possible.

25 Born in 1859 in the Tirunelveli district into a family of Nadars who had converted to Christianity two generations before, Abraham Pandithar, by all accounts a gifted student, initially became a teacher at Lady Napier's Girls School in Tanjavur (Nadar 1954, 110–11). Around 1890 he and his wife resigned from their positions as teachers to take up farming and medicine making full-time. The title "Pandithar" was conferred on him after he became known as a physician. Indeed, between his work as a physician and the sale of the "Sanjeevi Pills" for which he became famous, Pandithar was said to have earned nearly a thousand rupees a day (ibid., 111). Because of his financial success, he was the subject of a detailed sketch by Somerset Playne in 1914, in a guide to South India's commercial development (1914, 486–91).

26 Extensive records of Pandithar's conflict with other participants in the 1916 Baroda conference regarding the number of srutis in an octave were appended in the Tamil version of his book, *Karunamirtacakaram*. Most of the book itself was given over to minute calculations through which Pandithar mathematically showed that others' theories were wrong.

27 According to Pandithar, "upholders of Sanskrit" had tried to convince people that Tamil was derived from Sanskrit, that even the name "Tamil" was derived from the Sanskrit term *dravida*. Pandithar greeted such theories with ridicule, claiming instead that the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans had been unable to pronounce or write the name Tamil and thus had mispronounced it as dravida (1917, 32).

28 Indeed, the essay was politely returned by the British journal editors; Pandithar included their correspondence in his record.

29 C. N. Annadurai's quote can be found in Muthiah 1996 (40).

30 The information in this section I take from interviews I conducted in Madras and Madurai in 1998. I have made the interviewees' identities vague in order to protect their confidentiality.

31 Dharmapuram Swaminathan, personal communication, Kondrattur, India, November 1998.

5  *A Writing Lesson*

1 This booklet, printed 16 August 1985, was a compilation of sources that Balachander made to support his argument and was addressed as an "open letter" to "present and future musicians, musicologists, music-lovers, music students, experts in allied arts, press and public."

2 A comparable debate is described by V. Narayana Rao in his article "The Politics of Telugu Ramayanas" (2001). In describing the conflict between traditional Ramayana readers who treat the Valmiki Ramayana as the original and correct story and the oppositional readings of what he calls the "anti-Ramayana discourse" in the 1920s, Narayana Rao points out that the concepts of authorship and authenticity differ crucially between these two points of view. Whereas leaders of the anti-Ramayana discourse claim Valmiki to be the author of the Ramayana in a factual mode, for traditional readers, Narayana Rao suggests, "Valmiki's authorship of the Ramayana is ideological; they do not base their statement on empirical textual evidence" (163). Balachander's challenge to the party-line Swati Tirunal story was scandalous because it similarly attempted to counter myth with an empirical, factually based argument.

3 I thank Katherine Bergeron for suggesting this way of framing the issue.

4 S. Balachander, open letter, 1. The letter was appended to a copy of the Gayan Samaj Proceedings of 1887 and copies were distributed to many musical institutions and musicologists in Madras. I thank the Music Academy Library for making this source available to me.

5 Ibid., i.

6 Ibid., 1.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 2

9 Ibid., 3.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 4.

12 Ibid., 5.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 5–6.

15 Published 23 September 1982. A rumor circulated that the brothers were in possession of palm-leaf manuscripts containing evidence to back up their argument, but when the Travancore royal family made an offer to buy them, there was no response. Although Sivanandam and Kittappa's claim was a far cry from Balachander's assertion that Swati Tirunal was a fictional composer, it could be used—and indeed was used—as evidence for Balachander's case, even though the brothers later publicly declared their disagreement with Balachander (K. V. Ramanathan 1996, 17; Nayar 1997, 23).

16 This musician was from the Icai Veḷḷālar caste and took great pride in being from the same caste as the Tanjore Quartette, precisely because of the "professional" way they had made a living from music.

17 I thank Dr. Kovalam Narayana Panikkar and Dr. V. S. S. Sharma, both of Trivandrum, for discussing the matter of Sopanam music and the Mullamoodu Bhagavatars with me in June 1998. Dr. R. P. Raja of Trivandrum very generously discussed the Swati Tirunal case with me at length in May 1998. Sopanam style is discussed in Poduval n.d. (3–4, 27).

18 Compare Katherine Bergeron's discussion of conflicting ideas about the revival and performance of Gregorian chant between 1880 and 1900, in chapter 4 of Decadent Enchantments. Bergeron contrasts the "Romantic" approach of Dom Pothier, who was concerned with going beyond the written notes to find "the long-forgotten vox of the chant," with the "Modern" approach of Dom Mocquereau, who embarked on a "philological" project, comparing written manuscripts with each other to arrive at a standardized notation (1998, 101). Mocquereau's idea of going back to the original—he used photographs of the original manuscripts—is similar to Nayar's idea of finding the original compositions preserved by the Mullamoodu Bhagavatars.

19 In the epigraph quote, Tagore was arguing against ideas that staff notation would provide a universal language for music (1874, 382).

20 Christopher Pinney quotes the Parisian photographer Félix Nadar's comments on the difference between photograph and portrait. The portrait gave one "the moral grasp of the subject—that instant understanding which puts you in touch with the model, helps you to sum him up, guides you to his habits, his ideas and character and enables you to produce not an indifferent reproduction, a matter of routine or accident such as any laboratory assistant could achieve, but a really convincing and sympathetic likeness, an intimate portrait" (1997, 33).

21 Taking C as the scale tonic, ri-1 = D-flat; ri-2 = D-natural.

22 The discussion of the status of ornaments in Karnatic music was part of a larger discourse on ornament taking place in the context of Indian art. In 1939, in response to European critiques of Indian art as "merely ornamental," Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote an essay entitled "Ornament," in which he defended the ornament against charges of superfluity. He noted that in Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin, the word for ornament had originally meant "that

which is added on to make something sufficient"; it was only later that it came to mean "embellishment." Although Coomaraswamy was refuting notions of the purely "decorative" or "aesthetic" quality of ornaments, his argument still depended on the kind of oppositions between communication and pleasure, necessity and luxury, adequacy and excess, that make the idea of ornament thinkable in the first place. His defense of alankaram also seems to allude to the authority of Sanskrit as a classical language in which the role of alankarams is central (Coomaraswamy 1939).

23 The difference between note and swara is sometimes explained thus: the swara refers to the space between two notes, for example C and D; it is thus a kind of placeholder. When someone sings "ri" it doesn't necessarily mean they are singing a D; rather, that note is the tone center for what they are singing. In some ragas "ri" is actually specified to be sung or played as an oscillation between D and E; in that sense the swara "ri" is not a "note."

24 Another proponent of staff notation was Ernest Clements, member of the Indian civil service in the Bombay Presidency and a participant in the great sruti debates in the years following the first All-India Music Conference in 1916. Clements argued, in his Introduction to the Study of Indian Music (1913), that the staff notation was the most logical kind of notation because of its economy: "It possesses a distinct advantage over any method which requires the eye to follow one set of signs for melody (svara) and an entirely distinct set for time (laya)" (16). He demonstrated how the "middle octave," the range commonly employed in Indian music, "fit easily" onto the staff. He warned, however, that those who had "become ensnared by Western notation" were unwittingly accepting the law of equal temperament. Falling for the neat appearance of the notation, they were not aware of its implications, the fact that it consistently blurred together differences of a quarter-tone (35). If the notation was really going to be self-sufficient, musicians had to see the exact interval portrayed in the notation itself. Accordingly, he used a slash through the sign for flat and natural notes to show that twice as many notes as regular staff notation illustrated existed in the scale. The use of notation demanded a standardization of the Indian scale, the mathematical calculation of each note. Only then would the gap between ear and eye be closed, and Indian music become truly visible. In 1920 Clements undertook to show practically how his notation worked by translating compositions written down in Indian sargam notation into staff notation. For the sake of visibility, Clements did away with all gamaka symbols.

25 Bergeron illuminates the idea of "legibility" in her discussion of late-nineteenth-century debates about notation for Gregorian chant. "The notion of legibility referred to the way printed characters enabled the act of reading." The ideal of legibility implied words (or notation, in this case) so clear that they would seem to be transparent, to disappear, leaving the impression of direct vocal communication. Thus, "a beautiful page had the power . . . to

transform what was known as 'silent reading' into a blissful interval of listening" (1998, 58–59).

26 On the symbolism of mother's milk in the context of Tamil language devotion in the 1930s, see Ramaswamy 1997, 106–8.

27 *Saṅgīta Sarvartha Sāra Saṅgrahamu*, printed in Telugu in 1859, was supposedly the first book of Karnatic compositions published. But, according to M. Hariharan, it was a mere compendium with no pedagogical project (Clements 1920, preface).

28 A. R. Venkatachalapathy has documented similar changes that took place in reading practices with the emergence of printed books. He notes the rise of silent reading among the middle classes in Tamil-speaking areas at the turn of the twentieth century, in contrast to the older practice of reading aloud and memorizing from palm-leaf manuscripts. Whereas palm-leaf manuscripts, written in a continuous, run-on fashion, left many possibilities of interpretation for the reader, printed books and the introduction of punctuation in Tamil gave rise to new modes of reading, like scanning and browsing, as well as to the feeling of an inexhaustible quantity of printed material available to be read. The illusion of plenty became part of this experience of reading (1994, 282).

29 The epigraph reflects a line spoken by a character in Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's play, "Saraswatia Redux," modeled on Shakespearean comedy, in which the theoretical aspects of Karnatic music, including the 72-melakarta raga system, are explained. The play was published in several issues of Chinnaswamy Mudaliar's journal, *Oriental Music in European Notation*, between 1892 and 1895.

30 The 72-melakarta raga scheme appeared in Venkatamakhi's treatise, *Caturdandi Prakasika*.

31 A full description of the system is beyond the scope of this chapter; it is more the idea of such a system that I am trying to convey. Sambamoorthy's *The 72-Melakarta System* (1961) provides a lucid demonstration of how the system works.

32 If the magic of numbers was not sufficient, the system could also be made to work with letters. The first two syllables of each raga name corresponded to two letters in an ordered table of numbered Sanskrit letters. By taking the corresponding numbers for these letters in the alphabet table, and reversing them, one would arrive at the number of the melakarta raga in the 72 melakarta raga table, and with this number one could then determine the notes of the raga (Sambamoorthy 1961, 14–16).

33 Such a scheme resonates with Michel Foucault's description of the table and its importance in what he calls the classical episteme, which he identifies with the seventeenth century. In the classical idea of "natural history" as formulated by Linnaeus, the table functions as "a grid [that] can be laid out over the entire vegetable or animal kingdom. Each group can be given a name.

With the result that any species, without having to be described, can be designated with the greatest accuracy by means of the names of the different groups in which it is included. . . . Once the system of variables . . . has been defined at the outset, it is no longer possible to modify it, to add or subtract even one element. . . . To know what properly appertains to one individual is to have before one the classification — or the possibility of classifying — all others" (Foucault 1970, 141–44).

34 This idea was pursued by almost all those who wrote about Indian music in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth (e.g., Clements 1920). It was undoubtedly influenced by the ideas about language "families" in philology.

35 N. S. Saminathan, personal communication, Madurai, June 2002.

36 It is interesting to note that there was no punctuation as we know it in Indian languages such as Tamil or Telugu before the advent of printing and modern prose forms that arose in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth. Full stops were represented, but there were no commas, exclamation points, or other marks. Such punctuation in part reflects the effect of English on Indian languages (Dharwadker 1997, 108–33).

37 A *meend* is a slow sliding from one note to the next, especially in the alap of Hindustani music.

38 Compare Katherine Bergeron's argument in the conclusion of *Decadent Enchantments*.

39 In Hindu Advaita Vedanta philosophy the concept of Brahman is often translated as "ultimate reality," the source from which all emanates and returns, the unchanging absolute. Jeaneane Fowler describes it as the "Unmanifest Source of the manifestation of cause-effect processes in the universe" (2002, 51).

## 6   Fantastic Fidelities

1. Harrison suggests that we gather "significant examples of where things are heard differently, or where the description of listening undergoes major changes and of where listening seems to take on an historically changed position within the modal construction of self and psyche" (1996, 22).

2 For instance, my violin teacher used to refer to her guru (who also happened to be her father) as "my god, my mother, and my father." I learned that she expected me to call her "Amma" (mother). Similarly, a mridangist with whom I studied in Madurai referred to his guru, C. S. Sankarasiva Bhagavatar, as his father. It was only later that I learned that he had "adopted" his guru as a father.

3 *Sangati* refers to variation on a musical phrase; compositions are elaborated in Karnatic music by adding sangatis.

4 This and the following passages are my translations of Malan's story, originally published in *Kalki* and reprinted in *Āṉṟu*, a collection of Tamil short stories.