David Dennen (2010; revised 2012)

The Third Stream: Odissi Music, Regional Nationalism, and the Concept of "Classical"[1]

Like the Saraswati River that formed the "triveni" along with the Ganga and the Yamuna, Odissi was a distinct stream of music like the Carnatic and Hindustani. It evolved from the ritualistic music of the Jagannath temple of Puri, and the 12th century saint-poet Jayadev was a prominent practitioner of it. However, during the time of Mughal and British rules, it was marginalized like the Saraswati River that vanished later.

(Odissi vocalist Damodar Hota, quoted in Chakra 2007)

Introduction

As India has modernized, detached itself from colonial rule, and become a nation in the modern understanding of the term, Indians have attempted to demarcate for themselves—and for the international community—a set of unique, "national" art traditions. Integral to this process of identification has been the defining of serious music traditions, and, owing to India's long interaction with Western cultural concepts, these traditions have usually been labeled "classical." Yet India does not represent anything like a homogeneous nation-state; while at times it may appear as a unified political entity, it may also be seen as a collective of many small—mostly linguistically-defined—nations that now find themselves with a stake in creating a federal-national identity. In such a context the privileging of certain musics as classical, over others that may be labeled folk or regional, can be contentious.

The notion of "classical," in its now worldwide usage, typically implies a certain notion of music as serious, developed, old—as something representative of the finest and most distinctive of a culture. This is not a music of the masses, but of an educated elite, often with aristocratic and spiritual overtones. In India there are two widely recognized styles of classical music representative, to both Indians and foreigners, of music most Indian: Hindustani and Karnatak music. The classicization of musics in India, beginning in the 19th century, was largely a middle- and upper-class Hindu-Brahmin project, and thus a substantial portion of the population was absent from the discussions. The questions of why certain musics were defined as classical in India, what classical means in India, and what this meant for the groups left out of the classicizing process has not begun to be extensively explored by scholars until recently. Some early discussions were provided by Neuman (1980) and Powers (1980), but more specific and comprehensive work has been done in the last few years by Bakhle (2005), Subramanian (2006), and Weidman (2006).

The canonization of Hindustani and Karnatak music has been contested, but with seemingly few effects, since the beginning of the process in the mid-19th century; but virtually all ethnomusicological work on art music in India, including the works just cited, focuses on one of the two accepted forms of such music. Still left largely undiscussed are the musics at the borders of these traditions, musics that do not fit so easily into accepted musical categories—musics, for example, that may be considered classical by smaller groups within India, though they are not

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recognized as such by Indians (and non-Indians) at large. What is the place of such music within the cultural politics of India?

The present article is concerned with one such type of music[2]—Odissi music (*Odisi sangita*), as it is known to its practitioners and audience. Outsiders who know of it typically consider it a regional, perhaps folk, music rather than, strictly speaking, a classical music; its adherents, however, often adamantly defend it as a third "stream" of Indian classical music, positioning it explicitly in relation to the two more commonly recognized streams of Hindustani and Karnatak. Few scholarly sources exist on this music by non-Odias. It receives the briefest of mentions in Powers and Katz's *New Grove Dictionary* entry on Indian music (2001: 156). The two most substantial nonlocal treatments of it (which are still rather brief) available in English that I am aware of are in Subhadra Chaudhary's *Time Measure and Compositional Types in Indian Music* (1997: 276–7, 322–3) and Sukumar Ray's *Music of Eastern India* ([1973] 1985). Of the various Odishan Sanskrit treatises from which Odissi music is said to draw its theory, one has been thoroughly translated and commented upon in English (Katz 1987; also Mishra 2009). For the most part, then, the following discussions of the specifics of Odissi music, and of how it is conceptualized by its practitioners and audience, derive mainly from my own experiences in Odisha, as well as from English- and Odia-language works written by Odias.

As noted, Odissi music is claimed by many Odias to be a third style of Indian classical music. The basis and significance of this claim is to a large extent what this article is about. It should be noted that whether the claims made by Odissi music's supporters are objectively "true" or not, they have a rhetorical force in an Indian context deriving from the classicist discourses of Hindustani and Karnatak music—which in turn were produced through an interaction with colonial cultural discourse. This is, inevitably, the view of an "outsider"; I hope, however, that it will provide a productive point of engagement for "insiders" as well.

A Brief Introduction to Odissi Music

Odisha sits on the central-east coast of India, and Odissi music primarily circulates in the state's coastal region. It is usually performed by a solo singer, accompanied by *mardala* (a two-headed barrel drum), *gini* (small cymbals), *tambura* (the drone), and harmonium and/or violin; in some genres flute, *sitar*, and other instruments are also used. The song texts performed were mostly produced by poets, working near Odisha's major temples or at the courts of princely estates, in the Odia language from about the 16th to early 20th century;[3] the Sanskrit songs (*ashtapadi*s) of Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* (12th century) are also used. The content of these songs is very often based on the activities and experiences of the "divine lovers" Radha and Krishna. Nowadays Odissi music is performed in occasional concerts in urban areas, in auditoriums or on outdoor stages; it is heard occasionally on the local All India Radio station and can be found on a relatively small number of recordings; and various genres also accompany Odissi dance and drama. The music's existence is supported, in financial terms, by a variety of public and private institutions and associations, and by the continuing interest of generations of music students and their parents.

[2] One of a small number of other cases known to me is that of *sufiana mausiqi* or *sufyana kalam* (i.e.,Kashmiri classical music; see Raja [2005, 315] and Pacholczyk [1978, 1980]).

[3] Some of the more popular poets are Kavi Samraṭ Upendra Bhanja (1670?–1740?), Banamali Dasa (18th century), Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha (1779?–1840?), Gopaḷakrusha Pattanayak (1784–1862), and Kavichandra Kalicharan Pattanayak (1897–1978).

The songs of Odissi music were usually set by their authors to particular *raga*s and *tala*s. There does not seem to have been an indigenous form of Odia notation prior to the 20th century; most likely the *raga* and *tala* indications, in conjunction with the specificities of the text itself, provided commonly understood guidelines within which individual performers had some leeway for expression (this seems to be more or less the case today). In their general construction, Odissi *raga*s and *tala*s share many characteristics with those of Hindustani and Karnatak music (and there are many differences in the details). Many gurus and scholars will divide Odissi *raga*s into three categories: those that share names with and are (nearly) identical with Hindustani or Karnatak ragas; those that share names with *raga*s of the other systems but whose characteristics differ substantially; and those that are unique in both name and substance. It is likely that this scheme does in fact reflect historical reality, as no doubt some *raga*s found their way into Odisha from other regions of India, perhaps being transformed in the process, while others would have developed locally (within the general confines of the pan-Indian *raga* system).

The repertory of Odissi music consists of several genres of songs, and performances too may be structured in several different ways depending on the context and function of the performance. Currently, the most common structure for a performance by a solo vocalist begins with an *alap* (a relatively freeform introduction to and elaboration of the *raga*, unaccompanied by percussive instruments); moves into the performance of the song text and the establishment of the *tala*, accompanied by percussion; and finishes with various types of improvisation (e.g., *tan*s) and variations on the given melody and text.[4] Odissi music is often said to be distinguished by its "medium speed" (it does not utilize the extremes of slow and fast tempos found, for example, in Hindustani music), the syncopated rhythms of the *mardala*, and its use of ornamentation that often gives its melodies an undulating, cascading feel.

Few discussions of Odissi music, whether in print or in person, take place without some reference to its potential "classical status" as well as its relation to Hindustani and Karnatak music. We now turn to the history and significance of these concerns.

"Classicist Discourse" in India

Why should it be important for a music in India to be labeled "classical" or not? This question must be understood historically. The concept of "classical" as understood by most of the world today is a fairly recent invention, having evolved in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries and transported to—and internalized by—other cultures often through processes and interactions related to colonialism.[5] Thus, despite India's rich musicological heritage, there was, prior to the late 19th century, no equivalent indigenous term. Premodern Sanskrit music theorists did divide music into different categories: there was a distinction, for example, between *marga* ("way" or "path") and *desi* ("place") music, but for most of those terms' histories they did not refer to a classical/folk or classical/popular dichotomy, though they are sometimes used that way today. The former term usually referred to music used in religious rituals (and which thus should be invariant from place to place) and the latter to music as an everyday, nonsacred practice (e.g., entertainment).[6] More recent terms that hew more closely to a familiar classical/folk dichotomy

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[4] This would fall under the *raganga* performance format.

[5] Ironically, the categorization of culture as "folk" or "classical" itself derives in part from 18th-century elite Europeans' increasing cognizance of the non-West and their subsequent recognition of "primitive others" in their own midst (see Gelbart 2007).

[6] See Babiracki (1991: 70–1), Rowell (1992: 12), and Allen (1998: 24–5) for discussions on the various usages of these terms in the context of music.

are *shastriya sangit* ("scientific," codified music based on extensive written theory) and *lok sangit* (folk/tribal music). The history of these terms is less clear than that of *marga* and *desi*—whether, and to what extent, the *shastriya*/*lok* distinction existed prior to 19th- and 20th-century cultural debates is open to question.[7]

What Allen calls the "classicist discourse" of India (1998: 23) has its beginnings in the colonial period, along with a burgeoning nationalist discourse. To be sure this discourse built upon an earlier indigenous musicological and conceptual foundation, but it was then mostly developed in the terms of Western-educated (Indian) theorists. Consequently, as Weidman potently if discomfortingly notes, discussions of Indian music, along with the music itself, "are neither properly Western nor Indian, but specifically colonial in the sense that they position the West and India in relation to each other" (2006: 9). It should be emphasized, however, that the discourse about Indian music is no mere "derivative discourse"; it was the productive outcome of a sustained engagement with foreign modes of thought, the purpose of which was nothing less than cultural and political survival. Janaki Bakhle (2005) has discussed the role of colonialism and Indian nationalism in north Indian music; Lakshmi Subramanian (2006) and Amanda Weidman have done likewise for south Indian music. The following discussion, based on these writers' critiques of India's classicist movements, is undertaken so that parallels to and divergences from the situation in Odisha will be discernable.

The Birth of Indian "Classical Music"

It was not until well into British rule that there was felt to be a need to protect India's rich musical heritage and to put forth some manner of a national, "classical" music. Not coincidentally the earliest modern writings on music reform and theory come from the same period during which the national independence movements were taking their first steps in the last quarter of the 19th century; and a major factor in both the nationalist and classicizing movements was a growing Western-educated middle class during this time. Partly in response to newly available Orientalist critiques of Indian music (Subramanian 2006: 56), this group was increasingly cognizant of its cultural heritage and how this heritage was viewed by Europeans. Subramanian writes,

> As beneficiaries of colonial education and patronage, the urban middle-class developed a new mode of reflecting on culture and its consumption, partly as a self-reflexive exercise. Without for a moment discounting the deep personal engagement that many of them had as listeners and connoisseurs, there was a new compulsion to validate their cultural heritage. (ibid.: 67)

In the field of music this "compulsion" manifested itself in, among other things, the creation of listener appreciation societies, reforms in music education, the development of systems of notation, and, in the north, attempts to reclaim a "Hindu" music from its Muslim practitioners. In north India these types of activities were spearheaded by scholars and musicians such as Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936) and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931), and in south India by those like Chinnaswamy Mudaliar (d. 1901) and P. Sambamoorthy (1901–1973).

[7] It should be pointed out that the folk/classical distinction, though now very common in Indian music discourse, is not universally accepted (e.g., Lath 1988).

By the beginning of the 20th century the modern conceptions of Indian music had formed or were well into the process of forming.

Important landmarks in the institutionalization of music in southern India include the forming of a branch of the Gayan Samaj, a music appreciation society, in Madras in 1883 (Weidman 2006: 194); and the forming of the Madras Music Academy in 1928, born out of the previous year's Indian National Congress session in Madras (Subramanian 2006: 70). The Madras Music Academy in particular had a pivotal role in standardizing Karnatak music and music pedagogy, constructing its history, and defining its place within the larger culture.

The case of Hindustani music was complicated by its demographics. In southern India the emerging Western-educated elites and the Karnatak musicians were both Hindu, often upper-caste Brahmins. In the north, however, while the emerging middle-class audiences were largely Hindu, most musicians—certainly most high-profile musicians—were Muslim. Hence, while south Indian Karnatak music was seen as a model by Bhatkhande for the reform of Hindustani music because of its "impeccable system" (Bakhle 2005: 105), it was also considered by many to be—since at least the time of C. R. Day's influential *The Music and Musical Instruments of Southern India and the Deccan* in 1891—a tradition of greater "purity," in contradistinction to the northern system "tainted" by Islamic influence (Subramanian 2006: 13; also see Neuman 1985: 99).

It is interesting to note that in fact *both* musical systems were considered, at the beginnings of the classicist movements, to be in states of neglect. Subramanian quotes a newspaper article from the 1920s: "Is it not the duty of every true lover of Karnatak Music to strive to rescue it from *its present neglected state* and to develop it on the right lines so as to preserve ancient Indian music in its pure and pristine form and in all its glory for the benefit of posterity?" (2006: 78; italics added). In the north "illiterate" and "secretive" Muslim musicians were perceived as impeding Hindustani music's classicization. One of many examples described by Bakhle: "The argument that music was in the hands of people who were liable to destroy it by their negligence—Muslim musicians who performed it for the dissolute entertainment of indolent princely state rulers—was expressed on a number of occasions in the [Marathi nationalist newspaper] *Keshari*" (2005: 148).

"Classical," as it applied to music, was defined similarly in each case. For Hindustani theorists such as Bhatkhande, "classicization meant at least two things: system, order, discipline, and theory, on the one hand, and antiquity of national origin, on the other" (Bakhle 2005: 124); Indian music "needed a demonstrable and linked history, one with a few key texts that explained foundational rules, theories, and performance practices" (ibid.: 98). Similarly in the south,

> [w]hat mattered was the need to establish an identifiable standard for the art form that would not only pass western scrutiny but one that would reinforce the essence of Indian culture. It was here that the idea of the classical as a validating category became so important. The idea of the classical had multiple connotations of antiquity, lineage, textual rigour, and above all, resonated with the essential spirituality of India's tradition. (Subramanian 2006: 17)

In both cases notation—an important marker of art music in the West—came to be seen as crucial for Indian music's classicization. One of the organizers of the third All India Music Conference (attended by both northern and southern musicians and connoisseurs) in 1919 stated, "if we want our music to take its proper place in the musical world of today, we must standardize

our notation and engraft on our ancient system the scientific method of the west" (quoted in Subramanian 2006: 76). In the later part of the 19th century there had been publications of Indian compositions in Western notation, but now in the early years of the 20th century Paluskar, Bhatkhande, and others worked to develop systems of notation more suited to Indian music (Bakhle 2005: 67–8, 190–1). This tied in to ideas of modern music pedagogy, and both Paluskar and Bhatkhande founded music schools; Paluskar in particular was quite successful in this area—he began his first music school, the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, in 1901, in Lahore (ibid.: 148) and went on to found many similar institutions in other parts of India.

The classicization of music in north and south India thus followed similar trajectories: an emerging, Western-educated middle class becoming aware of themselves as part of a "nation" with a distinctive culture; a belief among those elite classes that a part of their culture—in this case music—needed to be reclaimed, revitalized, and brought into line with modern (i.e., colonial) conceptions of a sophisticated, "Indian" expression; and finally institutionalization and standardization. In the following section I argue that the modern history of Odissi music has followed a similar path, with the significant difference that this history can be seen as a reaction not just to Western and colonial cultural discourse, but to the Indian-classicist discourse that had emerged in relation to it.

Odissi as a Classical Music

Broadly speaking the modern engagement with music in Odisha proceeded along similar lines—the establishment of music associations and schools, the fixing of musical "grammar," the publishing of notations—though generally at a later date. But the development of a specifically Odishan classical music was complicated by the fact that both Hindustani and Karnatak music already had a significant presence in the state by the early 20th century. Perhaps for this reason, in contrast to Odisha's many literary societies that mostly focused on the discussion and cultivation of Odia-language literature, the few specifically music-based organizations during the first half of the 20th century were oriented mainly to Hindustani and Karnatak music. The Utkal Sangit Samaj, for example, founded in 1933, as late as 1948 employed instructors only in Hindustani and Karnatak music ("Review of the Activities" 1948: 1).[8] Based on the information so far at hand, it seems that the idea of an Odissi music equal in its rigor and heritage to Hindustani and Karnatak music began to coalesce around the time of Indian Independence (1947) and would find fullest expression during the 1950s and after. Kalicharan Pattanayak (1964) would explicitly position Odissi in relation to Hindustani and Karnatak music; both he and Shyamsundar Dhir (1964) would attempt to ground Odissi music theory, or the "Utkal music method" (*Utkala sangita paddhati*) in Dhir's formulation, on the basis of Sanskrit music *shastra*s; and notation projects would be undertaken in order to provide models for "correct" performance (e.g., Hota 1970, Panda 1982). In addition to this there were numerous conferences and demonstrations from the 1950s onward, both in Odisha and in major cities such as Chennai and Delhi.[9]

[8] At least this is how they described what they were doing. Specifically mentioned are "classical music" and "Carnatic music," the former presumably referring to Hindustani music (the instructor studied in Lucknow). Interestingly, the two instructors employed for Karnatak music, Shyam Sundar Kar and Nrushingha Nath Khuntia, would later become well-known for their efforts on behalf of Odissi music.
[9] As Kalicharan Pattnayak discusses in his autobiography (1975: 336ff; or see Panigrahi 2003).

Over this period of time the meaning of the term “classical” in the Odishan context seems also to have crystallized. The English term has had a complex history in Odisha. One of the early appearances of the term in connection to Odissi music is in the extensive dictionary *Purnnacandra Odia Bhashakosha*, which includes definitions in both Odia and English. The entry for the term “*Odisi sangita*” gives the English definition: “Songs composed by the classical Ordia poets.” “Classical,” however, is glossed in Odia as “*pracina*,” which has the sense merely of old or ancient (certainly one component of the meaning of “classical” in the West). And one can occasionally find, for example in the writings of Kalicharan Pattanayak, transliterations of the English term into Odia (which might be re-Romanized as “*klasikal*”). What has become the dominant conception of “classical music,” however, relates it to the Sanskritic notion of *shastriya sangita*. The current case for Odissi as a form of classical music in this sense—as a *shastric* music—is made variously but also with a great deal of consistency. Jiwan Pani, for example, makes the argument thusly:

> If any regional style of music of this country claims a distinctive and *shastric* system, then it has to satisfy the following points:
>
> (a) The tradition is more than one century old.
> (b) The system is based on one or more written *shastras.*
> (c) There are a number of *ragas* at the core of the system even if the number is less than one hundred, and
> (d) The *ragas* at the core of the system and those borrowed from other systems are delineated in a distinctive style. (2004: 49)

He then proceeds to demonstrate how Odissi music satisfies these requirements. Ramahari Das similarly argues that classical status has three requirements:

> Any music which is considered to be *shastric* is seen to have three aspects. One is tradition [*parampara*], or the music’s development in an unobstructed stream. Another is system [*prabidhi*], or the use of musical rules or grammar. And finally and most importantly is application [*prayoga*], or a distinctive manner of performance. (2004: 20)

He goes on to explain how Odissi music, despite commonly held beliefs, conforms to this definition. And finally, a more general comparative statement in which we see similar values at work:

> Odissi music is a lot more lyrical as compared to Hindustani or Carnatic. Just like these two forms, it has its typical feel, its *unique identity*. It is *raga-based* and very old. . . . There is huge evidence in our rock edicts to support the *ancient origins* of Odissi classical music . . . (Sangita Gosain, quoted in Tandon 2007; italics added)

The larger argument for Odissi music as a classical music thus has three components which I should like to evaluate: the argument of antiquity, the argument of systematicity, and the argument of distinctiveness. The first two arguments can be traced back to earlier cultural debates in India over Hindustani and Karnatak music, where the antiquity and systematicity (or “scientificness”) of these musics needed to be defended (or even invented) in relation to a Western classical music model. In the case of Odissi music, however, it is Hindustani and

Karnatak music that provide the model (in local writings on Odissi music one virtually never finds Western music held as a model for comparison).

The antiquity of Odissi music is typically invoked nowadays by reference to a set litany of historical evidence, including: the dramaturgical treatise *Natyashastra* (c. 200 BCE to 200 CE); sculptural, architectural, and inscriptional evidence beginning in the 2nd century BCE, and found in such places as Puri, Konark, and Bhubaneswar; the 12th-century song-cycle *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva; various regional treatises on music and dance written in Sanskrit, beginning most substantially perhaps with the sixteenth-century *Gita Prakasha*. As this last item suggests, the question of systematicity is bound up with the question of antiquity: the older the system the better. Thus, as Hindustani and Karnatak musicians and theorists (following the model of European Orientalist scholarship) in the early 20th century sought the systematic roots of their traditions in Sanskrit texts such as the *Natyashastra*, *Sangita Ratnakara* (13th century), and *Sangita Parijata* (17th century), so too Odissi scholars. Many discussions of Odissi music, for example, begin by noting the mention of an *Odhra Magadhi* style of music in the *Natyashastra* (Odhra and Magadhi being names of ancient kingdoms in the region of Odisha).[10] Although mention is typically made of the other standard treatises, of special interest have been the many Sanskrit treatises written in the Odishan region since the 15th century.[11] Unfortunately, most remain unpublished or untranslated and thus have received little evaluation beyond a handful of local specialists; determining their historical role in the practical musical life of the region remains a task to be further taken up.

Among the Odishan Sanskrit treatises, perhaps the 17th-century *Sangita Narayana* has received the most attention (from both locals and non-locals). Indeed, this work is claimed by its author to be based partly on regional musical practice (see Katz 1987, vol. 1: 170; vol. 2: 63). It was widely circulated in the area of Odisha, Andhra, and Bengal (Rath 2006: 31), and was translated into Odia in the 18th century (Mahapatra 1982, Section I: 273). Regarding this treatise Jiwan Pani has written that the *Sangita Narayana,* along with the 16th-century *Gita Prakasha,* contains the "definitions of the ragas that formed the core of the [Odissi] system" (2004: 53); K. N. Mahapatra notes that "scholars interested in the birth and growth of 'Odisi' music may study this work critically to their advantage" (1982, Section I: 273); and Sukumar Ray writes, "It is held that the system of Odisi music is more or less available in the principles explained in *Sangeetanarayana*… " ([1973] 1985: 142). In actuality, making connections between this text and current practice remains rather speculative given, for example, the lack of technical detail with which *raga*s are described. Nevertheless, the *Sangita Narayana* does seem to give exceptional emphasis to the song text—a common strain in Odishan musicological treatises (Katz 1987, vol. 2: 19)—and this is very much a part of modern Odissi theory and practice.[12]

The third component of the Odissi classicist argument—the argument of distinctiveness—is more unique and would not have figured into the Hindustani and Karnatak discussions in the same way. The distinction between Indian music and Western music seemed self-evident to all concerned as, for the most part, was the distinction between Hindustani and

[10] In fact, as far as I can tell, the *Natyashastra* makes no specific connection between the *Odhra Magadhi pravritti* (i.e., "local style" to be represented in Sanskrit drama) and music; nevertheless a connection is often intuited.

[11] Hota (1977) provides a list of these, as do many other sources.

[12] In fact, I would argue that it is the Odissi song texts themselves that provide Odissi music with its most potent claim to antiquity and perhaps even systematicity. Unfortunately, given the rigid division between musical and literary theory in the modern era, the specifically *musical* and *music-theoretical* import of the *language* of these texts remains under-examined.

Karnatak musics themselves. Yet in Odissi classicist discourse there evidently *is* a need to defend Odissi music's uniqueness—not in relation to Western music but in relation to other types of Indian (classical) music. As the *Purnnacandra* compilers already feel compelled to state: "Odissi music is entirely different from other regional musics" (Praharaj 1931–40, vol. 7: 7974–5). Presumably this need arises from the occasional characterization (or dismissal) of the music as a derivative of Hindustani and Karnatak music (a perspective going back to the late 19th century[13]), or as some kind of fusion of the two.

So is Odissi music distinct from the other styles? Given the almost overwhelming diversity each system encompasses, and the lack of an accepted standard for determining "distinctiveness," any answer to this question is suspect. Whether or not Odissi is "objectively" heard as a unique style will depend on the subjectivity (the biases, cultural competence, etc.) of the listener; it may also hinge on which type of Odissi music is taken to be the "real" Odissi music, still a topic of contention in Odisha. Furthermore, it may be noted that, different though they may be, Hindustani and Karnatak music are not mutually unintelligible—there is a long history of *raga*-exchange between systems, a probably equally long history of collaborations between northern and southern musicians, many listeners who enjoy both styles, and a number of musicians who actually perform in both styles. To my ears, Odissi music is about as similar to Hindustani and Karnatak music as those styles are to each other. In addition, as with listeners and musicians in India generally, Odias appreciate many kinds of music, and many Odissi musicians are able to perform at least one of the other "classical" styles. In this context any answer to the question of distinctiveness will probably tell us more about the listener than about the music itself.

To draw one final parallel with previous classicist movements, there is also the sense among Odissi supporters that the music is in a state of neglect and may even be corrupted by the musicians who practice it.[14] On the latter count, singer and scholar Damodar Hota, for example, is reported to complain that "perverse forms of Hindustani and Carnatic ragas are being represented as Odissi music" (quoted in Rajan 2009); and Jiwan Pani charges that some musicians are "even going to the extent of borrowing certain cheap and glamorous elements from film music" (2004: 56). Such comments—while advocating for the sustained "purity" of the Odissi tradition—display again the desire to position Odissi music in relation to what it is not to be, that is, Hindustani and Karnatak, or popular music.

From a larger perspective, by making these multiple arguments Odissi music's advocates can be seen to both reinforce and challenge the classicization of Hindustani and Karnatak music. The advocates of Odissi assume *a priori* the legitimacy of the classical status of the two major musical systems and the criteria (whatever it may be) used to define that status; but they also throw into question the ability and appropriateness of those systems to represent or index the totality of the Indian nation musically. Turino has written that nationalism "involves the fashioning of a *somewhat* distinctive cultural unit within an overall framework of similarity" (2000: 217). A parallel process can be seen in play regarding the similarly cosmopolitan concept of "classical" in India. As discussed earlier, the conceptions of Hindustani and Karnatak musics

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[13] M. M. Chakravarty at this time claimed that "Oriya music is essentially southern," (1898: 337) and that "most of the ragas and raginis were borrowed from Telugu and the Oriya music was up to a late date chiefly based on this Dakhini music" (1897: 322). Fifty years later Krishnacharan Panda agreed: "It is clearly ascertained that Odia music is written in imitation of southern Karnatak music" (1946: 4). Other such examples could be cited.

[14] The issue of neglect is taken up in the following section.

as national, classical musics evolved in relation and sometimes opposition to Western colonialist discourse on the subject. Similarly, in the cultural discourse of Odisha, Odissi music is defined in relation and opposition to Hindustani and Karnatak music: Odissi music discourse seeks to position the music as a "*somewhat* distinctive unit" within the "overall framework" of Indian classical music. Of course it cannot be seen to be too similar to either of the dominant traditions or it will be subsumed by them; but neither can its difference be too forcefully asserted or it will continue to stand outside the classical framework.[15] Ultimately, however, the question of whether Odissi music is similar and different enough cannot be answered through purely musical considerations; the musical question is itself part of a larger question of identity that needs to be addressed.

Regional Identity

Indian historians have recognized that, since colonial times, there have been multiple coexistent "nationalisms" in India, the two most prominent being the various nationalisms based on regional-linguistic identifications and a nationalism based on a pan-Indian identification. These nationalisms have been given various terminologies (see Nag 1993: 1521), but here the terms "regional nationalism" and "pan-Indian nationalism" shall be used. These two forces, which emerged more or less concurrently, are by no means mutually exclusive; indeed, early nationalists found no contradiction between the two (Guha 1984: 46). This is not to say, however, that the two movements never conflict—there is the potential for pan-Indian nationalism to become overbearing and aggressive and for regional nationalism to become chauvinistic and even secessionist (ibid.: 53). A balance must constantly be sought, and it is useful to acknowledge the tension between the parts and the whole of India and to inquire into the processes of attempted compromise and resolution. With this in mind, the tension between the social-cultural region of Odisha and that of India *in toto* needs to be explored further.

The identifications (whether national, social, cultural) of an individual or group are always, in varying degrees, contingent, and capable of changing over time and across contexts. The relationship of Odias[16]—like the relationships of many of India's regional-linguistic groups—to the federal-nation of India, as the arbiter of a dominant culture and central government, has been troubled. Odias are supportive of the idea of India in general, and many Odias were involved in the Indian Independence movement. But Odisha is a poor state, one that has not historically received much aid or interest from the central government. In addition, the culture of Odisha is often overshadowed by that of neighboring West Bengal—Kolkata being one of the primary cultural centers of India. Regarding music, then, it is not uncommon to see such statements as these:

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[15] This position has musical implications, such as the tension between emphasizing "purely musical" and virtuosity-displaying improvised elements (*alap*, *tan*s), which take Odissi performances more in the direction of modern Hindustani and Karnatak music, and the more "traditional" emphasis on the text.

[16] As opposed to the Odishan government. I should also note that it is obviously problematic to speak of Odias "in general" since the nationalist and classicizing movements in India were primarily of the middle classes, were closely tied to a capitalist ideology, and so on. Other groups, in Odisha as elsewhere, such as those that may fall under the heading of "subaltern"—though they also participated in nationalist movements—have had very different sorts of relations with the dominant power structures of India.

> As for Odissi music, there is a systematic conspiracy to relegate the singers to the background…. There is no genuine concern for Odissi music. (Sikandar Alam n.d.)[17]

> Odissi musical tradition remains an obscurity. Traced back to the second century when the then ruler of Orissa (Kalinga) patronized the art form, it never really could muster the attention it deserved…. [W]hile Odissi dance found a winning patronage … Odissi music kept languishing on the fringes. (Tandon 2007)

> Music Syllabi across the country teach two systems of music: Hindustani and Carnatic. They usually miss the third, a music system that has distinctive features of its own and lies between the two. (Mohanty 2007: 108)

Kalicharan Pattanayak, a poet, dramatist, and cultural revivalist took on the argument that Odissi music is merely a regional music; I paraphrase him as follows:

> Hindustani music is performed in India's western region, Karnatak in India's southern region—these are two Indian regions, are they not? But if these are the only regions of India, is Odisha then exterior to the country? In this argument Odisha must also be a region of India. If it is true that in the western and southern regions Hindustani and Karnatak music are performed, what sense is there in denigrating Odissi music as *only* a regional music? (1997: 89)

From such statements we can begin to detect a particular viewpoint. The first component of this is—as previously discussed—the belief that Odissi music is an ancient and distinct classical system, comparable to the Hindustani and Karnatak systems. The second significant aspect, intertwined with the first, is a sense of unfair neglect. This is an attitude rooted in Odia nationalism, and for a better understanding of the situation we must look at the origins of nationalism in Odisha.

In the early 19th century the British began taking over the administration of the areas that would become Odisha, binding them variously to the Bengal, Madras, and Central Provinces. One consequence of this was that Odia-speakers became minorities of three different provinces. For Odias this was not a beneficial development. In the case of the substantial Odia-speaking region attached to Bengal,

> the Oriyas were excluded from all administrative posts which were now filled up by outsiders and mostly by Bengalis because of their knowledge in English. This resulted not only in an influx of Bengalis to Orissa but became ultimately responsible for a serious attempt by the Bengalis to make their language the medium of instruction in the educational institutions of Orissa and [the] virtual extinction of the Oriya language…. The administrative officers, mostly being outsiders, had practically no sympathy for the inhabitants of Orissa…. The Oriyas were harassed both by the officers and clerks. (Kabi 1997: 47)

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[17] It is difficult to tell, however, whether his ire is directed at the state or central government, or both. Alam (1939–2010) was one of the most famous Odia singers of the second half of the 20th century.

Things continued in this direction until the great Odisha famine of 1865–1866.[18] When the British, who previously had paid little attention to Odisha, eventually learned of the extent of the suffering they became sympathetic toward the region. As a result Odisha gained several new Western-style educational institutions into which Odia students were recruited. Unfortunately, the teachers qualified to instruct in these institutions were mostly Bengalis who rankled at having to teach Odia-speaking students; this difficulty was compounded by the fact that there were few Odia-language textbooks. Thus it came to seem to many Bengalis that eliminating, or at least modifying, the Odia language (e.g., having it written in Bengali script) would be the best solution. The seeming condescension and arrogance of the Bengalis toward Odias (see Bailey 1998: 34) eventually sparked a full-fledged language controversy, with Bengalis arguing for the superiority of the Bengali language and educated Odias intent on defending their "mother tongue." P. K. Mishra describes this period:

> These writings and debates [over language] caused acute tension in the public life of Orissa. But one most significant outcome and beneficial aspect of this language controversy was the emergence of a strong race consciousness among the Oriyas. It created an unprecedented awakening in the dormant mind making them aware of their backwardness, sufferings and humiliation. That Orissa possessed a glorious history and cultural heritage, that their language and literature had [a] rich legacy, that Orissa should be for the Oriya-speaking people, and [that] they alone should get employment in the Government—these feelings created a sort of vigorous national awakening in their mind. . . . The threat to their language and culture brought forth in them an unprecedented sense of unity and determinism. (Mishra 1997b: 193)

With the aid of certain sympathetic British officials and naturalized elite Bengalis, Odias achieved some success in asserting the legitimacy of their native language. Numerous printing presses were started to print Odia-language newspapers and books, and there was a flowering of internal interest in Odia culture, especially literature. Similar struggles took place elsewhere in Odisha where Hindi or Telugu were the administrative languages. These battles and the resultant cultural developments went a long way toward creating a sort of "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) of Odia speakers, a community of people who may not have directly known one another but who were connected nevertheless by a common language. Few bonds among people are more fundamental and powerful than a belief in their ability to communicate with each other in a common tongue; this period marks the beginning of that belief on a "national" level in Odisha and consequently of Odia nationalism.

Beyond the Regional?

Later on this language-based nationalism—the sense that Odias, as a language group, are distinct from but equal to Bengali- and Hindi-speakers and others—was transferred to other cultural realms, notably dance. It is unclear to me why precisely dance, more so than music, became so much the focus of post-Independence Odia cultural revivalists (or classicists). But the drive to have Odissi dance recognized as classical was clearly successful. This may have had to do in part with the fact that near the time of Indian Independence there were already four dance

[18] The following account of language and nationalism in Odisha is based on those of Mishra (1997a: 207–23; 1997b: 191–206), Boulton (2003: 73–97), and Mohanty (1982).

forms commonly recognized as "classical." These styles—Bharatanatyam from Tamil Nadu, Manipuri from Manipur, Kathak from northern India, and Kathakali from Kerala—were region-based, had ostensibly long histories, and in most cases were believed to conform in theory to certain rules of performance laid out in ancient treatises such as the *Natyashastra*. And within this plurality of styles it would become possible to fashion a space for Odissi dance.

Although the various Indian dance styles are historically linked to particular geographic areas, the classicization of certain styles has allowed many of them to be dispersed throughout India (and the world), and no *single* dance form has come to exemplify the concept of classical dance in the context of India. Indeed, it is common now to recognize at least eight separate classical Indian dance forms, with additions in recent years from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, and again Kerala. While there may be difficulties associated with asserting the classical status of another dance form, there is apparently still space on the map for alternatives to present themselves. In dance the regional *can* be classical, and the classical often becomes national (in the pan-Indian sense); thus a Delhi-ite or Bengali can study Odissi dance or Bharatanatyam as a hobby and feel connected to the wider sphere of pan-Indian culture.

In music the situation is rather different. Because of the pre-Independence efforts of scholars and musicians in north and south India there came to be prominent two forms of classical Indian music: a northern style with major centers in Delhi, Bombay, Kolkata, Banaras, Lucknow, and Baroda; and a southern style centered mainly in Chennai but which had other important centers in Mysore and Hyderabad. Given the preexisting linguistic-cultural-geographic distinctions between northern and southern India the gradual mapping of music cultures onto this bifurcated geographic space came to be seen as natural and incontestable (to the detriment of Kalicharan Pattanayak's argument). In the sphere of art music, Hindustani and Karnatak music now occupy all available space; even in early 20th century Odisha, as mentioned earlier, this perspective seems to have been widely accepted.[19] For another form of music to be claimed as classical in this context thus seems reflexively unnecessary and challenges the underlying framework of India's musical geography: where exactly *is* the third space in a north-south bifurcation? As a consequence of this, and contrary to the situation in dance, in music the regional is *only* regional, and it is quite doubtful whether at present a non-Odia Indian could study Odissi music and feel a connection with the larger nation of India.[20]

The present push for the classical status of Odissi music has at least one indirect precursor in the Tamil Isai Iyakkam—or movement for Tamil music—which formed in the 1930s. This movement, at least in the descriptions supplied by Lakshmi Subramanian (2006: 153–67) and Amanda Weidman (2006: 150–91), did not really propose a separate, *independent* classical tradition as the advocates of Odissi do, but rather attempted to redefine Karnatak music, rooting it more firmly in Tamil's own unique language and music traditions. The movement, which on a large scale appears to have been unsuccessful, advocated a greater use of Tamil-language compositions by performers and the popularization of ancient Tamil styles. Subramanian writes tellingly of the ultimately disappointing outcome of this movement:[21]

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[19] This is perhaps why Odissi music as an *independent* shastric or classical practice seems to have faced more *local* resistance than Odissi dance (as hinted at in Kalicharan Pattanayak's autobiography [1978: 341]).

[20] As an illustration of this situation, at the time of this writing the website *Art India* (http://www.artindia.net/), which maintains information on Indian performing arts teachers and teaching institutions, has listings for eleven types of dance but only two types of music, Hindustani and Karnatak.

[21] Other scholars, however, have had different opinions on the success of the movement (cf. Viswanathan and Allen 2004: 19–21).

> This failure had as much to do with a limited conceptual framework that eventually deferred to the norms of the nationalist paradigm and the categories of classicism it imposed, as it had to do with the fact that at no time did the Tamil Isai confer on classical music the central role in the articulation of an expressive space for Dravidian identity that the brahmin elite of Madras city gave to it for themselves. (2006: 166)

Sadly, this could be equally applicable, with some changes in regional terminology, to the present inability of Odissi music to find a wider audience.

Conclusion

The assertions by Odias of Odissi's classical status have been fueled by the tension between Odia regional nationalism and pan-Indian nationalism—by the belief that there is an Odia national culture that is distinctive and highly evolved, but which has not gotten fair recognition from the rest of the country of which Odisha is firmly and proudly a part. But will Odissi music ever attain widely-recognized classical status? At this point, sixty years post-Independence and fifty years after Odissi dance was recognized as classical, convincing non-Odias of the need for another classical music may prove an insurmountable obstacle. India has an astounding number of distinct cultures vying for attention; unless Odissi music can be made the repository—the articulated "expressive space"—for more than an elite Odia identity, through which it may be able to carve out a third space on the map for itself, its prospects as a player on the pan-Indian cultural stage will remain dim.

A more interesting question might be: Would the conference of classical status on Odissi be an overall benefit to the music and the musicians? Certainly some degree of prestige, perhaps even some economic benefits, might accrue with classical recognition. But there is also a danger here. As Purnima Shah (2002) has argued regarding dance, classicization—while perhaps raising the prestige of the more recent dance additions—can necessitate stylistic compromises and lead to a "museumized" treatment of the traditions: the road to classicization, in other words, can also lead to homogenization and a discouragement of innovation. Though more work yet needs to be done, there is strong evidence that Odissi music and its performance practice have indeed been altered to align more closely to the established styles of Hindustani and Karnatak. Whether these alterations are seen as healthy innovation or as homogenization is perhaps a matter of perspective.

Despite the dangers, and regardless of whether the Odissi music movement is successful in its aim of some kind of *official* recognition, the movement already seems to be having positive effects. By means of festivals in major cities throughout India—where music performances are often paired with performances of the more recognizable and popular Odissi dance—and attractively produced local festivals, Odissi music now appears to have greater visibility within India than ever before, and the ears of sympathetic non-Odia audiences. One optimistic prediction of the outcome of this trend might be that it will demonstrate that regional Indian music can be, if not classical, then at least more than regional. But whether or not the music is able to find a new stature or larger audience, I feel it is at the very least proper to recognize—along with its practitioners—that Odissi music *is* a unique and powerful form of expression. Whether or not one labels the style "classical," for now it continues to be performed and developed. Who can know what lies ahead? Surely the dedicated musicians of Odisha will

continue their work rehydrating the riverbed of the Saraswati, so that a third stream may finally take its place in the musical geography of modern India.

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