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TRADITION OF ODISSI MUSIC IN CLASSICAL CONTEXT: A REIVEW

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ABSTRACT: -

In the field of music this "compulsion" manifested itself in, among other things, the creation of listener appreciation societies, reforms in music education, the development of systems of notation, and, in the north, attempts to reclaim a "Hindu" music from its Muslim practitioners. In north India these types of activities were spearheaded by scholarsand musicians such as Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936) and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931), and in south India by those like Chinnaswamy Mudaliar and P. Sambamoorthy (1901–1973). By the beginning of the 20th century the modern conceptionsof Indian music had formed or were well into the process of forming. Important landmarks in the institutionalization of music in southern India include the forming of a branch of the Gayan Samaj, a music appreciation society, in Madras in 1883; and the forming of the Madras Music Academy in 1928, born out of the previous year's Indian National Congress session in Madras. The Madras Music Academy in particular had a pivotal role in standardizing Karnatak music and music pedagogy, constructing its history, and defining its place within the larger culture.

The case of Hindustani music was complicated by its demographics. In southern Indiathe emerging Western-educated elites and the Karnatak musicians were both Hindu, often upper-caste Brahmins. In the north, however, while the emerging middle-class audiences were largely Hindu, most musicians—certainly most high-profile musicians— were Muslim. Hence, while south Indian Karnatak music was seen as a model by Bhatkhande for the reform of Hindustani music because of its "impeccable system", it was also considered by many to be—since at least the time of C. R. Day's influential*The Music and Musical Instruments of Southern India and the Deccan* in 1891—atradition of greater "purity," in contradistinction to the northern system "tainted" by Islamic influence. It is interesting to note that in fact *both* musical systems were considered, at the beginnings of the classicist movements, to be in states of neglect. Subramanian quotes a newspaper article from the 1920s: "Is it not the duty of every

true lover of Karnatak Music to strive to rescue it from *its present neglected state* and to develop it on the right lines so as to preserve ancient Indian music in its pure and pristine form and in all its glory for the benefit of posterity?". In the north "illiterate" and "secretive" Muslim musicians were perceived as impeding Hindustani music's classicization. One of many examples described by Bakhle: "The argument that music was in the hands of people who were liable to destroy it by their negligence—Muslim musicians who performed it for the dissolute entertainment of indolent princely state rulers—was expressed on a number of occasions.

"Classical," as it applied to music, was defined similarly in each case. For Hindustani theorists such as Bhatkhande, "classicization meant at least two things: system, order, discipline, and theory, on the one hand, and antiquity of national origin, on the other".

Indian music "needed a demonstrable and linked history, one with a few key texts that explained foundational rules, theories, and performance practices". Similarly in the south, what mattered was the need to establish an identifiable standard for the art form that would not only pass western scrutiny but one that would reinforce the essence of Indian culture. It was here that the idea of the classical as a validating category became so important. The idea of the classical had multiple connotations of antiquity, lineage, textual rigour, and above all, resonated with the essential spirituality of India's tradition.

In both cases notation—an important marker of art music in the West—came to be seen as crucial for Indian music's classicization. One of the organizers of the third All India Music Conference (attended by both northern and southern musicians and connoisseurs) in 1919 stated, "if we want our music to take its proper place in the musical world of today, we must standardize our notation and engraft on our ancient system the scientific method of the west" .In the later part of the 19th century there had been publications of Indian compositions in Western notation, but now in the early years of the 20th century Paluskar, Bhatkhande, and others worked to develop systems of notation more suited to Indian music. This tied in to ideas of modern music pedagogy, and both Paluskar and Bhatkhande founded music schools; Paluskar in particular was quite successful in this area—he began his first music school, the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, in 1901, in Lahore and went on to found many similar institutions in other parts of India. The classicization of music in north and south India thus followed similar trajectories: an emerging, Western-educated middle class becoming aware of themselves as part of a "nation" with a distinctive culture; a belief among those elite classes that a part of their culture—in this case music—needed to be reclaimed, revitalized, and brought into line with modern (i.e., colonial) conceptions of a sophisticated, "Indian" expression; and finally, institutionalization and standardization. In the following section I argue that the modern history of Odissi music has followed a similar path, with the significant difference that this history can be seen as a reaction not just to Western and colonial cultural discourse, but to the Indian-classicist discourse that had emerged in relation to it.

Broadly speaking the modern engagement with music in Odisha proceeded along similar lines—the establishment of music associations and schools, the fixing of musical "grammar,"

the publishing of notations—though generally at a later date. But the development of a specifically Odishan classical music was complicated by the fact that
both Hindustani and Karnatak music already had a significant presence in the state by the early 20th century. Perhaps for this reason, in contrast to Odisha's many literary societies that mostly focused on the discussion and cultivation of Odia-language literature,the few specifically music-based organizations during the first half of the 20th century were oriented mainly to Hindustani and Karnatak music. The Utkal Sangit Samaj, for example, founded in 1933, as late as 1948 employed instructors only in Hindustani and Karnatak music. Based on the information so far at hand, it seems that the idea of an Odissi music equal in its rigor and heritage to Hindustani and Karnatak music began to coalesce around the time of Indian Independence and would find fullest expression during the 1950s and after. Kalicharan Pattanayak would explicitly position Odissi in relation to Hindustani and Karnatak music; both he and Shyamsundar Dhir would attempt to ground Odissi music theory, or the "Utkal music method" in Dhir's formulation, on the basis of Sanskrit music *shastra*s; and notation projects would be undertaken inorder to provide models for "correct" performance (e.g., Hota 1970, Panda 1982). In addition to this there were numerous conferences and demonstrations from the 1950s onward, both in Odisha and in major cities such as Chennai and Delhi. Over this period of time the meaning of the term "classical" in the Odishan context seems also to have crystallized. The English term has had a complex history in Odisha. One of the early appearances of the term in connection to Odissi music is in the extensive dictionary *Purnnacandra Odia Bhashakosha*, which includes definitions in both Odia and English. The entry for the term "*Odisi sangita*" gives the English definition: "Songs composed by the classical Ordia poets." "Classical," however, is glossed in Odia as "*pracina*," which has the sense merely of old or ancient (certainly one component of the meaning of "classical" in the West). And one can occasionally find, for example in the writings of
Kalicharan Pattanayak, transliterations of the English term into Odia (which might be re-

Romanized as "*klasikal*"). What has become the dominant conception of "classical music," however, relates it to the Sanskritic notion of *shastriya sangita*. The current case for Odissi as a form of classical music in this sense—as a *shastric* music—is made variously but also with a great deal of consistency. Jiwan Pani, for example, makes the argument thusly: If any regional style of music of this country claims a distinctive and *shastric* system, then it has to satisfy the following points:

(a) The tradition is more than one century old.
(b) The system is based on one or more written *shastras.*
(c) There are a number of *ragas* at the core of the system even if the number is less than one hundred, and

(d) The *ragas* at the core of the system and those borrowed from other systems are delineated in a distinctive style. He then proceeds to demonstrate how Odissi music satisfies these requirements. Ramahari Das similarly argues that classical status has three requirements: Any music which is considered to be *shastric* is seen to have three aspects. One is tradition

[*parampara*], or the music's development in an unobstructed stream. Another is system, or the use of musical rules or grammar. And finally, and most importantly is application [*prayoga*], or a distinctive manner of performance.

He goes on to explain how Odissi music, despite commonly held beliefs, conforms to this definition. And finally, a more general comparative statement in which we see similarvalues at work: Odissi music is a lot more lyrical as compared to Hindustani or Carnatic. Just like these two forms, it has its typical feel, its *unique identity*. It is *raga-based* and very old. There is huge evidence in our rock edicts to support the *ancient origins* of Odissi classical music. The larger argument for Odissi music as a classical music thus has three components which I should like to evaluate: the argument of antiquity, the argument of systematicity, and the argument of distinctiveness. The first two arguments can be traced back to earlier cultural debates in India over Hindustani and Karnatak music, where the antiquity and systematicity (or "scientificness") of these music needed to be defended (or even invented) in relation to a Western classical music model. In the case of Odissi music, however, it is Hindustani and Karnatak music that provide the model (in local writings on Odissi music one virtually never finds Western music held as a model for comparison). The antiquity of Odissi music is typically invoked nowadays by reference to a set litany of historical evidence, including: the dramaturgical treatise *Natyashastra* (c. 200 BCE to 200 CE); sculptural, architectural, and inscriptional evidence beginning in the 2nd century BCE, and found in such places as Puri, Konark, and Bhubaneswar; the 12th-century song-cycle *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva; various regional treatises on music and dance written in Sanskrit, beginning most substantially perhaps with the sixteenth-century *Gita Prakasha*. As this last item suggests, the question of systematicity is bound up with the question of antiquity: the older the system the better. Thus, as Hindustani and Karnatak musicians and theorists (following the model of European Orientalist scholarship) in the early 20th century sought the systematic roots of their traditions in Sanskrit texts such as the *Natyashastra*, *Sangita Ratnakara* (13th century), and *Sangita Parijata* (17th century), so too Odissi scholars. Many discussions of Odissi music, for example, begin by noting the mention of an *Odhra Magadhi* style of music in the *Natyashastra* .. It was widely circulated in the area of Odisha, Andhra, and Bengal, and was translated into Odia in the 18th century. Regarding this treatise
Jiwan Pani has written that the *Sangita Narayana,* along with the 16th-century *Gita*

Prakasha, contains the "definitions of the ragas that formed the core of the [Odissi] system" ; K. N. Mahapatra notes that "scholars interested in the birth and growth of 'Odisi' music may study this work critically to their advantage" ; and Sukumar Ray writes, "It is held that the system of Odisi music is more or less available in the principles explained in *Sangeetanarayana*… " . In actuality, making connections between this text and current practice remains rather speculative given, for example, the lack of technical detail with which *raga*s are described. Nevertheless, the *Sangita Narayana* does seemto give exceptional emphasis to the song text—a common strain in Odishan musicologicaltreatises and this is very much a part of modern Odissi theory and practice.

The third component of the Odissi classicist argument—the argument of distinctiveness— is more unique and would not have figured into the Hindustani and Karnatak discussions in the same way. The distinction between Indian music and Western music seemed self- evident to all concerned as, for the most part, was the distinction between Hindustaniand Karnatak music themselves. Yet in Odissi classicist discourse there evidently *is* a need to defend Odissi music's uniqueness—not in relation to Western music but in relation to other types of Indian (classical) music. As the *Purnnacandra* compilers already feel compelled to state: "Odissi music is entirely different from other regional music". Presumably this need arises from the occasional characterization (or dismissal) of the music as a derivative of Hindustani and Karnatak music (a perspective going back to the late 19th century), or as some kind of fusion of the two. So, is Odissi music distinct from the other styles? Given the almost overwhelming diversity each system encompasses, and the lack of an accepted standard for determining "distinctiveness," any answer to this question is suspect. Whether or not Odissi is "objectively" heard as a unique style will depend on the subjectivity (the biases, cultural competence, etc.) of the listener; it may also hinge on which type of Odissi music is taken to be the "real" Odissi music, still a topic of contention in Odisha. Furthermore, it may be noted that, different though they may be, Hindustani and Karnatak music are not mutually unintelligible— there is a long history of *raga*-exchange between systems, a probably equally long history of collaborations between northern and southern musicians, many listeners who enjoy both styles, and a number of musicians who actually perform in both styles. To my ears, Odissi music is about as similar to Hindustani and Karnatak music as those styles are to each other. In addition, as with listeners and musicians in India generally, Odias appreciate many kinds of music, and many Odissi musicians are able to perform at least one of the other "classical" styles. In this context any answer to the question of distinctiveness will probably tell us more about the listener than about the music to draw one final parallel with previous classicist movements, there is also the sense among Odissi supporters that the music is in a state of neglect and may even be corrupted by the musicians who practice it. On the latter count, singer and scholar Damodar Hota, for example, is reported to complain that "perverse forms of Hindustani and Carnatic ragas are being represented as Odissi music", and Jiwan Pani charges that some musicians are "even going to the extent of borrowing certain cheap and glamorous elements from film music" . Such comments—while advocating for the sustained "purity" of the Odissi tradition—display again the desire to position Odissi music in relation to what it is not to be, that is, Hindustani and Karnatak, or popular music. From a larger perspective, by making these multiple arguments Odissi music advocates can be seen to both reinforce and challenge the classicization of Hindustani and Karnatak music.

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