

Tamil Nadu

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About 63 million Tamils live in India, most of them concentrated in Tamil Nadu ‘Tamil Country’, India’s southeasternmost state. The Tamil language they speak is the oldest Dravidian language for which written evidence exists. In addition to its roughly 90 percent Hindu population, Tamil Nadu has a substantial number of Christians and Muslims, and some Jains. The hills host some of the state’s tribal populations—Kurumbas, Iruḷas, Kotas, Todas, and Paṇiyas—all of whom speak Dravidian languages. These tribes do not consider themselves Tamils, although they do participate in Hindu worship and in some cases identify themselves as Hindus. Some have converted to Christianity.

MASINAGUDI MARIYAMMAN FESTIVAL

Before the onset of the rainy season each year, Tamils of many faiths and castes participate in colorful fairlike festivals devoted to the goddess Mariyamman. Like other large religious events in India, Mariyamman festivals are not only matters of ritual or solemn devotion but also complex social and economic encounters among often diverse populations. Mariyamman controls rain, healthy crops, and fertility; she protects her devotees from diseases, such as chicken pox, that are caused—according to indigenous belief systems—by excessive heat in the body. Music and dance are two important means of propitiating the goddess, making her happy and keeping her “cool”; when devotees become possessed, the music and dance performances also become vehicles for the goddess’s presence.

Along the road between Ooty in the Nilgiri hills (westernmost Tamil Nadu) and Mysore (southern Karnataka) is the town of Masinagudi, home of the goddess Maciniyamman, one of Mariyamman’s sisters, and the tribal village of Bokkapuram, home of another form of the goddess. In February, thousands gather for the Masinagudi festival: rural villagers, forest-dwelling tribal peoples, urbanites who wish to fulfill a vow or are simply curious, and a host of professionals with both commercial and spiritual interests. These professionals include musicians, vendors, priests, puppeteers, circus troupes, gamblers, forest guards, police, and welfare officials of one sort or another.

Such Tamil festivals coalesce around central events often connected with the

The pot carriers danced as they moved forward, bending each leg in time with every three-beat unit, each man keeping the pot on his head balanced with the right hand, sometimes also with the left.

reenactment of local mythologies; in the case of Mariyamman, the event usually involves a conflict between the goddess and a demon. Highly visible and palpable is a sprawling multitude of localized kin- or community-based activities, including bhajan singing or dancing by clusters of devotees and processions of colorfully outfitted people bouncing jauntily, water pots balanced on their heads. Near certain sites, such as temples or rivers, devotees must take turns filling brightly decorated pots with water, or receiving the goddess's blessings through divine vision (*darśan*, *taricanam* in Tamil).

A procession

The family of a young man named Subramaniam, who worked in a budget tourist hotel in Ooty, came every year to the Masinagudi festival. While conducting fieldwork in Tamil Nadu in 1991, I found his family in leisurely repose under a temporary canopy, elaborately decorating narrow-necked, round-bellied brass water pots with yellow and white flowers to form cone shapes (according to local tradition, the festooned flowers are shaped one way for gods and another for goddesses). On one side of each cone they affixed a metal image of the goddess. If the procession leader, in this case Subramaniam, has undergone several days of dietary restrictions and has carefully observed rules of ritual purity, he may carry a special pot (*śakti karakam*) containing the goddess's power or *śakti* (Tamil *satti*).

Subramaniam led the procession, consisting mostly of female relatives dressed in red saris. Members draped large garlands of the yellow and white flowers around their necks and carried the decorated water pots on their heads. Facing the pot carriers and walking backward was a father-and-son team of professional priest-singers. The musicians' function was to invite the goddess forward and make her happy with agreeable music and words. The goddess was seen to reside at various times and in various senses inside the pot, in the metal image affixed to the pot, in each of the individual processioners (if they were possessed), and especially in the leader of a group.

M. Virarakavan, the senior priest-singer, sang while squeezing the strings of an hourglass-shaped tension drum (*kōṭṭāṅki*) with his left hand and striking it with the fingers of his right hand. The drum, sometimes called *uḍukkai* (usually a smaller version of the same drum), had a fiber snare and projected a thick penetrating sound. Kopalan, the son, rapped two sticks, one thin and one thick, on the *rappattai*, a frame drum about 35 centimeters in diameter. These professional singers had learned the song texts from printed sources. They played the drums so close to their mouths that individual words were obscured, rendering the singing and drumming a continuous, efficacious entity.

The drummers played a particular 6/8 rhythmic pattern associated with the *karakam* procession and dance in Tamil Nadu: the hourglass drum player emphasized beats 1, 3, 4, and sometimes 6, occasionally introducing an additional duple subdivision in beats 1–3 and 4–6 (figure 1), creating a tension between duple and triple that



FIGURE 1 a, Typical 6/8 drumming pattern for *karakam* procession and dance; b, variation emphasizing duple meter.

is typical of many Tamil drumming styles. The pot carriers danced as they moved forward, bending each leg in time with every three-beat unit, each man keeping the pot balanced on his head with the right hand, sometimes also with the left. Other women clapped their hands and jumped up and down in time with the music, sometimes swooning in possession, sometimes putting vermillion on the heads of men to give them "power." These processions typically proceeded from a temple to a river and back to a temple. The final destination for this festival procession was the temple at Bokkapuram, whose guardians and priests were Iruḷas, a tribal community respected for their abilities as musicians and sorcerers.

Community and itinerant musicians

Along the road to Bokkapuram were many private groups of devotees (families, friends, or acquaintances from a particular town or village), and several kinds of musical ensembles. At one point I could see Kota tribal women dancing around a Tamil female medium of the goddess and singing songs to her in the Kota language (figure 2), as in the following excerpt of a song composed by Rajammal of Trichagadi village in the Nilgiris:

macanī amā macanī amā māyakāri macanī amā
 bokkapūrē amanikē pavaḷa tērē kacuvēmē
 cikḱaminē vēcuvēmē cinadu keṟē vāmē amā
 ukēramā ukēramā unacirēnē pācuvēmē

Macani mother! Magical one, Macani mother!
 We build a red coral palanquin for Bokkapur mother!
 We pray to Cikka mother, please come to us with a gold umbrella!
 We sing to Uker mother with emotion.

Two ensembles of tribal instrumentalists, one Kota and one Iruḷa, were playing for circles of their respective community dancers just a few yards away from one another. A possessed man clad entirely in yellow was the center of attention for the

FIGURE 2 Kota tribal women singing in Trichagadi village near Ooty, 1984. Photo by Amy Catlin.



moment, as a venerable if somewhat-decrepit looking Irūḷa priest with long gray hair and a long, thick, curly gray beard whipped him. In this part of Tamil Nadu, according to Virarakavan, the goddess would order the priest to whip the devotee whom she had possessed until his or her trance state wore off when the goddess vacated the devotee's body.

Along the road I encountered Icvari and Matavan, itinerant musicians of the Vēṭar caste, who are traditionally hunters. Wearing a red-flowered cotton sari, Icvari sang Tamil and Kannada devotional and film songs while accompanying herself expertly on the *kañcīrā* 'tambourine'. Matavan, a sinewy, strong-featured man wearing a color-coordinated pale-green bandana and safari shirt, played a harmonium suspended from his shoulder, and matched the pitch and rhythm of Icvari's melodies with uncanny precision. Their performance wove together variegated, now inseparable, strands of history and cultural tradition: favoring minor modal harmonies, Matavan elaborated on Icvari's folk rendition of movie songs. Icvari looked around while she sang; her voice was neither the mellifluous, high-pitched, thin voice of film songs nor the shouting, tonally imprecise voice of many professional Tamil stage actor-singers, but was deep and harmonically rich, loud, and penetrating. Her large lips, chapped and cracked from the dryness of the season, moved in almost exaggerated fashion around the "u" and "o" vowels of the song, plaintively heightening the shading of doubt these final sounds add to Dravidian interrogative phrases.

Scenes from Bokkapuram

At Bokkapuram, hundreds of tents were set up adjacent to the temple, some housing hastily erected shops, others sheltering whole families. Vendors hawked bright-hued flowers, fruits, bangles, and religious items as thousands of people walked by, turning the grassy areas into mud. Groups congregated around campfires or in tents to sing devotional songs, mostly in Tamil, Kannada, or Malayalam. I counted five different gambling games underway. Four ferris wheels were powered by men standing inside the wheel and nimbly stepping forward like hamsters on circular exercise equipment. Among the most popular entertainments was a finger-puppet show with dances choreographed to cinema songs, and a young girl's seductive dance, also to film songs. In another area, a member of a traditional barber caste shaved young children's heads, after which their parents offered the hair to the goddess. In a somewhat less-visited tent, family-planning movies ran almost continuously through the evening hours.

Buses, trucks, and cars came and went throughout the day and night, kicking up dust in dry areas, making deep ruts in wet places, and adding the diesel and petrol odors to the air without which an Indian *mēlā* 'festival' is never complete. Regiments of pot carriers arrived and departed, each exhibiting its own style of music, dress, and pot decoration.

MUSICAL REGIONS

Common throughout the state are certain traditional ritual, entertainment, and devotional musics that might be termed "classical" because they employ Karnatak tala and raga (or *paṇ*, the equivalent in ancient Tamil music), but styles and schools are regionally distributed. Traditions that do not employ tala and raga or that do so in ways that do not conform to scholarly treatment of these entities are somewhat more localized, defined sometimes according to their musical characteristics or style, frequently according to textual content, context, or instrumentation. The following overview of Tamil music divides the state geographically into three sectors: East and South; Central and North; and West.



FIGURE 3 The metrical pattern of a Tuticorin fishermen's song organized in groups of three (*top*), shown in relation to the rhythm of the oar strokes (*bottom*).

East and South

In cities of the eastern seaboard such as Tuticorin, fishermen sing distinctive songs while rowing or drawing in large nets. The "meters" of these songs, like those of most Tamil folk songs, are equivalent to duple, triple, and compound-duple time in Western terminology; songs sometimes begin with vocalizations in free rhythm. Most if not all of the fishermen's songs are antiphonal, pitting a single man or alternating individuals against a heterophonic chorus. The relationship between rowing and the song meter is neither simple nor regular. A field recording illustrates the coordination between the creaking of the oars and the song's brisk triple meter (figure 3). The melodic phrases, particularly those in triple meter, do not resolve themselves into regular patterns of four, six, or eight; rather, the phrases overlap, as do the metric orientations of the sung phrases, providing an overall phrasing effect reminiscent of some Indian tribal musical traditions.

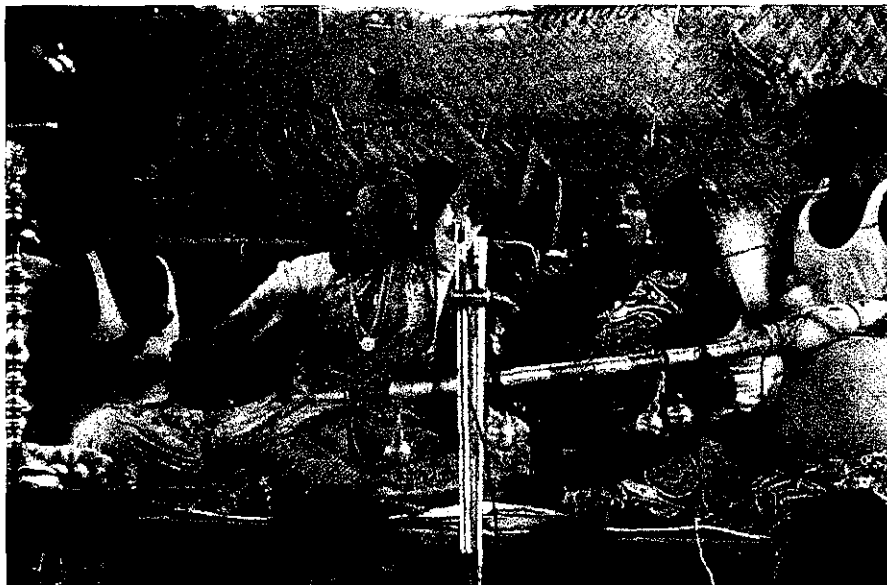
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In the southern districts of Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari, a ritual storytelling form called the bow song (*villuppattu*) is characteristic; it is named after the bow-shaped percussion instrument it features in performance (figure 4). This tradition places extraordinary emphasis on the sanctity of the written text, which is preserved on palm leaves (Blackburn 1988). These southern districts are also famous for the lament form called *oppāri* or *pilākkanaṁ*. Tamil laments usually feature a nonmetrical, recitative-like descending melody interspersed with sobs. The texts are highly alliterative lists that enunciate what the deceased will no longer be able to do, what the mourner will be deprived of without the loved one (items and activities), and how wonderful the dead person was when alive (favorable comparisons).

Central and North

From the mid-seventeenth century, musical patronage during the reigns of the Telugu Nāyaks and Marāṭhās led to the flourishing of Karnatak music in the east-central district of Tanjavur. The northern kingdoms also brought with them their own regional musical forms that took hold and developed in the district. One such form of religious narrative was the *kālakṣepam*, which included singing and instrumental music. In the late nineteenth century, Tanjore Krishna Bhagavata is widely

FIGURE 4 The *villuppattu* troupe Sivalingam Nadar plays (*left to right*) *vālam* cymbals, *villu* bow (using *visukkōl* rattle beaters), *kaṭṭai* (wooden clappers), and *kudam* brass pot on which the bow rests, struck with a *pālai* beater. Kanyakumari, 1984. Photo by Amy Catlin.



The Todas do not play instruments, with the tiny exception of the one aging performer who can still play the *puxury*, a bamboo trumpet.



FIGURE 5 Tep Venkatalam Tevar Pillai sings the *kāman-pāṇḍigai* debate form, also known as *lāvṇi*, and plays the *tēp*, also called *tappattai*, Madurai, 1984. Photo by Amy Catlin.

credited with combining Tamil folk styles, Karnatak music, and Marāṭhi *kīrtan* ‘devotional song’ to create the highly popular, modern *kālakṣēpam* form (Gurumurthi 1989; Nixon 1988; Premeela n.d.).

Bhāgavata mēlā, a classical dance-drama enacted before temple idols by all-male troupes, also developed in Tanjavur district. According to popular belief, the form grew out of the Telugu dance form now called *kuchipudi*, which spread into Tamil Nadu after Muslim invaders drove the Nāyak rulers of the Vijayanagar empire south. The form has all but died out, although efforts to preserve and revive it in villages such as Melattur have been underway since the 1930s (Arudra 1986; Khokar n.d.).

Tradition also credits the Marāṭhās with introducing to Tanjavur the *lāvṇi* folk-song genre, in which two parties engage in a musical debate on philosophical or mythological themes. The primary theme concerns whether or not the god of love, Kama, was consumed by the fire of Shiva’s third eye. The *tappattai* ‘frame drum’ and the *tuntina*, a Marāṭhi plucked drum, accompany the *lāvṇi* (Lakshmanan Chettiar 1980) (figure 5).

Wet-paddy cultivation provides the context for an invocatory song form, *kuravai*, sung with melody only in Tanjavur district. In other parts of Tamil Nadu women perform a kind of ululation also called *kuravai* in conjunction with agriculture, on festive occasions, and at auspicious moments during rituals. The latter *kuravai* is an important marker of significant ritual moments but is not a form of singing.

A dramatic narrative form, *terukkūttu* (or simply *kūttu*) ‘street drama/dance/music’, is most popular in central and northern Tamil Nadu. Drawing on some of the same textual traditions as the southern bow song (*villuppāṭṭu*), such as the Mahabharata epic, it often recounts stories of local deified heroes and performers. Unlike the bow song, performers act out the stories instead of describing them, and both performers and audience members become possessed by the characters represented (Frasca 1990).

Another related form of sung narrative is the *uḍukkai pāṭṭu* of the Konku section in Coimbatore district in west-central Tamil Nadu. *Villuppāṭṭu*, *terukkūttu*, and *uḍukkai pāṭṭu* all describe or enact epic events of regional importance, and thus come under a more general label, *katai pāṭṭu* ‘story-song’. *Uḍukkai pāṭṭu* derives its name from the *uḍukkai* ‘small hourglass drum’ with which the male singer accompanies himself (Beck 1982).

West

In westernmost Tamil Nadu, bordering the states of Kerala and Karnataka, lie the Nilgiri hills, home of South India’s most celebrated tribal populations. The Todas have gained fame as objects of fascination to Westerners since the Italian missionary Jacome Finicio wrote the first authoritative account of them in 1603. Among Nilgiri tribes, they have a highly distinctive singing style characterized by deep, guttural, but

tuneful undulation. They do not play instruments, with the tiny exception of the one aging performer who can still play the *puxury*, a bamboo trumpet.

The Nilgiri tribes can be divided into two major groups: those inhabiting the plateau and nearby slopes (Todas, Kotas, Alu Kurumbas, and Iruḷas), and those who live in the northwestern part of the district (Mullu Kurumbas, Beṭṭa Kurumbas, Kāṭṭu Nāyakkas, and Paṇiyas). The Todas, numbering some twelve hundred, live primarily on the Nilgiri plateau in many small isolated hamlets. Until the early twentieth century, they subsisted through the production of dairy products, but now practice agriculture and work in semiurban jobs. They used to fulfill a Brahmin-like role among the Nilgiris, serving as honored attendees at ceremonies of Baḍagas, Kurumbas, and Kotas. Until the onset of a modern cash economy in the past century, all Nilgiri tribes engaged in a system of reciprocal ritual and economic cooperation structurally resembling the *jajmānī* system elsewhere in India. The Hindu Baḍagas (some are now Christians), who considered themselves socially and politically superior to the Nilgiri tribals, were also singers, not instrumentalists. Now numbering nearly 150,000, the Baḍagas perform on pan-Indic instruments such as harmonium and tabla to accompany bhajan singing.

Until the late 1930s, Baḍagas and Todas used to hire Kotas (who number about fifteen hundred) to perform essential instrumental music for funerals. The Kotas, increasingly aware of the low status associated with performing music for other peoples' funerals in Hindu society (although they still perform for their own), eventually discontinued this service (with rare exceptions), for they do not consider themselves inferior. The Kotas were not only musicians but also skilled wood and metal workers, basket makers, potters, hunters, and procurers of traditional medicines. They maintain these skills today, but on a diminished level, and no longer for other tribes.

The Iruḷas and Kurumbas provided services and forest produce to all three of these groups—Baḍagas, Todas, Kotas—and occasionally also performed music for them. Along with the Kotas, these two large groups (numbering perhaps ten thousand or more) play related musical styles in similar shawm and drum ensembles; their dance styles and rhythms also exhibit similarities. Now that Kotas no longer play funeral music for Todas and Baḍagas, Kurumbas and Iruḷas sometimes perform this function.

The Todas and Baḍagas also frequently hire small bands of Tamil or Kannada-speaking plains people to play at funerals. The bands consist of a clarinet, one or more tom-toms and/or snare drums, and metal maracas. Outfitted in brightly colored (though frequently tattered and stained) military band uniforms, the musicians provide essential instrumental music alongside the tuneful wailing of Todas. The kind of music Todas patronize has changed over the last half-century, but its importance and its ritual function (to honor the dead, among other things) have not.

Among the other major group of Nilgiri tribes in the extreme northwest, the most elite—the Wynad Ceṭṭis, a Malayalam-speaking Hindu caste, and the Mullu Kurumbas—have an elaborate verbal art but do not perform musical instruments. Instead they chant while performing circle dances around a sacred lamp, an art the Mullu Kurumbas call *vaṭṭakali*. The two communities also perform several varieties of stick dances called *kōlāṭṭam*, also while circling a lamp. The middle-ranking communities, the Beṭṭa Kurumbas, Iruḷas, and Kāṭṭu Nāyakkas, utilize musical instruments and play musical styles almost identical to those of Kotas, Iruḷas, and Kurumbas elsewhere. At the low end of the hierarchy, Paṇiyas play double-reed instruments and drums of slightly different construction, and move differently while playing these instruments and while dancing. The Paṇiyas also perform an indigenous style of musical drama, which they are reviving from the state of decline it reached in recent decades.

SOCIAL STATUS, IDENTITY, AND MUSICAL STYLE

The division of musical labor in the Nilgiri hills in many ways parallels that found on the plains of Tamil Nadu. Three important similarities are (1) the association between ritual rank and the type of vocal or instrumental music performed: those of higher rank specialize in vocal forms, those of lower rank play drums and reed instruments; (2) the articulation of ritual rank through the differential status of patrons and hired musical performers: higher-status performers have higher-status patrons; patrons usually equal or outrank performers; and (3) the articulation of status by the auspiciousness of the event for which a musician performs, and the performer's proximity to the focus of an event.

Ritual rank and type of music

The musical culture of the highest castes in Hindu society, the Brahmins, like that of the high-ranking Nilgiri tribe, the Todas, focuses on vocal music and the power of correctly pronounced, intoned, or chanted words and sounds. The music of the lowest castes (Dalits or scheduled castes), in contrast, emphasizes percussion, rhythm, and the power or meaning of nonverbal sound. Scheduled castes (see below) have adopted the drum as a cultural emblem, although not all Tamil scheduled castes are in favor of this occupational link with drummers. One such caste, the Paṛaiyars, is named for the *paṛai* (another term for *tappaṭṭai*), the cowhide frame drum with which this caste is associated.

Brahmins do not perform ritual roles as instrumentalists because this would compromise their rank, making them musical 'servants' to their ritual patrons, but among themselves they do perform a wide variety of song types, some specific to particular occasions. Most varieties of Brahmin song, whether ritually specific, generically devotional, or domestic, tend to be based on Karnatak ragas (or at least compatible with South Indian raga classification). Lullabies are generally in *nīlāmbari rāga*; wedding songs sung when the bride and groom sit on a swing are often in *kuraṅgi rāga*. Brahmins and other affluent communities generally have access to and resources for education in classical music, but there is nothing specifically Brahmin about classical music. Lower-caste performers of ballads, work songs, and folk-dance songs place less conscious emphasis on Karnatak raga melodies or talas, although they may incorporate classical pieces, or emulations of classical styles, into these genres. In many forms of Tamil folk music, vocal embellishments have classical counterparts; voice quality and intonation, however, tend toward norms different from those characteristic of Karnatak music.

Ritual rank and social status

Musicians belonging to the upper-middle-caste Iṣai Veḷḷāḷars dominate in the most important and ubiquitous type of temple music in South India, that of the *periya mēḷam* 'big ensemble.' Until the 1930s, they were the traditional dance teachers, musicians, and dancers of *catir*, the temple dance now called *bharata nāṭyam*. The ensemble associated with the dance was called the *cinna mēḷam* 'small ensemble'. The musical styles of both are based on Karnatak ragas and talas; the repertoires and performance practices are somewhat different [see KARNATAK RAGA].

Iṣai Veḷḷāḷars are not the only caste to perform in the *periya mēḷam*, but they have been the only ones to master both *periya mēḷam* and *cinna mēḷam* performance styles. This caste has historically been concentrated in the Tanjavur district, an important "seat" not only of Karnatak concert music but also *periya mēḷam* music. Iṣai Veḷḷāḷar musicians in this district also perform for weddings and other auspicious occasions of Brahmins and high-ranking non-Brahmin castes.

The Naidus (*nāyudu*, a title associated with the Nāyaks), who migrated to Tamil

Nadu from Andhra Pradesh, are another set of castes associated with the *periya mēlam*, and are especially known for their performance on the clarinet. They have helped popularize the practice of playing Karnatak music on Western band instruments (Terada 1992).

Scheduled castes

The scheduled castes, also referred to as untouchables, or Dalits, are the lowest-ranking members of the Hindu social order, outside the four classes of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The two best-known scheduled drummer castes are the above-mentioned Paraiyars and the Telugu-speaking Cakkiliyars. The Paraiyars are concentrated in east-central and northern Tamil Nadu, and the Cakkiliyars predominate in western Tamil Nadu. In areas where they overlap, both provide services as drummers. Neither drummer caste would participate in functions of the highest castes, but they do participate in various ensembles for village or district temple festivals attended by people of differing ranks and backgrounds. At these functions, the upper-caste *periya mēlam* generally performs in close proximity to the temple or next to a temple cart (*tēr*) taken out on procession, whereas the scheduled-caste ensemble performs some distance away. In some locations, a nonscheduled caste drummer will perform on two cylindrical drums (*pampai*), one tied on top of the other, just a few feet away from the temple's central shrine, with a *periya mēlam* just beyond this, and the scheduled caste further away. This arrangement represents both a caste and an organological hierarchy, for the *pampai* double drum and its player are credited with special supernatural powers.

Lower-caste musicians perform music at distances from the temple in inverse proportion to their ranks because higher castes believe them to be polluting to their temples, to their gods, and to their persons. Scheduled castes are not allowed inside higher-caste temples, despite laws to the contrary. The anthropologist Michael Moffatt found that the music of the *periya mēlam* was considered auspicious or "good," and that of the Paraiyars was believed to frighten away various classes of malevolent beings (Moffatt 1979). Although this is certainly the function of some kinds of music in Tamil Nadu, it is not the only function of all music performed by untouchables, nor is it the function of music performed only by untouchables. Research remains to be conducted that explores scheduled-caste perspectives on their own roles as drummers.

Tamil language and Tamil music

The independence movement in India in the 1930s and 1940s not only fostered a sense of nation, of a primarily Hindu "unity" expressed in the arts through such reinvented traditions as *bharata nāṭyam* dance, it also stimulated an appreciation of "diversity" by fostering interest in regional art forms and languages. The poet Subramania Bharati, who died a quarter of a century before India gained freedom, revitalized the Tamil language, adapting it to suit the nationalist cause while also glorifying its own venerable past. Bharati composed songs and poems of social and political relevance, employing traditional forms derived from both ancient Tamil literature and contemporary folk songs, and instilled in his compatriots new pride in all things Tamil (Baskaran 1981; Roy 1974). Bharati was perhaps the most significant inspiration for the Tamil Isai 'Tamil Music' movement of the 1940s.

In the decades leading up to the 1940s, Telugu and Sanskrit were the languages of classical music and dance and English was the colonial administration's language; in public life, Tamil was relegated to colloquial speech and scholarly and religious writings. Since most Tamils could not understand Telugu or Sanskrit, their understanding of music remained incomplete, especially since Tamil culture pays great lip

There is a substantial market for cassettes of folk music arrangements; the cassettes do not include descriptive notes, but some include song texts.

service to the importance of song texts (*sāhitya*). In the 1940s the proponents of Tamil music began to insist on the inclusion of Tamil-language Karnatak music compositions in every concert, and in some venues the performance of Tamil compositions exclusively (Ramachandran 1983). This led to a great controversy in the music world that continues to some extent today, a debate over whether the essence of music (*rasa* and *bhāva*) lies in pure sound (*nāda*) or in the language of song.

An organization called the Tamil Isai Sangam was formed in 1943 to encourage the composition and performance of Tamil songs. To this day, the Sangam sponsors performances of Karnatak music compositions almost exclusively in the Tamil language, even if the performances are rendered instrumentally. The Sangam also sponsors research into Tamil music traditions of the past as well as those (such as *tēvāram*) not central to the concert tradition. The organization is particularly interested in demonstrating the link between the music described in ancient Tamil texts and modern-day classical music.

Indian musicologists have paid little serious attention to the many regional non-classical traditions of Tamil Nadu, usually couching descriptions invidiously in terms of Indian classical music and omitting insiders' perspectives. Some writers with a performer's bent, such as Vijayalakshmi Navanitakrishnan, M. Navanitakrishnan, and K. Kuppuswami, have collected and learned Tamil folk songs and rearranged, orchestrated, and performed them in a light classical style. Proponents of Tamil folk music argue that although these performers change and decontextualize the songs, they also raise Tamil awareness of folk music and introduce it to a wider audience. There is a substantial market for cassettes of such folk music arrangements; the cassettes do not include descriptive notes, but some include song texts.

ENSEMBLES

The term for ensemble in Tamil is *mēlam*, derived from the Sanskrit root *mil-* 'to gather, meet or join'. In North India, the Hindi word *mēlā* refers to a fair or festival. In Tamil, *mēlam* refers either to a gathering of musical instruments or to the collection of frets on the vina. By extension, *mēlam* has also come to refer to drums (especially the *tavil* 'barrel drum'), because drums are conspicuous at outdoor instrumental-music parties; *mēlam*, however, does not mean "drum" in any literal or historical sense. Other terms for ensemble include *koḷvar*, an ensemble of double-reed instruments (*koḷ*) and drums (*par* 'cylindrical drum', *tabaṭk* 'frame drum') among the Kotas of the Nilgiris.

Periya mēlam is composed of one or more *nāgasvaram* 'seven-holed shawm', one or more *tavil* 'barrel drum', *tālam* 'finger cymbals', and a drone, formerly an *ortu* 'shawm without finger holes' but now a *śruti peṭṭi* 'bellows-driven reed organ'. Performing for auspicious occasions such as weddings and temple festivals, these ensembles have historically been known for extensive unmetered improvisation (*ālāpana*) on the *nāgasvaram* and solo rhythmic improvisation on the *tavil*.

Classical and quasi-classical dance and drama ensembles

The *cinna mēlam* of the 1930s and earlier, associated with temple dance, comprised a female dancer, a male dance master (*naṭṭuvanār*) who sang the rhythmic dance syllables (*jati*) while playing the finger cymbals (*tālam*), a junior dance master who also sang, possibly additional women singers, and instrumentalists playing flute or *mukhavīṇā* 'double-reed instrument', *mridangam* 'barrel drum', and bagpipe drone. Formerly the ensemble stood behind the dancer and moved forward and backward on stage according to her movements. The modern ensemble sits to one side of the stage. South Indian bamboo flute and clarinet came to replace the *mukavīṇai*; additional instruments include the vina. A bellows-driven reed organ, the *tamburā* string drone, or an electronic drone now replaces the bagpipes.

The *cinna mēlam* instrumental grouping appears to persist in another transformation in the all-male Tamil drama form *terukkūttu*, which predominates in the central and northern parts of the state (Frasca 1990). As in *cadir* and *bharata nāṭyam*, the musical ensemble retains a close relationship with the drama company, remaining attached to it throughout the careers of the performers. On stage, the ensemble sits on an elevated platform in the rear, playing instruments from stage right to left generally as follows: pedal harmonium (*peṭṭi* 'box'), which replaces the drone-shawm (*ottu*), providing melodic support; an upright *mridangam* 'barrel drum' with left head facing down, shorter and squatter than its classical counterpart, thus providing a higher pitch; a horizontal *dholak* modified by the addition of a small bamboo stick for striking the right head; a 30-centimeter-long *mukhavīṇā* 'double reed'; and *tālam* 'finger cymbals'. The actors/dancers themselves sing, receiving vocal support (*pin pāṭṭu*) from the harmonium and from off-stage actors.

A related form of theater is *icai nāṭakam* 'music drama' or special *nāṭakam* 'special drama', with large actors' associations in Madurai, Pudukkottai, and fourteen other smaller towns. This form differs from *terukkūttu* in its inclusion of women as actresses and the practice of individually booking each actor and musician: there are no troupes or rehearsals, but rather a shared repertoire of dramas. *Icai nāṭakam* shares with *terukkūttu* a rather informal approach to classical forms (ragas and talas) and the linking of specific ragas with certain kinds of scenes; it also employs musical styles derived from folk genres and commercial film song. Two drummers provide the musical accompaniment: a *mridangam* player uses both vertical and horizontal drums similar to *terukkūttu*, and sometimes also the North Indian tabla; the other drummer, called the "all round," plays special effects on two bongos, tom toms (using face and rims), large cymbals, and other percussion instruments. The most prestigious musician in the ensemble plays the leg (*kāl*) harmonium, with bellows driven by a foot pedal, and provides vocal melodic support; following him in status are the *mridangam* player, the "all round," and finally the player of the finger cymbals.

Folk ensembles

Whereas the *periya mēlam* and *cinna mēlam* are classical-music ensembles associated with ritual and dance, respectively, the *naiyāṇṭi mēlam* is a folk ensemble associated with both ritual and dance. The melodies are based not on ragas but on specific song tunes (*meṭṭu*), and the percussion patterns are organized into talas that are closer to the *ṭhēka* 'specific ostinato patterns' of Hindustani music than to classical Karnatak tala: folk talas tend to be specific percussion patterns on which the performer can elaborate in particular ways on individual instruments.

The distinction between "folk" and "classical" may be analytically difficult to draw in some musical traditions, but Tamils today do make the distinction linguistically. Tamil terms referring to "the folk" appear to describe indigenized versions of nineteenth-century European notions, and the twentieth-century Western disciplines

FIGURE 6 A *naiyāṅṅi mēlam* ensemble of Kallar men playing (left to right) *pampai*, *tavil*, *śruti* box, two *nāyaṅam*, *jāḷra*, *tavil*, *tamukku*, *pampai*, and *uṟuṇi* (rubbed membranophone). Usilampatti, Madurai district, 1984. Photo by Amy Catlin.



of folklore and anthropology have also contributed to the development of this terminology. *Nāṭṭupuram* ‘countryside’ is used as an adjective with words such as song (*pāṭal*), art (*kalai*), and literature (*iyal*) to denote folk song, folk arts, and folk literature, respectively. Tamils similarly employ other adjectives, some specifying village rather than city.

Naiyāṅṅi mēlam folk ensemble

The Tamil word *naiyāṅṅi* means “teasing” or “cajoling,” and refers to the light-spirited, raucous, sometimes slightly obscene tenor, behavior, and performance of this kind of folk ensemble. The *naiyāṅṅi mēlam* performs on festive occasions, for dance-dramas or for demonstrations, and consists of players from varying backgrounds. The ensemble usually accompanies professionalized versions of ritual dances such as *karakam* and *kāvaṭi* (a dance associated with the god Murugan, in which dancers perform with a bow-shaped burden on their shoulders), or other staged folk dances such as the hobby-horse (*poy kāl kutirai* ‘false leg horse’), *kuravan-kuratti* (the playful, erotic banter of a romanticized tribal/gypsy couple), and buffoon dances (the standardized comic role in a drama).

The *naiyāṅṅi mēlam* usually consists of two *nāyaṅam* ‘shawm slightly shorter than the *nāgasvaram*’, one *ottu* ‘double-reed drone’, one or two *tavil* ‘barrel drums’, a tension drum consisting of two cylindrical drums laced together (*pampai*), a pair of conical drums tied around the player’s waist and played with curved sticks (*kirikaṭṭi* or *kuṇṭalam*), a small kettledrum played with thin leather straps (*tamukku*), and finger cymbals (*jāḷra*) (Deva 1987; Sambamurthy 1971) (figure 6). Unlike Karnatak music, where the tempo as articulated by the *tala* remains fixed, the music of the *naiyāṅṅi mēlam* speeds up considerably at the conclusion of certain kinds of pieces.

Other ensembles

In some ensembles, the association of a particular piece with a particular dance or ritual is indicated both by the percussion pattern employed and by the melody. In moving down the hierarchy of ensembles, diagnostic musical features of a piece (and characteristics that identify pieces with particular rituals or dances) change, from ragas and melodies (in the *periya mēlam*) to melodies (*meṭṭu*) and percussion patterns (in the *naiyāṅṅi mēlam*), and finally to rhythm alone. In the latter ensembles, invari-

ably composed of scheduled caste (Paraiyar and Cakkiliyar) drummers, the relationship among percussion instruments is foremost; the melody moves to the background, remaining inaudible or entirely absent, and when audible, does not exhibit significant variation from piece to piece. Performers often number the rhythmic patterns: one beat (*oraṭṭi*), two beats (*reṇḍaṭṭi*), and so on, each increasing in density and complexity. The numbers appear to refer to groups of drum strokes, not to *mātrā* counts characteristic of Karnatak tala [see KARNATAK TALA].

In these latter ensembles, which I have located in Dharmapuri and Salem districts, the leader is a *tappaṭṭai* 'frame drum' player, the figurative king (*rāja*) of the ensemble. Specially featured in some of these groups are one or more double-headed ceramic barrel drums (*mattalam*) and one or more shallow kettledrums (*tāca*), which are suspended from the player's waist and beaten with two sticks.

Some communities associate an ensemble composed of *nāgasvaram*, *pampai*, and *urumi*, sometimes called an *urumi mēlam*, exclusively with inauspicious occasions such as funerals. The *urumi*, an hourglass-shaped rubbed membranophone, is widely believed to have positive supernatural powers, particularly among the Telugu-speaking Kampalattar Nāyakar caste. When the ensemble plays for Kampalattar Nāyakar all-male line dances (*tēvarāṭṭam*) followed by circle dances (*cēvvaiyāṭṭam*), the ensemble consists of two or three *urumi* players, one of whom serves as the leader. This form involves no singing. It is unusual in the Tamil context that the dancers play two instruments while they dance: the *cēkaṇṇi* 'bronze gong' affixed to the dancer's waist and played with a 30-centimeter-long stick attached to the left index finger, and the *cēvai palakai* 'lizard-skinned tambourine' (Vicayalacumi 1983).

Tribal ensembles in the Nilgiris

TRACK 12

The Kotas, Iruḷa subgroups, and Kurumba subgroups (except for the Mullu Kurumbas) play a cognate set of musical instruments in ensembles consisting of at least two double reeds of up to 46 centimeters in length (Kota *kol*), a frame drum (Kota *tabaṭṭ*), usually two or more cylindrical drums (Kota *par* or *kinpar*), and occasionally cymbals and long S- or C-shaped brass horns (Kota *kob*) (figure 7). Kotas use a large conical drum (*ērtabaṭṭ*) in addition to the brass horn for making announcements or to mark important ritual moments (in Tamil society, the *parai* drum fulfills

FIGURE 7 Kota musicians playing (left to right) *kob*, two *kol*, *tabaṭṭ*, *kinpar*, *kob*, *kinpar*, and *dhopar* in Kolimalai village near Ooty, 1984. Photo by Amy Catlin.



Illiterate villagers have created many folk songs, which should be described as “intuitively” composed; however, there is a long tradition of highly literate Tamil poets composing folk songs.

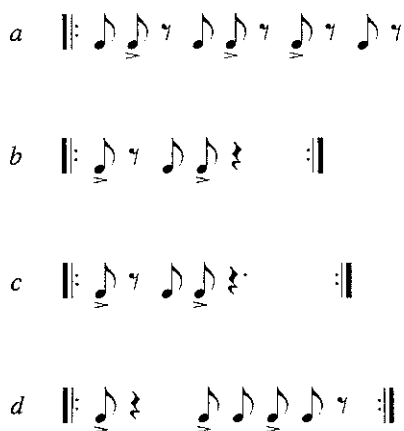


FIGURE 8 Common Kota rhythmic patterns presented in skeletal form: *a*, ten-beat *cadā dāk*; *b*, six-beat *cadā dāk*; *c*, seven-beat *cadā dāk*; *d*, eight-beat *tiruganāi dāk*.

this function). Irulas of the eastern, south-central, and western Nilgiris employ clay barrel drums (*kaḍime*, *tavil*, and *poze*, respectively) in these areas.

For solo instruments, most of the tribes employ end-blown bamboo trumpets (Kota *bugīr*) with five or six holes, on which they play songs and some of the shawm repertoire. This trumpet, along with a simple idioglottal bamboo clarinet (Kota *pulang*), serve as the principal practice instruments for the shawm as well as for informal music making in domestic contexts.

The shawms of all the tribes have six holes, except that of the Paṇiyas, which has seven. The melodies sometimes tend toward diatonicism, but often a single note will fall between two diatonic intervals (such as a major and minor third). The variance from diatonic intervals is notable because Indian classical and popular musics are usually built on a twelvefold division of the octave, and other Nilgiri tribal songs tend to be diatonic or at least have discrete pitches that correspond with South Indian classical pitches.

Melodies define instrumental ensemble pieces and tend to be short, with two to four phrases. The emphasis on melody in distinguishing one piece (and thus one significant context) from another represents a distinct break from observed behavior among lower-caste Tamils, who value percussive rhythmic elaboration and differentiation. The Nilgiri tribes share a limited number of rhythmic patterns. The most common are in cycles of six beats (compound duple), seven, eight, ten, and twelve beats. Figure 8 shows Kota versions of these rhythmic patterns (*dāk*) (Wolf 1997).

VOCAL TRADITIONS

Vocal traditions in Tamil Nadu, like those of instrumental ensembles, are almost always associated with the performance of dance, drama, or ritual. Some have instrumental accompaniment, and most instrumental melodies (except those of Nilgiri tribes) are based on songs. Singing styles and melody types vary enormously according to location, community, education, modernization, and degree of westernization. As mentioned above, Brahmin and other higher-caste vocal styles tend to share significant features with Karnatak music. Not only are these styles based on ragas or raga-like melodic entities, they also share with classical music features of vocal production: clear lyrics, distinct pitch definition, comparatively relaxed throat muscles, and mild nasalization. In contrast, non-Brahmin folk music, particularly of the lowest castes, tends to contain highly colloquial lyrics that are often significantly distorted by their musical renditions. Professional singers, who are often dancers and/or actors as well, tend to sing with very tight throats and significant nasalization. They also tend to shout or to sing with extreme forcefulness (*kaṭṭu pāṭukiraru*) in order to be heard over long distances. Shouting styles and some of the unaccompanied narrative styles may involve melodies of indefinite pitch, due either to wide vibrato or an almost spoken style, but pitches generally tend toward diatonic intervals.

Classical and folk melodies further differ in their pitch sets. Nonclassical region-

al singing, whether chant or sung narrative texts, women's circle dance songs (*kummi*), or devotional songs, tends to remain within restricted vocal ranges, sometimes as small as a fourth or fifth and containing only four or five tones. Seldom do songs range the entire two octaves or more of classical music. Folk melodies are similar to light classical ragas in their inclusion of more than one variety of a pitch class (*svara*), as in the use of both pitches approximating the Western minor and major third. While classical ragas may include two varieties of certain pitches, their use is usually quite restricted—either to an ascent or descent, or to rare phrases in which their novelty is highlighted. Folk melodies and light ragas (*rāga behāg*, for example) tend to make greater use of alternative pitches; there are no general rules along the lines of classical ragas that govern such melodies as a collectivity. Most common is the alternation of phrases using two varieties of the third degree. Thus the alternation of “major” third and “minor” third—and the frequent appearance of pitches lying between the two—suggests that conceptions of pitch differ between folk and Karnatak music.

Illiterate villagers have created many folk songs, which should be described as “intuitively” composed; however, there is a long tradition of highly literate Tamil poets composing folk songs. These literary folk-song forms have become part of mainstream village repertoires; in some cases, poets and scholars invented the genres. The songs recall ancient Tamil rules of prosody, which need to be considered in the definition of some folk genres. In general, meter and prosody are central to folk-music forms, particularly those connected with communal dancing. Meters tend to be duple, compound duple, triple, and septuple. At the beginning of an *oyilāṭṭam* or *kummi* song, for example, singers establish the rhythmic/poetic meter and the melody by singing syllables such as *ta na na ne*. This vocalization is then repeated between verses as a type of refrain. In the *oyilāṭṭam* transcription (figure 9), the vocalization is indicated by syllables appearing directly below the notation. In rendering verses or composing new ones, singers must preserve the sequence of long and short motives set up in the vocalization. One line of Tamil-language text, shown below the vocalization in figure 9, provides an example of how the lexical text is articulated in relation to the vocalized pattern. The fourth bar shows how alterations in the rhythmic pattern are introduced to accommodate vowel length in the text. The song text describes a pilgrimage to a hill temple, and the text line roughly translates as “I playfully came along the path to the Kunta Malai hills.” The clay pot accompaniment illustrates a common ostinato pattern in which duple and triple subdivisions of the half-note beat are played.

FIGURE 9 Tamil *oyilāṭṭam* song recorded by Richard K. Wolf in Madurai, 1982. The syllables directly below the notation are vocalizations on the song melody and rhythm; below the vocalizations is one line of Tamil song text indicating the relationship between the lexical text and the vocalized pattern. The clay-pot ostinato accompaniment sounds both duple and triple subdivisions of the half-note beat.

Song genres and their contexts

Virtually any day of significance is an occasion for song in Tamil Nadu [see SEASONAL AND LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS]. The most prominent occasions are annual reli-

Vocalization/
refrain

Verse

Clay pot rhythm

Fingers of
right hand

Heel of
left hand

FIGURE 10 Bhajan procession with harmonium and *tambūrā* in Madras, 1977. Photo by Amy Catlin.



gious festivals, regular temple worship, and domestic events. In regularly scheduled singing sessions or in a temple during a festival, devotees, accompanied by an experienced leader, sing bhajans in a traditional order according to generally agreed-on rules (*padhatī*). On other occasions, such as during a procession, devotees may sing whatever they wish (figure 10). In the morning during the month of Mārkaḷi, devotees sing *tiruppāvai* in Vaiṣṇavite temples and *tiruvempāvai* in Shaivite temples; the verses are similar in form and content; both have intense, devotional (*bhakti*) texts in which the poet assumes the persona of a female devotee (Cutler 1979, 1987). Other parties of bhajan singers, called *kōṭṭi* (Sanskrit *gōṣṭhi*), may parade in the streets singing *nāmāvali* 'string of names', antiphonal songs (usually in eight-count *ādi tāla*), *divyanāma sankīrtana* 'divine names and praises' (often sung while devotees circumambulate a sacred oil lamp), *tēvāram* (hymns composed by seventh-century Tamil Shaivite saints), *tiruppugal* (complex metered devotional songs to Murugan composed by the fifteenth-century saint-poet Arunagirinadar), and other hymns.

Women and men sing and perform festival dance forms separately; the most important of these are *kummi*, *kōlāṭṭam*, and *oyilāṭṭam*. Song texts often recount mythological stories of general Hindu significance, which may or may not relate to the principal deity of a given festival. *Kummi* and *kōlāṭṭam* in particular are ubiquitous in Tamil Nadu, including most tribal communities, and in an extraordinary variety of styles.

Work songs and ritualized work songs

Folk songs accompany virtually every type of work, although they are on the decline in Tamil Nadu, due in large part to technological changes in the way work is accomplished in villages and in some measure to the proliferation of film songs. Just as ululation songs (*kuravai*) accompanied rice-seedling transplantation during wet-paddy cultivation, so also did special songs accompany sowing, plowing, and harvesting. Songs called *ērap pāṭṭu* once accompanied the hoisting of water buckets from an irrigation well by means of a bamboo pole. Sometimes these songs could serve several functions at one time: a mother could sing her child to sleep while performing the rhythmic irrigation work and singing. These songs were often of the counting variety, each stanza mentioning successive numbers. With the completion of each stanza, the singer would know how many buckets had been drawn.

Songs occasionally become part of a carefully circumscribed ritual performed before a potentially dangerous task. The Jēnu Kurumba tribe of the Nilgiris collects honey from nests lodged in rocky, often vertical slopes. Honey collectors sing to the bees (*jēn-paduna*) while hanging from ropes and smoking out the nests.

Until recently Toda culture was concerned almost exclusively with ritualized dairy farming, and Todas performed nearly every major kind of work—feeding salt to the buffaloes, rethatching a temple/dairy, preparing buttermilk coagulant—as a religious ritual accompanied by formulaic songs. Toda work songs, like Toda work and singing generally, are gender-segregated: women sing their own genre of work songs, called *iim*.

Dance songs

Besides bhajans, the most important communally shared type of folk song in a Tamil village, particularly among women, is that associated with dance. Special ritual songs, such as those for weddings, are generally known only by a few women. Dance songs frequently involve a leader and chorus, thus enabling all to participate while at the same time learning the songs.

Kummi and oyilāṭṭam

Usually a circle dance, *kummi* invariably consists of a group of women singing while performing a variety of hand clapping patterns (*kummiyaṭi*) and dance steps (*aṭavu*) (figure 11). A leader and chorus perform some varieties of *kummi*, whereas in others all participants sing at once. In Dharmapuri district women perform a less common form of *kummi*: women sing antiphonally in two facing lines, clapping their hands while bending forward and not moving their feet. Men practice a similar form called *oyilāṭṭam* (also called *oyirkummi*), although the dances are different (figure 9 presents an *oyilāṭṭam* song). Men dress up in turbans, put on anklets, and dance in rows brandishing handkerchiefs in both hands. The song subjects are local historical tales or episodes from pan-Indic Hindu myths such as the Ramayana. Singers perform *kummi* either along with the dance or simply as songs: set pieces in a Tamil drama or illustrations of moral/religious points in a didactic context. Tamil Christians and

FIGURE 11 Girls and women demonstrating the *kummi* dance in Tuvariman village, Madurai District, 1996. Photo by Richard Wolf.



Noṅṅi cintu 'lame song' is the song form associated with Tamil Nadu's one-man music-drama genre. The play is a moral tale and a spectacle: the actor must perform for several hours with arm and leg bound up.

Muslims also use the *kummi* form to sing about their own religious traditions (Caktivel 1991; Perumal 1982).

The songs usually comprise pairs of short antecedent-consequent phrases of two or four counts. Each count is usually subdivided into three beats; if the tempo is slow, triple, duple, and compound-duple subdivisions may appear alternately as hemiola or simultaneously as polyrhythm. Performers clap out counts simply, one clap per count, or in a variety of patterns. Two pairs of phrases make up one line; lines are usually organized in couplets. Non-Brahmin women's *kummi* songs in Madurai and Dharmapuri district villages seldom exceed three tones. It appears from initial observation that men's *oyirkummi* may exhibit a wider ambitus than that of women's *kummi* in communities where both are performed. Also, in *oyirkummi* singers place more emphasis on rhythmic intricacy, the rhythm tends to be vocalized more frequently (using "tan nā nē" and so on), and the ends of songs usually speed up significantly. Brahmin *kummi* tends to exhibit greater tonal range and, as with other genres, is sometimes set to classical ragas.

Kōlāṭṭam

Women perform *kōlāṭṭam* by knocking sticks held in each hand against one another and, often in complex patterns, with those of other dancers in a circle. Anklet-wearing dancers knock the sticks of their partners, skip one or more dancers in the circle, turn around and return to a new partner. In *pinnal kōlāṭṭam*, colorful ribbons join dancers' arms to a central pole—the dancer creates spiraling, lanyard-like knots of the colored ribbons, and unravels them by reversing the direction of the dance at the end. Although *kōlāṭṭam* still holds a place in ritual contexts (weddings, puberty ceremonies), it has been widely adopted for social occasions and public displays because Tamils find it interesting not only to participate in the dance but also to watch.

Cintu

Cintu was originally a song type with three divisions: *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *caranam*, as in the Karnatak *kīrtana* [see KARNATAK VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]. It is now usually a strophic song (the *caranam* section only) with a short melody and many verses. Often the *cintu* appears as a solo melody, such as when rendered on the double-reed *nāyaṇam* in a festival context. Musically, the *cintu* shares rhythmic features with *kummi* song—the prevalence of triple meter, sometimes in tension with duple meter, but also other meters. Unlike *kummi*, *cintu* is named for particular kinds of activity with which it is associated, and is thus similar to occasional songs, such as marriage songs or instrumental melodies of Nilgiri tribals, many of which are named for associated rituals or dances (Muttappan 1983).

Noṅṅi cintu

Noṅṅi cintu 'lame song' is the song form associated with Tamil Nadu's one-man

music-drama genre, the *noṇṭi nāṭakam*, which flourished under the Tirunelveli petty chieftains or Poligars (*pālaiyakkāvar*) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The drama depicted a parable of a debauched man's life. In punishment for a crime the man is subjected to the ancient Tamil punishment of *māru kāl māru kai*: amputation of an arm on one side of the body and a leg on the other. After his subsequent discovery of God, in recognition of supreme self-sacrifice and devotion, he regains his lost limbs. The play is a moral tale and a spectacle: the actor must perform for several hours with arm and leg bound up. Later versions of this dramatic form have diverged from the original plot, omitting the story of the cripple entirely, yet the actor still performed the drama, singing and dancing as if he were a cripple, with arm and leg bound.

The dialogue for this drama was composed in a special *noṇṭi cintu* meter. Like *kummi*, *noṇṭi cintu* is composed in two-line couplets, but unlike *kummi*, the first line is usually shorter than the second—the form thus iconically reproduces the physical condition of the protagonist. Typically the actor sings a passage and then dances while a *nāyaṇam* player repeats the melody in the background (Palacupiramaniyam 1991).

Kāvaṭi cintu

An ensemble sings or plays a *kāvaṭi cintu* while a Murugan devotee bears on his shoulders a large bow-shaped burden (*kāvaṭi*). The music induces possession and the devotee moves to the intoxicating meter of the *cintu* in a sort of dance (*kāvaṭiyāṭṭam*). According to popular belief, the Tamil poet Annamalai Reddiyar (1861–1891) created the musical-poetic genre when he was commissioned to compose devotional works on Murugan by a Tirunelveli Tēvar (a dominant landed caste) chieftain.

Verses have three, five, or seven lines rendered in alternate slow-fast-slow tempi. At the end of each verse the drummers perform a rapid interlude on the *nāyaṇam*, simultaneously sung by the devotees, to which the bow-shaped-burden carrier attempts to dance. The melodies are frequently raga-based, but in performance are not subject to the same grammatical strictures as classical music (Manikkam 1991; Subramaniam 1990).

Other cintu varieties

Many other *cintu* types exist, some quite obscure. It is unclear whether they all share musical or structural features with one another. *Valīnaṭai cintu* is a type of song that pilgrims or travelers sing to while away the time on a long journey. The song's metrical character tends to match the traveler's gait. *Vipattu cintu* recounts accidents; *nīṭi cintu* is a moral song; *kōlai cintu*, popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Tamil Nadu, recounts tales of famous murders; and *valaiyal cintu* is a song form sung by bangle sellers on special ritual occasions. Tamil converts to Islam, such as Acan Ali Pulavar, have composed *cintu* on the Prophet Muhammad, called *pūvaṭi cintu* (literally 'flower-feet song').

CHRISTIAN MUSIC

India's diverse spiritual and cultural landscape includes 20 million Christians. The state of Tamil Nadu is home to 3 million Christians, who make up 5.8 percent of its population—twice the national percentage. Portuguese Catholics were the first to convert Tamils to Christianity in the sixteenth century, followed by German Lutherans in the eighteenth century and British and American Protestants in the nineteenth century (Grafe 1990). More recently, Pentecostal and other independent denominations have started churches in South India (Caplan 1987). In 1947, a