ARTICULATING AN AESTHETICS FOR INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC IN 20TH CENTURY: REVISING THE 'THEORY-PRACTICE BINARY'

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This paper approaches and investigates the subject of aesthetics in relation to Indian classical music. The articulation of aesthetics was put forward both as part of a living *practice* as well as a sub-field of *formal musicology*, albeit in an amateurmanner, in course of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. This dual movement of practice and discourse corresponded to the complex social divisions that had come to characterize the social context and milieu of music performance and scholarship in late colonial India, with important regional variations. My tentative formulations are twofold. First that the production of ideas on music practice, largely intended for pedagogic transfer by practitioners (in the case of North India, Muslim *ustads*), and the production of theoretical discourse by both non-hereditary practitioners as well as by publicists and connoisseurs, (mostly Hindu) converged (and diverged) on several points and occasions. Also, these need to be examined more carefully rather than simply seen in terms of irreversible and incomprehensible difference between aesthetic theory and performance/practice. Secondly, I suggest that practitioners, especially in South India, were not immune to the political context in which they wrote, performed and positioned their understanding and their inheritance. In developing these ideas, I have worked from a mixed and heterogeneous archive of biographies and auto-biographical reflections, of formal texts and opinions, ephemera and curriculum-driven material to map out the principal sources of inspiration for formulating a language of aesthetics and its principal tenets from the end of the 19th to the first half of the 20th century.

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My case studies are drawn from Southern India and Bengal, that help provide sharp contrasts and commonalities.

Framing Music as Art and Science

For the greater part of the 19th century, the articulation of an ideal aesthetics was part of a project that aimed at establishing standard foundations for classical music, its theoretical basis and its moral and philosophical dimensions. This came in the wake of the formation of new musical publics in colonial centres of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and later replicated in important princely centres (Bakhle 2005; Subramanian 2006; Weidman 2007; Pradhan 2014). The new publics were constituted by elite listeners drawn from the educated middle class and from ex-aristocratic establishments who made homes in the new colonial cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras as well in reforming Princely states like Baroda, Rampur, Gwalior and others. Their sensibilities were informed in part by Orientalist scholarship and in part by the new expectations they experienced in listening to music, as also by practical and pedagogical imperatives for defining and developing the tradition and in the case of North India by the Hinduization of the public space. All these considerations made it pressing to engage with and underline a clear definition of what classical music stood for, what its repertoire was, how stylistically it stood apart from other performative expressions, especially drama music and particularly from popular modes of entertainment such as the genres associated with courtesan culture and its morphed versions in the bazaar.

Let me start with Bengal where, by the 1880s, we come across a public with a heightened sensibility for music in the city of Calcutta that worked in tandem with robust circuits of musical interactions linked to the networks of patronage and performance among aristocratic establishments in eastern Bengal and with the mini Lucknow established in Metiaburj in Calcutta by the deposed Nawab of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah. Bengal enjoyed a central location in the circulation of North Indian music culture, connecting important centres in Bengal, Bihar and Nepal with Rampur and Lucknow that remained extremely significant centres of seni music (Subramanian and Atarthi 2017). The patronage enjoyed by the musicians in these locations gave Bengali publicists first-hand experience of listening to and learning from some of the finest music practitioners associated with the lineage of Mian Tansen that was almost universally acknowledged as the gold standard for classical music. However,

in terms of discursive representation, the perspective was a little more complicated. Sagnik Atarthi's work on the emergence of musicology in colonial Bengal makes the valuable point that Bengali music scholarship in the 1870s,and thereafter, associated with early reformers like S.M.Tagore and others of less exalted social status grew out of the personal interactions between elite students, the listening gentry and Muslim hereditary *ustads*. These interactions produced a complex and multi-layered understanding of music andengaged in the process with issues of authenticity, notation and practice that made up the staple of an ideal aesthetics. New connoisseurs saw writing about notations, about music's history as an important part of a toolkit to learnthe practice of art music. These early efforts indexed the appearance of a rudimentary musicology, its importance in situating the art form within a more inclusive history of shared practice and tradition. These concerns, especially arising from what I propose to call a personal musicology, were important especially as they help us move beyond the simplistic theory and practice binary corresponding to the latent Hindu-Muslim antagonism and prejudice that characterized a lot of Orientalist and nationalist scholarship. What I am proposing, therefore, is to consider and scrutinizethis mode of writing, i.e. personalized musicology to reflect on the production of idealized aesthetic values; and two, to argue that the engagement by performers and publicists with artistic categories was an exercise in discovering a subjective orientation as infixing an objective evaluation of music and its transmission. Unless we are able to situate artistic categories in this context, it would be impossible to go beyond the usual lament of prejudice, opacity and the unintelligible translations of Western conceptions that Harold Powers so tellingly wrote about decades ago (Powers1965).

Modern Indian musicology in Bengal is often associated with the writings of the elite reformer and publicist Sorindro Mohun Tagore, a member of a prominent elite/zamindari family, and a British loyalist. For him and his band of devoted followers, the concerns were to produce work that would support pedagogic initiatives, disseminate his own ideas and enthusiasm and to produce a relevant literature on music. As a keen listener and generous patron, he could not have but been moved by the rich musical fare that was available in the city. As a loyal colonial subject, keen to impress the Empress and to negotiate the reception of the nation's musical inheritance, he took his cues from the musical culture of Bishnupur with its distinct base of seni-trained Hindu practitioners who maintained a familiarity with the archaic Sanskrit traditions and texts. While Calcutta's contemporary

musical scene provided a learning and listening space, it was also a useful field for making a critique from this Hindu vantage point. His personal musicology was part of a slowly growing corpus of music writings—Kshetra Mohun Goswami and Radhamohan Sen Das being other significant writers. Most of these early works were anthologies of songs and expositions of Raga theory framed in an older language of Sanskrit aesthetics but they werealso grounded in actual practice. Atarthi's work demonstrates how many, if not all, of these writers were in conversation with the *ustads* and even required/obtained their consent and approval as endorsement for their writings even when they rued the abject condition into which music had fallen during the Muslim rule. In fact, this was not surprising given that the *ustads* were an important and an essential part of the musical scene and even if they did not explicitly take the initiative in showcasing the tradition, their actual practice, as performers and as teachers of enthusiastic Bengali gentry students, meant that their inputs were fundamental in the articulation of a public discourse. Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay, the rival of Tagore, was quite open in his critique of the so-called classical past and instead preferred to anchor his work in actual practice. For him, the Metiabruj establishment and musical culture associated with it was central to Bengal's musical story. His own work, the celebrated *Gitasutrasaar* betrayed his penchant for *nyay* (logic) and *jukto,* (reason), the basic tenets of rational evaluation but above all, he insisted on framing his understanding of theory *in practice* (Bandyopadhyay 1885). He was not interested in reiterating the Orientalist discourse; he rather saw the Muslim past as robust and creative, interrogated the so-called purity of the classical past and had little time for theory. He was critical of the tendency of hereditary practitioners to keep their knowledge (and to eschew the writing down of music, insisting instead on a purely oral transmission) to themselves and his thirst for practical knowledge led him to takethe practice ofnotating/notations very seriously. He pitted in favour of Western notation and while we may well agree that notations were in fact rudimentary mnemonic devices and were not adapted to grasp the quality of Indian music or communicate its richness, it is still important to understand what notations meant in the context and the kind of significance they had for the imagining of modern Indian musicology. It is difficult otherwise to explain why there should have been so many attempts at notation and why notations should feature in every conceivable music journal. For Krishnadhan, notation represented the most reproducible medium for understanding the acoustic experience and embodied principles of enlightened modernity.

Subsequent writings in the late 19th century to the middle decades of the 20th century continued to organize and render intelligible music that they heard and which captivated them. Two strategies seem to have been available to them, one was to build up a narrative of reminiscences and anecdotes that carried the sense of intimacy in circles of listening and learning and the other was to theorize the music they heard and practiced. Inevitably this meant a close reading of texts such as the 13th century text *Sangita Ratnakara* whose status as a foundational text had already enjoyed some recognition thanks to the endeavours of musicologists like V.N.Bhatkhande,whose interventions were widely appreciated in Bengal. One of the problems in theorizing 18th-19th century practice was that the scales and many of the *ragas* current then and now bore little relation to those described in the ancient literature,including the *Sangeetratnakara*. Put simply, it was difficult to fit *ragas* as practiced into a formulaic theory. However, aspiring theorists did have access to nomenclature, some conventional understanding about usage and in some cases a deep interest in *Rasa* theory. The result was a diverse collection of writings that took the form of reminiscences, historical analysis of the evolution of classical music and dictionaries of terms and definitions. Bimal Roy and Bimalakanta Roy Chaudhuri, both came up with dictionaries that we shall have occasion to refer to later, are important instances in point.

We do not have the time here to track all these writings. But two tendencies, as indicated earlier, appear to distinguish themselves; one is the scientific imperative to try and treat music as a science and establish a consensus of principles with which to grasp the technical essentials of music and to simultaneously address its esoteric and spiritual element and two, to write about subjective experiences of learning from and listening to musicians and lend a personal and intimate access to that world of audition and transmission. Thus, personalized musicology emerged out of a close listening experience to express embodied experience, memory (intimacy with the Gurus) and even time/space. It is far too easy to dismiss this as a personal and biased reflection for if we subject these writings to a closer scrutiny, it is possible to identify a language of practice and a world of affect that had the potential to generate conceptual categories. This is especially evident when we analyse the writings and papers of late Birendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury whose faith in and fondness for his seni teachers translated into a very personal musicology that seemed to invoke a different history of classical music and an altogether unequivocal endorsement of musical values that were explicitly seni. It is not easy to translate this affective identification

into clear conceptual categories that could constitute a language of formal aesthetics that went beyond the usual and customary *Rasa* theory but it is certainly worthy of closer scrutiny and appraisal. Birendra Kishore worked very closely with his teachers and seni masters and understandably extolled seni teaching that he suggested was the cornerstone of Indian music. In his Indian music, he asserted the centrality of Mian Tansen and his lineage in providing Hindustani music with its core essentials and observed how Tansen and Haridas embodied the two principal sources for Indian music. *Seni* musical values were key to the formation of an evolving aesthetics for Hindustani music, vocal and instrumental. They were embodied in the way that they taught and created new instruments that best encapsulated refined acoustic choices. Neither the *ustads* nor their students like Birendra Kishore translated these musical ideas into language borrowed from either Western musicology or *Shastric* terminology; instead, there seems to have been a preoccupation with collecting and anthologizing compositions and notations that registered the *dhrupadi ang* of *seni* teaching and traditions. Far from dismissing notations as skeletal mnemonic devices, they were seen as a language to record traces, impressions and not surprisingly, the *ustads* found in the notebooks a new aura that they were attentive to. This mode of remembering and celebrating transmission and of recording a personal intimacy with the guru made for a very distinct mode of aesthetic appreciation where the emphasis was on actual practice that embodied the theory. The practice itself was multi-sited and in order to access it, it was important to rely on anecdotal referencing that enhanced the sense of immersion in practice, to participate in networks of circulation in order to listen and learn. The act of listening was central in the articulation of an aesthetics which in turn made the practice/theory untenable. It is, therefore, my contention that by this time, i.e. the 1930s and 1940s, the reality of music practice as a craft practice could not and did not square up with the older discourse that was heavily informed by notions of high art that had to be put on a pedestal. Instead what emerged was a personal musicology that tried as best as possible to frame experiences of listening and learning. Admittedly such personal reflections could be exaggerated and could even produce myths out of anecdotes but what is important to keep in mind is that students and listeners did not see practitioners in the same light that an older generation of Orientalist scholarship had. By the time we come to the work of musicologists and scholars like Bimal Roy and Bimalakanta Roy Chaudhuri, the imperatives had changed or for

that matter the choice of strategies to grapple with the art form whose living masters were fading away had changed. For S.M.Tagore,the *ustads* as embodiments of practice and as living repositories were somewhat instrumental, for Birendra Kishore, the relationship with teachers was one of intimate realization while for the later music scholars, the emphasis seems to have been on access to an intelligible language that could salvage and consolidate a vanishing heritage. Interestingly, Bimal Roy, who later authored the dictionary of musical terms (*sangeet kosh*), writes how he was inspired by the relatively stable legacy of the southern tradition to undertake his venture, how it was necessary to produce a comprehensive glossary of terms derived from a range of Sanskrit texts and customary usage. This brings us to the history of music writing in Southern India where the experience of collaborating with living masters to achieve a working theory of aesthetics and practical demonstration assumed very clear dimensions.

The Southern Story

Was the story different in the south? It was commonly assumed that the practice/theory gap in the Southern India was much less, thanks to the relative isolation of the South from 'Islamic excesses', and to the fact that the bulk of the practitioners and their sponsors belonged to the same class and who worked together effectively to produce an aesthetics. In fact, the story was both, similar and different; similar in the sense that performers were able to forge a more practice-oriented musicology. In other words, practitioners were not overly concerned with the textualization of tradition, except in so far as being attentive to the existing precepts of classification such as that initiated by Venkatamakhin in the 17th century. Their understanding of tradition—textual as well as practical—was mediated through actual practice and they were able to share this freely with self-appointed custodians and publicists. The latter, on their part, were primarily concerned with issues of pedagogy, with the best means to disseminate the form to a larger circle of middle-class students. Unlike in Bengal, we do not find the same nostalgia for memories of listening; the emphasis was on pedagogy, and on devising an ideal repertoire for performance and practice. However, given the fault lines of caste and gender in the domain of music practice, South India threw up a range of interesting discourses from publicists, musicians and artists that contributed to the making of a multi-layered discourse on aesthetics. Further and importantly,

this was institutionally anchored especially in the Madras Music Academy that emerged as a significant arbiter. In course of its annual December season, experts met and discussed threadbare the actual usage and practice of music-making and it was here that an aesthetics was actively produced, contested and communicated. Nor was this the only space for discussion and debate, alternative fora developed in the wake of the Tamil music movement that provided important complementary perspectives on practice, whose esoteric dimensions were complex and not easy to capture in language. The result was the formation of a dense corpus of writings that did not harp so much on the theory/practice divide as it did on the need for a scientific understanding of music and on the need to standardize usage and treatment. There was alongside a keen interest in preparing biographies of musicians but whose lives and practice did not occupy the same register of affect as evident in the case of the Bengali oeuvre. These were like directories that identified musicians and patrons and conveyed a sense of geography of music practice. It would, however, be presumptuous, even counter-productive, to suggest that a substantial proportion of these writings translated into a standard or systematic musicology embodying an ongoing set of productive conversations among practitioners, thereby falling into an older rhetorical trap of southern exceptionalism. On the other hand, to overlook the difference in approach would be to cancel the historical specificity of the developments in the domain of discourse.

Early writings on music in English and Tamil were an integral part of the changing aural publics in Madras city that saw from the 1890s a marked growth in public concerts and the formation of a self-conscious listening public. The making of the public concert or *kaccheri* and its repertoire and the constitution of the new public was largely the work of a self-selecting class of upper caste in Madras city.Theatre music and stand-alone concerts encouraged many of the new listeners to write about music both as appreciative listeners and as spokespersons for music-related reform. The writings were, therefore, diverse and heterogeneous, some journalistic and some others pedantic. The intention behind the bulk of amateur writings was a combination of leisure and pedagogy, of genuine theoretical concerns and textual studies, of recalling lives and setting them in very specific contexts of performance and social practice. On the other hand, there was a steady and incremental accumulation of knowledge by practitioners who met as part of the Madras Academy's Expert Committee to discuss and debate melodies, usage, appropriate phrases, compositions and their interpretation and whose decisions

over time came to constitute the bedrock of actual concert practice. A third domain was provided by a range of biographies especially written in the wake of the Tamil Isai Iyakkam that addressed select performers and musicians to reflect on specific kinds of practice and aesthetic experience.

Writings on music in Southern India fell under several categories. There was for instance a corpus of journalistic writing that was informed and took on the responsibility of shaping public taste and of demarcating those elements that reinforced the classical aesthetic that publicists and associations in the city were putting together. Thus, there was a preoccupation with the work of the Tanjore trinity, (Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Syama Sastri) whose compositions enjoyed being not merely the pride of place in any concert but also embodied all the values that constituted the tradition. At the same time, the writings indicated a growing disenchantment with the aesthetics of rhythmic virtuosity and instead rooted for a more emotional and interiorized understanding of melody. In framing these views, the writings also invoked the importance of a scientific approach, which in fact became the hallmark of music writings in Southern India. This was taken up even more forcefully by amateur musicologists, who showed relatively little interest in invoking old classical texts, and instead demonstrated an attachment to scientific application of methods in determining acoustic principles. We have the case of C.S.Ayyar, for example, who was primarily interested in developing a scientific method to ascertain musical values and frequencies and to learn music, especially instrumental music by looking more closely at the acoustics of sound. Two of his texts are particularly important in this connection—one dealt with acoustics and the grammar of music and the other was a more generalized set of impressions about culture, music and philosophy. He undertook practical experiments on the violin and the veena to demonstrate how only certain motes at relatively simple ratios could be extended and prolonged and how that sort of scientific understanding could grasp the complexity and finesse of Carnatic music. The fact was that Ayyar was fascinated by science and by music and his writings were a personal exercise in reconciling these two passions into a unified field of understanding, a personal musicology. Yet there was no question of either overlooking or experiencing the transcendental dimensions of music, the effects of which defied explanation. Thus in his *Artists Miscellany*, he wrote how "music was neither like the written language of poetry nor like the finished statue in marble ready to be read or gazed on and enjoyed by anyone at anytime". Listening was, thus, paramount in

order to arrive at any understanding of aesthetics, one has to first of all listen to music, that is to say we listen to the interpretation by the vocalist, the violinist or the veena player of the composed music unless he himself were the composer—as that music may be rendered badly. Naturally, therefore, the interpreter's abilities and the musical qualities had to be the first aim of criticism depending upon the musical voice and knowledge of technique. Ayyar stressed the importance of listening to great performers who had imbibed the musical values of the trinity, whose oeuvre represented all that was pristine and profound in the tradition. The trinity was to Carnatic music what seni values were to Hindustani music and it is this that constituted the foundation for all writings on aesthetics.

The emphasis on scientific experiments did not have too many takers but the debates were kept alive by the Madras Music Academy and its journal where scholars and practitioners wrote freely contributing to the field of musicology that was more clearly defined under the University's curriculum, something that the Academy contributed to. In fact, what was an important distinguishing feature of the Southern story was the collaboration between practitioners and publicists, a feature that we tend to overlook. It was in this space of collaborative exchanges that a language of aesthetics developed and ideas were discussed and debated. It was in this process that there came musicologists like P.Sambamorthi and scholars like V.Raghavan, both of whom worked within the institutional space that the Madras Academy provided in order to consolidate the aesthetic foundations for Carnatic music as a concert practice.

Practitioners were central in the formulation of aesthetics and operated within the Madras academy that by the 1940s, it was the principal arbitrating authority. There is no doubt that the academy was what it was; a body of upper caste sponsors, listeners and musicians, mostly Brahmin but not exclusively so. Throughout its tenure, the Academy enlisted the support of practitioners, hereditary and non-hereditary, and did not make a distinction on lines of caste and encouraged musicians to write and to preside over their annual celebrations. While there were considerable heartaches about the selection of musicians for the Academy's prestigious award, it would be a misnomer to suggest that the Academy excluded discussions. In the successive 10-day conferencethat accompanied the December concert season, the agenda was all about standardizing the tenets of practice, adopting the appropriate classificatory techniques and writing the modern history of Carnatic music. In this collective exercise, musicians took a lead role and insisted on establishing the primacy of the Trinity's repertoire, working with what was called

patantram (as they had learned it from an established authority of practice and not text) and the publicists almost always endorsed it. There were occasional expressions of standard prejudice about the so-called uneducated musicians and those who were avaricious but this was on the whole rare. The Academy, in its annual seminars and demonstrations, emphasized the centrality of a practice-based understanding; in 1931, the presidential address stressed upon how textbook maxims were suitable only for the library and not for the enjoyment of music in practical life. The Academy took pride, during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s,in being the only common platform for musicians, teachers and connoisseurs to meet and collaborate. Its journal gave an optimum space for robust debates and for a corpus of writings, which were quite coherent, to emerge. It was layered and accommodated diverse modes of understanding from the 'scientific' to the 'textual' and to the 'biographical' but all of these moved away from the initial lament of the theory-practice hiatus and celebrated the role and agency of the actual practitioner. If Ayyar spoke at length on frequency, ratios and oscillations, V.Raghavan, the celebrated Indic scholar perused Sanskrit texts and P.Sambamoorthy developed an elaborate historical understanding of Indian music focusing on both grammar, biographic details and on teaching techniques. The performing imperative, combined with the pedagogic one, informed the build of the writing that inevitably was about practice even if this was difficult to capture in words. Interestingly, the esoteric element of music as yoga was not stressed in any of these works and it was left to the champions of Tamil music to venture into writing about a more rarefied domain of experience and practice.

An important concern that featured in the discussions on standardization and authenticity was notation. The experts who met in the Academy meetings spoke of the limited potential of notations in conveying the expressive range of Carnatic music especially its *gamaka*, is well documented. And yet we do find extensive attempts to come up with detailed notations and many of these were fairly eccentric and individual even while conforming to more standardized textbooks of compositions (sponsored by the Academy) and exercises that carried rudimentary notation indicating the beginning of a time cycle or sharp and flat notes with some symbols for slides. Notations were sometimes seen as valuable aids to reconstructing the music of the past, occasionally as an extension of the theory/practice dilemma—we have for instance the case of the Pallaki Seva Prabandha, an opera of the 18th century Maratha court that was discovered both as a manuscript as well as a performing practice (by Veerammal), notated by Sambamoorthi and presented as a musical

piece on AIR and more recently taken up by noted artist Vedavalli. It is, therefore, important to access what musicians and music teachers wrote when they wished to communicate an interpretation to a student and study this carefully so as to be able to go past the standard appraisal of musicology. Music teachers, traditional as well as based in new modern institutions, took to notating lessons and communicating their understanding of the received tradition and of their own improvisations through notation, which circulated and which over time embodied a very definite *padantaram* or teaching lineage. Analysing and contextualizing notations, I suggest, would be an important exercise to deepen our understanding of musicology as it was actively understood and expanded by practitioners.

What stands out in the Southern context was the absolute control that the Madras Academy was able to wield over taste and its consolidation. It was a super patron, and thanks to its ongoing relationship with musicians, it was able to develop a vibrant network that extended to the University, to the radio and to private recording channels. It served as a teachers' training college that supplied the University with the requisite resources and quickly adjusted to changing requirements, especially in the wake of Carnatic music's globalization.

It was only for a brief moment in the 1940s that the Academy faced challenges in the wake of the Tamil Music movement. The movement championed the cause of language, its votaries insisting that Tamil compositions enjoy a pride of place in the repertoire that Carnatic music engaged with. The movement was an offshoot of language politics in Tamil Nadu and did not necessarily challenge the upper caste basis of Carnatic music which in its redefined form, emphasized Brahmanical elements, and catered to middle class Brahmanical sensibilities. Instead, it chose to reclaim compositions in Tamil and to popularize more recent songs (devotional and nationalist) as part of a concert repertoire and as fare for radio recordings. Subsequently, it made a bid for reorganizing ritual, recitative music by inviting hereditary ritual practitioners and professional musicians to collaborate but with very little results. In fact, as it turned out, the Academy and its musicians directed the discussions of the Tamil music conferences and advised *oduvars* or ritual practitioners on issues of tradition and reception. At the same time, the mainstream musicians popularized Tamil compositions, set them to tune and integrated them quite seamlessly into the concert repertoire without fundamentally restructuring it wherein the songs of the Trinity remained central.

However, one important consequence of the challenge lay in rethinking about Tamil musical conceptions as embodied by its principal composers whose biographies became increasingly important. The most important of these writings was that of U.V.Swaminatha Iyer, best known for his scholarship on Tamil but whose life experience was closely moulded by the music he heard. As an ardent and passionate champion of all things Tamil, it was not surprising that he took up the biographies of musicians, such as Ghanam Krishna Iyer and Mahavaidyanatha Iyer who composed in Tamil. What was more remarkable was the description of actual practice and experience that in turn yielded an impressive glossary of aesthetic terms and hinted at a more esoteric approach to music. The style that was emphasized was that of *ghanam*, distinct from *nayam* and *desikam* and one that required from the very depth of the abdominal cavity –the *mooladhara* –with a perfect and self-conscious understanding of the ways the energy travelled up to the 'lolupa'. Admittedly U.V. Swaminatha Iyer was more interested in affirming the contributions of Ghanam and Mahavaidi to the Tamil language, with the result that his reminiscences were appropriated by the votaries of Tamil Isai. The Academy's journal carried occasional pieces on musicians like Bobbili Kesavayya and referred to older circuits of musical practice and communication, anecdotes on duels and musical competitions that tested endurance and vocal control. These did not, in the end, cohere into a sustained set of reflections on the mystical and experiential aspects of practice.

Concluding Impressions

I ventured into this essay to revisit the theory-practice dyad that was identified as the single most persistent motif of musical writings in late colonial India. This binary assumed several forms, not all of which corresponded to the colonial sociology of music, backed by Orientalist scholarship that preferred to associate theory with Brahmanical scholarship and practice with *Ustadi* engagement and to see the divide as a lack in Indian music. Indian publicists were not immune to these views but many of them had the advantage of actually experiencing closer ties of sociality and of responding to the actual process of listening to and learning from the *ustads*. In Bengal, where elite publicists were either *zamindars* or the new gentry in colonial Calcutta, their close links with the *ustads* and the subjective experience of listening carried with it a nostalgia for the past and a sense of loss that had to be compensated by a

resolute reformist project. This lay at the core of the writing project. Notwithstanding the occasional lapses on illiterate *ustadi* practice, the writings captured the ambivalence of the Bengali elite's investment in classical music that carried the marks of an older feudal culture and sensibility and that had to be carried forward on the back of a modern imagination. The writings, therefore, resembled a reverie and were mostly a set of reminiscences and recollections about listening. Both Dilip Kumar Ray and Amiyanath Sanyal came up with personal reflections peppered with prescriptions. The spectre of the practitioner, the *ustad*, was never absent—his practice seeped out as biographical details were assembled. The self of the Bengali connoisseur was constituted in the webs of social relations between performer, teacher, listener and learner and this found articulation in the writings that were both ethnographies of practice as they were autobiographies. The Southern experience was different—for one, practitioners and their spokespersons came together as one community to discuss and develop a discourse on aesthetics that tended to be more functional and geared to a modern pedagogic setting. The element of nostalgia, recalling days of yore, did not produce the same genre of reminiscences and autobiographical literature, instead certitude and a prescriptive orientation and the overall confidence in the robust future and foundations of Carnatic music characterized the oeuvre in Southern India.This is not to say that the discourse was uncontested or without ruptures but the idea is merely to comprehend the distinct and specific context in which classical music circulated, was received and represented, while juxtaposing it to the actuality of the performing milieu in the contemporary times. The anxiety about theory and practice was in fact nothing but a red herring as practitioners and publicists groped for a language to express their investment in securing and expanding their received tradition.

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