

# Music in the Balance

## Language, Modernity and Hindustani Sangeet in Dharwad

TEJASWINI NIRANJANA

The paper examines the social role of Hindustani music in the Dharwad-Hubli region, situating the music's early 20th century emergence and proliferation against and within the debates on language that were central to cultural transformation in that area. What was the problem of Kannada and more broadly the language question in the mid to late 19th and early 20th centuries? What might have been the role of vocal music in negotiating the language conflict? The paper suggests that Hindustani music is part of the cultural labour undertaken in the region during the rise of Kannada "nationalism". The phrase draws attention to the nature of the work involved in cultural practice and performance, and the nature of performers' activity, through teaching, singing, playing, evaluating and arguing about music. Cultural labour references a visible aspect of social transformation and social process, the latter to be seen as marked by elusive shifts in ways of living, thinking and creating. The formation of the taste for Hindustani sangeet in Dharwad is one result of such shifts.

For their support and sharp questions, many of which I have yet to answer, I am grateful to Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Urmila Bhirdikar, Amlan Dasgupta and Ashwin Kumar A P. For stories that set me thinking, I am indebted to Girish Karnad, Jayant Kaikini and the late Ashok Ranade. Early versions of some of the arguments in the paper were first rehearsed in an essay published in *Sangeet Natak*, XLIII(2) (2009). Research for this paper was supported by the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and the Institut d'etudes avancees de Nantes.

Tejaswini Niranjana ([tejaswini.niranjana@gmail.com](mailto:tejaswini.niranjana@gmail.com)) is with the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

### Kannada Pride on the Marathi Stage<sup>1</sup>

It was around 1930. In Pune, the cultural capital of Maharashtra, a play was being performed. An actor came on stage and began to sing in a unique voice. There was a commotion amongst the spectators, and someone called out: "*Kaanadi appa*" (a derogatory term used for Kannadigas in Maharashtra). Others picked up the cry. The accompanying instruments stopped playing. The actor came to the front of the stage, and said: "You are showing this intolerance because I am from the Kannada *desh*. Show me someone amongst you who can sing as well as I do, and I will engage him in a contest." Having said this, he sat down for a *baithak*. He sang for a good three to four hours. The spectators fell silent. As the man finished singing, garland after garland was heaped around his neck. Everyone began to praise his display of erudition. The actor who conquered Marathi intolerance with the light of his knowledge was Sawai Gandharva.<sup>2</sup>

How do we interpret this scene? The lens of Kannada pride filters Sawai Gandharva's Hindustani sangeet (music) performance into the celebration of Kannadiga competence. Why was it relevant that he was a Kannadiga? Was his performance all the more laudatory *because* he was Kannadiga? Why – if this is implied in the scenario – is it more remarkable for a Kannadiga to succeed in Hindustani sangeet than a Marathi-speaking person? And conversely, why would the audience assume a Kannadiga would not perform as well? Whatever the status of this assumption, the answer perhaps lies elsewhere, in the language-music conjuncture that the cultural landscape of the Dharwad region presents to us in the 20th century.

Another glimpse of the issues at stake can be seen in my second example, also involving music and musicians.

### Saving Marathi Pride in Marathi Country

It was in the early 1940s that Bade Ghulam Ali Khan of Lahore had triumphantly toured northern India and come to Bombay to perform. *Rasikas* from Pune and Kolhapur had gone there to listen to him. Impressed by his brilliance, they invited him to Kolhapur. "What would I do in such a place? What sort of singers do you have there?" commented the Khansaheb. Touched to the quick, the Maharashtrians came to Alladiya Khan, the court musician in Kolhapur, and related this incident to him.

Alladiya Khan declared that they must organise a concert that could provide a fitting response. The organisers invited Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and he agreed to come. But who would sing as his opponent? Everyone knew that the Khansaheb was

no ordinary singer. Alladiya Khan was perfectly capable of challenging him, but he was now quite old. He was further diminished by the deaths of his two sons, Manji Khan and Burji Khan. Alladiya Khan then thought of a young pupil of his *gharana*, and sent a telegram to summon him to Kolhapur. The backdrop of the concert, and the Khansaheb's comments, were relayed to the young man. Alladiya Khan said to his pupil that he must sing boldly and save the reputation and honour of Maharashtra's music tradition.

At the appointed time, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan came to the concert hall. A huge audience had gathered. The Khansaheb was a broad-shouldered and well-built man. To have a skinny, weak-looking young fellow singing in front of him seemed laughable to many. But the young singer climbed onto the platform. He began with Raag Nand and sang it effortlessly. Then followed Nayaki Kanada. The audience was clapping loudly. People uttered cries of praise. Then, Ghulam Ali came onstage. First, he sang Raag Bahar, which did not go down well. Then, Raag Malkauns, which also did not have an effect. Lastly, he sang a thumri. That too sounded as though it was without savour. The Khansaheb grew angry. "Did you organise this concert to humiliate me?" he roared. "The aim of this concert was to show that we too have good singers", said the organisers. The young singer who challenged the Khansaheb was none other than the Kannadiga Mallikarjun Mansur, who that day – as the story goes – saved not only the honour of Maharashtra, but that of the whole of southern India.<sup>3</sup>

Both these instances refer to musical contestations that also seem to manifest themselves as a tussle over linguistic dominance. However, the language terrain on which such contestations were mounted is not amenable to easy understanding, either then or now. What was the problem of Kannada and more broadly the language question in the mid to late 19th and early 20th centuries in the region known in official British records as the Southern Maratha Country? What might have been the role of vocal music in negotiating the language question? My attempt in this essay is to situate the early 20th century emergence and proliferation of Hindustani sangeet in the Dharwad region against and within the debates on language that were central to cultural transformation in that region. My focus will be on anecdotes, to try and make them yield – through close reading – a sense of the range of questions thrown up by the music-language conjuncture.

### Marathi and Kannada in Dharwad

The anecdotes in this essay are embedded in the historical context of the hegemonic spread of the Marathi language towards southern, western (Gujarat) and northern (central region) India from the 17th century onwards. The context, in brief, is one in which the Maratha Confederacy of chieftains who carried forward the legacy of the empire built by Shivajirao Bhonsle (1630-80) strengthened Marathi as an administrative language, even if mixed with Persian – the main language of government and diplomacy in west and south Asia – where necessary.<sup>4</sup> In 1818, the British defeated the Peshwas, originally the brahmin advisers to the Bhonsle family, who had

controlled the Maratha state for the entire 18th century. In that time, they had directly or indirectly dominated three "linguistic-cultural regions, Maharashtra itself, Gujarat and the Bombay Karnatak".<sup>5</sup> In the last-named region, called the Southern Maratha Country in the early 19th century, the population was divided into Kannada-speaking Lingayats, Jains and other castes (of cultivators and traders), and Marathi-speaking brahmin or Maratha landowners. The administrators were also Marathi speakers, from the traditionally literate castes – Chitpavans, Deshasthas, Karhadas – and also from the Saraswats and Prabhus who were at the time of lower social rank (Roberts 1971). The caste-language equation is an important point of reference for the decisions taken on education matters by the British after the Southern Maratha Country was incorporated into the Bombay Presidency, as my next anecdote shows.

After incorporation of the Bombay Karnatak region into Bombay Presidency, the younger administrators in the Presidency, who were less sympathetic to the old Marathi elite, worked for the substitution of Kannada for Marathi as the official language in 1836. Starting government Kannada schools was part of the larger plan for decreasing what the British saw as the dependency of the peasants on the elite. Marathi was seen as a "foreign language" in this region by the Reverend U Taylor, who was asked by the British government to express his expert opinion on the language issue. He went on to declare that "this state of things is not natural" (Parulekar and Bakshi 1957: 47). The Reverend Taylor narrates the story of "a Kanarese man" being tried for murder. His confession was supposedly written in Marathi, which the Reverend learnt afterwards that he did not speak or understand. The confession was read by a clerk before the magistrate, and "explained in Hindustanee", upon which the magistrate asked the prisoner whether that was his confession. The prisoner "unwillingly expressed his assent", not realising he could not actually be convicted because of lack of evidence. But because he gave assent, "by that very confession he was convicted and afterwards executed". "I could not help feeling", says the Reverend, "that the man caused his own death warrant to be signed by giving his assent to a statement in a language which he did not understand whatever might have been his verbal confession before the Mamlutdar in his own Native tongue" (ibid: 48). Schooling in Kannada is what the Reverend recommends as an antidote to such predicaments.

As early as 1831, however, sub-collector Elliott had started a Kannada school in Dharwad and paid the master out of his own pocket for a few years. In a letter to Mr Nesbet, the principal collector, dated 12 October 1833, Elliott draws attention to the fact that the Marathi school in Dharwad provides instruction only to brahmins and does not benefit the "great mass of the people, using the Canarese language exclusively" (ibid: 42-43). The British government, acknowledging that the administrative records were in Marathi and civil servants would need proficiency in that language for some time to come, decided in 1836 not to shut down the existing Marathi schools in the Dharwad and Belgaum collectorates, but declared that all new

schools would use Kannada as the medium of instruction. Enabling the use of Kannada as the language of “public business” was the ultimate goal of training students in Kannada schools, since the British could not countenance the use of a “foreign” language such as Marathi.

The determination of the British officials to create vernacular monolingual identities and map them onto geographical regions historically marked by considerable polylingualism, had far-reaching consequences in many regions of the country including the southern Maratha area. This determination was additionally fuelled by British anxiety in this region over brahmin complicity with the older Marathi-dominated administration, especially that of the Peshwas who had preceded the British as rulers. The Marathi-speaking brahmin elite, connected through an elaborate network of kinship and patronage, proliferated even under the new regime in spite of British efforts to minimise their influence (Roberts 1971: 258). It was in this context that the British attempted to bring in people from other caste-language backgrounds into the civil service. The Kannada schools, which would also cater to a large Kannada-speaking non-brahmin Lingayat population, would serve as sites for the production of modern Kannada-language materials intended to strengthen the written language.

The rise of Kannada nationalism in the early 20th century owed much to the efforts to popularise the use of Kannada in a range of domains. But Kannada nationalism has had a curious relationship to the language question, as though the assertion of a Kannada (linguistic) identity can actually be done through a sleight-of-hand that both puts forward and masks Kannada simultaneously. Witness this astonishing story from *Nanna Jeevana Smritigalu* (1974), the memoirs of Alur Venkata Rao, one of the earliest proponents of a distinct Kannada identity. The year appears to be 1905. Alur and his friends from northern Karnataka were undergraduate students at Fergusson College in Pune. They were beginning to experience, along with pride in the nation, says Alur, some amount of pride in their mother tongue Kannada. One day they decided to put up a play in their college. “It was decided that the play should not be in Marathi. Then should we do it in Kannada? If we did, then we would have been both the players and the audience.” How could they find a way out of this dilemma? “After a good deal of discussion, we asked that the Kannada-speaking students should be allowed to put up their own play, in English. The Marathi speakers wanted to know why they were being excluded from acting in an English play. The debate was a heated one.” Finally, the administrators ruled in favour of the Kannada students, who tossed their caps to the ceiling in joy. “This was perhaps the first of the Marathi-Kannada wars that broke out heedlessly from this time on” (Alur 1974: 69).

Did this linguistic tension prevail in relation to the music that came to dominate this region? Not quite in the same way, although the simultaneous putting forward and masking of Kannada-ness is to be seen in relation to singers of Hindustani sangeet as well. My approach to this music is not an ethnological one. My intention is not to pursue a line of inquiry that focuses on questions like “what is Hindustani music in the

region?” or “how it is different from Hindustani music elsewhere in India?” My interest lies more specifically in asking what Hindustani sangeet – both as cultural practice and aspirational horizon – came to mean in Dharwad, or north Karnataka more broadly speaking, in the period between the 1890s and the 1940s. The route by which I came to Dharwad’s music is an unusual one, and I will outline it here because my earlier preoccupations have deeply informed my current interests.

### From Port-of-Spain to Dharwad

My last project focused on analysing Caribbean popular music in terms of the centrality to it of the “Indian question”, and in terms of the history and current provenance in Trinidad of people of Indian origin, descendants of indentured labourers taken there to work on the sugar plantations after the abolition of slavery. The book, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad* (2006), was followed by a documentary film called *Jahaji Music* (directed by Surabhi Sharma, 2007). The film engaged with the musical culture of the Caribbean through the journey and collaborations of an Indian musician, Remo Fernandes. The Remo project, which tried to pursue the possibility of connection in another sphere, that of actual musical practice, seemed to be a logical if somewhat unexpected outcome of the earlier scholarly endeavour.

Perhaps the most predictable direction I could have taken next would have been to pursue the story of the Indian diaspora and its musical negotiations in the United Kingdom for example, where once again the Indian and the African come together to form different sorts of cultural equations. However, the insights I gained from thinking about music, nationalism and race in Trinidad took me in another direction altogether. The point of the comparative frame I proposed in my book was not simply to look at two different contexts, but to see how the questions I was asking could be brought back home to India.

What did I gain from thinking about popular music in Trinidad? That consolidation and displacement occur together and form part of a continuing process. (Here the consolidation and displacement had to do with notions of racial identity and citizenship.) That this complicated process is often manifested most visibly as cultural practice, and as music production in particular. That in our modernity – fashioned as it is through and in the wake of colonialism – thinking about the music might help us see one of the important ways by which ideas of who we are/who we want to be are put together, circulated, and gain purchase. That music is related to the structure of social aspiration and issues of social mobility. That the making and remaking of gender distinctions is central to processes of nation-making and the processes by which modern subjects are produced, and that music is one such important process. Thinking about these issues has brought me to my own primary cultural context, which is that of southern India, and as I began thinking of music in that region, I thought not just of Carnatic music but of the significant numbers of major singers of Hindustani music.

After Trinidad, I began to look more carefully for the music question in discourses of modernity in India. Often, this question seemed to be part of a larger effort in colonial society that gathered momentum in the early 20th century to work towards the re-codification of musical texts (texts authorising certain kinds of musical practice as well as the actual text or *bandish/sahitya* of a composition) and the recasting of performative traditions. If I had come directly to Hindustani music, either as a student or a lay analyst, solely from within an Indian context, I suspect it would have appeared before me as a “tradition” with its own strict and inviolable rules. This would have had more to do with received notions with maybe just a hundred-year history, the emergence of which coincides with the codification and assertion of “national” cultural practices in India. Scholars have pointed to other contexts, especially those involving women, where notions of “tradition” and “modernity” take shape and acquire solidity as part of a colonial contestation (Chatterjee 1993; Sarkar 2001), leading to the *fixing* of certain elements of cultural practice as authentic and traditional. What I am referencing here is not music alone, but a range of other social and cultural practices that went through a process by which they came to be named as traditional (Peterson and Soneji 2008).

### Formation of Hindustani Sangeet

While a few scholars have tried to give us historical insights into the formation of what is today called Hindustani music, and the social background of its practitioners and patrons (Manuel 2010; Trivedi 2000), the general disposition of audiences and singers today is to eternalise that music, seeing it as part of that which in the 20th century came to be called “Indian culture”. Although the musical strands that today form the Hindustani archive go back many centuries, the consolidation and emergence of a recognisable and distinct body of music took place over the last 400 years or so (Trivedi 2000).<sup>6</sup> As Hindustani sangeet evolved through the formation and dispersal of several courtly cultures in northern India (Bor and Miner 2010), by the mid-18th century courtesans and dancing girls came to be significant practitioners of both music and dance, challenging the pre-eminence of professional communities of musicians.

Nearly a century later, the establishment of the British Empire and the dwindling power of the princely states led to the dismantling of the elaborate establishments that had provided patronage to musicians and other cultural practitioners (Sundar 1996).<sup>7</sup> These performers, including *tawaifs* and courtesans, began to move out of the northern regions and travel westwards and southwards looking for new patrons – who they found in the rising Gujarati merchant class of Bombay and the heads of the small princely states that dotted the region below the Vindhya mountains. New performative genres took shape, including the western India sangeet natak or musical play – covering present-day Gujarat, Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, and using at least three to four languages – which brought trained musicians, both Muslim and Hindu, to a wider audience.

In the late 19th century, efforts were made by members of the professional classes in the cities to engage in discussions about music pedagogy, and to start modern music schools as opposed to the traditional *gharana/gurukul* system, where the student lived with the teacher’s family. The performance which Muslim men and courtesan women dominated was sought to be purified, and returned to the Sanskrit texts which were supposed to have authorised the musical practice (Farrell 2000; Qureshi 2000). Similar processes were undertaken with other kinds of performance, as, for example, with the south Indian dance form, *sadir*, which transformed through nationalist intervention into Bharatanatyam (Natarajan 1997).

In their new and nationalised forms, these performative traditions were assimilated, often by Hindu middle-class women and men, and relocated to a different social space. Thus relocated, it was possible to celebrate these as truly Indian, sometimes even as Hindu. The early 20th century brahmin codifiers and teachers of Hindustani music, like V N Bhatkhande, claimed to be democratising the music by making it part of a seemingly transparent pedagogic process (Bakhle 2005). Especially after the 1950s, the new subjects of musical training, a training that was now also done through graded national examinations and eventually also through regular courses within the university system, were mostly middle-class women – men always being fewer. However, earlier in the century it was the women who were fewer, and those women who took to music were mainly from the caste-occupation groups involved in the performing arts. Large numbers of women singers, for example, were to be found in the sangeet natak, as evidenced by the names to be found in histories of Kannada and Marathi theatre of that period (Marathe 1994; Ranade 1986; Amingada 2007).

Some work now exists on the establishment of the music schools in Lahore and Bombay, and later in other parts of northern and western India in the early 20th century. Scholars have also discussed the efforts of V N Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar in creating a new pedagogy and a new sense of what constituted Indian classical music (Bakhle 2005). Even a cursory glance at music CDs available today would reveal that a large number of singers without Muslim names are brahmins from Maharashtra in western India. But to see this as the primary direction taken by Hindustani music today would be to miss out on what has happened in a region in northern Karnataka, which has contributed at least five of the dozen most important singers of the last 50 years or more. The existing scholarship on Carnatic music or Hindustani music suggests that the consolidation of diverse older genres into “national” traditions was the problematic achievement of nationalist discourse. I suggest that the process was neither unidirectional nor did it achieve anything resembling a hegemonic set of conventions, and questions of caste, of language and region, and of religious identities continued to play a crucial role in musical negotiations.

### Hindustani in North Karnataka

Some of the best-known names in Hindustani music are from the north Karnataka region: Sawai Gandharva, Kumar Gandharva,

Mallikarjun Mansur, Bhimsen Joshi, Gangubai Hangal, Basavaraj Rajguru. Unlike Maharashtra, where musical practice and performance came to be dominated by brahmins, in the Dharwad region Lingayats competed with brahmins, both on the popular stage and in classical music. The lone woman in the list above is from a devadasi family, even if this tradition was disavowed in her mother's lifetime.<sup>8</sup> Nowhere else in Karnataka was Hindustani music taught widely in the early to mid-20th century, or for that matter to this day. Before the early 20th century there was not much evidence of such music in the region. By this I mean that the development from *dhruvad* to *khayal* that happened over several centuries in northern India did not have any parallel in Karnataka (see Deshpande 1987). Instead, *khayal* and other genres like *thumri* erupted into visibility in the early decades of the 20th century, gaining acceptance through the spread of the gramophone and the radio, and through the musical plays.

Before this time, there would have been, of course, Persian-Arabic intersections with local musics (folk and ritualistic), even before the time of Ibrahim Adilshah II (1580-1627) of the Bijapur empire, who wrote the musical text *Kitab-i-Nauras* in the Dakhni language.<sup>9</sup> In the Deccan Plateau region – including areas of present-day Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka – Hindu, Islamic and folk religious practices, and the merging of several musical traditions can be seen. One example is the performance of *tattvapada* (philosophical song) in northern Karnataka (Allen and Viswanathan 2004: 120-21). But while this may have been the cultural terrain on which Hindustani music made its mark, the past history of the region does not entirely explain how it was in that period, that is, in the early 20th century, that Hindustani music became such an important and widely-appreciated cultural form. If so many “great names” have emerged, what does it indicate about how many are learning music, how many teachers and patrons exist, and what sort of audiences turn out for Hindustani music? From all accounts, the popularity of this kind of music is only growing, and there are people teaching vocal or instrumental music in Hindustani style in almost every town in the region.

To the question of why there is so much Hindustani music in the Dharwad region, some of the common answers are along the following lines:

(a) Abdul Karim Khan, founder of the Kirana Gharana and court singer of the Baroda state, was often invited by the Maharaja of Mysore to sing at his court or in the Dasara festival. Abdul Karim usually stopped at Dharwad for performances on his way to Mysore. He began teaching music to Sawai Gandharva and others, thus creating a wave of interest in Hindustani music in the region. They, in turn, taught many more. Many ustadhs came to Dharwad for long visits, and sometimes to settle there, because of the pleasant weather. Indeed Dharwad used to be called Chota Mahabaleshwar in those days.

(b) Large numbers of Maharashtrians (Marathi-speakers) lived in Dharwad. They were the patrons of Hindustani music.

(c) Because Dharwad was in Bombay Karnataka, the influence of Marathi culture was predominant. Marathi popular plays

had Hindustani music and Kannada plays were derived from these.

(d) The chillies and spicy food of northern Karnataka clear the throat and make for voices more suited to Hindustani music.

The answers are inadequate even on their own terms. If Abdul Karim Khan's final destination was Mysore and he went there frequently, why did he not teach disciples there? Why was the Dharwad region such fertile ground for the spread of this sort of music? What sort of musical networks were formed that allowed Belgaum, Miraj, the smaller princely states (Jamkhandi, Kurundwad, Ramdurg, Ichalkaranji) and the Hubli-Dharwad region to become the catchment area for the practice of Hindustani music? Why is Kannada cultural practice perceived as “derived” from its Marathi counterpart, when all the evidence points to the simultaneous growth of theatre in the region and experiments carried out roughly at the same time? Answers to questions about the emergence of Hindustani music usually work with implicit theories of cultural influence or the importance of individual teachers who happened to visit Dharwad. But these, I argue, do not take us very far in understanding the significance of Hindustani music in that region.

### Significance of Sangeet Natak

The popularity of Hindustani music in the north Karnataka region is closely tied to its role in the Kannada sangeet natak. The language question is not prominent in the musical play, I suggest, precisely because it is displaced onto the question of musical form. What happens with the musical play could well give us an indication as to what is happening in the cultural space of the region itself, and how eventually the language issue finds a tentative resolution.

The modern Kannada theatre drew on folk forms such as the *Doddaata* (big play) and the *Sannaata* (small play), the *parijaata* (plays about the god Krishna), and *yakshagaana* (the more recent name for an old tradition of enacting with music and dance stories from the epics and Puranas), even as it came in contact with Parsi theatre in Bombay, the first proscenium-style Indian theatre modelled on Shakespeare plays, Sanskrit plays, Persian epics, and northern and western Indian folk theatre. Parsi theatre introduced to its audiences genres such as the *thumri*, *ghazal* and *hori*, and also drew on the Hindustani music that was prevalent in the western region by the 1880s (Gupt 2005).<sup>10</sup>

Kannada professional theatre gave rise to a popular new musical genre called *ranga sangita* or *natya sangita* (Garud 1998: 196). The Kannada sangeet natak, which began around the 1870s as middle-class entertainment, soon attracted a large rural audience, as is evidenced from the many venues where it was performed. The plays were performed by *natya mandalis* or drama companies, the earliest of which may have been established around 1869 (Marathe 1994: 50-51). The themes of the plays ranged from the mythological, including religious stories such as those about Akka Mahadevi or Basavanna or Kabir, to the historical such as a play on the anti-imperialist queen Rani Chennamma, to the “social”, lampooning modern education or manners, and on social reform issues

like widow remarriage, such as “Vishama Vivaha”. Some were translated Marathi plays. There were often up to 50 songs per play (Marathe 1994: 22), and at least 30 raags, most of them from Hindustani sangeet, were in common use (Amingada 2007: 75).<sup>11</sup>

The plays’ immense popularity also indicates the popularity of Hindustani sangeet, which occupied a central place in the unfolding of the plot.<sup>12</sup> Accounts of the time indicate that the audience, both urban and rural, was more than familiar with the raags that tended to be used in the natya sangeet (ibid). The opening invocation or *naandi haadu* was usually sung in Bhimpalas, Yaman, Bihag, Deshkar or Hameer because the play usually began around 11 at night, and these raags were to be sung at that time according to the principles of Hindustani music. Malkauns was used for the songs sung around midnight. As the play ended, by early morning, Bibhaas, Todi, Bhairav, Bhairavi, Jaunpuri, or Jog would be used for the songs. The final benediction or *mangala* would be sung in any raag. Malkauns, in particular, was very versatile – it could be sung in *karuna rasa* (in compassion), in *raudra rasa* (in rage), or in *bhakti rasa* (in devotion) (ibid: 77-78).

In Amingada’s account, Yenagi Balappa the singer-actor narrates the story of Badshah Master of Bevoor, Bijapur district, a close relative of the famous women singers Amirbai and Goharjan Karnataki. Once, Badshah appeared in the play “Rani Rudramma” in the part of Mallasarja. One of the songs of that character was in Malkauns. Badshah sang it beautifully. The spectators applauded him, and called out “once more”. Now, Badshah sang the same song as before, but this time in Bhairavi. The audience loved this too. Again, they called out a “once more”. Then, Badshah sang the song in Lalit. This sort of “musical ball-tossing” between actor and spectators created a joyous atmosphere (ibid: 121).

Music was so central to the plays that all actors had to be able to sing. Some were trained in classical Hindustani style, like Gadgoli Nilakantha Buwa, who acted in Garud Sadashiv-arao’s famous play *Satya Sankalpa*. Sripadarao Garud, who acted in his family’s theatre repertoire, relates this incident:

Once when he was alone on stage, Nilakantha Buwa started singing at length in Malkauns so that it appeared as though there was a *baithak* in the middle of the play. He would not stop singing. It was as though he had a *parwanagi* to sing. There was a cry of ‘once more’. He sang for ten more minutes. Again, ‘once more’, and ten minutes of singing. ‘Once more’ rang out again, and ten more minutes of singing followed. Garud lowered the curtain. Nilakanth Buwa went in front of the curtain. Another curtain fell. He went in front of that too. Garud was furious. He told the audience that he would not tolerate any ‘once mores’ for singing, otherwise Nilakanth Buwa would sing till morning. ‘If you want to listen to his singing, why do you come to a play? Invite him to sing for you separately’. This happened in 1932. To ensure the smooth onward movement of the play, Garud planned not to leave anyone alone on stage from that time on... (Sripadarao Garud, Interview, 22 February 2007).

This discussion of the centrality of Hindustani sangeet in the sangeet natak leads us to entertain the possibility that in the musical play the language question became displaced onto the music question, so that the genre of stage song was not rendered intelligible through the language of the lyrics, but

through the kind of music that was used. To go back to the story of Sawai Gandharva with which I began, the displacement was not *allowed* to the singer who was performing on the Marathi stage and not on the Kannada stage. So what is being challenged in Pune is his linguistic competence. He would obviously have been speaking Marathi on stage before (and after) singing, since it was a play which included dialogues, too. Is the implication therefore that his Marathi diction is faulty because he is not a native speaker? Is the objection of the Pune audience to his speaking or his singing? Can the two be separated out in performance? Instead of showing the audience that he can use Marathi well, Sawai Gandharva demonstrates that he can sing Hindustani! Is the triumph, narrated to us in the story of Sawai Gandharva shifting gears out of natya sangeet and into Hindustani sangeet proper, where his “language” cannot be challenged, because that belongs in a sense to the music and not to any ethnic or linguistic group?

### Towards a Hypothesis

How do we explain the simultaneous growth of Hindustani music in the same area that first articulated a demand for the unification of the Kannada-speaking territories, which at the time were spread across 19 different administrative regions? The Kannada identity movement, like many others in India as well as in other parts of the world, was premised on the idea of a distinct and unified culture, distinct language, and common history. Did Hindustani music, which was not sung in Kannada, pose a problem for the assertions of Kannada nationalists? The obvious answer would be that it did, and that Hindustani musicians of northern Karnataka *must have resisted* the cultural homogenisation suggested by the Karnataka Ekikarana or unification movement. But the very obviousness of the answer must make it suspect.

Was Hindustani music inconsistent with the Karnataka Ekikarana project, first articulated by Alur Venkata Rao in *Vagbhushana* (February 1907 issue, cited in Alur 1974: 231), the organ of the Karnataka Vidyavardhaka Sangha, or could we say it made the project possible in the first place? (The Ekikarana

## Survey

August 11, 2012

### Econophysics: An Emerging Discipline

by

Sitabhra Sinha, Bikas K Chakrabarti

Contemporary mainstream economics has become concerned less with describing reality than with an idealised version of the world. However, reality refuses to bend to the desire for theoretical elegance that an economist demands from his model. Modelling itself on mathematics, mainstream economics is primarily deductive and based on axiomatic foundations. Econophysics seeks to be inductive, to be an empirically founded science based on observations, with the tools of mathematics and logic used to identify and establish relations among these observations. Econophysics does not strive to reinterpret empirical data to conform to a theorist’s expectations, but describes the mechanisms by which economic systems actually evolve over time.

For copies write to: Circulation Manager,  
**Economic and Political Weekly,**  
320-321, A to Z Industrial Estate, Ganpatrao Kadam Marg, Lower Parel,  
Mumbai 400 013.  
email: circulation@epw.in

movement was intended to bring about the integration of 19 administrative regions under the Bombay and Madras Presidencies and a variety of princely states in which Kannada-speaking people were scattered.) If, as Alur saw it, there was no contradiction between the concept of India (nation) and Karnataka (region or *praantha*), was Hindustani music simply part of “national” culture? Then, *what happens to that which was not national?* “Truly, I do not see any difference between nationalism (*rashtreeyatwa*) and *karnatakatwa*” (Alur 1974: 103). He also introduced the concept of *pradeshika rashtreeyatwa* or regional nationalism (ibid). As Shivarama Padikkal and other scholars have suggested, there was no contradiction in the simultaneous birth of Kannada nationalism and devotion to *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), since these two were actually complementary, unlike in other parts of India, such as Tamil Nadu, for example (Padikkal 2001).

One of the most significant aspects of the cultural milieu of Dharwad in the early 20th century was the production of literary texts in a variety of genres – from poetry to drama, to the novel and essay – contributing substantially to the canon of modern Kannada literature. Did literature and music compete for cultural space? Or is it more likely that there was a division of “cultural labour”? The first, reaching out to the Old Mysore regions with its insistence on building canons of Kannada literature, and helping carve out the contours of Kannada nationalism/linguistic identity; the second, reaching northwards to Maharashtra and beyond, inserting itself into the story of a national modernity with its own definitions of the classical?

Perhaps it can be argued that it was the spread of Hindustani music that allowed literature (including both fiction and non-fiction) to become the key site for Kannada “sub-nationalism”. The articulation of the distinctive Kannada nation, which was presented as the daughter of Mother India, may have been enabled through this particular cultural configuration. The suturing of the gap or potential conflict between the social aspiration of the music and the political desire of Dharwad district for the unification of Karnataka along linguistic lines was made possible, I suggest, because of the way in which Hindustani music took hold of the cultural imaginary.

In the writings of Aa Naa Krishna Rao, a key leader of the movement, singers like Mallikarjun Mansur are represented as *kannadada raayabhaari* or the ambassador of Kannada in the rest of the country, even if this notion flies in the face of the fact that most listeners of Hindustani music are not always aware of the linguistic or regional background of the musician. Krishna Rao takes the credit for having urged Mansur to sing also in Kannada, by suggesting that the Shaivite *vachanas* and the songs of the *daasas* in particular, could be adapted to the Hindustani style (Krishna Rao 2007).

But, what of the present? The unification of the state happened several decades ago, and has not resulted in better facilities for the region that spearheaded the movement. The agricultural and industrial wealth of the state is concentrated in the south and along the coast, leaving the northern regions with depleted resources and decaying institutions. However, the

institutional structures for the teaching of music, informal though they are sometimes, show remarkable robustness. Hindustani music continues to grow in strength in the Dharwad region. Now there are several generations of singers, with children learning this music in every village and small town. Often the poorest and most disadvantaged (even in terms of physical disability) turn to the music, unlike in the metros in other parts of the country. The Veereshwara Punyashrama, a Lingayat ashram in Gadag, for example, has been training orphans, children from poor families, and physically challenged children, irrespective of the caste they come from, for over half a century in both vocal as well as instrumental styles.

Unlike elsewhere, in Karnataka state, Hindustani music is one of the three courses you can choose in the 11th grade in this region. It is also one of the three courses you can select for your bachelor’s degree in the humanities and social sciences. There is also a separate bachelor’s degree in music. Some of the best singers in the region teach in these colleges. For those who want to supplement the official pedagogy and the limited exposure in the classroom, there are equally good teachers on every other street in Dharwad town, the better known among them having more than 30 students each. There seems to be no memory of a time when anything other than Hindustani sangeet was the dominant music in the region.

### Conclusions: Cultural Labour

I return in conclusion to the notion of cultural labour, which I have used in this essay to refer to the work of suturing, of smoothing out contradictions in the body politic and creating a coherent cultural identity. The phrase draws attention to the nature of the work involved in cultural practice and performance, and the nature of performers’ activity, through teaching, singing, playing, notating, evaluating, and arguing about music. Cultural labour references a tangible and visible aspect of social transformation and social process, the latter to be seen as marked by elusive shifts in ways of living, thinking and creating. A particular cultural “act”, such as the play put up by Alur and his friends in Fergusson College, works like a condensation. The condensation, as it were, throws a spotlight on, illuminates, through an event/moment, that which has happened already, even as it indicates what impasse it tried to resolve. It could also be proleptic, suggestive of what is to come. The emergence in Dharwad of a cultural practice such as Hindustani music could well work like a condensation in the manner I have just described.

Thus, understanding the significance of Hindustani sangeet in Dharwad gives us a glimpse into one set of processes by which what it meant to be “modern” in the 20th century was assembled in India. The rise of Hindustani music in this region involved a set of social choices, or cultural directions taken. These choices can be disaggregated only in hindsight, so I am not suggesting that they were intentional and deliberated upon. Instead, they must be seen as choices thrown up by the historical moment that was a conjuncture of so many different strands. The word “balance” in the title of my essay refers to the notion of “Dharwad *takkadi*”, the idea prevalent among

musicians that Hindustani sangeet audiences in Dharwad are among the most discerning in India, and any singer would be grateful to have been weighed in that *takkadi* (balance,

weighing scales) and gained their appreciation. My attempt has been to throw light on the process by which the prevailing taste in Dharwad was formed.

## NOTES

- I use the contemporary term "Kannada" (the language) in my own text, but have retained "Kanarese" and "Canarese" while quoting from historical records.
- Paraphrased from Krishna Rao (2007: 41). Sawai Gandharva was the stage name of Rambhau Kundgolkar, whose guru was Abdul Karim Khan of the Kirana *gharana*. Sawai Gandharva acted in Shankarrao Sarnaik's Yaswant Natak Mandali, then acted with Hirabai Barodekar (Abdul Karim's daughter) in 1929 in the Nutan Sangit Vidyalaya's drama section. They acted together in *Mirabai*, *Saubhadra* and other plays. Hirabai left the troupe in 1932, and soon after, Sawai Gandharva also ended his stage career.
- Narrated in Mathapathi (1991: 70-71). While living in Mumbai, Mallikarjun Mansur was introduced to Manji Khan, son of Ustad Alladiya Khan, and began learning from him in 1935. In 1937, Manji Khan died. Mansur asked Alladiya Khan to be his guru, but the *ustad* was old and bedridden. He asked Mansur to study with his other son Burji Khan, and this discipleship continued for several years.
- See Guha (2004: 29), "When foreign authorities were to be impressed [by the Peshwas after the early 18th century] it was done by incorporating large amounts of Persian".
- For a detailed discussion of the linguistic and caste divisions in the Bombay Karnatak, see John Roberts (1971).
- Scholars of music have pointed out that around the mid-17th century, when the Mughal capital shifted from Agra to present-day Delhi, the "classical traditions of the Mughal court" incorporated the "regional musical patterns of Delhi" (Trivedi 2000: 281). When Muhammad Shah (1719-48) came to the throne during the political turmoil of the late Mughal period in Delhi, Hindustani sangeet went through a period of transformation, with folk traditions influencing prevailing courtly genres. These influences, among others, enabled the *khayal* to become the most prominent musical form, as also the *qawwali*. After Muhammad Shah's death and the decline of Delhi, musicians dispersed to other centres of power. Lucknow, seat of the Awadh court, became an important artistic and cultural centre when it provided refuge to those leaving Delhi as the Mughal empire fell apart; this phase ended when Awadh was annexed by the British in 1856 (Bor and Miner 2010).
- These states, which were under the Indirect Rule system and were nominally headed by Indian kings and princes, constituted over 30% of the area in British India.
- Gangubai claimed a musical lineage going back to the legendary Kirana Gharana singer Abdul Karim Khan and his student Sawai Gandharva. Her mother sang in the south Indian Carnatic tradition, and came from a devadasi background. By the early 20th century, changing structures of patronage had led to the domestication of devadasis and their giving up dancing-and-singing for more "respectable" performative modes like vocal music. Like her mother before her, Gangubai too acquired a brahmin "patron" with whom she had children. What were the trajectories of social aspiration in the period when Gangubai started learning music that propelled her in the direction of a different musical style than her mother's? The hypothesis I propose in this paper could point us in the direction of a possible answer.

- As Richard Eaton among others has pointed out, the Dakhni dialect was developed by the Muslims in south India and achieved literary status long before Urdu in northern India (Eaton 1996).
- Garud (1998: 199) and Gupt (2005). The influence of the Parsi theatre can be demonstrated for example in the plays put up by the Konnurkar Kaadasiddheswara Sangita Nataka Mandali, established by Konnurkar or Shivamurti Swami Kanaburgimatha, Konnur, in 1901. Some records suggest that the Mandali was actually established in 1899. Konnurkar brought Bombay-style scenarists, a dynamo for transfer scenes, and rich costumes to the stage. The Mandali lasted until 1921.
- The heyday of the sangeet natak lasted until about 1940, when the theatre split into two tendencies: one, a largely amateur and elite theatre concentrating on social realist plays, and two, a popular professional theatre that concentrated on plays containing farce and sexual innuendo. This split has continued to this day. The emergence of sound in cinema also contributed to the demise of the musical play.
- The actual notation of the composition is not provided; in the plays, the dramatic instructions merely indicate the name of the raag or say "this should be sung like... (followed by the first line of a *thumri* or *chhota khayal*)". Witness the instructions in *Sri Rukmini Parinaya Natakam* by Polepalli Padmanabhaya (1908). One composition is supposed to be sung in "Hin. Bhairavi" in *aaditaala* and "as though it were *Dekho chaman ka bahaa*"; another in Bihag "as though it were *mukhda dikhla jaa re*"; another, not named by raag or *taal*, but to be sung "as though it were *aayi mujhe dard de jigra ne sataaya*". Some plays had a mixture of songs sung in Hindustani as well as Carnatic style (such as Bihag and Kedar coexisting with Kambodhi and Kalyani, in *Karnataka Shakuntala Natakam* by Bellave Narahari Shastri (1928), or a Carnatic *aaditaala* with something called Raag Hindustani).

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Matthew Harp and T Viswanathan (2004): *Music in South India: The Karnatak Concert Tradition and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Amingada, Ganesh (2007): *Bannada Badukina Chinnada Dinagalu* (The Golden Days of a Colourful Life – A Biography of Enagi Balappa) (Mangalore: Prasadhana Prakashana).
- Alur, Venkata Rao (1974): *Nanna Jeevana Smritigalu* (Dharwad: Manohara Granthamala).
- Bakhle, Janaki (2005): *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Delhi: Permanent Black).
- Bor, Joep and Allyn Miner (2010): "Hindustani Music: A Historical Overview of the Modern Period" in Joep Bor, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Jane Harvey and Emmie te Nijenhuis (ed.), *Hindustani Music: Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers), 197-220.
- Chatterjee, Partha (1993): *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Deshpande, Vamanrao H (1987): "Dhrupad, Khayal and Thumari" in *Indian Musical Traditions* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan), 172-81.
- Eaton, Richard Maxwell (1996): *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal).
- Farrell, Gerry (2000): *Indian Music and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Garud, Prakash S (1998): "Vritthi Rangabhoomiya Swarupa: Uttara Karnatakavannu Anulakshisi" (The Shape of the Professional Theatre, keeping North Karnataka in Mind), PhD thesis, Kannada University, Hampi.
- Guha, Sumit (2004): "Transitions and Translation: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500-1800", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24(2): 23-31.
- Gupt, Somnath (2005): *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development* (trans and ed. Kathryn Hansen) (Kolkata: Seagull).
- Krishna Rao, Aa Naa (2007): *Karnatakada Kalaavidaru* (Artistes of Karnataka) (Sagar: Sagar Prakashana).
- Kurtkoti, Keerthinath (2003): *Rajakeeya Matthu Dharma* (Politics and Dharma) (Dharwad: Manohara Granthamala).
- Marathe, Ramakrishna (1994): *Uttara Karnatakada Vritthi Rangabhoomi* (The Professional Theatre of North Karnataka) (Bangalore: Ila Prakashana).
- Manuel, Peter (2010): "Thumri, Ghazal and Modernity in Hindustani Music Culture" in Joep Bor, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, Jane Harvey and Emmie te Nijenhuis (ed.), *Hindustani Music: Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers), 239-52.
- Mathapathi, Siddharamayya V (1991): *Hindustani Sangeetagaararu* (Hindustani Musicians) (Gorata, Bidar District: Rudreshwara Prakashana).
- Natarajan, Srividya (1997): "Another Stage in the Life of the Nation: *Sadir, Bharatanatyam, Feminist Theory*", PhD thesis, University of Hyderabad.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini (2006): *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad* (Durham: Duke University Press).
- Padikkal, Shivarama (2001): *Naadu nudiya ruupaka: raashtra, aadhunikate mattu kannada modala kaadambarigalu* (Formation of Land and Language: Nation, Modernity and the first novels of Karnataka) (Mangalore: Mangaluru Vishwavidyalaya Prasaraanga).
- Parulekar, R V and C L Bakshi, ed. (1957): *Selections from Educational Records (Bombay) Part III, 1826-1840*, Narayanrao Topiwala Memorial Educational Research Series, Vol V, Indian Institute of Education (Bombay: Asia Publishing House).
- Peterson, Indira and Daves Soneji, ed. (2008): *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt (2000): "Confronting the Social: Mode of Production and the Sublime for (Indian) Art Music", *Ethnomusicology*, 44(1): 15-38.
- Ranade, Ashok D (1986): *Stage Music of Maharashtra* (Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi).
- Roberts, John (1971): "The Movement of Elites in Western India under Early British Rule", *The Historical Journal*, 14(2): 241-62.
- Sarkar, Tanika (2001): *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black).
- Sundar, Pushpa (1996): *Patrons and Philistines: Arts and the State in British India 1773-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Trivedi, Madhu (2000): "Hindustani Music and Dance: An Examination of Some Texts in the Indo-Persian Tradition" in Muzaffar Alam, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau (ed.), *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers), 281-306.