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Ownership of Knowledge

Beyond Intellectual Property

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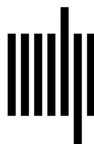

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RAGA AND THE PROBLEM OF OWNERSHIP: KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE IN CARNATIC MUSIC

Annapurna Mamidipudi and Viren Murthy

Capitalist society is usually thought of as being based on ownership—specifically, private ownership of the means of production. However, the problem of ownership pervades modern capitalist society in a manner that goes beyond owning the means of production and influences our relationship to intellectual production as well. Intellectual production, or knowledge, in this regime is usually subsumed under the concept of copyright, authorship, and patents, which delineates who has the rights over the sale, purchase, and symbolic capital related to the product of a specific person's intellectual labor. From this perspective, ownership is largely about exclusivity with respect to the use and exchange of objects.[1] In order that knowledge be owned in such a mode, it must be made detachable from the thing that is known, and mobilized[2] independent of the knower. This detachability or alienability is one of the conditions for the possibility of reconnection between knowability and ownability, which turns such knowledge into an exchangeable commodity.

We will be using the notion of ownership of knowledge in a slightly broader sense, as we examine struggles over the ownership of a form of artistic practice, Carnatic music, or South Indian classical music, by focusing on four specific performers. We wish to foreground two perspectives. First, we point to the central role of practice as an authoritative way of knowing. The creation of new spaces for performance during the twentieth century, and institutional boundaries for access to such spaces, show how practice becomes a mode of legitimately owning knowledge. Second, for Carnatic music, ownership of knowledge is not just about the use or exchange, but also about a certain social value of the music, which enables entry or membership into a specific community. Thus, ownership is also about being part of a community. In the instances examined in this chapter, the act of owning can change both the owner and the owned. What we examine here is the key point of the constitution of the relation between what is known and what can be owned as knowledge. In short, we must think

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about ownership of knowledge through performance as a form of relation that is constitutive of these categories.

We will examine knowledge related to a specific set of practices associated with the framework of *raga* in Carnatic music and interrogate how ownership of knowledge is embedded in these practices. While the system of *raga* is a framework that is operationalized in the performance, and in the practices of producing and consuming music, we find that when the relevant knowledge system becomes codified as a *raga* system, it becomes theory that is potentially detachable from the practice of Carnatic music. Though codification has played an increasingly important role since the turn of the twentieth century,[3] detachability does not mean that the theoretical framework is independent of practice; rather, as we shall see, the two remain in a dialectical relationship. Both change over time, since performance continues to be the site for experimentation through improvisational practices and the evaluation of musical production. However, once this *raga* system is codified, it requires actors to produce and consume it in this mode to ensure its reproduction and transmission. The *raga* system, now abstracted, has a technical vocabulary of its own and thus becomes a site for explicating and owning musical knowledge. It begins to function as a conceptual framework that has explanatory power over practice, with a knowledge role disembedded from the performance of the music itself. Given the nature of this codification, it opens up the sphere of Carnatic music to a newly defined knowledge community made up of two groups of people—performers and listeners (or *rasikas*, connoisseurs) of Carnatic music. In short, knowledge is defined in terms that legitimize the communal ownership of a newly emergent unique group who endeavor to distinguish themselves as being a knowledgeable elite by mediating the cultural and/or symbolic value associated with Carnatic music as explicable knowledge, rather than practice alone.

We use the example of Carnatic music to make a wider point about knowledge systems that are owned as practice. Practice, theorized as arrays of human activities, highlights embodied, materially mediated, nonpropositional knowledge;[4] within social theory and ethnology it speaks against deterministic grasps of social structures and systems,[5] and among cultural theorists it is used to depict language as discursive activity as against abstract discourse.[6] Despite the diversity, practice accounts in theory agree that as a field, practices constitute knowledge. Thus, the mind itself is constituted within practices; further, such knowledge is no longer even the property of individuals but instead a feature of groups.[7] We use the performance lens to follow technical practices and practical skills, allowing us to use performance as practice of craft skills and improvisation unfolding in time and space.[8] From this perspective, we follow Nicholas Cook in focusing on how music is performed. Cook writes:

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> The experience of live or recorded performance is a primary form of music's existence, not just the reflection of a notated text. And performers make an indispensable contribution to the culture of creative practice that is music. My claim is that in order to build this deeply into our thinking about music—in order to think of music *as performance*—we need to think differently about what sort of an object music is, and indeed how far it is appropriate to think of it as an object at all.[9]

This point is perhaps even more true of Carnatic music, where lovers of the art form are much more interested in going to a concert to hear a specific singer, without even knowing what they will perform. Through an analysis of various figures in Carnatic music, we explore how the practice of singing has the potential to signify beyond the social categories that have been imposed on it. Here, while performance is connected to performativity, they are not the same; even as performativity is not an extension of discourse theory, bodies speak without necessarily uttering.[10] Thus, in analyzing practice (both as doing and knowing) as performance we bring together two approaches: the first, performing as *showing doing*,[11] and the second, performing as *doing knowing*.[12] Practice-based research is the default approach in artistic performance; here, we propose that performance itself can produce and validate knowledge, connecting knowing to owning knowledge. Shifting focus from propositional content of knowledge, performance as performing knowledge stresses the co-presence of actors and audiences, temporality, and spatiality. Such a performance situation, where knowledge is presented in person, becomes a place to experiment with new modes of public knowledge, where production of knowledge is inseparably bound up with its reception, as well as the intermediality (sound, visual, material) implied in performance practices in knowledge production.[13] Thus, audiences constituted as communities of practice as well as publics remain important in the discourse about ownership, not only as social determinants, but because they arbitrate the performance of knowledge.

In general, Carnatic music can be placed into a longer historical trajectory of examples where musical forms are reconstituted by capitalism and the nation-state, which we can see in other musical traditions as well. For example, Hermano Viana has masterfully discussed how, in Brazil, samba became a symbol of the nation.[14] Perhaps even more closely related to our project, Fred Lau shows how the concept of modern Chinese music emerged in the early twentieth century as part of a nationalist project.[15] The story of the movement of Carnatic music from palaces to concert halls is similarly very much tied to new forms of identity associated with the emerging Indian nation-state and with market forces. However, there are some additional issues we need to keep in mind when discussing the transformations of Carnatic music. First, it self-identifies as classical music as opposed to, say, samba, or the Chinese folk music of which Lau

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writes. Second, although there are Carnatic singers, such as M. S. Subbalakshmi, who eventually represented the nation, to do so they needed to overcome regional divides. In other words, Carnatic music is usually understood to mean South Indian music in particular, not Indian music in general. Finally, Carnatic music became intimately enmeshed in a hierarchical social structure—namely, the caste system, which comprised another obstacle to labeling Carnatic music "national music." This is issue not unique to India, since the problem of elite discourses on music becoming dominant is also evident in the Brazilian and Chinese examples. However, in the Indian case, because even the languages of the south differ significantly from those of the north, we find, for example, Tamil nationalism influencing Carnatic music at least as much as Indian nationalism. T. M. Krishna has argued that Carnatic music is fundamentally exclusive because it is monopolized by the Brahmin caste in India.[16] This framing of Carnatic music enacts a barrier between the music and wider society that is almost impossible to negotiate for anyone who is not hereditarily Brahmin. From this viewpoint, membership of a social elite acquired by birth is the only way to know Carnatic music.

In examining the issue from a knowledge ownership perspective, we show how the evolving relation between the *theoretical concept* and *performance* of *raga*, as organizing practices of singing, playing a musical instrument, and listening, potentially allows or excludes participation beyond institutional boundaries of caste and class. A key factor here is the importance of improvisation in the performance of Carnatic music, which goes beyond mastery. Practice or *sadhana* is often done in private and comprises training for performance. During this practice, musicians will often work on various aspects of Carnatic music and, once they gain mastery, will begin to improvise. This private practice, guided by a guru, will eventually become a public performance, which will enable a large audience to experience the music. During the performance, listeners in the audience can demonstrate their knowledge by, for example, identifying *ragas*, and this grants them membership in a community of listeners. Connoisseurs belonging to this community, referred to as *rasikas*, can then become gatekeepers, both of the boundaries of what constitutes valid improvisation in the music itself and of who can be granted entry to become knowledgeable audiences and patrons.

It is through attaining and expressing knowledge of *ragas* that an individual affirms their belonging in a community, either as a listener or as a musician. We begin with an outline of the basic features of *ragas*, followed by a brief discussion of the change in social contexts of performance—of how the centers of music have moved from temples and palaces to concert halls or *sabhas*. This implies a shift in ownership practices, since potentially it has given more people access to Carnatic music, but at the same time, earlier hierarchies related to caste have been reconstituted and become more pervasive.

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Specifically, the twentieth century saw Brahminization and modernization emerge as twin phenomena. Once we have set this scene, we will examine various themes and four singers who have influenced *ragas* and Carnatic music more generally in their own ways from the early twentieth century to the present. The four artists who form the subject of our case studies are: G. N. Balasubramaniam (GNB) (1910–1965), who might be called a Carnatic pop star, the most famous female singers of the twentieth century; M. S. Subbalakshmi (MS) (1916–2004); T. M. Krishna (TMK) (1976–), a well-known contemporary critical Carnatic musician; and Vidushi R. Vedavalli (RV) (1935–), a contemporary female musician in her eighties.

The shift from palaces to concert halls brings us to a discussion on the opportunity and the impulse to universalize classical music. In a palace, the king was at the center of musical performance, but music was not played for the public. In contrast, GNB shaped the knowledge of Carnatic music so as to emphasize its universality. After this, we move on to discuss the religious value of devotion in Carnatic music, which is evidenced by Subbalakshmi. MS belonged to the marginalized community of *devadasis*, women who performed in temples and courts to great acclaim, before their practice was deemed promiscuous by the law and lost respectability. She went on to become one of the major figures in Carnatic music and consequently provides a prime example of a person from outside the community of Brahmins who makes Carnatic music their own through negotiating both the social boundaries and the knowledge framework of Carnatic music, including the nuances of *ragas*. In her practice, musical knowledge was connected to a virtuous life, which was accepted by people beyond the Brahmin community. Next, we move on to what could be conceived as a reaction to the above emphasis on devotion, Brahminization, and virtue—an attempt to make Carnatic music "modern" in a different way. Krishna is emblematic of this trend and could be called the rebel star of Carnatic music. He has recently berated the Carnatic tradition as being insular and has attempted to rejuvenate it by radically altering its form, while at the same time rethinking and appropriating the framework of *ragas*. The final section of this chapter deals with the trajectory of traditional Carnatic music and the manner in which, by highlighting the gap between that knowledge and practice, Carnatic music can result in traditionally informed innovation that is distinct from the global mass culture that threatened to marginalize classical music in the 1960s and 1970s. Vedavalli, along with others in the community, has noted how *ragas* have changed over time, by comparing contemporary practice to notation texts written in the late nineteenth century, which were early attempts to codify *ragas*. RV sees herself as very much rooted in the tradition of Carnatic music, but by sticking to this tradition firmly, she changes it. Together, the various sections in this chapter show how Carnatic music

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is owned and transformed within a particular kind of experimental epistemic culture that self-identifies as traditional and classical music.

RAGA AS A KNOWLEDGE FORM

Raga is a concept that is unique to Indian classical music and notoriously difficult to define, but in this section, we will briefly examine the conceptual framework that people now refer to as a *raga*. A *raga* is a melodic framework or a generative mechanism consisting of rules, which appear in the form of musical scales and phrases. The concept of *raga* emerged before colonial influence and was first elaborated in a classical treatise on music in Matanga Muni's *Brhaddeshi*, usually dated between the sixth and eighth centuries. However, this and later texts do not use *raga* in the same way that we use the term today. Perhaps most importantly, music was not a distinct subject of knowledge at that time—the pre-thirteenth-century literature on music also covered art, aesthetics, beauty, dance, and theater.[17]

Initially, there was no difference between Carnatic music, which originated in South India and Hindustani, and North Indian classical music, and they continue to share a similar structure of *raga*.[18] Carnatic (and Hindustani) musicians have used something analogous to the solfège to map the musical scale of *ragas*. In short, the notes do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti in Western classical music correspond to the notes or *swaras* sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni in Carnatic music.[19] The intervals between the notes can change, just like in Western classical music. Although a certain type of notation existed before Western colonialism and influence, as we shall see in the next section, in the twentieth century there was a conscious effort to make an analogy to the Western system, to claim that Carnatic music was also a type of classical music, through a focus on producing texts, some of which were notated. We argue that this codification implied a certain emphasis on theory, but as such, theory associated with the *raga* was continually performed or displaced through practice. We argue that this shift to describing what was previously known primarily through performance sets the stage for the current discussion on Carnatic music as a regime of ownership of knowledge that must accede to particular classificatory rites of passage if it is to become a modern knowledge system.[20] As music became more of an independent artistic practice, the concept of the *raga* also evolved.

In this chapter, we will focus primarily on the concept of *raga* in the twentieth century. In general, a specific combination of *swaras* is the foundation of any given *raga*. For example, the major scale in Western classical music corresponds to the Carnatic *raga Sankarabharanam*.[21] *Ragas* are more than merely scales. For instance, although much baroque music uses the same notes as the *raga Sankarabharanam*, baroque music

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might not invoke this *raga* for practitioners and listeners of Carnatic music. Rather, there are often also set phrases that evoke the moods and emotions of a particular *raga*. Certain notes in a *raga* are played or sung with embellishments or *gamakas*, which are essential to the *raga*'s mood. A mark of a knowledgeable listener of Carnatic music is that they are able to identify which *raga* is being sung.

To enable the listener to identify a *raga*, the performer has to sing certain key notes in phrases. To evoke the mood of a *raga* and make it identifiable, a performer often plays or sings a melodic phrase with what is called an oscillation of notes or a *gamaka*, a concept that we find in the early texts on Indian music.[22] Similarly, any given *raga* will have certain key phrases that enable the audience to recognize it in the initial stages of a song, or *kriti*. This description shows that although a complex melody can elegantly evoke a *raga*, a *raga* is at a higher level of abstraction than a song or specifically composed melody. One can insert notes and string phrases of a specific *raga* in many possible patterns and combinations. To some extent, this creativity or innovation is the work of the composers, who write songs in any given *raga*. The framework of *ragas* gives the singer a large degree of creativity as well, and to grasp this, we will need to introduce a bit more detail about the manner in which a song is presented.

Typically, in a concert, a singer will not jump straight into a complex *kriti* or composition—that will be preceded by what is called an *alapana*. In this section, the singer sings phrases of a specific *raga*, but the *alapana* is improvised without any lyrics or composed rhythmic structure. The singer sings using syllables such as tha, da, ri, and na, among others. During this phase, the singer brings out the essence of the *raga* and explores various possibilities within it. This is then followed by a violin solo, where the violinist presents their version of the *alapana*, partly mimicking the vocalist.

When these two improvised portions are finished, the singer launches into the *kriti* or song, which largely follows the composed version and includes a specific rhythmic pattern. We say "largely" because—toward the end of this composition—there are two improvised sections, which can be distinguished from the *alapana* because they are performed while conforming to the rhythmic structure in which the *kriti* is composed. These two sections are called the *neraval* and *kalpana swaras*. In the *neraval*, the singer takes a phrase from the lyrics in the *kriti* and improvises around it, this time within the strictures of the rhythm. The *kalpana swara* then continues this type of improvisation, but instead of using lyrics, the singer directly sings the notes sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni in different patterns at increasing speeds, again exploring the possibilities of the *raga*. In these various periods of improvisation, there are certain aesthetic criteria that govern the manner in which the singer can develop the *raga*. It is here that the community of listeners and connoisseurs plays a role, sanctioning such experimentation as being legitimate or not.

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We have gone into some detail about the various modes of improvisation because this illustrates the dynamic nature of the *raga* in performance. In other words, as a knowledge system or framework for practice, *ragas* may be described as comprising a combination of scales, phrases, and *gamakas*; however, because of the high level of improvisation the musical form demands, the initial framework is being both constantly reproduced and gradually transformed based on aesthetic criteria that are not easily codified during practice and performance. We argue that this internal dynamic is connected to what it means to own or master a *raga*. In short, one cannot possess a *raga* like an object, and so when we discuss ownership in this context, we are talking about belonging to a community of listeners and musicians at the same time; owning knowledge of *raga* equates to being recognized as a part of the community. There is a constant tension between three elements—the theory, the musician's performance, and the social mediation that makes up this epistemic culture. There is a dialectic between the structure of the *raga* and the various reproductions and transformations that occur with the performance of improvisations based on various aesthetic criteria.

The training required to learn a *raga* then takes us beyond usual forms of ownership or belonging, because owning or appropriating a *raga* involves a transformation of the subject doing the owning. The repetitive, imitative, technical, and meditative practices required to learn Carnatic music, along with their religious overtones, often call for overcoming the self and following the logic of the *raga* itself. While this is not the place to go into the complex world of Carnatic pedagogy, typically a neophyte will begin by repeating various exercises while imitating their teacher. At that point, students are introduced to forms of codification, especially the notes and the various *ragas*, which have been increasingly formalized in the past two centuries and form the basis of the various exercises. The exercises eventually grow in complexity and the *swara* patterns become increasingly difficult. Such imitation and repetition appear to be opposite to improvisation, but in fact they are creating the conditions for the possibility of creativity.[23] At the final stages of a student's training, teachers will expect moments of spontaneity to emerge without going out of the framework of the *raga*. At this level, the learner goes beyond both codification and mere imitation, but in a manner that retains what they have learned at the previous levels.

Musicians will debate whether *ragas* can be owned at all, as in their framework, ownership is about having the responsibility to perpetuate the art without compromising its essential creative character. At the same time, when a musician is an accredited master of a particular *raga*, it becomes attached to his name, as, for example, in the case of Todi Sitaramayya, who was known for his mastery of the *raga* called *Todi*. One could also say that rather than possessing the *raga*, at that point it should be almost as if the

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singer is *possessed by* the *raga*, which seems to undermine one of the key conditions of ownership—namely, self-possession. This element of Carnatic music could represent a moment of self-transcendence through self-discipline. Popular fiction about Carnatic music often alludes to this moment of transcendence in Carnatic music. For example, in the famous Kannada novel the *Swan's Song* (*Hamsa Geethe*, 1952), the protagonist's singing teacher tells him that in order to sing, he needs to transcend himself. "Did I not tell you before: Advaita. Everything is me. Everyone's pain and happiness is in my mind. The mind is the ontological whole [*aham braham asmi*], implying that the mind must come to full maturity."[24] Interestingly, in such stories, the protagonist has to eventually disown everything else to learn Carnatic singing, including their own self, and devote their entire being to practice. Then finally they are able to learn improvisation, which begins to come "naturally." There is an analogous narrative for the listener, where true *rasikas* could be found in unlikely places, like the driver of the bullock cart who could converse knowledgeably about the previous night's performance while ferrying the musician of the day to her concert.

These idealized representations of Carnatic music do say something about the practice, and we see contemporary musicians drawing on such ideas as well. By combining musical practice with an understanding of ultimate reality, such texts indicate the universal significance of Carnatic music. Understanding and being able to practice Carnatic music implies understanding the secrets of the world—or even the universe. This idealized vision is inextricably connected with social mediation that puts people in certain subject positions that denote class, caste, gender, and numerous other social relations. Like all art forms, Carnatic music is socially mediated, so we must consider the social hierarchy that conditions its practice. To shed some light on this aspect, we will now briefly explain the transformation of the social context of Carnatic music and the Brahmin hegemony that surrounds its institutional performance spaces.

UNIVERSALIZING MUSIC: FROM IMPERIAL COURTS TO MADRAS CONCERT HALLS

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an important social transformation affected the social spaces in which Carnatic music was performed and presented as knowledge. These transformations help us to understand the changing conditions for the production of knowledge. Before the twentieth century, Carnatic music was not unified.[25] Just as music itself was considered in relation to other performing arts, there were various types of performers of Carnatic music. In particular, the two non-Brahmin practitioners, the *devadasis* and those playing the instrument, the *nagasvara*, were able

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to coexist with the Brahmin musicians and scholars, and all contributed to music. The *devadasi* is unique to the Indian context, but could be understood as the Indian counterpart to the Japanese geisha. A way of distinguishing the gender roles that emerged in Carnatic music, and which needed negotiation in the twentieth century, was that most musician composers, *vaggeyakaras*, were Brahmin and male, and they simultaneously acquired knowledge of language, *shastras* (sacred texts), *agamas* (Hindu devotional scriptures), and musical theory. In contrast, women of the *devadasi* community, though well versed in the sixty-four arts, were seen predominantly as performers. Although they would later be associated with prostitution, their actual artistic identity was much more complex. Strictly speaking, *devadasis* were women who were dedicated to worship and performed various artistic ritual offerings in the temple through song and dance. Precisely because they became identified with prostitution after India's independence in 1947, the government later outlawed them.[26]

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, singers would perform in temples and imperial palaces. Tanjore, a city in Tamil Nadu state in southeast India, was a center for art, and as the center moved to Madras, a Brahmin stream of music came to dominate the *devadasi* practitioners. *Devadasis* had a rich repertoire. including songs of *Shringara* (sensuousness) such as *padams* and *javelis*, but also, at times, larger *raga*-centered improvisation. As the Brahmins came to dominate patronage organizations and the framework of the *raga* became codified as abstract knowledge, it also became increasingly associated with Brahmin music.

This perception of the Brahmin way of singing embodied a contradiction. On the one hand, the emphasis on abstraction and improvisation suggested an openness, tending toward universality. Anyone who learned the rules and the aesthetic principles could participate in this music and potentially be accepted into the community of listeners and practitioners. On the other hand, the training and culture associated with such music was eventually limited to upper-caste and specifically Brahmin individuals, as this knowledge was transmitted within their homes and organizations. Even without caste-based restrictions, the amount of time and practice required to understand and appreciate Carnatic music meant that it was difficult to access.

We see here a type of contradictory development of Carnatic music that is at once open and closed. The same contradictions can be seen in relation to the emergent public. In particular, the concert space moved from the Tanjore palace and temples to public concert halls or *sabhas* in Madras, which were theoretically open to a larger public. The concert halls implied a structural transformation of the spaces where music was performed and appreciated. In place of a palace or temple where music was performed for a specific person, such as a king, performance halls were built for everyone, and

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included a stage that was separated from the audience's seating area. Other changes accompanied this transformation, such as the introduction of microphones and amplifiers that would enable large numbers of people to listen. But, as we have already mentioned above, this opening up occurred simultaneously with a Brahminization of the music, which in reality tended to make it the property of one particular caste. This exclusivity was sometimes aided by the religious nature of the music, which largely represented Hindu imagery, reinforcing religious boundaries.

At India's independence, people had gained legal freedom—they were increasingly officially free from bonds of caste, but the hierarchies of caste continued to operate in the private domain, and at times grew stronger, while at the same time creating new forms of identity and exclusion. This again fits with recent discussions of caste. For instance, Gill Navyug has used Karl Marx's "On the Jewish Question" (1844) to understand caste in India.[27] In that article, Marx argued that the transition from feudalism to capitalism officially abolished existing hierarchies, but in reality it allowed inequalities to continue in the private sphere. Marx is, of course, most concerned with the power of private property and the market, which is definitely an important part of this story as well. After all, the move to Madras must be understood in relation to the history of the emergence of capitalism in India. This had contradictory effects on music. On the one hand, it had the potential to lead to universalization, since theoretically, anyone who bought a ticket could listen to the concerts, which were open to the public. But on the other hand, this could result in the watering down of Carnatic music, as musicians began to cater to an uninformed public in order to broaden their appeal and therefore increase ticket sales.

As this process developed in the 1950s and 1960s, as we will see, the famous Carnatic singer GNB criticized the commodification of music. Lakshmi Subramanian has helpfully outlined the consequences of these transformations on listening culture, in ways that suggest a connection to the problem of ownership and also to the reproduction of hierarchy. She writes about the importance of a growing middle class in Madras, successful professionals for whom the

> consumption of music was not only a matter of aesthetic pleasure or a marker of status and culture but an articulation of what Emile Durkheim would call a collaborative need to formalize togetherness by adhering to common symbols and practices. . . . However, what distinguished the engagement of the Brahmin elite in Madras was the enhanced symbolic significance they attached to the practice of listening and appreciating music, thereby participating in the construction of a sense of community with exclusivist overtones.[28]

We see here the construction of a new form of identity related to the emergence of the modern nation-state. Indeed, it was largely because of the narrative of the nation-state that it was deemed that if Carnatic music was to remain respectable, the *devadasis*,

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who were now associated with prostitution, could not be its main performers. In this context, earlier caste distinctions did not disappear but instead were reconstituted in a different form and, in some ways, exacerbated. To understand the reconstitution of the culture of South Indian music, we must also briefly examine the confluence of two aspects of capitalist modernity in the Indian context—namely, colonialism and education. Subramanian explains:

> The emergence of a new Brahmin elite was a direct outcome of the spread of western education and professional service that was evident from around the 1860s, when Tamil and Telugu Brahmin lawyers began to attain prominence, wealth and status as a professional group.[29]

These professionals, who had been educated in a Western style, then began to reframe the relationship between Carnatic music and Indian tradition. Elites would reconstitute Carnatic music in a contradictory dynamic between their colonial education and the imagination of a national culture. Many were Brahmins who stressed that Carnatic music, like the Indian nation, was pure and distinct from the tawdry practices of *devadasis* and other nonelites.

Before moving on to our case studies of four musicians, we should mention one more aspect of this transformation that is intimately connected to tradition—namely, religion. As we have mentioned above, the imagery of Carnatic music is primarily Hindu. However, the transformations associated with shifting the center of music to the Madras concert halls "fostered a genuine listening habit among an urban audience that responded to music not as a ritual experience, but as a kind of hybrid personal experience, that helped to negotiate the new professional life detached from the older moral economy."[30]

THE MAKING OF A CARNATIC POP STAR: G. N. BALASUBRAMANIAM

GNB became an icon in Carnatic music and is considered one of its most innovative musicians. He was born in 1910, at the very height of the transition from the Tanjore court to the Madras concert halls (*sabhas*). His life and career exemplify many of the changes that we have discussed but also show that innovation is possible and sustainable in the framework of modern Carnatic music.

He was born into a lower-middle-class Brahmin family. His father was a schoolteacher who was also the secretary of a concert hall in Triplicane called the Parathasarthy Swami Sabha. Because of his father's post, the young GNB was exposed to a great number of well-known musicians, and an early anecdote about this tells us something about the nature of *ragas* in Carnatic culture. When GNB was about three years old, a number of musicians and his father were discussing the music of a well-known singer, Maha

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Vaidyanatha Iyer. These types of discussions are an essential part of Carnatic music, since it is one of the places where listeners of Carnatic music participate in and perform the knowledge of *ragas*. GNB's father praised Vaidyanatha Iyer's ability to sing *kalpana swara* in the *raga Hamsadwani*. The young GNB then interjected that he could do this as well. His father first dismissed GNB's words as the idle boast of a toddler, but the musicians convinced him to give his son a chance. GNB went on to improvise *swara* combinations in the *raga Hamsadwani* in four-speed cycles. Extremely impressed, the musicians urged GNB's father to give him proper music lessons and forget about his school education.

The point of this story for our purposes is that the anecdote shows the manner in which *raga* functions as knowledge and in connecting a community. Learning the *raga* form opens Carnatic music newcomers up to the community. In this case, there is nothing especially unusual about a Brahmin boy who excels at improvising in Carnatic music. But at this level of abstraction, the community is seen as being able to potentially include newcomers who can grasp materially the abstract *raga*, as this group did by recognizing GNB's mastery. GNB would go on to become immensely popular among the young upper-class people of Madras, as an innovator famous for the speed of his singing and his use of a specific *gamaka*, the *brigga*. GNB himself described his gift for visualizing *swaras* thus: "Without so much as any basic training, I acquired swara gnana. . . . Whenever I listened to good music, I had an inner feeling that I could visualize it in the imagery of swaras."[31]

GNB's fast-paced *gamakas* or *briggas* are important not only because they took the music world from the 1930s to the 1960s by storm, but also because their genealogy went against Brahmin dominance, and he would eventually connect such things to a type of universality. Specifically, GNB contended that he had learned to sing *briggas* by imitating the music of the *nagaswaram*, a wind instrument that was primarily played by non-Brahmins. This instrument could be used to play notes at an extremely fast pace, and GNB incorporated this style into his own vocal music. But his incorporation was something like a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, or sublation, since in GNB's musical practice, the techniques of the *nagaswaram* maestros were appropriated and transported to a new space where complexity and innovation in developing *ragas* were key.

GNB graduated with a BA honors degree in English, which might be one reason why people called him an intellectual. Some suggest that because of his intellectual and creative proclivities, he would often push the limits of what was possible in terms of the accepted norms of a *raga*. Consequently, some of the older generation of Carnatic singers and listeners were initially skeptical about how he treated Carnatic music.

In addition to exploring the patterns within *ragas* that people already knew, an important facet of GNB's innovation lay in his singing and exploring *ragas* that people

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rarely sang. To do this, he drew on rare compositions by famous composers, especially Tyagaraja and Dikshitar, but during the periods of improvisation, he would have to create new melodic phrases that conformed to the aesthetics of Carnatic music. The audience and experts were satisfied with this, and GNB soon went on to become an icon of Carnatic music, partly because of his good looks, but also because he popularized a new style of singing that had an emphasis on creativity and intellectual virtuosity. He not only added to their listening pleasure but also expanded their knowledge base by adding new or rare *ragas* to their repertoire.

In some ways, he epitomized the new mode of Carnatic music in the Madras concert halls, and toward the end of his life, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, he began to reflect on the current state of music and promoted a universal vision of music. His reflections expressed the abstraction related to this genre but attempted to make more general statements about Carnatic music as art at a universal level. In an essay titled, "Art: Its Dawn and Future Role," GNB made the following comment:

> Music is the most universal and least sensual in its appeal. If painting is two-dimensional, sculpture three, one can say that music is four-dimensional, having its basis in tone, colour, rhythm and melody. The artist and the listener are free of the bonds of time and the logic of circumstances. It is enjoying and creating beauty without responsibility. Really, there is no language for sounds or music. Yet it is the most universal language.[32]

GNB's appropriation of Carnatic music makes it universal and accessible to anyone and, to some extent, echoes the ontological claims made about music in new interpretations of Hinduism. According to this, music becomes completely transcendent—a language beyond language. You cannot help hearing in these remarks something like Adorno's claim that "music is language of a completely different type. Therein lies its theological aspect. . . . It is demythologized prayer."[33] With such cryptic remarks, Adorno and GNB turn music into a new type of religion without religion, which perhaps implies a new way of knowing that is based not only on grasping an object but also on a transformation of the subject, which intimates a different relation to time. In the same essay, GNB strikes a messianic tone, which gives meaning to music and its knowledge:

> When all nations of the earth are worn out in their fight for world supremacy, when there is a desperate cry for universal peace, Music will be the Messiah for the golden age, uniting all in one common language and religion of sound at once sensuous and intellectual, exciting to calm, stimulating to appeasement and marshalling all the powers for Goodness, Truth and Beauty to work in unison in a spontaneous, disciplined and organized manner, towards the achievement of the common weal of all mankind.[34]

Music here gestures toward an ideal future where ownership within a community will seem to become irrelevant. This passage suggests that while music might currently

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be a framework that excludes some, it is seeking a universality that would go beyond social distinctions. By stressing the disciplined, organized, and yet spontaneous manner of Truth and Beauty, GNB emphasized the nature of Carnatic music itself, which involves repetitive training structure and exercises, only to eventually break these and create new patterns through improvisation. For him, the practice of Carnatic music and music in general could also have a meaning beyond India and beyond even the various religions and nations, offering a means for humankind to ultimately achieve harmony. But such a harmony would require Carnatic music to continue to be itself, while gesturing toward the universal. During the same period, GNB was concerned about the "annihilation of art," which was largely connected to the problems of modernity and the social mediation of artistic production. He feared precisely that art and Carnatic music would lose their identity in the throng of mass culture, writing:

> The greatest threat to the life and growth of all classic art is regimentation, which is to a certain extent unavoidable when the dissemination of art is mechanised, commercialised and discriminate. It clogs the springs of imagination and all creativity, forcing the artist into a dull, cold and inane level of achievement, at once tiring him and satiating the listener.[35]

GNB highlights mechanization and commercialization, both of which are connected to the processes associated with capitalist modernity. He had witnessed how commercialization was affecting Carnatic music in the concert halls of Madras. The problem of ownership there was complex, because as the public began to appropriate Carnatic music, it might cease to be itself by losing its creative moment. If the audience no longer had this creative subjective element, there was a risk they might end up treating *ragas* just as something that is purely formal or mechanical. As Hegel warned with respect to the process of thinking,

> The Idea [*Idee*], which is true enough for itself, in fact remains ensnared in its origin as long as its development consists in nothing but the repetition of the same old formula. Having the knowing subject apply the one unmoved form to whatever just happens to be present [*dem Vorhandenen*] and then externally dipping [*eingetaucht*] the material into this motionless element contributes as much to fulfilling what is demanded as does a collection of purely arbitrary impressions about the content.[36]

The analogy with Hegel emerges precisely because with the global reinterpretation of religion, there was an emphasis on interiority or subjectivity, which grounds creativity.[37] But in both philosophy and music, this interiority cannot just do whatever it likes; it must follow the logic of the inherent content—in the case of Carnatic music, the movement of the *raga* itself. The danger was that without creativity and improvisation, *raga* might dwindle into formalism without any aesthetically interesting content. In this way, GNB warned the Carnatic listener to focus on more than just the familiar

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framework of the *raga*, to include the moment of creativity that cannot be completely codified. This is why the role of practice is so important. With music, repeated practice gives rise to a moment that cannot be completely codified, which is why a *raga* can never be reduced to just its notation or rules. You cannot merely externally apply the framework of a *raga* to an existing voice or instrument. Rather, an artist must follow the aesthetic logic of the *raga* to create music. Because we are dealing with an aesthetic logic, the parallel with Hegel's phenomenology breaks down. There are moments of uncertainty in the improvised portions of Carnatic music, and creativity sometimes lies therein. A further exploration of the parallels might be interesting. If we interpret Hegel from a Carnatic perspective, we could say that he requires a *sadhana* or a practice of thinking, which is needed to follow the logic of concepts.[38]

We will now consider another tendency associated with the development of Carnatic music as knowledge—namely, the idea of a virtuous knower, which implies an innate attribute of the musician that cannot necessarily be codified.

THE MAKING OF A VIRTUOUS KNOWER: M. S. SUBBALAKSHMI

In dealing with the problem of knowledge and virtue, we will draw on the life and work of MS to illustrate how someone outside the community can be seen as a Brahmin by showing that they have the requisite type of musical knowledge. Similar to the GNB case, this section tells the story of how someone became accepted into the Carnatic scene. GNB was a Brahmin who learned the *raga* framework and attempted to go beyond it. The case of MS is more complex because she was not from a Brahmin family; instead, she was born into a family of *devadasis* and received the requisite training in singing and dancing. So, in addition to learning the framework, she had to transform her identity in order to become accepted. MS's virtuosity was not just abstract; she also expressed devotion and virtue, which made her appeal universal. Moreover, part of the transformation of her identity involved constructing her persona as someone virtuous and at the same time knowledgeable about Carnatic music.

One of the ways in which *devadasis* could move up in terms of class was through marriage, so her mother found wealthy suitors for her. However, MS was determined to follow a singing career in Carnatic music and twice fled to Madras at a young age. The second time was in 1936, when she was interviewed by a prominent Brahmin called Sadhasivam for a Tamil magazine. Sadhasivam sponsored MS and would eventually become her husband, which afforded her acceptance by the Brahmin community as well as respectability in her performance.

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This story fits with the narrative that Lakshmi Subramanian provides with respect to the move of *raga* performances to the concert halls in Madras, since Sadhasivam was also a prominent nationalist, and part of the nationalist project was to emphasize progress and the move away from *devadasi*-like practices. MS began her musical career by acting in films, and in 1940, the year she married Sadhasivam, she also acted in the film *Shakuntalai* opposite GNB and fell in love with him. During this period, GNB's influence on her music was evident, as she also experimented with fast-paced *gamakas*. It is said that Sadhasivam did not want to let MS act in any more movies, but he made an exception for the film *Meera* (1945), where MS played the heroine. In the film, she plays a woman who is so devoted to Krishna that her love for the deity goes beyond everything else, including her devotion to her husband, a king. The film was made in Tamil and dubbed into Hindi as well, and Jawaharlal Nehru and Lord Mountbatten attended special screenings. The freedom fighter Sarojini Naidu introduced MS to Hindi speakers from North India, saying, "You will cherish her. You will be proud, that India in this generation, has produced so supreme an artist."[39]

MS was then characterized by this type of devotional knowledge, and after India gained independence, Sadhasivam's influence was crucial in turning MS into both an image of the ideal Brahmin housewife and a symbol of the nation, which again required devotion. These two sides of MS went together, since being a good Brahmin housewife implied a certain sublime spirituality that negotiated religiosity and Indian nationalism. Gandhi adored MS's music and Nehru called her the Queen of Music. As her career progressed, MS became a public figure who was known for singing religious songs in languages from both North and South India; she also famously represented India when she sang at the United Nations (UN) in 1966.

Although some commentators have argued that maintaining her social persona affected her music, and that singing a large number of religious songs sometimes restricted her opportunity for improvisation,[40] she continued to sing elaborate *kritis*, *alapanas*, and other forms of improvisation. She was well known for her adherence to *shruti* (pitch) and her ability to sing a pure note with almost a sublime therapeutic effect on the listener. Becoming one with the *shruti* indicates a knowledge that goes beyond written words and echoes a theme in the film *Meera*, where Meera eventually becomes one with her god, Krishna. As part of the narrative around perfection, it became extremely important for MS to sing flawlessly, which some observers say restricted her attempts at creativity. Yet, being a woman subsumed in a marriage to a Brahmin man, the identity she asserted was that of Brahmin piety, attaching spirituality to the community whose membership had been the means for her to gain ownership of music.

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MS's case illustrates how the added dimension of gender may have shaped the ability of individuals to know and own Carnatic music by social status. Although GNB had faced some criticism in the initial stages of his career, he eventually became known as an intellectual musician and received the Sangita Kalanidhi, the Madras Music Academy's highest award, in 1958. MS also received this award, in 1968, and became even more of an icon than GNB, but her case is more complex. Her acceptance into this Brahmin community was aided by her ability to pronounce Sanskrit correctly; although she was not known for her intellectual authority, her devotional spirit was lauded.

Partly due to her performance at the UN and her connections to the Indian nationalist movement, she furthermore became the first Indian musician to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award[41] in 1973, and to become known globally. Such fame came at a price—namely, that she had to conform to the specific role of a religious Brahmin wife, which placed constraints on the individuation that, in modernist terms, is seen as the basis for musical development.

MS's story shows that in addition to its formal rules and various aesthetic criteria, the practice and reception of Carnatic music are mediated by various social structures including gender, capitalism, and the nation-state. In her life we can see the contradiction between something like the abstract elements of Carnatic music, such as intellectual discussion and improvisational experimentation of the *raga*, and the other side of her musical appeal—namely, the portrayal of virtue and devotion through flawless performance of the selfsame *raga*.

THE MAKING OF MODERN CARNATIC MUSIC: T. M. KRISHNA

There are numerous books stressing that Carnatic music as we know it is modern.[42] And by this, scholars usually mean that Carnatic music was fashioned as a genre of classical music that was in competition with Western classical music. Earlier in this chapter, we also showed how Carnatic music was conditioned by the social transformation that India shared with most parts of the world—the transition to capitalism and a larger consumer base—as well as India's particular circumstance of becoming a nation-state. However, between devotion and abstraction, Carnatic music seems to have eluded becoming "modern art," which has implications for the type of knowledge it becomes. In short, modern art, as in forms of painting such as abstract expressionism, is freed from the constraints of tradition and form. It becomes an art that is intimately connected to knowledge. Western music has certainly done this with famous compositions, such as John Cage's *4'33"*. In that piece, the music is not just about sounds, which vary with each performance; rather, the goal of the piece is to inspire a reflexive

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meditation on what music is. While the context of Carnatic music is obviously different, we suggest that TMK, the youngest musician we will consider, similarly attempts to make the audience reflect on what Carnatic music actually is.[43] He has also attempted to highlight the abstraction of Carnatic music by freeing it from the fetters of caste. TMK's mother was a Carnatic music graduate, and his grand-uncle, T. T. Krishnamachari, was one of the founding members of the Madras Music Academy, which could be called the center of Carnatic music orthodoxy. In the 1990s, TMK was one of many young musicians who attempted to delink Carnatic music from religion to make it more palatable to the younger generation. He rose to stardom in the late 1990s and early 2000s, eventually studying with Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer, a major figure in the Carnatic music scene who was considered the traditionalist rival of GNB in the 1950s and 1960s.

Around 2010, he took the Carnatic music world by storm by openly denouncing its hierarchies with respect to caste and gender. By doing so, TMK to some extent stepped out of his own context, and his explanation for how he could do that echoes the protagonist's guru in the novel mentioned above, *Hamsa Geethe*. TMK contends, "My art has given me a gift. A gift of experience, a gift of empathy. A gift to sense life beyond my limitations."[44] Like the guru in *Hamsa Geethe*, TMK suggests that he is able to experience the suffering of various castes and classes and thereby relativize his own existence. Similar to GNB, TMK asserts that there is something in Carnatic music that tends toward the universal and enables criticism of exclusionary practices. It implies a logic of sharing beyond exclusive ownership. For his practice and his writings on such subjects, including a groundbreaking book on Carnatic music,[45] TMK was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2016.

TMK's political commentary about Carnatic music is intimately connected to social issues and could be linked to our discussion of MS. In order for MS to become accepted in the Carnatic music world, she had to conform to a certain ideal, which TMK believes affected her music. TMK asserts that instead, he would like to recapture that pure art form that goes beyond the prevailing social structures. He aims to liberate the framework of Carnatic music from Brahmin hegemony, but to do so, he believes that he must change the practice of Carnatic music in certain ways. He states that he wants to rescue the pure aesthetic and abstract kernel of Carnatic music from the dross of caste, class, and gender oppression. Not only that, he furthermore believes that these forms of oppression have also seeped into the manner in which Carnatic music is presented.

We will describe two examples of how TMK is seeking to rescue Carnatic music from the constraints of its form by commenting on the type of knowledge it entails. First, as we mentioned in our discussion of *raga*, the standard rendering of a *kriti*, a song, begins roughly with an *alapana* or improvisation without lyrics, followed by a song

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with lyrics, and then ends with a *kalpana swara* or improvisation, explicitly singing the notes from the solfège. At a recent performance, however, TMK decided to sing a concert consisting only of *alapanas*, which bewildered the audience.[46] By doing so, he created something like a John Cage effect, which made the listeners ponder what Carnatic music is and how far you can change the format of Carnatic music while still preserving the art form. Second, TMK has experimented with changing the lyrics of Carnatic music to combat their religious basis, which could be associated with caste.

TMK also experimented with topical choices. While Carnatic music lyrics are generally largely about gods and Hindu mythology, with the help of contemporary Tamil poets, TMK has composed and sung lyrics about the environment and other social problems, such as "Poramboke" by the poet Kaber Vasuki, which is about the environmental crisis.[47] This represents a radical break from earlier practices of Carnatic music. This particular poem, and TMK's interpretation of it, are extremely germane to this chapter, since they fundamentally deal with the problem of ownership. The term *poramboke* in Tamil has three meanings: originally it meant common land, and later it came to mean illegal land and also became a derogatory term applied to people or places. TMK's video begins by asking how the meaning changed from positive to negative. The poem itself grapples with ownership and begins with the lines, "Poramboke is not for me and not for you, / but it is for the earth and for the nation." The poem pushes the work from a situation of exclusion based on laws to a larger inclusive perspective, which was implicit in the earlier interpretations of the term. TMK's rendition of this poem might be the first attempt to make a Carnatic music video, or even Carnatic performance art, since the musicians begin by wearing masks at Ennore Creek. TMK made the video and sang the song as part of an effort to save the backwater,[48] which demonstrates how he mobilizes Carnatic music for political aims and, consequently, potentially makes it available to everyone. TMK is saying that Carnatic music is not just for you or me, but potentially universal.

In "Poramboke," and more generally, TMK continues to use the *raga* to organize his music, which shows that he is still invested in the project of Carnatic music, but has propelled the genre into new contexts. For TMK, knowing about Carnatic music means not just knowing its framework; it also requires an understanding of its relation to caste oppression and other social and political issues. He attempts to bring the knowledge of modern intellectuals into the discourse of Carnatic music. Through this, he hopes to turn Carnatic music away from the logic of exclusive ownership toward a logic of sharing.[49]

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THE TRADITION OF INNOVATING IN CARNATIC MUSIC: R. VEDAVALLI

We will now consider how innovation is possible within the matrix of Carnatic music. Sometimes, it is precisely by emphasizing tradition that someone achieves innovation. RV is a contemporary musician and scholar who provides an interesting contrast to TMK, since she sticks to classicism but at the same time explores new vistas within this framework. She is also engaged in expanding the body of knowledge about Carnatic music and thereby renewing it. She herself noted in an interview that when people suggest that she is doing something new, she always retorts that she is merely carrying on the tradition of her gurus.[50] Her practice exemplifies the Confucian dictum, "to know the new through practicing the old."[51]

Her biography is typical of several well-known female Carnatic musicians.[52] She was discovered at the age of five by Madurai Srirangam Iyengar, who heard her voice as he was passing her house. He then insisted to her parents that she take on formal music training. After a few years, her family moved to Madras, where she studied with Mudicondan Venkatrama Iyer, a well-known scholar and musician who won the annually awarded title Sangeetha Kalanidhi in 1948. In the following years, RV embarked on numerous projects to enlarge the tradition from within. For example, she studied *padams* and *javelis* with the teacher Muktha, who was from the *devadasi* tradition. She was an early participant in the Madras Music Academy's musical conferences, at the time, one of few women and performers—as opposed to male patrons and teachers—who used the mode of a lecture-demonstration to describe and transmit musical knowledge to audiences. Performing during a time in the 1960s when musical connoisseurship was not exclusively the remit of the elite, she related that someone as ordinary as the rickshaw puller collecting her from the train station of a small rural town to take her to her concert would share his opinion of the quality of the previous night's performing artiste. Rather than being a space of aspiration, her experience is of the downward trend that followed, as the interest of ordinary people in Carnatic music declined in favor of film songs. She stressed the importance of *ragas* to resist easy appropriation by film music. Film music could be based on *ragas*, but it would not explore a particular *raga* in detail. One needed a certain training to appreciate and understand Carnatic music, and RV attempted to promote the conditions of such an understanding.

From the perspective of the construction of knowledge, perhaps her most interesting contribution lies in her rethinking of *ragas*. From the late 1990s up to today, she has been returning to classical texts to reconstruct *ragas* through the compositions as they were sung before the twentieth century. Consequently, when RV and her students

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sing the so-called traditional versions of *ragas* in a contemporary concert, they often strike listeners as sounding strange and new. In short, singing *ragas* in an older form, and thus going against the grain of contemporary practice, causes something of a feeling of strangeness, which might also cause people to question what they understand as knowing Carnatic music.

This provides us with an example of two key points in this chapter. First, although there is a shared understanding of the basic framework of a *raga*, it changes by being constantly reproduced through practice. There is an important dialectic between the a priori framework—that is, the notes and phrases associated with a *raga*—and the a posteriori practice of improvising in a concert. It is the a priori framework that appears detachable and that is owned as knowledge by people in the Carnatic music community. But the a priori framework is a result of a dialectic that has gone on in the history of the theory and practice of Carnatic music. The historical framework of the *raga* confronts the singer, learner, and listener as something already given—it is a congealed practice that returns to live in every concert.

Second, Vedavalli's use of notation texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrates precisely the manner in which she uses tradition to produce something new. Her practice shows us that tradition is not just one thing, that there will always be a gap between how people imagine the tradition and the various ways in which the tradition is recorded and transmitted. By highlighting the gap between the imagined or presupposed tradition and the manner in which it is actually being documented and transmitted, RV potentially shakes up the practices of Carnatic music from within. Stressing the importance of oral history, and transmission through oral practices of learning and teaching, she uses textual notations of the past to authenticate her own practice, where it has diverged from popular parlance. This is an interesting illustration of epistemic culture in innovating tradition; she renders compositions that are new to the audience and yet are authenticated as traditional versions by her use of older annotated texts.[53]

A comparison with TMK's practices is instructive here. TMK spirits Carnatic music beyond its limits by, for example, singing a concert consisting only of *alapanas*. RV, on the other hand, often uses her scholarship to defend the importance of the nonimprovised parts of a concert, such as the *kriti*, and shows how this portion teaches us the contours of a *raga*, which forms a basis for improvisation. In other words, improvisation obtains its meaning in relation to the nonimprovised compositions that have been handed down by famous composers. But then, she simultaneously reinterprets *kritis* by showing how they would sound if the singer stayed true to the oral tradition of transmission, defending such a refusal to converge with popular taste by referring to classical

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annotated texts. In this manner, she destabilizes the *kriti* in the hope of expanding the aesthetic horizon of the Carnatic world. She shows the community of listeners that they need to be open to the uncanniness of the tradition that they think they possess, or to which they think they belong. By disrupting what appears to be given as a tradition of the community of listeners, she potentially unsettles their self-understanding, thereby opening them up to new possibilities. Yet, this presupposes the audience's knowledge of Carnatic music and their ability to make experimental aesthetic choices, albeit ones framed as tradition. In pushing this goal, she uses codified texts from the past to authenticate such experimentation in the present, in order to frame it as conserving tradition.

CONCLUSION

We have briefly examined the contours of the *raga* and examined different ways of negotiating through a body of knowledge and practices associated with Carnatic music, using performance as a lens. Carnatic music points beyond exclusive ownership to narratives of inclusion; however, it is embedded in a system that systematically excludes people based on their caste and class. This context allows us to better understand GNB articulating a messianic moment in Carnatic music and TMK's political practice and transformation. MS illustrated the manner in which a woman from outside the Brahmin community could negotiate the social system and become accepted far beyond the Carnatic world, to eventually become a symbol of the nation. Finally, RV shows the resources that the Carnatic tradition has available to go beyond itself and raises the possibility that for change, it should look within its own resources.

The discussions of GNB, MS, TMK, and RV above each demonstrate different determinants of the epistemic culture of Carnatic music, and changes in them over time. GNB popularized classical music after the institutional shift from temples to *sabhas*. By using speed and innovating the *raga* framework, he enabled new young audiences who were seeking entertainment rather than spirituality in their musical experience to identify and appreciate Carnatic music, which made them want to own it and become part of that musical community.

MS popularized classical music by embodying a nationalistic identity of Eastern spirituality, which by stressing her flawlessness and purity in performance became an assertion of the new Brahmin identity that was also seen as a depiction of national identity. While the shift to Brahminical processes of socialization gave her access to knowledge and respectability in the emerging phase of Carnatic music, it was through her performance, both of the music and as a quintessential Brahmin wife, that she came to own it. In doing so, she undeniably shaped the music itself, bringing the focus back to the

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aesthetics of the sublime, in the affective songs she performed, drawing on her *devadasi* ardor; virtue and virtuosity both become exemplary performances.

TMK stresses liberating himself from the social determinants of musical knowledge—as operationalized through caste, commodification of music, and constraints of institutional authority—yet there is an underlying tension between his attempt to maintain a "pure and abstract" creative art form that embodies individual creative freedom and his aim of liberating Carnatic musical practice on its own terms. This is reflected in the ongoing tension between his musical performance that aims to speak for itself and his reflexive theorizing of his practice through text and lectures.

Finally, RV operationalizes knowing and owning knowledge through an internalist discussion. Rather than separating the cultural and conceptual frames, she focuses on the interaction between the world of practice and the world of words. *Raga*, in this emerging epistemic culture, now has two modes of becoming knowable: one where the concept could be detached from the practice and debated in words, and a second, which is more important for the musicians—the aesthetic creativity that is transmitted orally and evaluated in performance. In order to keep practice authoritative in owning knowledge, rather than text, she holds that the working place for producing and evaluating knowledge and culture—the grammar of the music—is in the musical practice, while contrarily using the abstract discussion space of *ragas* to point to the gap between theoretical texts and popular practice. She experiments with singing *ragas* differently from contemporary practice, while framing her practice as tradition, to see how audiences will respond. Yet, this means that rather than attempting to change the narrative, she resolves the ongoing tension between tradition and innovation only in performance.

In order to understand the embedded nature of Carnatic music knowledge in its community of practice, we could think of Carnatic music as an epistemic culture[54] that is experimental.[55] What is at stake is the fixation of specific epistemic conditions under which it is still possible for processes occurring within the musical community to become manifest outside it, and thus to become accessible to analytical investigation. Experiment in Carnatic music has to do with the practice itself, where virtuosity is evaluated as the ability to improvise within the constraints of the *raga*, and the question of whether an experiment works or not depends on its evaluation by the musical community and the audience. Thus, the *condition for such experimentation* is precisely its history. By historicizing epistemological cultures, we analyze the cognitive history of experimentation in Carnatic music; in this chapter we study how rather than being independent, social determinants are produced in and through the musical practice of the *raga* and the discourse around it. We explore how patterns of change in evaluation of current practice depend on local histories of past practice.[56] Practices of *raga* change,

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and the treatment and understanding of the conceptual frames of *raga* undergo transformation over time. Furthermore, the correlation between the two suggests that cultures change in relation to conceptual work as much as concepts change in response to how singers practice their art.[57]

Thus, the resistance to opening *raga* up to influences from outside the community is not just social but is also linked to the epistemic culture, to the nature and values embedded in the music itself, and to fears of diluting a conceptual framework that is stabilized by the boundaries of the community of practice—in this case, enforced as caste. Yet, through historicizing different musicians' efforts to keep knowability as well as ownability open, this chapter has focused on Carnatic music as experimental culture rather than its forms of institutionalization, on processes of knowledge production that allow for new knowledge to be created, in which unprecedented things can happen. Foregrounding practice as an authoritative way of knowing and owning—in producing, listening, and evaluating Carnatic music performance—reveals that there is a generative aspect of Carnatic music held by a community of practitioners that goes beyond the gaze of caste and culture. Indeed, the pursuit of universality in Carnatic music is part of a larger search for a new universality that is not based on exclusion. Such a community of practice brings knowledge into manifestation and transforms it into ownable knowledge. They are concretions—not abstractions—in which epistemic, technical, and social moments are inextricably intertwined.[58]

Discussions about epistemic cultures are necessary, as they can destabilize such boundaries and help liberate Carnatic music from itself, thus creating the conditions for including those outside the community who may desire to know and own it legitimately. A study of epistemic cultures of music could lead the way for music to have a different social effect, one that is inextricably connected to creating a world beyond unjust hierarchies. We believe that we have taken the first step toward such a project by showing how a particular genre of music produces logics of ownership and exclusion.

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Notes

1. Although this picture of ownership is prevalent in the modern capitalist world, there were clearly different forms of ownership in precapitalist societies. In such societies, ownership may have been collective and the boundaries between owners and those who did not own an object may have been blurred. Moreover, as many observers have argued recently, capitalism does not do away with all noncapitalist forms of ownership and production. See Massimiano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* (New York: Haymarket, 2014); Harry Harootunian, *Marx after Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). This might be especially true for certain artistic forms which, although they have been thoroughly commodified, also retain earlier forms of practice.

2. See, for example, Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands," *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* 6 (1986): 1–40.

3. The paper follows a chronology from the turn of the twentieth century to the turn of the twenty-first century.

4. For philosophical practice thinkers, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1958); Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

5. For social theoretical thinkers see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

6. For cultural theory, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). For a detailed discussion on practice theorists, see Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina, and Eike von Savigny, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005).

7. This thesis unites a broad collection of thinkers of science studies. Karin Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge: An Essay on the Constructivist and Contextual Nature of Science* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981); David Bloor, *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Andrew Pickering, ed., *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

8. For a detailed discussion on performance lens as a conceptual and methodological contribution to studying ecologies of practices—in this case, farming—see Dominic Glover, "Farming as a Performance: A Conceptual and Methodological Contribution to the Ecology of Practices," *Journal of Political Ecology* 25, no. 1 (2018): 686–702.

9. Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1 (emphasis in original).

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10. For a detailed discussion, see Mieke Bal's work on performance as both rehearsal and repetition, as well as the theatrical performance aspect of performativity. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

11. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2012), 28.

12. For discussion on performing knowledge as doing, see Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013); Pamela H. Smith, "In the Workshop of History: Making, Writing, and Meaning," *A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 19, no. 1 (2012): 4–31; Karamjit S. Gill, "Hermeneutic of Performing Knowledge," *AI & Society* 32, no. 2 (2017): 149–156.

13. Mary Helen Dupree and Sean B. Franzel, *Performing Knowledge, 1750–1850* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

14. Hermano Viana, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

15. Fred Lau, "Nationalizing Sound on the Verge of Chinese Modernity," in *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity*, ed. Kai-Wing Chow et al. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 209–229.

16. He notes that the connection between caste and music is a recent formation. Perhaps the most famous work to underscore the modernity of the concept of caste is Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Carnatic music in the twentieth century was coeval with numerous new forms of religious subjectivity.

17. T. M. Krishna, *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story* (Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2013), 439.

18. A full discussion of the relationship between Hindustani and Carnatic music is beyond the scope of this chapter.

19. We find these notes in early texts such as the *Brhaddeshi* by Matanga Muni, which is usually dated between the sixth and the eighth century. See Lewis Rowell, *Music and Musical Thought in Early India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 144–179.

20. See Geoffrey C. Bowker, *Memory Practices in the Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

21. See S. Bhagyalekshmi, *Ragas in Carnatic Music* (Chennai: CBH Publications, 2010).

22. For the mood of a *raga* to emerge, the manner in which the individual notes are treated is just as important as the actual notes that are sung. We could say a great deal about this here, but we will limit ourselves to one central aspect—namely, the distinction between plain notes and notes with oscillations, since specific *ragas* require the practitioner to oscillate certain notes. Notes in Carnatic *ragas* often entail oscillations, or *gamakas*.

23. Annapurna Mamidipudi, *Towards a Theory of Innovation for Handloom Weaving in India* (Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2016).

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24. T. R. Subbha Rao, *Hamsa Geethe* (1952; Bengaluru: Hemantha Sahithya, 1984), 100, our translation.

25. T. M. Krishna describes this period in almost utopian terms. Krishna, *Southern Music*, 315.

26. For an overview of the history, see Hari Krishnan, "Bharatanatyam," section 5, "Social Reform and the Disenfranchisement of Devadasis," Accelerated Motion: Towards a New Dance Literacy, website produced by the Wesleyan University Press and the Academic Media Studio, 2009, accessed November 20, 2019, http://www.oberlinlibstaff.com/acceleratedmotion/dancehistory/bharatanatyam/section5.php.

27. Gill Navyug, "Limits of Conversion: Caste, Labor and the Question of Emancipation in Colonial Punjab," *Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 1 (2019): 3–22.

28. Lakshmi Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 42–43.

29. Subramanian, 45.

30. Subramanian, 45, 47.

31. Lalitharam, *The Prince of Music: A Biography of G. N. Balasubramaniam*, trans. V. Ramnarayan (Chennai: Wordcraft, 2018), 14.

32. G. N. Balasubramaniam, "Art: Its Dawn and Future Role," in *Gandharva Ganam: G. N. Balasubramaniam Centenary—Commemorative Volume*, ed. Lalitha Ram and V. Ramnarayan (Chennai: G. B. Bhuvaneswaran and Mahesh G. Bhuvaneswaran, on behalf of the GNB family, 2009), 113–119, 116.

33. Theodor W. Adorno, "Music, Language and Composition," *Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 33 (1993): 401–414.

34. Balasubramaniam, "Art," 118.

35. Balasubramaniam. "The Annihilation of Art," in Ram and Ramnarayan, *Gandharva Ganam,* 130.

36. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11.

37. The paradigm case is Protestantism, but other religions followed suit, stressing an individual's inner feeling or subjective experience. For a discussion of this issue in relation to Judaism, see Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). For a discussion of the Indian case, see A. R. Mohapatra, *Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (Delhi: Readworthy Publications, 2009).

38. Because we are dealing with an aesthetic logic, this is where the parallel with Hegel's phenomenology breaks down. There are moments of uncertainty in the improvised portions of Carnatic music, and creativity sometimes lies therein. A further exploration of the parallels might be interesting. If we interpret Hegel from a Carnatic perspective, we could say that he requires a *sadhana*, or a practice of thinking, which is needed to follow the logic of concepts.

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39. Karan Bali, "The Making of MS Subbulakshimis *Meera*: Her Final and Finest Film," Scroll.In, September 16, 2016, https://scroll.in/reel/816654/the-making-of-ms-subbulakshmis-meera-her-final-and-finest-film.

40. See T. M. Krishna, "MS Misunderstood: The Myths and Misconceptions around MS Subbulakshmi—India's Most Acclaimed Musician," *The Caravan*, October 1, 2015, https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/ms-understood-ms-subbulakshmi.

41. The Ramon Magsaysay Award is an annual award established to perpetuate former Philippine president Ramon Magsaysay's example of integrity in governance, courageous service to the people, and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society. It is considered the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize.

42. Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

43. T. M. Krishna, interview by Viren Murthy, December 28, 2019, Chennai.

44. T. M. Krishna's acceptance speech can be viewed here: S. Harihanan, "Indira Gandhi National Integration Award for T. M. Krishna," YouTube video, uploaded November 1, 2017, 14:34, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2r0GeJZoR4&t=189s.

45. Krishna, *Southern Music*.

46. T. M. Krishna, "The Argumentative Musician," interview by Sumana Ramanan, *Open Magazine*, January 23, 2014, http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/arts/the-argumentative-musician.

47. TMK's performance of "Poromboke" can be viewed here: Vettiver Collective, "Chennai Poromboke Paadal ft. T. M. Krishna," YouTube video, uploaded January 14, 2017, 9:33, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82jFyeV5AHM.

48. The poem touches on the building of power plants near Ennore Creek and the problem of pollution. The lyrics say that the floods have come and gone, but this has not changed people's attitudes to the creek or the environment. The problem was especially exacerbated during the Chennai floods of 2015.

49. Concert given by T. M. Krishna at the University of Chicago's Logan Center, October 14, 2018, attended by one of the authors, Viren Murthy.

50. Vidushi R. Vedavalli, interview by Annapurna Mamidipudi and Viren Murthy, December 27, 2017.

51. Confucius, *Lunyu yizhu* [Translation and annotations of the Analects], ed. Yang Bojun (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2002).

52. The famous Carnatic singer M. L. Vasantakumari (1928–1990) was similarly discovered when GNB overheard her voice when he was walking past her house.

53. In a two-CD recording, *Pramanam*, she sang compositions that illustrate the changes that time has wrought on well-known pieces.

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54. Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

55. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Cultures of Experimentation," in *Cultures without Culturalism: The Making of Scientific Knowledge*, ed. Karine Chemla and Evelyn Fox Keller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

56. Donald MacKenzie, "On Invoking Culture in the Behaviour of Financial Markets," in Chemla and Keller, *Cultures without Culturalism*.

57. Karine Chemla, "Changing Mathematical Cultures, Conceptual History, and the Circulation of Knowledge," in Chemla and Keller, *Cultures without Culturalism*.

58. Rheinberger, "Cultures of Experimentation."

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