

## *Pallavi* and *Kriti* of Karnatak Music: Evolutionary Processes and Survival Strategies

Amy Catlin

While conducting ethnomusicological research in Madras from 1976 to 1978, I began to perceive a relationship between certain processes of musical change evidently taking place within the realm of performance practice, on the one hand, and changing patterns of socio-cultural organization surrounding musical activity on the other. These processes were first pointed out to me by musicians and musical experts living in Madras. Their opinions, although undoubtedly valid in their own right, were not always easy to substantiate. My own perceptions of these patterns were necessarily shaped to a large extent by my background in western musicology and performance practice, especially in the realm of vocal music, as well as through graduate training in ethnomusicology and anthropological approaches to the study of performance. In attempting to find concrete evidence for the perceived phenomena, I eventually arrived at the arguments put forth in the present paper.<sup>1</sup>

The musical change to be documented here consists of two related elements. First, the performance of *pallavi*, a primarily abstract, minimally texted variation form, has undergone a radical decline during the past fifty years, causing strategies to be devised for its preservation. There is some evidence to suggest that *pallavi* has, at the same time, been acquiring some of the characteristics of *kriti* style. Second, in certain contexts, the performance of *kriti*, a texted song form, is becoming increasingly similar to performances of *pallavi*, by virtue of the inclusion of abstract materials formerly found primarily in *pallavi* performances. "Abstract" is used here to indicate those purely melodic and rhythmic features of performance which are largely independent of lyrics. Texted song forms such as the *kriti* are by nature dominated by words, at least in their archetypal form, and are considered here to be less abstract than *pallavi*, whose texts are minimal. Thus, the performance of *kriti*, in certain contexts, is apparently acquiring more abstract features hitherto characteristic of *pallavi* performances.

It is posited in this argument that both *kriti* and *pallavi* began as relatively simple forms to which accrued, over the generations, enhancements of techniques, embellishments, and similar features of performance practice which render both forms highly complex musical entities laden with abstract qualities at the present time. Performers of *kriti* still seem to be increasing those abstract musical elements in their renditions of these songs, while *pallavi* performers appear to have reached their zenith in this regard some fifty years ago, after which time they evidently began to reduce the complexity of the form considerably, and to adopt some elements from the more popular *kriti* performance style.

The hypothesis offered here concerning these changes is that they have been affected by the new constraints which characterize musician-patron-audience relationships as they have evolved since the ascendancy of Madras as a principal musical center from the turn of the last century. In order to support this hypothesis, evidence for musical change will be presented first, followed by the evidence which shows that these changes are related, at least in some part, to socio-cultural factors.

## Musical Change: Pallavi

The term *pallavi* is derived from the Sanskrit root for a sprout, shoot, bud, or other young growing extension of a plant; it is sometimes used more abstractly to mean “spreading” or “expansion” (Monier-Williams 1899: 610).<sup>2</sup>

The *pallavi* form consists of one line of text which may be intricately laced with literary devices such as conundrums, palindromes, and multilevelled symbolic references.<sup>3</sup> These texts are often in Sanskrit, although vernacular and multi-language texts are also common. In the initial statement of a *pallavi* theme, the line of text is sung to a set melody in a specific *ragam* and *talam*, so that the line has a distinct melodic contour and metric underlay. In the past, the musical setting of the *pallavi* text was composed impromptu as evidence of the musician’s creativity. In order to demonstrate his erudition, as well as to ensure the spontaneity of the setting, the court patron presiding over a *pallavi* performance could declare, immediately before the performance, the text, *talam*, *ragam* or even the entire theme to be improvised upon, thereby allowing virtually no time for the musicians to rehearse. Such a situation rarely occurs today, since individual patronage has been replaced by the group patronage of concert audiences.

As illustrations of the performance contexts characteristic of the nineteenth century, and the types of *pallavi* themes considered to be especially worthy of praise, two examples will be given here.<sup>4</sup> In one performance, a specially invented *talam* was created by “Pallavi” Seshayyar (1842-1902) on the occasion of the Pallavanatham Zamindar’s music conference held in 1888. The name for the invented *talam*, Kalinadam, was devised using the Katapayadi *sutra*, a formula used for such purposes based upon the Sanskrit alphabet. The *pallavi* text came from a pre-existing Sanskrit *shloka*m. For this *pallavi* theme and its execution, the musician received a gold chain and a sapphire from the zamindar.

Example 1. Pallavi Seshayyar, composer. *Pallavi* theme in Kalinadam *talam*, Todi *ragam*. Structural points indicated. (Shankar Iyer 1971:110-111).

The musical notation consists of two staves. The first staff has a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 5/4 time signature. It is divided into four measures with time signatures 5/4, 3/4, 5/4, and 3/4. The second staff has a bass clef, the same key signature, and a 5/4 time signature, divided into four measures with time signatures 5/4, 7/4, 5/4, and 3/4. Lyrics are written below the notes, and structural points are indicated by arrows and labels: 'eduppu' at the start of the first measure, 'arudi' under the second measure of the second staff, and 'muktai svaram' at the end of the fourth measure of the second staff.

Lyrics for the first staff:  
 P; P D p m G M, p d p d P; P G M, P- d N D D, M P p m G G,  
 śri kri—ṣṇa rat—nam su—ra se—vga rat—nam

Lyrics for the second staff:  
 M G M- p d P; P- n d p M P, P, M- d p m G M, P D N P D M  
 bha-jā ma-he yā— da-vam— śa rat—nam

Translation: Let us sing the praise of the jewel Krishna, the jewel honored by the gods, the jewel of the Yadava dynasty.

In the second example, the renowned singer Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer had an audience with the prince of Venkatagiri, who asked for a *pallavi* whose counts were divided in the form of Gopuccha *yati* (“Cow’s tail”, or with progressively diminishing

rhythmic values). These counts were to be merely a succession of individual beats, rather than the hierarchically differentiated groupings found in traditional *talam*-s. The result was the following *pallavi* theme in Arabhi *ragam*, with 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 and 3 beats per division, for which the singer received quadruple the sum of 108 rupees given to the other competing musicians.

Example 2. Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer, composer. *Pallavi* theme in unnamed metrical format (Gopuccha *yati*), Arabhi *ragam*. Structural points indicated. (Shankar Iyer 1971:62-3).

eduppu

arudi

D; P; PMP D, P, DP MGR S R P MGR R MPM P,-  
 śam-bha sa—bhā — pa-te pā — hī — mām

MGR, PMP, DPM P, D, Ś N D R Ś, DP MGR S, D S R M P  
 sam—bha śī—va kuñ—ci—ta pā—da mām pā—hī  
 ↑ muktai svaram

Translation: Oh Shiva, Lord of the dancing hall of Chidambaram, protect me;  
 Shiva, with the arched foot, protect me.

As Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer's biography illustrates, the performance of *pallavi* was often in the form of a contest between a resident court musician and a visiting challenger. After the initial statement of the *pallavi* theme, the two musicians set out to execute the musical assignment in a contest of skill and imagination. The original theme would then be repeated and varied, sometimes for hours, according to a seemingly infinite repertoire of variational and improvisational techniques, many of which were formulaic in nature. Highly abstract musical structures governed the competition, often so complex that only the initiated cognoscenti could perceive them and appreciate the sport. The text and its relative rhythmic proportions remained unchanged throughout, while the singers repeated the words endlessly in a manner reminiscent of *mantra* recitation, varying the melodic materials and rhythmic subdivisions within the syllables. Finally, with a panel of musical experts to guide him, the patron would proclaim the victor, and silks, jewels, and gold would be disbursed among the contestants according to their skill. Such competitions enjoyed great popularity as court entertainment during the nineteenth century, and probably in the eighteenth century as well.

*The Pallavi Singer's Techniques*: The abstract improvisational and variational techniques in the *pallavi* singer's repertoire can be described in terms of seven main categories, each containing numerous subtypes. Many of these were subsequently adopted by *kriti* singers, as will be shown later. According to one performer and musicologist, Prof. T. Shankaran, the details concerning some subtypes have remained the secret property of a few musicians. "It is not easy to research these matters, because the deliberate intent of the musician was to confuse his opponent or partner" (1977, personal communication).<sup>5</sup>

The seven categories in the *pallavi* singer's repertoire were, in the order of performance: 1) *ragam*, 2) *tanam* (statement of *pallavi* theme), 3) *sangati*, 4) *niraval*, 5) *kalpana svaram*, 6) *anuloma-pratiloma*, 7) *raga-talamalikai*.

These same techniques are still followed by *pallavi* singers today. The first two, *ragam* and *tanam*, occur prior to the statement of the *pallavi* theme, exploring the *ragam* without the introduction of *talam*. *Tanam*, however, differs from *ragam* in that intermittent pulsation is introduced, paving the way for the constant pulse of the *pallavi* section which follows. These two introductory sections are without text, although syllables such as *nom*, *tom*, *na* and so forth are often sung, as well as devotional words such as *anantam* (infinity).

After the obligatory *ragam* and *tanam* sections, which could both be quite lengthy, the musician sings the *pallavi* theme at least twice without variation, in order to allow musical accompanists (most typically violin and *mridangam*) and listeners to become familiar with it. This theme follows certain conventions which will now be summarized, following descriptions by Sambamoorthy and others.

*Pallavi Theme Structure:* A "proper" *pallavi* theme should consist of two sections. The first (*purvanga*, *prathamanga*) must end on a strong beat, either the first beat of a *talam* or another strong beat in the cycle. This moment of arrival is called *padagarbham* (Sanskrit: line + inside, middle) and consists of two elements. The first is the above-mentioned final note of the *purvanga*, which is called the *arudi* or *mudivu* (Tamil: ending, conclusion). Its pitch should either be identical to the first note of the entire theme, or else its *samvadi* (a fourth or fifth away). The second element in the *padagarbham* is a rest (*vishranti*) following the note.

The second section (*uttaranga*, *dvityanga*) of a *pallavi* theme must end one note above or below the first note of the theme, thus providing for a smooth melodic transition back to the beginning. This final note is called the *muktai svaram* or *muttaipu* (Tamil: *muttai*, front). It leads back to the beginning of the theme, called the *eduppu* (Tamil: to awake, produce musical sound) which normally falls on the first beat of the *talam* or a certain duration before or after the beat.

Examples No. 1 and No. 2 illustrate many characteristic features of nineteenth century *pallavi* themes which differ from typical "modern" *pallavi* themes. First, they are fairly lengthy. Second, they employ complex metric structures of an "academic" nature, without easily recognizable recurring units. Third, the melodies tend to meander and are not readily grasped upon first hearing.

The following *pallavi* theme (Example No. 3) is taken from a recent performance by the prominent female vocalist, M. L. Vasanthakumari. It illustrates the "modern" style of *pallavi* composition. First, it is short and succinct. Second, it uses a non-classical *talam* considered to be derived from folk music, the 7-beat Mishra Chapu, which has an easily discernible structure. Third, the melody is "catchy", and may even be a quotation from a *kriti* by the singer's guru, the late G. N. Balasubramaniam, whose compositional style was uniquely tuneful and easy to grasp.

Example 3: M. L. Vasanthakumari, vocalist. *Pallavi* theme in Mishra Chapu *talam*, Kamavardhani *ragam*. (All India Radio Sangita Sammelan, New Delhi: 1977).

eduppu                      aruḍi  
or muḍivu                      viśrānta                      muktaī  
svaram

- ś ś, ś D P - G- P- R G M P- , - P P, - G P P D N  
śī-vā-nan-da      kā-ma-var-dha-nī      śī-ve      pā-hī

pūrvāṅga  
or  
prathamāṅga                      pādagarbham                      uttarāṅga  
or  
dvitīyāṅga

This notation gives the basic structural points of the theme. The following transcriptions, however, depict the theme as it was actually performed with ornamentation.

Example 4: *Pallavi* theme transcribed as performed with ornamentation.

d ś ś, ś n ś d-ś P - g p g P s r g r<sup>5</sup> p g P P, - , - p m p d p m d P, p-g p g d p d p d d ś-  
śī-vā-nan-da      kā-ma-var-dha-nī      śī-ve      pā-hī

The Sanskrit text addresses the goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, by one of her other names, Shive, the vocative form of her name, Shivaa, which is also his name in its feminine form. A pun is made on the name of the *ragam*, Kamavardhani, which means literally "increasing pleasure and desire", one of the important attributes of Parvati. The following translation in which the double meanings are italicised, should make this clear.

Text: *Shivananda Kamavardhani Shive pahi*

Translation: You who are the joy of Shiva, 1) Oh *Ragam Kamavardhani*, 2) and who *increases his pleasure and desire*, Goddess Shivaa, protect me.

**Techniques of Varying the Theme:** After singing the original *pallavi* theme several times, the process of variation commences. First, the *sangati* (Sanskrit: *sangama*: meeting with, an uninterrupted series) technique is employed, in order to embellish the theme further, altering different areas of the theme with each repetition so that its melodic contours are eventually exaggerated and transformed.

After a number of *sangati*-s, the singer introduces the second section, *niraval* (Tamil: *niravu*, to make level, to spread evenly, especially with a horizontal circular motion). Here, the singer abandons the shape of the original *pallavi* melody, replacing it with level recitations of the text on successively higher pitches, as seen in Examples 5 and 6 below. These phrases alternate with elaborate melodic flourishes, encompassing an octave or more. Normally, the singer retains the original rhythmic underlay of the



Example 8: *Kalpāna svaram*

In the fifth and final variation technique, *malikai* (Tamil : garland), the singer refashions the original theme to fit a series of *ragam*-s or *talam*-s, called *ragamalikai* or *talamalikai*. In her performance, MLV cleverly weaves the name of the new *ragam* into the Sanskrit text, creating double meanings in each case. Thus, the *ragam*-s have been chosen by her not only for their interesting tonal contrasts but also for the literary possibilities inherent in their names. Shriranjani, Manoranjani, and Shivaranjani, which mean, respectively, "auspicious and pleasing", "pleasing to the mind", and "pleasing to Shiva", are substituted for the original *ragam* name, Kamavardhani. Each new *ragam* is introduced by *svaram*-singing, thereby revealing its identity gradually and engaging the curiosity of the audience. After all "bets have been placed" by the listeners as to the identity of each new *ragam*, the *pallavi* theme is stated in its new tonal garb with the substituted *ragam* name, and guesses can be verified.

The following texts and translations show the ways in which MLV incorporated the new *ragam* names into the original *pallavi* text during the *ragamalikai* section.

"Shivananda *Kamavardhani* Shive pahi" "You who are joy to Shiva, *Kamavardhani ragam*, and *increase his desire and pleasure*, Oh Goddess Shiva, protect me".

First new *ragam* :

"Shivananda *Shriranjani* Shive pahi" "You who are joy to Shiva, *Shriranjani ragam*, and are *auspicious and pleasing*, Oh Goddess Shiva, protect me".

Second new *ragam* :

"Shivananda *Manoranjani* Shive pahi" "You who are joy to Shiva, *Manoranjani ragam*, and *pleasing to his mind*, Oh Goddess Shiva, protect me".

Third new *ragam* :

"Shivananda *Shivaranjani* Shive pahi" "You who are joy to Shiva, *Shivaranjani ragam*, and *give pleasure to Shiva*, Oh Goddess Shiva, protect me".

The original melody of the *pallavi* theme is altered in the following ways in this example of *ragamalikai*.<sup>9</sup>

Example 9: *Pallavi* theme in *ragamalikai*

The musical notation for Example 9 consists of three staves of music in 7/8 time. Each staff is accompanied by a line of rhythmic notation and lyrics below it. The lyrics are in Tamil and Sanskrit.

Staff 1:  
 - ś ś, ś DM - M R S R, M M, - , - D d ś d ś d DMMD ś  
 śi-vā-nan-da śrī-rañ-ja-nī śi-ve pā-hī

Staff 2:  
 - ś D, DPP - M, M P, P D, - , - ś ś D. P G, R, S  
 śi-vā-nan-da ma-no-rañ-ja-nī śi-ve pā-hī

Staff 3:  
 - ś ś, D, P - G R, G G D, P , - D ś d ś ś d ś d ś d ś d ś d ś d ś d ś d  
 śi-vā-nan-da śi-va-rañ-ja-nī śi-ve pā-hī

Finally, the percussion accompanist(s) perform the "solo" or *tani avartanam* (Tamil: *tani*, alone; Sanskrit: *avartana*, turning around, revolving, repeating, circular motion), in which variations based upon the rhythmic properties of the *pallavi* theme are created. To conclude, the main performer usually restates the *pallavi* theme in its original form.

Although transcriptions of nineteenth century *pallavi* performances have not survived for us to examine today, the broad definitions of the variational techniques used and descriptions of the monumental virtuosity and durations of some nineteenth century performances suggest that they might have been similar to MLV's performance in overall form, while differing in length and specific details. Before discussing the socio-cultural background which surrounds these and other changes in *pallavi* performance practice, it is first necessary to proceed with a similar description of musical change in the *kṛiti*.

#### *Musical Change: Kṛiti*

The term *kṛiti* comes from the same Indo-European root from which we derive the English word "creation". It refers to that which has been composed, created, formed, or accomplished, thus implying a certain fixity of materials (Monier-Williams 1899:300-303). The *kṛiti* of South India is a three-part song form which dominates the repertoire of composed pieces in the classical tradition today.

The "father" of the modern *kṛiti* is considered to be the saint-singer of Tanjore, Tyagaraja (1767-1827), who is said to have elevated the artistic level of the form to previously unattained heights. As a *bhakta*, or devotee, of Lord Rama, he believed in the power of music to communicate directly with the Deity. Because

of his beliefs in the divine nature of music, he vehemently opposed the use of music in the princely courts, where music functioned to praise the worldly prince or patron, and frequently refused invitations to perform for such royal audiences, reserving his music for those devotional or ritual contexts which he found to be acceptable. Among these were his own household *puja*-s or ritual worship ceremonies, *guru-shishya* teaching contexts in which he led his disciples in songs praising the Divine, pilgrimages to religious shrines, and begging for alms in the streets of his village each day (Sambamoorthy 1970: passim).

The lyrics of Tyagaraja's *kriti*-s reflect the philosophy of the *bhakti* tradition. His texts are written in prose verse in his own vernacular dialect of Telugu, rather than the complex metrical poetry of the ritually sacrosanct Sanskrit language. They employ a vocabulary normally reserved for familiar relationships, allowing him to depict his involvement with the Divine in a very intimate manner.

The following is a typical *kriti* text by Tyagaraja.<sup>10</sup>

*Pallavi*

Translation

nagumomu ganaleni najali telisi

You know my distress at not seeing your smiling face

nannu brovaga rada Shri Raghuvara (ni . .

Won't you bless me, Lord descended from Raghu? (Your . . .

*Anupallavi*

nagaraja dhara nidu parivaru lella

Oh King who lifts the mountain, have not all your attendants

ogibodhana jesevaralu gare

Advised you properly, that you should visit me?

itulundudure (ni.....

Are they really like this? (Your . . .

*Charanam*

khagaraju ni yanati vini vega canaledo

Did not the king of the birds come quickly (to bring you here), hearing your command?

gaganani kilaku bahu duram baninado

Did he say that the earth is too far from heaven?

jagamele paramatma evarito moralidudu

Ruler of the universe, Supreme Being, to whom can I appeal?

vagajupaku talanu nannelukora

Don't show unfriendliness That is unbearable for me. Take me under your grace.

Tyagarajanuta (ni . . .

You who are praised by Tyagaraja (Your . . .

Here, Tyagaraja implores Lord Rama, manifestation of Vishnu and Tyagaraja's chosen deity (*ishta devata*), to mount the *garuda* bird, fly to earth, and show his smiling face (*nagumomu*) to his devotees. At the end of each section, the first line of text returns, following the transitional "ni" ("your") which leads back to the incipit, "*nagumomu*" ("smiling face").

Tyagaraja's musical settings, as handed down through the *guru-shishya* tradition as well as through published notations, make extensive use of *sangati-s*, one of the musical techniques also found in the *pallavi* tradition.<sup>11</sup> Tyagaraja was very particular that his students reproduce his compositions faithfully and "...made it a rule to jealously exclude all pupils with a tendency to improvise variations and embellishments of their own (PALLAVI-singers)" (Mudaliar 1893, para 112). Mudaliar's statement clearly implies that improvised *sangati-s* were once the prerogative of *pallavi* singers and were introduced into the *kriti* form by them.<sup>12</sup>

Today, a considerable degree of variability as well as change can be seen in performances of Tyagaraja's *kriti-s* by musicians in Madras. As a case in point, the *kriti*, *Nagumomu ganaleni*, will be discussed here. In a study based upon seven prominent performers' renditions, as well as five published notations of the composition, it was found that improvised *sangati-s*, *niraval*, *kalpana svaram*, *tani avartanam*, and *ragamalikai* were commonly employed devices.<sup>13</sup> As many as eleven *sangati-s* were performed for some lines of the song, while six *sangati-s* was the maximum given for any line in the published notations, the average being far fewer. Thus, it is clear that some of the technical devices from the *pallavi* tradition have found an accepted place in the performance of *kriti*. *Tanam* and *anuloma-pratiloma*, have, however, been eschewed by *kriti* singers mainly because they are considered to be too heavy, ponderous, and intellectual for a *kriti* performance.

One can only guess at the processes whereby improvised variations were introduced into *Nagumomu* as well as other *kriti-s*. According to Mudaliar, imperfect transmission was responsible, as well as inconsistency at the very source:

"Very few of his (Tyagaraja's) pupils lived long enough with him to learn all his difficult songs; it is easy to understand that with the varying capabilities of most of his students he could not possibly impart the same lessons to all; the choicest and most difficult variations (*sangati-s*) were necessarily left untaught, being beyond the reach of his best pupils; to a select few some more embellishments were consigned than to the bulk of his disciples, who were favoured with but a small modicum of the immense store of ... music ... The same words were set to music in different melody-molds ... while the same music was arranged in different styles according to the requirements of the pupils. Mediocre singers who know but a few of the airs of this great composer strive to introduce in every one of his pieces variations belonging to other tunes by the same author, or more often interpolate creations of their own brains and tacitly pass them off as genuine." (Mudaliar 1892, paragraph 112).<sup>14</sup>

### *19th Century Pallavi and Kriti: Contrasting Context and Content*

Based upon the characteristic features of *pallavi* performances of the nineteenth century which received large rewards from patrons, it is evident that

the aesthetic values prevalent in the courts during this period favored complexity, display, imagination, competition, and the affirmation of the patrons' position, power, and musical knowledge. While it would be a mistake to view the South Indian court environment in purely secular terms, the favored aesthetic values of the time were such as might be found in any court environment. *Kriti*, on the other hand, was undoubtedly inspired by the devotional *bhakti* movement and favored such values as sincerity, purity of expression, relative musical simplicity, limited improvisations, and the expression of devotional thoughts and feelings through music.

It appears that the two forms dominated in different performance contexts in the nineteenth century. *Pallavi* singers performed mostly in court settings and in the mansions of wealthy landowners. Chinnaswami Mudaliar lamented in 1892 that there were many eminent *pallavi* singers whose talents could never be appreciated by the populace at large, and described these singers as

"...quite competent to extemporise PALLAVIS and variations in the classical style... How often do they electrify private audiences by their wonderful skill... and yet how is it all lost to the nation like the splendours of a Chinese rocket shot into the sky, and the perfumes of the 'flower born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air'" (paragraph 114).

In contrast, *kriti* singers were considered to be less skilled in the art of music, and performed more frequently in non-ritual religious contexts of temple and village life: weddings, housewarmings, while asking for alms, and at *bhajan* gatherings.

Similarly, the musical materials used by the *kriti* and *pallavi* singers, appear to have been distinct to a certain extent in the nineteenth century. Both sang in *ragam-s*, but the *kriti* singers often preferred "lighter" *ragam-s* such as the *rakti ragam-s* and the newer *ragam-s* created by Tyagaraja, the so-called *apurva* (rare, unusual) *ragam-s*, many of them similar to melodies found in popular *bhajan-s* and *kirtan-s*. *Pallavi* singers, on the other hand, tended to be limited to the dozen or so "major" *ragam-s*, particularly the "*ghanam*" (heavy) *ragam-s* believed to be best suited for *tanam* expositions. Both sang in *talam-s*, but *kriti* singers like Tyagaraja often preferred the shorter *talam-s*, including *chapu talam-s*, again suggesting a connection with lighter devotional forms such as *bhajan* and *kirtan*. *Pallavi* singers, however, utilized complex *talam-s* having as many as 108 beats, which were comprehensible only to the initiated few.

Of the seven improvisational and variational techniques in the *pallavi* singer's repertoire described earlier, it appears that only *ragam*, *sangati*, and *niraval* were used by *kriti* singers such as Tyagaraja. In his case, biographical documentation refers to only one or two occasions when he performed *niraval*, and only one occasion when he performed *tanam* and *svara kalpanam* during an 8-hour rendition of a single *kriti* for his guru's musical associates (Sambamoorthy 1970:102). Normally, composed *svaram* (*chitta svaram*) and improvised *svaram* (*kalpana svaram*) sections were avoided by Tyagaraja. The association of such techniques with the *pallavi* tradition of the courts, as well as the unsuitability of *svara-s* for

expressing a devotional text may well have caused him and his followers to exclude them in their performances. Today, the same values are upheld by only a minority of musicians and music critics, who upbraid certain performers for embellishing Tyagaraja's *kriti*-s with extensive *svara* sections and other obvious excursions into their own creativity. Aside from their desire for authenticity, many of these traditionalists have virtually deified Saint Tyagaraja and regard any departure from his practices as tantamount to sacrilege.

### *Socio-cultural Background for 20th Century Musical Change in Pallavi and Kriti*

As a result of the gradual disappearance of royal patronage of music in South India beginning in the late nineteenth century, and the concurrent shift of population to Madras, new performance contexts emerged in the early twentieth century—concert organizations or *sabha*-s, first private and soon made public, sponsored performances by musicians brought to Madras from the surrounding countryside, especially from the centers where music had formerly flourished under royal and temple patronage.<sup>15</sup> These concerts provided the grist for controversies in the newspapers and weeklies of young Madras. As in other aspects of South Indian life such as the ritual reform movements and anti-Brahmin political campaigns, the Brahmin's supposed domination over musical practices became a matter for intense criticism by other groups, as well as by Brahmin reformists. In particular, the elitist incomprehensibility of the *pallavi* was associated, rightly or wrongly, with the cultural stereotype of the arcane Brahmin scholar.

Some critics went so far as to demand the removal of the *pallavi* from the concert platform altogether, denouncing the form as "scholarly" and "meaningless". It seems that the popular audiences of the twentieth century demanded more text-related emotionalism from their artists, for which the *kriti* was ideally suited.

Two participants in the *pallavi* controversy of 1929 expressed the following views through the newspaper columns which convey a sense of the socio-cultural changes surrounding musical activity and performer-audience interaction of the time.

"If *pallavi* is a treat for the initiated few, why should the uninitiated many be made to suffer from what appears to them a torment of torture? The present mania of the musicians to exhibit their scholarliness rather than their emotion is one of the main causes of the downfall of the *pallavi*. Surely the music performance is not the time or place even for the initiated to learn, much less for the uninitiated" (Subramania Iyer 1929).

"Mr. Sambamurti (P. Sambamoorthy) says: 'To listen to a good rendition is a real intellectual treat.' But it is a treat no doubt to the initiated few. . . Let others try to understand and appreciate the musician's lofty flights in his *pallavi*. . . As Mr. Ramaswami Iyer put it, 'We must not forget that music parties have been nowadays transferred from the select audiences in private houses to the motley audiences of the *Sabha*-s. Indeed, music has been more or less democratized" (Krishnan 1929).

Changes in the musical values of Madras can be further explained as part of the process of "rationalization" described by Tamil sociologist R. S. Perinbanayagam (1971:211). In this process, the Sanskritic and Brahminic values which supposedly advocated blind obedience to ritual formulae and traditions were countered with new, "non-Brahmin" ideals of rational and intelligent (but not intellectual) behavior. The Tamil word *pakuttarivu* (*pakuttu*: to analyze; *arivu*: intelligence), translated as "rational", was an important term in the non-Brahmin movement. Perinbanayagam cites the Tamil stage and cinema as the most obvious channels for expressing aspects of this new philosophy. These were the arenas for glorifying the common-sense, wisdom and rationalism of the non-Brahmin Tamilian, the common man so long dominated by others.

As a result of the objections raised against the *pallavi*, a significant decline in its performance has become evident. Formerly, *ragam-tanam-pallavi* seems to have occupied the central portion of any formal performance, and its duration was seldom less than an hour, sometimes even lasting for several days. Today, however, if it is included at all, it is likely to be relegated to the latter portion of a concert, and rarely lasts as long as one hour. The daily radio broadcasts do not include *pallavi* renditions in their many hours of classical music programming; instead, a *pallavi* is featured only on alternate Sunday mornings for a brief forty minutes.

Similarly, the Madras Music Academy's yearly Festival schedules "scholarly demonstrations" of *pallavi*-s during the morning paper sessions, conducted under the aegis of the Experts' Committee, which functions as a modern-day vestigial survivor of the presiding patron and his court of advisors. The Academy also includes *pallavi* performances during the evening Festival concerts, although they are not actually performed as frequently as the printed programs in the Festival Souvenir Booklets would indicate. In January of 1979, a revival of *pallavi* protest was organized by some audience members who advocated the removal of *pallavi* singing from the Academy's evening concerts altogether. Their published objection declared that the proper context for such scholarly music was the morning lecture and demonstration sessions. Thus, while many musicians say that they would prefer to perform *pallavi* more often, it is evident that restless audiences and *sabha* organizers discourage them.

### *Strategies for Preservation of Techniques*

One response has been for musicians to devise adaptive strategies in order to ensure the survival of *pallavi* techniques. It appears that these skills, which are acquired through painstaking mental and physical perseverance under the tutelage of a ritually sanctioned guru, are often very high in a musician's priorities for preservation. As Hopkins (1976:435) emphasises, the desire or intention to preserve musical materials is a crucial aspect of the survival potential of any tradition or trait, and should not be neglected in assessing patterns of musical change.

As part of an adaptive strategy, musicians have begun to streamline and modernize their *pallavi* renditions, as well as to make the form more easily comprehensible, so that the proportions and affect of the modern *pallavi* more

closely resemble *kriti* style. For example, musicians often involve the audience in the counting of the *talam* during their *pallavi*-s, and the *talam*-s chosen are more often the shorter, simpler ones more characteristic of *kriti*. As illustrated by MLV's theme in Example 3, *pallavi* themes are often selected from well-known *kriti*-s today, providing a familiarity at the outset, and texts are often in vernacular languages. Thus, mystification and alienation of outsiders are no longer the effects desired by musicians, but rather education and inclusion of a broader audience. The eminent *kriti* and *pallavi* singer, the late M. D. Ramanathan, spoke of this change in the artist's role in society, which he attributed to the removal of communication barriers between musicians and their listeners:

"The mystery attached to *vidwan*-s in former days has almost gone away. I am sorry to say that it is a bit disturbed, because of the expense and spread of communication." (Lieberman and Catlin, 1978).

Another example of musicians' efforts to ensure the survival of *pallavi* techniques has been to incorporate them into their *kriti* renditions, particularly *sangati*, *niraval* and *kalpana svaram*. As mentioned earlier, this practice has not been accepted entirely without criticism by Tyagaraja's followers. The use of variational techniques in a composition is a delicate process requiring sensitivity to the composer's original expressive impulse. A musician's forays must create the impression of springing from the same poetic and musical impulse as that of the *vaggeyakara* (poet-composer). When this illusion is not convincing, critics censure the performer for indulging in meaningless academic or technical display. Thus, even when adopting *pallavi* techniques, *kriti* performers attempt to adhere to the original purpose of the *kriti* as intended by Tyagaraja: to express the devotional meaning and emotion of the text, even through the use of musical abstraction.

Today it is common practice for a musician to display his variational and improvisational skills within some of the *kriti*-s in any given concert. A *kriti* can still be performed without variations, especially in the initial and final stages of a typical *kaccheri* (concert). When a *kriti* occurs in the central portion of a concert, in the area formerly reserved for *ragam-tanam-pallavi*, it must be highly developed with the improvisational and variational techniques derived from *pallavi*: *ragalapanam*, *niraval*, *kalpana svaram*, *ragamalikai*, *tani avartanam* and competitive exchanges between soloist and accompanist. Thus, the "major" composition and *ragam*, and improvised materials for the evening sometimes lasts an hour or more, although its original song may have consisted of only a few lines of tuned text. However, if these materials give the impression of having been pre-composed, critics will find the artist deficient.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

The present discussion has associated the *kriti* with the contexts of private worship and devotion and the *pallavi* with the context of court entertainment; their intermingling has been shown to be the result of adaptation to socio-cultural factors affecting a third context, the public concert. This process has been dependent upon certain principles which seem to characterise interaction between South Indian musicians and their listeners. One such principle is that these musicians

are specialists who tend to develop their technical capabilities in handling abstract musical materials over lifetimes and generations, and hence value those materials very highly. A second is that this process of development is recognized not only by the community of musicians, but also by some patrons and audiences. However, in the system of checks and balances at work in the new public marketplace for music, these capabilities are held in check by the preferences of other patrons and audiences for whom music functions in many different ways, not necessarily focussing upon the appreciation of developing abstract musical techniques. The large number of commercially produced *pallavi* recordings in the west, as compared with the virtual absence of *pallavi* recordings produced in India, demonstrates further the interaction between musicians and their consumers, particularly foreigners, as well as the desire on the part of musicians to promote their skills in performing *pallavi*.

A third and final principle to be mentioned here in the form of a general conclusion is that the development of the *kriti* has been dependent upon the gradual growth in musical appreciation and taste among public audiences in Madras, just as the development of the *pallavi* must have depended upon a gradual process of enlightening court audiences during previous centuries. The complexity of the nineteenth century *pallavi* was as much a reflection of the musical comprehension and aesthetic values and philosophies of courtly listeners as today's *kriti* style is a reflection of the skills and values held by contemporary Madras audiences. Over time, these capacities and values will continue to grow and respond to new socio-cultural factors, just as they have in the past.

These conclusions lead to several hypotheses which seem to apply to the South Indian context. First, because the *pallavi* was threatened with extinction, its practitioners borrowed elements from the *kriti*, which was considerably popular at the time. Second, the *kriti*, which was, in its initial stages, primarily a text-based form, has acquired much of the abstraction and virtuoso elements from the *pallavi* tradition, to the present point, when critics are beginning to object to the excessive use of these elements. One can thus see a cyclic pattern in process: musicians tend to develop in the course of time the abstract musical elements in their performance style, with a corresponding emphasis on virtuosity, gradually alienating all but the most knowledgeable members of their audience. When the patronage of this élite audience group is removed, in this instance through social change, the form begins to die. In the process of dying, the form squirms to stay alive (through its practitioners, the musicians who perform it) often by borrowing elements from other forms enjoying more popularity at the time. The fact that the *pallavi* borrows from the more popular *kriti*, can be seen as a strategy for survival, which may or may not succeed. The cycle, arising again in the *kriti*, has evidently reached its apex, for we now see critics condemning particular renditions of this form also for excessive abstraction and complexity.

This process is similar to the "upward mobility" practised by social groups in India. By borrowing from the court-based *pallavi* tradition, performers added to the sophistication and stature of the *kriti*, making it more complex, respected, and elevated in social stature. The question which arises is why there should be a need for this type of upward mobility in musical expression, when a form is at the height of popularity. The only explanation seems to be that professional musicians inevitably

build up their technical expertise, virtuosity, and innovative skills over a lifetime of endeavor and naturally incorporate these elements into their performances. In other words, performance without these creative elements would be considered dull and prosaic in the South Indian environment, both for the musicians, and for the more attuned listeners. This, then, begins the process of alienation with other sectors of the audience, and presumably a new form will arise to cater to the needs of this group. We may also predict that when this new form begins to take away from the popularity of the *kriti*, it will adopt its own strategies for survival, drawing from elements of the new form.

That this cycle is not limited just to the South Indian environment is suggested by the evolution of North Indian forms. *Dhrupad*, like *pallavi*, faced extinction as a performing art with the demise of its courtly patronage. Its stylistic survival strategies are not as obvious, perhaps because, to some extent at least, its survival has been fostered through foreign interest in its revival. *Khyal*, like *kriti*, has exhibited signs of upward mobility by adopting *dhrupad* techniques, e.g. *gamak tan-s*. There are signs, too, that *khyal* may be reaching its apex in the cycle, as *thumri* is beginning to receive more recognition. Here, too, we can see the early signs of upward mobility, as longer abstract *tan-s* and *sargam tan-s* are occasionally introduced into *thumri*, particularly by singers of the Panjab school, e.g., Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Barkat Ali Khan. *Thumri*, which is still thought to be a semiclassical form by many, is apparently waiting in the wings, ready to take over from the *khyal* as the prominent classical form, and is already girding itself by adding these abstractions and complexities.

Of course, there are many factors which can affect the rate and directions of change, among them government policies, the impact of mass media and the influence of foreigners. Nevertheless, in the Indian classical music environment, evidence seems to support these hypotheses governing the cyclic rise and fall of musical forms, and that musicians employ adaptive strategies which contribute to the preservation of traditional materials in the development of musical style.

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#### Notes:

1. Many of the ideas in this paper have developed in conversations with Nazir Jairazbhoy, as well as earlier discussions with T. S. Parthasarathy, M. D. Ramanathan, S. Ramanathan, T. Shankaran, T. Viswanathan, T. V. Gopalkrishnan, and many other Madras musicians. The paper in its present form is an expansion of that delivered in New Delhi for the ICAES in December 1978.
2. Frequently, however, the term is explained following the respected Asian philological tradition termed by Becker "etymologising", i.e., explaining a word using less historically rigorous methods (Becker, A., 1979). In this instance, one of the leading musicological writers of Madras, the late Dr. P. Sambamoorthy (1975: 23) wrote that the word *pallavi* is composed of the first syllables of the Sanskrit words *padam*, *layam*, and *vinyasam*,

meaning respectively “words”, “time”, and “variations”. This is a somewhat specious derivation, however, which does not do justice to *pallavi* as we know it, because it overemphasises the importance of the text, while giving no credit to melodic improvisation. It does, however, draw attention to one important aspect of *pallavi* performance: the treatment of the texted tune which is subjected to a series of temporal augmentations and diminutions in one of the techniques of variation.

3. Instrumental renditions of *pallavi* and *kriti*, which are based upon the texted originals, have unique characteristics which will not be addressed in the present paper.
4. These are taken from the Tamil biography of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer (1844-1893) by V. S. Gomathi Shankar Iyer (1971), who bases his accounts on the singer’s extensive diaries.
5. Prof. Shankaran was referring specifically to *kaittalapidi* (Tamil: *kai*, hand; *tala*, meter; *pidi*, to catch), a subdivision of the *nagaswaram* tradition known as *rakti* of the *ragam-rakti-pallavi* cycle, which is similar to *ragam-tanam-pallavi*.
6. This technique is similar to augmentation and diminution in western music. For a detailed discussion of *anuloma* and *pratiloma*, see Widdess (1978).
7. Sometimes the *anuloma* section is followed by the reverse technique, called *pratiloma* (*prati*, against). Here, the durational value of each note in the original *pallavi* theme remains constant, while the units of the *talam* are clapped first at slower multiples of the original tempo, and then in increasingly faster multiples. *Pratiloma* is uncommon in *pallavi* performances today, although it was evidently a usual feature in nineteenth century *pallavi* renditions. In the MLV performance considered here, the singer did not include *pratiloma*.
8. In rapid tempi, the pitch of the note being named by Karnatak singers often becomes polarized around the pitches of stronger notes nearby, as shown in the transcription here. Musicians would say that subtle ornaments are being sung in such cases, or that intonation is stretched so that one note is being sung very close to another, i.e., *ni* is being sung very close to *sa*, as seen in this example.
9. *Talamalikai*, in which the theme is reset in a series of different *talam*-s, might occur next, although MLV did not do so in this case.
10. This translation was prepared with the help of T. S. Parthasarathy and M. Balamuralikrishna.
11. Although Tyagaraja’s biographers (Mudaliar, Sambamoorthy, et al) posit that he was the first person to introduce these types of *sangati* variations into *kriti* performance, evidence seems to suggest that Tyagaraja’s contribution in this connection was in the introduction of composed *sangati*-s as inextricable elements of his own *kriti*-s, and that singers were improvising *sangati*-s in *kriti*-s before his time.

12. The division of singers into those that sing *pallavi* and those that sing *kriti* holds, since not all singers today are capable of singing *pallavi*.
13. This is discussed in my dissertation (Catlin 1980), a copy of which is in the ARCE, Pune.
14. There is some justification for this view since there exists to this day a divergence of opinion regarding the *ragam* in which the *kriti* was composed. One reason for this may have been that Tyagaraja himself could have sung the *kriti* in different *ragam*-s on different occasions. It is now normally heard in the *ragam* Abheri, but there are several versions of this *ragam*, suggesting the kinds of tonal shift postulated by Jairazbhoy (1971) for North Indian *rag*-s. For further discussion of the changes in Abheri *ragam*, see Catlin (1980) 52-75.
15. Public concerts and radio programs today constitute the principal performance contexts for *pallavi* and *kriti*, resulting in stylistic changes which have also been noted by Kathleen and Adrian L'Armand: "Carnatic music is now largely a concert and public art, as distinct from its probable origins in temple and private worship and in its later function as private entertainment in the courts. The elements of devotion and competition which respectively characterized these two uses of Carnatic music are largely absent in the concert music of today." (1967 : 27).

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