THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

RESOUNDING CASTE:

PRACTICES OF DISTINCTION, URBAN SEGREGATION, AND MUSICAL POLITICS IN CHENNAI, INDIA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

PRANATHI DIWAKAR

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2022

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone involved in the anti-caste resistance in India.

Jai Bhim.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

I've been told that writing your acknowledgements at the end of the dissertation writing marathon is an intensely nostalgic and moving process. It is indeed, as I have now discovered, both formidable and immeasurably exhilarating to recount nearly seven years' worth of relationships with people who have sparked my desire to learn new things, have held space for me, and invited me into their lives with unfailing openness. Words fall short, but I will try in these few pages to describe the incredible generosity of the people who have been, in the end, the most meaningful part of this journey.

First, I have to thank my dissertation committee—Marco Garrido, Constantine Nakassis, Liza Weinstein, Omar McRoberts, and Claudio Benzecry—who have, by example of their mentorship and scholarship, been inspirations to me. Thank you for reading drafts at various levels of doneness and offering such thorough and helpful feedback. You have given me the space to find my way as a researcher and writer and helped develop my capacity for thoughtful analysis (I hope). Marco, you have seen me through nearly a decade of this rollercoaster, and I would not have made it this far without your unwavering belief in me. Thank you for supporting my craziest ideas and teaching me so much about how to be a sociologist and an ethnographer. Costas, you have always given me such rich feedback, and I am so grateful for every reading recommendation, comment, and insight you have shared with me. I am immensely thankful that you invited me to be part of a community of scholars invested in exploring questions and themes related to Tamilagam. Liza, your scholarship has been so important to my own, but I am forever grateful for the kindness with which you took me to get coffee at SSHA and generously gave me your ear. I appreciate every conversation we have ever had—they have taught me to always be curious about the world. Omar

and Claudio, thank you for being on my committee and taking the time to talk with me about my project as it developed.

My time spent doing fieldwork in Chennai was enriched by the interactions I had with everyone who made space for me to co-exist alongside them for anywhere between a few hours and several months. I am so grateful to have gotten the chance to learn from you; this dissertation would be nothing if not for the generosity with which you shared your stories, wisdom, and lives with me. I cannot express my gratitude enough to Logan, Tenma, Sunil, Arivu, Muthu, Nithya, Miran, Saran, OfRo, Vishnu, Nanda, Poonga, Swetha, Vinoth, Guna, Stephen, Tamil Prabha, Rayman, Prof. Ramakrishnan, Shalin Maria Lawrence, V. Geetha—the list goes on. All of you helped me understand the living, breathing relationship of Gaana to the city of Chennai. Thank you for teaching me about the anti-caste struggle, music, writing, and politics in our conversations and demonstrating how best to be in this world. Logan, Sunil, Vishnu, Nanda, Vinoth, Guna, and all the members of the Black Boys, thank you for inviting me to your homes and sharing your music and stories with me. I will always remember sitting around Logan anna's house and hearing you talk and sing; thank you for letting me be with you then. I have learned so much from how deeply you think about music, equality, Chennai, and style. Tenma, thank you for being the reason that I understood anything about this topic at all. I am so inspired by what you have done with Casteless Collective and what you continue to share with me your music, politics, and thoughts about the world. I have really cherished our conversations. Arivu, you taught me to think about politics and how to respond to injustice, and I am in awe of you as a performer, writer, thinker, and activist. I will never forget the conversations in which we spoke about everything from Ambedkar to Nina Simone— thank you. Tamil Prabha, thank you for your novel, *Pettai*, a love letter to Chennai, and for taking the time to have conversations with me about Gaana paattu and

so many other things that I have written about in this manuscript. Rayman, Vinoth, Stephen, Miran, Nithya, Muthu, Saran—I am so grateful to you for telling me about your journey through Gaana and teaching me about the importance of joy. The following pages are dedicated to the stories that you shared with me with such openness and thoughtfulness. I hope I have done justice to them.

Thank you to the members of the Carnatic music world in Chennai who let me ask questions that were not always easy to answer. I am so grateful for your openness and generosity of spirit. While I know that all of you may not agree with my analysis, I trust that this is the start of an imperative discussion that will only enrich the art form. I hope you will come along and think through these questions together with me. Thank you to Praveen, Anantha, Charumathi, Mahesh, Rithvik, Sandeep, Vignesh, Vidhya, Akshay, Ramakrishnan, Archana and Aarathi, Amritha Murali, Jayanth, Shreya, Apoorva, and of course, T.M. Krishna, for inviting me so open-heartedly to have conversations with you about Carnatic music and its place in the world today. I have to thank Soosainathan especially for speaking with me about the art of making mridangams and being candid with me about the labor involved. I regret that we could not make it out to Pulianthope since the pandemic struck just in time for our visit, but hopefully, next time. Thank you to countless others who offered to speak with me about their careers in, and love for, Carnatic music. I am grateful to those of you involved in the planning and staging of Chennai Kala Theru Vizha, such as Monali, Sharada, Nity, Karen, Amrit, T.M. Krishna, and Sangeetha—thank you for letting me tag along.

I would not have been able to make it thus far without the able guidance of the mainstays at Chicago Sociology: Linnea Martin, Pat Princell, Meredith Clason, and Kelsie Diaz, who have always kept me on track and responded to an endless barrage of emails. Thank you to Brett Baker, Nick Seaver, and Kathrin Krantz for helping me figure out various graduate school-related

logistics and opportunities that seemed bewildering and daunting at the time; I owe so much to you. I have been lucky to have a community of scholars who have encouraged me along this marathon journey, both in Sociology and other disciplines. Thank you to Kristen Schilt, Jenny Trinitapoli, Forrest Stuart, and Andreas Glaeser for being so invested in my progress through the doctoral program, introducing me to new ways of thinking about sociological questions, and for alerting me to opportunities for fellowships, grants, jobs, and projects throughout my time at the department. A shoutout to Todd Schuble, who taught me how to make the most beautiful maps. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to meet Amanda Weidman, Davesh Soneji, Karthikeyan Damodaran, and Karthick Ram Manoharan through the Chicago Tamil Forum. These scholars have been my most important interlocutors and have always encouraged me to sharpen my analysis and broaden my understanding of caste and cultural history in South India. Thank you especially to Amanda and Davesh for your kindness, encouragement, and your brilliant scholarship that inspired me from the very start. Through Davesh, I also met some of the most prolific scholars of South Indian cultural history, such as Indira V. Peterson, and incredible new researchers of the performing arts in South India: Praveen Vijayakumar, Marek Ahnee, Divya Chandramouli, Janani Mandayam Coomar, and Ihsan Ul Ihthisam. Your thinking and writing about the performing arts in South India will no doubt sustain me for years to come. I also have to thank Shailaja Paik, Gajendran Ayyathurai, and Ramnarayan Rawat, whose thoughtful scholarship about caste and their generosity in conversations with me have been so immensely thought-provoking. Thanks to Jacob Remes and Eric Horowitz and the entire host of researchers who were part of the Critical Disaster Studies project for embracing this junior scholar with such open arms and inviting me to be part of the volume as a scholar in my own right. I am so grateful to Gabriel Ethiraj Dattatreyan, Emily Lordi, Xavier Livermon, David Brackett, and Tejaswini Ganti for being so willing to have

conversations with me about my research, opportunities, and the performing arts. I am grateful to my supervisors and colleagues at the Smart Museum for giving me a peek into another world and allowing me to be a part of it. I have also learned so much from the students whom I have taught and mentored over the years at the University of Chicago and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; they have brought me so much joy and introduced me to so many new perspectives.

I am grateful for the funding and support of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) through the IDRF fellowship, the Committee on Southern Asian Studies, the Center for International Social Science Research, and the Division of the Social Sciences and the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous financial support and the community fostered through these various fellowships and grants that have sustained my research.

I also consider myself very fortunate to have had other graduate students to walk alongside on this long journey. In Sociology, I thank the people in my cohort—Benjamin Rohr, Allison Reed, Yuhao Zhuang, Laila Noureldin, Brandon Sward, Rishi Arora, and especially Rebecca Ewert. Without Rebecca as the "armchair" of my dissertation, I would have never been able to make it through the travails of the prelim, coursework, dissertation writing, and the anguish of finding my way through this intense and grueling process. I have appreciated your friendship, guidance, and openness to learning with me more than I can express in words. Thank you to other graduate students in the department, including but not limited to Jonathan Schoots, Georg Rilinger, Sneha Annavarapu, Sarah Outland, Melissa Osborne, Jeffrey Parker, Alex Brewer, Anjanette Chan Tack, Esma Ozel, Jane McCamant, Hanisah Abdullah Sani, Austin Kozlowski, Moira O'Shea, Andrew Swift, Nisarg Mehta, Shannon Morrissey, Maryam Alemzadeh, Priyanjali Mitra, and Lauren Beard, who have been absolutely invaluable to my development as a sociologist. I found my

community among anthropologists and South Asianists who let me in and helped me find an intellectual home at the university. Thank you to Raffaella Taylor-Seymour, Harini Kumar, Hanna Pickwell (and Ben), Joshua Babcock (my co-conspirator), Uday Jain, Eleonore Rimbault, Shubham Shivang, Sharvari Sastry, and Sanjukta Poddar for keeping me sane and giving me the chance to have some of the most important conversations I have ever had in graduate school. My fieldwork friends in Chennai—Anusha Hariharan, Harini Kumar, and Amulya Mandava—are some of the most brilliant, thoughtful, and caring people and researchers I have had the fortune of knowing, and I have no doubt that this dissertation would never have achieved any analytic sharpness without our thoughtful conversations and the care we had—and continue to have—for each other. Thank you especially to my sis Anusha, who has been a friend, interlocutor, and akka to me. You sheltered me at a time when I most needed it, and for that, I will be forever grateful. I cannot wait to sit on a swing and drink coffee and laugh maniacally with you again soon. Thank you to Harini for being a close confidante and scholar whose thoughtfulness I have always admired, and I am grateful to you for being my partner in the frenzy of dissertation writing. Raffaella, our paths have always paralleled each other, and our conversations going into fieldwork and the pandemic felt life-affirming even though we seem to always be many time zones and oceans apart, so thank you. I am so grateful to Uday for being a friend, ally, and comrade through my years of graduate school. Thank you all for your friendship and for investing in building a community of care—you have shown me how to produce brilliant scholarship that is, first and foremost, steeped in the ethics of care and intimacy.

I have been sustained and enveloped by the love and companionship of my friends in Chennai, Chicago, and New York. My time in Chennai was enriched by the friendship of Tanvi, Rhea, Surya, Nikhil, Vishal, Richard, Marc, Vidyuth, Manasa, and Eric, who were always game

to hang out and go on excursions. Thank you to my friends from younger days, who have seen me grow and held witness to my life even though we are now grown-ish and so dispersed: Tara, Swetha, Nitya, Manasa, Sahithya, Bhakti, JJ, Aditya, Prateek, Jayadev, Isha, Swaroop, Anirudh. Thank you to my friends in Chicago who have put up with me always having to leave and loving me so hard anyway: Bindu, Alexa, Pooj, Nadya, Jon, Timna. I am so lucky to have friends who are as captivated by the making and eating of food as I am: Thom, Rebecca, Bindu, Alexa, Pooj, Nadya, Krushna, and Kaushik. I am thankful to have made friends outside of the social sciences in my time living in Hyde Park: Julian, Zoheyr, Akash, Yuqing, Brandon, and Milena. I am so grateful for music and my friends who love to experience it as much as I do: Mike, Ivan, Matty, Mikaylo. Thank you especially to my JQBX friends who kept me company through so much of the pandemic and my dissertation writing with only the fonkiest and most excellent of tunes. I have looked forward to Thursdays every week for the past two years because of you. I am indebted to my friends and roommates in New York, Kaushik and Krushna, for being the most wonderful company during the crazy seven months at 3333 and for continuing to be my favorite people to watch trash TV, explore the city, and play games with. Speaking of games, thank you to Vigyan, Irene, and Hari for always being down to play games, I have so enjoyed getting to know you more. Thank you to my oldest buddies and chosen fam, Tharini, Shyam, and Amrit, for always believing in me and my work. I am so fortunate to call Nithya my cousin-sister-bestie; thank you for gracing my life with your presence always, but especially during this last month of writing—it meant so much to me to have you by my side on this last leg of my adventure. I am grateful to Theresa, who has taught me gently over the years that I am happiest when I lean into myself.

Thank you to my parents, who have always challenged me to be more thoughtful about my work and have always stressed the importance of curiosity and kindness above all else. Thanks to

my brother, Pranav, for being my biggest fan and supporter for as long as I can remember. Thank you to my ammamma, who has coached me over the phone and taught me to make the best bisi bele bath and akki roti after her own, and my paati, who would have gleamed with pride if she were around today. I have been so grateful to have such love and affection lavished on me. I am grateful to Vibhu for coming into my life when he did, and for loving me so fiercely. You make me feel so seen, loved, and appreciated. Thank you for being so attentive and curious about my research and helping me parse through it with such clarity for years now. Those morning cups of chai and our ceaseless conversations have meant more to me than you will ever know.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has ever taught me to be unafraid and find joy in the most unexpected of places and situations. Joy is not made to be a crumb, and this dissertation is dedicated to all of you with hope against all hope that with that, together, we will imagine and realize more equitable and joyous futures.

Abstract

Caste inequalities persist in the relatively anonymized terrain of the modern, Indian city. The study of caste in urban India thus requires us to turn to the seemingly invisible symbolic processes by which caste makes itself known and continues to matter for social actors. Music is a symbolic arena in which these distinctions are battled, marked, or resisted. In this dissertation, I investigate how caste differentiation is socially reproduced by locating my study in the southern Indian city of Chennai and exploring the caste dimensions of two live musical scenes situated here: Carnatic and Gaana. I use data from participant observations and 103 in-depth interviews collected over eleven months of fieldwork in these two scenes with various members of the two music worlds: musicians, patrons, sponsors, brokers, producers, technicians, dancers, and fans, who animate contestations over contemporary meanings of caste in the city. In my analysis, I argue that caste is socially reproduced through four modes: socialization; spatialization; politicization; and the related processes of digitalization, migration, and globalization. Using this framework, I proceed from the individual, in examining the ways that a caste habitus is shaped through musical socialization; to the city, in analyzing the spatialization of caste, or how urban segregation is exacerbated as caste comes to be imprinted upon social groups through stereotypes and territorial identities. I then describe how these dichotomous social and spatial locations of caste mobilize distinct political ideologies and shape political action. Finally, I delineate the ways that caste has been made mobile through the circulation of recording and digital technologies, the movement and migration of caste diasporas, and the engagement of these two genres with global circuits of taste. I contend that caste comes to acquire varying levels of social, cultural, and political resonances in modern, urban India. This analysis of "musicking" reveals new insights into how caste boundaries

are re-entrenched as Brahminism acquires a *hegemonic register*, and how these boundaries are resisted through an *anti-caste aesthetic* that recovers marginalized histories of arts associated with Dalit communities to reimagine radically different and equitable futures. This study contributes to sociological understandings of social difference, inequality, urban segregation, distinction-making, and social movements as they relate to the politics of caste, city, and culture.

Introduction: Sound Check

The two tall speakers perched precariously on Monobloc chairs crackle to life as Sundar* takes the stage. Twenty or thirty audience members are gathered in the skating rink of a north Chennai public park for this evening's installment of an ongoing concerts-in-the-parks series. In 2017, Chennai was awarded membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), as a "Creative City for Music" following the efforts of a few Carnatic music world members who felt that Chennai's Carnatic music scene ought to be given due recognition on the global stage. But between 2017 and 2019, public discourse in the city questioned why only Carnatic music was being spotlighted in a city where dozens of musical traditions live and breathe. As a result, a private arts management agency was hired to bring in more diversity to the weekly concert lineup. This week, they had decided to showcase Gaana—a genre associated with the musicianship of Dalits, or previously "untouchable" caste communities living in the city's informal settlements. But as the events of the evening unfolded, it became clear that this was hardly a Gaana performance.

Sundar is a Tamil rural-folk singer who sings playback (songs prerecorded for film) for popular Tamil film music. In a hushed tone, the organizer from the private arts management agency informed me that she had made a strategic choice to enlist a singer who was not, in fact, a Gaana musician. She had informed Sundar before the performance that he was expected to plan a predominantly "folk" lineup with only a few Gaana songs thrown into the mix. She worried that a full Gaana lineup would be "too vulgar," and she worried that the crowd would "lose control." As a primarily Carnatic music fan, she had never heard of Gaana until very recently, and her associations with the form betrayed the negative stereotypes she held about the music and its performance. Gaana musicians are stigmatized for their performance at "slum" funerals of mostly

poor, Dalit families around the city and are overwhelmingly conflated with negative tropes such as “vulgarity” or “violence.”

As soon as Sundar flashes his toothy grin at the audience and begins to sing, walkers in the park begin to gravitate toward the skating rink. A few Carnatic music world personalities who sponsor this concert series are seated in the front row and smile gamely at Sundar as he starts to belt out a folk song. By the second song, park-goers have filled the rows of plastic chairs in the seating area, and still, a Gaana song has not yet been performed. For the third song, Sundar dons a pair of black sunglasses to suggest a shift away from the pastoral quality of the rural-folk music and toward an edgier signature “cool” pose adopted by young, male Gaana musicians. This Gaana song is met with hesitant whistles and cheers from the younger men in the crowd, but they quickly quieten down when it becomes evident that they cannot dance or react in ways that they would ordinarily do so at a Gaana performance. The fourth song turns out not to be a Gaana song after all: it is a raunchy film song that has folk overtones, “Soodana Mohini.” Sundar nevertheless decides to dramatize his performance by adopting the swagger and humorousness that he associates with Gaana. As Sundar performs, two of the UCCN sponsors whisper feverishly, throwing reproachful looks at Sundar and the organizers in turn. One of the sponsors, a man who appears to be in his seventies, motions to the organizer and asks that they move the speakers to face the street instead of the rink, because the volume is “too loud.” After Sundar finishes the song, the sponsor takes him aside and upbraids him for singing a “vulgar Gaana song.” Sundar emerges looking chastised and proceeds to sing only folk songs for the rest of the performance.

After the show, the organizer shares her consternation with me. “We told him not to sing vulgar songs, and the misogyny of that one song was deeply troubling! I am a feminist, so I had told him not to sing Gaana songs because the lyrics are so explicit and disparaging to women, but

he did it anyway." Her fellow organizer continues, "We were already nervous because this show is happening in north Chennai, and we were worried about how we would control the crowds. The music was also *so* loud. If I'm being very honest, it's the one UCCN show that I would not have minded missing." What about Gaana suggests a breach in the aesthetic preferences and norms of performance held by elites in the city? How do some listeners come to perceive sound as "noise"? Why is it that Gaana is associated with these negative tropes when Carnatic music enjoys its de facto status of "classical" music in the city? The answer is a sociological story that takes sound as its starting point and traces how sounds come to be evaluated as "musical" or "noisy" in its associations with communities from different social and spatial locations. In telling this story, I ask a broader question about the place of caste in social and cultural life in the city. What are the ways that caste identities get marked and unmarked in modern, urban India, and what does music have to do with it?

In the wake of affirmative action measures that started in the 1990s, India has witnessed a transmutation of its caste society, where reservations in education and employment have offered historically oppressed and devalued caste communities a modicum of opportunity to ascend the socioeconomic ladder. And yet, research on quantitative indices of inequality, educational attainment, employment, and segregation show that caste continues to play a disaggregating effect in social life even today. The city continues to exhibit markers of persistent urban inequality, residential segregation, differential access to resources, and low caste status and poverty are still strongly correlated (Vithayathil and Singh 2012; Desai and Dubey 2011). Dalit, or previously "untouchable" castes, continue to occupy the ranks of manual scavengers, sweepers, cleaners, and waste pickers who lead precarious lives. They experience violence at the hands of dominant castes and carceral systems, and educational attainment continues to remain low. Finally, they are often

ghettoized or evicted from urban informal settlements that illustrate the persistent poverty experienced by members of this community. Brahmins, who occupy the apex of caste hierarchies as "upper" castes, remain overrepresented in well-paying and "respectable" professions such as engineering or medicine.

In Tamil Nadu, the southern Indian state of which Chennai is the capital city, hundreds of middle castes jostle for dominance and legitimacy, drawing from the long history of non-Brahmin political movements that spearheaded the nativist Dravidian movement in the early 1900s by elite non-Brahmin castes. A study using data from the 2004-2005 Human Development Survey showed that there are significant disparities in opportunity structures between Dalits and Brahmins, with Brahmins remaining uniquely privileged in terms of higher income and consumption expenditure despite constituting only 6 percent of the sample (Desai and Dubey 2011). Even in Tamil Nadu, Brahmins make up approximately only 3 percent of the state's population, yet they enjoy economic and sociocultural privileges that far outweigh any other community. Despite a robust history of wresting back political control from Brahmins, Tamil Nadu continues to experience frequent caste violence, particularly against Dalits and communities belonging to the census category of Other Backward Castes (OBCs). How is caste kept alive despite these institutional and political strangleholds, and how is it that Brahminical privilege and Dalit oppression are reproduced time and time again? What are the invisible interactions that make up the sum of caste discrimination, and how might music be an entry point into investigating the extant caste matrix that operates in symbolic ways? How can music become a resource to challenge these rampant caste-based inequalities?

To answer these questions, we must reject a purely outcomes-based reading of caste inequality in India. While quantitative metrics reveal the extent of inequality, they cannot get at

the seemingly invisible and symbolic boundary-making processes that entrench caste privilege and oppression at the micro-sociological level of interaction. Additionally, despite these academic studies, the government of India has not conducted a comprehensive caste census nor has it made data available for researchers to understand how caste functions at the granular level of interaction. Caste is broadly understood by those in the West to be a rigid and inflexible hierarchy of social status groups that is undergirded by the polarizing conceptions of "purity" and "pollution," and untouchability and segregation are considered to be the hallmarks of such a society. Anthropological monographs of caste in the 1950s and 1960s took the village as a pristine site to uncover the operations of caste in its prototypical format. But the rapid urbanization of India since has not led, as some forecasted, to a decline in the importance of caste identity. The relative anonymity provided by the city's scale, lack of enforceability of caste segregation, and migratory flux have all resulted in the inability of caste segregation to proceed as it does in the clearly demarcated segregation of the village setting. As a result, the marking and unmarking of caste in urban spaces has taken radically new forms in the absence of strictly enforced spatial segregation in the village. In the city, ways of "knowing caste" enter the symbolic sphere of comportment, dress, bodily expression, or even complexion (Gorringe and Rafanell 2007). The city is no less concerned with caste status than the village, but the definition of its status, symbolic form, and social expression are not the same for the city and the village. Modern status distinctions are being articulated in other realms such as marriage, occupation, or income (Beteille 1996).

This study takes seriously the implication that caste identities are being drawn into the symbolic arenas of expression. Musical genres in India have historically been tied to the corpus of the community, providing coherence and continuity and enabling the social reproduction of the genre's norms, social position, and status. Through a careful investigation of musical appreciation

and performance and by paying particular attention to the norms and aesthetic dispositions of a genre's concomitant social world, we are able to get at the ways that caste makes itself known in India. In this dissertation, I sharpen the study's focus to two musical genres and scenes in the city of Chennai that are steeped in the particular caste histories of Brahminical and Dalit communities: Carnatic and Gaana music respectively. I investigate the ways these two musical scenes foster in-group coherence for their respective caste communities and become an entry point into caste socialization. In doing so, I examine the possibilities they afford their members for the re-entrenchment of existing caste privileges, norms, and exclusions while also providing the basis for challenging these bastions through the reworking of stigma, discrimination, and valences of the social and spatial ontologies of historically oppressed castes. In the next section, I lay out the theoretical framework for this study by considering the relationships of caste, city, and music to one another as they provide the possibility for shared meaning and action.

City, Caste, and Music

In theoretically conceptualizing the scope of this research project, I intervene in ongoing scholarly debates over caste in modern India, the role of caste in furthering urban segregation and inequality, and the place of music in providing social actors a symbolic realm for the expression of caste identities, aspirations, and meanings. As I showed in the previous section, the ontology of caste in India is immutable despite changing epistemologies of caste identification in the sprawling, anonymized urban landscape. In this section, I first consider how both caste and scholarship on the history of caste have transmuted to accommodate shifting political processes.

"Knowing" Caste: A Brief History

Scholars have traditionally attempted to isolate the features of caste that make it amenable to the marking of status distinctions. Definitions of caste differ over the exact metrics that anchor

caste as a social category. I broadly categorize the three modes of definition that I find in the literature into debates over Indian specificity versus universal generalizability, features of caste, and hierarchy or rank. While some scholars associate caste with its specific and local histories within the Indian context, others use the category to understand forms of social hierarchization in other contexts, often juxtaposing them with categories such as race, class, or ethnicity. However, the history of scholarship on caste begins with the advent of British colonial rule. As early as 1816, chronicles of early colonial ethnography and sociology were commissioned by British colonists to investigate the culture, social mores, and traditions of their colonial subjects. This is certainly not to say that caste was a function of colonial rule; it had existed as diffuse kinship groups, clans, and artistic guilds loosely hierarchized according to local systems of dominance. For example, in Tamil, labels such as *sammugam, jati, kulam* are all used to refer to some form of belonging in a community, although they do not refer to "caste" in the ways mobilized by administrators or scholars (Bate 2011). But in 1816, "caste" as the category for understanding this mode of stratification was used for the first time in Dubois's *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*. The British Board of Control wrote that the distinctions of caste must be understood by civil officers as the colonial regime could incur severe liabilities attempting to rule a caste society in the absence of such knowledge (Dirks 1992).

British colonial rule thus crystallized a bureaucratic epistemology of caste with the purpose of enumerating, controlling, and forecasting the norms and mores of their colonial subjects living in a caste society. As British rule became increasingly more entrenched, the ethnographic sensibilities of the late nineteenth century turned to caste histories as a mode of inventorying caste-based customs and norms. It was at this juncture that caste began to be viewed in relation to race. The Census of 1901 played a decisive role in establishing caste as a category within the annals of

colonial administration. Risley and Thurston invoked race and anthropometry—using biological features such as "nasal indexes"—to understand the demarcations among caste groups and their associated social rankings (Dirks 1992). "Upper" caste Indian scholars such as Ghurye responded to these western racial characterizations of caste with moderate enthusiasm, eager to adopt Risley's theory of anthropometry while also criticizing Risley's assertion that caste is detrimental to society (Ghurye 1932). Ghurye approved of the abolition of untouchability, but lamented the growing resentment toward Brahmins. Scholars such as Ghurye were proximate to the British colonial administration and its related monopolistic history over learning and education by virtue of their Brahminical caste status, which granted this caste community enhanced opportunities for mobility and a greater possibility of English language acquisition. This was in addition to their historic monopolization over knowledge production. As a result, Brahminical understandings of caste filtered into colonial conceptualizations of caste, informing its approach to the administration of caste.

The Brahminical vision of caste society thus dictated the acceptable forms of "respectable" citizenship and aesthetics. Soneji (2014) delineates how taste hierarchies in South Indian dance coincided with the Brahminical worldview, resulting in the divestment of the dance genres performed by South Indian hereditary dancers of the Isai Vellalar caste from their art on the grounds of respectability politics of caste. This dovetailed with the colonial abolishment of "nautch" or dance, which mobilized a characterization of these women as "prostitutes." The application of "vulgarity" or "criminality" to historically oppressed castes cemented the creation of a colonial caste society in the Brahminical vision. The conceptualization of caste as a *varna* system thus began to outweigh all other epistemologies of caste: the *varna* system of caste understands it to be a four-tiered system composed of caste groups arranged on a hierarchy of

descending social prestige: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. Other castes outside this four-tier system were deemed physically and ritually "impure" and therefore "untouchable." The *varna* system began to attract sociologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for its ability to represent a closed system of social stratification characterized by a hierarchy of limited interactions among closed status groups. For Weber (1916), caste hierarchy emanated from the very nature of Hinduism: "Without caste, there is no Hindu." This cemented caste as a locally particular version of social hierarchy most commonly found in the Indian context.

Sociological and historical explanations of caste in the early twentieth century identified sociological features that kept castes insular and separate, and caste was deemed to be particular to Indian society since it was understood to have been established by Brahminical Hinduism, and therefore unlike—even if somewhat reminiscent of—class. Occupation and hereditary specialization were identified as the main features contributing to the social reproduction of caste (Senart 1930). Castes were viewed as ranked in relation to the ranking of related occupations along a hierarchy of ritual purity and pollution, relegating caste occupations associated with death, dirt, animal products, waste, or other polluting substances to the status of "untouchability." Other features of caste identified in this attributional theoretical turn were commensality, where discrete castes do not share meals or contact; endogamy, or intra-caste marriage; and spatial segregation, whereby dominant caste residences are spatially separated from the residences of "untouchable" castes. Scholars working in the context of US race relations began to see the resonances between caste and race as systems of closed status groups hierarchically arranged, taking the strict racial lines of the US to represent a "dual caste" system. However, the local specificities of historical contingency and tides of socioeconomic and political change make such comparisons complex, as Harper (1968) identified. "Any system of stratification is in some ways like *all* systems of

stratification; any system of stratification is in some ways like *some other* systems of stratification; any system of stratification is in some ways like *no other* system of stratification."

The use of "caste" to understand the ravaging inequalities of race in the US had resonance in the context of the antebellum American South, where features such as strict residential segregation and an obsession with ritual purity through the enforcement of endogamy. Caste appeared in Du Bois's (1903) *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he referred to "Southern Negroes" as a "servile caste." In 1945, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton published *Black Metropolis* about Chicago's South Side, arguing that a caste system continues in Chicago. But they noted that caste only existed in a watered-down form in the wake of the Great Migration (1916–70) that led to the migration of Southern black folks to new, major Northern cities like Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and New York City that changed the nature of the strictly segregated "color line." Fuller (2010) argues that caste faded away in sociological conceptualizations of race at this point in time, relegating it once more to the ambit of Indian caste society. Cox concluded that the caste system is "an Indian cultural invention" found practically nowhere else. Berreman (1960) argued that scholarship comparing race and caste unfairly contrasts an idealized view of Indian caste with a pragmatic view of American race relations, conceding that the most salient similarity in both systems is the enforcement of social deference. As caste fell out of sociological favor in the US by the 1950s and 1960s, it took on heightened importance for anthropologists of caste in India.

The field view of caste espoused by anthropologists such as McKim Marriott rejected the importance given to Hindu scriptures and biological or racialized explanations that had abounded just a few decades ago. The ahistorical and culturalist nature of earlier studies gave way to an anthropological response in the form of ethnographic monographs that sought to emphasize the particularities and regional specificities of caste on the ground. F. G. Bailey, who belonged to this

empirical anthropological tradition, believed that traditional caste in its most "pristine" form was found in India's villages and that they were not a byproduct of codes or scriptures found in Brahminical Hindu texts (Bailey 2001). Bailey's emphasis on the village as the locus of caste and his focus on empirical observations of *interactions* at the village level are characteristic of this "ethnosociological" field view of caste that emerged during this period. Marriott's ethnosociological approach offered explanations for localized ranking systems that eschewed the ideal-type of the four-tier *varna* system in favor of the *jati* view of caste, which understands caste society as one in which hundreds of regional sub-castes have historically battled and continue to jostle for dominance. Marriott's (1959) interactional theory of caste posited that castes are regarded as higher when they receive greater amounts of ritual honoring or purification from others, while giving them less in return. Such a theory stands at odds with a feature-based attributional theory of caste ranking, which Marriott criticized for neglecting to acknowledge the way that polluting behaviors are combined in a hierarchy of values; its indifference to whether the attribute is occupational or non-occupational; and its inability to explain the role of local history of politics in making sense of how groups may be similar in corporate attributes and still be differentially ranked (Marriott 1959). Marriott's notion of attributional ranking resonated with Srinivas's concept of "dominant caste," used to refer to communities that are locally dominant because of their material and socioeconomic strengths, regardless of generalizable notions of purity.

Marriott's ethnosociological view of caste inspired a "school" of scholarship around caste at the University of Chicago in the 1970s, drawing heavily from Schneider's cultural analysis of American kinship and positioning itself in opposition to Dumont's view of caste. Dumont was a French sociologist whose seminal *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966) polarized scholarship on caste.

Drawing from Tocqueville's conceptions of inequality and the holism of Levi-Strauss's structural cognitive principles, Dumont developed a theory of caste that eschewed micro-sociological accounts of caste and instead privileged the concept of hierarchy along the spectrum of ritual purity and pollution as the underpinning basis for caste society. Dumont's structuralist theory of caste drew from Brahminical Hindu scriptures and rules for conduct, arriving at the conclusion that the mutual repulsion of castes through principles of purity and pollution maintained caste hierarchies and ensured the segregation of caste groups through the development of elaborate rules of social interaction (Dumont 1966). Dumont's holism and his reliance on Brahminical scriptures were thoroughly criticized by Indian scholars and US anthropologists like Marriott for his total omission of the state as an analytic factor in explaining how caste had acquired its present character, making it appear as though unequal caste relations were consensual. His holism also led to a mischaracterization of Indian values as essentially Brahminical Hindu religious values, and the presentation of hierarchy as distinctive to Indians essentialized, orientalized, and "totalized" India (Jodhka 2012). Marriott's school was not exempt from criticism either, with critics arguing that it committed to a more traditional view of India that conformed with the book view of caste rather than a field view, thus privileging uniformity and generalizability in theories of caste (Fuller 1996). Subaltern scholars began to pioneer an anti-holistic turn by recovering the voices of communities marginalized by scholarship that had privileged the colonial or the Brahminical hegemonic view of caste.

At the same time, for Indians in the twentieth century, the question of caste and untouchability had become a polarizing political issue on the ground that was wrapped up in the question of what Indian society would look like after India achieved independence from colonial rule. The most prominent debate over caste took place between Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar over

which parts of the caste system ought to be reformed, and what political measures would be mobilized to do so. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a jurist, lawyer, scholar, and social reformer who advocated for the complete repudiation of the Hindu religious system, which he saw as the origin of all discrimination in Indian society. In *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), Ambedkar argued that Brahminical Hinduism had institutionalized caste discrimination and inequality and called for the annihilation of caste in its totality. The term "Dalit," which was coined by social reformer Jyotirao Phule, was then popularized by Ambedkar in his demand that Dalit castes across India unite and form a separate electorate to have a say in—and rectify the inequalities of—the system of inequality that had been propagated by Brahminical Hinduism and its venerated religious texts. In contrast to Ambedkar, Gandhi's prerogative was not to annihilate the caste system, but rather to rid Hindu society of untouchability. In *A Vindication of Caste*, Gandhi called only for the end of untouchability of "Harijans"—an infantilizing term to refer to "untouchable" castes, meaning "the children of god"—while arguing that the *varna* system ought to continue as a framework for Indian society. Ambedkar responded that *varna* could never be a justifiable basis for a society based on equality, and that the sanctity behind caste and *varna* must be destroyed. Although separate electorates were not instituted, Article 17 of the Indian Constitution abolished the practice of untouchability.

The Ambedkar-Gandhi debates shaped the conversation around caste in present times. They are also emblematic of the polarized positions on caste that have on the one hand, galvanized political and social movements around Dalit identity and citizenship, while on the other, radicalized *savarnas* or "caste Hindus," who benefit from caste inequality and feel threatened by burgeoning anti-caste movements. The Indian Constitution, drafted under the leadership of Ambedkar, recognized two protected categories of castes that were created in order to afford

historically oppressed and disadvantaged groups the benefits of affirmative action, namely Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST). In institutionalizing the rights of SCs and STs, the newly independent Indian state not only established the right to be free from discrimination, but also instituted positive discrimination or affirmative action measures via "reservations," whereby SCs, STs, and another category called Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are guaranteed varying percentages of all seats in public education and employment. In 1979, the Mandal Commission was tasked with investigating the conditions of "backward classes" and identified OBCs as groups that had historically occupied a low social position in the caste hierarchy; experienced a lack of educational advancement; and suffered a lack of representation in government service, trade, commerce, or industry, thus qualifying 2,399 communities as "backward" and eligible for reservations (Radhakrishnan 1996).

However, when the Mandal Commission report was nationally implemented in the 1990s, the institutional measures provoked a series of violent protests and clashes from "upper" castes who felt that they would be disadvantaged by the rising mobility of these historically oppressed castes and classes. The implementation of the Mandal Commission report marked a turning point in the history of caste in India. At the same time, the Ambedkar centenary celebrations in 1990 launched a range of regional social and political movements that organized around the Dalit identity and sought representation in politics. These political trends, along with a growing anti-Islamic sentiment, explain the bolstering of Hindu right-wing politics in the past few decades, which resulted in the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014. Since, the Hindu-right not only advocates for Hindu supremacy in the Sanskritic Hindu vision of Hindutva political doctrine, but it has also enacted genocide and attempted to affect the constitutional displacement of Muslim and Dalit citizenship as exemplified by the

proposal of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens in 2019, which were met with nationwide protests and a repressive and violent governmental response.

A Note on the Contingency of Caste Categories

Ongoing political debates about the place of "minorities" and oppressed communities in present day India require us to think about the categories mobilized by communities in the wake of the legal-juridical abolishment of "untouchability." Administrative, political, scholarly, and community conceptualizations of caste identity have historically interacted with one another and produced an array of terms that are variously applied discursively to communities by others, as well as other terms that are used by individuals themselves to self-identify. Administratively and politically, we see the transformation in nomenclature of previously "untouchable" caste communities from "Depressed Classes" to "Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and Other Backward Classes." Politically, we observe changes from the Gandhian use of *Harijan* to describe historically "untouchable" castes to that of "Dalit" and *panchamar,* which was popularized by Tamil social reformer Periyar. Social reformers like Ambedkar or Phule called for the politicization of a pan-Indian identity that captured the historic oppression of these castes and would provide a resource to organize and resist the persistent degradation of these communities. Such movements led to the creation of the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s, who not only found political resonance in such cross-regional solidarities, but also looked to the context of racial discrimination in the US and the pioneering work of the Black Panther Party during the US Civil Rights Movement.

But in reality, previously "untouchable" castes consist of a range of regionally particular sub-castes or *jatis* such as Adi Dravidar, Pallar, Paraiyar, Chakkiliyan, and Arunthathiyar in Tamil Nadu alone. In contrast, decades of rising anti-caste political consciousness among these and other historically oppressed regional sub-castes have led to the embracing of "Dalit" identities, or other

community terms that reject the stigmatized *jati* name, to avoid re-stigmatizing or re-hierarchizing Dalit communities along Brahminical caste hierarchies. At other times, the espousal of religious identities, such as "Buddhist" or "Christian," by these communities are a response to an Ambedkarite call to abandon Hinduism and turn to Buddhism to repudiate caste, which was a Hindu project. Or, in the case of Christian conversions, some embraced a Dalit theology that drew on liberation theology as a conduit to escaping continued caste-based oppression. The shifting and contested nomenclatures of caste thus reflect the ever-transforming nature of political sensibilities, social movements, and resistances that reject administrative or "upper" caste terminologies, which seek to preserve the "low" social position of historically oppressed communities. Political activists and organizers continue to find new ways to reject terms emerging from casteist or Hindu religious discourses: "Dalitbahujan," "casteless," "historically oppressed," or "anti-caste."

For Brahmins, who perceive themselves to be "upper" caste, there is a particular kind of caste-denialism that results in public-facing claims of "not seeing caste" or "castelessness" within the framework of modernity.[1] However, the entire corpus of scholarship on caste and ongoing oppression in the name of Brahminical Hinduism would suggest that Brahminical casteism runs rampant. During the implementation of the Mandal Commission's reports in the 1990s, so-called "upper" castes organized and identified with the administrative label of "general" or "other category" to register their sense of threat in the wake of affirmative action. Subramanian (2019) argues that "upper" castes shunt the label of "caste" to historically "lower" castes who invoke their affiliation in the public or political arena to claim resources from the state. In contrast, "upper"

[1] Note that this version of "castelessness" does not indicate the presence of an anti-caste framework that seeks to annihilate caste or make "upper" castes "give up" their caste. Rather, it allows for a reimagining that they are "modern" and would be presumed to be casteless unless they invoke caste explicitly (Deshpande 2013).

castes "transcode" (Pandian 2002) or transform their own caste affiliations into new discourses, such as those of "merit," to justify their aversion to recognizing or speaking of casteism as a structure that still continues to benefit them. As a result, they adopt discursive characterizations such as "modern" or "meritorious" to suggest that their exalted social position is not the reality of their historically accrued caste privilege, but rather, the fruits of their own "merit" or "intelligence." Words such as "community" are often used in lieu of the *jati* name to suggest that the basis of affiliation is about something *"other than caste"* (Deshpande 2013). However, these terms only serve to occlude the reality of Brahminical privilege that persists nationwide as well as the symbolic legitimation it provides to the newly rampant Hindu-right that targets minorities under the banner of Brahminical Hinduism. In seeking education, matrimonial alliances, or employment opportunities, Brahminical *jati* names continue to be both whispered and proudly proclaimed as the basis for caste affiliations. Subramanian (2019) notes, for example, how Tamil Brahmins refer to the Indian Institute of Technology, where Brahmins continue to dominate on claims of "merit," as the "Iyer-Iyengar Institute of Technology," referring to the Tamil Brahminical sub-castes that continue to be electively adopted by members to gain symbolic and other forms of capital.

The tens and hundreds of "middle-castes" that tend to adopt regionally specific labels such as their *jati* name, often make identarian claims on affirmative action such as reservations under OBC quotas. Although such quotas are instituted to benefit historically oppressed classes, caste communities wielding great socioeconomic influence and standing, such as the Patels in Gujarat, lay claim to these categories. Alternatively, other castes, like Nadars in Tamil Nadu, have historically bargained for enhanced group status: At first, the Nadars turned to Sanskritization to increase their status, creating a new myth of Kshatriya status. They then turned away from that to

pursue secular economic and political goals through the creation of a caste association, which became the vehicle for community mobility and entry into politics (Hardgrave 1969). Revisionist histories have been deployed by existing and new caste formations to construct mythologies of caste origins to oppose politically powerful castes. For example, the Devendrakula Vellalars in Tamil Nadu seek to oppose the political might of the OBC Thevars, who are themselves a consolidated caste formation that grew out of colonial domination (Gross 2022). In the case of Tamil Nadu, the term "non-Brahmin" came to be a political resource for the non-Brahminical "upper" castes who articulated and constructed an oppositional political identity in the early twentieth century in order to challenge hegemonic Brahminical dominance in society and politics.

As these complex naming and identification practices suggest, capturing caste as any one thing is slippery. Caste affiliations and nomenclatures are continually shifting in response to political tides and lived experiences of caste, and they interact with activist, administrative, political, and scholarly discourses in the course of their transmutation. If anything, this shows that the rigid ascriptive *varna* system in Weberian understandings of caste is far from the reality of caste contestations on the ground. In this dissertation, therefore, I attempt to capture the range of ways that members of discrete caste communities self-identify to both mask and unmask their caste location. When I write "Brahmin" or "Dalit," I use these terms *not* to essentialize their caste identities as intrinsic to who they are as social actors, but rather to mean that they are *discursively deemed* as such in interactions. I also note points of departure from these terms as different individuals from disparate caste communities self-identify using a range of contingent and contextual cues. Sometimes, these terms manifest as place identities (see Chapter 2) or political identities (see Chapter 3). In all cases, contingent identity-making processes take place at the level of the individual as they move through different spaces and temporalities in the course of their

own lifetime, or at the level of the group in the context of ongoing political debates and movements that afford new possibilities for the signaling or masking of caste identity.

The Contemporary Contours of Caste

In the aftermath of changes that took place in India with relation to caste affirmative action and political mobilizing in the 1990s, caste has taken radically new forms of operating, especially in cities. Since the liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s, Indian cities have expanded dramatically, with the quantum of urban affluent classes nearly tripling in size, as well as a growing number of working-class migrants (Stroope 2012). Anthropological village ethnographies have shown that if caste purity is maintained through separation, then the enforcement of this separateness takes place through spatial segregation. The village or "*ooru*" in Tamil Nadu is separated from the *cheri*, which are Dalit settlements and colonies that exist outside the ambit of the *ooru*. The rapid urbanization of India has not led, as some forecasted, to a decline in the importance of caste identity in the city, nor has it annihilated spatial segregation. Certainly, the anonymity provided by the larger scale and size of the city, the lack of enforceability of caste segregation, and the flux of migration have all resulted in the inability of caste segregation to proceed as it does in the village. Instead, the signaling of caste in urban spaces has taken radically new forms in the absence of strict segregation and complete knowledge of another person's caste by their place of residence.

While some scholars argue that caste manifests through microstructural symbols and indicators like comportment, dress, bodily expression, speech, or even complexion (Gorringe and Rafanell 2007), others have shown that the city continues to exhibit signs of residential segregation, differential access to resources, and the persistent correlation between low caste status and poverty (Vithayathil and Singh 2012; Desai and Dubey 2011). Evidence from quantitative studies of caste in Indian cities shows that caste inequalities in education, income, and social

networks are less strong in India's metropolitan centers, but they are higher in developed villages and smaller cities (Desai and Dubey 2011). Yet, a spatial analysis of ward level data from 2001 census data shows that there is a high level of residential segregation by caste in India's seven largest cities, and residential segregation by caste far surpasses residential segregation by other socioeconomic markers, such as income, in each city (Vithayathil and Singh 2012). Metha's (1968, 1969) study found that segregation was highest for highest and lowest status groups, and that the relative increases in the degree of separation were highest among Brahmins and Dalit groups. Recent studies have only shown the persistence of such segregation as evidenced by the fact that only one-fifth of urban segregation of caste groups can be explained by differences in income (Vithayathil and Singh 2012). Even though capitalism and modernity unsettle caste in fundamental ways, it is equally true that caste adapts and survives within these formations (Natrajan 2009). Beteille (1996) declares that the city is no less concerned with status than the village, but the definition of status, its symbolic form, and social expression are not the same for the village and the city.

Beteille's exhortation to study the symbolic forms that casteism takes in the city leads to the substantive intervention being made in this study. In studying the contemporary lives of caste in the city, symbolic arenas such as food, dress, marriage, speech, and music provide resources to social actors for the signaling of caste identity. Especially in the context of India, where "religion" and "culture" are often used interchangeably in common parlance, caste identities become visible in the ways that religious identities are signaled in the public sphere. In light of rising religious and communal violence in India and the bolstered stridency of Hindu nationalist discourse, Nandy (1997) writes that the crisis over identity, and particularly religious identity, bubbles up within the "upper" caste—and particularly Brahmin individuals—as a fear and the insecurity of becoming

marginalized. The preservation of a "cultural" identity for caste becomes a repository for the Brahminical expression of both religious and national identities. Natrajan (2005) posits that the concrete existence of caste is propped up by the work of symbols, which shape and legitimize dominance and authority.

In this context, music provides fertile ground to understand the range of symbolic codes and processes that social actors engage in to either further entrench caste dominance or challenge such dominance. India's diverse and wide-ranging musical traditions are intimately linked with the practice of caste, resulting in the concentration of caste identity-making processes within musical norms and spaces associated with respective caste groups. "Musicking" understands music as a social activity comprised of "performing, listening, rehearsing, composing, or dancing" (Small 1998, 9). A sociological approach to music understands music to be embedded in social life and relations (Roy and Dowd 2010), a perspective that finds heightened relevance in Indian society where different musical genres accompany acts and phases of social life such as birth, marriage, death, religious functions, and leisure. When transposed to the context of a caste society, these genres acquire distinctions of "high" and "low" in relation to their aesthetic forms, social purpose, and their concomitant caste associations. Caste is marked in the public sphere because it persists in the private sphere of cultural participation, marital networks, and social associations with other families, allowing caste to "re-fang" itself as cultural identity, or group taste or preference for like-minded partners or culturally similar alliances (Natrajan 2005).

Music thus opens up a sphere in which to excavate the complex relations of caste society. It enables actors to employ a range of strategies for social interaction that mobilize music as a resource to produce "the scenes, routines, assumptions, and occasions that produce social life" (DeNora 2000). In this context, investigating musical activities in relation to caste and urban social

life advances new understandings of how musicking produces group differences, encodes symbolic boundaries, and confers cultural power and stigma. Music is an important site for scholars to regain accounts of the agency of the urban poor and caste-oppressed communities as they reappropriate, subvert, or challenge the singularizing negative stereotypes that are applied to them with a broad brush. Social movements often politicize cultural consumption by questioning links between social positioning, artistic merit, and taken-for-granted frameworks of judgment by creating new forms of music, performance, and aesthetic principles (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Lieberman 1995; Roy 2002). I embrace this agentic approach to the study of musicking in the context of Indian cities, where ongoing casteism breeds new and dangerous forms of cultural nationalism while also engendering resistance through cultural articulations of anti-caste dissent.

Caste and Music in Chennai, Tamil Nadu: Carnatic and Gaana

The Tamil musical landscape is stained by caste differentiation and the practice of distinct musical genres for various events in the life cycle. One such practice is that of *parai* drumming, which is a funerary, circular drum made with cowhide and played by beating a stick against the taut surface of the drum. The drum is deemed to be polluting since it is manufactured from the hide of a dead cow and played at dominant caste funerals to drive away evil spirits (Arun 2007). The *parai* is therefore a symbol of "impurity" or "pollution" that is relegated to the *tholil* (labor) of "untouchable" castes. Historically, they were proscribed from playing it at their own funerals, which led to *parai* becoming a form of servitude that was rarely compensated except for the raw rice offered to the deceased during the funerary rituals (Gorringe 2016a). Especially since the Ambedkar centenary celebrations in 1990, Tamil Nadu has witnessed a range of Dalit-led political and cultural movements, including that of inverting the stigma of *parai* drumming. Arts festivals

across the state incorporate *parai* drumming to resist the caste logics that kept *parai* drummers from playing at their own funerals or seeking just remuneration for their labor.

It is against this backdrop of Dalit assertion and reappropriation of arts associated with Dalit musicianship that this story takes place. Carnatic and Gaana music, unlike rural *parai* drumming, are intrinsically linked to the city of Chennai, or Madras. The city of Chennai was named Madras under British colonial rule, and it emerged as a crucial node in the trade flows that contributed to the economic and demographic growth that led to the urbanization of Madras in the years following its incorporation in the seventeenth century. Madras represented disparate possibilities to its colonial overlords, the newly migrant Brahmin communities that flocked here to occupy positions in the colonial administration, and the Dalit communities that migrated to the city in search of employment at the mills and factories that began to emerge in the nascent city's core, what is now referred to as North Chennai. Geetha and Rajadurai (2001) illustrate how Brahmins wielded disproportionate influence in city planning, and the *cheris*—segregated residential settlements of Dalits, separated from dominant caste residences—were ghettoized. "Upper" castes blocked the development of routes from the *cheris* to the urban core of the city, operating within the Brahminical view of caste that sought to maintain ritual purity and abhorred the ritual pollution of "lower" caste movement into spaces marked for Brahminical religious activities (Subramanian 2006).

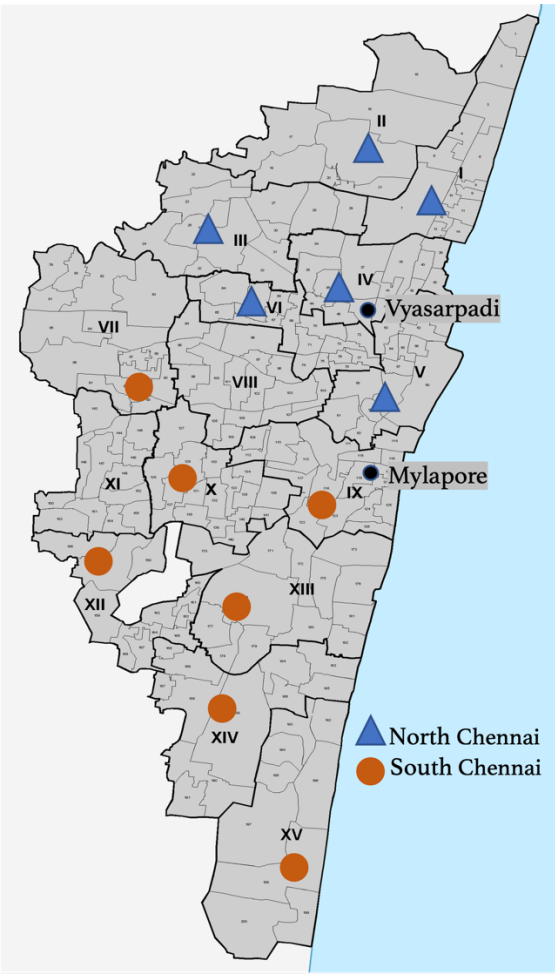

Figure 1.1. *Map of Chennai (source of base layer: Wikipedia)*

Although Carnatic music had a longer history in the Tanjore courts that patronized late-medieval composers and gave a fillip to the development of the music, it was only when Tamil Brahmins moved to the city under British colonial rule that Carnatic music began to acquire its current proscenium format. As a newly urban caste, Brahmins began to acquire English to be proximate to British rule and wield influence in political, socioeconomic, and cultural realms. For this urban caste of Tamil Brahmins, the changing circumstances of urban living meant that they had to eventually sever the connections held with their agrarian pasts and their landholdings, which had served to connect them to the prestige enjoyed in the village (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014).

In order to replicate this order in the new social space of the city, Brahmins began to engage in the creation of institutions and physical spaces through activities like temple building and the staging of spectacles of Sanskritized religiosity (such as religious processions) to mark out their territory. The southward shift of elite Brahmin lawyers and their families from the northern parts of the city to localities like Mylapore sparked a flurry of placemaking activities and areas like Mylapore came to be marked out as "Brahmin" areas of residence.

The patronage and consumption of the performing arts, particularly Carnatic music, was the bridge between their desire to construct an innately Indian cultural identity for nation-building and their desire to fit into the mandates of modernity. This was reflected in their preoccupation with constructing performance spaces like music halls in the European style, as well as through the introduction of the western violin into the canonical ensemble of performance, the creation of English-language texts with musical notations that standardized its pedagogy, and new recording technologies that preserved this exalted music for posterity (Weidman 2014). The performing arts were also spurred on by temples that served the purpose of connecting music with the intended goal of a spiritual transcendence that rested on a Brahminical vision of Sanskritic Hinduism. As professional success enhanced the economic fortunes of Brahmins, Carnatic music increasingly became a way to lay claim to "high" taste, spiritual purity, and nation-building.

At the turn of the twentieth century, "non-Brahmin" assertions by elite non-Brahmin castes gave rise to the Dravidian political movement, which challenged Brahminical hegemony over socioeconomic spheres. Dalit communities were historically excluded from such movements that gave a fillip to the political fortunes of non-Brahmin, "middle-castes." By the 1940s, in response to the Dravidian contestation of Brahminical influence in politics, Tamil Brahmins had reinvented their image through Carnatic musical patronage as a social class that would bridge tradition and

modernity in service of the nation-building project. Fuller and Narasimhan (2014) argue that this spatial consolidation of Tamil Brahmin elites lent "critical mass" to their corporate caste identity by providing group cohesion and cultural hegemony despite their being a numerical minority.

In contrast to Brahminical culture that was situated around Carnatic musical activity and residence in Mylapore, Dalit life in Madras centered around the "slum." Shaikh (2021) argues that industrial capitalism under colonial rule birthed a laboring class that could be paid cheaply, as a result of which the "slum" emerged as a space where underpaid laborers could be housed inexpensively. Dalit migrants to the city settled in North Chennai, cordoned off from the rest of the city by Brahminical caste sensibilities that inflected colonial urban planning. Here, they were primarily employed at nearby British mills and factories (Viswanath 2014b). Gaana music emerged from the confluence of Dalit migrants living in informal settlements around the city. The *parai* drums at the rural Tamil funeral were replaced in the Gaana percussive context with everyday objects of urban life—overturned water drums, metal containers, or matchboxes—and instruments like the tabla or dholak, which were borrowed from the Tamil Sufi tradition. Gaana concerts became central to the urban slum funeral as well as other community events that continue to take place at informal settlements around the city.

With Chennai's deindustrialization and the subsequent information technology (IT) boom in the 1990s, the city began to shift southward in the wake of factory shutdowns (Hancock 2008). With this residential expansion, Dalit settlements began to mushroom even in southern and western parts of the growing city, following the trend of migration to new outposts in the city by dominant communities. But the association of North Chennai with Dalit residences persists despite drastic demographic transformations all over the city, and South Chennai localities are associated with "upper" caste residence and signifiers despite the wide-ranging demographic variation in caste and

class within localities. As the following pages demonstrate, the spatialization of caste has led to the enmeshing of North Chennai's slums with the Dalit, urban poor, thus generating a place identity to refer to urban Dalits—an identity that is systematically devalued in contrast to the cultural power enjoyed by Brahmins, who reap the benefits of the cultural power stemming from their place association with South Chennai localities like Mylapore.

Despite these musical scenes appearing worlds apart, they share resonances from originating and acquiring their present form in the same city. Both Carnatic and Gaana place an emphasis on voice as the centerpiece of performance, both hinge upon live musical performance over recorded music, and both have long lineages that inform their present-day musical canons. And yet, the ways that Carnatic music is perceived as *the* "classical" music of South India stands in stark opposition to the stigma and discrimination that Gaana music and its musicians face daily. Carnatic music lovers, who are predominantly Brahmin, enjoy an annual festival every December, with 4,500 concerts taking place over the course of a month at nearly forty dedicated music institutions or *sabhas* around the city. Even while constituting less than 3 percent of the state's population, Tamil Brahmins have secured the status of "high" art for this art form. Carnatic musicians are awarded national recognition and frequently tour national and global circuits, indicating the cultural legitimacy and centrality this music occupies. In contrast, Gaana musical performance still predominantly takes place on makeshift stages at mostly informal settlements, and Gaana musicians face the stigma of singing at funerals, belonging to Dalit castes, and hailing from parts of town considered to be "slums." At the same time, the rapidly accelerating anti-caste political consciousness in Tamil Nadu has led to a cultural articulation that is most visible in the rise of Dalit films, literature, art, and music that demand dignity and legitimacy for art forms that have historically been devalued for their caste affiliations. Gaana music is one of many sites where

this anti-caste cultural expression flourishes and fuses with new forms such as hip-hop, as well as older arts like *parai.*

Carnatic and Gaana music thus provide an entry point into asking questions of the social underpinnings of these musical worlds and their broader resonances. At the root of "resonance" is the concept of *sound*. Taking sound as the starting point for this study, I ask: How are sounds evaluated as "musical," "aesthetic," "transcendent," or even "sacred," and how are other sounds relegated to the totalizing qualifiers of "noisy," "too loud," "vulgar," or "profane"? What social processes undergird such evaluations, and what implications does that have for the people associated with the production and consumption of these sounds? How do such individual evaluations of sound filter into bureaucratic attempts to suppress "noise" and their makers? Inversely, how do reputations of "classical" or "high art" come to be socially constructed and acquire salience? What consequences does this have for different social actors navigating urban spaces and cultural politics? In order to answer these questions through a sociological lens, I stress the "re-" in "resounding" as a process of breaking open the black box of sound to investigate how sound affords possibilities for the re-production of caste, the re-inscription of caste boundaries, the resistance of caste discrimination, and the collective re-imagining of social and spatial locations by disparate caste communities. Social valuations of sound have significance in the realms of caste distinction and resistance and resonate well beyond the "local" context of Chennai alone. This dissertation is titled *Resounding Caste* because in this study, I investigate how distinct social valuations of sound come to be mired in sociological processes of marking and challenging caste distinctions, urban segregation, and musical politics in the city of Chennai and the global Tamil

diaspora, with the multivalent effects of reinscribing, reproducing, resisting, and reappropriating caste locations.[2]

Data and Methods

In order to study these research questions, I conducted ethnographic research on Carnatic and Gaana musical scenes in Chennai between December 2018 and April 2019 and September 2019 and March 2020, totaling eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork. The aim of my research was to learn about these two seemingly disparate musical scenes, which I knew from my experience of growing up in Chennai were both inextricably linked with the history of the city itself. Having been socialized into Brahminical norms and Carnatic music myself, I began to see the music as problematically incubating both invisible and strident social expressions of casteism. It was in college that my deep discomfiture with Brahminical exclusivity and casteism sharpened into an anti-caste political commitment. During fieldwork for my master's thesis on the politics of urban infrastructure in north Chennai's Pulianthope neighborhood, I met Gaana Bala. By this time, he had already acquired a reputation as a prolific Gaana and Tamil film playback singer, but he remained deeply invested in the people of north Chennai's Pulianthope area, where he grew up. In conversations with Gaana Bala, I learned that he had ambitions of running for Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) elections in the ward, and his primary agenda was to provide cash transfers for community members to arrange Gaana music funeral concerts, a community funerary tradition that had roots extending back into the city's initial history of settlement. It became clear to me that Carnatic and Gaana music were both integral to the city's residents in remarkably

[2] If you would like to pause here and gain a more involved understanding of how these two musical genres sound and are performed, here are examples of Carnatic music and Gaana music performances and videos.

distinct ways, providing arenas for the unfurling of caste expressions and boundary-making, as well as their resistance.

Of the 103 interviews that I conducted, roughly half of the respondents were embedded in the Carnatic music world as singers, instrumentalists, sound technicians, patrons and sponsors, arts managers, heads of Carnatic musical institutions, and fans. The other half were participants in the Gaana music world: singers, instrumentalists, lyricists, music producers, audio and video technicians, dancers, and fans. Nearly all of my respondents were residents of Chennai, except for three Carnatic music fans and sponsors who traveled from North America to Chennai each year to attend the December music festival. My native fluency in both Tamil and English helped in this research. Most conversations with Carnatic music scene participants were in a mix of English and Tamil, and my interactions with individuals from the Gaana music scene were entirely in Tamil. At the invitation of my interlocutors, or through advertisements in the newspaper and social media announcements, I began to attend Carnatic music concerts, lectures, and festivals to take part and observe the interactions, social composition, and invisible boundaries that dictated who belonged and who did not. My ability to speak English and my institutional affiliations facilitated interactions with Carnatic music world participants and gave me legitimacy in these spaces, where I ostensibly appeared to "fit in." My own musical socialization gave me insights into the unspoken codes and norms of these spaces, making me keenly aware of the things that were both said and left unsaid. I suspect that a seeming homology in our social positions opened up Carnatic music world participants to speak to me with relative openness, perhaps even emboldening them to say things they would not ordinarily say. All respondents orally consented to having interviews recorded, but seemed often to forget that they were being recorded, eliciting moments of frank disclosure on their part. Similarly, I attended a few Gaana concerts and music video shoots at the

invitation of my interlocutors or through social media announcements, but I only attended a single Gaana music concert in the funeral setting due to the nature of the event and my reluctance to be a voyeur at a moment of grief. At all events I attended, I kept extensive fieldnotes either in a notebook or as notes on my phone, the latter of which proved to be less ostentatious and drew less attention in musical spaces. I would type up my fieldnotes every few days, annotating them and producing analytic memos every few months.

Methodologically speaking, attempts to find spaces for "the interview" proved to be more difficult in the case of Gaana musicians, who were mostly young men and expressed their discomfort at meeting in the cafes and restaurants where I would meet Carnatic musicians. Although both Carnatic musicians and Gaana musicians invited me into their homes, I found that "privacy" and the one-on-one nature of the typical in-depth interview were harder to replicate in the homes of Gaana musicians. Many of them live in housing board buildings in single rooms that they shared with family members, making "the interview" more of a collective discussion rather than a conversation between two people. In other situations, we could not meet at the home of these Gaana singers because a sister had to study for an exam, or a mother was unwell, or a father was at home probably watching television. In some cases, Gaana musicians wanted to meet with me at cafes, restaurants, or malls, where as one respondent remarked, they were turned away when on their own. When I accompanied them, they felt that I provided "safer" social passage into these spaces. However, this was not always the case. During one interview, one of my respondents felt mocked by a group of tittering girls from a nearby college in the food court of a prominent Chennai mall, which he observed was because of his blonde highlights, his cut-off jeans, and other invisible markers that made him feel doubly out-of-place. In another situation where I was meeting a Gaana singer on the sands of Marina Beach, the fact that a woman like me, ostensibly from affluence that

signals caste privilege, sitting with a young man like him, seemingly without, piqued the interest of passersby and eventually a policeman, who asked questions about what we were doing together. Even though he left us alone after a few short questions, the flow of "the interview" had been disrupted by the interruption, making my respondent feel self-conscious. The ethnographic interview is often imagined among US scholars as taking place in a hermetically sealed room as a two-person conversation without interruptions or social perceptions accompanying "the interviewer" and "the respondent" into the space of the interview. I contend that this imagined version of the interview is idealistic at best, and naïve at worst, in the context of a caste society where the image of a "*savarna*" (caste Hindu) woman with a "Dalit" man, both unmarried, raises suspicions and stokes anxieties stemming precisely from the social segregation produced by structural casteism.

During "interviews" with Gaana musicians, I was aware of the privilege that I carried into these spaces because of my affiliation with an American university and their initial apprehensions at speaking about caste discrimination, worried that I would take offense as someone deemed as belonging to a Brahminical social world. One of my interlocutors asked me where I lived, and when I mentioned my locality in south Chennai, a look of comprehension came over him as it corroborated his decoding of my social location. I cannot grasp in entirety the effect my presence had in these spaces, but I endeavored to stay open to—and learn from—the gentle criticisms and often humorous remarks made by my interlocutors in the Gaana musical world that often opened the door to frank conversations about the wide gulf of social differences between us. An interlocutor whom I met repeatedly as I helped out on the "set" of a Gaana music video shoot casually joked one day about people like me in south Chennai: "You guys all walk around wearing coat and tie in that part of town, but *here*, we have style." In response, I joked self-deprecatingly

about my own fieldwork outfit of chudidar-dupatta as "*mokkai*" or "lame," eliciting laughter from those around us. I took moments such as these, where interlocutors felt comfortable joking about my social location, to be evidence of a growing ease between us. I believe that creating the conditions for trust is the responsibility of the ethnographer. This is at the heart of an ethnographic ethical framework in which the "ethnographer-interviewer" holds various forms of social privilege over the "interlocutor": a willingness on the part of the ethnographer to earn the trust of interlocutors over time by repeatedly committing to question one's accompanying privileges and to "see"—and in this case, "hear"—the person and the breadth of their individual experiences as more than just another "ethnographic subject." To ask someone to share their life is an exercise in vulnerability that ought not to flow unidirectionally, for that reinforces the unequal power dynamic of "the interview." In response to the vulnerability that was shared so generously with me, I attempted to remain vulnerable in turn, recognizing that such a connection is a precious thing that cannot be taken lightly.

After returning from fieldwork, I hired a research assistant to help me transcribe fifteen of the interviews conducted in English. I translated the rest myself and coded all interviews and fieldnotes by hand, allowing themes to emerge inductively. I organized them into subcodes after grouping them thematically (Saldaña 2016; Van Maanen 2011). I wrote new analytic memos to combine data excerpts from interviews with vignettes from fieldnotes, and to synthesize emerging themes. This approach allowed me to prioritize the narratives of my respondents, first and foremost, while situating them in the contexts of distinct musical, social, and spatial words from which they emerged. Through the rest of this dissertation, I have chosen to retain the names of some of my interlocutors who rejected offers of anonymization. Although I have anonymized the names of respondents who preferred to stay unnamed, I think it is only fitting that I name those

who requested that I do so. In the ethnographic "exchange," there is very little that I can offer to those who have so generously given me their time and shared with me the stories of their struggles and joys. But as Muthu interjected when I read out the oral consent form from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), "Why do you want to remove our names? That's what everyone is already trying to do." I believe, therefore, that it is my duty as a scholar to name those whose stories are repeatedly relegated to the margins of history and those who seek to see their names and stories reflected in the scholarship that I produce. In response to this counsel, when I first introduce them I placed an asterisk (*) next to the names of the interlocutors who remain anonymous, and I have retained the names of those who requested that they be faithfully represented in this manuscript.

Argument and Structure of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I show that the social reproduction of caste is made visible through the sociological processes taking place within the two worlds of Carnatic and Gaana music. The relative anonymity of the city enables the masking and unmasking of caste through a range of codes that operate discursively and often times, invisibly. Through the investigation of the codes, mores, and norms of these musical spaces, the underlying dimensions of caste identity, exclusions, and resistances represent an ongoing struggle between the reinscribing of Brahminical identity in Carnatic musical spaces and the resistance of stigma to, and celebrations of, Dalit identities in Gaana musical spaces. Rarely is caste talked about so simply; rather, caste takes subtle forms, and cues emerged organically as I observed alignments and discrepancies between the words and actions of various interlocutors.

The main argument of this dissertation is that the social reproduction of caste takes four modes extending from the individual to collective negotiations of identity in global circuits of taste. These four modes are: socialization, spatialization, politicization, and the related processes

of digitalization, migration, and globalization. The four modes offer sociological insights into the tenacity with which caste socially reproduces itself, while also revealing that caste distinctions are continually contested and battled through musical acts of self-expression and anti-caste resistance.

In chapter 1, "Sacred and Profane," I consider how musical socialization serves to shape caste habitus at the individual level. Socialization into Carnatic music produces a musical habitus that fundamentally shapes Brahminical caste habitus, which results in "durable, transposable dispositions" that orient the individual to perceive the social world through the lens of such socialization. It leads to the development of a taste for specific kinds of aesthetics that are rooted in Carnatic musical socialization. Socialization into Gaana music similarly produces a musical habitus that shapes how actors perceive the aesthetic imperatives of musical activity in addition to shaping a caste habitus that makes actors aware of their own social location as they interact with dominant caste groups and other residents of the city. I argue that musical socialization is one of the primary ways caste is inscribed on individuals and gets written onto the bodies of participants in these two musical worlds.

In chapter 2, "Caste-ing the City," I argue that caste is imprinted onto the city and organizes how individuals are perceived as belonging to groups vis-à-vis their spatial location in the city. I refer to the process by which cultural power or stigma accrues to different caste groups as the "spatialization of caste," the process by which caste identity comes to be signaled by place identity. The production and reproduction of place-based or territorial stereotypes enables elite caste groups such as Brahmins to wield outsized symbolic and cultural power in the city, whereas territorial stigma becomes an obstacle to the navigation of the city by oppressed communities such as Dalits. In this chapter, I consider the modes by which spatialization of caste persists and is resisted in the

city, taking music as a crucial site through which symbolic distinctions are conjoined with spatial stereotypes.

In chapter 3, "Saffron and Blue," I examine what musical caste affiliations enable in terms of fashioning political ideologies and actions. In the backdrop of rapidly saffronizing India, where the Hindu-right employs tactics of Brahminical Hindu supremacy to target caste and religious minorities, I argue that Brahmins engaged in Carnatic music frame their musical, religious, and cultural affiliations as a disavowal of "doing politics," even as support for the Hindu-right and Hindutva political ideologies are disseminated in these spaces. I find that Gaana music, which takes lyrical inspiration from the politics of everyday life on the margins of caste and urban hierarchies, lends itself to a growing anti-caste political consciousness that links the "local" with national and global forms of political activism that seek to dismantle oppressive power structures. I situate both forms of politicization within the historical matrix of Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu and its relation to competing strands of political mobilization, such as Hindutva and Dalit political self-assertions.

In chapter 4, "Making Music 'Mobile,'" I investigate the related processes of digitalization, migration, and globalization and their relationship to these two musical genres as music is made "mobile." I argue that these musical genres are made mobile to broader cyber-publics with the advent of recording technologies and digitalization in India, which have enabled the dissemination of these genres to geographically and socially disparate listeners. I also contend that the distinct migration flows of distinct caste groups have positioned listeners in the diaspora to engage with these genres in distinct ways to produce affective sonic and visual relationships to the imagined "homeland" while also enabling socialization into caste habitus for successive immigrant

generations. Finally, I look at how "fusion" projects align themselves with global circuits of taste, aesthetics, and politics in their quest for distinction.

The four chapters thus echo each of the four modes by which caste is socially reproduced at the level of the individual (socialization), caste groups and the city (spatialization), political ideology and action (politicization), and the transportation of caste to new geographical and musical frontiers (digitalization, migration, and globalization). I find that the persistence of caste hierarchies and discrimination are both re-entrenched and resisted through musical modes of finding broader social resonances. Carnatic musicking and its related practices of socially reproducing caste privilege allow Brahminism to acquire a "hegemonic register" that pervades caste society and seeks to preserve the exclusivity of Brahminical sociocultural and religious spaces in a seemingly secular terrain. Gaana musicking challenges these bastions by carving out an "anti-caste aesthetics" that represents and demands dignity for Dalit communities through its reflection of everyday experiences of discrimination as well as the everyday practices of joy, which present an irrefutable challenge to the hegemonic register of caste and its aesthetics in modern, urban India.

Chapter 1

Sacred and Profane: Early Musical Socialization, Distinction, and the Construction of a Caste Habitus

In December, during the slightly cooler months that offer respite from the relentless heat, the city of Chennai rises early. Chennai's southern locality of Mylapore is often reputed to be the "cultural hub" of the city, dotted with prominent residences and institutions that are specifically the preserve of Brahmin, or "upper" caste communities with historic wealth. Here, during the corresponding Tamil winter month of Margazhi, Hindu-religious Brahmins wake at the crack of dawn to perambulate and sing religious compositions—*bhajans* and *kritis*—on the Mada Streets, the four streets running proximate and parallel to the four sides of the neighborhood's central and historic Kapaleeswarar Temple. These four Mada streets were historically reserved for the exclusive residence of the city's most affluent Brahmin lawyers, doctors, and other professionals, mimicking the Brahmin-only caste enclave, or *agraharam,* found in the caste-segregated Tamil village. Even though a century of robust non-Brahminical politics has eroded the stridency of exclusive caste enclaves in the city, the contract between Brahminical cultural practices and their dominance and influence over the city is renewed on these streets during the Margazhi season. The streets are imprinted with the intricate, curving patterns of the *kolam*, drawn outside homes by women who wake up when it is still dark outside to bathe and ritually purify themselves ahead of marking their verandahs with these designs. The sound of these songs suffuses the air of these Mylapore streets, sung in peregrinating groups by those intimately familiar with the typical Tamil or Sanskrit language compositions, these streets, rituals, and idioms of musical expression.

How do these people know to find each other? How are they familiar with these same century-old religious compositions sung exactingly in specific melodic expressions and rhythmic meters? The short answer is that they speak the same language: the particular melodic and rhythmic expressions of *raaga* and *taala* serve as building blocks of Carnatic music,[1] a classicized south Indian music that has, over time, come to be regarded as the preserve of Brahmins, particularly of those residing in Chennai. The compositions that permeate the early mornings of Margazhi in Mylapore are part of this *raaga*-based musical canon of Carnatic, and its singers have most likely been trained in this music as part of their upbringing. In cultural sociological literature, there is a great deal of curiosity about the relationship between social location and the accumulation of cultural capital or the development of tastes. In other words, what are the social processes that result in the close connection between upbringing in a specific social class and certain durable orientations and dispositions to the world? Much of the cultural sociological literature on taste with Bourdieusian provenance tends to focus on western modes of acculturation, relying especially on class as the analytic wellspring from which theorization of cultural capital can be extrapolated. But in this chapter, I turn our attention to *caste* as a factor that shapes the acquisition of cultural capital for individuals, influencing their tastes and dispositions within a caste society. I argue that "upper" caste Brahmins develop a musical habitus through Carnatic musical socialization and intensive, codified musical training from childhood, which disposes them to perceive their musical tastes as sacred, aesthetically valuable, and generative of cultural and social capital. In addition to learning musical norms and standards, this early socialization also predisposes them to learn caste

[1] *Raaga* is a melodic mode or framework for composition and improvisation, and *taala* is the rhythmic meter that undergirds these compositions.

norms, which present diffuse but critical forms of cultural capital crucial to the social reproduction of caste.

The story of Gaana music stands apart from this "highbrow" culture, turning us to another vision of individuals' and communities' relationships to music entirely. From Chennai's iconic landmark of Chennai Central Railway Station, which is the imagined divide between north and south for city residents, Vyasarpadi is a straight shot north by share auto—the rickshaws shared by passengers in lieu of robust public transit infrastructure in this part of town. It is in this northern part of town that Gaana musicians say their music first emerged. In the evenings, when the work is done and the sun sets over the city, a community member brings out a *dholak*, a two-headed percussion instrument, and sits at the door to his home or at a corner tea stall. Singers are drawn to the catchy, familiar beat of the *dholak* and attempt to best each other with lyrical prowess and wit, making up songs and witticisms on the spot to entertain the growing crowd of listeners. Some begin to dance, others clap along, and the street is abuzz. How do audience members recognize Gaana musical standards while also recognizing and lauding the originality of newer compositions? How did Gaana become a musical form indigenous to—and enduringly associated with—the city of Chennai and its Dalit, or previously "untouchable" caste communities living in the city's informal settlements?

Early socialization into Gaana happens not through rigorous, personalized, codified training as in the case of Carnatic, but rather, through a discursive community-oriented process that ensures Gaana's ubiquity in the social life of the slum. The autodidactic nature of Gaana acquisition and familiarity results in a musical habitus that privileges lyrical improvisation and relationality with the "profane," everyday lives of listeners, as the pinnacle of aesthetic value. At the same time, those considering a career in Gaana must contend with the stigma conferred to the

music and its practitioners on account of systemic casteism, its association with funerals in slums, and extant stereotypes about the young, poor, Dalit, and male musicians that result in a lack of stages and institutions for the promotion of Gaana musical careers. The easy and cheap availability of high-speed internet in India has resulted in the uptake of digital platforms for the production and promotion of new Gaana music, resulting in a distinctly visual and countercultural sartorial style and increased opportunities for virality, fame, and potentially, revenue. These are forms of cultivating countercultural capital, or non-dominant capital, as Carter (2003) would describe cultural approaches to opportunity structures that are distinct from dominant forms of capital acquisition.

In both cases, music has the power to organize social life and urban spaces, calling its constituent lovers and fans to be stirred by live music. But as I illustrate in this chapter, the ways in which "good" music is differently valuated in these two scenes of Carnatic and Gaana give us insight into how music is intimately tied to its social origins. I ask, how do individuals develop a taste for specific music scenes as a result of their socialization into them, and what does caste have to do with it? In doing so, I find that musical learning happens early for individuals in both scenes, disposing them to distinct visions of what music ought to be, and whether it is worth making professionally. In tracing the trajectory of musical socialization from childhood to professional careers in music, I show how musical habitus emerges and feeds into the construction of caste habitus for individuals on extreme sides of the caste spectrum.

Constructing a Brahminical Caste Habitus via Carnatic Musical Socialization

One day during the 2019 December Carnatic music season, I walked to the ticket booth at the front of the Music Academy building. The Music Academy is located at a busy intersection on TTK Road in the southern Chennai neighborhood of Mylapore. It is notoriously difficult to get

tickets for concerts at this pinnacle of Chennai's Carnatic music *sabhas*, or music halls. Most of the festival attendees occupy seats reserved through memberships purchased for entire lifetimes. These membership tickets often exchange hands within families and personal networks and may be used interchangeably. But for those without these lifetime memberships, tickets must be purchased in person at the ticket booth. This particular day, I wasn't able to get to the booth in time to purchase my usual ticket for a seat located vertiginously in the very last row of balcony seating. The only remaining tickets were the infamous stage seats, which permit members to sit on either side of the musicians seated onstage. A twenty-something-year-old audience member told me as we waited in line to take the stage, shoes off, silent in the wings, "It's intimidating to be sitting onstage because everyone in the audience is watching you." Sitting cross-legged onstage, directly facing the musicians with the audience to my left, I noticed a girl to my right—maybe eight or nine years old—writing in a notebook.

The concert began, and with each new song, I would see her face reflect instant recognition, or in other cases, fleeting confusion followed by clarity. And then she would write down the name of the composition, the composer, the *raagam* (melodic mode), and *taalam* (time signature) in a table neatly drawn with the aid of a ruler. How did she know each of these compositions and their late-medieval provenance? How was she able to identify the underlying melodic and rhythmic structures of these songs without any announcements by the performers? How did everyone sitting cross-legged on the stage know when to remain silent and when to clap? How did listeners know not to move their bodies except for an appreciative shake of the hand or by keeping the beat, or *taalam,* with their fingers counting and palms turning against their laps?

Individuals in the Carnatic music scene enter into the musical space of the auditorium or *sabha* with knowledge of the invisible cues and norms that guide the social event. Using a cultural

sociological framework, I show in this section that these forms of knowing are embodied, learned from such a young age through intergenerational and social exposure that such knowledge and norms of comportment become instinctive. Habitus is a concept that owes its conceptual lineage to Bourdieu, who wrote about habitus as a system of "durable, transposable dispositions" absorbed by individuals from childhood on account of the way that they were socialized into cultural and social practices. Habitus captures the ways that individuals act, see, listen, and interact with the social world on account of various structuring influences received by individuals from their families and networks, immediate surroundings, or other influences from their social worlds. The Bourdieusian conceptualization of habitus guides how I describe the process of socialization into music in this section, but it is also complicated by attention to the context of *caste* rather than class alone as the originator of such dispositions. I argue that early socialization into music feeds into an individual's musical habitus, which in the context of a caste society, is crucial to the construction of caste habitus. In turn, caste habitus shapes and structures individuals' ways of knowing and interacting with the broader social world of caste and the musical and cultural practices of "others."

Rimmer (2012) posits that cultural capital has an embodied nature, and in the case of music, results in the production of a musical habitus through early musical socialization. He argues that primary musical socialization happens via the presence or absence of musical sounds in the home, the regularity of their use, their material nature (volume, tempo, timbre, etc.) and sources (radio, television, musical instrument, or human voice), as well as the types of relational interactions between children or through child-adult(s) interactions. Also impacting early musical socialization are factors such as the nature of social and physical spaces where music unfurls, the times of day they occur, the nature of the physical movement involved, the associated practices of musical

encounters, and the types of emotions expressed by listeners seen as "belonging" to the music. Secondary musical socialization engages a range of factors such as how peers, siblings, and extended family validate, normalize, and engage with music; the role played by media; and actors' access to exposure to different musical experiences, particularly in the realm of education. In this chapter, I consider both primary and secondary modes of musical socialization within Carnatic and Gaana musical worlds, where caste as an axis of social location impacts how cultural capital and musical habitus(es), and ultimately, caste habitus(es), are shaped as a result of these influences.

In laying the theoretical framework for this chapter, I reconcile individualized understandings of *loving* music with theorization about cultural consumption in relation to status groups. On the one hand, music fans perceive music as an object of their love, fashioning an affective, individualized relationship with the music they have come to love. On the other hand, among other cultural practices, music has to do with social prestige, distinction, and boundary-making. Benzecry (2011, 8) posits that scholars of cultural consumption must understand taste as an activity, one that comes to be constituted "by the devices and practices implied in liking something." How do either Carnatic or Gaana music fans come to *love* what it is that they hear, produce, consume, and circulate? And how does music become a social, political, and cultural resource for marking group boundaries, maintaining distinction, and mobilizing social movements? Theories of cultural consumption are invested in mining the importance of cultural consumption and tastes in reflecting and impacting social relations as well as social locations. In this regard, Lamont and Molnar (2001) set the stage for my analysis of the construction of caste cultural capital and caste habitus in their assertion that cultural preferences sustain group identities and allow for groups to make boundaries between themselves and others. Cultural practices also mark and preserve social distinction (Peterson and Kern 1996) and mobilize new social movements

that seek social change by leveling their critique and demands in the arena of cultural practices. At the same time, cultural practices such as music are not perceived as purely instrumental by their fans; rather, music "gets into life" (DeNora 2000), and music's affective influence creates a relationship of love and fascination between the fan and the music as the object of love. Engaging with both strains of thought simultaneously, I argue that it is precisely the transfixed love that musicians of distinct scenes feel for their music that allows for the social reproduction of a *musical habitus* that becomes durable, transposable, and integral to shaping *caste* habitus. In the next section, I turn to an explanation of how this musical habitus comes to be constructed through socialization into music and its extant norms, and how this relates to the reproduction of caste habitus.

Primary Carnatic Musical Socialization

In Tamil Brahmin households, musical education is taken as seriously as formal education and schooling. Growing up, children are enrolled in music—or *paattu*—lessons from as young as four or five. These lessons usually take place in the home of the teacher or *guru* and may either be group or individual lessons. Both teacher and students usually sit cross-legged on straw mats laid out on the floor, facing each other. The *Ganamrutha Bodhini* is a manual that contains printed notation of *swara* (solfege pitch) and *sahithya* (song text) published in the 1950s in both Tamil and English, shortly after independence. This form of musical tutelage and the publication of pedagogical texts institutionalized Carnatic musical learning as a cultural rite of passage, especially for the newly mobile Tamil and Telugu Brahmins of newly independent Madras. Even today, these standards and texts form the canon of Carnatic musical learning, and students are prescribed this book and expected to practice songs and scales from it. Early music education usually involves learning scales—*varisai*—in order to build familiarity with *raagas*, melodic

modes, and *taalas*, rhythmic structures, while focusing on maintaining key and pitch as the foundational principle of virtuosic singing. Carnatic music is a highly vocal tradition (Weidman 2006) and singing remains the centerpiece of live performance. Much of the vocal tradition rests upon melodic improvisation and embellishments as well as adherence to the sanctity of late-medieval religious compositions that constitute the bulk of the Carnatic musical canon. These compositions are traditionally composed in Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, or Kannada, and students are instructed and evaluated on their proper pronunciation of the lyrics.

Carnatic musical training is thus more than just musical education—the emphasis placed on individual rigor, practice, and discipline shapes students' understandings of their own relationship to music and includes language acquisition, particularly of classical south Indian languages. The learning of these languages, especially Sanskrit, feeds into religious education that also forms an important component of socialization in Brahmin households. Anand* is a Carnatic music fan and official within the governance structure of a prominent *sabha*. In an interview with Anand,* he described his affinity for Carnatic vocal music since it allows him to experience lyrical beauty and spiritual transcendence:

> I think I was brought up in a vocal tradition so I preferred that. And I was very, even today, for me the main interest is the lyrical beauty of the songs. The poetry, the words, the meaning and all that. It is remarkable to think how powerful they are all these years after they were written. I am very fluent in both Tamil and Sanskrit. My grandmother was the reason I learnt Tamil. She was very clear I needed to know both Tamil and Sanskrit so I knew all the *shlokas* because we came from a family where my grandfather was a very prominent Sanskrit scholar.

As this excerpt indicates, early socialization into Carnatic music and Sanskritic Hinduism are aided and mobilized by intergenerational interactions within the family. Older relatives tend to appoint themselves as responsible for their children's and grandchildren's moral, cultural, and religious upbringing, which are not often easily extricable from one another. Lareau (2002) would describe

this form of child rearing as "concerted cultivation," or the fostering of children's talents through extensive reasoning and organized leisure activities. As another Carnatic music listener, Brinda,* recounted, she was induced to listen to Carnatic music by her parents, who emphasized the importance of musical *discernment* to her:

> I don't think either my brother or me ever decided this was good or bad, and we were forced to sit down and decide for ourselves. There could be disagreements in the house, but if I said I don't want to listen to Carnatic music because it was boring, that was not a good enough reason. I needed a better reason to not listen, I had to be discerning. This helped us develop a taste. When you engage with it as a student, you also need to engage separately as an audience member that also just loves it.

Brinda explains that her parents gave her the freedom to choose *not* to listen to Carnatic music, but had to offer a reasonable explanation for why she would not be interested beyond that it was "boring." The two-hour long concerts and the extensive melodic improvisation within complex *raaga* and *taala* structures require listeners who take the music *seriously*. In other words, Carnatic music is not meant to produce merely an affective response, but rather, is valued for its ability to appeal to a highly cerebral, serious, and well-educated listener who has built lifelong familiarity with the vocabulary and grammar of the music. Becoming a "serious" listener and fan of Carnatic music thus necessitates extensive education and family-mediated concerted cultivation of such proclivity for this kind of listening and engagement. Many Carnatic musicians trace the origins of their love for Carnatic music to efforts from parents and other family members to animate their Carnatic music listening and learning, and to notice and encourage their musical talent. Anand tells the story of his upbringing and his grandmother's role not only in his linguistic and religious education, but also his cultural upbringing:

> So we grew up, I grew up in a joint family[2] and music was, you know, a very much a living presence in the house because my grandmother could sing very well and she was a,

[2] A joint family usually refers to an intergenerational household comprising not only grandparents, but also aunts, uncles, and their children.

> I mean, she was a very big influence on my life. The fifteen years of my life I kind of, she was the one who focused a lot on the cultural aspect of my upbringing. But the first thirteen years were very, very rich, in terms of experience. And so, you know, when she used to sing, and my father and all his siblings could sing.

For Latha,* a Carnatic violinist, her introduction to Carnatic music was also through her relatives:

> My mom used to sing. My dad was from a musical family. My grandmother on my father's side was very soaked in Carnatic music. They really enjoyed music, but there were not many performers in the family. My aunt sang on All India Radio. But music was always there in my house, all of them had learned Carnatic music, would listen to it always, on both sides of the family. My mom was a very beautiful singer, and she taught music but never took it up seriously. My sister, even though she didn't pursue it seriously, it was always there in her system, she always knew how to enjoy it.

Latha's references to taking Carnatic music "seriously" show how the most well-regarded form of engagement with the music is to turn to professional performance, even though actors may engage with it through various registers: love, fandom, intellect, pedagogy, criticism, and transcendence. These registers of engagement become part of the Carnatic musical habitus through intergenerational living, especially in tightly-knit larger families that demonstrate and model the kinds of engagement younger family members observe and absorb. For example, siblings play a role in modeling and recognizing Carnatic musical interest in their younger siblings, as Latha says in an interview:

> My sister used to play violin, and I would imitate her with a scale and a pencil. That was probably when I was one and a half or two, without even knowing what I was doing. My mother was a music teacher, so when I picked up her violin, she must have identified something in me. "Okay, there is music in her, and we should channelize this." I started learning violin formally when I was four.

Anand corroborates the importance of this kind of "exposure" to Carnatic music that is fostered by family members and relatives who instill the value and importance of such education to their younger relatives:

> I had the great fortune of my cousin sister growing up along with me in Calcutta. And so she was in many ways mentor to me in music. She could sing very well. Still does. So she was a very big influence and I remember her bringing the first Shruthi magazine in '83 saying can you believe it there's a music magazine now and all that.

Brinda* also attributes her eventual decision to embark on a Carnatic musical career to belonging to a "musical family."

> Carnatic music was a part of the house, and we always listened to music a lot. We lived in Bangalore, and we didn't have as many concerts happening back then [as there were in Chennai]. Listening was mostly on cassette tapes, and we have a huge collection even now at home. So that was something that was constantly at home. My parents had also learned music at a very young age, and so they had developed a taste for it.

As Brinda's story conveys, her parents developed a *taste* for Carnatic music via musical learning at a young age and had the set of cultural repertoires necessary to pass it on to her. Bourdieu (1979, 190) writes that "taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body." In the case of the caste habitus, Brinda's experience of having her tastes shaped by her parents' own preference for listening with discernment has also shaped her bodily hexis, or her proclivity for listening and engaging with Carnatic music like her forebears. Many Carnatic musicians describe their early aptitude and fascination for this music as a matter of developing the *taste* for it, acknowledging that it is a predisposition that is not meant to come naturally, but is rather cultivated through acculturation. In addition to the intangible asset and resource of intergenerational transmission of tastes and cultural repertoires, Brinda's story also shows how the auditory technologies of cassettes, CDs, radio, and newer dematerialized platforms like MP3 files, streaming services, and digital services preserve a large repository of music for the production of continuous collective memory for both the music and its cast of characters, which range from performers to fans. Families steeped in this cultural world make use of such repositories to engage

with this music outside the live concert format and to pass on a sense of tradition and continuity to younger listeners.

Secondary Musical Socialization: Formal Education and "Discernment"

Formal education plays a crucial role in extending and continuing the kinds of musical socialization that takes place within the family. In Chennai, a network of south Chennai and some west Chennai schools governed by the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) tend to be reputed as Brahmin and "upper" caste spaces. Admissions are often based on who you know, and the social capital of being an alumnus of one of these schools is linked to caste location and its concomitant social networks that become available as a result. Some schools in Mylapore especially, such as Vidya Mandir, have developed a reputation for supporting early careers in classical music. Students are offered resources and infrastructure to be flexible with their schoolwork, or allowed to perform at concerts during school days. Carnatic musical learning takes place as part of the educational curriculum in such schools, offering these "middle" class and "upper" class Tamil Brahmin children and adolescents the cultural capital of becoming familiar with Carnatic music even when this type of learning doesn't take place in the family. Latha,* who grew up in a very musically-steeped family, felt the continuity of such encouragement even in school.

> I used to read a lot by the time I was in school itself, and Vidya Mandir was a school that really encouraged Social Sciences, History, Geography. For them the involvement in the arts was very important.

Even for those who do not live in Chennai, the diaspora of Tamil Brahmins across cities in India and even North America, Europe, and Australia sees Chennai as the moral center and "Mecca" for Carnatic music. This means that Carnatic musicians who started performing early were encouraged to travel to Chennai to learn from a *guru* there and attend live Carnatic musical events, especially

during the December Carnatic music season, which hosts over 4,500 concerts in forty to fifty prominent venues around the city. The most prestigious venues are clustered in Mylapore, and many Carnatic musicians who started their musical education elsewhere eventually moved to Chennai permanently to be recognized by the members of this scene, who are seen as the most knowledgeable audiences. Latha* explains the draw that Chennai has for Carnatic musicians.

> Chennai offers opportunities and crowds. Everybody has this feeling, "I want to play in Chennai." There are good audiences everywhere in south India, but why is it important for Kerala, Karnataka, or Andhra musicians to come here and get validation from Chennai audiences? It is the Mecca of Carnatic music and there are so many concert opportunities. You sing here, and then you go places. Even for musicians from Karnataka or any other state, you are recognized more if you have gone to Chennai and then established yourself. It's like getting a tick mark.

Latha's own parents recognized this importance of making it as a Carnatic musician in Chennai, and when they realized that Latha was showing talent beyond her years, they made the decision to take her there during summer holidays to learn from a prominent Carnatic violinist in Chennai. Here, she would attend concerts, music lessons, and interact with peers who also sought to make it as professional Carnatic musicians. Eventually, her mother made the decision to move to Chennai with Latha as she was entering high school so that she could be more fully immersed in the scene, a move that Latha remembers as essential to her growth as a Carnatic musician. In Chennai, she joined Vidya Mandir and noticed that there was a class difference between her and her more "middle" class peers.

> Here in Chennai, things were the opposite of living in a sheltered, middle-class, "normal" background in Mumbai. Vidya Mandir in Chennai was a little different—mothers would drive their children in cars. I would happily go on my Ladybird cycle or take the 21 bus, I had a very simple upbringing in that sense. The things they talked about, the influence of the western culture, the music that they discussed. I came from a very different background. All my life I was like "Carnatic, Carnatic, Carnatic"; at most I would listen to Bollywood. We say Chennai is a very cultural city, but at that time, my friends were not so inclined to listen to the classical arts. Now that they're in the thirties, maybe they

> realized, "Wow there is something in it and it takes me back to my roots." At that time, it was not such a cool thing to do.

Latha's anecdote describes how her friends circled back to Carnatic music in adulthood, which they had been socialized into during childhood but left behind until getting older or becoming parents themselves. Carnatic music represents their "roots," as the excerpt suggests, connoting familiarity and nostalgia especially later on in adulthood. Coming back to Carnatic music, especially for young parents, allows them to socialize their children into it as part of their cultural upbringing too. Latha's story also suggests the ways that class striates the experience of caste in terms of structuring cultural consumption. Whereas Latha grew up being told that Carnatic music was the pinnacle of all music, she found that her peers at school were more omnivorous in their musical tastes. Being able to speak about Carnatic and especially "western" music in the same breath was a sign of cultural breadth for her peers, and so she began to try and listen to this music as well.

> I tried to fit in, I tried my best to know all the bands—Pink Floyd, Linkin Park—all of that was very big at the time. I would try and get to know it, and perform them at cultural events. It's not that I didn't enjoy it, but my focus and interest was somewhere else.

On the other hand, Brinda's upbringing predisposed her to having omnivorous tastes in music.

> My parents evolved beyond just listening to Carnatic music; they started to explore other forms of music like Hindustani, western classical, so they also taught us that. There was generally an environment of listening and being discerning about it.

These two divergent experiences of musical discovery and taste development show that while Brahminical upbringing generally encourages an affinity for Carnatic music, for "upper" class Brahmins with cultural capital, omnivorous musical tastes signal a cross-cultural fluency and an orientation to "global" or "western" forms of music. Peterson and Kern (1996) made a landmark contribution to the sociology of tastes by showing that Americans moved from snobbish exclusion

of “lowbrow” tastes to appropriating them omnivorously as a marker of taste and distinction. In the case of elite castes in India, where practices such as musical acquisition are inextricably woven with the development of a caste habitus, the preference for more omnivorous approaches to musical consumption mark an aspiration to “global”-ness and “western”-ness. These aspirations also indicate the ways that caste is disaggregated by different class positions, presenting disparate models for understanding how caste habitus is shaped for Brahmins with different outlooks on what “elite” consumption looks like. Gautham,* a lifelong Carnatic music learner and lover, expressed that he also listens to other musical genres, especially western classical music and jazz.

> If you are exposed early enough, with people who know both, it’s all different music. You don’t get so attached to one system, so when you see the second system, you don’t need to translate it into the first system to understand it. Same with language learning. You can learn them both natively, and that makes a difference.

This excerpt illustrates the emphasis placed on cross-cultural fluency; the comparison with language learning captures the complexity of vocabulary, grammar, and norms that musical knowledge entails for members of this world. For those in “middle” and “lower middle” classes, demonstrating fluency with popular, north Indian, or western forms may feel less imperative than for those in “middle” and “upper” classes who wish to mark distinction by showing effortless affinity for a range of musical traditions. At the same time, such affinities may be marked by boundaries that preclude engagement with certain “low” arts such as those of oppressed communities within India, like Gaana. When I mentioned to some Carnatic music lovers that my research project was also geared toward understanding the Gaana musical world, responses ranged from mild curiosity to scorn. Some responses included, “What is Gaana music?” “How can you compare that with this music?” And “Isn’t that a funeral music?” These responses reveal an aversion to being placed on the same footing as a music associated with Dalit funerals in “slum”

areas. The first question especially shows the skew in cultural dominance that leads Carnatic music to be referred to by its stakeholders generically as "music," whereas Gaana is rarely recognized as "art" because of its caste and class associations with "polluted" *labor*. The distinction between art and labor that is drawn in the Brahminical conceptualization of cultural hierarchies is crucial to their understanding of *their* music as sacred and intellectual, whereas the music(s) of "lower" and "oppressed" castes is relegated merely to labor and is negatively stereotyped and reputed for its association with "polluting" funerary rituals and poor, Dalit communities. This distinction affords insights into why certain "western" musical genres may be seen as acceptable, desirable, or worthy of bringing into conversation with Carnatic music while others are ghettoized and perceived as non-art or labor. For elites, omnivorousness as a marker of cultural capital creates a musical habitus that mobilizes *discriminating* and intellectualized approaches to consumption or appreciation. This enables claims of proximity to certain "high" status social groups and arts globally, while allowing elites to mark symbolic boundaries with other, "local" arts that have historically been degraded and devalued within Indian caste society.

Construction of Social Networks

The expression of omnivorous tastes conveys distinction and shows that caste is also striated by class. But broadly, an interest in Carnatic music brings people together to share experiences that affirm the space of affinity as well as the boundaries that mark distinction between themselves and others. Bourdieu (1979, 241) writes that "taste is what brings together things and people that go together." This social aspect of taste affirms the correspondence between dominant social status and the corresponding cultural practices that come to be seen as "high" art; this correspondence is what Bourdieu would term as "homology." Examples of such homology in the Carnatic music world include fan clubs for popular Carnatic musicians or associations, musical

"outreach" programs that aim to make the music more "accessible," or associations for the appreciation of Carnatic music. Consider Latha's story:

> In 2005, I was part of this thing called YACM, the Youth Association for Classical Music. It was an initiative started by Vijay Siva sir and some other prominent musicians at the time, like Sanjay Subrahmanyam. They all came together because they felt there weren't opportunities for the youth. They wanted to give a stage for young people. I made a lot of friends through that process; we would go to each other's concerts. We didn't have much otherwise—school, concerts, and going to others' concerts. We would have a lot of practice sessions: ghatam, kanjira, violin, singing. We were in constant touch, so it was all SMS at the time, we didn't have WhatsApp then. We would meet in someone's house, all we needed was a big hall. So there would be a mid-point of shruti, so we would all practice together. It was very casual, very random. Those were a lot of fun and we got to learn from each other, we built a nice camaraderie.

YACM originated from a recognition that more opportunities were necessary for younger musicians seeking to become professionalized. In addition to providing such resources, the group offered Latha and others in her cohort a chance to relate to others with a similar taste for Carnatic musical learning and appreciation. These relationships translated to other contexts, becoming networks through which friendships, romances, and professional associations emerged through the years. The convergence around a taste for Carnatic music also enabled the transposition of the networks cultivated purely for music to other realms. Latha says,

> There's a Carnatic musicians' cricket match that happens every year in the second week of January, and that's also conducted by YACM. They would happen at the YMCA ground in Nandanam. A lot of musicians and their families would attend. It was also advertised in the paper, so people were welcomed to come see it although it was mostly Carnatic musicians and fans.

The musical world experiences a stronger sense of internal coherence through such non-musical opportunities to socialize and form durable ties and networks. These networks offer social capital to music world participants; it allows them to cash in on these extra-musical networks at later points in time and feel a sense of kinship even while meeting socially, or while on tour, in the case of professional musicians. I often found that Carnatic musicians would refer to each other in

conversation using Tamil kinship terms such as *anna* (elder brother), *akka* (elder sister), *maama* (maternal uncle), and *amma* (mother). The use of kinship terms not only connotes respect, but makes the social world of Carnatic music resemble the extended "joint family" network that enables members to engage familiarly and call upon them outside musical spaces. At the same time, it becomes a way to create symbolic boundaries around the inner circles of such spaces to the exclusion of outsiders who may not be familiar with the kinship hierarchies of the space or may be precluded from assuming such familiarity. A non-Tamil Carnatic musician moved from another part of the country to Chennai to attempt entering the musical world as a professional singer, but was immediately made aware of her difference. She said, "I didn't know if I could take the same liberty to call these people my *akka* and *anna* because I could already see the way they looked at me because I was wearing a sleeveless blouse and didn't meet their understanding of who could be a Carnatic singer."

Gendered Socialization

Despite the seeming cohesiveness of this social world for Tamil Brahmins, gender disarticulates such coherence through the enforcement of certain norms around dress, comportment, and conduct. Even from the age of five, girls learning Carnatic music are often expected to attend class wearing "traditional" Tamil clothing such as a *paavadai*, consisting of a silk blouse and skirt. They are expected to have their hair neatly combed and plaited, they are to wear a *pottu* or *bindi*—a forehead marking traditionally worn by women to signal religiosity, although non-Hindus sometimes wear them too, and they are often required to wear a chain around their neck and bangles in order to connote modest and chaste femininity. Consider, for example, the story of Anandhi,* who started learning to sing at the young age of five.

> I started learning from Sundari *maami*[3] when I was very young, just five years old. I remember once that my mother forgot to keep a *pottu* on my forehead. And Sundari *maami* was very strict because she always said that music could only be really learned with discipline. When I reached class, I remember I was made to stand outside. It was an important lesson for me, and I never forgot to wear a *pottu* ever again.

In this way, the musical habitus that is being shaped for young Carnatic music learners is inflected with Brahminical norms of femininity, and this becomes a project that serves the broader construction and social reproduction of caste. Carnatic musical learning, especially for young women, is a prerequisite in Brahminical matrimonial pursuits. For women, emphasis is placed especially on facility with speaking about Carnatic music and being able to sing on command, especially during the "*ponnu paakardhu,"* the social ritual of "seeing" a potential bridal match by the groom and his family. Being able to sing Carnatic music within the private setting of the home is a precondition to being perceived as "marriageable." Carnatic musicians told me about older female relatives who had received Carnatic music vocal training, but were discouraged from pursuing it as a professional career. Consider the story of this Carnatic musician's grandmother.

> So she could sing and she had given some performances before getting married. She got married into a very conservative family that didn't encourage it. Later, she used to sing and temples and *mathas*[4] when they invited her, but that was the only time I have heard her perform in public. I would not say that she was a great performing artiste. But she was a very good singer.

This type of gender skew in achieving the level of professional performance impacts the gender parity of this musical world. Latha speaks about her experience of navigating compensation.

> I don't think I get paid the same as male artists. It's a tough life to be a musician. Most people are just happy to get opportunities, without even negotiating or even knowing what they will be paid afterwards. That culture has not been there for the longest time, where they will tell you how much you will be paid. It's never been part of the culture.

[3] *Maami* means maternal aunt, but is often used among Tamil Brahmins in the generic sense of "aunty" to refer to older women. The use of the kinship term is meant to signal respect as well as familiarity.
[4] *Mathas* are Hindu religious monasteries.

Latha's story demonstrates the kinds of obstacles that women artists have to face in being paid fairly and on par with their male counterparts. It also highlights the significance of public disavowal of economic interest by Carnatic musicians to be considered as "serious" musicians, whose art is not linked to mercenary profit-making. But these cultural norms of silence allow for inequalities and hierarchies of compensation within the Carnatic world, which hinge upon gender, age, role, and prestige. Latha explains:

> How Carnatic music treats women depends on the role you play. If you are a vocalist, you may be treated differently and be paid more. But if you are a violinist and mridangam or morsing/ghatam/kanjira[5] player, you may be paid less. Like in any other field, there is a gender bias. It mostly comes from the older generation, understandably so. I have stopped fighting with this because I know they are coming from a highly patriarchal society. So there have been instances when probably someone thought, and I can only speak for myself, "Maybe we can do just fine with a male musician in your place." There is also an age hierarchy—they may not always understand merit or talent, so everything rides on an age hierarchy. Someone older than you is your senior, regardless of the music. Senior, in some sense, because they've spent more time here than you have. It's not about money always. But it's a basic courtesy, yet you are taken for granted. I get told often, "They aren't even asking for so much, and you are a young girl and asking for this much."

As this excerpt from Latha's interview confirms, Carnatic musical performances are valuated and compensated along axes that reinforce the differential and hierarchical valuation of musical virtuosity in this world. Women are paid less than men, instrumentalists are paid less than vocalists, and younger musicians are paid less than "senior" musicians. But Latha's insistence that "merit" may not always be understood or recognized points to a more insidious linking of "merit" with a longer history of affirmative action for oppressed castes. Subramanian (2019) argues that the use of "merit" by "upper" castes suggests that their successes are not accrued on the basis of their accumulated caste privilege, but through the recognition of their own merit. The masking of caste

[5] Percussion instruments that are played on Carnatic musical stages.

through the use of "merit" marks those in the "reserved category" as those with caste positionalities, implying that they are able to achieve positions of eminence not because of merit, but because of caste-based affirmative action measures. As Subramanian writes, "Upper castes evacuate caste markers and inhabit the 'meritocratic norm' while lower castes become 'hyper-visible' (Deshpande 2013)." In the Carnatic musical world, Latha's disgruntlement at the lack of meritocratic valuation hints at the expectation in this Brahminical world that success is accrued not because of various forms of accumulated historic privilege, but purely through merit.

In addition to these gendered norms, in 2019, the MeToo movement stormed the performance world in Chennai. The Carnatic musical world was flooded with reports of amateur and professional female Carnatic musicians having had experienced sexual harassment from male teachers, colleagues, and members of the community. Some of the male Carnatic musicians called out were Chitravina Ravikiran, Sasikran, and O.S. Thyagarajan. Former and current students raised allegations, but as quickly as the allegations came, they disappeared from view and public memory in a few short months. The Federation of City Sabhas (FCC) set up an internal complaints committee, deterring survivors from taking legal recourse. Although some *sabhas* dropped accused musicians that year, they were invited back the following year. N. Murali, the president of the Music Academy, said, "We have not blacklisted them forever. We cannot hold them guilty based on complaints alone." Survivors were further deterred from raising complaints because of the lack of anonymity promised by these internal complaint committees, in addition to the extremely closely guarded fraternity whose power to make or break careers silenced many survivors. Little has happened to safeguard women and girls from the abusive gender dynamics of the Carnatic

musical world, and much of the sanctity granted to it silences any possibility of discourse around the potential abuses of the *guru-sishya* relationship that is prized and venerated above all else.[6]

Transcendence and Religiosity

The Carnatic musical habitus that is produced as a result of these processes of Brahminical caste socialization prizes hierarchical relationships of age, seniority, gender, instrumentation, and vocality. The final component of Carnatic musical habitus construction is an aesthetic of religiosity that serves as the through line between the religious content of the lyrics and the religious orientation of Carnatic musical spaces. At the individual level, norms around religious comportment order the ways that participants engage with both the music and one another. Carnatic musicians and fans alike describe their experience of Carnatic music as a sacred and transcendental experience, using divinity and sublimity as the lens for musical involvement. When Carnatic music fans describe moving musical experiences, they often experience both the music *and* its content as "divine"—an aesthetic register that prizes the transcendental quality of music. In an event as part of the Carnatic music festival in December 2019, a debate was held at the Narada Gana Sabha, a prominent musical venue in the Mylapore area. The debate took place between six Carnatic musicians and music critics in total and was organized around the question: Is the purpose of Carnatic music to foster *bhakti* (devotion) or to improve the art? Neyveli Santhanagopalan, an eminent Carnatic vocalist, said, "Without *bhakti*, a musician is just a magician." To illustrate his point, he sang a tune in the melodic mode or *raaga* of Kaapi, and audience members responded to the music with enthusiasm, recognizing the popular *raaga.* Then

[6] A *guru-sishya* translates as student-teacher, originating in Sanskrit.

he proceeded to insert the words, "*Kadavulai nambaathey,"* which means, "don't believe in god." After singing, he smiled at the audience members and said,

> Even though I sang these words, the *raaga* itself is so filled with *bhakti* that you probably nodded your head with that devotion. This is what Carnatic music can do, it is full of *bhakti*. Going to the temple is part of our culture. Can you go there and sing rock music? *[everyone laughs]* Everyone agrees that Carnatic music is what should be sung before god.

This excerpt captures the exaltation of devotion, or *bhakti,* within the Carnatic musical world. It represents a double move of sacralization in which both the lyrical content and the melodic mode of *raaga* allow listeners and performers to reach a state of transcendental divinity. In turn, this inherent divinity of the music is perceived by Carnatic musicians as an unequivocal good to aspire to even outside of strictly musical spaces. In saying that "going to the temple is part of *our* culture," religiosity is framed as essential to Brahminical culture, and by asserting that "everyone agrees that Carnatic music is what should be sung before god," the debater shows how legitimation occurs for Carnatic music by tying it to the religious ideal espoused by Carnatic music lovers and Brahmins at large. Temples, houses, and other spaces become sacralized and co-constructed by the collective musical experience of performers and audience members that tends toward religious transcendence and devotion.

Latha, who described earlier the norm of disavowing profit among Carnatic musicians, made an exception.

> Sometimes it's not so much about money and it's about music if it's a temple, if it's an atmosphere I want to be in. It's not about money always. I love concerts at Kapali temple, it's the temple atmosphere that makes me feel moved to make music.

Carnatic musicians regularly perform at religious spaces like temples or *mathas* (monasteries) for free, considering that form of performance to be "purely" about the transcendental quality of music and locating the temple as its most naturalized site of performance. While some musicians tie the

experience of musical divinity to the site of performance or the overt religiosity of the lyrics, musicians regularly describe "getting lost" in the music as an experience of divinity.

> Carnatic music is something that's second nature to me. I don't know if I should call it divine or not, or spiritual or not. It's the most natural way to express myself. It's like the language we speak. Is that divine? Music is like that to me, it's second nature to me.

In this musical world, divinity is understood as tied to a specific vision of Sanskritic religiosity that prizes interiority and an escape from the material realities of the world: a space for ostensibly escaping quotidian themes of struggle, life, and politics. T.M. Krishna, a Carnatic musician and one of the few musicians vocal about the insularity of this musical world, describes this process.

> That's where religion comes in, it becomes an escape route because religion, because faith, then, cannot be political. It's an internal experience, so that cannot be political.

The emphasis on the performance of religious devotion became paramount to the consideration of aesthetic value and "merit" within this world. The creation of an interiority of musical experience is venerated, and as a result, musical spaces are coded as "spiritual" or "sacred" rather than political and quotidian. Participants are also expected to adhere to the norms of Sanskritic religiosity that take embodied forms. For example, a young Carnatic instrumentalist explained his relationship to Carnatic musical religiosity.

> I'm not religious in the way that older musicians are. I don't always go to the temple or care whether the lyrics are about this god or that god. But I do feel the divinity of playing this music, it feels sacred. So when I approach *sabha* secretaries, or play a concert, I make sure that I am wearing *kumkumam* on my forehead to let them know I am not taking this lightly.[7]

There is a recognition among younger musicians that the transcendence of Carnatic music is not tied to the religious content of the music alone. However, they are aware that the appropriate performance of religiosity is currency in this world, where patrons and the relatively older audience

[7] *Kumkumam* is a vermilion powder that is applied by Hindus to the forehead as a marker of religiosity.

members expect a conformity to the appropriate embodied expressions of religiosity. Bodily markers of religiosity or performative gestures indicating spiritual transcendence signal to the tastemakers and authorities of this world that there is a *serious* engagement with the religious component of the music. At the same time, these bodily markers of religiosity, such as forehead markings or awareness of Sanskritic themes and verses, are available predominantly to the world of Tamil Brahmins, where religious identity is inculcated from a very young age. Belonging in this world comes through a naturalization of the Carnatic musical habitus as Brahminical *caste habitus*, which lend an easy familiarity with the unstated, symbolic norms of this musical space. For others who attempt to make it from the "outside," acceptance and opportunities to perform remain limited in the face of such insularity and stringently defined norms of acceptable involvement. The entry point into the exclusive Carnatic musical world is therefore the construction of a Carnatic musical habitus through early socialization, which leads to the development of a *taste* for Carnatic music and its surrounding norms of comportment, performance, and engagement. In the next section, I describe how Gaana musical habitus is constructed and note the significant departures in the modes of musical acquisition and engagement compared to Carnatic music.

Gaana Music's Social History

In 2019, Logan was a lyricist and singer at the time for Casteless Collective, a Gaana music ensemble that fuses anti-caste lyrical content with hip-hop, rock, and jazz. I asked him how he would describe Gaana to someone who has never heard of it. He said,

> Through Gaana, we talk about what matters to us. That is what Gaana is. It started because some people who worked as coolies and laborers in Black Town would finish work and relax, maybe have a little to drink. Then they would take their *dholak*, an overturned water pot, a matchbox, or whatever was around them and turn them into instruments. They would go work at Parry's Corner and earn less than 50 paisa a day. So they didn't have any entertainment back then, no football or movies, so they didn't have money to spend or anywhere to spend it. Gaana became a way to entertain themselves and kids in the area.

> They would take a cinema song and add their own lyrics to it so they could sing about things around them, and they would sing it in a jolly way.

Tamil Prabha, a Tamil novelist and writer from north Chennai's Chintadripet area, has researched Gaana and experienced it as part of the landscape of his life in this area. He described the different types of Gaana that emerged to serve various social uses.

> There are so many different types of Gaana. There's of course *marana* Gaana, which is traditionally performed at the funerals of people living in slum areas who want to honor their dead with a musical performance that commemorates their life. Then there's *poti* Gaana, which is a competitive form of Gaana performed at community events like a *thiruvizha,* where two Gaana singers of the area will face off against each other, like a rap battle, and they will compete to see who can make up more *kadhai paadal*, or story songs, on the spot. Some of that involves making fun of the other person in a witty way, so it is meant to be funny and jolly. There's *thozhil* Gaana, which is sung especially by fishermen while working or coolies as they lift heavy objects. There's route Gaana, which is made up on the bus by young college boys to tease one another or a girl sitting in their bus.

These are just a few of the types of Gaana that have been described by Gaana music fans, but when I asked Prabha what ties it all together, he said,

> The essence of Gaana is the voice, rhythm, and improvised lyrics. The aim is not to use professional instruments and ultimately remove it from the lives of people. Rather, the lyrics are meant to reflect the issues that normal people face: pain, heartbreak, dope, drink, oppression, love, mothers, the beauty of Chennai and its landmarks like Chennai Central railway station or General Hospital. Gaana can make you feel a range of emotions. Some singers sing about social issues that need to be highlighted like blood donation, condom usage, traffic, and the dangers of drunk driving. Essentially, Gaana is the music of marginal people living especially in North Madras. They say, "If you don't give me a stage, then the street will be my stage."

As these descriptions of Gaana suggest, it is a music that grew out of the development of the city in the informal settlements that housed marginal laborers that first settled in the city. According to Prabha, "It is an urban folk music made by the people indigenous to this city." The framing of Gaana as an urban folk music and its stakeholders as indigenous urban residents sets the stage for the various ways Gaana music has come to represent the city's marginalized communities. The themes of Gaana encapsulate everyday joys and struggles of life in the city for marginalized

communities, and the utmost goal of its performance is relatability. Especially in the traditional site of performance—the "slum" funeral—it is a music that is meant to make mourners feel the pain of loss and also deliver them from joy with "jolly" numbers. Gaana musicians see their role as entertainers for other members of Dalit communities in the city's informal settlements, seeking audiences predominantly within their own imagined community of listeners even while releasing recorded music and music videos.

Figure 2.1. *Athiredi Dollak Saran performing Gaana at a funeral event*

If Carnatic musical knowledge is achieved through intense forms of primary and secondary musical socialization, then Gaana musical transmission is also predicated on the construction of a musical habitus and ultimately, a *caste* habitus. Gaana's long history of being a folk music of the

city has meant that despite changes in form, style, and presentation, it has a long lineage and canon that is kept alive by its performance. How does Gaana musical socialization take place, and what are the ways that it contributes to the formation of the caste habitus for those in this musical world?

Primary Gaana Musical Socialization

An appreciation for Gaana is developed by virtue of living around it. Many Gaana musicians pinpoint their early exposure to the music at the site of community events, especially funerals. The Gaana concert or *kutcheri* has come to become an indelible part of the "slum" funeral—especially in Dalit communities—as a way of commemorating the deceased through the performance of an all-night concert that usually takes place on a makeshift stage or enclosure constructed directly on the street outside the home of the family commissioning the concert. Stephen is a Gaana singer in his early twenties, and he describes how he first started singing Gaana.

> My father was a Gaana singer, so I've been singing since I was a child. My father was born in North Chennai, and I was born in Choolaimedu. But from the time I was a child, I have been singing Gaana. I don't know how it came to me. In my area, they would have a lot of these Gaana concerts outside the house of someone who died. So I started by standing below the stage, waiting for an opportunity to sing a song, but I would have to wait a long time to just get the chance to sing one song.

Stephen's early socialization into Gaana happened by way of his father, who was a professional Gaana singer himself. A majority of successful Gaana musicians in the city tend to be predominantly singers rather than instrumentalists, and usually have family members who have also taken up Gaana professionally. Women sing Gaana too, but they are less likely to take it up professionally because of the professional demands of staying up all night, being around men where fights may take place, and the stigma of rowdyism in Gaana that persists even within Dalit communities. It is predominantly men who make a professional career in Gaana, and as Stephen's reflection suggests, it becomes aspirational for young men who see older men in their areas singing

at community events. Sunil says about North Chennai, an area reputed to be the birthplace of Gaana and the original site of residence for the city's Dalits, "There is a Gaana singer in every other home." Stephen's story of having to wait for an opportunity to sing a song at a local event indicates the limited institutionalization of the music, which leads to fewer stages and fewer opportunities for a musical career. However, the stories of how Gaana musicians first came to fall in love with the music provides context for why people seek out a Gaana musical career or fandom.

Rayman is a Gaana lyricist in his fifties who wrote many of the hit songs for the 1990s Gaana superstar, Sindhai Punnaiyar. Rayman explains how he came to Gaana.

> Gaana used to be about *nilayam tattuvam* (philosophical truths) and our predecessors borrowed the percussion instrument of *dholak* and *tabla* from the Tamil Sufi tradition, which also had a strong presence in north Chennai where Gaana emerged. This led to a tradition called Gaana *qawwali*, which was strongly associated with Sufi music and philosophy, leading to a lot of early compositions stemming from Sufi saints such as Nagore Masthan. But as the needs of the community changed, the music also changed to reflect new issues. Gaana came to be passed on from generation to generation as an oral tradition with no formal training. That's how I came to Gaana, by watching elders in my community sing at events and then using that formula to sing with friends or make new songs. One of the guys would just play *dholak*, and we would sit by the beach and just sing. Sometimes they would call us to sing at a funeral, where I met Punnaiyar, and we became a team.

Rayman's trajectory into Gaana captures the highly oral and informal tradition of Gaana musical socialization, where observation and practice with peers forms the bulk of musical development. In contrast to the organized and hands-on "concerted cultivation" approach of Carnatic musical acquisition, Gaana is absorbed experientially through the accomplishment of natural growth, where young people develop an appreciation for the music without much formal inducement.

What counts as "Gaana" in light of the emphasis on lyrical improvisation reflects the ever-changing trends, preferences, and concerns of its listening community. The diverse origins of Gaana and its varying content and themes throughout its history also illustrate the adaptability of

Gaana to suit the needs of its listeners for entertainment and awareness of local issues. But the endurance of some canonical songs in today's Gaana repertoire, such as Nagore Masthan's compositions, suggests the continuity in lineage and canon that make Gaana a musical tradition with a history nearly as old as Carnatic's in the city of Chennai. These compositions are ubiquitous and absorbed by young listeners who attend the concerts of elders in their community. Early exposure to Gaana thus often takes place through attending live events, but it is also mediated by access to recorded Gaana music. Junior Nithya is a Gaana musician in his early twenties who describes how he was first introduced to Gaana.

> When I was in school, one of my friends had a Nokia phone. Back then, there was no YouTube, only MP3 files and then later videos. So we would share the phone and huddle around it to listen to the latest songs. If someone else got a phone, they would ask the person with the song to Bluetooth it to them. Even then, we had to be physically around each other to share music, so that's how it would go. Friends in the area or in school shared music with friends and we would have our personal favorites.

Nithya's story illustrates the importance of early exposure not just from family members, but also friends and peers, especially those physically proximate either through residing nearby or at school. The crop of Gaana musicians currently topping charts in Chennai grew up in the early 2000s and used phones and digital technologies to explore the Gaana music from both their predecessors and those around them. For the preceding generation of Gaana singers, who are nearing their thirties and grew up in the 1990s, CDs were the primary mode of releasing and purchasing music. Cassettes were the most popular form before the advent of CDs, and Gaana musical cassettes were sold at the marketplace in Pondy Bazaar by a seller who acted as a "tastemaker." Gaana Muthu described him as, "The person whose ear decided who becomes famous." One of the oldest Gaana recording studios was started in Vyasarpadi in north Chennai by "Spools" Kumar, who had the idea of recording live performances of local Gaana artists as they

sang at funerals or community festivals. Kumar explained that while the live musical performances in 1980s Chennai was often local and community-based, the availability of cassette-based recording technology allowed a broader range of consumers to access Gaana songs, resulting in their popularity and advent in the Tamil film music industry.

In contemporary Gaana, YouTube allows musicians to adopt a countercultural form of capital by producing original music and lyrics that run counter to mainstream Tamil film music. Nithya says,

> The people who sing and make film music think of us as less. But popular singers and light music singers sing only someone else's lyrics always. But in Gaana, we sing our own words and our own lyrics. There is a separate audience for Gaana, it is really music made by and for oppressed people.

The countercultural status of Gaana and its independent music video scene does not mean that it is entirely outside of what is considered "mainstream" music in Tamil Nadu—i.e., Tamil film music. Deva's Gaana-inspired film scores in the 1990s were the broader Tamil population's first exposure to Gaana music, which had thus far been confined mainly to Dalit communities. Deva eschewed the husky vocal texture of self-produced cassettes by Gaana singers in favor of "upper" caste playback singers, who met the dominant aesthetic standards for "melodious" vocality that suited an "upper" caste ear. Deva's choice of non-Gaana playback singers drew the ire of some Gaana musicians, who expressed frustration that Gaana's growing popularity through film did not generate a livelihood for the burgeoning community of Gaana singers who continue to sing mostly at live musical events and especially at funerals.

Despite the lack of stages and venues for Gaana musicians to produce their music sustainably in the absence of resources and venues, the arrival of high-speed internet has provided access to YouTube as a revenue-generating platform. Independent Gaana music videos have

become the mode of achieving fame and income from musical production, with the most popular videos often reaching tens of millions of views. However, musical production at this level requires significant resources and financial investment. Concerts at funerals and community events become the means through which Gaana musicians earn and save to afford video production costs. At the same time, some Gaana artists refuse payment from bereaved family members who may not be able to afford payment for the funeral concert. Saran, a Gaana singer, insists that "Gaana is about dignity above all else. When we sing *irangal* Gaana (dirges), we are affording them that dignity." This is the ethos of the Gaana musical community, where fame and the desire for material wealth sit adjacent to the notion of Gaana as a non-transactional community service in poor, Dalit communities. YouTube and digital media as the only conduit to fame and material wealth, however, is far from sustainable for the economy of the art form. Monetization on YouTube makes considerations of virality a precondition for artistic production, which leads to the prioritization of "mass" songs over all other songs. Not everyone can ascend this level of fame, as a young man aspiring to be a Gaana musician told me.

> You have to slowly collect money from singing at funerals if you want to pay the recording studio to produce your music video. Then you need someone with a camera and break dancers and a whole crew. My boys will arrange for that if they have the money, that's not a problem, but having that kind of money is also not possible for someone like me whose family doesn't have savings. I have to support them so I can't live this lifestyle where I sing all night at a concert and then come home and sleep, because I have to go out and earn.

As this musician described, the path to virality (becoming a viral sensation) is paved with obstacles. Even in cases where people gain fame on YouTube, it can be short-lived. At a Gaana recording studio one day, a group of young musicians were trying to illustrate this point. One of them said, "What's his name? That guy who made that song about cellphones and got some 30 million views?" No one could remember, and so he said, "This is what I mean. Everybody makes

one hit song and then everyone forgets about them. Everything moves too quickly when there's only one platform."

Within this context, recorded music and the presence of live music in the surrounding community form the bulk of primary musical socialization into Gaana. Children often surround the stage during a Gaana concert and dance to the music alongside adults, mostly men. The purpose of the music is to make people move their bodies, and Gaana musicians' success is evaluated on their ability to evoke a range of emotions in their audiences with lyrical improvisation. Junior Nithya explains how he began to sing.

> At first, I would just accompany some elders who had sung at Gaana *kutcheris* (concerts) for years. I had grown up listening to their songs, so I would just observe them. They would invite me to the stage to sing one or two songs, but there would be four other guys also wanting this opportunity to sing. So I had to prove myself. The way that you do that is to write original songs on the spot to distinguish yourself. Singing our own lyrics that make people feel a range of emotions from sadness to joy is what makes you a good Gaana singer.

Junior Nithya's experience is echoed by others, who first came to love Gaana for its lyrical improvisation and wit. Lyrical improvisation is aided by specific words and coinages that animate conversation among members of this community—words that reflect the diverse origins of the communities that reside in the city's informal settlements. The early wave of migration that constituted the labor force of colonial India brought with them words from Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Burmese, Armenian, Portuguese, Urdu, and English, resulting in enduring verbiage that encouraged singers to produce new words. Examples of this include words like "*somitta,*" meaning "so sweet," which comes from the Urdu "*meetha"* for "sweet," or "*majaa,*" which comes from the Urdu for "fun." Other phrases alter the meaning of existing Tamil words and phrases to connote new meanings. For example, "*Thatti vidu*," which literally means "tap it and leave," is reworked to mean "to leave or forget something." Younger Gaana musicians who have obtained

some measure of fame set trends for what lingo is "in," creating a shared language for the community of fans. In Tamil Nadu, there is a culture of working-class men venerating the figure of the "mass hero" whose filmic presence inspires fan clubs centered around "the gravity of the hero's mass" (Nakassis 2020). But for Dalit youth, who describe the feeling of seeing themselves represented only as villains in films, who are "never the hero" because of the color of their skin, Gaana becomes a space to imagine different futures in which *they* are heroes with "mass" appeal. Gaana fan clubs organize the reception of musicians' music videos both through physical fan club meetings around song releases as well as through a strong digital presence via social media and YouTube. Fan clubs thus have an important role to play in shaping the public reaction to Gaana musicians and often have codes of countercultural dress, hair, or language that set the norm for what is perceived as trendy by the broader fan base. Especially among teens and children, learning these trending phrases and composing Gaana songs that include them is a way to relate to their peers and create a countercultural identity that stands apart from the elite aesthetics of Carnatic music or even film music. Gaana musicians, despite seeking to become film music lyricists for fame and a stable income, recognize that their audiences are primarily other people like them, who are also stigmatized and discriminated against. The draw of Gaana, then, is to recover the dignity that is lost in dominant caste society and take pride in the traditions, musical aesthetics, and original lyrics that form the Gaana musical tradition.

Secondary Gaana Musical Socialization, Acquisition, and Production in the "Slum"

Logan grew up in the north Chennai neighborhood of Vyasarpadi, where many of the city's first laborers migrated. Even today, it continues to house many of the city's poorest residents who live in tenements or government housing. Logan says,

> There are a lot of problems here. They put us in the housing board, and those are only 10x10 meters large. Four to six people tend to live in this one small space. Picture this: the mother is cooking in one corner. The father is tense in another corner because he's not able to earn a livelihood, so he is at home. In another corner, someone is watching TV, and just next to them, the sister might have her period and have a stomach ache. With all these problems, where do the children study? So what we do is we find a good friend, someone who is living a very similar life to ours in the area. Someone who has the same problems, so we can talk about our lives and issues at the local tea stall just to get away from it all. But then because of how we look, people will see us talking and think we're up to some trouble. They file a false case and throw us in jail, that's it. That's why the pen is so strong. I pick it up and write a song about all these problems. I write about my mother, my sister, my friends. And immediately, others going through the same issues are able to relate.

Logan's quote illustrates the extent of poverty in the "slum" of the housing board buildings or tenements, where it is not just the lack of financial privilege but also systemic caste discrimination that prevents men from finding remunerative employment and leads young men to be policed and incarcerated. Logan frames Gaana music as his respite and salve to the host of issues compounding poverty and caste discrimination, such as lack of space within homes and the lack of family support for young children. Logan has since written lyrics for over fifty Tamil film songs, but remains embedded in his community.

> I am a film music lyricist and have produced hit songs for over fifty movies. But when I am at home and compose music that I want to test, to see if it will become a hit, I invite the local kids from the area to come and listen. Are they able to say the words easily? Are they hooked by it? If kids can sing it, that's when I know the song will become a hit.

In contrast to Carnatic music, where learning the correct pronunciation of classical Sanskrit, Tamil, or Telugu lyrics is imperative for young learners, Gaana music's emphasis on lyrical improvisation about everyday themes means that lyrics are meant, first and foremost, to catch the attention of the listener. As Logan suggests, if children can remember his lyrics, then it indicates that they are catchy and simple enough for the song to become a hit. Unlike the exclusivity of "serious" Carnatic musical appreciation, the ethos of Gaana lends itself to becoming "viral" or otherwise capturing popular imagination and reaching as many people as possible.

Logan, who hails from north Chennai's Vyasarpadi, felt a profound empathy for the lives of children in his area who experience a range of troubles at home. Despite the organic character of Gaana musical acquisition, Logan decided that he would start involving the children in his neighborhood as part of his musical process to give them an outlet. He says, "They would just come and observe, I didn't teach them anything. But they asked to sing and they just picked it up so quickly." The local children, ranging from ages five to twelve, began to show up at Logan's house, and he started to teach them the songs that he grew up with. He expresses concern for the volatile family situations that lead them to find other spaces to escape to.

> Many of their fathers drink, but who can blame them? They are just unable to get jobs. There are a lot of fights that happen between the parents, and there's no space in the housing board buildings for these children to get any escape from all of this. So they find each other and play or talk to each other about their home situations. Gaana becomes a way for them to start writing about all of this and turning it into music. In ten years, we'll have to see where these kids go. I hope that the name of Vyasarpadi means something totally different, that people will see it as a place with talent. These are the children that can make that kind of change about how people see our area.

Having grown up in this area himself, Logan knows the stigma of being from Vyasarpadi in north Chennai—a stigma associated with the identity of poor, Dalit residents of the city that points to the extent of systemic caste discrimination. Gaana, in its ability to reflect the everyday, the profane, and the local, becomes a site for young people especially to find cathartic release and space from their circumstances. Logan's insistence that young children write about their emotions and their experiences reflects an attunement with the reality of the everyday, which cannot, unlike Carnatic music, be separated from the struggles and taint of living in this part of town. At the same time, Gaana places emphasis on finding everyday forms of *joy* (often described by the use of the English word "jolly") as a radical site of self-expression and affective relationality with others leading similar lives. Logan's weekly music sessions with local children reflect the intergenerational ways

in which a sensibility for Gaana is constructed through a recognition and discussion of life in the "slum," producing original lyrical compositions that reflect the joys and struggles of their writers.

During a music video shoot that takes place on the street by Logan's house in Vyasarpadi, nearly thirty of us occupy the street outside the wall that separates us from one of the city's largest dump yards. The song is Gaana Guna's, and he is the hero of the music video, which is about friendships with his "area *pasanga*" or "area guys." The song is a passionate declaration of his loyalty to these friends beyond the heartbreak of romance and family troubles. Many Gaana songs center this theme of friendship, a theme that resonates with the thousands and millions of viewers of these YouTube music videos, who leave comments claiming their love for the musician, their friends, and the song. At this music video shoot, three children aged approximately nine or ten years old, two girls and one boy, were part of the dance crew for the video. B-boying and breakdancing have been an integral visual corollary to the musical aspect of Gaana, often animating the songs with a dance team that performs impressive flips and moves right behind the hero and his main crew, who are often the same set of personal friends to the hero and feature across all his music videos. The dance "master" trains these three children along with tens of other students who come from the housing board buildings in nearby areas. They train on the beach, and he believes that giving children a venue to dance is crucial to giving them a space to have fun and interact with each other. He says,

> I started learning dance sixteen years ago. I used to just dance on the street, but we found out about one dance class so I went and joined with some money that my uncle gave me. He asked me afterwards, "Did the class go well?" I said it went well. He said, "You should keep going to dance class and you ought to become a dance master yourself." Now, I have five dance classes and there are so many kids around me that learn from me.

In the music video, the three children are part of the background dance crew. Much like the men in their early twenties who form the majority of the dance crew, they also wear a baseball cap

backwards and are outfitted in denim cutoffs and sneakers. They exude an effortless cool in executing the moves that the teacher choreographs on the fly, borne of years of practice on the soft sands of the Marina Beach.

North Chennai areas like Vyasarpadi, Pulianthope, Chintadripet, and Washermenpet have given birth to some of the most prolific Gaana musicians. For younger residents of these areas, such as the nineteen-member Gaana and rap fusion group called "Black Boys," growing up in these areas and facing life together provides the material for their original compositions. Nanda is the beatboxer for the Black Boys, and he describes how they came together.

> All nineteen of us grew up together. We went to Don Bosco school right here, and we were all in the same class growing up. Our parents wanted us to go to college and get a degree so we could earn better than they did, but that didn't really work out for most of us. One of us is a delivery boy in Sowcarpet area, and another one delivers water cans. But we knew that we needed to write songs together, everybody agreed. We took inspiration from the songs that rappers like Arivu are making about social issues, and we thought that growing up with Gaana meant that we could also rap. It's the same thing as Gaana in terms of lyrics, but faster.

Nanda's story outlines the pitfalls of formal education, which rarely translate into a stable income. Gaana becomes a channel to achieve acclaim and renown for these young men who feel disillusioned by the failure of a college education to deliver them from poverty and marginalization. Gaana is increasingly fused with rap—a development that has taken place in the past four or five years with the rising prominence of Tamil rappers. I asked Sunil, another member of the ensemble, how he became drawn to rap in addition to Gaana. Sunil explained,

> At first, I only knew Gaana. I didn't know rap and all. My father used to sing Gaana songs back in the day, and I would sometimes come up with song lyrics for him. My mother told me that I got this talent of writing Gaana from him. When I started singing Gaana more, I realized that rap is basically Gaana but with speed lyrics. It still has the same feel.

Sunil's recognition that Gaana and rap are similar in their orientation toward lyrical improvisation and wit was extended when the Black Boys met Logan, who was already writing songs for the

anti-caste ensemble called Casteless Collective. It was at this point that they were introduced to Gaana's potential to disseminate their stories and raise political consciousness, particularly around urban marginality and caste discrimination. Sunil narrates how they met Logan, who they refer to as "*anna*" or elder brother.

> *Anna* was making songs for his film, and that's when I saw him first. He was walking down the street wearing a t-shirt and pants. He was wearing a cap, he's always wearing a cap, but he was not wearing any slippers. He seemed so humble that at first, I didn't believe that was Logan *anna*. So I asked the boys, "Is that really him?" They said yes, so I went up to him and quickly said, "My name is Sunil and I'm from Sathyamurthy Nagar. I have this song, and I write songs and sing." I showed him the audio. He was so busy, but he listened to my song on the spot, just for my sake. After listening, he smiled and said, "Wait for a while, there's a real surprise for you." That's when we started going to him for guidance about how to write music.

Logan corroborates this story of when he first met Sunil.

> When I first met Sunil, I saw the color of his skin and it struck me. There's a title to our area, "Karuppar Nagar," or "Black Town." When I made this connection, they took on the title of Black Boys, because that is who they are. Then I introduced them to Pa Ranjith,[8] who has taught us all a lot about Dalit arts and history through his films and his activism on behalf of Dalit people. He taught me to be proud of it instead of accepting that it is looked down upon by others. It was he who said that these boys' talents should not go unrecognized. He told me to help them prepare and he would finance a show. They are preparing for that now.

Sunil adds that they meet on the terrace of his housing board flat, which can only be reached via a ladder that some of the residents procured and propped up against an opening on the top floor that leads to the roof. As we clamber up the ladder, Sunil tells me that this is where they write music after work in the evenings.

> We are lucky to have this space. It is the only space we can meet where people don't ask questions about what a group of guys are doing together. They assume we're up to no good, but in reality, we're writing songs about everything. We write about love, heartbreak,

[8] Pa Ranjith is an anti-caste Tamil filmmaker and advocate for the reclamation of Dalit arts and history. He started a collective called Neelam, meaning "blue," which is associated with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his advocacy on behalf of Dalit communities across India. Neelam serves as a physical space, library, resource bank, and meeting point for Dalit musicians, artists, writers, filmmakers, and activists. It is the only space in Chennai that serves this precise function.

> money, the problem of waste pickers from our area who are left to die by the government, the water crisis that meant we had no water for months, the caste discrimination we face when we say our address is in Vyasarpadi.

Sunil and the Black Boys write every evening, recollecting their experiences of working through the day and observing the lives of those around them. The collective experience of marginality is captured by their lyrics, but it is converted into a type of defiance that rejects the stigma meted out to young men like them. In their songs, Gaana and rap are made commensurate by the work of comparison that finds resonances in their lyricality, themes, and defiance. Logan has been instrumental in kindling the musical interests of children, teenagers, and college students in his area. He acknowledges that he didn't always receive such guidance, and other young men who aspire to become Gaana singers lack the space and resources to produce and release songs. Mani, who is an aspiring Gaana singer from another area in north Chennai, talked about his struggles with singing Gaana professionally.

> If someone has had a Gaana singer in their family, it is easier for them to get acceptance from their family that they will take up this profession. Even in our own communities, it is looked down upon because Gaana singers don't make a lot of money because they sing at funerals of poorer families. They don't have much money to give us and sometimes we sing for free if they cannot afford it. They deserve to leave us with dignity. So I try to go to Gaana concerts and get a chance to sing, not for money but just to be recognized. But there's too many of us and not enough stages. My mother sometimes gives me money to record songs and publish them on YouTube. But she works as a maid in someone's home and she doesn't earn enough to support me.

The Black Boys' story of receiving recognition and support is an anomaly in the Gaana musical world. Many aspiring Gaana musicians do not have the resources to produce their own music for public consumption. The themes of popular Gaana thus reflect whatever is in demand within the digital arena of YouTube. Mani elucidates,

> The guys on YouTube who are looking for new Gaana music are not looking for preaching about politics or caste. They just want a release. So the songs I write are mostly about girls

> or fights, because that is what sells. But maybe if I had more support, I could also write more about the things I want to speak about.

Mani's story is emblematic of the tribulations that Gaana musicians face in professionalizing or pursuing a full-time musical career. The lack of institutional support and stages for Gaana music means that all musical production now takes place predominantly on YouTube. The culture of Gaana music videos engendered by the advent of YouTube has made visual footage indispensable to musical production. As a result, YouTube-based independent musical production requires patrons, sponsors, dancers, videographers, recording studios and producers, and a crew that helps the Gaana musician with the logistics of music video shoots. Such resources are not forthcoming for the majority of Gaana musicians, who toil away in obscurity and grow increasingly frustrated at the lack of institutional and financial support. As Mani suggests in this excerpt, the resulting music predominantly reflects trending themes of love, violence, and heartbreak. Marking their music as distinctive presents a challenge to Gaana musicians who are competing with each other for virality.

Gaana musical acquisition and production for the "slum" residents of Chennai is conditioned by the experience of caste discrimination daily and the struggle to find "formal" employment. But as Gaana musical production has come into conversation with extant anti-caste movements in the city, it has taken on a political character of defiance. Even the songs that are not explicitly about the politics of inequality present an image of defiance that challenges dominant aesthetic standards and metrics of musical valuation. Ultimately, Gaana has become a music that is synonymous with the experiences of Dalit musicians living in the city's informal settlements. This equation between Dalit identity and Gaana at once siloes it from mainstream consumption

and simultaneously provides the basis for challenging the stigma faced by both the music and its musicians.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how primary and secondary musical socialization occur in the two musical worlds of Carnatic and Gaana. I describe the ways that early musical socialization is tied to caste location and its concomitant privileges and resources, or their relative absence. In addition to learning music formally, musical socialization takes place through a range of intergenerational interactions within families, between peers, and across a range of musical and social spaces. These forms of musical engagement shape the musical habitus of Carnatic and Gaana musicians and fans, predisposing them to view what counts as "music" very differently. The construction of musical habitus is one of the driving factors for the construction of caste habitus in these scenes, where musical socialization is inextricably tied with social location and spaces of residence and engagement in the city of Chennai. Developing a "taste" for either Carnatic or Gaana music and coming to love it is a function of such socialization, inseparably tying caste identity, socialization, and musical involvement together. For Tamil Brahmins, Carnatic musical socialization allows individuals to accrue cultural capital and orients them to perceiving their own social location and musical practices as legitimate and worthy of reverence. In contrast, for Dalits, Gaana musical socialization takes place without formal training, and its attendant associations with slums, degraded caste positions, and the traditional site of performance at funerals results in an absence of institutional spaces and resources for those seeking to pursue careers as Gaana musicians. At the same time, a countercultural disposition is being constructed for young Dalits in light of ongoing anti-caste activism in Tamil Nadu, which has allowed actors to reclaim the stigmatized form and instead channel their engagement with it as a political act of defiance. In the

next chapter, I show how these disparate modes of individual musical socialization coalesce into forms of group boundary-making that ultimately further caste-based urban segregation through the process of caste spatialization, whereby groups come to acquire cultural reputations that legitimate their social position or require them to mediate their social and spatial location in the city.

Chapter 2

Caste-ing the City: Urban Segregation and Caste Spatialization in Chennai

Vaa sonnen—Vada Chennai!	Say it with me—North Chennai!
Vada Chennai eppadi irukkum yaarukaachu theriyumaa	Does anybody know the real North Chennai?
Unmaya eduthu sonnaa oruthanukkum puriyuma?	If I spoke the truth, would you understand it?
Irundha azhagai ellam azhichittaanunga	They've destroyed all that was beautiful, and
Pala unmaigala adiyoda marachittaanunga	they killed and buried the truth.
Ezhandha nelangala namma meettu edukkanum	We must reclaim the lands taken from us;
Irandaam sudhandhiramaa adhuvum irukkanum	Come! Let's fight for a second independence!
Koovanadhi oruthula kudisai nariya irundhuchaan	Tiny huts once lined the banks of the River Cooum;
Makkala adichu police ooravitte verattuchaan	Then the police hit the people living there and made them leave.
Marachaa maranjiduma karupparoda parambara	But try as you might, you can't erase this black tribe!
Chennai mattum dhaan da engaloda karuvara	Chennai is our home, it is our womb.[1]

Introduction: A Protest in Song

On New Year's Eve of 2018, the Vaanam or "Sky" Festival headlined a 16-member ensemble called Casteless Collective. The band performed their song, "Vada Chennai," meaning

[1] See Casteless Collective's "Vada Chennai" lyric video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALAxCEPyj2Q.

"north Chennai," to the thousand-strong gathered at this school playground. Despite the suggestion in the song's title, the festival took place not in north Chennai, but rather in the south Chennai of Mylapore, considered the nucleus of "upper" caste, Brahmin residences and cultural activity in the city. The song's twangy guitar riffs are interwoven with the lyrical dynamism of Gaana, a musical tradition rooted in north Chennai's Dalit or previously "untouchable" caste communities as a musical accompaniment to the daily acts of labor, mourning, and entertainment. Gaana's association with both Dalit musicianship and its traditional performance site of the funeral on the streets of the "slum" have historically led to its devaluation by the city's more privileged residents, stigmatizing its performance and enjoyment. The performance of this song in the Brahmin bastion of Mylapore to protest north Chennai's segregation was, therefore, a moment of transgression: spatial and cultural boundaries considered to be intractable were crossed to register dissent.

In the course of singing the song, Muthu cries out, "You cannot erase this black tribe!" This moment promptly reveals the operation of something more than just class-based segregation of the urban poor. Muthu reappropriates the stigma of dark skin that is often used as a coded expression of caste discrimination to protest the mass evictions of the *Dalit* urban poor in north Chennai. While urban sociological literature understands segregation along the lines of residence-based indicators, such as the presence, concentration, or isolation of slums relative to wealthier residences, the primary object of analysis remains relatively limited to *class* and its manifestation through unequal residence. However, "Vada Chennai" indicates that class and residence-based indicators of segregation alone are not sufficient to understand the processes by which segregation constitutes urban inequality. In the case of Indian cities like Chennai, unequal interactions based on class differences are severely compounded by the persistence of inequalities by *caste* that are

made visible in the maintenance of the symbolic and spatial boundaries constructed around caste elites.

As "Vada Chennai" implies in its gesturing at the "black tribe" of Dalits, caste identity is rarely stated so baldly and remains interactionally unspoken. In the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and its capital city of Chennai in particular, a long history of robust non-Brahmin, Dravidian politics has obliged "upper" caste expressions of power to hide just beneath the surface of urban social interactions. Scholarship on urban inequality in cities of the global South provides evidence of the "compulsory closeness" (Veloso 2010) shared between elite and marginalized urban residences. The proximity between elites and marginalized communities in cities like Rio de Janeiro, Metro Manila, or Chennai are markedly distinct from the social and spatial distance often exemplified as the hallmark of segregation in the US. The compulsory closeness produced by the interspersion of elite and marginalized residences compels elites to employ strategies of separation that secure their social and spatial exclusivity. Using Gaana and Carnatic musical spaces as an entry point into the examination of urban inequality, I investigate what happens when these strategies of exclusion coincide with processes of caste differentiation in the city, where the relatively anonymized social terrain mobilizes elites to find new strategies to signal caste and mark the exclusivity of their social and geographical spaces.

In this chapter, I analyze how spatial segregation intersects with caste politics in the city. I find that Brahmins, or "upper" caste residents associated with the city's classicized Carnatic music scene, experience positive externalities of the link that persists between areas of residence by caste elites and the symbolic power of their cultural institutions and practices. In contrast, the historical stigma meted out to Dalit, or previously "untouchable" caste residents of the city, inheres in the negative stereotypes attributed to the neighborhoods historically associated with their residence

and cultural practices, such as Gaana music. I argue that the accrual of cultural power or stigma for disparate caste groups is enabled by a sociological process I refer to as spatialization of caste, a process by which caste identity comes to be signaled by place identity. As caste groups come to be stereotypically identified with certain places in the city, these stereotypical associations enter the public imagination with little regard to the reality of demographic heterogeneity in these places. The tenacity and reproduction of these tropes reveals the crucial role occupied by caste elites to wield outsized symbolic power in elevating their own cultural practices and institutions or spaces of association. Caste oppressed communities, such as Dalits, face the negative consequences of the spatialization of their caste that include excessive policing, degradation of their cultural practices, and the persistent stigma that follows residents as they navigate the city. Gaana musicians find strategies to reappropriate or distance themselves from stigmatized place identity, revealing the operation of an anti-caste resistance that takes a musical articulation in the city.

Caste, Urban Inequality, and Segregation

Urban sociological scholarship on segregation locates the history of racial segregation as a driver of concentrated poverty and ghettoization in US. cities. Race-based stereotyping compounds the prevalence of minority group poverty, resulting in spatial segregation that emerges from the interplay between racial prejudices and class inequalities experienced by African American and Latinx populations (Massey and Denton 1993; Ellen 2001; Small 2004). The importance of racial inequalities to US urban sociologists is superseded by a focus on *class* in the context of cities in the Global South. The pattern of segregation identified in cities ranging from Rio de Janeiro to Metro Manila resembles the interspersion of slums and enclaves as a result of segregation that primarily cuts across *class* in contrast to the racial ghettoization of US cities. In studies of Indian cities, the attention to the relationship between urban governance and the urban poor manifests in

significant scholarly accounts of housing and urban evictions (Weinstein 2020; Bjorkman 2014; Benjamin 2000; Manecksha 2011) and "world-class" city making that aspires to "global" urban aesthetics and seeks to eradicate the physical markers of urban poverty in the Indian city (Baviskar 2011; Bhan 2009; Arabindoo 2011; Ghertner 2008).

While this scholarship provides compelling evidence that class drives a distinct form of urban inequality in the Global South, the parallels between prejudices along race and caste lines (Pandey 2013) would suggest that Indian cities are striated by caste, a form of social difference that has attracted the attention of race scholars because of its similarities to race as well as its intractable distinctions from it. Natrajan (2009) argues that the focus on untouchability as a cornerstone of caste discrimination in India has to be reconstrued as the "spatial gap" of separateness that organizes not just housing and urban infrastructural access, but also refracts the caste norms of "purity" and "pollution" in the rigidly entrenched and inflexible concept of *place* identity in the cognitive and social map of caste. Garrido (2020) refers to the process by which groupness is constituted by place identity as "spatialization," where people associated with a specific place or type of place come to be identified with that place. The spatialization of caste in urban India is crucially important to consider, especially in light of quantitative evidence of persistent residential segregation by *caste* that surpasses residential segregation by class identity alone (Vithayathil and Singh 2012). The mere fact of caste-based residential segregation in Indian cities does not explain the entire gamut of social processes by which caste comes to matter in urban social interactions, or in other words, how caste comes to be spatialized in the Indian city.

An obstacle to studying caste as a driver of urban segregation is the coded forms by which caste is inscribed and experienced in the city. Pandian (2002) writes that urban middle and upper classes disavow their caste affiliations and deride caste-based politics as "pre-modern." There is a

tendency among "upper" castes to believe that caste inequalities of education, income, and social networks rampant in the village cease to exist in the relatively anonymized context of the city. As Natrajan (2009) observes, the practice of untouchability anchored caste to a Brahmanical vision of social order, and its practice in modern day India need not be tied to touch alone. Rather, the "technologies of stigmatization" (Natrajan 2009, 80) reproduce the inflexible place occupied by Dalits in the cognitive map of caste. Caste discrimination viewed through the lens of technologies of stigmatization allows us to understand how dominant caste ideologies reproduce stereotypes and stigmas, which come to adhere to spaces, bodies, and cultural practices over time. Taking music as a social field where symbolic distinctions are carved out and resisted, this chapter makes sense of the ways that caste locations—both social and spatial—are tangled up with the experience of urban navigation and residence.

Constructing Symbolic Power

The annual Carnatic music festival in December is a long-standing tradition known at least in passing to most residents of Chennai, but its primary constituency remains predominantly limited to Brahmins from Chennai, other states in southern India, the global diaspora, and some European foreigners with an interest in "Indian classical music." For all of December and most of January, a total of nearly 4,000 concerts are hosted from morning until night at around forty-five musical venues, known as *sabhas,* all around the city. Chennai's *sabhas* host Carnatic music concerts throughout the year, but the December festival has come to occupy a crucial role in reproducing the stature of the musical form. Carnatic music's most prestigious *sabhas,* such as the Music Academy, are located in the southern Chennai locality of Mylapore. A Carnatic music fan and festival-goer expressed the importance of this space to him and other Carnatic aficionados: "Music Academy in Mylapore is *the* Mecca for Carnatic music." Together with the exalted status

of Carnatic music, Mylapore and its cultural institutions occupy a place of symbolic significance for the making and signaling of Tamil Brahmin identity in the city.

Mylapore has historically been home to the city's wealthiest Brahmins whose houses populated the main streets around the neighborhood temple, echoing in the urban context the caste-segregated enclaves or *agraharams* that were reserved exclusively for Brahmin residence in the village setting. The expansion of the city and the success of non-Brahmin Dravidian politics have led to the decline of these enclaves, and neighborhoods typically associated with Brahmin residences like Mylapore, Nungambakkam, and T. Nagar are no longer exclusively reserved for Brahmin residence. Yet, as the city has grown and expanded, a closer look at the religio-cultural institutions of importance to Brahmins reveals the persistence of spatial clustering of Brahmin residences in these and newer neighborhoods. The southward growth of the city in response to the Information Technology (IT) boom has led to the migration of Tamil Brahmins to newer localities. Along with new clusters of Brahmin residences in these areas, new *sabhas* and temples have also been constructed, marking new frontiers of Brahmin cultural geography in the city. T.M. Krishna is a prominent Carnatic musician whose criticism of caste exclusivity within the Carnatic music world has drawn the ire of the same Carnatic music fans who queue up for his concerts. In an interview, he described the relationship between Brahmin residence and musical institutions in Chennai.

> So you have the same fiefdoms that existed before. That is, the Music Academy, Mylapore Fine Arts Club, Krishna Gana Sabha—these are typical Brahmin hubs and these exist in Mylapore. Then what has happened is you have smaller hubs being created. Where are they created? Nanganallur, Adambakkam…. These were at one point where poor Brahmins went and settled. Those who couldn't afford Mylapore or T. Nagar moved to Nanganallur, Adambakkam, Chromepet. Now there you have little *sabhas*. If you go to those *sabhas*, their location is usually within 4–5 streets where I can wager that 90 to 95 percent of the population is Brahmin. Upper caste populations…. So in a way it's the same model that has extended itself once the city grew.

This excerpt illustrates the importance of *sabhas* and institutions of religio-cultural significance for Brahmins to signal caste affiliations even as they migrate to new localities. Waghorne's (2004) findings corroborate the coincidence between a rise in new temple constructions and Brahmin migration within the city and beyond. Clusters of Brahmin residences are flanked by institutions like the *sabha* or temple, which offer congregational spaces for Brahmins whose capacity for overt signaling of caste has been diminished in the wake of non-Brahmin Dravidian politics in the state. At the same time, despite the establishment of newer *sabhas* and the sprawling migration of Brahmins, Mylapore's *sabhas* like the Music Academy still constitute the apex in a hierarchy of Brahminical cultural geography. The cohesiveness of Brahminical caste is preserved and reproduced by the shared consecration of such cultural spaces and institutions, which appear to be about things other than caste, but are, in reality, the places where caste affiliations are affirmed and spatial stereotypes of Mylapore as a "Brahmin" locality are produced.

Norms as Boundary Work and Maintenance

Spaces like the *sabha* are closely guarded by the establishment of cultural norms that are learned through Brahminical caste socialization. The exclusivity of musical spaces is preserved by gatekeeping practices that undertake coded, symbolic forms of boundary maintenance. In the tightly surveilled environment of the Mylapore *sabha*, outsiders are swiftly identified as distinct from the regulars. The food at *sabha* canteens is a draw for "outsiders": a separate canteen space allows visitors to bypass the music hall entirely. But in doing so, they earn the disdain of the predominantly older, self-appointed Brahmin custodians of this space. I overheard a woman, perhaps in her late sixties, decked in what was doubtless a handloom silk sari, complaining to a woman who had taken a seat at one of the circular tables under the marquee of the Music Academy

canteen. Tilting her head to gesture at a table of Muslim women in *purdah*, she remarked, "They just come for the food, no interest in our culture or anything." The use of "our culture" by this self-proclaimed gatekeeper of the space indicates the degree of ownership claimed by Brahmin audiences over this musical world.

Other norms governing Carnatic musical spaces restrict who is invited to belong. Some of the hallmark features of caste's infinite reproducibility are woven into aspects of everyday life, such as food and marriage. The canteens at Carnatic *sabhas* advertise their "pure vegetarian" food made according to Brahmanical strictures, and advertisements for exclusive caste-based online matchmaking services are unabashedly displayed at these venues. Norms around "pure" vegetarian food and marriage maintain Brahminical caste exclusivity by refracting the Brahminical concern over norms of "purity" and exclusion (Iversen and Raghavendra 2006; Gorringe and Karthikeyan 2014). An advertisement for a matrimonial company displayed at a *sabha* read: "Matchmaking services available for Brahmins, Mudaliars, and other castes," indicating the desire of concert-goers to find intra-caste matrimonial matches, demonstrating one of the ways that caste endogamy is maintained.

Figure 3.1. *T.M. Krishna in concert at a sabha in Mylapore*

Norms of comportment regulate and order the *sabha* space, but these norms are not easily learned or acquired by those lacking an intimate familiarity with the musical and social content of the Carnatic musical world. Songs performed at these concerts tend to be overwhelmingly comprised of late medieval religious compositions in classical Sanskrit, Tamil, or Telugu languages. Appreciation for the music entails a knowledge of Sanskritic religious themes—an important feature of Brahminical life—as well as the complex *raaga* or melodic system and the intricate *taala* or rhythmic patterns. Performers' melodic improvisations are evaluated by knowledgeable audience members, whose awareness of these unstated details of compositions is demonstrated through subtle codes to indicate to other audience members that they are in the know. A listener might loudly exclaim, "*Besh!*" or "*Shabaash!"* to express their appreciation using these phrases characteristic of the Carnatic music world, but it is in their judgment of when and what to appreciate that they signal to other audience members that they belong to the cadres of the Carnatic cognoscenti. The audience thus co-constitutes the Carnatic musical performance, playing an active part in the social production of legitimacy for the musical exercise. Knowledge of such complex musical details are gained from a young age through the near mandatory Carnatic music lessons that children in Brahmin families are obliged to take. Here, rules surrounding comportment, Sanskritic religiosity, and other caste norms are imbibed in addition to musical knowledge.

As a result, the exclusivity of these spaces is maintained through symbolic barriers to entry. Although "non-Brahmins" might drop in for a meal at a Mylapore *sabha* canteen and attend a concert, this social category does not include those who are poor and *Dalit*, even though a poor *Brahmin* can be seen as a legitimate member of this world with the appropriate embodiment and performance of caste norms. This trumping of caste-based, in-group inclusion over class suggests the complex and coded ways that caste exclusivity is maintained in musical spaces.

One afternoon, after attending a concert at the Music Academy in Mylapore, I stepped out of its compound onto the street, where a fleet of auto rickshaws awaited music festival "*sabha* hoppers," or fans trying to get to the next *sabha* on the day's musical itinerary in some other part of the city. I got into the first rickshaw and struck up a conversation with the driver, Daniel, during which I asked if he had ever attended a concert at the Music Academy. As Daniel sped ahead, he turned to me with a look of incredulity. He said by way of explanation, "Have you seen me? You think they will allow me inside? I am from Chintadripet [a north Chennai locality]." I asked if he had ever attempted to walk into the foyer before, to which Daniel responded, "They won't say anything directly, but it's the way they look at you. I was just going to fill my water bottle, but as soon as I entered the lobby, I got scared and walked right out of there. I just *knew* they were thinking, 'Oh, he definitely doesn't belong here.'" Daniel's felt experience of out-group status is illustrative of the ways that exclusivity is preserved in the Carnatic musical world through the expected performance of in-group norms and its links to caste socialization and Brahminical spaces.

Linking Cultural Power to Place Identity and Caste Power

The hegemony of Brahmins over Carnatic music is an issue that has been raised by a handful of members from this community, such as musician T.M. Krishna and his supporters. Mylapore *sabhas* like the Music Academy tend to charge exorbitantly for tickets to concerts during the festival, sometimes even making it impossible for nonmembers to get tickets without a "season pass," a bonus reserved for the tightly knit, thousand-odd members, comprised almost exclusively of wealthy Brahmins who pass their membership on intergenerationally. Other venues subsidize the price of their tickets with the aid of government concessions, which are intended to draw wider audiences. One such auditorium is the Kamarajar Arangam, which has long been associated with

political rallies and other non-Carnatic musical events. In contrast to Mylapore *sabhas*, with their historically conferred prestige and "pure" vegetarian canteens of repute, these other *sabhas* are seen as less puritanical and stand in lower esteem. T.M. Krishna explained to me how this venue is viewed by in-group Carnatic music world members.

> Carnatic concerts happen in this venue, Kamarajar Arangam. So Kamarajar Arangam has never … belonged, you can say, to this *sabha* culture. In a way, it is just an auditorium, a massive auditorium that seats 1,500 people. What happens there is usually spiritual lectures, or you have film song concerts. During the music season and just after it there are concerts, Carnatic concerts, that happen. And I will ask you to kindly go and watch the concerts, just the aesthetic of how it is presented is so different from what happens here. The people who come to concerts there never come for concerts to any *sabha* okay. It's a very interesting set of people. And where do these Kamarajar Arangam people advertise? You'll find posters behind PTC [public] buses. You'll find posters for shows here on walls where people may even urinate. I've heard many musicians complain that their wall posters are in ugly places.

As illustrated by the comment about Kamarajar Arangam being "just an auditorium," institutional spaces and stages for Carnatic music are not created equal: they are sacralized by its patrons, suggesting that legitimate venues are those that are co-consecrated by the entire cast of characters in the privileged echelons of the Carnatic music world. One evening at the December festival, a Carnatic musician performing at the Kamarajar Arangam told me that he took concerts here less seriously:

> At the Music Academy, you know everyone is there for the music. Here, people come to sleep or go straight for the food. It is not a serious crowd. See that guy sleeping over there in the second row! There is even a chocolate covered car in the canteen! What does that even have to do with music?

The musician's contempt for the aesthetic and crowds at this "lesser" venue exposes not only the symbolic significance of engaging with Carnatic music normatively, but also the symbolic power of sacralized spaces and entire neighborhoods in what Fuller and Narasimhan (2014, 201) describe as an exercise in "building a community with exclusivist overtones." The sanctioning of

Carnatic musical performance is thus not just about what happens onstage, but also the space in which it happens, extending all the way from the *sabha* to the imagined space of the neighborhood, such as Mylapore. It is through such sacralization of space that cultural power comes to be conferred to an entire neighborhood, regardless of its actual demographic variation. At the same time, when someone claims that they are from Mylapore, assessments about caste identity and cultural affiliations are quickly divined by others to triangulate their social positioning. Indeed, when I was traveling to other parts of the city, a question I was often asked was, "Where do you live? Mylapore?" Even though I did not live in Mylapore, this *place identity* has come to stand in as a signifier of "upper" caste identity.

The positive externalities associated with "being from Mylapore" extend far beyond Mylapore. Southern parts of Chennai, which despite class and caste heterogeneity, signals a level of social prestige if other markers such as cultural affiliations, caste identity, and class coincide with place identity. The neighborhood of Mylapore, in turn, has gained epithets such as "the cultural heartland of Chennai" and receives funding from private and public sponsors to organize festivals to showcase "the" culture of Mylapore and of Chennai at large. During the annual Mylapore Festival, Carnatic music plays a large role in the festivities, with a range of concerts hosted at Mylapore parks and music venues. One of the *mada* streets around the Kapaleeswarar Temple is cordoned off for a range of events as part of the Mylapore Festival, including Carnatic musical concerts and competitions. The free occupation of public spaces and streets offered to the participants of the Mylapore Festival, and the festival's showcasing of Brahminical cultural practices as "culture" more broadly, suggests the ways in which Brahminical cultural practices are exalted, allowing them to unfurl on the streets with the full weight of social and political sanction. Mylapore is also home to many Gaana and other musical traditions, but Carnatic music has come

to stand in as a representative of the city's cultural repertoire, and Mylapore has become synonymous with "culture." When foreign dignitaries and officials visit the city, they are often treated to a private Carnatic performance, which provides evidence of its exalted status in coming to represent the culture of the city despite only being the preserve of an elite minority. Chennai was awarded the title of "Creative City for Music" at the behest of a group of Carnatic music world members—patrons, sponsors, and *sabha* functionaries—who felt that Carnatic music's eminence in Chennai as a "classical" music ought to be recognized on a global stage. For the first two years after Chennai was awarded this honor, there were few events to recognize other communities' musical traditions that have paralleled or even pre-dated Carnatic's advent in Chennai. The generic appellation of city for "music" thus belies the monopolistic cultural power enjoyed by Carnatic music and Brahminical cultural practices.

Cultural power cements not only social prestige for already elite caste groups, but its adherence to places—music venues, neighborhoods, and entire swathes of the city—allows place identity to stand in for various indicators of social positioning like caste, class, and cultural capital. It is in this way that caste comes to be spatialized through the accrual of cultural power made mobile. In the next section, I examine the case of Gaana music in Chennai to analyze how caste spatialization works to create stigma based on caste, cultural practices, and place identity.

Stigmatized Caste and Place Identities

Gaana is everywhere in Chennai, and yet remains relatively stigmatized. Many Carnatic musicians I interviewed were barely aware of its existence; even if they had heard some Tamil film songs that used Gaana style lyrics, humor, or instrumentation, they rarely knew to recognize it as Gaana. But as musician Gaana Vinoth ardently explained, "Gaana is the music of Chennai's people. If you take a bike and roam around the city at night, you will hear it from each and every

slum and you will see people dancing to it." Gaana originated in the informal settlements of north Chennai, which housed the Dalit migrants who helped build the city's earliest constructions and provided crucial labor for the mills and factories of colonial era Madras. Gaana emerged to fill a variety of social needs for this community: funerals, labor, political messaging, social reform, and entertainment. The part of the city generalized now as "north Chennai" has expanded north from the area known as "Black Town," a racial epithet indicating the color line that divided the residential settlements of the indigenous, often Dalit laborers, who built the city from those of the European settlers and colonizers in "White Town." In the postcolonial context, the racial line has given way to reflect the interspersion of variously classed and casted residential settlements in Chennai's social terrain. And yet, symbolic boundaries endure in the maintenance of segregation through the spatialization of caste.

Despite the ubiquity of Dalit residences in all parts of the city, "north Chennai" has become homogenized and vested with negative stereotypes alluding to its purported criminality and informality. These negative stereotypes are evoked when the place identity of "north Chennai" is used in lieu of caste slurs to deride Dalit residents of the city. In reality, residential areas in north Chennai—especially in newer areas like Kilpauk, Anna Nagar, and Ambattur—comprise a variety of caste and class groups that have relative social power compared to their counterparts in informal settlements. Yet, the use of "north Chennai" to refer to Dalit identity makes stigma mobile by adhering to the bodies of poor, Dalit, north Chennai residents as they navigate the city. The stigma of being from north Chennai's notorious informal settlements is described by Gaana singer, Muthu.

> North Chennai is just seen as this land of rowdies. We are all seen as good for nothing, and our dark skin means that we will always be spotted out. It doesn't matter that I went to college. The minute that employer from the IT firm sees my dark skin or asks me my address, it's over for me. The government doesn't care about us either. We can't even get to the hospital easily because there's no easy way to get there, and there's only one anyway.

> At the same time, because of caste discrimination that continues to this day, men in my area die over and over again while cleaning your sewers or picking up waste. That's all we're seen as fit to do.

Muthu's description of place-based stigma illustrates how the place identity of north Chennai, which despite its extensive demographic variation, has been reified and used for caste identification and discrimination in the city in conjunction with pre-existing schema for caste discrimination, such as phenotypical features. Sunil, another young Gaana singer in his twenties, says, "All you have to do is say your address, and the minute you say, 'Vyasarpadi, north Chennai,' they will lose all interest in hiring you for a job or a role in some film. If you do get hired, you will only be a villain, never the hero." Both Muthu and Sunil point to the operation of stereotypes that not only play up the alleged violence or poverty of men from north Chennai, but also leads others to assume and slot them as "Dalit" on account of their place identity, phenotypical features like dark skin, or their "countercultural" sartorial and hair fashion, which instantly bars them simultaneously from both respectability and fame in dominant caste circuits of taste. The conflation of "north Chennai" with the stigmatized Dalit identity is a reflection of the spatialization of caste at work, a process through which place identity comes to stand in for group difference.

Gaana is not limited to north Chennai, and in recent years, it has traveled extensively to other parts of the country and even the world. At the same time, it operates in a different global circuit than Carnatic, which is predominantly the preserve of the upper caste, Brahmin diaspora of North America, Australia, and Western Europe, who meet the stringent requirements of educational credentials for immigration in these countries. In contrast, Gaana travels through "lower" caste or Dalit migrant communities in countries like United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, or Singapore—countries that attract working class laborers with lower barriers to immigration. But at the same time, Gaana remains resolutely tied to the concept of "local." "Local"

is Chennai slang, borrowed from English, that is often used to deride the "low" caste and class status of individuals navigating the city that present in a certain style, or through other bodily markers identify themselves as being from the "slum." North Chennai's conflation with "slum" residents results in other urban Dalit poor also being marked with this stigma, even if they live in other parts of the city.

In 2019, a controversy erupted when "*pullingo,*" or Chennai slang for "son" or "guy," traveled from the ambit of Gaana and north Chennai to the rest of the city and morphed into a slur for the young, Dalit, urban male. A Tamil comedy group called Erumai Saani, meaning "Bullshit," created a sketch mocking the "*pullingo,*" young men from "the slum" stereotypically characterized by an affinity for a flashy style of clothing, colored highlights, and "Dio" motorbikes preferred by these young men to signal material wealth. Denouncing the usage of "*pullingo*" as "toxic," Tenma—the band leader of the aforementioned Gaana-fusion musical group Casteless Collective—criticized this characterization as reductive and compared it to "a slur like the N-word for Black [people], the C-word for East Asians."[2] He continued, "The word is increasingly being used to mock the self-expression of young people from underprivileged sections, and stereotyping their activities as criminal or dangerous." The slurring of Dalit identity through references to place identity, cultural practices, or stylized forms of self-expression all point to the ways that caste stigma in the urban setting has become spatialized.

The construction of "*pullingo*" as a countercultural identity is deeply braided with the question of Dalit masculinity in the urban context. In a caste society, hegemonic masculinity is determined

[2] "'Pullingo' is Toxic: Tenma Writes on Erumai Saani's Video Mocking North Madras Youth," *The News Minute*, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/pullingo-toxic-tenma-writes-erumai-saani-s-video-mocking-north-madras-youth-110502.

and institutionalized through Brahminical and dominant caste patriarchal codes. As a result, Dalit men are policed and proscribed from embodying norms of hegemonic masculinity through style, clothing, or hair. For example, Gorringe and Rafanell (2007) describe the imbrication of Tamil dominant caste masculinity with the concept of "valor," which is embodied by sporting mustaches for men of dominant castes. Dalit men, as a result of their subordinated masculinity and caste position, are often barred from sporting mustaches and face violence from dominant caste men in the villages of Tamil Nadu when such norms are transgressed. In the context of the city, such overt modes of policing Dalit masculinity are replaced by the creation and circulation of negative stereotypes about Dalit men from "slum" areas, which become affixed to these men as they navigate the city. Stereotypes of criminality, violence, or hypersexuality that become categorically attached to Dalit men serve to prohibit interactions with the *savarna* or "upper" caste women. Interactions between Dalit men and *savarna* women present a challenge to the Brahminical social order by threatening to erode the basis of caste, which rests on the strict social and spatial segregation of castes. Phadke et al. (2009) argue that "upper" caste women are tasked with performing "respectability" by marking themselves as distinct from those with less social privilege, particularly men from oppressed castes and classes. The framing of safety for privileged women as threatened by the lower class or caste man—derided as "*tapori,*" "*pullingo,*" or "rowdy"—is a patriarchal construction of caste society, which privileges notions of "purity" around sex, marriage, and social interactions. As a result, Dalit men are subject to increased surveillance and policing that falsely anticipates their transgression of caste-derived boundaries constructed to order conduct in public spaces. In the next section, I examine how Gaana musicians navigate the social and spatial obstacles presented by such caste discrimination that, in the context of the city, hinges upon a derision of their territorial identities.

Stigma Management and Rejection

Gaana Stephen's viral YouTube music video, "Gumbalaaga Suthuvom,"[3] which has over 7 million likes, claims that he and his friends from the area are, indeed, "*pullingo*":

Ey gumbalaaga suthuvom	We'll roam in our gangs
Naanga ayyo yammanu katthuvom	And we'll shout, "Ayyo amma!"
Katthurenu kettaa	If you ask us why we're shouting,
Unna vaayiliye kuthuvom	We'll punch you in the mouth.
Enga pullingo-lam ellaa bayangaram	My *pullingo* are wild—
Engala paartha Tamanna mayangi	If [actress] Tamanna sees us,
vizhundhudum!	she'd faint!

Through the entire duration of the music video, Stephen smiles beatifically into the camera as he threatens to punch those who complain about him and his "area boys" taking up space on Chennai's streets, humorously drawing out the irony of characterizing a group of friends hanging out as criminal or "rowdy." Dhareshwar and Srivatsan (1996) trace the provenance of this catch-all phrase of "rowdy" to the colonial practice of quashing dissent through the charge of "history-sheeters" who could be arrested for the "disturbance of peace" or "nuisance" (205). In contemporary, urban India, the rowdy is a figure that threatens the middle-class imagination of the city by stoking anxieties about rampant criminalization, resulting in fear of the rowdy, who is almost always a "lower" class and caste man and almost never "upper" caste or middle class.

[3] See the Gumbalaaga Suthuvom music video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBriG9Q51yE.

Gaana musicians often refer to instances of policing and surveillance that result from their stereotyping as "rowdy" or criminal, combined with the persistence of the street as the site of Gaana musical performance. Gaana musicians often describe the music's ascent into popularity as a story of the music's movement from the street to the stage. A few decades ago, concerts would take place on a piece of tarp laid out on the street, but now, makeshift stages on the street have allowed Gaana to be elevated in some respects from its association with the street. Yet, most concerts happen outdoors right on the streets and narrow by-lanes of "slum" areas still, since there are virtually no music halls that would host Gaana artists and their music. Saran once told me half-jokingly, "We don't have those air-conditioned halls with the cushioned seats, right? So we make do with the street because this is where we started from anyway." In the face of institutional absences and the ghettoization of Gaana, even music videos feature the streets as the stomping grounds of the young men depicted as the "*pullingo,*" who are filmed riding their bikes down wide open roads by the beach. The scenes of young men driving their bikes gleefully down open roads points to a desire to actively navigate the city's streets without fear of surveillance—a desire that is thwarted by the extensive policing that Gaana singers face in occupying streets where they are marked as "out-of-place."

Sunil narrates an incident in which he was hired to sing at a funeral in a slum south of Chennai Central railway station, a landmark that is shorthand for residents' imagined boundary between the northern and southern parts of the city. Gaana funeral concerts usually begin around seven or eight in the evening and go until late in the night. At first, bereaved family members and members from the community grieve their loss to mournful numbers, and then as the music becomes more upbeat, they dance as the music coaxes them out of their sadness for a night of fleeting revelry. Sunil finished singing at a Gaana concert that went on until 2:00 a.m. and was

waiting for a friend with a bike to pick him up since he doesn't own a vehicle. As he waited on the main street a little further away from this South Chennai slum, a policeman drove up to him and asked him why he was "loitering" on the street. Sunil surmises that it may have been the clothes he was wearing that day—a hoodie, cropped jeans, and sneakers—or the blonde streak in his hair, but the policeman had identified Sunil as being out of place in this part of town. Sunil quickly scrambled to prove that he was not a "rowdy." He explained to the policeman that he was there to sing at the Gaana concert, but Sunil tells me that this doesn't always spare young men like him from being beaten by the police, especially if the concert isn't over yet and the police come to shut it down on account of "noise pollution."

The use of bureaucratic conceptions of "noise" in urban policing points to the ways that the spatialization of caste marks as "out-of-place" both the cultural practices and the physical presence of young, Dalit men on city streets. Whereas Brahminical temple and wedding rituals such as *oorvaalam* (processions) receive the tacit and explicit support of bureaucratic machinery and policing, the presence of Dalit men and Gaana musical events or funerals on the streets are subject to hyper-surveillance that assumes the posture of policing "noise pollution." This dichotomy in the ability to sonically occupy streets and claim a right to the city displays the ways that sonic evaluations of social and spatial legitimacy are entrenched in bureaucratic and governmental ordering of public spaces. Gaana music concerts at funeral wakes, which typically extend well into the wee hours of the morning, necessarily involve a sonic and physical occupation of the street as makeshift stages are erected in the absence of institutional spaces for musical performance. In an interspersed city, where "slum" colonies abut wealthier residential colonies, Gaana concerts and sonic occupations of space may be arbitrarily shut down through the leveraging of bureaucratic machinery around "noise pollution." Gaana musicians share that they

must work with the families of the bereaved to obtain the required "noise" permits from local police stations ahead of funeral concerts. Even after obtaining these permits, Gaana concerts are subject to being shut down or abruptly canceled after "noise complaints" from their wealthier neighbors. At the same time, loudspeakers often blast Hindu religious music onto the streets with few sanctions, suggesting that the evaluation of "sound" as either "musical" or "noise" are deeply tied to the context of their social and spatial origins. Policies against noise "pollution" acquire an ambivalent character with the capacity to adjudicate what forms of sonic occupation are deemed legitimate or illegitimate.

Social actors in the musical world of Gaana come to be hyper-visible and subject to violent policing even as they reappropriate the negative valuations of slurs like "*pullingo*." Gaana musician Sunil's friend from north Chennai describes how his sartorial style that is described as "*pullingo*" style becomes targeted in his navigation of the city.

> I used to have pink highlights in my hair and I would wear this earring in my left ear. But one day, the police beat us up pretty badly on our way back from singing at a funeral. I knew then that my *adayaalam* [signature] hair and earring would give me respect from the other guys, but it singles me out to the police. My mother cried and pleaded with me to please stay safe, so I cut off that part of my hair and I took out the earring.

Sunil's friend deals with the stigma of being spotted as "*pullingo"* by removing bodily markers of his caste and place identity. The same markers that afford countercultural distinction to Gaana musicians and Dalit male youth become signals of social and territorial identities in the context of urban policing.

Stigma management and repudiation strategies for Gaana musicians involve a reappropriation of the negative stereotypes of criminality, poverty, and hypersexuality that are ascribed to them through various registers, but especially through the targeting of their territorial identities. Sunil's Gaana musical group called the "Black Boys" respond to the stigmatization of

their address and social location by rejecting and repudiating the stigma altogether. In their song, "Vyasarpadi," which refers to the neighborhood of north Chennai that the group is based out of, they mix Gaana lyricism with Tamil language rap to reject the territorial stigma meted out to the poorer residents of Vyasarpadi. The song lyrics argue that Vyasarpadi has been painted in a negative light, and challenge the listener to accept a different picture of the area as presented by its own residents. "Vyasarpadi" rejects the framing of its residents as "rowdy," instead choosing to delineate the various landmarks, talents, and historical markers of the neighborhood that its singers claim ought to earn them respect, not stigma. The Black Boys' subversion of the stigma attached to their Vyasarpadi, north Chennai address is indicative of a broader range of strategies by which territorial stigma is resisted. The resistance to tags of "local" or "*pullingo*" or "north Chennai" do not take the form of mimetic aspiration to dominant caste notions of hegemonic masculinity. Rather, through the use of sonic and visual representations of the self, Gaana musicians challenge the very foundations of such discrimination by delinking these labels of "local" or "rowdy" from the sting of their casteist implications.

In other cases, Gaana musicians engage with the negative stereotypes that circulate via mainstream media by reappropriating territorial stigma. The reappropriation of stigma often exaggerates negative stereotypes of criminality or marginality attributed to young, Dalit men with the effect of criticizing its circulation. In Gaana music videos that sometimes get millions of views, the negative connotation of "local" is reappropriated by these young men who proudly proclaim their "local"-ness as a marker of subaltern and simultaneously "*weightu*" or "mass" identity—Chennai slang for "cool." The slur of "*pullingo"* is reappropriated to subvert the negative connotation of the slur. Stephen's "Gumbalaaga Suthuvom" song at the start of this section is an example of the ways that Gaana musicians subvert its negative valence by proudly proclaiming

themselves as *"pullingo,"* and also by circulating visuals of themselves dressed stylishly, adopting "cool pose," and freely occupying the very same streets on which they experience surveillance in daily life.

Reappropriating the tags of "local" or "rowdy" often take a tone that is "jolly," or humorous, offering an entry point into the critique of caste discrimination without becoming pointedly moralizing. Songs like "Gumbalaaga Suthuvom" exaggerate tropes of violence with the effect of criticizing their operation while also appealing to their predominantly young listeners with performances of "*gethu*" or "cool." Gaana singers have also responded to the devaluation of the north Chennai tag by reclaiming their ownership of the "area" that they come from. Especially with the advent of films like Pa Ranjith's, which explore the Dalit identity within the context of urban life, Gaana songs have doubled down on the reappropriation of place-based identity in north Chennai as a mode of expressing defiance to the dominant caste urban order. Studies of hip-hop in the US context show that hip-hop provides a politics of recognition and rage and an aspirational focus for urban youth up against marginalization, isolation, and exclusion (Lamotte 2014) by offering "an alternative sense of place, a means of interpreting the world" (Pieterse 2010). Even in the case of Chennai, Gaana offers Dalit male youth an alternative space in the city to find affiliation with one another by challenging urban exclusion and creating new meanings of belonging and ownership within the city. Lamotte's (2014) assertion that hip-hop provides not only a means for recognition, but also an outlet for *rage* explains the affective politics behind Gaana and Gaana-rap fusion that adopt the posture of defiance.

For example, in a 2021 Tamil rap video by Asal Kolaar called "Jorthaale,"[4] Gaana-style "*gethu*" is fused with fast-paced Tamil rap to the beat of the *parai*. The song, released on YouTube, has over 22 million views and counting, delivering a message of defiance that blends humor with territorial self-assertion in just over two minutes. Asal Kolaar sings:

Evlo kaas vandhaalum change aava illa chance	I will never change, no matter how much money I get,
Bandhaa-laam kaataadha aaduvom dance	Don't show me attitude, we will dance
Chennai oda face north Madras, local guys	North Madras is the face of Chennai, local guys.
Venaam advice!	Stop giving us [youths] advice!
Ey jorthaalaya urtaadhe	Stop bugging me
Thortaa thookinu mertaadhe	Stop chasing me
Karatha kathunu mertaadhe	Stop flexing, or else
Apram paduthukuve jorthaala	I'll send you to bed with a fever.

Jorthaale became a viral hit on YouTube upon its release for its pithy, rhythmic lyrics and the encapsulation of defiance that the Gaana musical movement offers its community of listeners. When Asal Kolaar sings, "I will never change, no matter how much money I get," he echoes the sentiments of many Gaana singers and rappers who strive, first and foremost, to remain relatable to their audiences in Chennai's oppressed castes and classes even as they sing about aspirations to material wealth. This emphasis on relatability—"keeping it real" (Forman 2000)—is also

[4] See the Jorthaale music video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T61Sa9KD5jw.

grounding in the sense of their *emplacement* within the geography of the city as being from "north Chennai." Kolaar raps, "North Madras is the face of Chennai, local guys, stop giving us [youths] advice!" in the signature format of defiance and pride in territorial identity presented in many Gaana music videos. "Stop giving us [youths] advice," again puts Kolaar firmly back in conversation with his listeners, who are exhorted to live young and carefree without regard to the strictures of society. Self-expression in this countercultural framework builds upon defiance to the codes of dominant caste urban society that polices young men ostensibly from "north Chennai," and Gaana and Tamil rap afford alternative spaces for the expression of defiance and even rage that such surveillance creates. The chorus of Jorthaale captures this casual defiance: "Stop bugging me, stop chasing me, stop flexing, or else I'll send you to bed with a fever." The point is not, however, for Asal Kolaar to appear to be violent, but rather, to embody a sense of "jolly" defiance that allows viewers and listeners to relate to this posture of pride in their social and spatial location. Asal Kolaar's insistence that he will dance, surrounded by break dancers in the music video, reflects not only the aesthetics of Gaana, but also global hip-hop, the ethos of which Bronx-based rapper and DJ, Afrika Bambaataa, defined as including rapping, break dancing, and "knowledge of the self," referring to a critical consciousness about the oppression of history and exclusion (Pieterse 2010). Gaana and Tamil rap closely resemble this ethos by embracing and disseminating the knowledge of historical exclusion and oppression faced by oppressed caste communities living in urban informal settlements.

"North Chennai" as a label for the self-identification of young, Dalit men from "working class" areas or informal settlements thus offers a strategic alternative to collectivize under its banner rather than defer to its devaluation by dominant castes. Humor subverts and effectively topples the casteism of territorial stigma and gestures at a countercultural identity that

reappropriates the very territorial identity—"north Chennai"—that is consistently degraded in Chennai's caste society. A strain of Gaana music that has become popular is the type of "area Gaana" that expresses the pride of being from areas of the city that are stigmatized within the caste framework, producing songs such as Jorthaale and Gumbalaaga Suthuvom. This countercultural expression of defiance subverts the negative valence of "local"-ness or "north Chennai"-ness by mocking the aesthetic foundations of dominant caste society and asserting instead the "*weightu*" or "cool" of Gaana sartorial and speech styles. The spate of Gaana songs that successfully embody such stylistic defiance has influenced Tamil film music too, which is often considered to be "mainstream" or "pop" music in Tamil Nadu. As a result, Tamil film heroes like Dhanush have adopted such defiant postures and countercultural aesthetics in films ranging from "Pudhupettai" (2006) with songs like "Enga Area Ulla Varatha[5]" ("Don't Come into Our Area") or actor G.V. Prakash Kumar in "Kuppathu Raja" (2019) with songs like "Enga Area Engaludhu" ("Our Area is Our Area"). In "Enga Area Ulla Varatha", the lyrics are as follows:

Ai padicha naaiye, kitta varaatha	You literate dog, don't come near.
Enga area ulla varaatha	Don't come into our area—
Pudhupettai, Kasimedu, ennoru Vyasarpadi	Pudhupettai, Kasimedu, and Vyasarpadi [north
enga area	Chennai localities] are all our areas;
Anna Nagar, KK Nagar, T Nagar, Boat Club	Anna Nagar, KK Nagar, T Nagar, and Boat
unga area	Club are your areas.
Enga area ulla varaatha	Don't come into our area.

[5] See the video for Enga Area Ulla Varatha here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWDXNg-sxzw.

As these lyrics demonstrate, musical turf lines between "north" and "south" Chennai are drawn with the symbolic intent of displaying defiance to the entry of dominant and elite castes from wealthier parts of town—like Anna Nagar, KK Nagar, T. Nagar, and Boat Club—into areas of residence typically associated with poor, oppressed castes like Pudhupettai, Kasimedu, and Vyasarpadi, all located in "north" Chennai. The experience of segregation that young men of latter areas face in navigating wealthier parts of town do not produce a desire to be included in dominant caste spaces, but rather, generate a countercultural disposition of mutual repulsion and the demand for dignity. "Don't come into our area" captures the defiance of residents in neighborhoods that are consistently derided and degraded for their stereotypical association with members of oppressed castes and especially Dalits. The song, however, is not part of an independent Gaana repertoire, nor does it resemble the production or instrumentation styles typically found in Gaana. Rather, it captures the ethos of territorial defiance and reappropriation typically found in the Gaana repertoire, but transposes it to a film musical aesthetic that is voiced by a dominant caste hero, Dhanush.

In the Tamil film "Bigil" (2019) with mass film hero Vijay, the song "Verithanam"[6] uses the word "*pullingo*" as Vijay adopts the cool pose and claims that he is a "rowdy." But Saran, a Gaana singer, says that "pullingo" is a word that has long been used among Dalit communities in Chennai to refer to "friends" or "the guys" as a term of endearment and intimacy. As this countercultural slang and stylistic expression of Dalit masculinity have become appropriated by dominant caste film actors and songs, terms like "*pullingo*" have been popularized even among dominant caste youths who reify the negative valences and stereotypes affixed to Dalit men. As a

[6] See the video for Verithanam here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtd_VveAEaI.

result, Gaana Stephen suggests, the word *"pullingo*" or accusations of being "*local*" have become tropes that stand in for casteist slurs. These terms are leveled by dominant caste individuals to degrade poor, Dalit men's place in the city and the stylistic elements of their aesthetics that they seek to reappropriate.

In reality, independent Gaana music videos that are self-produced by these young men outside the ambit of film musical production seek to celebrate the friendships they share with other young men from the area where they grew up with and depend on for various affective and material needs. Stephen confirms that it is his "area guys" or *"pullingo*" that helped him pull together the resources he needed to produce his viral song, "Gumbalaaga Suthuvom." Even in "Jorthaale," Asal Kolaar celebrates the "local guys" who are his friends beyond romantic heartbreaks and family troubles. This is similar to the hip-hop "posse," "a fundamental social unit binding a rap act and its production crew together, creating a collective identity that is rooted in place and within which the creative process unfolds" (Forman 2000). In these ways, "turf" and territorial identity are central to the affective reimagining of alternative spaces for Dalit men to inhabit in a city where their actions and occupations of public spaces and streets are constantly surveilled and policed.

Gaana music thus offers us a lens to understand how members of the purported urban "underclass" view and manage their own stigma, offering an agentic understanding of how urban inequality is produced, and more importantly, subverted and resisted. The spatialization of caste, which produces harmful stereotypes that are linked to place identity, is thus also drawn into musical self-assertion for Dalit youth who identify with the reified concept of "north Chennai" and change or challenge its negative valence.

Urban Inequality and Anti-caste Resistance

Gaana music has historically been the music of urban Dalit communities living in "slum" areas, making it inherently political in its reflections on urban inequality. Urban inequality in Indian cities is reproduced through the spatialization of caste, presenting a view of segregation that goes beyond the US-based model of isolation and concentration of poverty. As caste stigma comes to be spatialized, residents of negatively stereotyped neighborhoods face the consequences of such social and spatial inequality in outcomes like limited urban infrastructure services, fewer opportunities for socioeconomic mobility, housing insecurity, and continued caste discrimination that is linked to their place identity.

At the level of urban infrastructure, areas associated with the residence of Dalits have become typecast as "slums" in conjunction with the systemic poverty and discrimination experienced by their residents. Gaana songs capture the extent of urban inequality by pointing to the lack of equitable urban welfare and infrastructure in their areas of residence. In 2015, during Chennai's typically devastating monsoon season, the city was submerged in rainwater, and many localities, especially in north Chennai, underwent an extenuated experience of disaster as streets, buildings, and crematoriums flooded. Gaana Muthu writes and sings songs about experiences of urban inequality in the characteristic "jolly" style of Gaana, and the floods were a topic of one of the songs he performed at a public event organized in 2019 by the Civic Action Group (CAG) at a park in T. Nagar.

Figure 3.2. *Gaana Muthu's performance at T. Nagar*

The song resembles the songs of fisherfolk in the city with its inclusion of the repetitive sound "*yelelo*"—a sound that provides sonic synchronicity to the fisherfolk's rowing action. Muthu's song riffs on that sound but situates it in the context of Vyasarpadi streets, which remained flooded well beyond the rest of the city.

Yelelo, yelelo	*Yelelo, yelelo*
Chinna oru boat-la	In a small boat,
Naa travel panna roadtula	On a road that I traveled,
Nikka kooda edam illa	There was no place to even stand,
Odhunga kooda edam illa	There was no place to gather.
Idulla epdi toilet-ku poven?	In all of this, how do I go to the toilet?
Nammakku thanni nikka eri kolam thevai	We need tanks and reservoirs to catch rainwater.
Idhulla illa arasiyal	[They say] there's no politics in this,
Ellaam inga arasiyal	[but] everything is political here.

Iyarkai aala vella varum usual-ah?	Is it usual for nature to cause flooding?
Government kandukkaama vittuduchu casual-ah.	The government has neglected us casually.
Yelelo, yelelo.	*Yelelo, yelelo.*

Muthu's song takes the experience of flooding in Vyasarpadi and turns it into both a tool of public education as well as a critique of government inaction and failure to relieve north Chennai's residents from the experience of disaster. Many Gaana songs adopt this dual role by exhorting its listeners to pay attention to the inequities of governance that are deeply rooted in unjust politics, but this song also makes a broader pedagogical point about the importance of preserving pre-existing techniques of urban ecological conservation. The stanza about *eris* (reservoirs) and *kolams* (tanks) refer to the erasure of ecological conservation systems by the government, which Muthu interjects conversationally to say, "The *eris* and *kolams* that once prevented the city from flooding are now someone's parking lot." Muthu's comment sheds light on the manmade and government-induced nature of the disaster. He does not negate the devastating effects of the floods elsewhere in the city, but by situating himself in his own area of Vyasarpadi, he is able to autobiographically indicate the extenuated experience of flooding that north Chennai residents faced because of structural and governmental neglect. He refuses the anti-political framing of disaster by asserting that "everything is political here." But rather than taking a purely didactic approach, the song is upbeat and humorous with the periodic insertion of *"yelelo*" as Muthu mimes rowing a boat around the streets of his area.

In another song, Muthu brings attention to how the city's waste is dumped in north Chennai and set ablaze, adversely affecting the city's most oppressed residents by suffocating them with

the smoke of openly incinerated waste. In this song, he personifies the smoke itself, and plays humorously with the "rowdy" ethos of popular Gaana songs:

Naan dhan da Yaman-oda son	I am Yama's son,
Saavadippen ungalellaam ninnu	I will line you up and kill you.
Ayyo TB kuppa noyya tharuven	I will give you tuberculosis and other diseases,
Unga uyiru edukka seekramaa varuven	I am coming to take your life.

In this verse, Muthu lends voice to the smoke as Yama's "son." Yama is the Hindu god of death, and by claiming that the smoke is Yama's son, he frames the incineration of waste in north Chennai's dumping grounds as a consequence of the inequitable systems of waste management that underscore the precarity of north Chennai residents' well-being. North Chennai experiences casteist exclusion at the level of policy, which results in the persistence of Dalit communities' employment in waste collection and sanitation, and their heightened exposure to the toxicity of inequitable urban waste management in the city. Songs such as these, addressed directly to the communities that most keenly experience urban inequality, serve to educate, politicize, and organize listeners to resist and develop political consciousness about their own social and spatial location in the city.

In addition to songs about structural urban inequality, Gaana singers also point to broader systemic injustices that make education and secure employment unattainable to the city's most oppressed castes and classes. The promises of formal education have failed to supersede the juggernaut of caste discrimination, a phenomenon that is captured by the Gaana musical world. The disillusionment of Gaana musicians with the promised rewards of formal education and employment is commonly cited as a reason for why they choose to take up this profession that

remains stigmatized, even by their own families who recognize that their Gaana-singing sons will be negatively reputed in their own community and society at large. Junior Nithya is a Gaana singer from north Chennai whose music videos have over 50 million views. He describes his ascent to fame and mobility as shaped by his Gaana musical career after the failure of a "formal" education in securing the socioeconomic mobility promised by "middle-class" markers of success:

> My father was a coolie. He lifted luggage for rich people at Chennai Central railway station, and he would see how they dressed and walked. They would wear suits and go to work in a car. He really wanted that for me too, and so I went to college with the money he saved up. Then when I graduated, I realized that no number of college degrees would guarantee me the kind of job that people in South Chennai can get just by being born and having fair skin and going to elite colleges. So I quit trying and made myself famous through Gaana. At first, my father was upset because people look down on Gaana singers for being rowdies. But then he saw that I was able to afford a fancy new bike, I started dressing more stylishly, I got my sister a job as a nurse as a favor from one of my fans. Then he didn't mind so much. He actually became proud of me, and I owe all of this success to Gaana.

Nithya's autobiographical telling of his rise to fame suggests that for him and others like him, success is to be found outside the formal structures of education and "respectable" employment. The increased visibility and popularity of a Gaana musician through their viral YouTube music videos and live performances afford some resources and networks that may result in some financial security for the musician's family. But as Gaana singer Saran described, success in the Gaana musical world is precarious and fleeting, and the Gaana musical world lacks institutions and stages to accommodate everyone who wants to successfully establish a career as a Gaana musician.

As illustrated in the previous section, the negative stereotypes about place identity severely disadvantage residents of slum areas in their individual navigations of the city and in their search for socioeconomic mobility. However, these negative stereotypes also adversely impact communities of the urban, Dalit poor at the structural level in the way that they mediate policing and governance. Residents of slum areas are often framed as criminal, polluting, or itinerant in

urban policy to justify their displacement and eviction to rehousing complexes at the outskirts of the city. In response, Gaana songs exhort their audiences to prevent politicians from splitting the slum vote by caste and denounce the evictions that displace slum residents to the urban periphery. Songs such as Muthu's "*Yelelo*" lament the working conditions of the manual scavengers of waste, who remain overwhelmingly Dalit and poor despite the pretensions to "world-class" city-making touted by urban governance. In songs about the city, Gaana musicians assert their indigeneity to the city, lamenting that although their ancestors helped construct the city, their descendants are denied access to these same urban spaces. Gaana songs often refer to anti-caste leader, Dr. B.R. "Babasaheb" Ambedkar and his vision for a caste-free society, echoing his call to rid society of urban caste discrimination. Anti-caste messaging in Gaana can take different forms, ranging from recounting autobiographical experiences of caste inequality and discrimination to normative calls to end caste discrimination by launching an anti-caste cultural revolution. The latter is particularly evident since 2018, when the Casteless Collective was formed, the ensemble that performed the song reproduced in the introduction of this chapter. Casteless Collective has taken on a range of social inequalities and tackled them in compositions that fuse Gaana with hip-hop, jazz, or rock in order to challenge caste inequality and give a cultural articulation to an anti-caste resistance.

As caste continues to striate experiences of urban life, Gaana singers show the ways symbolic expressions of caste discrimination amount to negative stereotypes that mediate the displacement and dismissal of their right to the city. Gaana affords spaces—whether on streets or in virtual spaces—to transform the exclusions of urban spaces in the city into a "meeting point for building collective life" (Lefebvre 1991). Gaana musicians point to the persistence of caste discrimination and inequality in the city, in contrast to the Brahmins of the Carnatic musical world who refuse to recognize the persistence of caste for fear that they would be relegated to the "pre-

modern" realm. The anti-caste messaging of Gaana points uniquely to the condition of urban Dalits, who demand that their musical culture be noticed and echo a refusal to participate in their own oppression. Instead they strive to make a stigmatized music popular and rich with social commentary on the conditions of urban inequality.

Conclusion: Spatializing Caste

As I have shown in this chapter, the spatialization of caste in Chennai relies on symbolic modes of operation in which musicking serves as a key terrain that enables boundary construction, maintenance, and resistance. Urban sociological research that is concerned with how social and spatial group difference is constituted in cities of the Global South ought to consider music as a sociological site of inquiry that enables better understandings of how social categories become portable in the spatialization of class, race, and in this case, caste. The operation of caste as a multivalent framework for social interactions is far more complex than this chapter's focus on the polarized Brahmin and Dalit social groups and their musical practices would suggest. In Chennai alone, hundreds of caste groups jostle for dominance, let alone the rest of Tamil Nadu state or all of India, where thousands of sub-caste groups or *jatis* contest for cultural, sociopolitical, and economic power. Similarly, Tamil Nadu is home to hundreds of musical sub-genres that are associated with different caste, class, and regional constituencies and serve discrete social and cultural purposes. However, the focus on these two caste groups in Chennai and their respective musical worlds of Carnatic and Gaana music reveals crucial insights into the spatialization of caste as understood through musical participation.

Symbolic boundary-making and the maintenance of these boundaries to cement cultural power are central to the reproduction of caste privilege and dominance among Tamil Brahmins, who have historically been the focus of the Tamil Dravidian movement that has sought to challenge

the sociocultural dominance of Brahmins. In contrast, the spatialization of caste has negative material consequences for the Dalit, urban poor who have historically been dismissed by the non-Brahmin movement of Dravidian politics that predominantly comprise "middle" castes in Tamil Nadu state. The urban history of Chennai has equated north Chennai with Dalit identity, indicating a caste spatialization that uses the place identity of north Chennai to devalue Dalit individuals, style, culture, and imagined places of origin. I show in this chapter that the negative stereotypes coalesce to follow Dalit men in the city and obstruct their free navigation of the city. At the same time, the present moment of anti-caste assertion taking place in the Gaana musical world suggests a new turn in the history of Dalit politics that assumes a cultural articulation in self-assertion and critiques of *urban* caste inequality. By thinking through how musical cultures that serve as codes for social group identity constitute caste spatialization in the city, urban sociologists can make sense of the more invisible, symbolic forms of both boundary maintenance and resistance that animate urban cultural politics. More broadly, this research project suggests that there is tremendous benefit to the fields of urban sociology as well as critical caste and race studies in understanding the anti-caste urban, Dalit expressions of musical resistance in the context of global resistance movements that reappropriate stigmatized cultural practices to challenge urban inequality.

Chapter 3

Saffron and Blue: Brahminical Hindutva Cultural Politics and the Dalit Anti-Caste Movement in Chennai

As the sun sets, this stretch of beach is lit up only by the neon glare of signs from cafes and restaurants across the street meant for the more affluent beach-goers that live in this southern Chennai locality of Besant Nagar. It is January 27, 2019, and a show is about to take place here on the beach as part of the fifth annual installment of the Chennai Kalai Theru Vizha, or the Chennai Arts Street Festival. The festival was born in the wake of a protest against an expressway that was being planned between two parts of the coastline that would destroy this entire stretch of the beach, displacing the fisherfolk that live along the coastline and depend on it for housing and income. A coalition of fisherfolk, civil society organizations, and activists banded together to successfully resist the construction of the expressway. This incident of near-erasure of the city's marginalized fishing communities culminated in this arts festival, created with the intent to shine a light on the urban spaces and art forms historically neglected from typical depictions of "culture" in the city. The goal of the festival was, in the words of its organizers, "to equalize all arts, spaces, and people." Some of the notable organizers in the history of the festival have included Nityanand Jayaraman, an environmental activist, and T.M. Krishna, a Carnatic musician with a recent history of raising issues of casteism, exclusivity, and bigotry within Carnatic music circles.

The mission of equality embraced by this arts festival mirrors the anti-caste agenda of the Chennai-based sixteen-member ensemble performing at the festival this evening. Casteless Collective fuses Gaana with hip-hop, rock, and jazz. Casteless Collective takes a staunchly anti-caste stance in the range of political themes that comprise its original compositional repertoire.

The band had been pared down to just four members for this evening's performance, two Gaana singers: Muthu and Balachander; Arivu, a rapper and singer; and Gautham, who plays the *molam,* a Tamil drum traditionally played at funerals.

As the performance starts, stage lights illuminate the ring of people gathered on the beach around the performers. The audience claps and cheers the band as they perform some of Casteless Collective's well-acclaimed original compositions. One of the songs they sing this evening is their most famous—"Beef Song"—which criticizes the government's ban on beef, challenging the casteist and Hindu majoritarian policy that would destroy the livelihoods and diets of people dependent on beef and its production, mostly comprised of poorer Dalit and Muslim communities. And then, they begin to sing a new composition, "Modi Masthan." This song is a riff on a Gaana standard called "Nagore Masthan" popularized by a Gaana singer from the 1990s, Gaana Pazhani, and it references a saint from the Tamil Sufi mystical tradition. The modified lyrics prove to be a double entendre, for the phrase "Modi Masthan" refers to a magician or mystic, but can also be taken to refer to the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The double meaning of the song allows for a veiled critique of Modi's brand of Hindutva politics that targets India's Muslims and oppressed castes. But less than a minute into this song, the two policemen standing slightly apart from the audience spring into action. They wave their batons to gesture "no," and then speak to the organizers who, in turn, signal to the performers that they must stop singing this song right away. The performers acquiesce—the singing and percussion stop abruptly—and a moment later, the performance continues with a different song. But in the wake of this incident, there is a buzz in the air as the audience reels from the sudden turn of events.

In the blink of an eye, those performing the song had been censored for daring to critique—however obliquely—India's Prime Minister, an unabashed Hindu supremacist. This moment is

emblematic of the era in which India finds itself. Freedom of speech and expression amounting to political dissent are being curbed with swift ferocity. Legal instruments, such as an amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, are being indiscriminately wielded to arbitrarily detain those branded as seditious for 180 days without legitimate charges. Nowhere was this version of authoritarianism more on display than in the government's response to the 2019–20 protests against Modi's proposed Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which would bar Muslims in neighboring countries from seeking refuge in India. The CAA was particularly dangerous in conjunction with the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), which would require Indian residents to provide documentation of legal citizenship, thus endangering minorities like Muslims and poorer residents of the country that never had, or no longer have, the required papers. The protests were led by students in cities all over India and received the support of political alliances, parties, and other action groups that sought to register their dissent against these blatantly discriminatory propositions. The protests were met with violent repression by the police, who were directed by the government to curb any and all dissent. The cultural arenas of music, art, and writing came under particular scrutiny, as they often do on the cusp of authoritarian regimes, for they contain the most explosive means to spur their audiences to take to the streets. Writers, musicians, journalists, and protesters were rounded up and detained for daring to raise their voices in protest.

In this chapter, I take the anti-CAA/NRC protests in 2019–20 as a moment of rupture in India's democracy to consider not just *how* freedom of speech and expression have increasingly come under threat in Modi's India, but also to investigate the links between social location and political action: *Who* is allowed to be "political" and what forms of politics are rapidly coming under fire in an alarmingly repressive and saffronized India? This sociological question finds

heightened relevance in the wake of a global turn to authoritarianism among elites, accompanied by a concomitant rise in people's movements to demand social equality. The field of cultural politics—whether music, art, literature, film, or dance—is ripe for an examination of how political ideologies are constructed and fostered in conjunction with cultural practices, which are, in turn, tied to social positions. In the case of India, caste and religious identities are becoming especially incendiary in light of caste and communal tensions, proving to be particularly relevant to political action. Using insights from data collected in the two musical scenes of Carnatic and Gaana music in Chennai, I analyze how members of these two polarized caste and cultural communities embark upon two very different trajectories of "doing politics."

I find that Brahmins within the Carnatic music scene perform a disavowal of politics by distancing themselves from the tag of "doing politics," which they perceive to be mired in questions of caste, corruption, and the failures of democracy. This disavowal allows a framing of Brahminical cultural and religious spaces as "apolitical" even as they incubate Hindu right-wing political ideologies that are fashioned to appear as anything other than politics—"culture," "good governance," and "Hindu religiosity." On the other hand, Gaana music, the lyrical content of which emerges from reflections on daily life at the margins of caste and spatial hierarchies in the city, takes the everyday as political. Anti-caste messaging and mobilizing in Gaana takes its cue from the everyday experiences of caste discrimination and links it to local, national, and global strains of political activism that seek to dismantle oppressive power structures. In engaging with this question of how distinct caste groups are "doing politics," I seek to conceptualize how the social location of communities and their associated cultural practices shape political ideologies, orientations, and actions. This question finds particular resonance in the context of democratic backsliding in India as a growing clamor of voices stridently support the national wave of Hindu

supremacy at the same time that anti-caste movements are strengthening by taking a cultural articulation, particularly in Tamil Nadu.

Music and Dravidian Politics in Tamil Nadu

Music is a particularly fertile terrain in which to excavate how caste ideologies have structured distinctive political orientations. Music and its links to sociopolitical considerations of power and caste have always been a hotly contested issue in Tamil Nadu. The question of what role music would play in politics came to the fore as the Dravidian movement gradually acquired political and cultural steam. Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu originated with a movement to question the hegemony of Tamil Brahmins—who comprised less than 3 percent of the state's population—in sociopolitical and cultural institutions of prominence in colonial civil society. By 1916, this movement crystallized into a full-fledged sociopolitical movement, when the Non-Brahmin Manifesto was released for public debate and scrutiny (Geetha and Rajadurai 2001). Despite the expected hostility to this manifesto on the part of Brahmins and intellectuals who supported Home Rule, political non-Brahminism posted a serious challenge to the Brahmin-led Congress nationalism in Madras. The Justice Party gave impetus to the Dravidian movement that was founded on anti-Brahminism, and the party was comprised of a tightly-knit elite that called for the fusion of all non-Brahmin castes (Hardgrave 1965). By 1937, the Justice Party declined, and Gandhi's politics of piety, which sympathized with a Brahminical view of caste, were challenged by the growth of the Self Respect Movement led by E.V. Ramasamy, or Periyar as he came to be known. The Self Respecters propounded a Tamil separatist movement that was opposed to the "holy alliance" of caste, religion, and nationalism. "Dravidanadu" was imagined as a casteless society, an egalitarian land in which the glorious past of Tamil language and culture would be revived to counter the "Aryan" conquest from the north that had eroded and obscured

this past to the indigenously Tamil inhabitants of this land. Eventually, the Justice Party, which was reorganized as the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) by 1945, attracted C.N. Annadurai with the political vision of Periyar. Annadurai seceded from the party following a split with Periyar and went on to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which remains one of the two foremost political parties in Tamil Nadu today.

As illustrated here, the DMK was initially formed in resistance to the nationalistic politics of Brahmins. In 1945, the Dravida Kazhagam took a black flag with a red circle as its symbol to represent mourning for the subordinated Dravidians, with red as a symbol of hope for Dravidanadu (Hardgrave 1965). In contrast, Brahmins had always sympathized with the Congress party, which was attuned to the politics of nationalism. Brahmins occupied key positions of power in the early decades of the twentieth century in government service, teaching, and journalism, and were powerful in their corporate caste status and their public influence (Geetha and Rajadurai 2001). With the gradual success of the anti-Brahmin stance by the leaders of the Dravidian movement, Brahmins began to lose political hegemony but the "so-called sovereign domain of culture uncolonized by the west" became a domain to concretize Brahminical culture and spirituality as the culture of the nation (Pandian 2002). By annexing the language of caste in politics to the cultural domain, Brahmins began the process of elevating their cultural practices in service of building a nation in their image. Here, Carnatic music became a crucial tool in the refashioning of Brahminical desire to maintain social control as indispensable to a nation-building project that required an "authentic" cultural practice, untouched by Islamic intervention (Subramanian 2004). As Carnatic music moved from the royal patronage of Tanjore courts to the western-style music halls of newly urbanizing Madras, it became a site for Tamil Brahmins to reimagine themselves as the true inheritors of a "pure" and "classical" tradition that hinged upon Brahminical, Sanskritic

religiosity, a rigorous and stylized vocal tradition, and an increasingly homogenized audience (Weidman 2006). At the same time, the new institutions of *sabhas*, or music halls, for the classicization of Carnatic represented a forward-looking exercise through which Brahmins established themselves as the inheritors of modernity.

To return to the question of music in Tamil politics, the Tamil *isai*, or Tamil music movement, is indispensable to our understanding of the political forces shaping what role music ought to play in Tamil polity. Weidman (2005) argues that the Tamil Isai movement sought to make music subordinate to language, and in doing so, produced a divergence between Carnatic music and the Tamil language. The Tamil Isai movement was spearheaded by non-Brahmin "high" castes such as Chettiars and Mudaliars, who were staunchly Hindu and Saivite, in stark opposition to the atheistic supporters of Periyar, who thoroughly denounced religion and pronounced Hinduism irredeemable. For the religious non-Brahmin elites, Tamil Isai was a movement that sought to encourage the composition and performance of devotional songs in the Tamil language. According to Subramanian (2004), this movement was important to the self-definition of non-Brahmin elites vis-à-vis the Brahmin elites who favored the Sanskrit and Telugu compositions of the Carnatic compositional trinity—Muthusamy Dikshitar, Syama Sastri, and Thyagaraja—the latter of whose Telugu compositions were central to the reinvention of Carnatic music as a site of authenticity and interiorized musical expression associated with the religious and transcendental dimension of music. In contrast, Tamil Isai was an outgrowth of the movement to deploy the Tamil language as a vehicle for social empowerment of non-Brahmin castes by emphasizing their difference from Brahmin castes. The Tamil Isai movement made its mark in the 1940s when a series of Tamil music conferences were established around Tamil Nadu. They advocated for increased musical composition in Tamil and preferred a spontaneous singing voice, which was

seen as a natural extension of accessibility of lyrics in the Tamil mother tongue. The Tamil Isai movement had few takers in the anti-Brahmin movement, and Periyar rejected it entirely by criticizing it for the blind devotion and religiosity that he argued could only enslave the non-Brahmin subject. Yet, Tamil Isai made its mark on Carnatic music too, with some singers responding to the call for increased Tamil compositions, and the Madras Music Academy eventually softened its anti-Tamil stance to allow for Tamil compositions.

The history of the Tamil Isai movement reveals some of the crucial contentions of Carnatic music in relation to its present-day Brahminical character. First, it exposes the centrality of Sanskritic Hindu religiosity to the making of Tamil Brahmin identity. Second, Carnatic music was reimagined as a "higher" music in the urban context of the *sabha*, which could not be imbibed without training. This classicizing move in Carnatic music was part of the project of acquiring a simultaneous "modernity" and exceptionalism for the music and its constituency of Tamil Brahmins (Weidman 2006). Third, the religious and transcendental quality that became attached to Carnatic music reveals the importance of "purity of sound" and "authenticity," which create an impression of rejecting the material world in favor of a spiritual realm of transcendence. However, Pandian's (2002) warning reminds us that this spiritualist reframing of music cloaks the ways Brahmins have annexed invocations of caste into the realm of Brahminical cultural practices such as Carnatic music. Finally, this historical background of Tamil Isai informs contemporary Tamil Brahmin cultural practice and political ideology, which have erected shrines to Sanskritic Hindu religiosity via music in response to the anti-Brahmin Dravidian movement and the Tamil Isai movement, which aimed to democratize music by favoring simpler compositions in the Tamil language.

If Tamil Brahmins wielded their influence over this cultural domain of Carnatic music to establish their sociocultural dominance as a corporate caste community in response to the anti-Brahminism of Dravidian politics, then we must consider another community on the other end of the caste spectrum—Adi Dravidas, or the Dalit and Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in Tamil Nadu. In the city of Madras, restrictions were placed on the free mobility and occupation of Adi Dravidas and Parayars, limiting the public space that they could occupy (Geetha and Rajadurai 2001). On the issue of labor, the strikes and lockouts between 1918 and 1921, referred to as the "mill troubles," exposed the extent of caste and class differences as Adi Dravidas began to end their strike and provoked the ire of fellow mill workers (Viswanath 2014b). In terms of their mobility—both physical and social—Adi Dravidas were unfree and provoked the anxieties of elite political classes in the Non-Brahmin Movement. As far as Adi Dravidas were concerned, Viswanath (2014b) argues that both Brahmins and non-Brahmins were caste people, and for the Justice Party, the Adi Dravidas were a threat. This set the precedent for the ambivalent relationship occupied by Dalits within the political matrix of Dravidian politics over the course of the second half of the twentieth century. The Dravida Kazhagam (DK), under Periyar's political leadership, did not take as much effort to woo Adi-Dravidas in order to prevent antagonizing caste Hindus, which Suresh (1992) argues, continued into the legacy of DMK's lack of concern over Scheduled Castes (SC) in Tamil Nadu. Following the Ambedkar centenary celebrations in Tamil Nadu in 1990, Gorringe (2016) shows how Dalit movement organizations coalesced around the issue of Dalit representation in Tamil politics. Abandoning a decade long boycott of elections, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) entered party politics under Thirumvalavan's leadership. Gorringe argues that entering party politics has accentuated the leader-centric nature of VCK, resulting in a weakening of the strongly assertive stance for Dalits that the movement had originally promised.

The entry of VCK into party politics has also led to the adoption of Dravidian party styles of political mobilization, mimicking the Tamil oratorical style instead of reflecting a dominant caste understanding of Tamilness rather than a Dalit one (Gorringe 2007). Devakumar (2007) finds that the upward mobility of some SC castes in Tamil Nadu has attracted the attention of dominant castes and police, resulting in crimes against Dalits rising by 89 percent between 1992 and 2004.

On the cultural front, Dalit assertion has also meant a transformed relationship with forms of cultural labor like parai drumming. For some younger generations of Dalit communities, the parai is a symbol of their forced labor and slavery at the hands of dominant castes. Paraiyar caste communities were expected to play at dominant caste funerals without any compensation save for the raw rice offered to the deceased (Gorringe 2016). This has led to a rejection of the hereditary forced labor of parai drumming for some Dalit communities, who have sought occupations offering socioeconomic mobility and dignity outside of parai drumming. For others, as Sherinian (2014) demonstrates, this reading of parai drumming is challenged by an alternate approach that reframed the relationship with the drum as one capable of heralding social transformation. The parai has been reimagined as an instrument of protest and change, challenging dominant caste norms and bringing an inversion in the stigmatized valence of parai drumming (Gauthaman 2012). Reimaginations of the parai drum, as well as other cultural practices tied to Dalit communities, have sought to valorize Dalit arts through a recasting of these practices as art rather than labor. Arun (2007) shows, for example, how Dalit cultural festivals or *kalai vizhakkal* celebrate these arts and challenge their negative characterization. As I show in the course of this chapter, such festivals represent a new epoch in Dalit self-assertion that rejects the paternalism of Dravidian politics and also dismisses Brahminical registers of artistic value by creating new spaces and meanings for art associated with Dalit communities.

Hindutva Politics and Carnatic Music

The start of Chennai's renowned Carnatic music season in December, 2019, coincided with the anti-CAA/NRC protests that swept the country in a matter of days. By December 10, the bill had been introduced by Home Minister, Amit Shah, and passed in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's bi-cameral parliament. The bill assumed the status of an act by December 12, when the President of India assented to it. The contents of the act would expedite citizenship for all those seeking asylum from religious persecution in neighboring countries, except Muslims, who were notably missing from the act along with Sri Lankan Tamils, Rohingya refugees from Bhutan, and Tibetan Buddhist refugees in China. Protests began to erupt nationwide at this bold act of consolidating Hindu nationalism, especially when viewed in conjunction with other recent anti-Islamic actions of the Hindu-right government in power, such as the repealing the special status held by Jammu and Kashmir through the revocation of Article 370, and the Supreme Court verdict on the Babri Masjid dispute that granted the Indian government the right to build a Hindu temple for the Hindu god, Ram, over the site of the mosque desecrated by Hindutva zealots.

Disavowal of "Politics" and Anti-politics

In the music halls or *sabhas* hosting the concerts as part of the Carnatic music season, the protests seemed like a far cry to the inhabitants of this world of glittering silk saris, melodic improvisations, and aspirations to a transcendental spirituality. Repeatedly, I had been told, "There is no politics here," or "This music takes you away from all these worldly things like politics." The rejection of politics was explained by various concert-goers as stemming from their disdain of the "dirty" world of corruption and in-fighting, relegating politics to a material, polluted act that "others" did—a topic that had no place in this sacralized space of the Carnatic music *sabha*. Yet, the inauguration of the Music Academy's 93rd "Annual Conference" began with a Hindu religious

invocation in Sanskrit, and an interaction with an attendee in the canteen later that morning revealed some of the political beliefs that were circulating in this space. I struck up a conversation with a woman in her sixties, perhaps, and she shared her excitement for this year's season. I asked about the anti-CAA/NRC protests, and she bristled immediately. "Why are they protesting? People love to protest about nothing. Modi's doing good things, so what has to happen will happen. Politicians can't be changed, they will always egg people on to protest, but Modi is different." I asked her what was different about Modi, and she responded, "Modi knows how to lay down rules. We need rules because Muslims in this country are fine. Some of them even come and listen to our music. It's only when Muslims come from outside and politicize them that they become argumentative." I ask where she thinks these "other" Muslims are coming from. "Pakistan," she responds without missing a beat.

The conversation with this woman strikes me as emblematic of many of the beliefs that circulate in Carnatic musical spaces. First, there is a disavowal of politics as a "polluted" and "dirty" act that "politicians" do to pursue divisive ends. Note the clarification in the excerpt above, where Modi is categorized as "different" from other politicians because of his ability to lay down a rule. This leads us to the second point, which is that there is a strong preference for authoritarian rule by a politician who is marked as a "ruler" rather than a regular politician. Third, the comment about "Muslims from outside" reveals the xenophobia stoked by the Hindu-right: fears of "outsiders" stoking trouble in domestic affairs are both stoked and allayed by promises of swift punishment and control on the part of Hindutva leaders.

The fear of "politics" as a polluted activity is managed by the creation of a binary that posits the miasma of politics rooted in material concerns in contrast to the spiritual transcendence promised by spaces of religiosity and sublime experiences of spirituality provided by Carnatic

music, or just "music" as concert-goers refer to this very specific and stylized art form. The "purity" of musical spaces is reaffirmed by public disavowals of polluting talk of politics or caste, making violations of such norms of conduct anathema to the conventions governing these spaces. Elites frame cultural spaces as distinct from politics, but Hansen (1999) writes that "culture is yesterday's politics stabilized, depoliticized, and authorized as 'truth' and 'history.'" The historical framing of Carnatic musical spaces as representative of a "high" nationalistic, spiritual culture has allowed participants to appear as if they are disavowing politics by standing above and outside it, a genre of cultural "anti-politics" that views politics as morally empty or corrupt. The invocation of caste or religious politics by both outsiders and participants in this scene can be deemed illegitimate or unwelcome if those political stances are in opposition to the dominant view of politics.

Cultural Politics of Carnatic Music

Yet, despite the professed anti-political character of the Carnatic music world, these spaces are hardly devoid of politics with religious overtones. Sanskritic Hindu religiosity is pervasive and integral to the Carnatic music world. The religious compositions of the "trinity" in classical Sanskrit and Telugu form the canon of what is performed even today. As Subramanian (2018) notes, even the demand to sing Tamil songs in concerts by the 1940s Tamil Isai movement led to great pushback from institutions like the Madras Music Academy, despite their demands for more accessible, Hindu religious content. This demonstrates the foundation of classicism that was imagined as the basis for a Carnatic music that would orient itself towards the nation and away from the anti-Brahmin, Dravidian politics of the state and towards a Sanskritic version of Hindu religiosity that was squarely rooted in a Brahmanical version of Hinduism. In the middle of a concert at a Chennai *sabha*, audience members often react to the music as if they were in a religious

space, by folding their hands as if in prayer or otherwise being moved by the piety expressed musically or lyrically. However, the performance of that piety requires an intimate familiarity with the meaning of the lyrics, which can only be acquired with the kind of training and socialization that Brahmin families insist upon, and it is the basis for the cultural "authenticity" and "purity" that becomes linked not just with the performance of the music but also the performance of listening and interacting with the music.

In the case of a few members of the Carnatic music world, like musician and activist T.M. Krishna, their political opinions draw the ire of other members. Krishna explains how he came to realize the hypocrisy of an understanding of classicism as unchanged and unbroken lineages of sound, aesthetics, and religiosity. He explained,

> For me I think that the big revelation for me was actually was when I started researching the *Sangeeta Sampradayam*. All my politics began completely music-related, it didn't start from anywhere else. All these notions of something being old and beautiful and carried down and *sampradaya* [tradition], it just went boom. Because when I tried singing what is written in that book, it sounded so horrible. So for me it was scary because my whole notion of beauty was broken.

T.M. Krishna describes his journey of questioning his taken-for-granted assumptions of Carnatic's innate classicism in the form of a "frame break" (Goffman 1974), a moment in which he began to question the claims of sublime, high aesthetics, and beauty touted to be the preserve of Carnatic music. For Goffman, "frames" permit social actors to make meaning of the social world, and a "frame break" is the occurrence of a competing cue that erodes the power of a frame to organize social reality. Krishna was socialized into the belief that Carnatic music has remained historically unchanged and experienced a continuity in aesthetic from its origin in antiquity. But when he began to research this seminal text, the *Sangeeta Sampradayam*, which is revered as a primer on Carnatic music, he began to realize that it defied all conceptions of sonic beauty and aesthetics that

form the frame justifying Carnatic music's classicism. Krishna found that the contemporary view of Carnatic musical aesthetics contradicted the "purist" interpretation of the text and its compositions, which "sounded horrible" to the modern ear. From this point, he arrived at the conclusion that "there is no universality of pitch perfection. That's an absolutely classist, casteist, and racist idea."

Krishna's arrival at the idea that there is no inherent musical or sonic perfection led him to reconsider his relationship to Carnatic music and its social world, revealing that this idea of sonic perfection is absolutely central to the social and cultural legitimacy of the Carnatic music world. As soon as he began to voice his doubts, he experienced flak from his supporters who criticized him for besmirching the image of Carnatic music and objected to his new projects that sought to uncover the Christian and Islamic influences that had historically shaped Carnatic music. He began to write about the stranglehold of caste exclusivity over Carnatic music, and throughout my fieldwork, any mention of T.M. Krishna was met with contempt from Carnatic music listeners and performers. During the anti-CAA/NRC protests, an arrest warrant was issued against him for taking part in the protest at Valluvar Kottam in Chennai and singing the unabridged version of the Indian national anthem. His book *Sebastian & Sons*, written on the basis of research he undertook on the Dalit Christian community that has historically made *mridangams*, a Carnatic percussion instrument, was supposed to be released at Kalakshetra, a cultural institution in Chennai. But after famous mridangist Palghat Mani Iyer wrote a column about his discomfiture with the skinning of a cow—an animal that has become highly politicized by the Hindu-right—to construct the instrument, Kalakshetra canceled the book launch because of its "political overtones." The book launch was relocated to the Asian College of Journalism, where Krishna gave a speech in which he mentioned that despite the cancellation of the book launch by Kalakshetra and the boycotting

of the event by eminent mridangists, his own status as a Brahmin within the Carnatic music world meant that despite these criticisms, the same critics would queue up for his concerts. This statement reflects the question of *who* is allowed to hold political opinions that go against the dominant ideologies of the music world, and what consequences they face. Despite claims of political disavowal, the members of this musical world are particularly vocal when insiders and outsiders challenge the dominant political ideologies that govern these spaces.

A Carnatic musician in his late twenties told me about the performance of in-group status that is demanded of all musicians through an adherence to the norms, symbols, and codes that govern this world. He mentioned that he is not particularly religious himself, but he feels he has to wear his caste mark to gain acceptance and legitimacy from the audience members as well as the *sabha* secretaries who unilaterally decide who performs in these spaces. Another younger Carnatic musician mentioned that she sees the truth of T.M. Krishna's critique of casteism and elitism in Carnatic music's social world, but to publicly side with him would be "professional suicide." The norms that guide this world require an implicit acceptance of Sanskritic Hindu religiosity as the foundational principle of the music, despite evidence to the contrary. Christian composers like Abraham Panditar or Vedanayakam Pillai and Sufi composers like Kunnangudi Masthan Sahib and Kasim Pulayar have been sidelined in the Brahmanical retelling of what constitutes the Carnatic canon, and those who dare to question it are swiftly ostracized.

Carnatic singer O.S. Arun faced controversy and harassment when a member of the Rashtriya Sanathana Seva Sangam (RSSS), a Hindu extremist group, learned that Arun was singing at a Christian event with a long-time collaborator, T. Samuel Joseph, in August, 2018. Arun was shamed on the internet by these self-proclaimed Carnatic connoisseurs and gatekeepers of Hinduism for "betraying" Hinduism by daring to sing Christian compositions. Other singers,

such as Nithyasree Mahadevan and Aruna Sairam, who had also sung for Christian musical events and compilations, were abused and trolled online. Carnatic musicians are also equally involved in the project of gatekeeping Carnatic music and equating it with Brahminical, Sanskritic Hinduism, the most notable example being the wildly popular Carnatic music duo, Ranjani and Gayatri. On the day that the Supreme Court verdict charged the Indian government with building a Ram temple over the site of the desecrated Babri Masjid—a clear victory for Hindutva—Ranjani and Gayatri announced that their concert that day would be devoted to "Lord Ram" and led the audience in a chant of "*Jai shri ram,*" which serves as more than just a religious chant in light of its weaponization by the Hindu-right during communal riots to intimidate their victims and project Hindu supremacy.

In this section, I described the contradictions between self-professed disinterest or disdain for politics by the members of the Carnatic music world and their own tacit and overt espousal of a Hindu-right political agenda. In the next section, I explain how the Hindutva political ideology is more stridently advanced by Tamil Brahmins through a description of a political campaign framed as a cultural and religious event as part of the December music season. I also illustrate how Brahmanical political ideology has seamlessly fused with that of the Hindu political right and produces political orientations that are harmful to the very basis of democracy.

Political Mobilization for the Hindu-Right

As soon as you enter the Tattvaloka building from the busy Eldams Road, it feels like you are entering a Hindu temple rather than an event space. You are expected to leave your shoes outside as a mark of respect for the sacralized space you are about to enter, and the foyer has bookshelves that carry copies of the Hindu religious magazine published eponymously by Tattvaloka that carries the slogan, "The splendour of truth." Tattvaloka is a quasi-religious

institution that is sponsored by the Sringeri Saradha Peetam, which is a prominent Hindu *matha*, a religious and monastic institution adjacent to the institution of the Hindu temple. It is December 2019, at the very start of the December Carnatic music season that sees over 4,000 concerts and "lec-dems," or lecture demonstrations, around the city. This music festival takes place at forty to fifty venues around the city, but the south Chennai locality of Mylapore is the symbolic apex of a hierarchy of spaces for the performance of not just Carnatic music, but various religious activities venerated by Tamil Brahmins. Tattvaloka prizes its location in "the heart of Mylapore" (as advertised on its website), and its magazine is intended to "showcase Indian Vedic knowledge and wisdom." The auditorium doubles as an event space to host talks such as the one taking place today: "Rama Rajya: Mission, Vision & Values for Today." I came to know of the event because it is listed in the hundred-page pocket catalogue of events taking place during "the Season," which is published annually by the sari emporium founded by the prominent Chettiar family headed by Nalli Kuppusamy Chetti, a leading patron of Carnatic musical events and spaces.

The event is well-attended, with most seats in the auditorium occupied by senior Tamil Brahmin audience members, some of whom I have seen at other musical events around the city. Lectures are a part of the semi-academic image that Carnatic music patrons have chosen to project since its reimagining as "modern" music with a serious cerebral and religious component, evident from the fact that the esteemed Madras Music Academy calls its yearly music festival an "annual conference." The lecture taking place today is part of this continuum that radiates from the intellectualizing bent of Carnatic music and extends to these types of "lecture demonstrations," or "lec-dems" for short. The event organizer takes the stage and folds his hand in prayer and chants the Sanskrit religious invocation, "*Shri gurubhyo namaha,"* ahead of introducing the speaker. The emcee introduces Dr. M.D. Athreya as affiliated with Harvard, noting that Athreya has lectured at

the prestigious Indian Institute of Management and writes a column in *Tattvaloka* targeting youth. I look around, and there is no one that can be characterized as "young" in the audience, except for me, perhaps, and even that is dubious. The event is framed as a "campaign" by the middle-aged man who makes the introductions. "I believe there is something we have, and we want to share this with the world. This is what our campaign is all about."

Athreya ascends the stage and says, "*Namasthe, jai shri ram*." The three words "*jai shri ram"* have become synonymous with a Hindu-right war cry, used by supporters to assert and celebrate the Sanskritic Hindu god, Ram, who has become the symbol and epitome of the ultimate values that are exalted in a Hindu ruler. For Athreya to use these words is an explicit signal to the audience, who are also in the know, that he is in support of the Hindutva ideology. The rest of his speech goes on not only to corroborate his support, but indicates his strident advocacy on behalf of the Hindu-right. Athreya looks around at the audience and says that he recognizes and has known many people in the audience for several years, and that this "campaign" has also been underway for many years now. But he makes a significant departure from the use of the word "campaign" by stating that he will now refer to this agenda as a "mission" since the vision is acquiring greater clarity. He clarifies, "People of India are voting more and more wisely." Athreya is referring to the growing support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Modi's leadership, which has been heralded by several exponents of the Hindu-right as the coming of the "Rama Rajya."

The Hindu god Ram has become the symbol of the "saffron wave" that is sweeping India. This Hindu supremacist project, or the political doctrine of "Hindutva," imagines a construction of a Hindu nation that has a common Aryan or Brahmanical "high culture" knit together by a common language, Sanskrit; a body of ancient texts; codes of purity and pollution to uphold caste;

and shared sacred geographies and ritual practices that Hansen (1999) refers to as a "truly logocentrist epistemological operation." As he points out, arms of the "Sangh Parivar," or the family of Hindu-right outfits such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), work at various layers of symbolic integration, incorporating the figurehead of Ram to symbolize "good governance" and the "*bhagwa dhwaj,*" or the saffron flag, which is often hoisted during communal riots to mark Hindu areas or superiority over Muslims as flags are hoisted over Muslim tombs and mosques. Ram becomes part of this symbolic imagery, and the Ramayana, or the Hindu epic that tells the story of this king-god's life, is often mined as quasi-historical text by RSS members to justify and invoke Hindutva ideology. Athreya's own slide deck for his speech begins with an image of Ram and a quote from Gandhi that reads, "I have described Swaraj as Ramarajya and Ramarajya is an impossibility unless we have thousands of Sitas." Gandhi's political doctrine has also been folded into the governance praxis that RSS members advocate—the "upper" caste brand of Hindu religious overtones in Gandhi's own understanding of "good" governance meshes with that of the Hindu-right. This quote captures the ways that terms like "Swaraj," or "self-rule," used to critique British colonialism have resurfaced and been co-opted by "upper" castes and Brahmins today to explain what they perceive in the present-day context as reverse casteism or persecution from minority religions like Islam or Christianity on account of their stridently Hindu supremacist religious and political beliefs. Sita, the wife of Ram in this mythology, is invoked here as a sacrificial figure whose sacrifices are indispensable to the creation of a kingdom led by a ruler like Ram. The exhortation in the quote is to selflessly submit to the process of manifesting Ramarajya, or Ram's kingdom, in present-day India. Athreya describes his—and the RSS's—vision of the Ramarajya, this Hindutva utopian kingdom.

> Ramarajya is not a soft and permissive regime. The society we live in today is not able to rid people of crime because *rajas* and *tamas* are part of the body. Ramarajya requires the stick. This regime will also lead to the flourishing of dance and art.

Athreya asserts that crime is produced by "*rajas*" and "*tamas,*" which according to the Hindu religious medicinal system of Ayurveda, are humors of the body that cause anger, sloth, or other forms of loss of control. "Upper" caste Hindus often use this to deride and negatively stereotype "lower" castes, evidenced by the ways that meat-eating, dancing, or any "loss of control" over the body are perceived as undesirable and thus coded as "low" caste behaviors. Athreya's insistence on "the stick" is an expression of desire to wrest control back and vest it in the hands of an authoritarian leader, who he finds in Modi. This authoritarian rule will lead to the flourishing of "dance and art," he claims, which reflect the concerns of this predominantly Brahmin audience for whom ("upper" caste) culture is the embodiment of naturalized political practices that have become inscribed in binary matrices of good and evil, or purity and pollution (Hansen 1999). Note the common nouns for "dance" and "art" are used here rather than "Bharatanatyam" or "Carnatic," suggesting the taken-for-grantedness of the innate superiority of these specific cultural practices.

Athreya continues to say that the state government is captured by sectarian interests, and that the work culture in India was destroyed because of unions and labor legislation that withheld productivity. Since the 1990s, Athreya argues, things have gotten better with liberalization and the decline in union memberships. All of this suggests to Athreya that people need "to make a transition from working just to live to changing their attitude to being '*karmayogis*' who are willing to do more to manifest the Ramarajya." It is at this juncture that Athreya's talk goes from "vision" to "mission," generating an action plan to manifest a Hindu nation. He argues that Indians suffered from an inferiority complex on the global stage, but insists that the time has come for Indians to

"take pride" in their ancient civilization, referring to this moment as a "renaissance" moment. His plan, as a management professor and an RSS member, involves a blending of modern management techniques with the Upanishads, or the Sanskritic religious texts venerated in Brahminical Hinduism. Speaking to the anger of Brahmins over the issue of "reservations," or affirmative action to benefit historically disadvantaged social groups and caste communities, he says, "Convert the anger creatively into a strategy. We can create an inclusive India, we just need implementation. Parents need to educate themselves about Ramarajya and educate their children also. For parents who don't know about the beauty of say, Carnatic music, will fill their kids' heads with nonsense like Netflix, web, and Microsoft."

Athreya's discourse, much like a significant portion of Hindutva ideology, is particularly insidious in the way that he uses the language of "inclusivity" to play on the fear and anger of the Brahmin hegemons who believe that they have been sidelined and excluded because of the "reverse casteism" that has led to the creation of more opportunities for historically oppressed castes. Further, his own exultation over Carnatic music's "beauty" rather than the nonsense of "Netflix, web, and Microsoft" indicates the paternalistic view taken by many on the Hindu-right with respect to their "youth," who they believe must be guarded against the onslaught of liberalism or westernization that would lead to their "forgetting" of India's Hindu past and future. Athreya's implementation strategy thus involves a pedagogical project. "Teachers should enforce learning Carnatic music and Ramayana at universities and schools. Ramayana needs to be told and retold. We need to have more Sanskrit colleges. Everyone should have their own personal action plan. Ramarajya is like a seed, it will grow. It may not grow in every heart, but even if it is met with skepticism at first, share it with your stakeholders." As illustrated by this excerpt, the vision being

implemented is that of Brahminical Hindusim, replete with cultural propaganda like education in Sanskrit, Carnatic music, and the Ramayana.

Finally, with the help of Dr. Chitra Madhavan, who Athreya describes as "one of us" as well as an acclaimed art historian and expert on "our culture," the final steps of the manifestation of Ramarajya are laid out clearly. The final step that Athreya and Madhavan take is to discredit democratic structures that have been put into place by the Indian Constitution. They bemoan the "inefficient" and "corrupt" state of affairs and blame the "sectarian" interests of politicians and civil servants for it. This is a cloaked way of referring to the Tamil Nadu state government, which has historically taken an anti-Brahmin stance, thus drawing the ire and criticism of Brahmins who have instead pinned their hopes on national-level, Hindu-right politics that favors a Brahminical vision of Hinduism and politics. Madhavan says, "The political class has alienated itself from the people now. In a place like Tamil Nadu, I will be bold and say that Ramarajya as a concept will not sell. Thirukural maybe. *[audience laughs]* Monarchs from ancient India were more cultured and more democratic than our modern politicians. Do you want a democratic monarchy or a monarchic democracy?" Madhavan's snide comment about the Tamil epic of the Thirukural reflects the Tamil Brahmins' frustration at the inability of Hindutva to take root in Tamil Nadu as a result of Dravidian political organizing against Brahminism. The last portion of her statement, framed as a question although it really serves as more of a suggestion, makes the case for the return of a Hindu monarch. Athreya chips in, "Even in Britain, the only stability they have is the queen!"

In short, the talk by Athreya and Madhavan, which was met with thunderous applause from the audience, boldly advocated for the repeal of democracy. Instead, the speakers advanced a Hindutva conception of nationhood that draws from the Sanskritic text of the Ramayana and made the case for a Hindu monarch who would safeguard the material interests of the "upper" caste

Brahmins, who feel that they are no longer served by democratic politics and instead feel that they are becoming victims of a growing anti-caste, anti-Brahminical discourse. Political sociological research shows evidence of a growing turn to authoritarianism across global polities, which is explained by an increased acceptance and naturalization of economic hierarchies (Solt 2012). But as this section illustrates, the preference for authoritarianism is not motivated merely by concerns over economic dominance for caste elites. Rather, political action is mobilized along ostensibly "cultural" or "religious" lines that come from a concern for the preservation of Brahminical hegemony. Considering the historical context of Dravidian politics that has challenged this very hegemony, claims of anti-political stances deflect attention from the Brahminical annexation of the cultural arena to advance a project of consolidating corporate caste status. This Brahminical approach to politics, which is masked by a disavowal of "politics," lends new insight into the existing discourse on the authoritarian turn across different contexts by taking caste as a social position with disproportionate influence on political action.

Gaana and the Anti-Caste Movement

In contrast to parai drumming, which has historically represented the forced labor of Dalit musicians in service of funerals at dominant caste households, Gaana music has historically been by and for the community of urban Dalits whose history is tied to the story of urban expansion in Madras. Although Gaana music was meant to accompany everyday acts of labor, love, community gatherings, and rites of passage like weddings and funerals, over time, different types of Gaana have emerged to reflect its various social purposes: *marana* Gaana*,* for funerals; *poti* Gaana, or competitive Gaana that takes a bardic, storytelling approach and is performed competitively between two or more musicians for a trophy and prize money; route Gaana, which is sung by college-going young men on the public buses that take them to their universities; "advice" Gaana,

through which singers offer timely, humorous words of advice to their listeners about the consequences of driving drunk, not wearing helmets, or a range of other social issues; and Ambedkar Gaana, which memorializes the political and personal victories of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his anti-caste struggle.

Anti-Caste Gaana and Ambedkarite Songs

B.R. Ambedkar is a key figure in the drafting of the Indian constitution and a social reformer who is at the heart of anti-caste politics; that he is enshrined in the Gaana canon is a reflection of the politics of this musical scene. Gaana has evolved in its sound and import over the years, but with the arrival of high-speed internet, musicians have been incentivized to introduce a visual element of style and aesthetic in music videos released independently on YouTube. However, most musicians still perform live at musical events in the community like neighborhood festivals, weddings, or funerals to earn enough to pay for the costs of recording and shooting a music video.

Figure 4.1. *Gaana music video shoot at Vyasarpadi*

When Gaana Guna invited me to attend a music video shoot in his north Chennai locality of Vyasarpadi, I took the first train to get there early in the morning because Guna warned me that the heat would be too oppressive to continue shooting on the street later in the day. It had rained the previous night, so as soon as I got off the share auto at Vyasarpadi Pillar, I noticed that all the by-lanes were severely waterlogged. Guna mentioned that water stagnated on these streets at the slightest hint of rain, which proves to be a recurring problem for the residents of this locality every monsoon season. But Guna had hired break dancers to perform in his music video, and they had decided to use the stagnant water to their advantage. When we reached the street where the video was being shot, one of the dancers was practicing a backflip that sprayed the stagnant rainwater in an arc that followed the neat curve of his own flip. The music video being filmed today was Guna's latest single about his friends in the area. The lyrics pledged his lifelong devotion to them—a bond described as more durable than any love interest. Around 1 p.m., the heat became unbearable, so we decided to take a lunch break at Guna's friend's house.

Some of the crew settled on the chairs at the far end of the room, and I sat on the floor in a circle with the children from the area who had been looking on as the shoot took place. After we finished eating, Guna's friend started telling a story about an incident that had taken place a few days ago. He narrated:

> This Iyer[1] woman needed some guys to paint her walls white. It was a really hot day, so I took a break and leaned against the wall with my hand. She saw me and immediately shouted at me to take my hand off the wall. So I said, "Ma'am, should I bring my hand gloves the next time I come?"

This anecdote was met with laughter and headshaking. Guna responded, "And they'll ask who sees caste these days! This is why we need to keep singing about Ambedkar, so we can make them

[1] A Tamil Brahmin sub-caste.

understand that we will not just take their untouchability sitting down." Guna turned to the children seated on the ground and began to talk about Ambedkar's fight to end caste discrimination, exchanging stories with others in the room. He said that this is how he learned about Ambedkar too, through stories and Gaana songs sung by his family and community at gatherings. Singing Gaana songs about Ambedkar's life and accomplishments is just one of the many ways that Gaana mobilizes a range of anti-caste political ideologies.

Local and Global Cultural Politics in the Anti-Caste Movement

In recent years, there has been a meteoric rise in anti-caste cultural articulations through film, art, and music, particularly in Tamil Nadu. Filmmaker Pa. Ranjith has been instrumental in this movement to recover and celebrate the cultural histories associated with Dalit communities. Pa. Ranjith's films, such as *Sarpatta Parambarai* (2021)*, Kaala* (2018)*,* and *Madras* (2014), depict Dalit life with a multidimensionality that is often missing from dominant caste portrayals of Dalits, which tend to paint a singular picture of abject suffering. Instead, Pa. Ranjith advocates for a fuller depiction of Dalit life that also showcases joy, dignity, and love in addition to highlighting the persistence of casteism that continues to plague Dalit communities in Indian cities and villages. He founded a production house and cultural center called Neelam—"Blue"—which has become the symbolic color of the anti-caste struggle. He has used this color effectively as a motif in many of his films, and the color made an important appearance in the clothing choice of Casteless Collective, a band he helped found in collaboration with bandleader, Tenma. Casteless Collective made their debut performance in 2018. The sixteen bandmembers comprised of Gaana musicians, guitarists, and percussionists all wore tailored blue suits onstage for their performance. Muthu, one of the band members, said that thinking of this moment makes him feel emotional. "I tear up when I think about that moment. I had never worn a suit in my life before, and I had always seen

Ambedkar wearing this blue suit as he fought for us and our rights. When I saw the videos later of all of us in our suits, and I was so happy." Rejecting the loincloth-clad Gandhi, a modern, suited Ambedkar has always been a stronger visual symbol and inspiration for Dalits who aspire to equality, dignity, and respect.

Casteless Collective has been instrumental in encouraging the political undertones of Gaana music to become more overt while also broadening the scope of issues addressed within the repertoire. Original compositions penned for the band by its members have addressed and critiqued a range of social issues: temple entry in Sabarimala for women; the beef ban that adversely affects Dalit and Muslim communities; and the persistence of poor, Dalits in the ranks of manual scavengers who undertake precarious and life-threatening labor to keep the streets clean. Many of the band's Gaana singers have taken this political bent to address local issues of salience. In Muthu's "*Singaara Chennai,*" which takes its name from the "Beautiful Chennai" campaign of the city that embraces a middle-class visuality of the "world-class" city, he critiques this beautification plan that privileges the construction of green parks and beachfronts at the expense of the city's poor, who live in areas where the city's waste is burned. In another song, Muthu sings about the 2015 Chennai floods that inundated many parts of the city, but particularly his locality of Vyasarpadi in north Chennai. As mentioned previously, the song is written in a humorous vein to sound like a Tamil fishing tune traditionally sung on boats, but as we find out, the singer goes around his neighborhood on a Styrofoam raft instead of a boat to survey all the damage. Another song by Muthu exhorts listeners to reject politicians who attempt to politically divide the residents of the slum and evict them to the city's periphery. The political commentary of songs like Muthu's is wrapped up in the local politics of inequality that falls along caste and class lines in the city.

Another key outcome of Casteless Collective and Neelam's cultural organizing has been the critique of cultural bastions in the city that are reserved for Brahmins and other upper castes, such as the December Carnatic music festival in Mylapore. In the three days leading up to 2019, Neelam Cultural Center organized a festival called "Vaanam" or "Sky" Festival, which showcased a range of art forms from Dalit practitioners who have historically been relegated to the street or the *cheri*—the segregated residence of Dalit communities set apart from the "*ooru,*" where dominant castes live. At the festival, Gaana artists were invited to perform onstage along with Oppari musicians and parai artists. Parai drumming and Oppari have historically been associated with Dalit labor as they are traditionally performed by Dalit musicians at the funerals of dominant caste homes across towns and villages in Tamil Nadu. Gorringe (2016b) writes that Dalit artists have expressed that drumming was on par with slavery, where parai drummers would not be paid in cash but instead, were only compensated with the raw rice symbolically offered to the deceased. With the rise in Dalit political consciousness following the 1990 Ambedkar centenary celebrations, which sparked a range of political movements and parties across Tamil Nadu to champion Dalit rights, many of the next generation of parai drummers refused to play the drum. At the same time, as Sherinian (2014) finds, parai drumming has been reframed by practitioners as an important symbol of Dalit cultural history to fight oppression, emerging as the sound of protest across Tamil Nadu.

"Dalit" Arts and the Sound of Protest

The Vaanam Festival was inaugurated with parai drumming. A large circle of fifty parai drummers covered the entirety of St. Ebba's School playground in Mylapore, where the festival was held to mark a symbolic spatial transgression of Dalit arts into an area symbolically associated with Brahmin sociocultural activities. The parai drummers formed a circle to symbolize equality

among all performers, and they were overseen by Che Guevara and Ambedkar, to whom monuments had been erected around the playground. Over the course of the festival, various performers took to the stage, and a makeshift book stand sold copies of key political treatises from the world over translated into Tamil, such as Malcolm X's autobiography, Alex Haley's *Roots*, as well as books by Indian anti-caste leaders such as Iyothee Thass, Periyar, and Ambedkar. The decision to incorporate global political influences in addition to local anti-caste leaders was a powerful symbolic move that places resistance efforts to end caste discrimination on a par with global resistance movements such as the Civil Rights Movement in the US, which tackled racism through cultural and political strategies. The global infusion of cultural influences by Neelam has also seeped into the musical realm.

Tenma describes the Casteless Collective as a "fusion" group that merges Gaana with global influences from jazz, rock, blues, and notably, hip-hop. Band member Arivu has been one of the most prominent and prolific artists to have emerged from Casteless Collective, who admits that he came to rap as a musical form only after joining the band. But he finds that hip-hop is a musical idiom that makes immediate sense to him. Arivu explains, "As far as I'm concerned, the best rapper is my grandmother. Rap is the story of the oppressed, it's really about storytelling. Who told me the best stories? My grandmother." Arivu comes from near Arakkonam, a couple of hours west of Chennai, and his parents were involved in the Arivoli Iyakkam, a central government scheme in the 1990s that used a mixture of music and theater to encourage the children of illiterate farmers around the Tamil countryside to go to school. With both parents being educators and teachers, Arivu was exposed to the political philosophy and doctrine of Ambedkar early on in life. He says about Ambedkar, "My grandfather was a landless laborer, and today, I am an artist who has made it in Chennai and is sitting before you to give you an interview. What is the reason for

this change? Education. How has that happened? Because of Ambedkar's emphasis on spreading education to every corner of India. It is not enough to just worship Ambedkar as another deity. He was against such blind worship. People need to understand why Ambedkar matters so much to the cause of eradicating caste in this country."

Along with music producer OfRo, Arivu started an event called Therukural. The name "Therukural" is a riff on the classical Tamil text of "Thirukural" with a modification to change the "*thiru*" meaning "special" to "*theru,*" or street, and "*kural,"* or verse. Popularized via social media, Therukural was an invitation to artists across the city to perform to each other. Arivu explains, "Therukural is about street artists. Streets are where the common man's issues come to the fore, so I insisted that artists had to necessarily sing about political things that affect common people every day. It is the social responsibility of artists to talk about things that affect people on a daily basis, and this is what I try to do with my music." Arivu's conviction that artists belong on the side of people's issues is a deep concern with the politics of the everyday that made him indispensable to the events that took place in Chennai as part of the anti-CAA/NRC protests.

Protest Music and Resistance to CAA/NRC

By December 16, 2019, people's response to the government's announcement of the CAA and NRC had taken the form of organized protests around the city. The previous night, hordes of Delhi police officers had stormed Jamia Millia University and violently attacked students using batons and tear gas, the visuals of which looped on news channels across the country. Arivu remembers that when he saw it, he could not stop crying. He said, "I got really emotional. Maybe some people saw and then forgot the students getting beaten up. But I saw the student getting thrashed, and I put myself in his place. I've been there, I've been a college student. It made me really sad and I knew that as an artist, I had to do something." Arivu channeled his sadness and

anger at the state of affairs into writing a song, *Sanda Seivom* ("We Will Fight"), which he completed overnight. Arivu's first performance of *Sanda Seivom* before it was filmed as a rap music video, took place at a major protest held in Chepauk in Chennai. He performed it at the protest to the beat of the parai, and the song was an instant hit.

Figure 4.2. *At the anti-CAA/NRC Protest in Chepauk*

The song was filmed in his flat the next day, and it went viral on social media. Arivu recounts his experience of *Sanda Seivom*'s instant popularity. "I went to sleep, and the next

morning, it had taken off. Everyone was sharing it, random politicians and famous people. I knew then that for them to share it, the song must have really spoken some truth."

Sanda Seivom begins with a short excerpt of the Indian national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, sung in an almost mocking tone to visuals of Arivu stirring awake under his sheets. Then, the beat drops and Arivu springs up onto his bed, ready to fight.

Sanda seivom, vaa da Thamizha	We will fight, come forward Tamizha
Sanda seivom, veedhi ku erangi	We will fight, in the streets
Sanda seivom, onnaa seyndhu	We will fight, united as one
Sanda seivom, urimaiya parichaa	We will fight, if our rights are taken away

The song addresses "Tamizha," or all Tamilians, and serves as both a rallying cry to take to the streets and protest the CAA and NRC as well as a political commentary on the history of religious zealotry and casteism that had brought the country to this sordid juncture. "It's important to tell the truth," Arivu raps. At the outset, Arivu recounts a historical narrative of the Aryan conquest of the land of Dravidian peoples, a story that is known to anyone familiar with Dravidian politics. He raps, "We lived here as so many tribes / then some people came here on their horses / they subjugated us from then until now / they grabbed our land, exploited our resources / generation after generation, they refused to touch us / they segregated us into separate religions and castes." It becomes evident through the course of the song that Arivu is not speaking to "them" who have oppressed and subjugated communities, but rather is addressing Dalit and minority communities, who he asserts were the indigenous people on this land before foreign invaders exploited and segregated these tribes into disparate castes and religions. "We cannot forget that!" he warns, with a shake of his index finger. Arivu says in our interview that at first, many of his

musician friends did not like the overt political tone he took in this song. But as the song acquired a life of its own on social media and in the space of street protests that mushroomed around the city, Arivu's song became the refrain of the protest not just in Chennai but also in other cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, where even non-Tamil speakers were able to engage with it because of the English subtitles in the music video. Throughout protests that took place for months around the city, I would hear Arivu's *Sanda Seivom* blasting from speakers or even being chanted and sung by mostly younger protesters at rallies and demonstrations.

Other protests, like the one organized by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), also used music as an accompaniment to raising slogans against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its various key actors like Modi and Amit Shah. But rather than using rap, parai was deployed at the protests to galvanize the crowd and to lend force to the chief sloganeer who would shout out slogans to the beat of the parai, and the crowd would respond. Various WhatsApp messaging groups cropped up to plan and inform people about protests that were taking place in the city, and many of the posters quickly put together had parai or people playing parai as a symbol to indicate protest. Sherinian writes, "The parai drummer has become the icon of the Tamil Dalit liberation movement" (2014, 13), inverting the stigmatized symbolism of the drum to challenge Brahminical hegemony and the degradation of Dalit cultural expression. While the CAA protests were very specifically targeted towards challenging a policy with severe ramifications for India's religious minorities and oppressed communities, they doubled as a social movement that questioned the very foundation on which the ruling Hindutva government staked a claim to political legitimacy. Eyerman and Jamison (1998) write that cultural traditions are mobilized and reformulated in social movements, producing a possibility of oppositional collective identity formation that catalyzes broader changes in values, ideas, and ways of life. In playing parai, rap, and Gaana at protests

around Chennai, its performers and supporters not only challenged the discrete political event of the CAA, but also more broadly questioned the dominant categories of artistic merit by problematizing taken-for-granted frameworks for artistic evaluation and judgment.

During the protests, Carnatic musician and activist T.M. Krishna also used music to register his dissent. T.M. Krishna took the stage at a particularly contentious protest that took place at Valluvar Kottam. The police later said they had not given permission and threatened to arrest speakers and protesters, including T.M. Krishna. Krishna sang, "Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram" at the protest to scattered applause. The song is a Hindu devotional song that exalts Ram and is familiar to most Hindi speakers because of its popularization by Gandhi. But at this protest in Tamil Nadu where Krishna shared a stage with the likes of VCK, or Dalit Panthers Iyakkam's ferocious orator, Thirumavalavan, the song did not hit the right note to capture the imagination of protesters. It is worth noting that the beat of the parai or Arivu rapping at the protest struck a completely different tone with the protesters, who responded with enthusiasm, often chanting or singing the lyrics to Arivu's *Sanda Seivom* as a protest chant or dancing to the beat of the parai.

In activist circles comprising of predominantly middle-class and "upper" caste individuals, music from oppressed communities comes to stand in for protest music. The power of music from oppressed communities to protest the status quo is in the politics of equality that emerge organically from the connection to every day experiences of marginalization and inequality. At the same time, as Dalit musicians are increasingly seen to be making "political" music, this may lead to their typecasting as "political," resulting in the application of convenient stereotypes that emerge from existing casteist caricatures rather than the music itself. For example, the Black Boys, a Gaana and hip-hop fusion group based out of Vyasarpadi in North Chennai, were invited to sing at a "concerts in the park" series organized by the head of an arts management agency that traditionally

caters to Carnatic musicians. She admitted to me that this was her first time programming a Gaana concert for the series, indicating the advances that have been made by the cultural expression of the anti-caste movement to bring public attention to Gaana music. But a week before the concert was to take place, one of the Black Boys members told me that the concert had been canceled. When I asked the arts manager what led to the decision to cancel, she informed me that she felt that the music was too "political" and the logo of the group was too "negative." She explained that the logo was a cartoon of a young man who looked "angry" and wielded the mic like a knife, an inference she made from the image of blood splattered behind him. She expressed her unwillingness to allow any "violence" to take place at the concert. But when I asked the Black Boys bandleader what the logo meant, he said that he had designed it himself to portray the violence that Dalit communities faced daily, with the mic representing a symbol of freedom as music allowed a way for people like him to sing or rap about their experiences. In this scenario, the politics of anti-caste resistance was interpreted by the "upper" caste woman through the existing stereotypes she had for Dalit men, which typecast them as "too political," "violent," and "negative." If the politics of Gaana music become the singular qualifier of the music, then it allows dominant caste individuals to react to it based on their relationship to the politics rather than seeing them as musicians.

In conclusion, the case of Gaana music's embrace of anti-caste politics is an effort to free the music of Dalit communities from the shackles of labor and caste oppression and instead find dignity, equality, and artistic appreciation for the music. At the same time, the context of reception of art is overwhelmingly determined by dominant caste registers of what counts as "art." For Gaana music to receive the appreciation that its artists seek, they recognize that it involves not just

"inclusion" efforts, but rather, a social transformation that would bring both political and social equality for oppressed castes.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the distinct ways in which social location impacts political ideologies and orientations. For Brahmins, whose hegemony in all realms has been challenged by the robust anti-Brahmin agenda of Dravidian politics, distancing themselves from being perceived as "political" allows them to continue to mobilize in cultural and religious spaces. In the context of a global turn to authoritarian governments among the middle class and elites, the case of Brahminical support for Hindutva politics sheds light on the ways that "doing politics" for elites may be disguised as talk about culture or religion. It also points to the ways that social elites across contexts may distance themselves from political strategies by framing politics as something that "others" do. Technocratic language about governance and notions of "merit" may instead be used to justify elite political mobilization strategies that stake a singular claim on "rationality" of discourse compared to the politics of oppressed communities.

In contrast, Gaana, which is predominantly associated with urban Dalit communities, incorporates political commentary by way of its lyrical considerations of everyday experiences of urban inequality. For communities that have faced systemic oppression, politics cannot be bracketed away from experiences of urban life, and art cannot be separated from politics. At the same time, not all political expressions may relate to electoral politics, and some musicians may distance themselves from political factionalism, particularly in communities that have been pawns of party politics. In other chapters of this dissertation, I explore how politics of urban inequality and Dalit masculinity are engaged by Gaana musicians. Scholarship on music is enhanced by a greater attention to detail on how "doing politics" may be perceived by musical actors, and

scholarship on politics of inequality may in turn be enriched by investigating how cultural and religious identities or spaces get drawn into political action. The link between political action and the social position of actors vis-à-vis caste identities is a relationship that deserves close attention from scholars, especially in this particular moment in India where both anti-caste movements as well as Hindutva political mobilizations are on the rise.

Chapter 4

Making Music "Mobile": Digitalization, Migration, and Globalization of Carnatic and Gaana Musical Genres

When I asked Jagan where we should meet for the interview, he suggested that we meet at Express Avenue mall in Mylapore. A few paces into the mall's lobby, we noticed a security guard outside an apparel store signaling to Jagan. He told Jagan that he was a big fan of his latest Gaana music video and asked if Jagan would record a TikTok video with them singing a few bars of his hit song together. Jagan smiled, fixed his hair to show the blonde highlights running through it, and extended the phone in front of them to record the video. When we reached the food court on the top floor of the mall, we took a seat and noticed a group of young, affluent women from a nearby college pointing at Jagan's blonde highlights and giggling at him. Jagan nervously flattened his hair down. Over the course of our conversation, he began to get increasingly more uncomfortable and confided that he felt mocked by the women at the next table. Jagan had suggested we meet at Express Avenue mall because he had never been inside; the last time he had attempted to enter with his area friends from his neighborhood of Chintadripet, they had been turned away. He expressed that he felt more reassured entering the mall, this time with me, someone who looked like I "fit in." But even in this space, ostensibly open and free to the public, he had been made to feel out-of-place yet again.

Jagan is aware that when he leaves his north Chennai neighborhood, the heightened visibility from his blonde hair and sartorial style is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, his hair and cut-off jeans serve as his identity, or his *adayaalam*, which makes him feel closer to his fans, like the security guard at the mall. On the other hand, the heightened visibility plays into the

tropes held about young men like him, who are stereotyped as "rowdy," "slum," or "local," leading them to be surveilled, policed, and barred from entering certain spaces. It is Jagan's YouTube viral Gaana music videos that have led to both the recognition of his individual identity, or "*adayaalam"* as a Gaana star, as well as the negative stereotyping that leads young men like him to face adverse consequences for entering certain spaces.

In this chapter, I consider the how the increased digitalization of musical dissemination offer different pathways for these musical genres to enter into disparate local, national, and global circuits of taste. I examine how these musical genres are *made mobile* to varying degrees of influence. First, I explore how recording technologies and digitalization have positioned these two musical genres to generate distinct aesthetic cyber-publics. I also consider the role that the Tamil film industry has had in shaping the political economies of Carnatic and Gaana musical production and reception. Second, I examine how caste and migration flows intersect and diverge within the Tamil diaspora, making distinct musical genres portable via recording and digitalized mechanisms. I argue that with this enhanced access to music from the imagined "motherland," immigrant generations variously mediate their diasporic ties between host country and country of origin, subsequently reproducing or reworking caste hierarchies. Second generation immigrants in cities and suburbs of North America develop a taste for Carnatic music through early socialization as well as exposure to digitalized learning and listening platforms. They learn to code Brahminical cultural practices, such as music and religiosity, as national or "classical" traditions that bridge their diasporic identity and their "roots." Consequently, Carnatic musicians from Chennai are sponsored, invited, and hosted by members of the Tamil Brahmin diaspora in North America, which serves as an important source of income in the Carnatic political economy. In contrast, members of the Tamil "working class" diaspora in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, U.A.E., and

Sri Lanka prefer Gaana, often sponsoring the production of music videos for north Chennai-based artists in particular, and also providing circuits for Gaana musicians in Chennai to travel and perform live shows in these locations. The virality of Chennai-based Gaana musicians' videos often makes them visible at different levels to new fans and countercultural cyber-publics. I show how the musical genres themselves respond to global musical influences by investigating how "fusion" projects align themselves with global circuits of taste, aesthetics, and politics.

Recording and Digitalization: Music Goes "Mobile" in Carnatic Music

The history of Carnatic music has typically prized the live format of performance as the ideal mode of musical consumption. However, the advent of recording technologies allowed for different modes of musical consumption as well as archiving. Weidman (2003) shows how the quest for authenticity in twentieth-century public discourse on Carnatic music was intertwined with its relationship to technology and ideas of fidelity and authority. The centrality of voice culture in Carnatic music led to a moral panic over the arrival of the gramophone, which reproduced vocal sound without any connection to the musician's corporeal body, stoking fears about the loss of fidelity to tradition and voice culture. Eventually, the gramophone came to be accepted as it enhanced options for the storage and archiving of performance in the face of uncertain modernity. Weidman (2003, 462) writes that "recording technology both creates and fulfills a demand for memory that exceeds human capabilities."

The desire to archive performance had to first be moderated to suit the time constraints introduced by the use of wax cylinders, reducing the time available for musicians to perform *alapana* (a form of *raaga*-based improvisation). As a result, by the 1940s, Weidman (2003) argues that a musician could only become complete by fusing with technology, adopting a combination of "live" and recorded music. Additionally, not all voices could be captured by gramophone

recordings with equal facility: women's voices were perceived to record well, and some male musicians such as Musuri Subramania Iyer were considered to sound better on gramophone recordings than even during live performances. Women, and even young girls, like M.S. Subbulakshmi, one of the most famous Carnatic musicians of the 1940s, could now be heard because recording circumvented the strictures that prevented "respectable" Brahmin women from taking the stage.

Another important facet of technological mediation that Weidman notes is the advent of broadcasting and radio, which allowed for continuities in the *guru-sishya* (teacher-pupil) tradition of Carnatic musical education through new broadcasts that offered music "classes," where a teacher taught pupils for about thirty minutes or an hour, offering radio listeners a chance to participate in Carnatic musical learning. In these ways, sound reproduction technologies "provided a new metaphor for tradition" (Weidman 2006, 268). Since the 1970s, with the advent of the cassette revolution, vinyl records were replaced by more cheaply and readily accessible cassettes, democratizing musical production and consumption (Manuel 1993). By the 1990s, the addition of the CD-ROM and the VCD formats had an impact on the Carnatic music industry too. For listeners, annual CD sales at venues in Mylapore, near the epicenter of the Carnatic music scene in Chennai, provided listeners access to compilations and live concert recordings of some of the most celebrated musicians of the time. Dilip,* a Carnatic music fan, described this era of Carnatic musical consumption:

> In the 1990s, the CD revolution was big. You remember, cassettes were just dying out and CDs were coming in. And what happened was this annual CD sale at Sankara Hall in Mylapore during the December music season. Between December 15 and January 1, AVM Saraswathi stores would organize an exhibition and sale of cassettes, CDs, DVDs, VCDs, and things like that. You couldn't get in, it used to be like sale day at Harrods or something! People waiting in lines outside, the billing queue going on for half an hour, and "give me this one or that one." They were all NRIs. They would buy in huge numbers, and each NRI

> would go back with so many CDs and DVDs that they would listen to for the rest of the year. Then the labels began going there to sell, saying, "Hey, if they are coming here for the season, why don't we go there for the rest of the year and sell to them?" This was Charsur, which started this at the time, they began going to North America and selling their wares. Musicians would sell their DVDs to Charsur, and they would take 100 or 200 DVDs and sell it in the States.

As Dilip recollects, while the December music season encouraged long-time patrons to attend live musical concerts, the sales of recorded music expanded the consumer base for Carnatic music. Compilations of devotional music elided the long and improvisational format of the live *kutcheri* or concert, offering listeners another pathway to connect with music through the prism of religiosity. Devotional music compilations consisted primarily of self-contained songs including *bhajans, keerthanais,* and even *shlokas*, or religious chants set to tune. Not all fans of Carnatic music were interested or able to access the exclusive *sabha* culture that took place in Carnatic music halls, so recorded music filled a lacuna for those interested in other dimensions of the music. As this excerpt shows, NRIs (Non-Resident Indians), especially Tamil Brahmins living abroad in North America, formed a big part of the clientele for the CDs, VCDs, and DVDs that were sold at Sankara Hall. This allowed music to become mobile within the diaspora, enabling émigrés to consume recorded Carnatic music and socialize their children into this musical tradition. Vikram,* who was born and brought up in the Bay Area, recollects his exposure to Carnatic music through CDs:

> My parents were both doctors, so they could not always take us to India for the December season like others could. But when they did go, or if relatives went, they would ask them to bring back as many CDs as possible. That's how I was first exposed to Carnatic music, listening to live concerts that were recorded in the 1980s or 1990s. I began to listen very intently, paying attention to the nuances and *gamakas* (vocal ornamentation). I would play these recordings again and again.

Vikram's experience of musical socialization through CDs also points to the engaged listening culture made possible by the infinite repeatability of recorded music. Vikram was raised as a

"serious listener" through repeated exposure to these CDs brought back from trips to Chennai, and the recording of live concerts fostered a sense of connection to the *kutcheri* format that was not always accessible to those living in the diaspora. Dilip argues that this also changed the way that musicians began to build reputations for themselves, transforming musical production and offering new sources of remuneration other than the paltry honoraria offered at live concerts:

> Some artistes built their reputation on CD sales at that time. Nithyasree and all were a product of the CD revolution. Her CDs, her devotionals and all, they were so popular. Today her voice is sadly gone, but at one time, even though you know it was not a comfortable voice, it was a very high-pitched voice that sounded good recorded. But you can't deny that she sang some wonderful music in her heyday. She was very good, very talented.

The "CD revolution" thus enabled musicians, especially women with voices outside of the desired norm of *ghanam* or "heavy" voices, to use audio technologies to create a more mellifluous sound that suited the recorded format and echoed intertextual connections with the "higher" register of the female filmic voice. Although singers like Nithyasree have been bracketed as no longer having the "voice" to sing live, they entered Tamil film playback singing at a time when female voices in higher registers were aesthetically cherished. While some of the "hardcore" *sabha* attendees abhorred such "lightness" in singers' voices, it was attractive to those who listened to recorded Carnatic music in addition to consuming film songs of composers such as Ilayaraja, who blended Carnatic-inspired *raaga*-based music with Tamil folk melodies and western classical or jazz-infused grooves. Recorded music thus augmented the consumer base for Carnatic music by expanding musical repertoires and making the genre more accessible to a wider range of listeners within the Tamil Brahmin community.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Tamil Brahmins began to take to occupations like software or computer engineering as the IT revolution began in earnest, sparking waves of migration to North

America where demand for this workforce was high. Such migration was also affected by the push factor of the Mandal report's implementation, which granted oppressed and "backward" communities reservations in public education and employment. Tamil Brahmins were thus no longer protected from downward economic mobility after generations of monopolistic socioeconomic power, resulting in anxieties over the security of their exalted caste position. But this community still possessed the cultural capital and socioeconomic resources to make a westward shift. The ensuing wave of Tamil Brahmin migration to North America also led to renewed efforts to "digitize" musical recordings existing in formats that were fast becoming outmoded. The driving push behind such digitization efforts was a desire to preserve personal and public archives and to prevent the loss of "musical heritage." Musicians and entrepreneurs began to develop web-based applications and software to digitize and preserve recordings. Another crucial concern of these mobile technologies was the preservation of continuity in musical education for the second generation diaspora. Examples include *Nadopasana*, launched in 1999, which was described as the "world's first VCD for learning South Indian music," raising Carnatic music to the status of representing South Indian music more broadly. The VCD flashes screens of text along with studio scenes of students repeating musical phrases. The producer of *Raganidhi*, a CD comprising explanations and expositions of various *raagas*, said, "Even a common man can take the audacious step to learn the complex form of Carnatic music" (Getter 2006). As Getter (2006) observes, these items may also be understood as manifestations of a desire not only to ensure Carnatic music's future, but also "to elevate and promulgate certain aspects of Indian culture to audiences both in India and abroad."

The enhanced availability of dematerialized formats like MP3 recordings aided the digitalization and cataloging of personal collections held especially by NRIs, who had collected

recorded music in a range of formats over years of living in the diaspora. Vikram* describes his own interest in the digitization process.

> My parents had collected not just CDs, but also spools, records, cassettes that were starting to wear away. As I grew up, I realized that this was an important part of our heritage, and these cassettes were just slowly disintegrating because we no longer had a cassette player or any way of preserving these as they were. I took it upon myself to digitize and catalogue this large personal collection, and I made it publicly available online.

Vikram's interest in digitizing his parents' massive personal collection came from the urge to preserve the "heritage" of recorded Carnatic music and share it with other "*rasikas,*" or Carnatic music listeners, like him, suggesting his investment in a shared community of listeners with a common heritage, indicated by the "our" preceding "heritage." The Sanskritic word "*rasika"* indicates the kind of listening that Vikram spoke about earlier, connoting an engaged and "serious" form of listening that cultivates a love for the music. With the advent of the internet, online musical forums, such as rasikas.org, began to emerge to offer Carnatic music lovers a platform to discuss live concerts, share "rare" recordings, and debate technical aspects of live concerts, *raaga*, compositions, lyrics or *sahithya*, and most crucially, connect with other geographically dispersed Carnatic music lovers.

Aside from efforts at digitizing and archiving personal collections, institutions like the Music Academy have also played the role of arbiter in technological mediation vis-à-vis Carnatic music recordings. On the one hand, the Music Academy has played a crucial role in digitizing and creating an archive of the many thousands of hours of recordings of live concerts from over the years. As their website announces, the TAG Digital Archives, inaugurated in 2008 and housed at the Music Academy, includes recordings of the institution as well as donations from private collections. "The Academy has now in its possession its own recordings as well as those of about 10,000 hours donated by well-wishers, comprising 4,490 concerts featuring 560 artistes … TAG

Listening Archives has 10 touch screen monitors with ear phones through which connoisseurs can listen to any individual musician or a composition or a concert of their choice at the touch of a screen."[1] The Music Academy's digital listening archives are a response to a perceived crisis of the "loss of heritage," but they also represent the vast resources available to Carnatic music lovers who can listen "seriously" to generations of Carnatic's recorded past. The Music Academy, however, has also historically placed emphasis on technological conservatism and "purity" as a marker of their "classical" status. Subramanian,* who is part of the Music Academy's administrative committee, describes the institution's efforts at ensuring "classicism."

> I think the founding fathers at that time [in 1927] felt that the world of classical music was increasingly being assaulted in their terms by cinema and lighter forms of music. And they wanted to preserve this as an art form that could be passed on to the succeeding generations. I think in that they succeeded very well. The question is what constitutes classicism. Classicism is, in my opinion, what has been already established as a certain order given by a certain set of written-unwritten rules, and you follow that when you continue to perform. So in our Academy's case, for instance, the junior slot we will tell them that, for instance, the *tambura*[2] is a must in the Music Academy; you cannot bring an electronic *tambura* and perform. You have to have the regular *tambura*; if they can't bring it, we will provide the *tambura* and a person to play it. This is one instance of our efforts on classicism. See, the format does not have to change based on technology, it doesn't have to change at all. We cannot allow everything that people like to be considered as classicism, which is where the moderating role of the Music Academy continues.

Subramanian's insistence on the role of the Music Academy in moderating "classicism" indicates how resistance to the adoption of new technologies has shaped the modern history of Carnatic music's *sabha* culture. Efforts at maintaining technological "purity" lay bare the contradictions of historical adoptions of new technology at the cost of refusing newer innovations. Subramanian elaborates:

---

[1] For access to the Listening Archives, see https://musicacademymadras.in/explore/the-music-academy-tag-digital-archives/.

[2] Tambura is a four-string plucked drone instrument that accompanies instrumental and vocal performances.

> The Music Academy works like this. The first stage in a musician's entry into the Music Academy's music season scheduling is what is known as the Spirit of Youth concert series. So you send a CD of your music to the committee, which listens to them blind and chooses the contestants who will move forward. Nowadays, people will ask, "Sir, can we send a link?" I don't think many people here on the committee know what a link is. I don't know how long we will continue to find CD players, so it's very outmoded. But that's the way it is at the Music Academy.

Debates over the preservation of "tradition" in classicized music reveal an abhorrence to the advent of new technologies, which are perceived as threats to the founding principles of traditionalism in "classical" music. At every stage of technological innovation, debates have ensued concerning the adoption of new technologies of recording, amplification, and circulation. Consider, for example, the following excerpt about microphone usage from the proceedings of the Sangeet Natak Akademi's Indo-Soviet seminar on "Tradition and Modernity" that took place in April 1988 (88–89).

> Technology, Dr. Narayana Menon agreed, should be intelligently used to help music. However, it is largely a failure of the commercial people who deal in music to exploit technology properly. In Europe, no great musician would even use microphones; microphones are an insult to his music. He would prefer a smaller audience and a better hall to the use of amplification gadgets. This is a kind of self-control for a musician, some sort of discipline that has come to stay. But in India, even a *nadaswaram* player nowadays wants a microphone; and we cannot change this growing habit. Professor T.N. Krishnan at this stage stated his experience in Soviet Russia, which he had visited recently. In his recitals there, initially he stopped using microphones. And when he stopped using them, there was a very favorable reaction among the listeners. Microphones, he said, are not generally properly used and they do hinder the music. Hence, he concluded, microphones are not necessary.

Despite such vehemently expressed aversions to using microphones in Carnatic music halls, microphones are a mainstay of the *kutcheri* or concert performance today. At the same time, these moments of reluctance to adopt newer technologies betray the contradictions between "tradition" and "modernity" that are reconciled and renegotiated constantly. The reinvention of "classical" music to suit modernity thus seeks to negate, moderate, or manipulate the effects of technological

innovation to reproduce "authenticity" through fidelity to traditional concert formats and the recreation of nostalgically imagined "organic" sounds, canons, and formats of performance.

Contemporary Carnatic Music and Technological Mediation

The arrival of dematerialized recording and listening formats have altered listening cultures and modes of Carnatic musical production. Subramanian laments the advent of streaming services as it impacts artists by limiting revenue streams.

> With music streaming and YouTube, the sale of CDs and DVDs has completely gone down. So recorded music is actually dead today. Those were all good revenue models for artistes, so today they have gone back to depending upon live performances. How many live performances can an artiste give in a year? Anything more than a hundred is very challenging, which means you're singing once every three days, which is a lot. And they need rest, they need time to enhance their creativity by reading. Leisure is very important.

Subramanian's assertion that "leisure is very important" for musical productivity suggests that Carnatic music is perceived as a "high art" that demands both creative labor and rest for the musician. However, revenue streams for artists, he contends, have dwindled considerably with the demise of CD and DVD sales. Regardless, Carnatic musicians have found new revenue streams by participating in tours to North America where they perform at well-paying concerts and find students with the ability to pay for lessons in US dollars. A music producer in Chennai reflected on the centrality of the Tamil Brahmin diaspora in sponsoring live and recorded Carnatic music performances. "Tamil Brahmins living in the Bay Area and New Jersey in the US are really the engine of the Carnatic music industry here in Chennai."

At the same time, new venues and avenues for Carnatic musical production and consumption have emerged with the advent of streaming services and new opportunities for technologically-mediated musical experiences. Mahesh, who is the founder and co-director of an initiative called MadRasana, explains how he came to this idea:

> MadRasana is about presenting the art form in a different set up. We used to attend concerts at the *sabhas* and found the sound output very monotonous. I always found the artists to be very uncomfortable in the *sabha* set-up. *Sabhas* hire sound engineers and equipment without considering that the engineer may not be someone who knows Carnatic music well, and only knows to set up the equipment. We invested a lot in better equipment, with different types of mics and speakers, and decided to invite younger musicians—in their thirties and forties—to come perform in a more organic setting here in our own garden.

This excerpt represents a new turn initiated by Chennai-based entrepreneurs to find new environments and auditory technologies to return listeners to an "organic" experience of Carnatic music. They are, however, resistant to changing the format of the concert itself.

> Chamber music formats change how artists respond to their own music. They have to react to what others play, whereas in *sabhas*, they are constantly hearing sound from the monitors. It is challenging for artists to respond to that because they are used to having a different type of sound architecture. What we are doing here is more organic. By organic, I mean that sound comes as an ensemble rather than individual sounds getting mixed. With a little use of technology, we are trying to achieve a more organic sound rather than change the format or content of Carnatic music in any way.

MadRasana's approach to presenting Carnatic music thus takes its cue from new auditory technologies to preserve "organic" presentation formats without touching the content or form of Carnatic music. At the same time, they offer a product that bridges a perceived gap in the *sabha* format.

> The intrigue to the whole concept of Carnatic and classical art is that it is the only art form where the expertise of performing the art belongs to a totally different generation than the people who are consuming it. The artists are very young and typically the audience is very old, and there is a generation gap between the two. To me, the idea of starting this is to see if I can pull in a new generation of listeners to the format. One of the ways I could do this is to promote only through social media, no newspaper ads. We admit listeners only by invitation, and there is a process of online registration. The feeling is that those who are good at Facebook and things, if we assume they're a new generation of potential listeners, then they will be the ones coming to our concerts. So the crowd here is different from that of *sabhas*.

The aim of MadRasana is to pull in younger listeners by offering an alternative to the *sabha* format, which typically attracts older audiences. MadRasana attempts to attract younger crowds—by

which they mean those aged around thirty or forty—by advertising exclusively on social media to be more "accessible" to younger audiences. At the same time, they replicate the "serious" model of listening and discernment by creating a multi-step online registration process that they believe will only attract those who are truly interested in listening to Carnatic music seriously. Mahesh says,

> We don't want to make it a business model. We are planning to convert it into a trust. Are we making money? We have in certain pockets, like CDs. We are surprised CDs still sell, but there are buyers. Art should not be free because it's come to a point where artists are sacrificing so much. They cannot think about the future since everything is freely available on the internet, so artists are making less and less. We want to be the people between the artist and the listeners. We want to be the á la carte rather than a buffet. When we make albums and things, which sell only for Rs. 300, fans might spend Rs. 3000. So those are the real fans, those who are willing to pay.

As this excerpt illustrates, MadRasana is a new model of bridging existing musicians with "newer" audiences, but those who are willing—and able—to pay. The class-based images of "á la carte" or "buffet" menus further underscore the classed nature of this revenue model and the audiences MadRasana wishes to attract. Ultimately, this ends up reproducing caste homogeneity and narrowing audiences to those with the existing financial capital to participate in the online registration process and engage with digital media. "Accessibility" as the motivation for such projects is, in reality, a form of entrenching "younger" listeners and returning them back into musical traditions that they were socialized into from birth. The process of participating in a MadRasana event requires a pre-conceived commitment to the art form and the musicians taking part. Mahesh explains,

> Once, someone registered, and we messaged them back two weeks later saying that their registration is confirmed. Then they wrote back asking which concert they had registered for. This showed me that they didn't have any connection with the music, artists, or us. So we don't want people like that, we want connection. You should have known that you want that artist's concert; you are just grazing, you are not connected.

Efforts to increase "accessibility" include presenting traditional Carnatic musical content in new settings or formats. For example, MadRasana began to release Carnatic music workout videos on YouTube after collecting data from listeners and fans through their online registration forms. Listeners had shown interest in Carnatic musical accompaniment for exercise routines. MadRasana also focuses on the "purity" of sound by investing in expensive equipment such as better speakers and binaural mics that "mimic what your brain hears." MadRasana additionally offered an alternative to the *sabha* concert by hosting a December concert series in 2019 at Sathyam Cinemas, which was chosen for its novelty and its proximity to Mylapore, "the epicenter of the December music festival." According to Mahesh, by consolidating demands from their consumer base, MadRasana propagates a digital alternative to *sabha* culture.

> When we started selling CDs, people said "digital is dead." But we know there's a market. We're planning to do an LP record, and I think it might come back because Carnatic music lovers take audio fidelity seriously.

Projects such as MadRasana, which make use of digital media and technologies to modify the kinds of Carnatic music being recorded and disseminated, are described in terms of increasing "accessibility" to the art. While this framing seems to suggest an attention to the religious, caste, linguistic, and musical ramparts that exacerbate Carnatic music's exclusivity, these framings actually betray the fear of Carnatic's decline. The "younger generation" referred to in these pleas for accessibility are often from Brahmin families, and they have been socialized into Carnatic music through paid lessons and family involvement or lineage. Another Carnatic music project led by musicians in their thirties is called "Indian Raga," which is predicated on "accessibility" efforts that draw upon a common well of cultural capital and social location in order to build a shared appreciation for the highly technical aspects of the musical genre.

Figure 5.1. *Performance at Carnatic 2.0. Reloaded*

In 2019, Indian Raga performed at an event dubbed "Carnatic 2.0. Reloaded." Its postpositive appellation of "2.0." and the word "reloaded" allude to technological mediation, ostensibly to attract younger audiences. Any inkling of variation in the types of audience members at this "new" branding of Carnatic music was dispelled with the lead singer of the band's question to the audience at the start of the show: "How many of you have learned Carnatic music?" The lights came on as most members of the audience cheered and raised their hands, and the singer responded, "Seems like a lot of you have learned Carnatic music, so please join us on this next song!" The lights dimmed and the band played an Electronic Dance Music (EDM)-inspired version of a Carnatic music standard, "Rara Venu Gopabala," incorporating synthesizers and an iPad. Later in the show, the band played a Carnatic version of "Despacito," a 2017 American pop music hit by Justin Bieber. The use of digital technologies and social media in Carnatic music today ultimately focuses on the entrenchment of younger listeners in the music world, but these efforts do not, in reality, enhance accessibility for those not already familiar with the grammar, norms,

and aesthetics of the art form. The creation of a Carnatic cyber-public imagines listeners to be invested in the aesthetics of Carnatic music through early musical socialization, and the focus on purity of audio transmission and augmented environments for "serious" listening reproduces the culture of distinction that is ultimately tied to a Brahminical vision of musical purity. The fear of a waning younger generation of Carnatic music listeners betrays the anxieties of a historically "upper" caste community that perceives itself to be at the receiving end of "reverse discrimination" in a globalizing India, and dreads the subsequent loss of cultural markers of Brahminism and their sociocultural sway.

Gaana Goes "Mobile": Digitalization and Recording Technologies

The transformations in production, consumption, scope, and content of Gaana music parallel shifts in recording and distribution technologies. There are few Gaana music recordings that survived from before 1985. In the late 1980s, a proliferation of recording technologies like cassettes enabled Gaana songs to be recorded at local recording studios or even at live events such as funeral concerts or community festivals. One of the oldest North Chennai-based Gaana was started by "Spools" Kumar, who had the idea of recording the live performances of local Gaana artists in North Chennai as they sang at funerals or local festivals. In an interview, Kumar explained that while the live musical performance in 1980s Chennai was often local and community-based, the availability of cassette-based recording technology allowed a broader range of consumers to access Gaana songs. Kumar narrated the story of a vendor in the commercial corridor of Chennai called Pondy Bazaar, where electronic goods are sold and exchanged. To have this tastemaker sell one's recorded cassette as a budding Gaana singer was an avenue to fame and recognition. The autonomous DIY production of cassettes, circumventing copyright approvals and engaging in an

alternate taste economy reflects what Liang (2005) might refer to as operating in a space of "porous legality" that sparked the cassette revolution in India.

The advent of Gaana in Tamil film in the 1990s, by way of music composer Deva, led to another seismic shift in the world of Gaana. Deva's Gaana-inspired film scores were the broader Tamil population's first exposure to Gaana music. Deva eschewed the husky vocal texture of self-produced cassettes by Gaana singers in favor of "upper" caste playback singers, who met the dominant standards for "melodious" vocality that suited an "upper" caste ear and aesthetic. Deva's choice of non-Gaana playback singers drew the ire of some Gaana musicians, who confided their frustration that Gaana's growing popularity through film did not generate a livelihood for the burgeoning community of Gaana singers, who continued to sing mostly at live musical events and especially at funerals. Nevertheless, Deva's introduction of Gaana into Tamil film music repertoire challenged dominant caste notions of what genres of music would enter the mainstream. Deva describes the experience of bringing this relatively stigmatized art form—a stigma stemming from its caste and class origins—as an uphill battle. "It took me years to traverse the small distance from Santhome, where I grew up in a small fishing village listening to my friends singing Gaana and being jolly, to Kodambakkam [a Chennai area where film studios are famously located]."

Muthu from North Chennai's Vyasarpadi area remembers that he was driving auto rickshaws in the early 2000s when the CD-ROM became widely available. Muthu had always grown up listening to his uncle singing Gaana at funeral concerts in the neighborhood and occasionally accompanied him onstage. When his friend penned some lyrics and suggested that Muthu sing these songs, they approached the local recording studio in Vyasarpadi, which was now headed by Sabesh Saloman, the son of "Spools" Kumar and a contemporary, independent leading producer of Gaana music. In keeping with the rapid changes to recording technology, Kumar's son

recorded a CD with Muthu's songs that they began to carry with them to performances to sell to fans.

Following the widespread arrival of the CD was the MP3 format, which allowed sharing via Bluetooth by the relative few Gaana fans who owned Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones. The 2000s saw the growing popularity of local internet browsing centers. Gaana Stephen, one of the most popular Gaana singers today, grew up in this technological generation. He describes how he started listening to Gaana.

> When I was growing up, we would take empty memory cards on a phone to the browsing center. My father was a Gaana singer too, so he gave me his old phone without a calling plan so I would use the phone only to listen to music on the memory card. We'd take the memory cards to the browsing center and they would download a few songs onto them. This is how I started listening to Gaana Vinoth *anna* [elder brother; a term of respect] and became a fan of his "advice" songs that were funny and talked about whatever was going on at the time in our society.

Early users of the mobile phone would thus make use of these browsing centers and their managers' tastes to build their own. Invariably, those with the technological know-how to do this were also younger fans of Gaana. Muthu pointed out how technological developments until the CD, or even a bit after with the MP3 recordings, did not require a visual accompaniment. Gaana was still about the sound and aural consumption insofar as it was recorded. In 2014–15, all of this changed with some technological developments that transformed Gaana music in crucially important ways.

YouTube has become indispensable to the Gaana musical community since the availability of cheap, high-speed internet in 2014 through Reliance Company's Jio data plans. And for a musical genre that bears relatively few musical continuities in each successive generation, there is the question of how YouTube as an easily accessible and growing repository of tracks and music videos may serve as archive for its practitioners, fans, and future members of this art world. Van

Dijck (2006) writes that musical memories become manifest at the intersections of personal and collective memory and identity. Specific cultural frames for recollection, such as internet forums or radio programs, do not simply invoke but actually help construct collective memory (van Dijck 2006). For Gaana music lovers today, the internet has become an important way to connect to music they remember from the radio or cassettes of the past. Some digitization efforts have led to recordings by stars from the 1990s like Rave Ravi, Senior Nithya, or Sindhai Punnaiyar circulating on YouTube.

While Carnatic music has physical archives of material records held by *sabhas* and libraries, or personal records that have survived multiple years and moves, Gaana's history as a music of the Dalit poor in Chennai means that there are fewer private or publicly accessible repositories of material records. I met the elderly neighbor of a Gaana musician I was interviewing in the slum clearance board buildings in Vyasarpadi, a North Chennai neighborhood. He was a fan of musicians who rose to fame in the 1980s and 1990s, and he used to collect their cassettes when he could afford it. "I had cassettes that I would buy from their concerts. They would just put it next to the tarp they sat on to sing, right on the street, and sell cassettes after singing all night. But now I don't have a tape recorder anymore. I don't have space for that in this small room." Others that grew up on these staples have rediscovered them by way of YouTube. Sindhai Punnaiyar's hit song "Chinna Ponnu" from the 1990s album "Kaathal Nila" has 1.2 million views. The song has been reuploaded to YouTube and has comments like, "90s kids ultimate" or "When this song released, I was maybe five years old and this song would play on the tape recorder, unforgettable

memories![3]" or "When I listen to his song, it feels like my grandfather is still with me, because my grandfather really liked this song."[4]

YouTube not only provides a way for Gaana musicians to speak to the present moment and their immediate surroundings, but it also allows for these forms of nostalgia and intergenerational exchange to emerge and inform the future of Gaana. Junior Nithya, a twenty-four-year-old Gaana musician with viral YouTube music videos, recognized this need for songs that reflect the specific memories associated with living in Chennai's "slums." He said in an interview,

> I was planning to make a nineties song. It will have references to *thenmitta* (honey sweet) that you could buy for cheap on the street, to the TV show Shakalaka Boom Boom, or how we would all play in the water when it rained because the water would collect on the streets. I want my listeners to also feel like there are songs being made for them.

Nithya's recognition reveals the ways that the present generation of Gaana fans are seeking to form collective memories and identities through generational cohorts or through the shared experiences of growing up in parts of the city rarely depicted in mainstream media. It points to the ways that Gaana's lyrical improvisation lends itself to humor and joy in addition to being a music of bereavement. In compilation CDs and cassettes, songs with these seemingly contrary emotions are intertwined. Tenma, the bandleader for the only Gaana fusion band, remarked, "In cultures of oppression, liberation from this earth is a reason to celebrate because this life is full of suffering. That's why Gaana is so jolly even though it's essentially a funeral music."

Saran, a contemporary Gaana singer in his twenties, reminisces about the experience of growing up around his Gaana musician father. Even though his father was a Gaana singer who had

[3] The original comment has been translated to English by me. The original comment reads: Inda sng Vara apo enku 5 vayasu something irkum taperecorder la inda sng pogum😍marakamudiyada memories😈
[4] The original comment has been translated to English by me. The original comment reads: ivaru song kekkum pothu eanga grand father eankooda irukura mathiri irkum yen na ivaru song na eanga thathaku romba pudikum.

cultivated moderate acclaim and fame, Saran's desire to become a Gaana singer was met with great consternation by his family.

> My mother cried and asked me, "How will you make a living? How will you get married?" My parents didn't want me to become a Gaana singer because even in our own community, Gaana singers are looked down upon. They are seen as working with rowdies or just wasting their time instead of getting a college degree and an office job. But things have changed for us now in some ways. We can become famous on YouTube and we can get booked for concerts in Bangalore or Hyderabad. It's not like before, when my father had to beg for his payments after a concert or even forget it because the big man who requested the performance would threaten him into silence.

Saran's story illustrates the ways that Gaana musicians were denied respectability by dominant caste society at large, and subsequently, even in their local communities or families because of its connotations of rowdyism, poverty, and the ongoing association with the funeral. His insistence that things are marginally different now is also testament to the transformations in the Gaana musical world made possible by new media and musical technologies.

The evolution of YouTube-enabled music video culture has also created a sartorial and visual style that is distinct to Gaana. Sunil, a Gaana singer just out of college, explained how this change has transformed the production of Gaana music.

> When we got Jio, we could start browsing on YouTube and TikTok. In the early days of YouTube, very few people had data to see the video, so it was just the audio of the song with an image of the album or song cover made with cheap graphics by a friend. But once we got Jio, YouTube became the way to become famous in Gaana because people started making Gaana music videos. Now, you can't make a hit Gaana song without having a video also. The guys [*pasanga*] like it when they can see your style—how you dance, what kind of shoes you're wearing, your hairstyle. All these set you apart and YouTube has helped guys go viral.

Vishnu, who is a Gaana singer and member of the Black Boys group, says,

> Where you come from, in South Chennai and all, there will be guys wearing coat-tie and walking around right? [laughs] Our style is different, it is better. It is *weightu* [cool]. One guy will cut off his jeans or bleach them. Another guy will wear earrings, but only in one ear! Another one might dye his hair pink and cut it to look different. But each guy will have his own style and make it unique so that it becomes his signature or his identity

> [*adayaalam*]. Then when he puts his video on YouTube, there will be hundreds of fans on TikTok copying that style and singing his song.

As these expressions of style demonstrate, Gaana musicians set the tone for what is trending by establishing their own virality and signature style. Digital platforms like YouTube and social media like TikTok allow fans to interact with their favorite musicians, who engage with their fans through direct messages, replies to YouTube comments, or even taking their phone calls. YouTube music videos often flash the mobile numbers of the entire cast and crew so that they may be contacted by music producers or fans, permitting easier access to the "star" unlike in Carnatic music, where musicians may not engage with their fans outside of the concert hall. Junior Nithya says about his fans,

> They are the ones that believe in me, and they come from slums like me. I cannot forget where I came from just because I'm famous, right? I know there are so many people that want to become Gaana singers and become famous like me. So I take whatever phone calls I get. There will be a guy in Kaatpadi or something, living in a small village, listening to my songs and wanting to also become famous. I give them some advice or tell them to keep trying. They need to hear it from me.

Nithya's recognition of his fans surpasses the star-fan dynamic that keeps film heroes enigmatic and out-of-reach from their supporters. Nithya and other Gaana musicians like him often interact with their fans who seek to fashion themselves in the image of their heroes, providing them encouragement and advice for breaking into the digitally-mediated Gaana music spaces of YouTube. Virality on YouTube offers a revenue stream for musicians who are successfully able to get upwards of 30 million views from their cyber-publics, providing a monthly income that sustains further musical production. However, depending on YouTube for income does not always provide consistent remuneration, leading already-famous Gaana musicians to depend on sponsors who often live in the Tamil diaspora or may even be local "big men" living in the same areas as Gaana musicians. At the same time, Gaana musical production tends to spotlight the main singer

or “star” at the cost of the supporting crew and dancers or instrumentalists that contribute to the song’s production. Lyricists and percussionists in particular earn little to nothing from YouTube revenue streams, which often accrue primarily to the singer. Sponsorship also requires pre-existing relationships and networks between the musician and the sponsor, which are cultivated through exchanges of musical dedications in return for sponsorship money. Nithya has successfully garnered attention from such sponsors, who often request him to make songs about them or even come perform at venues in Malaysia or U.A.E., where they live. Miran is a Gaana lyricist who writes songs for Nithya and Tamil film music. He says,

> I know some people that live in Malaysia and even America that really love Gaana music. They want to support us, so they will sometimes ask me to write a song in their honor. It takes me just a few hours to write a song, and I will send it to them via WhatsApp. The song will usually be very jolly, and I will make sure to use their name in it to make them happy. Then they send us money. But when I write songs for others to sing, I don’t always see the money that they get from advertisements on their YouTube channel. It’s tough for lyricists, dancers, and instrumentalists to depend on Gaana for income, so I often do coolie labor at Chennai Central railway station, lifting heavy packages and loading them onto trains.

As Miran’s story shows, sponsorship from local and global patrons is offered in exchange for performances, lyrics, and songs penned in their honor. However, such sponsorship can be intermittent and accrue unequally to the cast of characters that are instrumental in the creation of a single music video. Local sponsors also mediate the performance of Gaana at area festivals and events like funerals or weddings, providing Gaana musicians in their area opportunities to earn in exchange for performance. Nithya has received such sponsorship, and explains how it works.

> A local big man, maybe you would call him a “rowdy,” but they are more than that. They can do a lot of good too. He may have some family event or a funeral for a close one, so he will call me and say, “Nithya, can you sing a concert for us?” I will go and sing some songs in his honor, just to make him feel good. I will sing some songs that fit with the event—sad if it’s a funeral, jolly even if it’s a funeral. You can’t sing sad songs at a wedding. That’s what a Gaana singer has to do, you have to always know what to sing to make people feel the emotions you want them to feel. Even someone who is very rowdy

> will sit quietly on the floor crying if I sing an *amma* (mother) song. They give me money in exchange for my performance, and I can invest that in the production costs for making my next video.

Nithya continues about the challenges of being a Gaana musician who caters primarily to the demands of sponsors who are local big men.

> You have to be careful. You don't want to accept an offer to sing in an event in another area that is some other Gaana musician's area. If you don't know these things, they will send guys after you for taking their job. Sometimes this kind of violence happens because there are so few opportunities to get paid that people will not like if you cross those lines.

Nithya's allusion to violence at "taking another musician's opportunity" hints at the importance of turf lines in determining who gets to sing where. The lack of institutional stages and reliable sources of income make the political economy of Gaana musicianship fraught, resulting in Gaana musicians often having to pay attention to turf lines and not cross over into another's turf. When I asked him how turf is determined, Nithya said, "There might be one big man in Vyasarpadi, so if some guy from (nearby) Pulianthope comes in there, these guys might not like it. As a Gaana musician, you have to know how to keep people happy and not cross any lines." Nithya has also been asked to sing Gaana songs in praise of politicians at rallies and maintains that he has to sing at rallies of competing DMK and AIADMK politicians without upsetting either of them. He says, "Being a Gaana musician is about doing your job and not creating any trouble. It is about making people feel good and getting paid by keeping people happy." Gaana musicians thus depend on the good humor of their patrons, which may turn on a dime when musicians display affiliations to competing patrons, turfs, or politics. Such patronage can be ambivalent, resulting in "mainstream" independent Gaana music videos engaging with themes of love, friendship, or the coolness of "local" guys at the cost of avoiding explicit political messaging that may splinter their sponsorship and fan base. The freedom to express political messaging through Gaana music is thus linked to

the model of sponsorship, which privileges consumer or sponsor-led demands for "jolly" content. Music from groups like Casteless Collective often takes a more strident stand against casteism, Hindu right-wing politics, and gender-based violence. This is enabled by sponsorship from anti-caste film director Pa Ranjith's Neelam Cultural Centre. In contrast, Gaana musicians without the financial support of such sponsors produce songs that cater to the demands from young fans, who prefer music that engages with themes of violence or loving women. Nanda is a beatboxer for Black Boys, which takes its lead from Casteless Collective and produces "socially conscious" rap and Gaana. He says,

> If we go only by what YouTube wants, then we would produce songs that speak ill of women or glorify violence. But we are trying to do something different. We want people to learn about politics or equality, but there's less of a demand for that so our videos get fewer likes than some video about rowdy gangs or teasing women. They find anything with advice pretty boring so they won't choose that.

Nanda and the Black Boys' experience of dealing in the Gaana musical marketplace of YouTube reveal the contradictions of relying solely on digitally-led musical production. Catering to the demands of Gaana cyber-publics as the primary means of gaining fame and circulation limits the extent of artistic creativity and deters overt political messaging that would "bore" listeners. The cyber-publics for Gaana are entirely mediated through digital production, resulting in a demand-driven marketplace for Gaana music.

The availability of high-speed internet and the popularity of YouTube have also led to Gaana music becoming more audible in Tamil film music. Deva is credited with bringing Gaana into Tamil film music, resulting in songs that borrowed the lyrical wit and rhythmic percussiveness of Gaana, but ultimately favored formally trained playback singers. In contemporary Tamil film music, the enhanced sartorial and visual dimensions of the "cool" that Gaana has come to represent are similarly borrowed and often appropriated by film "heroes" who adopt the slang and style of

independent Gaana musicians. “Upper” caste film music producers, such as Santhosh Narayan, Harris Jeyaraj, and Anirudh Ravichander, have paved the way for Gaana to become more audible to the broader Tamil public. However, Gaana musicians often only provide the lyrics, or sometimes their voice, to these film musical compositions, rarely ever appearing onscreen themselves. The production style of Gaana-inspired Tamil film music employs a more eclectic approach to instrumentation than independently produced Gaana music videos, which results in an estrangement of the music from the community it originates from. Poonga* is ten years old and learns Gaana from Logan, who hails from the north Chennai Vyasarpadi area. Poonga says,

> I think our Gaana has more *gethu* (style). Sometimes I like to listen to filmy Gaana like Dangamari or something, but mostly I prefer our local guys like Gaana Harish who show people like us as heroes. In films, someone with dark skin will always be the rowdy or the villain in the plot. But in these videos, we can be heroes ourselves.

Independently-produced Gaana music videos mirror the themes, locales, and social locations of their fans, presenting them in a manner and aesthetic that affords fans dignity, “coolness,” and relatability. Mainstream representations of Dalit men from “slum” areas reinforces negative stereotypes and rarely afford them opportunities to star as “heroes.” In contrast, Gaana music videos that are independently produced by musicians from the same social and spatial locations as their fans present themes that center their experiences of life in the city, generating discourses that are often absent in mainstream Tamil film music.

Television channels have also played a major role in popularizing Gaana artists, with Gaana music programs that showcase both older artists from the 1990s whose songs continue to be enjoyed by Gaana fans as well as newer musicians who have gained greater visibility through their YouTube music videos. Peppers TV is a channel that has a dedicated segment for the performance of Gaana music, called “Gaana Pettai,” which is presented in a live format with the

singer at the center of a makeshift stage and a *dholak* player who keeps time. These videos are filmed in the areas that Gaana musicians hail from, with local children and onlookers comprising the "live" audience for these pre-recorded videos. Audiences clap, whistle, and support the musician by sitting on the stage and surrounding it. Musicians sing original "hit songs" as well as Gaana standards, often amending the lyrics to suit the venue and refer to trending themes, the TV channel, or their own experiences. Lyrical improvisation forms the mainstay of the Gaana performed on TV channels like Peppers TV, where audiences laugh and cheer musicians for these improvisational flourishes. While the uptake of Gaana music on television indicates a broader public interest in Gaana music in present day Tamil Nadu, the content of such shows does not resemble the kinds of visual cues and stylistic elements running through independent Gaana music videos. Gaana musicians like Junior Nithya are also invited to reality TV shows like Dancing Superstar on Vijay TV, where they are asked to perform tailor-made Gaana songs for the show.

At one such event, where Nithya was asked to compose a song the morning of the finale for Vijay TV's Dancing Superstar, he was informed that they would not tolerate political lyrics or any transgressive "teasing" of the judges of the show. At the same time, Nithya knew that he would have to compose lyrics that gently teased (*kalaai)* the judges or it would not entertain the audience. The lyrics he composed referred to the show, the TV channel, the judges, and Gaana music itself:

Dancing superstar	Dancing superstar
Dance thaarumaaru	Dancing frenzy
Title winner jeykaporadhu yaaru	Who will win the title?
Jeychaa vaangalaanga Audi Benz car	If they win, they can buy an Audi Benz car.
Mic ah pudichaa vaartha varum thaana	If you hold the mic, the lyrics come flowing

Radha naanum paaduvom da Gaana	Radha (the contest's judge) and I will sing Gaana.
Gaanavukku illa machaa end-u	There's no end to Gaana, *machaa*
Enga ponaalumey Gaana dhanga trendu	Wherever you go, it's Gaana that trends.

The lyrics demonstrate the kinds of topics that often "trend" in Gaana, showing a preference for references to ongoing events and breaking "the fourth wall" with mentions of people ostensibly "in the audience." These lyrics also point to the centrality of references to material wealth, typified by possession of cars, bikes, or brands that signal upward mobility. Miran, who is Junior Nithya's lyricist, spent the morning of the show with Nithya, advising him on elements of style that he had to adopt in order to get the judges and TV channel operatives to "take him seriously." Nithya wore cologne, new white sneakers, a navy blue bomber, and denim joggers that he bought specifically for the show the previous day. Miran chided him for not wearing his branded Allen Solly shirt, which he explained that Nithya had spent Rs. 8,000 buying from the mall. Miran describes this form of aesthetic stylization as derived from an Ambedkarite philosophy that he interprets as a sartorial expression of identity to demand respect from dominant castes, but also confesses that he has been inspired by the philosophy and visual aesthetics of hip-hop in America. This type of sartorial syncretism is made possible by the digitally-mediated borrowing of stylistic idioms from sources like American hip-hop. MC Jango, who was born to a Gaana singer but chose to become a Tamil rapper, describes how he came to his sartorial sensibilities.

> I used to work at Express Avenue mall cleaning the floors in the Nike showroom. Then one day, I heard them play something by Nas on the speakers. I stopped everything and took out my phone and looked his music up on YouTube. I loved how he wore gold chains and stylish clothing and decided to model my own image on his style. I don't earn much from my job or videos, but it's important to look a certain way so that my fans know I'm taking myself seriously.

Jango's arrival at his stylistic sensibilities was aided by his consumption of American hip-hop, which he also cites as the source of inspiration for his hairstyles. The language barrier means that visual and stylistic elements of American hip-hop are creatively reinterpreted for the local context, even if the lyrics do not always translate. Jango's friend runs a barber shop in Triplicane, where he and his friends freestyle, stylize their hair and clothes, and even record some of their videos. The countercultural elements of style in hip-hop translate well to the context of rap in Chennai, where the "authenticity" of "the urban real" is mediated through embodied stylizations of fashion, jewelry, and hair. Fleetwood (2005) argues that hip-hop style is based in referentiality and reflexivity, which is the essence of "mixing" and sampling at the root of the cultural movement. She writes that "clothing acts as the visual identifier of the sound," (Fleetwood 2005, 329) and clothing, especially brand names, are often cited in hip-hop lyrics. Gaana musicians similarly challenge the sartorial codes imposed by caste society on Dalit masculinity by appropriating elements of style from hip-hop and marking their distinction from other fashion styles. Gaana music today thus circulates globally and counts global markers of countercultural style, genres, and sensibilities as integral to its syncretic influences and reach. The presence of digital platforms allows for global referents of identity and style to filter into the production of the embodied self within Gaana music's visual modes of representation and aesthetics.

Music and Migration

Thus far in this dissertation, I have primarily focused on the contours of Carnatic and Gaana music worlds from the emplaced perspective of their location in Chennai. However, in this section, I examine how these two musical genres are made mobile and enter into global circuits of taste and musical production with the migration of their respective constituencies. Carnatic music's

predominantly Brahmin social world has expanded to parts of North America, Europe, and Australia in addition to some regions of Southeast Asia, where Brahmins have typically found employment in high-paying professions such as engineering and medicine. In contrast, Gaana music's predominantly Dalit and "working class" social constituency has traveled to countries like Malaysia, Singapore, UAE, Sri Lanka, and some parts of North America, where individuals have found employment in "blue collar" jobs and some segments have achieved upward socioeconomic mobility after generations of residing in these areas. In order to unpack the ways that these musical genres have been reworked and reinterpreted within these distinct diasporas, I will first describe the migration flows that led to the formation of these distinct Tamil diasporas before going on to describe how musical genres have traveled with them and fused with new genres and aesthetic sensibilities.

Tamil migration to parts of Southeast Asia such as Malaya took place under British colonial rule through the forced migration of indentured labor, consisting predominantly of lower non-Brahmin and Dalit castes. This wave of early Tamil migration made Tamil migrants to Malaya, and later Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia, indispensable to the social fabric of these countries. Segments of these "older" waves of migrants constitute a relatively more upwardly mobile demographic within these countries, who have achieved relative economic and cultural gains. Since 2006, Tamil Nadu has surpassed Kerala in terms of highest migration flows to these countries in addition to the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Forty percent of Indian migrants to the UAE are production-related workers who are employed as electricians, plumbers, welders, and construction workers (Zachariah, Kannan and Rajan 2002). The wave of "low-skilled" migrants from Tamil Nadu to GCC and Southeast Asian countries reflects the

immigration policies of host countries that admit migrants with lower educational status than non-GCC countries. However, problems persist in the experience of migration to GCC countries, such as compulsory expatriation, expiry of contracts, or poor working conditions, leading to the return of many GCC migrants to Tamil Nadu even as migration rates to GCC countries contribute to nearly 50 percent of all migration from Tamil Nadu (Rajan and Rajan 2019).

For this highly mobile demographic of migrants, many of whom are from OBC and Dalit castes, connections with the Tamil identity are maintained and moderated through engagement with cultural forms from Tamil Nadu like films and music, especially Gaana music. Dinesh* is a Gaana fan who returned from Dubai, where he had been employed as a construction worker until 2018. After a fire in his dormitory that nearly burned down most of his possessions except his passport, he returned to Chennai and began to drive for Uber. He describes his experience of migration.

> When I was employed in Dubai, we were expected to work almost twelve hours each day. I only left Salem [in Tamil Nadu] because I needed to support my family, but I was barely earning anything to send back. In the nights, I would play Gaana songs on my phone to make me feel connected to my home because it was a very difficult experience. I finally came back after the fire happened, deciding that it was better to be back with my own people rather than in a foreign country where I was getting paid very little.

Dinesh's experience of migrating to Dubai and returning to Chennai mirrors the experiences of many others like him who emigrated in search of better paying jobs and returned because of the harsh reality of migrating as a "blue collar" worker. Dinesh and other migrants maintain their connections to their Tamil identity by consuming and engaging with digitally available cultural content from Tamil Nadu, especially Gaana. Low-income workers in GCC and Southeast Asian countries see themselves as part of a Tamil rather than an Indian diaspora because of their regional linguistic and cultural ties that do not translate to the experience of Indian emigration at large.

Their participation in cultural consumption from Tamil Nadu helps them maintain links to Tamil Nadu and the broader Tamil diaspora. This large Tamil diaspora that actively consumes and engages with online Gaana music videos explains the high internet traffic that musicians from Chennai receive on their YouTube music videos, totaling up to 70 or 80 million views. Nithya explains, "For people living abroad, north Chennai Gaana musicians are the most popular because we remind them where they came from." Nithya's comment about the *authenticity* of experience reflected in Chennai's Gaana music videos clarifies the volume of engagement with their videos from the broader Tamil diaspora as well as the rural Tamil hinterland. The depictions of "the urban real" in Gaana music videos are mediated through visual and sonic representations of life in Chennai, including depictions of the street, style, and slang that are tied to the experience of living at the margins of the city.

Gaana music listening carries currency not only for newer waves of immigrants to GCC and Southeast Asian countries, but also for the wealthier, "older" migrants who have lived in Malaysia or Singapore and accrued generational mobility and wealth. For these older generations of Tamil migrants, Gaana music renews their connections with the imagined "homeland" by refreshing their conceptions of Tamil cultural practices. Nithya is one of a few Gaana musicians who has been invited to perform live concerts in Malaysia, Dubai, and Singapore for this community of Tamil migrants after achieving internet fame and global renown within the Tamil diaspora.

> There is a pub in Kuala Lumpur called Madurai KL that invites various Tamil musicians and the sponsors from there love Gaana music. So they sponsored my flight ticket, hotel stay, and showed me around the city when I was there. It was my first time on an airplane. That is the power of Gaana. It has given me everything.

Nithya's experience, while still not wholly representative of the kind of acclaim that Gaana musicians from Chennai receive, reflects a growing trend of globality that Gaana musical reach has experienced in light of online and digital platforms that have enabled self-production and financial sponsorship from a global Tamil diaspora. It also shows that there is a vibrant market for Gaana music and Tamil music more broadly in the Tamil diaspora through the institution of pubs, night clubs, and bars specifically for patrons to listen to and interact with Tamil music and musicians. Miran, who is a Gaana lyricist, corroborates this experience of receiving sponsorship from Tamil expats.

> There is a woman in Texas, America who loves Gaana music. She will reach out to me via WhatsApp or Facebook every now and again and ask me to compose a song about her or her relatives in exchange for some money. Once, she even asked me to compose something about Trump as a joke.

Miran's story also points to the presence of a Gaana musical diaspora in the United States, which remains in the minority of the Indian diasporic experience within North America. At the same time, the moderately enhanced socioeconomic mobility of "lower" non-Brahmin and Dalit castes enables some segments of this demographic to move to the United States and Canada, where educational and occupational parameters for immigration are significantly more stringent than requirements to migrate to GCC or Southeast Asian countries. This turns our attention to the case of Carnatic music and the Tamil Brahmin diaspora that tends to find a greater foothold in countries like the US, UK, Australia, and Canada because of generational access to education, wealth, and caste privilege that fosters their emigration to these countries.

For Tamil Brahmins, who have historically had access to high-status, well-paid jobs under British colonial rule as clerks and administrators, the IT revolution in India offered enhanced access to jobs overseas as a result of the monopolistic nature of Brahminical caste privilege that

covets these high-status positions. Fuller and Narasimhan (2014) argue that overseas migration is, in some respects, an extension of the urban migration and circulation within India that Tamil Brahmins have undertaken since the nineteenth century. But migration to the United States, they argue, has a unique quality because of the potency of the American dream and the potential endangerment of their children's socialization into "Indian" culture and values. Tamil Brahmins in the US have settled in parts of California and New Jersey, creating a politically and culturally hegemonic Brahminical diaspora that has produced a second generation identifying as "Indian American." However, the migration of Tamil Brahmins does not erode their ties to cultural socialization into caste-concomitant practices. In the face of their experience as minorities or "brown," second-generation Tamil Brahmins in America have taken to these cultural practices such as Carnatic music and Sanskritic Hindu religiosity with renewed fervor. In parts of the US like the Bay Area or New Jersey, which are densely populated with Tamil Brahmin immigrants, various institutions and organizations have emerged to entrench the second generation in cultural practices associated with Brahminical forms of distinction-making.

In the Bay Area, for example, various Carnatic music "hobby" groups and *sabhas* have emerged as a result of this heightened interest in maintaining ties to Brahminical practices that are coded as "Indian" cultural values. Fuller and Narasimhan (2014) describe the process of Brahminical socialization in America as invested in the production of a "model minority" that combines "traditional" values with high levels of educational achievement. In interviews with first- and second-generation Tamil Brahmin residents in the Bay Area, I found that most, if not all, of them had experienced early Carnatic musical socialization. Carnatic musical socialization takes place through rigorous training offered by Carnatic music teachers settled in these areas as well as Chennai-based musicians who tour North America and hold multi-day workshops to teach children

in the diaspora Carnatic musical compositions and *raaga*-based improvisational techniques in exchange for fees paid in US dollars. Chennai-based musicians are sponsored by this wealthy Tamil Brahmin diaspora to perform at various venues in North America, where they are hosted in the homes of Tamil Brahmin fans and patrons and receive up to three-hour concert slots. Vijay* explains the ways that Tamil Brahmin migration has shaped the Carnatic music scene globally.

> What happened is that large chunks of the Brahmin community began leaving the city in the 1970s because of the reservation policy, settling abroad and all that. Then came the IT revolution when again the Brahmin community was at the forefront. The worldwide prosperity that happened in the 1990s and several people began companies, sold companies, became millionaires overnight that became the diaspora that was going to support the arts for the next thirty years. They began inviting all these musicians to come abroad, to perform there then you've got the Thyagaraja Aradhana happening all over America. Musicians today make money based upon their trips to the US. They also make money out of their training students on Skype, sitting over here [in Chennai]. I'm told the going rate is almost something like Rs.3000-4000 for a song or some such thing. So they make a lot of money. So when I say lot of money, in relative terms, I mean they won't be making the kind of money that a professional in another field will be making. But they do make a decent amount of money.

Vijay's analysis of Tamil Brahmin migration centers the experience of reservation policies that led to many Tamil Brahmins feeling that they were at the receiving end of "reverse discrimination," regardless of the intergenerational forms of privilege that gave them the cultural and socioeconomic capital to migrate to the US in the first place. Upon arriving in the US, many Tamil Brahmins organized festivals and institutions that sought to ensure the transmission of caste-based cultural practices to younger generations of Tamil Brahmins in the diaspora, such as the Thyagaraja Aradhana. The Thyagaraja Festival takes place in Cleveland, Ohio, every year and parallels the annual celebration of late-medieval Carnatic composer, Thyagaraja, which takes place in Thiruvaiyaru in Tamil Nadu. In contrast to the Thiruvaiyaru celebration, which primarily involves professional musicians, the Thyagaraja Aradhana hosts various musical and religious

chanting competitions to engage younger listeners and musicians. Latha,* who frequently tours in North America, describes her experience:

> People living in the US are somewhat more interested in Carnatic music than kids here in Chennai also. They all start Carnatic music lessons very early, at ages four or five. Their parents are also very invested in helping them get Carnatic musical exposure by organizing concerts by us Chennai-based musicians there. A lot of concerts happen on the US especially around spring or fall. Between March and May, and August to November is the time when a lot of tours happen.

She continues her observation of crowds and concerts in the US compared to Chennai:

> When you travel, what happens is that people want longer concerts, more traditional concerts. They want to make full use of a singer coming after a year or something. Sometimes the concerts are a lot longer, around four hours almost. It will start earlier, around 4 p.m., and it can go on to 7:30 or so. And people stay till the end, that's one good difference. Most of these concerts will have dinner afterwards. Come to think of it, it's actually a nice thing because we as artists also spend more time when we are traveling. The big hubs are San Jose, Philly, New Jersey. The biggest hub is probably San Jose. A lot of young children come to watch concerts in San Jose. New Jersey doesn't have as much of a younger crowd. The Bay Area is so full of these young kids learning music, and their parents will make them come and listen to concerts.

Organizations like CMANA (Carnatic Music Association of North America) were established in the 1970s as tax-exempt, nonprofit institutions invested in the cultural promotion of Carnatic music and related arts like Bharatanatyam, a "classicized" dance form. CMANA has branches all over the US and Canada and arranges and promotes tours of local and Chennai-based Carnatic musicians. They also organize competitions and talent shows that seek to renew the younger generation of Tamil Brahmin Indian Americans' connection to their "cultural roots." Various music and dance schools have popped up all over the Bay Area and New Jersey, where children are trained in these arts as part of their socialization into "Indian" culture. Other organizations, schools, and groups have also emerged, like Yuva Sangeetha Lahari, SaPa Foundation, or the Navatman Music Collective, which seek to "promote" the uptake of Carnatic musical education and performance within the Tamil Brahmin diaspora. Unlike in Chennai, where *sabhas* often host

free concerts in the mornings, North American *sabhas* and educational organizations charge the extremely wealthy Tamil Brahmin diaspora exorbitantly for tickets and classes. The Cleveland Thyagaraja Festival, for example, has various tiers of ticket pricing that start at a couple of hundred dollars. Their focus on "sustaining *sampradaya*" or "sustaining tradition" entices parents of second-generation Tamil Brahmins to enroll their children in these competitions and classes to maintain links to an imagined "homeland."

Fusion Projects: Music Goes "Global"

The globalization of recorded music fosters new forms of musical connection and collaboration, especially with the increased availability of digitally-mediated platforms to mix, sample, and fuse sounds from seemingly disparate genres. As music moves through migration networks and digital technologies that make music "mobile," the globalization of ostensibly "local" musical genres fosters different approaches to "fusion projects" that take place within the ambit of commodified and commercial flows in the global music industry. Music from hitherto rigid provenances become fluid as they encounter new sources of musical inspiration and find geographically far-flung resonances, resulting in creative projects that advance distinct musical agendas and sonic innovations.

In North America, second-generation Tamil Brahmins have taken to Carnatic music with zealous passion, often finding "innovative" ways of propagating a taste for the art form by fusing it with musical genres popular in the West, such as electronic, pop, and even hip-hop music. The Thayir Sadham Project was initiated by four such second-generation Tamil Brahmin Carnatic musicians, taking their moniker from the "curd rice" that has stereotypically become associated with the "pure" vegetarian diet of Tamil Brahmins. In claiming that they are "*thayir sadham* lovers," they uncritically adopt and signal to others their pride in belonging to this caste

community. Such assertions are enabled by the translation of Brahminical cultural practices as part of their "Indian heritage" that offer second-generation immigrants a foothold to claim space in global circuits of musical taste. The Thayir Sadham Project has conducted workshops and provided Carnatic musical curricula for teachers in US schools, and they create music that fuses Carnatic music with western genres in order to create greater "accessibility." One of the members of the group says that she wants to change the perception of Carnatic music as accessible only to those with prior knowledge by offering a simpler "gateway" to "more traditional, serious music." Examples of such "accessibility" measures include projects like "A Million Dreams," which sought to take Carnatic music to government schools in Bengaluru to teach them about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, or the release of a music video called "Mylapore Rap." Set in the by-lanes of a Mylapore informal settlement, the members of the Project appropriate elements of hip-hop such as the street, clothes, or the "cool" pose, but the content of the music video omits lyrical improvisation—the mainstay of hip-hop—in favor of *konnakol*, or a Carnatic-based rhythmic percussive beat that is orally enunciated. Projects such as these that try to augment "accessibility" only serve to attract audiences of younger Tamil Brahmins that are already interested or knowledgeable about Carnatic music. Additionally, such Carnatic "fusion" projects seek to fuse with genres like jazz, pop, rock, or electronic music that are only accessible to an already-mobile class of Indians and Indian Americans who are interested in acquiring the symbolic capital of expressing omnivorous taste in these genres. Rarely do such Carnatic "fusion" projects acknowledge the plethora of locally vibrant genres such as Gaana, *parai*, or other musical forms that are enjoyed by the members of "lower" caste communities. In refusing to fuse Carnatic with these forms, they not only deny these forms the visibility that Carnatic music receives, but they also deny their inherent *musicality*. The aesthetics of Carnatic music fusion projects seek to

maintain a level of musical purity by only fusing with similarly high-status musical genres, or in the case of hip-hop, appropriating the "cool"-ness of the genre to attract young Brahminical listeners.

Fusion projects that bridge Carnatic music to jazz and rock are not new. L. Subramanian is a Carnatic violinist who has received global acclaim for his fusion projects that blend Carnatic with jazz and western art and symphonic music. His projects include collaborations with jazz musicians like Stanley Clarke, Al Jarreau, Stéphane Grappelli, and Ravi Coltrane; symphonies like the Oslo Philharmonic and the Berlin State Opera; and musicians of global renown like Yehudi Menuhin. The framing of Carnatic music as *the* classical music of South India has fostered collaborations that take place on the global stage. Hindustani or "north Indian classical music" serves as fertile ground for Subramanian's fusion projects, with collaborators from the Hindustani genre like Ali Akbar Khan and Ustad Rais Khan. Similarly, the Shakti project was a fusion band formed by English guitarist John McLaughlin and included Carnatic violinist L. Shankar, Carnatic mandolin player U. Shrinivas, Carnatic singer Shankar Mahadevan, Carnatic percussionist "Vikku" Vinayakram, and Hindustani tabla player Zakir Hussain. Carnatic music's mobility into world fusion projects was enabled by "crossover" musical movements like the world music trend in the 1980s, which birthed several "world fusion" projects combining jazz with musical genres ranging from Carnatic and Hindustani to Afrobeat, Celtic harp, and salsa music. The preeminence of Carnatic music as a "classical" music of South India gave a fillip to such projects by attracting western musicians like John McLaughlin, the Beatles, or Alice Coltrane to this highly visible genre. In the contemporary Carnatic musical context, the availability of global musical repertoires to the mobile class of Tamil Brahmins has led to fusion projects with rock (Bangalore-based Carnatic rock band Agam or Mumbai-based Anand Bhaskar Collective are some examples) and

jazz (examples include Rohan Krishnamurthy's The Alaya Project, VidyA Carnatic jazz trio, and Ganavya Doraiswamy and Rajna Swaminathan's "Aikyam: Onnu" project). Such projects take place in a geographically dispersed fashion, bridging collaborations between members of both Tamil Brahmin residents in India and the broader Tamil Brahmin diaspora through digital technologies of fusion, sampling, and recording.

In contrast to Carnatic musical fusion projects, which have taken place for over four or five decades at this point, Gaana musical fusion projects are taking place at an accelerated rate only in the past six or seven years with the advent of ensembles like Casteless Collective, a sixteen-member ensemble that fuses Gaana with genres like hip-hop, rock, and jazz "to give Gaana a global stage." Tamil rap predates these Gaana-hip-hop fusion projects, pioneered by rap songs in Tamil films like A.R. Rahman's "Pettai Rap" in 1994 and Malaysia-based Yogi B, whose 2006 rap-remix of the Tamil film classic "Madai Thiranthu" brought hip-hop to Tamil musical shores. Yogi B's provenance gestures at the importance of the broader Tamil diaspora in feeding musical innovation in Tamil Nadu—a trend that continues today with artists like Yung Raja and Lady Kash, both Singaporean-Tamil rappers and songwriters. However, with the advent of socially conscious rap via Casteless Collective's entry into the independent music scene, more Gaana artists are taking to rap because of similarities in lyrical improvisation and social messaging as well as their emphasis on rhythm, beats, and percussion. One of the most prolific examples of Gaana-rap fusion is Arivu, who came to rap only after joining the Casteless Collective in 2018. Arivu's background in penning Ambedkarite educational songs with his parents has lent itself to a career in socially conscious rap and songwriting. Arivu's 2019 debut rap album, "Therukural," produced in collaboration with Chennai-based producer OfRo, tackles a range of social justice themes and current events such as the police shooting of Snowlin, a protester of Sterlite's proposed expansion of a copper smelter

plant in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi; "tamizhachi" criticizes gender-based violence; and "kalla mouni" offers political satire that questions the effects of capitalism and corruption on Indian society. Arivu's success as a socially conscious rapper has inspired several young Gaana musicians in Chennai to take his lead and produce anti-caste rap, such as Vyasarpadi's "Black Boys," who fuse Gaana with rap to bring greater visibility to the caste and spatial discrimination they face on account of their social location and address. Others like MC Jango riff more subtly on themes of discrimination with rap songs like "Naanum Rowdy Dhan" ("I am also a rowdy") and The K Raps' "Kanavu" ("Dreams"), which harken back to the medieval Tamil language tradition of "*sol isai,*" or spoken poetry, and fuse it with more contemporary themes and styles influenced by American hip-hop.

However, rappers from Gaana musical backgrounds and from Dalit communities do not receive the kind of platforms or recognition offered to rappers from middle- and upper-caste backgrounds. At a hip-hop cipha that takes place in west Chennai's Anna Nagar Tower Park,[5] most of the participating rappers and break dancers are from relatively more privileged backgrounds and rarely invite musicians from the Gaana scene to participate in their rap battles and ciphas. When I asked about their absence, one of the rappers in the scene took me aside and said, "Here, we do hip-hop and rap, not Gaana. Gaana is made by Paraiyars [a Tamil Dalit caste community], and we don't associate with that here." As this statement illustrates, class and caste fragment the idealized view of socially conscious hip-hop and rap presented in mediatized depictions of the scene. The presence of "middle-castes" in these spaces inhibits rappers from Gaana and Dalit backgrounds from participating in such events. Musicians and rappers from Dalit backgrounds

[5] Ciphas (also spelled as ciphers or cyphers) are lyrical duels or freestyle battles (Williams and Stroud 2010).

express the exclusion and lack of reception they face when they release their videos. According to MC Jango, “It is almost easier to make it as a Gaana musician than a rapper coming from our background. They tell you that you are only fit to make Gaana, and when you rap, they claim it is not for us.” Many rap-based projects privilege “upper” or “middle” caste visions of what rap ought to sound like, often appropriating elements of street style, Tamil slang, and lyrical improvisation without acknowledging the more insidious caste silos that stratify this music scene.

Figure 5.2. *Break dancer at a rap cipha in Anna Nagar Tower Park*

Even in film music that borrows the oeuvre of Gaana musicians’ lyricality and styles of speech, dress, and posture, the production style takes Gaana out of its aesthetic, social, and political contexts by modifying beats and choosing “upper” caste playback singers to voice over lyrics composed by Gaana musicians. “Upper” caste Tamil film music producers like Santhosh

Narayanan and Anirudh Ravichander have invited collaboration with Gaana artists like Gana Bala, combining Gaana vocals with jazzy and bluesy riffs to sound aesthetically and sonically distinct from the kinds of Gaana songs being produced independently.

An independent record label called "maajja," founded in 2021 in collaboration with Tamil film music composer A.R. Rahman, seeks to put Tamil music on "a global stage" as a "technology-based label alternative" to invite collaborations between Tamil musicians from across the diaspora. "Enjoy Enjaami" was the debut single released in 2021 on the maajja platform, with artists Arivu and Dhee featuring in the music video that was produced by Santhosh Narayanan. Arivu wrote the lyrics in honor of his grandmother, Valliammal, who was a landless laborer in Sri Lanka forced into indentured servitude. The lyrics draw upon Ambedkarite philosophy, critiquing the exploitation of Dalit communities in caste-hierarchical divisions of labor. The title references "*enjaami,*" a term used to address feudal and colonial overlords. The word "*enjaami,*" Arivu clarifies, is also a term of endearment that Arivu's grandmother uses to refer to him. The video, however, prominently features Dhee, Santhosh Narayanan's own daughter and an "upper" caste Australian of Sri Lankan Tamil descent. Through the course of the song, Dhee is seated on a throne while Arivu stands. The track listing of Enjoy Enjaami—"Dhee ft. Arivu"—makes it appear as though Dhee is the main collaborating artist despite Arivu's composition and conceptualization of the song. In the song, Arivu assumes the character of his grandmother, modifying his voice to sound like that of a traditionally female Oppari singer.[6] He sings: "*Anju maram vazhathen, azhagaana thottam vechen, thottam sezhichaalum, en thoda nanaiyalaye,*" which translates to "I grew five trees, I maintained a beautiful garden. But even though the garden prospers, my throat

[6] Oppari is a Tamil, rural folk music traditionally sung at funerals with *parai* drumming as an accompaniment.

goes dry." Sung in the Oppari style, these lyrics poignantly capture the generations of labor exploitation that communities of indentured laborers to Sri Lanka and in Tamil Nadu have experienced while working on plantations. These lines are followed by Arivu rapping and Dhee joining him on the vocals. "*Enjoy enjaami, vaango vaango onnaagi,*" which translates to, "Enjoy enjaami, come together as one." Despite Arivu's musical interpretation of the caste-based exploitation of labor, the song is joyous and upbeat, resulting in a sound that is in tune with global production styles despite its engagement with caste-based modes of oppression. Yet, it is Dhee who is often featured in promotional videos, news reports, and billboards as "the face" of the song, and not Arivu, to whom the song owes its composition. In an interview, when Dhee was asked what the song was about, she said, "We wanted it to celebrate nature, our roots, ancestors and all life forms, not just humans."[7] Dhee's interpretation of the song offers little space for nuance regarding the politics of caste and labor exploitation. Even in such globalized musical collaborations, caste continues to play a major factor in how artists are credited, compensated, and acknowledged for their contributions.

In my interview with Arivu, he critiqued the uncritical celebration of hip-hop as a universal good for Tamil musicians.

> There are multiple ways for artists to survive, but how genuinely you approach your art form depends on who you're representing. You can't just appropriate a culture and sell it in an elite space as hip-hop and pose as a North Chennai person. You should have spoken up when evictions happened there and they evicted everyone to Kannagi Nagar. You went and used those streets, they are the people that must have given you water. But when they were evicted, you sat in your safeguarded bungalow. That's where capitalism comes in.

Arivu's critique of musical commodification cautions against a globalist perspective at the cost of omitting or erasing locally-rooted anti-caste struggles. The appropriation of hip-hop continues to

[7] As quoted in the *Hindustan Times*, https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/art-culture/meet-arivu-and-dhee-the-duo-behind-the-viral-protest-song-enjoy-enjaami-101616153305468.html.

persist within "upper" caste music scenes, whether in Tamil film or through independent productions that appropriate the experiences of exploitation faced primarily by Dalitbahujan communities. Similarly, Carnatic music fusion projects advance the "propagation" of Carnatic music under the guise of enhancing "accessibility" even when such fusion projects circulate within genres only accessible to elite castes and communities in India and within the Indian diaspora. Carnatic music within the Tamil Brahmin diaspora has uncritically been interpreted as representing all of "Indian culture," resulting in the problematic incubation of Hindutva right-wing politics and Brahminical caste supremacy within this scene. As Carnatic music fan Dilip* explains,

> NRIs are even worse than Indians in terms of their caste outlook. They are in a time warp. They left in the sixties, so they think India is in the sixties. They'll be lighting lamps over there and all, and there is a large chunk of NRIs that support Hindutva ideology. Modi's fan following is huge in the foreign countries. So you know where they're coming from. They all think that that is the order of the day.

Dilip's analysis of NRIs and the broader Tamil Brahmin diaspora reflects the high degree of support enjoyed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist ideologies within the diaspora. Carnatic musical socialization for members of the diaspora privileges continuities in "culture" and "heritage" with little regard to the problematic and exclusivist culture fostered by the music scene. The stark differences in the production and circulation of "fusion" projects in Carnatic and Gaana musical genres expose the variety of ways in which caste is socially reproduced in new geographical contexts as music is made mobile through digitalization, migration, and globalization.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, both Carnatic and Gaana musical genres have been influenced and transformed by the ever-changing landscape of digitalization. Even as these genres have been made "mobile" through the global circulation of distinct segments of the Tamil diaspora and new

digital platforms for "fusion" and collaboration, they retain aspects of their caste provenances that mark their inclusion or exclusion in global circuits of taste. The globalization of music industries has sparked new innovations and sonic sensibilities within Carnatic and Gaana, both locally and abroad, but their disparate circuits of movement reflect the ways that caste continues to inflect musical engagement, production, and consumption. Whereas Carnatic's mobility into digital and "global" circuits of taste draws from an interest to preserve its musical "purity," Gaana's digitalization has offered new possibilities for the resistance of musical and caste-based orthodoxies. In order to fully grasp the effect of the social reproduction of caste, sociologists must make sense of the ways that caste travels to new geographies via symbolic practices of music and other cultural forms. In this chapter, I have demonstrated some of the ways music is made mobile, and along with its movement, has taken the dynamics of caste inequality to new symbolic arenas where battles for distinction are fought.

Conclusion

Outro

On March 14, 2020, I went to the home of a Gaana musician in north Chennai's Washermenpet. We shared conversation, music, and several cups of tea. On the train home, I pulled out my phone and felt increasingly alarmed as I read news reports announcing what I know now as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chennai was subject to a months-long lockdown soon after, and my fieldwork came to an unceremonious end. In the months that followed, I sat at home and read the daily news reports of fresh infections, deaths, unemployment, hunger, and uncertainty in the city locked out beyond my doors—the same city that I had traversed daily for nearly a year. The situation was especially grim for the Gaana musicians, who occasionally messaged and called to tell me about how the pandemic was impacting them. Funerals were no longer a social affair even as death rates skyrocketed, especially in informal settlements where residential density is high. Gaana *kutcheris*—a community ritual for coping with grief—had been indefinitely canceled, and with them went the earnings that Gaana musicians had relied on to sustain themselves. Various relief efforts and donation drives were organized by individuals and NGOs, but the uncertainty resulting from months of foregoing income was taking its toll.

Saran called me at the end of April, 2020. He said that his revenue stream had dried up since he was no longer earning from singing at community events, and he did not have enough saved up to release new YouTube music videos. I was ready to offer to collect money for him and other Gaana musicians, but he stopped me and expressed a completely different concern. He said, "I have a roof over my head and so my family received rations from the government. But the people I worry about are the ones sleeping on the streets that are going hungry every day." Saran's

concern for unhoused people in his area led him to organize a food donation drive. Together, we organized resources and donations to create relief packages. Saran assembled his friends in the area to distribute the relief packages, but as he said a few days later, "Hunger doesn't stop after just one meal."

The pandemic revealed the insidious ways that inequality works in the city. The poor got poorer, and those with jobs in the music industry were left with few resources to contend with an interminably long series of unexpected events that depleted their revenue streams. Gaana musicians could no longer do their job of easing the collective grief of countless deaths in their own families and communities. Saran began to deliver for Swiggy, a meal delivery service, often putting himself in harm's way to deliver food to those in the city who could afford to pay to never leave their homes. Other Gaana musicians turned to similar gigs to be able to afford mounting medical bills, the price of food, rent, and petrol. Musicians in the Carnatic music world also faced the daunting prospect of attenuated incomes as concerts were canceled. But the extensive pre-existing digital infrastructure of Carnatic music meant that these musicians could migrate to online platforms and supplement their income by charging for entry to virtual concerts, programs, and music lessons.[1] Several Gaana musicians, on the other hand, have had to put aside their musical careers to attend to the more pressing matter of money and where it would come from.

The dichotomy between Gaana and Carnatic musicians' experience of the pandemic reveals the wide gulf of differences in how music is evaluated as "labor" on the one hand, and "art" on the other. Even as in-person concerts and events have picked back up, successive waves

[1] "Silenced by Pandemic, Going Digital is Only Way for Carnatic Music… But That's No Easy Raga," *The Indian Express*, https://Indianexpress.Com/Article/Entertainment/Music/Silenced-By-Pandemic-Going-Digital-Is-Only-Way-For-Carnatic-Music-6481883/.

of the pandemic continue to batter India and its people. For many Gaana musicians, this has meant reconciling themselves to leaving behind a professional career in music in favor of jobs and gigs that compensate their labor, whereas Carnatic musicians have capitalized on the ceaseless demand for "art" by a wealthier diaspora of listeners and patrons. While the pandemic did not cause such bifurcations in the valuation of art and music, it did expose them with irrefutable clarity.

In this dissertation, I have argued that the social reproduction of caste inequality is contingent upon four modes: socialization, spatialization, politicization, and the related processes of digitalization, migration, and globalization. The pandemic has provided enhanced definition to these modes by which caste inequality is reproduced by exposing the divergent experiences of hardship that musicians in these two scenes have had to face. Neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status, as identified in the 2011 census, showed an increase in pandemic-associated mortality in proportion to the increase in each measure of community disadvantage.[2] The study employed thirteen socioeconomic indicators such as household crowding, the absence of on-site toilets, and the lack of bank accounts, and found that the number of deaths in Chennai were undercounted. The stories of hunger, unemployment, and deaths in families and communities, however, paint a different and fuller picture. Herein lies the value of ethnographies of caste, which take seriously the stories of individuals and their experiences dealing with the consequences of living in a highly unequal caste society.

Through the course of this dissertation, I have excavated the ways in which musicking lends itself to the reproduction of caste inequality. I have found that music and other cultural modes of seeking distinction are not, in fact, peripheral to the production of caste inequality. Rather, they

[2] "Covid-19 Deaths Undercounted in Chennai: Study," December 23, 2021, *The Hindu*, https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/study-finds-under-counting-of-covid-19-deaths-in-chennai-district/article38013966.ece.

actively reproduce and provide resources to resist such inequalities. Brahminism in India, and particularly in Chennai, has acquired what I call a "hegemonic register." Sonic modes of renewing Brahminical caste affiliations and re-entrenching caste privilege are provided by the socialization, spatialization, politicization, and digitalization of Brahminical cultural power. Tamil Brahmins have historically held the privilege to migrate globally, taking their cultural practices and caste affiliations with them. The local, national, and global resonances of Brahminism reproduce Brahminical sociocultural hegemony by amplifying and elevating related sociocultural practices of distinction, exclusion, and privilege to heightened volumes. By refusing to identify Brahminism as enabling a pervasive form of casteism, this hegemonic register comes to stand in for "modernity," "nationalism," and "culture" in ways that seriously obfuscate its insidious effects in preserving caste hierarchies. The question of Brahminical caste exclusivity is not limited to the "local" context of Chennai alone; its acquisition of a global hegemonic register has extended its reach to new shores where its identification becomes dimmer as Brahminism transmutes into new manifestations.

In 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a lawsuit against Cisco on the grounds that a Dalit employee had been discriminated against by his "upper" caste supervisors. At the time, there were few conversations or legal sanctions against caste-based discrimination in the US. But this event revealed the importance of recognizing and constructing legal frameworks to safeguard caste-oppressed communities from the casteism of "upper" caste Indian Americans, who have dominated the cultural and ethnic discourse on "Indianness" within the US. Since 2020, organizations like Equality Labs and the Ambedkar International Center have been pushing for such measures despite the cultural hegemony of organizations like the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which has attempted to block the institution of such safeguards on

the grounds that it was violating the rights of "Hindu Americans."[3] The conversation on caste in the US has achieved a heightened pitch, and it is high time that sociology turns its attention to the question of caste as an axis of social difference not just in the US, but also in the context of its operation in India, its country of origin.

Can "caste" as a system of social differentiation and separation become a heuristic to understand race and other hierarchical social systems more broadly? Wilkerson (2020) would say yes, with her analysis of American racial oppression as a function of "caste." In this dissertation, I have argued that caste differentiation, in its localized conceptions, must be comprehended in full if we are to understand the contours of inequality in India. But this research also points us to another question: How do these localized conceptions of caste become portable and travel to new locations? Conversely, how do global discourses on dismantling systemic oppression get reworked in the context of localized anti-caste resistances? I contend that we must go beyond lifting "caste" out of its lived reality to produce an academic understanding of systemic oppression globally. To reify caste as yet another sociological "ideal-type" would only occlude the invisible and symbolic processes by which caste, race, and other forms of social difference share crucial resonances. By understanding caste in its various manifestations on the ground, we are better able to see and hear the complex sociological ways in which inequality is socially reproduced: through socialization into seeing inequality and hierarchy as normalized and necessary, through the spatialization of inequality as cities across the world contend with hyper-localized forms of boundary-making, through the politicization of inequality as various communities of privilege seek to preserve and

[3] "California's Legal Ground in Battling Caste Discrimination Takes Centre Stage in Historic Cisco Case," March 10, 2021, *The Wire,* https://thewire.in/caste/cisco-case-caste-discrimination-silicon-valley-ambedkar-organisations.

resist hegemony, and through the migration of these forms to new shores through digitalization and globalization.

The creative attempts of artists to connect Gaana's anti-caste aesthetics and hip-hop's long history of resisting racism lends sociologists new insight into the operation of inequality and the aesthetics of resistance. Whether in Chennai, Rio de Janeiro, or Dakar, the music of oppressed communities mobilizes hip-hop in conjunction with local aesthetic sensibilities to launch articulations of a *global* resistance to oppressive power structures. Similarly, the hegemonic register of Brahminism as voiced through Carnatic music affords new pathways for scholars to investigate the supremacy of privileged communities across the world through a careful examination of the symbolic, cultural, and musical modes by which fascism and authoritarianism are gaining currency. The story of caste and its audibility through music thus has broader resonances for urban sociologists, cultural sociologists, and sociologists of inequality in other contexts, who are committed to deepening our understandings of how social actors stake out differences, seek distinction, and create countercultural practices to challenge inequality. This dissertation, then, is an invitation to stay with the story of caste and music in Chennai for the richness it offers to sociological understandings of inequality, and also to take these insights into new contexts of sociological inquiry. Music has the power to bring people together to the exclusion of others, but it also has the capacity to organize resistance to such exclusion and demand dignity for historically oppressed communities and their cultural practices, histories, and aesthetics. If, at the end of this manuscript, you were reminded of resonances between musical politics of caste in Chennai and other contexts, then it is because they both point to the universality of power and its resistance. I hope you will consider this an offer to explore these resonances in order to sharpen

our understanding of inequality and how it travels across a range of contexts, histories, and geographies.

Bibliography

Allen, Matthew Harp. 1997. "Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance." *The Drama Review* 41(3): 63–100.

Akademi, Sangeet Natak. 1988. *Indo-Soviet Seminar on "Tradition and Modernity*." New Delhi: Sangeet Natak, Akademi.

Ambedkar, Babasaheb. 1944. *Annihilation of Caste: With a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*. Mumbai: New Age Printing Press.

Amrit Srinivasan. 1985. "Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and Her Dance." *Economic and Political Weekly,* 1873: 1869–76.

Anandhi, S. 1995. *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Madras Slums.* New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.

Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City.* New York: Norton.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1974. "Right and Left Hand Castes in South India." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11(2–3): 216–59.

———. 1986. "Is Homo Hierarchicus?" *American Ethnologist* 13(4): 745–61.

Arabindoo, Pushpa. 2011. "'City of Sand': Stately Re-Imagination of Marina Beach in Chennai." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35 (2): 379–401.

Arasu, V. "Ghana: Songs from the Slums of Chennai." In C.S. Lakshmi (ed.) *The Unhurried City: Writings on Chennai*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 92–102.

Arun, Joe. 2017. "From Stigma to Self Assertion: Paraiyars and the Symbolism of the Parai Drum." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 41(1): 81–104.

Ayyathurai, Gajendran. 2011. "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness: Pandit Iyothee Thass, Tamil Buddhism, and the Marginalized in South India." PhD diss. Columbia University.

Bairy, Ramesh. 2010. *Being Brahmin, Being Modern: Exploring the Lives of Caste Today.* New Delhi: Routledge India.

Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 1997. *Caste, Protest, and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal 1872–47.* Taylor and Francis.

Bate, Bernard. 2011. *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Baviskar, Amita. 2011. "What the Eye Does Not See: The Yamuna in the Imagination of Delhi." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46(50): 45–53.

Bayly, Susan. 2001. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beck, Brenda. 1972. *Peasant Society in Konku: A Study of Right and Left Subcastes in South India*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Benjamin, Solomon. 2000. "Governance, Economic Settings and Poverty in Bangalore." *Environment and Urbanization* 12(1): 35–56.

Benzecry, Claudio E. 2011. *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berreman, Gerald D. 1960. “Caste in India and the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 66(2): 120–27.

———. 1967. “Caste as Social Process.” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 23(4): 351–70.

Beteille, Andre. 1965. *Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

———. 1991. "The Reproduction of Inequality: Occupation, Caste and Family." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 25(1): 3–28.

———. 1996. “Caste in Contemporary India.” In C. Fuller (ed.) *Caste Today.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bhan, Gautam. 2009. "This Is No Longer the City I Once Knew: Evictions, the Urban Poor and the Right to the City in Millennial Delhi." *Environment and Urbanization* 21(1): 127–42.

Bjorkman, Lisa. 2014. "Becoming a Slum: From Municipal Colony to Illegal Settlement in Liberalization Era Mumbai." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(1): 36–59.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *Distinction*. London, England: Routledge.

Bourgois, Philippe I. 2010. *In Search of Respect.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bracket, David. 2016. *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Caldeira, Teresa P.R. 2012. "Imprinting and Moving Around: New Visibilities and Configurations of Public Space in São Paolo." *Public Culture* 24(2): 385–419.

Calefato, Patrizia. 2008. *The Clothed Body.* Enskede: TPB.

Carter, Prudence. 2003. "'Black' Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and Schooling Conflicts for Low-Income African American Youth." *Social Problems* 50(1): 136–55.

Castells, Manuel. 2012. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age.* Chichester: Wiley.

Chakravarti, Uma. 2003. *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens.* Sage Publications.

Chandler, Robin M. and Nuri Chandler-Smith. 2005. "Flava in Ya Gear: Transgressive Politics and the Influence of Hip-hop on Contemporary Fashion." In L. Welters and P.A. Cunningham (eds.) *Twentieth-century American Fashion.* Oxford, UK: Berg, 229–54.

Chatterjee, Debi. 2004. *Up against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Clark-Deces, Isabelle. 2006. "How Dalits have Changed the Mood at Hindu Funerals: A View from South India." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10(3): 257–69.

Clarke, Eric F. 2007. "The Impact of Recording on Listening." *Twentieth-Century Music* 4(1): 47–70.

Coelho, Karen and T. Venkat. 2009. “The Politics of Civil Society: Neighborhood Associationism in Chennai.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44(26/27): 358–67.

Cox, Oliver Cromwell. 1948. *Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Crawford, Margo Natalie. 2017. *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Dattatreyan, Gabriel E. and Dan Stageman. 2013. "Stage as Street: Representation at the Juncture of Arts and Justice." In Lalitha Vasudevan and Tiffany DeJaynes (eds). *Arts, Media, and Justice: Multimodal Literacy Explorations with Court-Involved Youth.* New York: Peter Lang, 109–35.

Dattatreyan, Gabriel E. 2020. *The Globally Familiar: Digital Hip Hop, Masculinity, and Urban Space in Delhi*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Deliège, Robert. 1997. *The World of the "Untouchables": Paraiayars of Tamil Nadu.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Demerath, N.J., Loren R. Demerath, N.J. Demerath III, and Surinder S. Jodhka. 2006. "Interrogating Caste and Religion in India's Emerging Middle Class". *Economic and Political Weekly* 41(35): 3813–18.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Desai, Sonalde and Amaresh Dubey. 2011. "Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46(11): 40–49.

Desphande, Satish and Mary E. John. 2010. "The Politics of Not Counting Caste." *Economic and Political Weekly* 45(25): 39–42.

Desphande, Satish. 2003. *Contemporary India: A Sociological View.* Delhi: Viking.

———. 2013. "Caste and Castelessness: Toward a Biography of the 'General Category.'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(15): 32–39.

Devakumar, J. 2007. "Caste Clashes and Dalits Rights Violations in Tamil Nadu." *Social Scientist.* 35(11): 39–54.

Dhareshwar, Vivek and R. Srivatsan. 1996. "'Rowdy-sheeters': An Essay on Subalternity and Politics." In Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.) *Subaltern Studies No. 9.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 201–31.

Diane Mines. 2005. *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual and the Politics of Dignity in South India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Dickey, Sara. 2016. *Living Class in Urban India.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Dirks, Nicholas 1987. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1992. "Castes of Mind." *Representations* 37: 56–78.

———. 1996. "Recasting Tamil Society: The Politics of Caste and Race in Contemporary South India." In C. Fuller (ed.) *Caste Today.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 263–95.

———. 2001. "The Reformation of Caste: Periyar, Ambedkar, and Gandhi." In *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 255–74.

Du Gay, Paul. 1997. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. London: Sage, in association with the Open University.

Dumont, Louis. 1966. *Homo hierarchicus: Caste System and its implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ellen, Ingrid Gould. 2001. *Sharing America's Neighborhoods: The Prospects for Stable Racial Integration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Eyerman, Ron and Andrew Jamison. 1998. *Music and Social Movements.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fiske, John. 1989. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Forman, Murray. 2000. "'Represent': Race, Space and Place in Rap Music." *Popular Music* 19(1): 65–90.

Fuller, C.J. (ed.) 1996. *Caste Today.* SOAS Studies on South Asia: Understandings and Perspectives. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Fuller, C.J. 1996. "Introduction: Caste Today." In C. Fuller (ed.) *Caste Today.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

———. 2003. *The Renewal of the Priesthood: Modernity and Traditionalism in a South Indian Temple*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 2010. "Caste, Race, and Hierarchy in the American South." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17(3): 604–21.

Fuller, C.J. and Haripriya Narasimhan. 2008. "From Landlords to Software Engineers: Migration and Urbanization among Tamil Brahmans." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50(1): 170–96.

Fuller, C.J., and Haripriya Narasimhan. 2014. *Tamil Brahmans: The Making of a Middle-Class Caste.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Garrido, Marco Z. 2019. *The Patchwork City: Class, Space, and Politics in Metro Manila*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2020. "Reconceptualizing Segregation from the Global South." *City and Community* 1-19.

Gauthaman, Raj. 2012. "Dalit Protest Culture: The First Stage." In D. Ravikumar and R. Azhagarasan (eds.) and Theodore Bhaskaran (trans), *The Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 263–71.

Geetha V. and S.V. Rajadurai. 2001. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Calcutta: Samya.

———. 1991. "Dravidian Politics: End of an Era." *Economic and Political Weekly* 26(26): 1591–92.

Gerbaudo, Paolo and Emiliano Treré. 2015. "In Search of the 'We' of Social Media Activism: Introduction to the Special Issue on Social Media and Protest Identities." *Information, Communication and Society* 18(8): 865–71.

Getter, Joseph M. 2006. Review of *Nadopasana: My Own Carnatic Tutor; Raganidhi; A Treasure Trove of Ragams; Carnatic Krithis and Varnams Audio Archive,* by Sristhi's Carnatica, Kalaioli Ethnomusicals, S. Sowmya et al. *Ethnomusicology* 50(3): 529–32.

Ghertner, Asher. 2008. "Analysis of New Legal Discourse behind Delhi's Slum Demolitions." *Economic and Political Weekly* 43(20): 57–66.

Ghurye, G.S. 1932. *Caste and Race in India*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co.

Gidla, Sujatha. 2018. *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gooptu, Nandini. 2014. *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India.* Cambridge University Press.

Gorringe, Hugo and D. Karthikeyan. 2014. "The Hidden Politics of Vegetarianism: Caste and "The Hindu" Canteen." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49(20): 20–22.

Gorringe, Hugo and Irene Rafanell. 2007. "The Embodiment of Caste: Oppression, Protest and Change". *Sociology* 41(1): 97–114.

Gorringe, Hugo. 2005. *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratization in Tamil Nadu*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

———. 2015. "From the Cheris to Chennai: Dalit Politics in Tamilnadu." In Hugo Gorringe, Roger Jeffery, and Suryakant Waghmore (eds.) *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Institutionalising Minorities in South Asia*. London: Sage Publications, 194–216.

———. 2016a. "Drumming out Oppression, or Drumming it in? Identity, Culture and Contention in Dalit Politics." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 50(1): 1–26.

———. 2016b. "Dalit Parties and the Dilemmas of Democratization in Tamil Nadu." *Studies in Indian Politics* 4(1): 49–62.

Gough, Kathleen. 1989. *Rural Change in Southeast India: 1950s to 1980s*. Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press.

Greene, Paul D. and Thomas Porcello, (eds.) 2005. *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Gross, Tori. 2022. "Constructing a Caste in the Past: Revisionist Histories and Competitive Authority in South India." *Modern Asian Studies* 1-39.

Guha, Sumit. 2015. *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black in Association with Ashoka University.

Gupta, Charu. 2001. *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India.* New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Gupta, Dipankar. 2000. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society.* New Delhi: Penguin Books.

———. 2005. "Caste and Politics: Identity Over System." *Annual Review of Anthropology* (21): 409–27.

Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson. 2006. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain.* London: Routledge.

Hancock, Mary. 2008. *The Politics of Heritage from Madras to Chennai*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hannerz, Ulf. 2003. "Being there … and there … and there! Reflections on Multi-site Ethnography." *Journal of Ethnography* 4(2): 201–16.

Hansen, T.B. 1999. *The Saffron Wave.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 2006. "Sounds of Freedom: Music, Taxis, and Racial Imagination in Urban South Africa." *Public Culture* 18(1): 185–208.

Hardgrave, R. 1965. *The Dravidian Movement.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

———. 1969. *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*. New Delhi: Manohar.

Harkness, Geoff. 2014. *Chicago Hustle and Flow: Gangs, Gangsta Rap, and Social Class*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Harper, E. 1968. “A Comparative Analysis of Caste: the United States and India.” In M. Singer and B. Cohn (eds.) *Structure and Change in Indian Society.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Harrison, Anthony Kwame. 2014. "'What Happens in the Cabin…': An Arts-Based Autoethnography of Underground Hip-Hop Song Making." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 8(1): 1–27.

Hebdige, Dick. 1991. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.

Hughes, Stephen P. 2002. “The 'Music Boom' in Tamil South India: Gramophone, Radio and the Making of Mass Culture.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22(4)*:* 445–73.

Ilaiah, Kancha. 1996. *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Ilan, Jonathan. 2015. *Understanding Street Culture: Poverty, Crime, Youth and Cool.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Irshick, Eugene F. 1969. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Iversen, Vegard and P.S. Raghavendra. 2006. "What the Signboard Hides: Food, Caste and Employability in Small South Indian Eating Places." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 40(3): 311–41.

Jaaware, Aniket. 2018. *Practicing Caste: On Touching and Not Touching*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2000. "Sanskritization vs. Ethnicization in India: Changing Identities and Caste Politics before Mandal." *Asian Survey* 40(5): 756–66.

———. 2003. *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Jeffrey, Craig. 2010. *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jodhka, SS. 2012. *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press India.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. 1982. *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in Twentieth-Century Punjab.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Kalpagam, U. 2006. “Secularism, Religiosity and Popular Culture: Chennai’s Roadside Temples.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41(43–44): 4595–4600.

Karthikeyan, D. 2016. “Contentious Spaces: Guru Pujas as Public Performances and the Production of Political Community.” In Hugo Gorringe, Roger Jeffery, and Suryakant Waghmore, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Institutionalising Minorities in South Asia.* London: Sage Publications, 194–216.

Katz, Mark. 2004. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Khare, R.S. *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity, and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars*. Cambridge University Press.

Kolge, Nishikant. 2017. “Was Gandhi a ‘Champion of the Caste System’? Reflections on His Practices.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 53(13): 42–50.

Kosambi, D.D. 1944. “Caste and Class in India.” *Science and Society*: 243–49.

Kothari, Rajni. (ed.) 1995. *Caste in Indian Politics.* India: Orient BlackSwan.

Krishnan, Hari. 2019. *Celluloid Classicism: Early Tamil Cinema and the Making of Modern Bharatanatyam*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Kumar, V.R. 2017. "Tracing the History of Urban Folklore: Chennai Gaana." *International Journal of Current Humanities and Social Science Researches* 1(1): 1–21.

Lamont, Michèle and Virág Molnar. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* (28): 167–95.

Lamotte, Martin. 2014. "Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-Hop and Resistance in the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(2): 686–94.

Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. 2nd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Larkin, Brian. 2008. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Leach, E.R. 1960. “Introduction: What Should We Mean by Caste?” In E. Leach (ed.) *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and Northwest Pakistan.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lee, Jooyoung. 2009a. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

———. 2009b. "Escaping Embarrassment: Face-work in the Rap Cipher." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72(4): 306–24.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.

Liang, Lawrence. 2005. "Porous Legalities and Avenues of Participation." In *Sarai Reader: Bare Acts.* http://sarai.net/sarai-reader-05-bare-acts/.

Liberman, Robbie. 1995. *"My Song is My Weapon": People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Livermon, Xavier. 2020. *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Longhurst, Brian. 1995. *Popular Music and Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Lynch, Owen M. 1969. *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Manecksha, Freny. 2011. "Pushing the Poor to the Periphery in Mumbai." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46(51): 26–28.

Manuel, Peter. 1993. *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marriott, McKim. 1959. "Interactional and Attributional Theory of Caste Ranking." *Man India* 39: 92–107.

Marx, Karl. 1853. “The British rule in India.” In K. Marx and F. Engels *on Colonialism.* NY: International Publishers.

Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mathew Harp Allen. 1997. “Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance.” *The Drama Review.* 64: 63–100.

Mattern, Mark. 1998. *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

McKim Mariott. 1955. “Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization.” In *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meintjes, Louise. 2003. *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mencher, Joan. 1974. “The Caste System Upside Down, or The Not-So-Mysterious East.” *Current Anthropology* 15(4): 469–93.

Mendelsohn, O., and M. Vicziany. 1998. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty, and the State in Modern India.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2012. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty, and the State in Modern India.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Menon, Dilip M. 2006. *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India.* New Delhi: Navayana Publishers.

———. 1994. *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in India: Malabar,1900–1948.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, Janice. 2011. *Fashion and Music.* Oxford: Berg.

Miller, Matt. 2004. “Rap’s Dirty South: From Subculture to Pop Culture." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 16(2): 175–212.

Moffatt, Michael. 1979. *Untouchable Community in South India*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Mosse, David. 2012. *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mukherjee, Rahul. 2019. "Jio Sparks Disruption 2.0. Infrastructural Imaginaries and Platform Ecosystems in Digital India." *Culture, Media, and Society* 41(2): 175–95.

Nakassis, Constantine V. 2014. “Suspended Kinship and Youth Sociality in Tamil Nadu, India.” *Current Anthropology* 55(2): 175–99.

Natrajan, Balmurli. 2005. “Caste, Class, and Community in India: An Ethnographic Approach.” *Ethnology* 44(3): 227–41.

———. 2009. “Place and Pathology in Caste.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44(51): 79–82.

Ogbu, John. 1988. "Class Stratification, Racial Stratification, and Schooling." In Lois Weis (ed.) *Class, Race, and Gender in American Education*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 163–82.

Pai, Sudha. 2013. *Dalit Assertion: Oxford India Short Introductions.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Paik, Shailaja. 2022. *The Vulgarity of Caste: Dalits, Sexuality, and Humanity in Modern India*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 2013. *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pandian, M.S.S. 2002. “One Step outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and Public Sphere.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(18): 1735–41.

———. 2015. *The Image Trap: M.G. Ramachandran in Film and Politics*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

———. 2017. *Brahmin and Non-brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black in Association with Ashoka University.

Pandian. Anand. 2009. *Crooked Stalks*: *Cultivating Virtue in South India.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Perlman, Janice. 1976. *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Peterson, Richard A. and Roger M. Kern. 1996. "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore." *American Sociological Review* 61(5): 900–907.

Phadke, Shilpa, Shilpa Ranade, Sameera Khan. 2009. "Why Loiter?: Radical Possibilities for Gendered Dissent." In Melissa Butcher and Selvaraj Velayutham, (eds) *Dissent and Cultural Resistance in Asia's Cities*. New York: Routledge, 185–203.

Pieterse, Edgar. 2010. "Hip-hop Cultures and Political Agency in Brazil and South Africa." *Social Dynamics* 36(2): 428–47.

Pillai, Shanti. 2002. “Rethinking Global Indian Dance through Local Eyes: The Contemporary Bharatanatyam Scene in Chennai.” *Dance Research Journal* 34(2): 14–29.

Prakash, Gyan. 1990. *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Prashad, Vijay. 2000. *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Quigley, Declan. 1993.“Is a Theory of Caste Still Possible?” *The Sociological Review* 41(1): 25–48.

R. Manivannan. 1992. “1991 Tamil Nadu Elections: Issues, Strategies and Performance.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27(4): 164–70.

Radano, Ronald and Tejumola Olaniyan, (eds.) 2016. *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Radhakrishnan, P. 1996. “Mandal Commission: A Sociological Critique.” In M.N. Srinivas (ed.) *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Raja, R. Saravana. 2017. “The Associational Basis of Vanniyar Organizations in Tamil Nadu.” *Studies in Indian Politics* 5(2): 181–92.

Rajan Krishnan, and M. S. S. Pandian. 2006. "The Brahmin and the Citizen: Shankar's ‘Anniyan.’" *Economic and Political Weekly* 41 (27/28): 3055–60.

Rajan, S. Irudaya, Rajan, E. Sownthara. 2019. "Tamil Nadu Migrants in the Gulf." In S. Rajan, and P. Saxena, (eds.) *India's Low-Skilled Migration to the Middle East.* Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 247–73.

Ramakrishnan, V. 2004. *Gaana Paadalgal: Chennai Adithala Makkal Varalaru*.

Ranganathan, Maya. 2006. "Television in Tamil Nadu Politics." *Economic and Political Weekly* 41(48): 4947–51.

Rao, Anupama. 2009. *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rimmer, Mark. 2012. "Beyond Omnivores and Univores: The Promise of a Concept of Musical Habitus." *Cultural Sociology* 6(3): 299–318.

Roberts, Nathaniel. 2010. “Language, Violence, and the State: Writing Tamil Dalits.” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 3, http://samaj.revues.org/index2952.html.

———. 2016. *To Be Cared For: The Power of Conversion and Foreignness of Belonging in an Indian Slum.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Roberts, Tamara. 2016. *Resounding Afro Asia: Interracial Music and the Politics of Collaboration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roy, Elodie A. 2020. "'Total Trash': Recorded Music and the Logic of Waste." *Popular Music* 39(1): 88–107.

Roy, William G. and Timothy J. Dowd. 2010. "What is Sociological About Music?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 183–203.

Rudolph, Lloyd I. 1961. "Urban Life and Populist Radicalism: Dravidian Politics in Madras." *The Journal of Asian Studies (Association for Asian Studies)* 20 (3): 283–97.

Saldaña, Johnny. 2015. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Sage.

Sassen, Saskia. 2014. *Expulsions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schultz, Anna. 2012. *Singing a Hindu Nation: Marathi Devotional Performance and Nationalism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Searle, Llerena Guiu. 2017. *Landscapes of Accumulation: Real Estate and the Neoliberal Imagination in Contemporary India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Senart, Emile. 1930. *Caste in India.* London: Methuen.

Shah, Ghanshyam, Harsh Mander, Sukhadeo Thorat, Satish Deshpande, and Amita Baviskar. 2006. *Untouchability in Rural India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Shaikh, Juned. 2021. *Outcaste Bombay: City Making and the Politics of the Poor.* Seattle, WA: The University of Washington Press.

Sherinian, Zoe C. 2014. *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Small, Christopher. 1998. *The Meanings of Performing and Listening.* Hanover: University Press of New England.

Small, Mario L. 2004. *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Solanki, Durgesh. 2016. "Cast(e)ing Life: The Experience of Living in Peripheral Caste Quarters." In Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit, and Astrid van Weyenberg (eds.) *Peripheral Visions in the Globalizing Present: Space, Mobility, Aesthetics.* Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Solt, Frederick. 2012. "The Social Origins of Authoritarianism." *Political Research Quarterly* 65(4): 703–13.

Soneji, Devesh. 2012. *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Srinivas, MN. 1962. *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays.* Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Srinivasan, Amit. 1985. "Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and Her Dance." *Economic and Political Weekly* 20(44): 1869–76.

Stoever, Jennifer Lynn. 2016. *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York: New York University Press.

Stroope, Samuel. 2012. “Caste, Class, and Urbanization: The Shaping of Religious Community in Contemporary India." *Social Indicators Research* 105(3): 499–518.

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. *Ballad of the Bullet: Gangs, Drill Music, and the Power of Online Infamy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Subramaniam, Ajantha. 2015. “Making Merit: The Indian Institutes of Technology and the Social Life of Caste." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57(2): 291–322.

Subramanian, Lakshmi. 2006. *From the Tanjore Court to the Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India.* New Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2007. "A Language for Music: Revisiting the Tamil Isai Iyakkam." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 44(1): 19–40.

Suresh, V. 1992. “The DMK Debacle: Causes and Portents.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27(42): 2313–21.

Taylor, Timothy D. 2001. *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture*. London: Routledge.

Terada, Yoshitaka. 2005. "Performing Auspiciousness: *Periya Melam* Music in South Indian Marriage Ceremony." *Journal of Arts Discourse* 4: 103–38.

V. Geetha, and S. V. Rajadurai. 1993. "Neo-Brahminism: An Intentional Fallacy?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 28(3/4): 129–36.

Vaid, Divya. 2014. "Caste in Contemporary India: Flexibility and Persistence." *Annual Review of Anthropology* (40): 391–410.

Valan, Antony Arul. 2020. "Gana (Gānā)." In Rukmini Bhaya Nair and Peter Ronald deSouza (eds.) *Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 21st Century*. Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 83–84.

Van Dijck, José. 2006. "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23(5): 357–74.

Van Maanen, John. 2011. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Van Wessel, M. 2004. “Talking about Consumption: How an Indian Middle Class Dissociates from Middle-class Life.” *Cultural Dynamics.* 16(1): 93–116.

Veloso, Latecia. 2010. "Governing Heterogeneity in the Context of 'Compulsory Closeness': The 'Pacification' of Favelas in Rio de Janeiro." In Mark Clapson and Ray Hutchinson (eds.) *Suburbanization in Global Society*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 253–72.

Viswanath, Rupa. 2014a. "Rethinking Caste and Class: 'Labour,' the 'Depressed Classes,' and the Politics of Distinctions, Madras 1918–1924." *International Review of Social History* 59(1): 1–37.

———. 2014b. *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Vithayathil, Trina, and Gayatri Singh. 2012. "Spaces of Discrimination: Residential Segregation in Indian Cities." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47(37): 60–66.

Wacquant, Loïc. 2007. "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality." *Thesis Eleven* 91(1): 66–77.

Waghorne, Joanne P. 2001. "The Gentrification of the Goddess." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 5(3): 227–67.

———. 2004. *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in an Urban Middle-class World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wallmark, Zachary. 2022. *Nothing but Noise: Timbre and Musical Meaning at the Edge.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Washbrook, David A. 1989. "Caste, Class, and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu: Non-Brahminism, Dravidianism, and Tamil Nationalism." In Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.) *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

———. 1976. *The Emergence of Provincial Politics in the Madras Presidency, 1870-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, Max. 1916. "India: The Brahman and the castes." In H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds. and trans.) *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology.* NY: Oxford University Press.

Weidman, Amanda. 2003. "Guru and Gramophone: Fantasies of Fidelity and Modern Technologies of the Real." *Public Culture* 15(3): 453–76.

———. 2006. *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Weinstein, Liza. 2014. *The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2020. "Reconceptualizing Housing Insecurity from the Global South." *City and Community* 1-12.

Whitsoe, Jeffrey. 2013. *Democracy Against Development: Lower-Caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, Quentin E. and Christopher Stroud. 2010. "Performing Rap Ciphas in Late-modern Cape Town: Extreme Locality and Multilingual Citizenship." *Afrika Focus* 23(2): 39–59.

Wyatt, A. K. J. 2002. "New Alignments in South Indian Politics: The 2001 Assembly Elections in Tamil Nadu." *Asian Survey* (University of California Press) 42 (5): 733–53.

Zachariah, K. C., Kannan, K. P., and Rajan, S. I. (eds.) 2002. *Kerala's Gulf Connection: CDS Studies on International Labour Migration from Kerala State in India*. Thiruvananthapuram: Center for Development Studies.