CHAPTER – V

TAMIL ISAI MOVEMENT: IDEOLOGISATION OF MUSIC

Prelude

The cultural and ideological struggle in colonial Tamil Nadu has been expressed through a variety of social movements, intellectual initiatives and political endeavors. This process was not a unifocal and unvariegated progression. It was riven with contradictions, complications and contentions.¹ The cultural-intellectual awakening of the Tamil society was neither the result of a national upsurge nor its counter-product. It was a movement that largely grew out of local necessities, interests and circumstances, aiming to undermine the cultural hegemony of the existing social order through an intellectual activism.²

The counter-hegemonic struggle to liberate the public sphere for Tamils/Dravidians/non-Brahmins went on from philosophy, philology and history to culture, culminating in fine arts - music and dance.³ Contrary to the reductionist approach of Cambridge school of historiography, the cultural issues of Tamil society must be studied independently, in spite of its political undercurrents in order to assess the intellectual commitment to the engendering crisis of identity questions. The 'benighted' Madras province of the Raj was the first to witness movements for singing, offering prayers in the mother tongue and the public use of Tamil in everyday life. Writing as early as in 1891 in the Madras Christian College magazine On the Age of Tirujnana Sambandar Prof. Sundaram Pillai indicated the importance of offering prayers and performing puja in Tamil.⁴

V. G. Suriyanarayana Sastri and Maraimalai Adigal argued for the use of impeccable Tamil in public-personal life.\(^5\) Similarly, Subrahmanya Bharathi, writing in *India* on September 8, 1910 observed that the ears of Tamils had become hard and impervious to change. “The concert begins with the usual invocation in Telugu. The musician goes on singing in a tongue unintelligible to both the performer and the listeners, thereby making the music a mockery of *manodharma sangita*. This must be done away with, otherwise the people of this nation (Tamil speakers) would lose imaginative power and intuitive skill for generating new melody types and improvisational techniques.”\(^6\) “The *sahitya* (lyrics) of the songs must overflow with the *rasa bhava* (emotive content) appealing to the hearts and the minds of the people galvanising them for action.”\(^7\)

It is often said that the revival of fine arts is the true index of cultural regeneration. The spirit of Tamil renaissance (in the Indian context) which manifested itself since the end of the nineteenth century began to influence every aspect of Tamil language, literature and culture.\(^8\) In this concourse, the last to be affected was music. Remarkable developments were discernable in the popularisation of Tamil music from the third decade of the twentieth century. The symbol of revolutionary spirit had been transforming the national life in various ways. One such development can be related to the revival and popularisation of Tamil songs in the classical concerts.\(^9\)

Raja Annamalai Chettiar, who was mainly instrumental behind this endeavor said that, Tamil music movement was but one of the phases of the Tamil renaissance. The movement to popularise the singing of Tamil songs in the Carnatic music concerts came to be designated as the Tamil music (*isai*) movement.\(^10\) In the deliberations, press and official communications, the movement was referred as Tamil

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\(^7\) S. Thirumurugan, *Elisai Yennangal* (Thoughts of Seven Musical Notes), Pondicherry, 1994, p. 21.


\(^10\) See special musical souvenir published for Tamil music conference as *Kumaran Isai Malar*, Kaariakkudi, 1944, p. 2-3.
Songs Movement or Tamil Music Movement, the latter to which I would like to subscribe owing to its linguistic convenience.\(^{11}\)

While in the initial stages the movement’s attention was directed towards the popularisation of Tamil songs, in the later stages, efforts were made to revive the ancient Tamil or Dravidian system of musicology.\(^ {12}\) Prior to it, in the late nineteenth century the intellectual effort to unravel the mysteries concerning the Tamil musical pasts developed along the lines of cultural historiography. Starting from an academic inquiry, it gathered strength over the period, developing into a movement that assumed larger significance by the 1940s.

The study of music as an ideology or a cultural sensibility will help to fill the gap found in the social and art history of Tamil Nadu. It would be particularly rewarding in the context of colonial rule, to see how Western influence swept through the cultural field of Indian music. What was its response to the suggestive technicalities? Did it bring any fundamental or structural change? and how did both systems mutually benefit from each other’s experience? These are the crucial aspects which will help to study the cultural intensity of colonial dominance over indigenous fine arts and its strengths and weaknesses.\(^ {13}\) There has been no considerable attempt made in this direction. On the other hand, in the Western musical world there is a rich corpus of literature dealing with the musical sensibility and its thematic approach ranging from cultural use of music to commercial enterprise. A peep into the Western musical historiography would unambiguously provide a canvas for the enumeration of Tamil music movement.

**Western Musical Historiography**

Contributions by eminent scholars like Edward Said, Theodore W. Adorno and E. J. Hobsbawm have opened new vistas in the field of musical historiography. The recently developed discipline, ‘ethno-musicology’, has also enlarged the scope for further research.

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\(^{11}\) NNR, Madras, 1943, for the week ending 22 January 1943, *Putiya Ulagam* (New World), January 21, 1943.


Edward Said in his insightful work *Musical Elaborations* (Vintage Publications, 1991, London), attempts to underscore the ideological aspect of music in shaping the cultural sensibility of a society. Borrowing from Gramsci, the idea of ‘elaboration’ problematises the role of music in the contemporary Western society. To speak in his language, “the fact is that music remains situated within the social context as a special variety of aesthetic and cultural experience” that contributes, in Gramsci’s terms, to the “elaboration or the production of civil society” (p. 15). In Gramsci’s usage, ‘elaborations’ stands for maintenance of the work done by members of a society that keeps them going. Certainly musical performance deserves the descriptions, as do the cultural activities like lectures, conferences, graduation ceremonies, convocation addresses, banquets etc.

Music, like literature, is practiced in a social, cultural and public setting. Like any other art, its quality is premised upon the individual performance or production. Treating music as a cultural field, he studies the Western classical music as ‘private pleasure’ and ‘public performance’, enacted in a particular social climate that flavours it (pp-7,8). It is an interesting aspect to study music as it takes place. The influence music brought about in the cultural life of modern West is extremely varied, which can be demonstrated on the basis of “affiliation between music and social privilege; between music and nation; or between music and religious veneration” (p. xi).

Said’s ‘middle-strand analysis’, acknowledging the ideological *apercus* of music, idealises the possibility of art being practiced for aesthetic sensibility. Sharply differing from Adorno’s ‘total administration’ and Foucaultian ‘disciplinarian’ approach, he suggests an alternative, based on geographical or spatial idea that is truer to the diversity and spread of human activity (pp. 29-33). Western music itself is not a monolithic and much contested thing, with all sorts of establishments, heterodoxies, upstarts and challenges vying for it. He does not want to leave an impression that there is only ‘one hegemony’, ‘one orthodoxy’, and ‘one social authority’, to which music has been engaged with itself opportunistically.

Said is very much aware of the fact of the sweeping globalisation accompanied by its paraphernalia of packaging, commodification, and reification which has substantially altered what is supposed to be the happiest and most fulfilling art of music. However, Said’s standing on a utopian aperture argues that ‘not all

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music' can be experienced as working towards domination and sovereignty. In support of his claim, Said comes out with a most compelling analytic 'solitude, memory and affirmation' which views that pleasure and privacy can still be maintained in the musical world for creativity and improvisation. Nevertheless, Said declines to further comment upon the feasible possibility of such an exercise in the much-contested commercial world of music (p. 73).

On the other hand, Said also analyses the role of music in the conquest of "civil society" since the seventeenth century. What are the factors that determine the success of certain music in place of other? Why do few become popular while the rest fail to make it? Is it something to do with the cultural taste determined by values and hegemony? His 'transgressive element' literally examines the development of modern secular music from its aristocratic and liturgical background. In the process of his musical inquiry he comes up with interesting insights which are highly suggestive of tackling cultural issues of current relevance.

Theodore W. Adorno (1903-1969), the well-known sociologist of Frankfurt School, is known for his scintillating esoteric approach towards 'the philosophy of modern music'. Wedded to the Hegelian tradition of dialectical analysis, he studies the historical forces that engaged in shaping human freedom in the modern Western culture, particularly during the inter-War period and the immediate aftermath. Adorno’s assumption of inescapable historical teleology of forward progression undermines the musical social autonomy in all possible forms. Introducing the concept of cultural industry along with Horkheimer in 1947, much before the rapid advancement of mass media, he forcefully brings out the material dichotomy of musical taste between 'high culture' and 'mass culture'. His idea of 'mass culture', as cultural identity, forms the corner stone of his social theory. The much celebrated work of Adorno, Cultural Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture (Routledge, London, 1991), with an introduction by Barnstein, argues in favour of 'standardisation, reification and anti-commodification' in order to maintain the quality of high culture. Like any other commodity, 'culture product' is an integrated component of the capitalist economy as a whole. According to Adorno, music had not

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15 Theodore Adorno, Dialectical Enlightenment, New York, 1976, pp. 59-60
only been the documentation of bourgeois reality, but also of its principle art forms.\textsuperscript{17} The proletariat never formulated nor was permitted to constitute itself as a musical subject. However, the twentieth century has substantially altered the structure of ‘total administration’, paving the way for ‘regressive listening’ or the deterioration in quality.

Unlike Marx, Adorno believes that the cultural forces cannot be unfettered from the capitalist relations of production, so to speak the ideology of aesthetic sensibility is inextricably linked to material reality. As Said observed, Adorno’s convoluted argument is hard to catch up with, as it is premised upon too many assumed spatial notions. Nevertheless, Adorno’s analytic ‘culture divide’ enables me to problematise the ideology of cultural sensibility in colonial Tamil Nadu.

E. J. Hobsbawm’s thought provoking \textit{Uncommon People} offers an opportunity to understand the history of ‘alterity’ against the self. \textit{Uncommon People}, examines the everyday struggles of ordinary people as critical to the historical understanding of modern time. Hobsbawm’s broad framework encapsulates the events leading to the development of jazz music as opposed to \textit{avant-garde} system. The chapters from 19 to 26 of \textit{Uncommon People}, deals with the cultural aspects of ‘Jazz scene’ and its protagonists (pp. 236-303). Jazz music was initially rooted in the industrial suburban mass culture of North America, whose membership was largely drawn from the Black southern diaspora. As the music grew around the idea of mass culture, it soon assumed a considerable stature and repute, particularly during the New Deal era. Thanks to the extraordinary talents of Billie Holliday, Sydney J. Bechet, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker jazz music became a major attraction among the Black youth. However, jazz has remained throughout the art of the minority and did not enjoy greater appeal anywhere in USA. At the same time, it did not continue to be a sport of \textit{gebräuchemusik} of entertaining dancers and beer drinkers. It was very much wedded to its own hoi polloi culture. Crucial to our analysis is the musical dichotomy that persisted along cultural lines. E. J. Hobsbawm cogently demonstrates the cultural dichotomy of American blacks and the whites. When the blacks began to register their excellence in jazz music, the whites then promoted rock music as an elite culture in the sixties.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 33.
The western school of historiography largely treats music as a fundamental part of the European culture, which grew along the lines of Greco-Roman tradition. Music as a totalising concept continues to dominate the cultural life within the established system. The African writers A. Cabral and Thiango treat the value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination, which lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological level of the material historical reality. That is, culture is the fruit of people's history and the determining force of their very social existence.\footnote{Ngugi Wa Thiongo, \textit{Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature}, London, 1986, pp. 16-17; Amilcar Cabral, \textit{Unity and Struggle}, trans. By Michael Wolders, London, 1980, p. 33.}

\textbf{Indian Musical Historiography}

In India music has yet to form the core of historical analysis. It has not yet been considered as a viable historical category for cultural construction. Moreover, the colonial dominance and the hegemony that went along with the music is also yet to be identified. All the works that have emerged are mainly narratives providing mere factual linear historical developments. O. Gosvami, P Sambamurthy, Rangaramanuja Ayyengar, T. V. Subba Rao and T. V. Kuppusami are the well-known names in the historical writings on music. The intellectual endeavour to decode the developments that went along with the colonial domination seriously needs to be relocated.

O. Gosvami in his book \textit{The Story of Indian Music}, (1957, Asian Publishing House, Bombay) traces various trends, phases and factors leading to the development of music as an art of enduring discipline in ancient India. Locating the origin of Hindu music in the hymnody of the \textit{Sama Veda}, he studies various aspects concerning the development of music as a genre of established order. He studies the subtle technical differences between Carnatic and Hindustani musical system. Fundamentally both the systems are similar and maintain a continuous contact. Both the systems share almost common historical traditions, \textit{leit motif}, and cultural experience. The differences are only technical in nature, such as melodic patterns, embellishment, the use of grace notes and nomenclatures.
While Hindustani music is an ideal synthesis of Aryan motif and Islamic cultivation, the Carnatic music on the other hand is Aryan in motif but Dravidian in practice. In spite of the overarching Persian influence, Hindustani music, Gosvami claims, is more close to the original framework and thought patterns. Pointing to the *Manasollasa* or *Abhilasha Chinthamani* by Someshwara III (early thirteenth century), he argues that Carnatic music had incorporated local trends and new possibilities, even much before the establishment of Muslim rule in Delhi. Accompanied by fast time measurement, convoluted mathematical elaborations, coupled with the combination of ascending and descending notes with the tonal value, the classical music of South became a gigantic exercise of intellectual effort. Whereas the music in North is set to have remained largely close to the people by appealing to their sentiments and passions as an art of aesthetic sensibility.

P. Sambamurthy, a well-known scholar on Carnatic music argues in his *The History of Indian Music* (1978, Indian Music Publishing House, Madras) that music is the brightest gem adorning the crown of India’s culture. At a time when nations had not grasped the idea of aesthetic sensibility, India had evolved a unique solfa system based on seven notes and twelve gamuts. The concept of consonant and dissonant (fourth scale and fifth scale), derivation of modal shift of tonic and the intervals comprising concords and discords were evolved as early as in the second millennium B.C. Attributing the origin of music to Rig vedic chanting he traces the development of adharashadja (fundamental scale) from the basic notes of anudhatta, udhatta and swarita of Sama Vedic hymns. The fundamental aspects of music were developed through the constant process of improvisation and elaboration. As early as in the time of Bharata (fifth century B.C.) the musical instruments were neatly classified into chordophones, aerophones, membranophones and autophones on the basis of playing techniques. Pointing to various literary ancient sources like *ithihasa* and *upanishads* he recounts that music had reached its high water mark with all sophistication and refinements as early as the first millennium B.C. The study of history of Indian music not only reveals the cultural self-sufficiency but also reflects the inherent intellectual acumen of Aryans in developing a suave aesthetic sensibility.

Contrary to the claims of O. Gosvami, he argues that music in South India was practiced undeterred by extraneous factors and continued to develop along the lines faithful to its hoary tradition. In course of time it came to be aptly designated as
Carnatic music denoting the old and continuing music as against the composite culture of Hindustani music. Sambamurthy rejects the notion of a thousand stringed yal (lute) and the idea of ninety-six microtonal values in an octave, claimed by the Tamil atavist scholars to have been prevalent in the ancient Tamil society. Manufacturing a thousand stringed yal and the tuning of it for a concert is a task beyond musical possibility. Sambamurthy also made an extensive research on the Tamil Pan system and he headed the Pannaraychi committee to identify the ancient Tamil Pans to the modern Ragas. He is also long remembered for his outstanding contribution in making music as a pliable subject for university curriculum and preparing a staff notation on scientific line for Carnatic music.

In the History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music from Vedic Time to the Present Rangaramanuja Ayyengar (1972, Pune) like any other mainstream author, traces the origin of music from the monotonic archika gana of Sama Veda. As the authors of a great civilization, the Aryan mind had brought out the synthesis between philosophy and psychology, through an aesthetic sensibility of music. Treating music as a result of mental discipline and the cultivated sense of higher value, he argues that India was the motherland of all music. Pythagoras (582-500 B.C.), the acclaimed mathematician visited India to learn the heptatonic Sama Gana with its family of twenty-two microtonal values. Ayyengar opines “Nothing in music belongs to the Greek that was not found in India in conditions of superiority which left but behind.”

Unlike other Pan-Indian writers Ayyengar extensively discusses the enduring contribution of Tamils to the growth of ancient Hindu music. Bharata’s Natya Shastras, was the first ancient theoretical work to problematise the subject of music as the aid to drama and dance. However, Ilango’s Silappathikaram, was the first foundational work on a practical musical scale with vivid description. The salient aspects of melodic improvisation, modal shift of tonic, nature of fundamental scales, genre of musical forms, types of instruments and the method of imparting musical training were explicated in great detail. Besides, many other Tamil classical works furnish a corpus of material on the subject of music. Taking a cue from the leit motif of Aryan tradition, he observes that Tamils had transformed the art of music into a scientific genre with gigantic theories and meticulous elaboration by the end of first

millennium. Music as an aesthetic sensibility is inextricably linked with the dominant forms of social ideology. Whether it is public performance, musical concert or academic research, the hegemony will invariably reflect the cultural authority and intellectual climate of a given time.  

Tamil Musical Historiography

Scholars who worked on the field of Indian musicology have tended to overlook the pre-eminence of the Tamil Pan system and its contribution to the evolution of Carnatic music. Treating the nomenclature ‘Carnatic’ as a geographical metonymy, many scholars had failed to grasp the etymological meaning as it implies in Tamil – the music of the classical land.

The origin of music is still a matter of great controversy. Scholars giving flight to their imaginations have advanced their own flamboyant theories. The question of chronology also remains to be an elusive chimera, which needs serious inquiry. The range of opinion in locating various literary works differs from hundred to thousand years posing serious inconvenience in studying the evolution of music as a cultural sensibility. For example, the period of Bharata is being speculated from 1000 B.C. to 600 A.D. Similar is the case with Silappathikaram, whose period also is being approximated from second century to ninth century A.D. However in the light of currently available evidences these works can be attributed to fifth  and sixth  century respectively without much of controversy. Central to the issue is a systematic and chronological recording of musical thoughts and materials that evolved during different ages in Tamil society. The study must invariably focus on the socio-cultural and material setting that flavoured the development of music by giving due importance to the historical forces and cultural agencies.

Music like architecture grew along the lines of independent thinking, aided by State and society as secular discipline in ancient Tamil Nadu. Nonetheless, owing to the overarching influence of Aryan hegemony, the cultural taste of Tamil music began to reflect the ideals and ideas of sanskritik attributes. This was manifestedly evident in the Sangam literature. Aryan motifs, symbols and legendry imports were

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insidiously incorporated. The political and intellectual class had shown keen interest in co-opting many of the values and practices of the north without subverting the local traditions. On the contrary the lower wrung of the society showed neither reciprocity nor resentment against the incoming values, but it went on to zealously guard its practices and rituals by handing it down to its posterity.

The process of sanskritisation had received a new thrust during Pallava’s time by spreading its tentacles almost in all walks of life. The intense intercourse between Tamil and Sanskrit had intensified the process of acculturation by unleashing the forces of linguistic domination. Sanskrit as the language of high culture slowly appropriated all the social knowledge system from various local sources for elite consumption by setting new intellectual trends. Musical ideas, dance theories, and architectural techniques were subsequently absorbed into the corpus of sanskritik idiom. Sarangadeva’s Sangitaratnahara, written in the thirteenth century is the case in point, which reflects the trend of the period.

Sarangadeva had extensively used Tamil materials in his work. The names of the Ragas, the melody types, the terms used for describing modal shift of tonic and the taxonomy of musical forms bear testimony to the fact that they were of Tamil origin. During this period Sanskrit came to be recognised (twelfth century) as the vehicle for intellectual activity. Ahobala, Pundarika, Vidhyaranya and Venkatamahin were some of the well-known musicologists of the south who had handed down their theories and findings into chaste Sanskrit by unveiling new vistas for political transformation.

The fall of Chola and Pandya rule and the consequent political predicament made it untenable for Tamil culture to retain its pre-eminence in the public life. The establishment of Telugu speaking Nayaka rule in the Tamil heartland further vitiated the atmosphere. The currently available works on Tamil musicology have not gone deep into various imperatives to identify the historical forces and social agencies that were fatal to the development of Tamil culture. Instead, exclusively essentialising the

role of Sanskrit as the dominant ideology and its concomitance of political domination, they sought to propose an analytic of cultural imperialism.

V. P. K. Sundaram a well-known musicologist has made a meticulous attempt to recast the history of Tamil musical theories by retrieving it from the corpus of literary and epigraphic sources. His Tamilisai Valam (1985, Madurai) traces the systematic musical thought from Tolkappiyam (the Tamil orthography).

Integral to the task of reconstruction, he argues that the material knowledge of musical thought must be re-appropriated, or in a sense must be retrieved from the dominant worldview, as it is embedded in the sanskritik idiom. (p.43). Coining new terms, culling old usages from the classical literature, developing jargons and incorporating new ideas in pliable language are critical to the cultural liberation movement.

V. P. K. Sundaram's Tamilisai Valam enumerates the evolution of musical ideas as embedded in the Tamil literature from classical time. The fundamental aspects of musical activity have been explicated as they are found in Tolkappiyam. However, the chronology has become a victim in his analysis as he fixes it in the third century B.C. on the basis of some cursory evidences. Pattupaattu (ten tens), Ettuthokai (eight anthologies) of Sangam literature offer an array of information about the conceptual framework of cultural practice, status of musicians, their life styles and the state of the art.

Subjecting Panchamarapu by Aravinar (the earliest work exclusively on musical activity in extant) into critical scrutiny he brings out the structural aspects of musical activities. Panchamarapu deals with the five integral components of musical culture. It talks about musical conventions (Isaimarapu), instrumental techniques (Vacciyamarapu), theories about dance (Koottamarapu), gestural elements (Abhinayamarpu), and time measurements (Talamarapu).

V. P. K. Sundaram considers Panchamarapu as the integral part of Sangam literature on account of its hero's name, one Pandiyaran called Thirimaran, whose name can be corroborated with Pandiyan, a ruler who reigned in the Sangam period, as mentioned in the Velvikudi copper plate genealogical list.(second century A.D.). On the other hand, M. Arunachalam, a well known Tamil scholar argues, that Panchamarapu extensively deals with the melody type Nrupattunga (Raga), which should have been named after the then Pallava ruler Nruputtunga Varman who is said
to have reigned between 850-870 A.D. Based on this assumption, he fixes late ninth century as the period of Panchamarapu.\textsuperscript{31} Angyarkanni postulates that Panchamarapu should have been the handy work of a band of scholars, in a span of period ranging from second to tenth century, as it is written in classical prosody meter, interspersed with sanskritik techniques.\textsuperscript{32}

V. K. P. Sundaram’s engagement with Tamil sol-fa notation intends to offer an explanation to its logical development by tracing it from its fundamental meanings. Chanting of Sama Veda on the basic notes of Utadhatta, Anudhatta and Svarita is the result of a natural phenomena and the cultivation of music as an aesthetic sensibility which took root much later in Aryan culture. Whereas the evolutions of Tamil sol-fa system testifies to the fact that it grew along with the idea and value of musical sensibility.

Extensively discussing about musical instruments and their manufacturing technique he argues that the yal (lute) was an indigenous instrument constructed by Tamils and used as a basic instrument to identify the fundamental notes and their values (p-283). Tamils had a rich tradition of time measurement with minute details. They also had used a host of percussion instruments, prominent among them were mulavu (little drum), matalam and tannumai (a skin instrument). Nagasvaram is another well-known wind instrument, which speaks in volumes about the musical heritage of Tamils. It has been in use in all the public and temple activities. The art of playing nagasvaram is being jealously guarded by the Melakarar community, which has dedicated itself to the promotion of this art.

The intellectual quest to improvise the art of the musical elaboration had throughout been the driving force in the cultural life of Tamils. Music and musical activities have undoubtedly occupied the central place in the mainstream cultural life of the Tamils. V. P. K. Sundaram’s insightful recount about the history of the Tamil musicology fails to grapple with the question of interregnum that sets in the cultural world in general and music in particular. Moreover, the historical forces and social agents that were engaged in tandem with the political authority by transforming the linguistic autonomy through cultural ideology also have not been addressed adequately. Tamil atavist scholars often advance their theory of cultural supremacy on

\textsuperscript{31} T. A. Dhanapandyan, Putiyaragangal, Tanjur, 1985, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 304.
the basis of historical speculations and philological conjectures attributed to the
golden period of pre-Aryan Sangam age. Though their tallest claim lacks historical
rigour and logical constellation they cannot be declassed as a figment of imagination
since they are based on fragmentary evidences, which indeed warrants further
investigation. Given the current reality of the diverse interpretations and delicate
sources the most contentious claims concerning the Tamil cultural past cannot be
sorted out through historical consensus. Since the contestation for the historical space
has already become more prominent, the conflicting views and claims may continue
to pour in the days to come.

Thandapani's antinomical work Dravidarisai (1993, Madras) offers an
autonomous discourse to the history of Tamil culture. He sets out to trace the
elements of musical activities from the Indus culture, as they were the authors of the
great Tamil Pan. Strongly rejecting the notion of the vedic origin he argues that Tamil
had evolved an excellent sol-fa system of seven notes with twelve gamut, twenty-two
micro-tonal values, hundred and eight time measurements and eleven thousand nine
hundred ninety one Pans (ragas). They had possessed a great deal of knowledge in the
field of acoustics, combinational mechanism, modal shift of tonic and instrumental
orchestration. In the course of their trade with Romans they exchanged their musical
experience, thereby making a lofty proposal of Tamil music as the mother of universal
musical sensibility, (p-83) a claim that was too often exuded by Tamil academia.

His main contention is that no work worthy of mention was written in Sanskrit
on musicology until the time of Sarangdeva (early thirteenth century). Conversely, all
the major Tamil works were written much before twelfth century. Evidently it is a fact
that cannot be simply wished away as it entails a history of cultural appropriation.
Curiously the term Carnatic music is yet another misleading fact as it stands for the
music of south. Thandapani argues the term Carnatic came into historical prominence
as a political description with the result of Anglo-French conflict in the eighteenth
century. Prior to it the term had no significant relevance. The nomenclature Carnatic
could have been used by Someshvara in his Manasollasa (twelfth century) and
Haripala in his Sangitasudhakara (fourteenth century) for purposes of classification to
distinguish it from the newly developed Hindustani musical system.

A perusal of Tamil musical historiography is broadly indicative of three major
trends heralding an era of intense intellectual activism towards the restoration of
Tamil cultural past. Tamil protagonists, activists and intellectuals have engaged vigorously in creating a mass awareness about their social predicament by linking it with subtle cultural hegemony of Aryan domination.\(^\text{33}\) A host of journals, pamphlets and monographs appeared by carrying the citational reference of European scholars as the justificatory rhetoric to their legitimate claims. What was started at the beginning as a matter of historical debate in the portals of academia had consequently become a central theme of state politics by giving rise to popular imaginings.

The idea of Tamil hoary past had soon been deployed in the realm of electoral politics to create a sense of identity worthy of appealing to the mass emotive feelings. Thanks to the intervention of ‘culture industry’ the enchanting sweetness of Tamil language had been demonstrated through the mass media proving its blameless taste of musical quality. The entry of Dravidian parties into the corridor of power also enlarged the scope for further research.

The newly opened institutes, universities and other academic organisations offered opportunities to conduct concerted seminal researches on various issues. Most of the works which appeared in recent times on musicology were the product of this enterprise. A special survey was undertaken to retrieve many Tamil songs and *keerthanams* from public memory and brought into print with staff notation. Singing in Tamil was encouraged at social and public functions. Awards, fellowships and titles were conferred as part of promoting musical activities. Music was included in the school curriculum, universities and colleges offered degrees and diplomas in music.\(^\text{34}\) A special institute was started at Swamimalai in 1966 to impart instruction on *nagaswaram* a prominent wind instrument.\(^\text{35}\)

Tamil intellectuals had succeeded to a large extent in promoting Tamil *isai* among the public through variety of measures and efforts. Crucial to the development was the pioneering initiatives undertaken by musical experts like M. Abraham Panditar (1859-1919), Swami Vibulanandar (1892-1947), T. K. Chidambaranar (1882-1954), N. Devaneyan (1901-1981), Varagunapandy (1888-1963), S. Ilakkumanapillai (1907-1969) and a host of others whose seminal, path breaking endeavours laid the foundation for Tamil musical research on solid ground.


Works and treatise in Tamil on Tamil music are pedantic and atavistic in nature, most of them are premised on prejudicial lines. Many of the works tend to manifest the cultural politics of musical elaboration. Most of the scholars who worked on Tamil music drew their inspiration and insights from Tamil gnomic literature. Their claims and formulations mainly rests upon literary evidences. However, the intellectual commitment that went into the imperatives of Tamil musicology had brought new evidences to the limelight. Prof. V. P. K. Sundaram, a versatile Tamil scholar, has already engaged in compiling a Tamil musical encyclopedia with the support of major Tamil universities. The initial enterprise that had undertaken the task of Tamilising the Tamil music is almost in its final stages. More research is yet to be taken on this subject.

The main intention of this chapter is to outline the intellectual commitment to the reconstruction of Tamil musical culture from the past. Providing an intellectual explanation to the emergence of cultural movements, this chapter will offer a synoptic development of Tamil music movement. An attempt is also made to trace the genesis of Tamil isai movement and to discuss the criticism leveled against it. It also indicates the extent to which the movement is influenced by Dravidian or Tamil consciousness.36

The pioneering enterprise for the promotion of Tamil music was undertaken by Abraham Pandithar who set the tone and tenor for the development of musical research.37 Abraham gave up teaching medicine and initiated the process of unearthing the past glory of Tamil music.38 He continued the study of Tamil music with such assiduity that he quickly attained in it proficiency sufficient to undertake Tamil research independently. He also made a sedulous effort to update himself in Carnatic music. He made a critical study on the differences between ragas and published a collection of Tamil songs, which he composed in the Telugu keertana style titled as Karnamirthasagara Thirattu in 1907. He founded the Tanjur Sangita Vidhya Mahajana Sangam in 1912 and convened six musical conferences under its auspices wherein various issues concerning Carnatic music and its nuances were

36 See the chapter on "Tamil Isai Movement" in K. Nambi Arooran, Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism: 1905-1944.
38 See for his biographical information, T. A. Danapandian, Tamil Isai Selvam Thantha Tamil Anban (Tamil Lover’s Gift of Tamil Musical Treasure), Tanjore, 1968.
deliberated. The proceedings of musical conferences were reported with vivid detail in Tamil academic journals. Quarterly sessions were also held with the concern to exchange views among the scholars. All major findings of Abraham Pandithar were brought in the magnum opus *Karnamirtha Sagaram* published in 1917. It is an important treatise in *Isai* Tamil of 1346 pages in which he showed the correlation between the music of ancient Tamils and modern Carnatic music. He also took an active part in the deliberation of All India Music Conference held in Baroda in 1916. While accepting the fact that Abraham was the first to bring to light the intricacies and nuances contained in ancient Tamil music system, it may not be wrong to conclude that his contribution was largely confined to the theoretical side of Tamil music. He did not make any attempt to popularise Tamil songs through his musical associations. But at the same time, it cannot be denied that here and there some odd artists who were inspired by the findings of Abraham made a maiden attempt to sing Tamil songs in classical concerts.

M. Abraham Pandithar was one of the early scholars to advance the theory of 'great deluge' and subsequent Tamil diaspora in a sophisticated manner as found in the Tamil classical literature. The fabulous land called Lemuria once situated adjacent to the modern Tamil Nadu in the southern Indian Ocean was the abode of the great Tamil civilisation. The Tamils who lived in the seven islets of this landmass were exceptionally enterprising in trade and commerce, art and architecture and other intellectual pursuits; they were ably supported by the pious Pandya rulers with scholarship and academies and they developed every variety of fine art and worked it out to its minutest details with precision and clarity.

Many treatises, manuals, guides, and commentaries were produced on a grand scale with a view to promote various arts and cultural sensibility. While the world was groping in darkness, the people of Lemuria had enjoyed the comforts of life as earned out by their intellectual labour. Around seven thousand B.C. the great deluge struck the land of Lemuria leading to large-scale destruction in terms of material culture and civilisational artefacts. After a period of two thousand years, yet another deluge had virtually nipped the land from its geographical existence, the people who escaped the

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39 See Pandiyar, *Senthamil, Tanjaimitrar* for the years 1915-17.  
fury of flood had migrated to other parts of the world and contributed to a great deal to the promotion of culture and science.

The much-celebrated civilisations like Mesopotamia, Assyria, China and Egypt were the product of this great enterprise and Pandithar claimed a lofty status for Tamils as the authors of great civilisations. His grand hypothesis was an effort to reiterate the rich intellectual tradition of Tamils to gain a rightful and legitimate place in the history of modern Indian civilisation. Pandithar's construct of cultural antiquity emphasised the enterprising initiative of Tamils rather than their intellectual acumen. While recognising the deftness of brahminical intellect, he argued that Tamils were responsible in developing a plethora of cultural arts like drama, dance, music, architecture and other aesthetic sensibilities. Brahmins added an extra flavour and fixity through their commentaries, treatises and other minor works. In course of time they had almost appropriated the vital features of Tamil culture through their linguistic idiom, a tongue that was solely prepared for cultural imperialism and intellectual hegemony.

Unlike other Dravidologists, Pandithar stressed the importance of Tamil contribution to the corpus of Indian culture. In spite of his excellent contribution to the retrieval of Tamil musical theory to its pristine glory, Pandithar attracted attention neither in the circle of Dravidian politics nor in the quarters of Tamil Saivite tradition owing to the non-utility of his esoteric findings for mass politics and partly due to his ideological leanings.

*Karnamirtha Sagaram* was one of the monumental works produced at a time when the Tamil cultural nationalism was in its formative stage. Many of his assertions and findings have already been proved as accurate and absolute. Written in an elegant running prose of about 1346 pages the book is a mine of information concerning the history, culture, literature, society, astrology and of course the musical activities of the Tamils. It is divided into four major parts dealing with the culture and history of Tamils; the 22 *sruti*-s are the microtones, its tonal values, equal temperament and

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enharmonic scale; classification of primary and secondary paalai-s and the 72 melam-s derived from them, 103 modes, the identification of fundamental notes and the idea of tonal value as practised in the south; derivation of 7 notes through the method of Vattapaalai both in clock and anti-clockwise (the modal shift of Tonic) as found in the Tamil tradition, and the mathematical calculation of 24 sruti-s in an octave on equal temperament. The central focus of Karnamirtha Sagaram was to outline the long historical antiquity, the rich cultural heritage and the high intellectual tradition of Tamils by explaining various stages of the development of fine arts, scientific and technological activities. No nation can afford to patronise a plethora of cultural activities without a strong ideological premise or intellectual base. Tamils by virtue of their independent thinking and Protestant approach had developed a variety of fine arts and music was undoubtedly one among them.45

Music was the direct result of the deliberate and conscious application of the principles of acoustics, mathematical sense and grew along the lines of Tamil intellectual traditions. Tamil had an elaborate and accurate prosody meter for the improvisation of various melody types with embellishment and graces. However, his pedantic engagement with the historical treatment of Tamil musicology was riven with contradiction, contention and conflation. Heavily drawing from legendary stories, mythic tradition and literary conventions he made the Tamil Pan system to appear as the oldest music genre of all aesthetic arts. While giving the fine account about the development of Lalit Kala in the pre and proto-historic period he naively held Jains and Buddhists responsible for its deterioration, whose puritanic teaching had strangled the orderly development of aesthetic activities particularly at the end of the pre-Christian era.46 But the Brahmins who came in the beginning of the first millennium B.C. evinced keen interest in the arts of Tamil and had soon acquired a considerable proficiency over the Tamil philosophy and cultural activity. In course of time they used their mastery to their advantage in carving out a sphere of influence in every aspect of social life. The emergence of brahminic hegemony had thus brought about the fall of Tamils from their high state of cultural activism.47

45 Karnamirtha Sagaram (first published in 1917), 747-48
46 Ibid., pp. 183-84
47 Ibid., p. 387.
Abraham Pandithar was of the view that Aryan domination was so subtle and imperceptible that it cannot be explicated in explicit terms. Nevertheless it had a cancerous impact over the Tamil way of intellectual life. He wrote that 'men of understanding will know', 'the Aryans rendered some help to the language from the time of their coming to South India, but that others who could not appreciate the excellence of the language did their best to strangle the language and its ancient literature'. Moreover, the Aryan cryptic tendency to preserve the art of learning within themselves under the garb of 'divine origin' had prevented the ordinary people from having access to the musical activity. He long decried that the men of understanding will know the music and its various parts such as Bharatam and Talam had attained high excellence and were practiced with the help of instruments such as Veena, the piccolo, and Mridangam long before the advent of the Aryans into South India, and how music was in great demand in temples and royal palaces. These Aryans became experts in South Indian music after they came to the South. Just as they are determined to keep the slokas of the Vedas as a sealed book to others they were also unwilling to teach others the South Indian music which they had learnt from others. Again, they discarded all the existing Tamil fragments in music, and composed new ones in Sanskrit and Telugu and used them exclusively and handed them down to their generations also. But in spite of it they unconsciously follow the ancient Tamil style only. So in course of time the music which originated in South India came to be considered to have been derived from the Sanskrit literature of the north.

As a matter of fact, Pandithar continued, the changes that had taken place in Carnatic music were mostly nomenclatural and decorational, but the system continued to grow faithfully along its traditional lines. In spite of his essentialising and ethnocentric approach Karnamirtha Sagaram was considered to be a monumental work, as it throws a flood of light in the field of music. It addressed a variety of issues ranging from esoteric enumeration of sruti values, identification of scales and application of staff notation to the techniques of improvisation, elaboration, vibration, modulation and derivation.

48 Ibid., p. 431.
49 Ibid., p. 841.
50 Ibid., p. 1006.
As an ardent lover of music, Pandithar started his in-depth research as early as the 1890s in pursuit of a meaningful explanation to the puzzling musical conundrums. His articles on musicology were mainly published initially in the columns of The Hindu and Swadesamitran in English and Tamil as well. 51 His main intention was to initiate a serious research towards Indian musical system to develop it into a modern discipline.

In a thought provoking article on the importance of Indian musical principles entitled A Plea for Understanding which appeared in the journal Sentami/, he stressed the importance of collective research for the promotion of Indian fine-arts. 52 He wanted to draw the attention of native intellectuals, particularly from the South to systematise the basic tenets of Indian music along with the western and scientific lines. He wanted to prepare a basic text and a manual for the purpose of imparting musical instruction so as to preserve the Indian cultural heritage and to expose its inherent quality and integrity to the world. 53

Pandithar strongly argued that "no problem relating to Indian music could be solved without a definite knowledge of sruti-s, (a) the principle which underlies and pervades them all, (b) the method of constructing melodies out of the sruti-s, and (c) the melakartha which contains all the melodies." 54 He further continued that "Professors of Indian music have devoted a whole life-time to a single ragam and have composed geetam-s, varnam-s, kirtanam-s and pallavi-s out of it, leaving the fundamental theory thereof to remain an enigma." 55 No serious attempt has so far been made from any of the musical quarters to unify and organise the fundamental values of Indian musical system, a task that warrants immediate attention focusing on the fundamental theoretical issues. He had presented a set of queries to elicit scholarly responses to arrive at consensual formulation regarding the time honoured basic principles.

He posed some interesting questions such as:

52 Sentami/ (Madurai), vol. 2, no. 4, 1904, pp. 133-44.
54 Ibid., p. 764.
55 Ibid., p. 765.
(1) What is the origin of the ‘Sapta Swara-s’? What was the order of their development? Is there at present any rule, which would enable any one to sound the various Swaram-s in order?

(2) It is true that there are 22 sruti-s in an octave. If so, what are they?

(3) Are there only 1008 varieties of ‘ragam-s’, which could be derived by the permutation, and combination of all the ‘Swaram-s’ except the permanent ‘shatjamam’ and ‘panchamam’? Or, is there room for the birth of more raga-s?

(4) Does the primary melakarta, which is the basis of all possible ragam-s, exist anywhere in the present day?

He pleaded that “If Indians will only publish for the benefit of all, their achievements in the art of music, its secret principles, fundamental laws and regulations, the reputation of Indian music will advance beyond their wildest reckoning.”56 And with that object he set forth his queries on the subject. It was to his utter dismay that not even a single response came from any quarter, nevertheless, some notes of appreciation appeared in some Tamil journals commenting on his yeoman service.57

When he failed to arouse interest among the native intellectuals he did not give up his initiative and went on to draw the attention of the Western scholars. Pandithar drafted a fine essay on the Peculiar Excellence of the Indian Music: General Remarks on the 22 Srutis, Its Antiquity and Dignity intended to be published in the Journal of Royal Society of Arts, London. However, his article could not find place in the pages, as it did not fall within the scope of the journal. Nevertheless, the editor of the journal, G. K. Menzies promised him that he would enquire with concerned journals such as The Musical Times based in London. Subsequently the article was sent back without being published, as he could not find a suitable referee.58

Pandithar firmly believed that no progress could be achieved when there is so much of doubt about the fundamental ideas of swaram and sruti-s. Music can stand only after the mathematical calculation of the sruti-s has been established. He strongly felt the need for an academy to advance the cause of music, a view that he placed

56 Ibid., 287. See also an article entitled “Some Queries Concerning Indian Sruti System,” Sentamil, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 218-27.
57 Seithiga/, Tamilagam (Tanjore), March 1912, p. 39.
before the eminent Musical Vidwans of the Tanjore region, who came to pay their respects to the visiting Governor of Madras Presidency on February 14, 1912.\textsuperscript{59} They in turn readily approved of his ‘plan’ and impressed him to carry forward the foundational work. Subsequently Pandithar discussed his proposal with men of social standing who in turn promised him to render all possible assistance to the furtherance of this cause. Prominent among them were Maharaja Setupati of Ramnad, Rai Bahadur Saminatha Vijaya Thevar of Papanad, V A Vandayar of Pondi, Rao Bahadur Annasami Tevar of Ukkadai and others. However, the running expenses of the Academy had been initially borne by him who wanted to prove to the world the expediency and usefulness of such a venture.\textsuperscript{60}

**Objectives of Tanjore Sangeeta Vidya Mahajana Sangam**

This started functioning from the spring of 1912 and grew by leaps and bounds in furthering the cause of musical research. Pandithar spent his energy and sources in garnering intellectual attention from various parts of the country. The Charter of the Sangam clearly indicates its aims and activities with regard to the promotion of Indian musical research in general and Carnatic music in particular.\textsuperscript{61} The main objectives of the Sangam, as envisaged by Pandithar, were:

1. To make a study of such data as would tend to the development of South Indian music and to publish them.

2. To establish an academy for the systematic teaching of South Indian music and its fundamental rules.

3. To arrange for examining its pupils and others desirous of being examined and give certificates of merit to those who are proficient.

4. To search for and publish works that would be of help to Carnatic music as well as Keertanam-s which have not hitherto been published.

5. To make arrangements about developing the art of performing Katha-s and singing.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 772.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 1333.

\textsuperscript{61} Abraham Pandithar's Birth Centenary Souvenir (Tanjore), 1960, p. 63-66.
(6) To deliberate upon and remove doubts about some of the important items of Carnatic music.

(7) To purify the Carnatic raga-s by weeding out few of its errors.

(8) To reward distinguished vidwan-s by means of medals and honorific titles.

(9) To place before the Sangam for its approval new treatises, essays, opinions, or new keertanam-s in connection with Carnatic music and have Carnatic raga-s and modes sung by distinguished musicians.

The Sangam conducted a number of periodical meetings wherein the convoluted issues concerning musical theories were deliberated threadbare. While recognising the importance of time honoured methods, conventions and traditions, the scholars who participated in the deliberations cautioned that they should not become the bete noire of progress. They also emphasised that adequate research must be undertaken to update the musical system along Western and scientific lines. Presentation of papers, demonstration of various musical possibilities, elaboration through instrumentation and panel discussions had constituted the core of the Sangam activities. 62

Besides this, the Sangam convened every year annual conferences to discuss various theoretical issues and exchange views among the scholars. Participants came from all walks of life from various parts of the country. Publicists, civil servants, land owners and musical Vidwan-s, all took part in the proceedings. There were about six such conferences held from 1912 until Pandithar breathed his last in 1919. While the proceedings were largely conducted in English, the paper presentations and discussions were mainly held in Tamil and alternate arrangements were also made with regard to translation. 63 Pandithar also spent considerable time and energy in translating papers in English and Tamil as well.

He was also instrumental in translating research papers in Tamil by employing proper technical terms, drawing most of them from the classical literature, lexicon and inscriptive records. Pandithar introduced appropriate jargons to convey western musical ideas. He selected about 25 fine papers from the host of presentations that

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63 Sentamil, vol. 17, nos. 3 & 4, 1919, p. 159.
were made in the conferences for further improvement and publication. Prominent among them were:

1. A.G. Pichaimuthu of Tanjore on the dignity and usefulness of music, the history of European music and a few important points thereon.

2. R. Subramania Iyer of Tanjore, on dignity and utility of music.

3. Saptarishi Bhagavatar of Tanjore, on Sangitam and Sahityam, the determination of the 22 *srutis* and their usefulness.

4. Veena Appakannu Pillai of Chidambaram on Nadam.

5. Seturama Bharatiar, Tamil Pandit, of Tanjore, on the indigenous ‘modes’ in use in Tamil country.

According to Pandithar the membership of Sangam was about 600 in 1917. The periodic and annual proceedings were widely reported in the academic journals like *Sentami*, *Brahmavidya*, *Kalaniti*, *Tancaimiran*, *Nagainilalochini* and *Pandian*, which published the Sangam proceedings in great detail. However, the Sangam lost its vigour and vision after the demise of Pandithar. His children, although showing keen interest in advancing the course of Tamil musical research, paid no attention to restoring the Sangam activities.

Pandithar’s significant contribution to the intellectual history of the Tamil musicology was his ingenious method of textual analysis to unravel the hidden information. He was successful to a large extent in reconstructing the ancient Tamil musical system on the basis of literary evidences. Pandithar was the first scholar to undertake an intensive study of *Silappatikaram* to bring out the relevant facts regarding the Tamil musical system. *Silappatikaram* is a well-known Tamil classical work written probably in the second century A.D. It contains a mine of information about music and dance in ancient Tamil land, and several musical scales, instruments, genres, tonal expressions and forms are described. It has two commentaries, which though written several centuries after the original are invaluable for not only do they explain the difficult passages but also augment their comments with copious quotations from ancient Tamil treatises on music and dance.

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66 For the discussion of the date of the *Silappatikaram* see Chapter II.
On account of the lapse of 1800 years since it was composed, the language of the text poses immense problems owing to its archaism, obsoleteness, unfamiliarity, particularly pertaining to music and dance. Pandithar had successfully reinterpreted the passages concerning music with the help of two commentaries viz., *Arumpata Urai* (written probably in twelfth century) and *Adiyaarkunallaar* (written probably in thirteenth century). His corroborative analysis had opened up new vistas in identifying various musical terms, modes and musical instruments like *yal, kulal* and *tannumai*.  

Pandithar through his meticulous survey had identified many of the Tamil *Pans* and other technical terms, as found in the Sanskrit works particularly in *Sangeeta Ratnakaram*. He argued that at least 21 Raganga Raga-s mentioned in the chapter on Raga Viveka in *Sangeeta Ratnakaram* were of definitive Tamil origin. He had also furnished a list of ragas of Tamil origin as found in the Bharata’s *Natya Sastra* on the basis of its etymological origin.

Pandithar undoubtedly made an original contribution to the growth of Tamil musicology, though over time many of his claims and conjectures have been disproved beyond a pale of doubt on the basis of scientific research. His mathematical calculations of 24 *srutis* in an octave on equal temperament were proved untenable and the time-honoured practice of 22 *srutis* in an octave was set in place. Pandithar also committed a mistake in identifying the ancient Tamil’s foundational scale as ‘*Sankaraparanam*’ which led him to arrive at entirely different secondary scales. Subsequently Prof. Sambamurti had identified *Harikambhogi* as the fundamental scale of Tamil and cleared all the doubts concerning the model shift of tonic.

Pandithar’s acknowledgement of Jeyankondar as the author of *Arumpata Urai* a commentary to *Silappatikaram* still remains a conjecture without any concrete evidence. In spite of these palpable shortcomings he is long remembered in the academic circle for his enterprising skill, enumerative style, analytical outlook, perspicacious approach, and unrivalled understanding of the subject. Pandithar’s path-breaking sedulous research had contributed to a great deal in reinstating the glory of Tamil musical traditions.

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67 P. Dandapani, *Dravidar Isai*, p. 211.
69 Ibid., pp. 351-52.
70 V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *Silapathikaram* (Tr), pp. 413-17.
Following by Pandithar, many more young scholars embarked on the field of Tamil musical research, partly owing to the compulsions of cultural nationalism and partly to the rediscovery of Tamil classical sources. Prominent among them was Vipulanandar of Batticaloa (1892–1947). Trained in the field of science at London University, Vipulanandar showed keen interest on Tamil research. Within a short span of period, he acquired a remarkable proficiency in linguistic and literary conventions of Tamil and spent the rest of his life in research oriented activities.

Vipulanandar made a significant effort in restoring the much celebrated antique musical instrument called yal from its oblivion. Yal is much the same as veena and was extensively referred to in Tamil literature. Made up of red wood with 4 to 1000 strings, it was used in all concerts, particularly in identifying the minute tonal value. However, the instrument fell into disuse and long forgotten at least for about thousand years with the emergence of veena. Vipulanandar made a maiden attempt to reconstruct yal on the basis of acoustic technique by applying all the specificities as prescribed in the literary, epigraphic and architectural sources. However, he could not succeed in his endeavour in developing a pliable instrument for all musical activities. Nevertheless, his research threw a flood of light on the state of art of the ancient acoustic making and its further exploration possible.

Vipulanandar’s analysis about the fundamental scale of Tamil had opened up new vistas for the derivation of melody types through modal shift of tonic in clock and anti-clock wise. His views on the identification of sol-fa notes were contested by many scholars and subsequently he had altered his opinion. Vipulanandar toured throughout the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu and popularised many of his theoretical formulations by generating interest among the young scholars. His research findings were posthumously published as a book entitled Yaalnoo/ by the Tancai Karantai Tamil Sangam. If Pandithar had initiated the process of Tamil musical research on the scientific lines, it was Vipulanandar who accelerated the tempo by applying technical principles. During this period many more well known scholars like N. Teevaneeya Pavanar, K. Subramania Pillai, Vellaivaaranar and a host of others actively embarked on Tamil musical research.

The intellectual commitment to retrieve the lost glory of Tamil cultural heritage made its appearance at the end of the nineteenth century. It was an effort to

71 V. P. K. Sundaram, p. 253.
secure a significant place in the domain of modern public sphere. Thanks to the intervention of colonial power, the idea of identity – uniqueness sought to have gained greater currency heralding an era of intense politicisation. Given this historical context an attempt to reconstruct the history of Tamil music was said to have begun with the rediscovery of Tamil classical works. In the initial stages there was no specific demand for popularising Tamil songs. But at the same time scholars like Bharati stressed the importance of singing in Tamil. The demand for popularising the Tamil songs became a prominent issue only in the second quarter of the twentieth century as a result of caste politics and cultural nationalism. The recent progress achieved in the field of theoretical musicology also further precipitated the Tamil Isai movement.

The real effort in this direction of popularisation of Tamil songs came only in the thirties. Organisers’ efforts to revive the Tamil music in general may be said to have begun since the holding of the 42nd Congress session in Madras (1927). On the sidelines of the Conference, a musical session was also conducted with a view to restore the national culture to their pristine glory. It was in this session that a decision was taken to establish Music Academy for the promotion of South Indian music.

The Academy came into being in 1928 and soon became a centre for classical music and dance. The success of the Music Academy stimulated other volunteer associations to undertake similar efforts. In this connection, a plea for the inclusion of Tamil songs in musical performances came to be made in the beginning of the 1930s.

Many Tamil scholars emphasised the need for the inclusion of Tamil songs in the classical concerts along with other vernaculars. C. R Srinivasa Iyengar, a well-known musicologist, while delivering a lecture at Summer School of Music of India organised by YMCA referred to the decline of singing Tamil songs in the concerts. He said, “it was a new trend of neglecting the songs in Tamil.” When he was a youth many Tamil kirtanas like Ananda Bharathi, Kavikunchala Bharathi, Gopala Krishna Bharathi and Arunachala Kavirayar songs were sung. Now it has gone into oblivion. He also deprecated the tendency of contemporary Tamil musicians singing nothing

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but Telugu and Sanskrit songs, saying that the compositions of Tamil songs bear no comparison with Telugu songs.\textsuperscript{75}

In a lecture on “Music and Musical Instruments of Tamils” at Madras University, U. V. Swaminatha Iyer deliberated on the question of \textit{pan} (melody) which formed an important part of ancient Tamil music. Such studies based on the literature reveal the characteristics of Tamil musical system at the beginning of the Christian era.\textsuperscript{76}

The first successful attempt to include Tamil songs in the curriculum in the higher education were made in 1929. It was in the month of May when Raja Annamalai Meenakshi Musical College was started at Chidambaram by Annamalai Chettiar with an avowed purpose of preserving the music talent of Tamil heritage. It was the first academic institute to teach music as a fine art as early as in 1926.\textsuperscript{77}

As early as 1926 the Senate of Madras University recommended a proposal for the formation of the Board of Studies to introduce the faculty of fine arts comprising painting, music and architecture.\textsuperscript{78} However it was vetoed by the administrative council.

The department of Indian music was finally started in Madras University in 1932 with the objective of imparting instruction in a one year course leading to a diploma in Indian music. A two year diploma course was also started in 1937 with a view to promote South Indian music.\textsuperscript{79} In the initial years there was no reference of a specific nature to the revival of Tamil music either in Annamalai University or in Madras University. Annamalai Chettiar did not make any significant remark with a view to popularise Tamil songs in his presidential address to the music conference conducted by Indian fine arts society in 1933.\textsuperscript{80} The spirit of reviving Tamil music was however in the air for quite some time. Many Tamil intellectuals like Swamy Vibhulanandar, N. Devaneyan, T. V. Umannageswaran Pillai and others emphasised the need for retrieving Tamil musical past from its oblivion.\textsuperscript{81} In the meantime E. V.

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\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 254.
\textsuperscript{77} G. Nagarajan, \textit{A Biography of Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar}, Annamalai Nagar, 1982, pp. 28-29.
\textsuperscript{78} Quoted in K. Nambi Arooran, \textit{Tamil Renaissance}, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{80} K. Nambi Arooran, \textit{Tamil Renaissance}, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{81} Ilangumaran, \textit{Tamil Isai Iyakkattin Torramum Valarchiyum}, p. 58.
\end{flushright}
Ramaswamy Naicker appealing to the non-Brahmin artists urged them to sing in Tamil and argued for due respect to non-Brahmin artists by institutions dominated by Brahmin artists.\textsuperscript{82} In an editorial which appeared in \textit{Kudiarasu} on April 30\textsuperscript{th} 1930, he criticised the Brahmin scholars for monopolising the field of music and ill-treating the non-Brahmin artists, and deplored the lack of self-respect among the non-Brahmin artists.

EVR announced a special Tamil music concert in order to encourage the non-Brahmin artists during the second Self-Respect Movement Conference held in Erode between 29-31 May 1930.\textsuperscript{83} Accordingly, a music conference was held. Along the sidelines of this conference a musical concert was held in which many non-Brahmin artists participated by singing Tamil songs. Nine such concerts were conducted.\textsuperscript{84} At the end of the Self-Respect Movement conference a series of resolutions were passed calling upon non-Brahmin patrons to support the languishing artists of their brethren. A resolution was also mooted urging the non-Brahmin parents to impart musical education to their children. Speaking in the conference E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker emphasised the need for singing songs of a secular nature devoid of mythical concocted stories. What EVR attempted was a part of a social agenda to ensure due recognition for non-Brahmin artists in the realm of music.\textsuperscript{85}

The demand for singing in Tamil became more prominent in the early thirties. In the musical conference at Mysore in 1934 C. R. Srinivasa Aiyengar stressed the need for singing in their native tongues in his presidential address. “Each province must take care that those who sing in the public concert must largely use the vernacular of a province except of course the classical pieces rendered by great musical scholars”.\textsuperscript{86} At the first session of the Madras presidency Tamil conference held in Tirunelveli in 1934 P. T. Rajan, the then Minister of Public Works, gave a clarion call to retrieve Tamil music from the quagmires of cultural distortion. He warned that the Tamils’ fine arts might die out unless immediate attempts were made to protect it.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{82} E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, "Tamil Isai", \textit{Kudiyarasu}, 1929, May 25.
\textsuperscript{83} E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, \textit{Kudiarasu}, 1930, April 30.
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Sentamil}, vol. 9, no. 9, 1931, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Kudiarasu}, July 25, 1931.
\textsuperscript{86} Quoted in K. Nambi Arooran, \textit{Tamil Renaissance}, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Tamil Polil}, vol. 9, no. 8, pp. 336-39.
At the same time, a number of articles were written in Tamil periodicals pointing out to the excellence and exquisiteness of Tamil music. A number of meetings and seminars were organised to mobilise mass opinion in favour of Tamil song movement throughout the province. Many Tamil intellectuals contributed their opinions and ideas in the leading Tamil and English dailies stressing the need for singing in Tamil. Tamil Ulagam, Senthamil Selvi, Tamil Pozhil, Kumaran were the main magazines which stood whole heartedly for the cause of Tamil music and continuously published articles to create awareness among the masses.

Vipulanandar, a well-known Tamil intellectual under the auspices of Madras University, delivered a series of seven lectures in English about ancient Tamil music. His main contention was to show that what is considered today as Carnatic music was actually evolved from the musical systems of Tamil. The change of nomenclature has not altered anything theoretically. He later published all his findings in a well-known treatise called Yalnool (Treatise on Lute). Like other scholars Vipulanandar also drew his findings mainly from Tamil literature particularly from Silappathikaram.

The music college of Chidambaram and Annamalai University embarked in supporting Tamil song movement in various measures. Various fellowships, scholarships and incentives were introduced in 1935 by Annamalai University to promote Tamil song singing. Many Tamil Keerthanas (songs) were given financial support and social encouragement. Many Tamil philanthropists like R. K. Shanmugam Chettiar, Annamalai Chettiar and others felt the need for spreading a movement to promote Tamil music through financial incentives. In his inaugural address at the Music Academy in 1939 R. K. Shanmugam Chettiar observed, “that apart from the rhythmical effects and sound the meaning of the song does a great deal in appealing to the souls of their listeners. I wonder how many of our great south Indian vidwans know the meaning of the songs they sing in Telugu and Hindustani. To a layman like me it is a mystery how a singer can produce emotional effect from a piece which is most unintelligible either to the performer or to the listener. I wonder if this would be happening anywhere in the world under the auspices of classical

88 Kumaran, “Tamil Isai Malar” (Special Musical Issue), 1942, pp. 33-37.
89 G. Nagarajan, Biography of Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar, Annamalai Nagar, 1982, p. 177-83.
90 Vipulanandar, Yalnool (Treatise on Lute) Tanjore, 1974.
91 G. Nagarajan, Biography of Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar, pp. 180-84.
Challenging this notion M. S. Rukmini Devi opined in her inaugural address to the seventh Indian Music Conference held in 1939 that, "controversies over the language of expression had no meaning for a true artist... Music is a language by itself. It would not matter much if the singer expresses him or herself in a language not familiar to the audience provided the music inspire and give expression to the beauty of creations. What is important is the quality of melody and elaboration and not the dreary meaning. Music has its own inspirative power which can kindle the emotions of every living being irrespective of linguistic and cultural differences".  

R. K. Shanmugham Chettiar reiterated his views when he delivered the founder's address at the Annamalai University in 1940. He said, when the Annamalai University was founded, people began to ask whether it was going to be one of the several stereotyped universities, whether it was going to have any particular characteristics of its own and whether one could expect it to devote its attention for the promotion of Tamil culture. He continued, music for instance made the greatest appeal only when it is sung in one's own mother tongue and hoped that the authorities of the University would realize the importance of that subject. These remarks perhaps prompted the pro-chancellor to offer a special endowment to the University in 1940 to encourage the study and the propagation of Tamil songs.  

In the same year His Holiness Srla-Sri Kasivisai Swaminadaambalavanar of Thiruppananthal mutt made an endowment for the study of Tamil music in Tevaram and Thirumurai. Accordingly, the committee of experts and teachers of Annamalai University met in April 15, 1941 and discussed the nature and number of Tevaram panms and passed resolutions relating to the adoption of Tevaram tunes and corresponding to the Carnatic music ragas (melody type).  

In this context it may be said that many Tamil scholars and musicians came to believe on the basis of Tamil literature that modern Carnatic songs and ancient Tamil music were one and the same and the former evolved out of the latter during the last five hundred years. Until the thirteenth century there was no division called Carnatic

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92 Quoted in K. Nambi Arooran, Tamil Renaissance, p. 257.
94 K. A. Subramania Pillai, Eirpu Aaraychi (Rebuttal Research), Annamalai Nagar, 1945, pp. 98-100.
95 Ibid., p. 110.
96 Thirunavakarsu, Sangeetha Yogam (An Opportune Time for Music), Madras, 1946.
97 Kumaran, Isai Malar (Special Musical Souvenir), 1942, pp. 42-44.
music as the country had only one music system.\textsuperscript{98} Many of the Tamil scholars basing their argument on \textit{Sangeetha Ratnakara} by Sarangadeva (1210-1247) argued that Tamil music was fundamental to the development of the Indian system. Prof. K. Subramania Pillai of Annamalai University undertook a special study to unravel the mysteries concerning the cultural polemics of the Tamil musical system from its beginnings. He came up with his treatise known as \textit{Ethirppu-Araychi} explicating the manner in which Tamil music was distorted to an extent to be called as the music of Aryas. As a staunch Tamilologist he made a scathing attack on Brahmin scholars for the misinterpretation of Tamil musical development. His analysis started from \textit{Tolkappiyam} (grammatical work) and went on to inquire into various Tamil works to prove his point. Tamils unlike other societies had a set of people who practised music and dance as their traditional occupation. They were called \textit{Paanars} who were the saviours of the Tamil cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{99} The \textit{nagaswaravidwans} of today were mainly from the \textit{Melakara} tradition who continued to practice music as their traditional occupation.\textsuperscript{100}

\textit{Silapathikaram} of Ilango, which is believed to be one of the works of Sangam, provides a mine of information about music and musical instruments. The period of this work is roughly located in the sixth century. However, there are many other claims as far as its date is concerned ranging from second century to eighth century AD.\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Silapathikaram}'s main commentaries such as \textit{Adiyarkku Nallar}'s work and \textit{Arumpathavurai} give vivid account of musical activities as they were practiced in the hoary past. These commentaries also speak about a number of musical instruments including a variety of lutes ranging from 1000 to seven stringed instruments.\textsuperscript{102}

\textit{Panchamarapu} by Arivanar is yet another work which speaks vividly about various musical activities such as elaboration, ornamentation, modal shift of tonic, melody types, octave and counter points. This work is dated between the seventh and eleventh centuries AD. As has already been argued the chronological dispute

\textsuperscript{98} Purachidasan, \textit{Tamil Isai Saamagaanam} (Saamagaanam and Tamil Music), Madras, 1992, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{101} See for the date of Silapathikaram Chapter - II.
\textsuperscript{102} S. Jayalakshmi, \textit{Silapathikarathil Isai Selvangan}, p. 7.
continued to be the major academic polemics from the very late nineteenth century onwards.\textsuperscript{103}

The commentaries of \textit{Silapathikaram} mention more than 20 musical works which became non-existent by the late nineteenth century. The main contention of Tamil intellectuals is that their rich musical tradition was swept by the great deluge that occurred in the second millennium. Most of the works of Tamil musicology were distorted and expropriated by the invading cultures.\textsuperscript{104}

Maraimalai Adigal believed that the basis of modern Carnatic music was mainly corrupted by Aryans to make it appear as if it did not correspond to the Tamil musical system. Extensively pointing to the \textit{Karnamritha Sagaram}, the introduction of Telugu and Sanskrit elements to the Tamil musical system is traced to the social and political changes resulting from the establishment of Vijayanagara rule and Maratha rule subsequently in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{105} Maraimalai Adigal was of the opinion that the music of the Tamils should form the basic structure of the Indian musical system. S. Somasundara Bharati also extensively delved into the imperatives of musical developments of Tamil society. The expansion in the intellectual activities in Tamil music accelerated the process of intense Tamil music propaganda.

Tamil music conference was convened in 1941 in Annamalai University with the objective of finding out the ways and means of popularizing Tamil songs.\textsuperscript{106} The subject committee in the conference passed a resolution asking All India Radio authorities to give prominence to Tamil songs in their programs intended for Tamil audience. Sangeetha Sabin should give due place to Tamil Keerthanas and Pathams.

In the mean time there was a counter Tamil musical movement initiated with a view to stop the efforts of Tamil protagonists to impose their agenda on musical performance. Their main contention was to deny the essential explanation of language as the prerequisite for musical performance.\textsuperscript{107} Giving major portion of the time to Tamil songs would affect the quality of the concert. Spearheading the movement, Musiri C. Subramania Aiyar pointed out that they could not give the best keerthanas

\textsuperscript{103} Arivanar, \textit{Panchamarapu} (Five Conventions), Madras, 1982.
\textsuperscript{104} K. Ponuswamy, \textit{Pooorvika Sangeetha Unmiagal} (Antiquarian Musical Truths), Madurai, 1978, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{106} Ilangumaran, \textit{Tamil Isai iyakkattin Torramum Valarchiyum}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{107} Thirunavakarsu, \textit{Sangeetha Yogam}, p. 24.
of Telugu and Sanskrit which had been holding their prominent place for the past 200 years if they waste their time in singing Tamil songs. K. L. Jairama Shastri, Pattinam Subramania Aiyar and Semmangudi Srinivasa Aiyar supported the above view.

Challenging their claims Rasigamani T. K. Chidambaramar argued “no musical culture can survive at the cost of people’s displeasure and this cannot continue to prolong as the people had already tasted the value of Tamil songs. The delaying tactics for reforms will soon be challenged with the regenerative people’s efforts. The gap and the void formed in the Tamil musical system can soon be dealt with”.

Tiger Varadhachariar pointed out that the Tamil musical conference held at Annamalai University campus had demonstrated clearly that Tamil songs were available in plenty if the vidwans were ready to further the progress of the Tamil songs. He further held that the resolutions passed in the conference were a momentous development in the onward journey of Tamil Isai Movement.

The mass phase of the Tamil musical movement began with a Tamil music conference in Annamalai University in the early 1940s. It soon spread to other places. Many public meetings were held in the mofussil towns to create awareness among the common people to garner their support. Much opposition seemed to have been registered in the initial years on account of the political loyalty of Tamil music protagonists. Arguments and counter-arguments were put forward in musical conferences and public meetings. Vitriolic remarks and scathing criticisms were expressed through the columns of dailies and journals. A souvenir published by Kumaran monthly from Kariakudi entitled as Chettinattu Tamilisai Malar contains a volley of criticism leveled against Tamil music movement and its protagonists.

The critiques of Tamil music movement often pointed out that the concept of raga was peculiar to Indian music and was a precious heritage, and raga was, as it were, a musical personality under whose influence words merged with feeling and meaning was thrown entirely to the background. Therefore, they argued that the

108 Tamil Isai, Senthamil Selvi, 1943, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 154-57.
109 Ibid., pp. 154-57.
110 Kumaran, Special Musical Souvenir, p. 21.
essential thing about music is melody and its appeal to the inner emotions of the listener and the language does not matter.\textsuperscript{112}

At the annual conference of Music Academy in 1941 a resolution was passed in this regard stating that it should be the aim of the musician and the lovers of music to preserve and maintain a high standard of classical music and that no consideration of language should be imported so as to lower or impair the standard.\textsuperscript{113} The critiques also pointed out that the attempt to exclude Telugu songs in order to encourage Tamil songs is suicidal to the growth of Carnatic music which is the confluence of contributions from all southern linguistic people.

Some musicians expressed their apprehension that this would lead to linguistic conflict thereby undermining the cultural unity of the nation. They feared that the boycott of Tamil artists in Andhra Pradesh may create further tension. Ariyakudi Ramanuja Aiyengar said one should by all means promote the cause of Tamil songs but not at the expense of other musical sensibilities.\textsuperscript{114}

The first public Tamil Isai Conference was conducted from December 23, 1943 to January 3, 1944 in Madras wherein the possibilities of independent functioning of Tamil songs were brought to discussion. Many speakers spoke of the importance of listening to songs in the mother tongue. C. Rajagopalachari, T. K. Chidambaranar, R. K. Shanmugam Chettiar, C. N. Annadurai, and Kalki spoke of the importance and the need for democratising the songs for the Tamil people.\textsuperscript{115} At the end of the meeting almost similar resolutions were passed with light modification. One of the resolutions said the time allotment for the Tamil programs in All India Radio at Madras and Tiruchirapalli should be increased with a view to accommodate Tamil songs. The other resolution called for the importance of syllabus in the course of music in Madras University. A committee appointed by the Tamil Isai movement went and met the Vice Chancellor of Madras University to expedite their demand. The conference resolution also urged the music faculty of Madras University to add more Tamil songs at least for the course of Sangeet Shiromani. 64 songs out of 66

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[112]{Kumaran, Special Musical Souvenir, p. 60.}
\footnotetext[113]{Journal of Music Academy, Vol. 13, 1942, pp. 47-48.}
\footnotetext[114]{K. Nambi Arooran, Tamil Renaissance, p. 260.}
\footnotetext[115]{Tami Isai Manadu, (Tamil Musical Conference) Senthamil, 1944, vol. 41, no. 6, p. 237.}
\end{footnotes}

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were Telugu. A possible Tamil speaker would face a tremendous problem on account of ignorance and indifference.116

A delegation was sent on behalf of Tamil musical movement to impress upon the university authority to do the needful. In accordance with this assurance the matter was referred to the faculty of music. In the Tamil conference many Congress leaders of Tamil Nadu also participated and expressed their solidarity for the promotion of Tamil songs in public life. However, they also cautioned the Tamil activists against showing intolerance or resorting to violent approaches to achieve their goals. This appeal was particularly made as the Self-Respect movement activists were calling for direct action.117

Many artists and organizations opposed outrightly the resolutions passed by the Tamil Music Conference as it violates the basic tenets of fundamental rights of musicians. Many scholars raised their eyebrows against prescribing the amount of songs to be sung in a particular concert. Newspapers like *The Hindu* came up with severe strictures calling it as petty patriotism.118

At the same time Madras Music Academy also conducted its annual conference, wherein it passed a number of resolutions challenging the Tamil Musical Conference’s demands. A resolution was passed saying that in the interest of classical music it is not desirable to prescribe any percentage of songs in any language in the recital in the public meetings, radio programs, or university curriculum or anywhere that would cause the growth of classical music. The prestige of classical composers should be allowed to occupy the prominent place as it had been long cherished through our cultural past.119

Applauding the resolutions passed by Madras Music Academy, Musiri N. Subramaniya Aiyer stated that there should be no linguistic restrictions in music programs and *vidwans* should be allowed to choose and select their songs. The personal choice of the performer should not be tampered by any means.120 Semmangudi Srinivasa Aiyer said that, “good music cannot be dictated to us by the

117 *Kudiarasu*, 1943, March 25, pp. 3-4.
120 Thirunavukarsu, *Sangeetha Yogam*, p. 86.
laymen. Democracy in music is an evil which needs to be nipped at its bud. It is a sin not to sing classical music to which we owe our knowledge of music.\textsuperscript{121}

Mutthiah Bagavadhar observed that “let us not enslave our art to the dictation of others. Let us not seal ourselves and our musical heritage to the people who do not know anything about music.\textsuperscript{122} To all these criticisms the founders of Tamil musical movement pointed out again and again that their desire is to listen to music set in their mother tongue rather than mere musical sounds.\textsuperscript{123}

Annamalai Chettiar forcefully argued, “our attempt is to preserve and promote our culture and hand it over to posterity which should not in any way be considered as an anti-cultural activity. Singing in the tongue unknown to the people will not generate creative art and sensibility... If this continues, our people will soon lose the taste for classical music and turn to bohemian culture”.\textsuperscript{124} On another occasion speaking in a local Tamil conference on 15\textsuperscript{th} October 1943 at Devakottai he observed that the movement was not prejudicial against any other language or it was politically motivated. “It was the natural desire of the Tamils to hear music sung in their own language for which every musician is bound to deliver the goods of the people”.\textsuperscript{125}

While inaugurating the tenth musical conference on 3\textsuperscript{rd} December 1942 in Thanjavur he reiterated that one could only understand and appreciate the beauty, emotion, and aesthetic value and style of songs rendered in the mother tongue. Only then can art prove itself. He stressed again and again that the Tamil music movement is purely for the promotion and development of Tamil music and Tamil musical compositions and there was no communal or cultural prejudice nor had it anything to do with the politics of the state.\textsuperscript{126}

Many Congress leaders irrespective of caste difference rendered their strong support for the expansion of the Tamil musical movement. The annual music conference of Devakottai, Tirunelveli, and Kumbakonam were totally organized by Congress activists and used that platform for airing their national sentiments and

\textsuperscript{121} K. Nambi Arooran, \textit{Tamil Renaissance}, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{122} Quoted in Ibid., p. 261.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Tamil Isai Manttu Malar} (Tamil Musical Conference Souvenir), p. 134.
\textsuperscript{124} Quoted in Ibid., p. 137.
\textsuperscript{125} G. Nagarajan, \textit{A Biography of Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 180.
cultural unity. Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai, a poet and a nationalist, observed that, “it is absurd to think that the Tamil music movement is born out of caste, or communal, or language prejudice”; and pointed out that it is not an auxiliary of the non-Brahman movement because it had support from many Brahmin scholars as well.

Tamil music movement drew its support from all walks of life particularly from the educated elites. Barring a few self-styled intellectuals it did enjoy great social respect and prominence. Many nationalists like N. Ramalingam Pillai, Shri Rajagopalachari, S. Satyamurthy gave their support to expand this movement wholeheartedly. While differing with Justice Party activists like Annamalai Chettiar, Shri Rajagopalachari shared a common platform in the Madras Tamil Musical Conference to express his support for the movement.

It is interesting to note that the Tamil music movement initially enjoyed strong support from Self-Respect movement activists. However, when the movement began to grow with the participation of many Brahmin scholars it lost its credible support from Self-Respect movement activists. A. Ponnambalanar one of the leading Self-Respect protagonist warned the movement followers against rendering support to Tamil music movement since it is going to strengthen orthodox beliefs thereby promoting superstitions.

However, E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker argued that the Self-Respect movement should continue to work with determination to achieve the one aim of freeing the Tamils from cultural domination of the Brahmins. He strongly criticised Tamil music protagonists for perpetuating unethical principles of Arya dharma by promoting Hindu mythological songs. “The songs must instill the hope of freedom and prospect but not hamper the self-thinking of the individuals. This spirit should be evident not only in the social field but also in the cultural movement as well.” In a meeting at Salem on 25th March 1941, E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker exerted that “there is an

127 R. Marie Manokara, Tamil Isai Torramum Valarchiyum (Origin and Growth of Tamil Music), Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Madras, 1981, p. 44.
128 K. Nambi Arooran, Tamil Renaissance, p. 262.
129 Tamil Isai Mannattu Malar, p. 148.
130 Kudiarasu, April 4, 1945, p. 7.
unnecessary controversy over the encouragement of Tamil music movement and it is
our intention that by all means the unhindered progress of Brahmins must be stalled at
any cost".133 There was a divergent opinion among the non-Brahmin scholars as well
regarding its utility. Further the critics like E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker and C. N.
Annadurai imputed political overtones to the movement.

Another major criticism leveled against the Tamil music movement was that
Tamil does not have high standard songs worthy of singing in a classical concert. The
musicians of the Musical Academy always pointed out that Tamil does not have
kirtanas of appreciable quality. Almost all the songs and kritis are in Telugu or
Sanskrit and Tamil does not meet the requirements of high standard. If the movement
continued, music would suffer at the cost of narrow linguistic aspirations. The critics
of Tamil music did not buy the argument that there was no dearth of Tamil songs and
that Thevaram, Thiruvasagam and Thirupugal could be sung in lieu of kirtanas.
Instead, they opined that those compositions were in the form of kanni (verse) which
were not pliable for kirtana singing. Hence, Tamil pieces could not be sung at the
core of classical music concerts but only as miscellaneous items.134

M. K. Thiagaraja Bhagavathar said that "it is a pity that in a musical
performance Tamil songs are sung as miscellaneous items. But the matter of the fact
is that there is no composition which could veritably meet all musical nuances. The
contributions of the early trinity—Muthuthadava Pillai (sixteenth century),
Marimutha Pillai (seventeenth century) and Arunachala Kavirayar (seventeenth
century)—can be certainly sung in the classical concerts. He also recommended
Gopala Krishna Bharathi, Kavikunchara Bharathi, Ganam Krishna Iyer and Uthukadu
Venkata Subramaniya Iyer’s songs can well become a part of classical music."135

In the meantime, many historical articles were published in Tamil academic
journals explicating the origin, growth and decline of Tamil music. Tamil songs were
not sung due to lack of patronage almost from the inception of Telugu rule in Tamil
Nadu.136 In an annual Tamil music conference at Tiruchirapalli on 14th December

133 Ibid., p. 1486.
1941 K. Ponniah Pillai stressed the need for the development of Tamil music and suggested the composition of Tamil kirtanas to meet the modern requirements.\(^{137}\)

As pointed out earlier, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar instituted a number of prizes for the composition of songs in Tamil, fulfilling the requirements of Carnatic music. Annual competitions also were organised and many other financial incentives were introduced to promote the study of Tamil music among the young scholars. An advisory committee was constituted in 1943 which devoted its energy in selecting and collecting various compositions, both modern and ancient, setting them to music and publishing them with notation.\(^{138}\)

Tamil songs began to appear in book form at regular intervals as Tamil isai series. There were about seven volumes of Tamil kirtanas compiled by M. P. Thooran. Though it was satisfactory with regard to its efficiency and lyric quality, it lacked beauty and elegance which cannot be easily improvised dexterously.\(^{139}\) Prof. Sambamoorthy, speaking in a meeting, on April 7, 1943 in Kumbakonam, suggested that a committee should be formed to tour the countryside to collect the songs and noting their exact tunes.\(^{140}\)

One of the criticisms leveled was the lavish expenditure towards the Tamil music in the name of munificent activities by Raja Annamalai Chettiar, who endowed a large sum of money for promotion of Tamil music movement. Speaking on a Dikshitar Day (19 October 1941) Sir Alladi Krishnasami Iyer ranted “music cannot be made at the instance of an order” and that giving presents was a musical fallacy.\(^{141}\) Similarly, C.R. Reddy, the vice chancellor of Andhra Pradesh University said “the only doubtful point in the benefaction of Annamalai is not in the motive which is excellent, but the means he has chosen to do so... money, awards and prizes cannot produce the song of credible quality.”\(^{142}\)

*The Hindu* also continued to criticise the lavish spending for the popularisation of Tamil songs and observed that it would tend to interfere with sovereign autonomy.


\(^{139}\) Ibid., p. 8.

\(^{140}\) K. Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance*, p. 263.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., p. 264.

\(^{142}\) Marie Manokara, *Tamil Isai Torramum Valarchiyum*, p. 140.
of the artists partly by overawing and partly by alluring with gifts. "The man in the street on whom the cinema and radio exercise a powerful influence is inevitably the victim of musical mis-education and he transmits the infection to the musical artists by clamouring for second rate music and paying lavishly for it .... Indeed the artist's integrity is tough enough to withstand these influences."\(^{143}\)

At the Tamil musical conference in Devakottai in October 1941 Annamalai Chettiar gave answers to a volley of criticisms leveled against his patronizing enterprise. He said "you cannot offer a prize to an unmusical person and ask him to produce a kirtana. The prospect of reward and fame only tempts men and women of high talent to exhibit their skill of erudition. This is self-evident. Therefore composers will come out if they were ensured that they will get something more tangible than mere appreciation. Supposing there are men and women of genius who will compose music by their virtue of intelligence surely the availability of reward and presents will not scare them away."\(^{144}\)

In one aspect, the sponsors of Tamil music movement accepted their limitations. In the beginning some of the critics protested against the attempts to break the long cherished musical structure. The leaders of the Tamil music movement answered that they are for songs and not for a Tamil school of music. Raja Annamalai Chettiar said, "we asked for Tamil songs within the framework of existing system. We want the same ragas and talas and same musical melodies, modes and nodes. But we wish the sahitya to be in Tamil".\(^{145}\) On another occasion, he "indicated that the object of Tamil music movement is to have within the framework of Carnatic music songs in Tamil, which the people of Tamil Nadu could follow and enjoy."\(^{146}\)

Hence it may be pointed out that in the initial stages of the movement, there was hardly any desire to revive the ancient Tamil or Dravidian system of music as expounded in Tamil literature. Therefore, it may be sufficient to conclude that in the beginning the success of the movement was largely attributed to the fact that Tamil musical compositions were accepted and sung by musicians along with those in Telugu and Sanskrit. As to the influence of the Dravidian movement, it cannot be

\(^{143}\) Tamil Isai Mannattu Malar, p. 143.
\(^{145}\) K. Nambi Arooran, Tamil Renaissance, p. 264.
\(^{146}\) G. Nagarajan, Biography of Raja Sir Muttiah Chettiar, pp. 173-77.
denied that the leadership and support for the Tamil music movement came in general from among the leaders of the non-Brahmin community. The opposition came mainly from Brahmin artists and organisations run by Brahmin scholars such as the Music Academy and newspapers like The Hindu and Bharata Devi, which continued to register their protests against the democratisation of classical music at the cost of rich heritage, cultural quality and musical taste. The Tamil music movement originated initially as a cultural expression of the Tamil intellectuals and later turned out to be a popular movement.