Performing Auspiciousness: *Periya Mēḷam* Music in South Indian Marriage Ceremony

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During the months considered appropriate for marriage ceremony, any locality in Tamil Nadu is filled with the music of the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble. One may hear its sound flowing from a marriage hall early in the morning, or encounter an ensemble at night leading the procession of a bridegroom or bride decorated with bright colored garlands. People are dressed up with expensive silk garments, and the atmosphere is exuberant and jovial. Going through a densely populated area such as the Mylapore or T-Nagar sections of Chennai (formerly Madras), one may experience such an event almost at every block.

In this paper, I will examine the performance of *Periya Mēḷam* music during a marriage ceremony in Tamil-speaking South India with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the successive stages of the ceremony and the types of music being played, and discuss the process of arranging musicians for the marriage ceremony. In doing so, I wish to illustrate the musical as well as other knowledge necessary for active musicianship in this performing context. I will also describe the recent trends concerning marriage ceremony including the effect of technology on the *Periya Mēḷam* musicians.

Periya Mēḷam Ensemble and its Function

Periya Mēḷam ensemble consists of four types of instruments: *nāgasvaram* (double reed aerophone), *tavil* (double headed drum), *tāḷam* (a set of two small hand cymbals) and *sruti peṭṭi* (free reed instrument to provide drone). The temple rituals and festivals are considered the primordial contexts and raison díêtre of *Periya Mēḷam* music, and historically its distinct musical characteristics developed in such performance contexts. Whereas daily rituals in the temple developed and sustained a system of playing music according to the time of the day, the improvisational aspect of music was pursued to the maximum during the all-night procession in which musicians could indulge themselves in exploring musical ideas in front of the attentive audience.

Apart from temple performances, the domestic rituals marking the transitions of one's life constitute the most important performance contexts for *Periya Mēḷam* musicians. As the salaries from temples they serve tend to be meager, these domestic functions are important sources of income for the majority of musicians. Despite this financial dependence on domestic functions, however, it is the status of god's servants at temples – deriving from their proximity to, and constant contact with the deity – which makes *Periya Mēḷam* musicians auspicious (*maṅgalam*) and provides them with the ultimate legitimacy for being invited for domestic rituals such as weddings. The music they play is religiously charged and conceptualized as the sonal manifestation of the deity itself.[1] Therefore, *Periya Mēḷam* music which brings the deity's presence to the occasion is also considered auspicious. The auspicious quality of *Periya Mēḷam* was the reason for its mandatory inclusion at all major life-cycle rituals in the past. Even at present when traditional customs are modified, simplified or curtailed, the presence of a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble at marriage ceremonies remains ubiquitous.

The sound of the *Periya Mēḷam* functions at two different levels, promotive and preventive, and are important for a successful completion of the ceremony. The ceremony to mark the

transition from one stage of life to the next is ritually dangerous as the transition by definition denotes unstableness (van Gennep 1960; Douglas 1966), and it is considered important to fill the ritual space with the auspicious sound of the *Periya Mēḷam*. The selection of melodic modes (*rāgam-s*) and compositions for the occasion are also made for this reason. The sounds and appearance of the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble provide the propitious atmosphere throughout the entire ceremony.

On the other hand, the crucial moments during the ceremony that symbolize the transition between stages are particularly susceptible to undesirable forces. Such forces can inflict damaging effect only when undesirable sensory phenomena are perceived. In the aural sensorial domain, the misfortune is believed to fall on those who hear inauspicious sounds such as coughing and sneezing (Padfield 1975: 106; Diehl 1956: 97, 189; Allison 1980: 371). The *Periya Mēḷam* is believed to prevent the various sounds culturally defined as undesirable from being audible by overpowering them with extremely loud music during those crucial moments, thus circumventing the consequent misfortunes.[2]

Life-cycle Rituals

Up to a few generations ago, more importance was given to the execution of the domestic rituals as prescribed by the tradition, and *Periya Mēḷam* ensembles were hired as an indispensable part of all the major functions. Table 1 shows the names and occasions of the major rituals among Tamil Brahmans which traditionally called for the inclusion of *Periya Mēḷam* music.[3]

Even Brahmans, who generally stress the rigid execution of rituals, now tend to simplify ritual procedures or dispense with less important domestic rituals altogether. This tendency is particularly evident in urban centers like Chennai where western values and lifestyles are adopted to a greater extent. For example, the marriage ceremony (consisting of rituals 7 and 8 in Table 1) which until around 1930 lasted four to five days, is now usually compressed into one or one and half days.[10]

Table 1: Brahman Life-cycle Rituals

A. Prenatal rituals (for mothers-to-be)	
1. *vaḷaikāppu*	Fifth month pregnancy ritual[4]
2. *sīmandam*	Hair parting ritual[5]
B. Childhood Rituals	
3. *aptapūrtti*	First birthday of a child[6]
C. Educational rituals (for boys)	
4. *aṭcarāppiyāsam*	Initial learning[7]
5. *upanayaṉam*	Initiation ritual[8]
D. Marriage related rituals	
6. *niccayatāmbūlam*	Betrothal ceremony
7. *māppiḷḷai aṟaippu*	Invitation of bridegroom[9]
8. *muhūrttam*	Consecration of marriage
9. *grhapravēsa*	Initial entering into bridegroomís house

The inclusion of the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble in some rituals and its exclusion in others illustrates the hierarchy of importance among these domestic rituals. While the *Periya Mēlam* ensemble is rarely seen today at *vaḷaikāppu*, *sīmandam*, *aṭcarāppiyāsam*, or *grhapravēsa*, it is still considered essential at *upanayanam* and at marriage related ceremonies (*māppiḷḷai aṟaippu* and *muhūrttam*). The *aptapūrtti* and *niccayatāmbūlam* come in between these two categories: they are often celebrated with a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble, but its exclusion does not usually bring explicit social disgrace to the host of the event or cause disappointment among the participants.

Brahman Marriage Ceremony

Marriage (*kalyāṇam*) is the most important stage of life for Hindus with the possible exception of the *upanayaṉam* (initiation ritual) for male Brahmans, and the ceremony to mark its beginning is conducted with the greatest care. As it is well documented, Hindu marriage is considered an act of duty and a matter of moral and religious obligation (Pandey 1969; Chatterjee 1978: 26; Devadoss 1979: 85). The Hindu conception of marriage is eloquently expressed and defined in the various rituals that constitute the marriage ceremony.

The ceremony to accompany and mark this important transition of life is executed grandly, and *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble and its music are regarded as indispensable for this ceremony (Padfield 1975: 118). While still heard during a variety of occasions, *Periya Mēḷam* (and the sound of *nāgasvaram* in particular) is so strongly associated with the marriage ceremony that it is frequently employed to symbolize marriage in literature, films, and advertisements (see Figure 1 for an example of such visual representation).[11]

Photo 1: A *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble (led by T.M. Godandapani of Tanjavur) leading a procession of the bridegroom during the *māppiḷḷai aṟaippu* (Chennai, 1989)

Despite this strong association today, to determine when the use of *Periya Mēḷam* music in the marriage ceremony started is

difficult. Abbe Dubois, a well-known French missionary who stayed in India between 1792 and 1823, speaks of the ubiquitous use of instrumental ensembles, though not mentioning names of constituting instruments (1986:587). Louis Marie Mousset (1808-1888) mentions the prevalent use of *nāgasvaram* for weddings in her Tamil-French dictionary published in 1895 (1981: 203). F.R. Hemingway reports that *Periya Mēḷam* is always present at weddings (1906: 78-82).

Among many ceremonies related to marriage, the most important are *niccayatāmbūlam* (betrothal ceremony) and the core marriage ceremony consisting of *māppiḷḷai aṟaippu* and *muhūrttam*. Both are still accompanied today by the music provided by *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble. The *muhūrttam*, in particular, involves a number of rituals to be accompanied by *Periya Mēḷam* music prescribed specifically for the occasion.

I will describe below the marriage ceremony among Tamil Brahmans and the performance practice of *Periya Mēḷam* music as executed at present. The reasons for choosing the Brahman marriage ceremony for description over that of the other groups are multifold. The Brahman ceremony is probably the most elaborate and complex of all, and in a number of ways it serves as a model for the corresponding rituals among other groups. It also requires a special musical repertoire that is not included in non-Brahman ceremonies. Most importantly, however, the Brahmans have been the most appreciative and supportive patrons of *Periya Mēḷam* music as well as of Karnatak music in general.[12] The importance given to the *Periya Mēḷam* in their marriage ceremonies is generally much greater than among non-Brahmans. A brief discussion on the general differences between Brahman and non-Brahman marriage ceremonies will follow the description of the former.

Invitation of the Bridegroom

The *māppiḷḷai aṟaippu* (invitation of the bridegroom) is the ritual in which the bridegroom is taken in procession to the marriage hall where the ceremony is to take place. This ritual is always held in the evening before the *muhūrttam* day when the core marriage related rituals are performed. The time and date of the ritual are usually not announced in the printed invitation. The attendance at this ritual is considerably smaller than that of the *muhūrttam*, since only relatives and close friends participate in it. For about one hour before the *māppiḷḷai aṟaippu* begins, the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble plays at the hall, while guests arrive for the occasion. No *rāgam-s* or compositions are specified, and usually several *kīrttaṉai*-s (a type of composition with three sections) of a performer's choice are played in succession. A melodic improvisation in free rhythm known as *ālāpaṉai* may precede some compositions. When the time to start the ritual comes, everyone, including the musicians, walks to the nearby temple where the bridegroom receives blessings from the deity during which the musicians play several more short compositions. The musicians lead the bridegroom around the inner enclosure (*prakāram*) with music. The bridegroom is given new clothes by the bride's family, often a western suit, which he wears during the procession.[13]

The return procession to the hall then begins. A sports car, usually bright red and decorated with flowers, is rented for the bridegroom.[14] Just as in a temple procession for the deity, torch carriers are hired to provide light, and the procession stops at several places on the way. The *Periya Mēḷam* musicians provide music continuously while leading the procession. They turn around to face the bridegroom whenever the car stops and play for sometime in that position until it starts moving again.[15] This manner of performance resembles (and most probably was adopted from) the temple procession in which a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble plays for the deity traveling on a chariot or a palanquin (Photo 1).

Upon returning to the hall, musicians sit where they were playing before the ritual and perform for some time while the guests greet and chat with each other, and gradually move into the dining hall for dinner. The musicians tend to play a number of short and light classical compositions like *tiruppugaṟ*, *jāvaḷi*, and 'English Note'.[16] When a majority of guests finish their dinner, the *Periya Mēḷam* musicians have their turn.

Day of Consecration (*Muhūrttam*)

The *muhūrttam*, deriving from Sanskrit *muhūrta*, refers in its narrowest sense to a division of time, which corresponds to one and half hours. It also means the auspicious time astrologically appropriate for doing something significant, such as the consecration of marriage, and by extension, the ceremony performed during that time, and also the day when such a ceremony is celebrated (Madan 1987: 51; Tamil Lexicon 1982: 3232). It usually takes place in the morning for the duration of seventy-five to ninety minutes. The exact time and duration of each *muhūrttam* depends upon the calculations based on the astrological signs of the couple. In order to illustrate the role of *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble at this ceremony, the description is provided here of a typical Brahman *muhūrttam* as observed in Tamil Nadu between the late 1980s and the present. Comparison with past practices is provided wherever relevant.

The marriage ceremony used to take place at the house of the bride's family who was responsible for its entire expense. While most marriage ceremonies of Brahmans and high-ranking non-Brahmans are presently held at rented 'marriage halls' (*kalyāṇa maṇḍapam*-s), the bride's family is still responsible for the arrangements and expenses necessary for the ceremony including the engagement of the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble. There is also a tendency among wealthy families to perform the marriage ceremony in a western style hotel.

The marriage ceremony consists of a series of rituals taking place one after the other. The rituals that require the *Periya Mēḷam* accompaniment include those preceding the *muhūrttam* per se (*kāsiyāttirai*, *mālai maṟṟal*, *ūñjal*), and the entire *muhūrttam* ceremony.

Mock pilgrimage ritual (*Kāsiyāttirai*)

The *kāsiyāttirai* (*kāsi*, Banaras; *yāttirai*, pilgrimage) is a ritual in which a mock pilgrimage to Banaras is performed by the bridegroom (Sasivalli 1985: 200-201). In villages where many ceremonies continue to occur at the house of the bride's family, the bridegroom would dress as a pilgrim and walk to the boundary of his village as if he was going to Banaras to become a *saṉṉiyāsi* (ascetic). He would be accompanied by his parents, friends, and relatives, and the procession would be preceded by a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble. When he crossed the village boundary, the father of the bride would meet him and ask him to return to marry his daughter (Dubois 1986: 221-22). Accepting the request, the bridegroom would return to the bride's house for the marriage ceremony.

While the above description still holds true in villages, the ritual is much more simplified in urban areas where the majority of marriage ceremonies take place at wedding halls.[17] The *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble leads the bridegroom from his dressing room in the marriage hall to just outside its entrance, where he is greeted by the brideís father and heads back inside the hall. The entire ritual is completed within fifteen to twenty minutes. It is customary among many *nāgasvaram* players to improvise on *Asāvēri rāgam* as they lead the procession to the

outside of the hall, and to play *Rārāmāyiṇṭidāga*, a composition in the same *rāgam* by Tyagaraja, on the way back inside the hall.[18] The choice of *Asāvēri rāgam* roughly follows the principle of time-*rāgam* correspondence developed in temple *nāgasvaram* tradition. *Asāvēri* is to be played in the late morning between 9 am and noon (Sambamurthy 1952: 30) whereas most *muhūrttam*-s take place in the early morning.[19] Tyagaraja's plea in the composition to the deity Raghuvira to join him in his house is a metaphor for the unbearable longing of the bride to join her husband-to-be. Thus, the rendering of this composition expresses the ideal image of a wife as a devotee to her husband.[20]

Photo 2: An old woman blesses the marrying couple during the *ūñjal* ritual (Chennai, late 1980s)

Garland exchange ritual (*Mālai Maṟṟal*)

When the bridegroom returns to the hall from the *kāsiyāttirai*, the bride is brought out to stand face to face with him.[21] The *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble stops playing even though they have not finished *Rārāmāyiṇṭidāga*, and stands aside to give more room for people to surround the couple, who then put garlands (*mālai*) on each other three times (*mālai maṟṟal*).[22] *Nāgasvaram* musicians play a song known as *mālai maṟṟal pāṭṭu* (*pāṭṭu*, song) with no rhythmic accompaniment during the exchanges of garlands. The rendition of *mālai maṟṟal* songs is often omitted today, and in such a case musicians stand around and wait till the next ritual begins.

Swing ritual (*ūñjal*)

The couple then sits on the swing which is usually set near the entrance of the marriage hall for the *ūñjal* (swing) ritual (Photo 2). The movement of the swing is representative of the disturbances likely to occur in the course of life ahead. The swing ritual is meant to caution the couple and advise them to remain steadfast to each other (Sasivalli 1985: 223; Sujatha 1987: 110). Five married women, including the mothers of the bride and bridegroom, one by one face the couple and bless them by applying milk to the couple's feet. They offer fruit to the couple, wave a tray of rice balls *(paccapidi)*, and throw a few of them into the air in the four cardinal directions to avoid the negative influences from evil eyes. The rest of the women sing a variety of marriage songs such as *lāli* (lullaby) and *ūñjal pāṭṭu* (swing song) (Ramanathan 1984: 6).[23] Both *ūñjal* and *lāli* are song types[24], and several songs for each type, set in a variety of *rāgam*-s and *tālam*-s, are frequently sung at the *ūñjal* ritual.[25] Immediately following the women's singing, the same songs are played on *nāgasvaram* in an unhurried tempo often without *tavil* or *tāḷam* accompaniment.[26]

Muhūrttam

The bride and bridegroom return to their respective dressing rooms, while guests sit on the chairs facing the marriage dais (*maṇamēḍai*) and wait for the *muhūrttam* to commence. Meanwhile, the *Periya Mēḷam* musicians sit at the designated place, either on an elevated stage specifically reserved for musicians or in one corner of the floor from where the ritual on the dais is easily observed (Photo 3). Now the marriage ceremony proper begins. When the marriage ceremony is ready to start, the officiating priest (*purōhidar*) signals the musicians to start playing. With *Periya Mēḷam* music played in the background, the bride and bridegroom return to the hall and sit side by side on the dais.

Throughout the marriage ceremony, musicians play a series of compositions of their choice

with a relatively short *ālāpaṇai* preceding some. While no specific compositions or *rāgam*-s are prescribed for the occasion until the very end of the ceremony, lighter compositions in *rāgam*-s with appropriate *rasa*-s are frequently selected for the occasion.[27] One exception occurs during the *tāli kaṭṭudal*, which will be discussed later. *Kalyāni* and *Ānandabhairavi* are popular *rāgam*-s at weddings because of their strong association with auspiciousness.[28] For the opposite reason, some *rāgam*-s like *Muhāri*,[29] *Āhiri*,[30] *Sāvēri*, and *Rēvati*[31] are consciously avoided because their *rasas* are believed to be inappropriate to the auspicious occasion.[32]

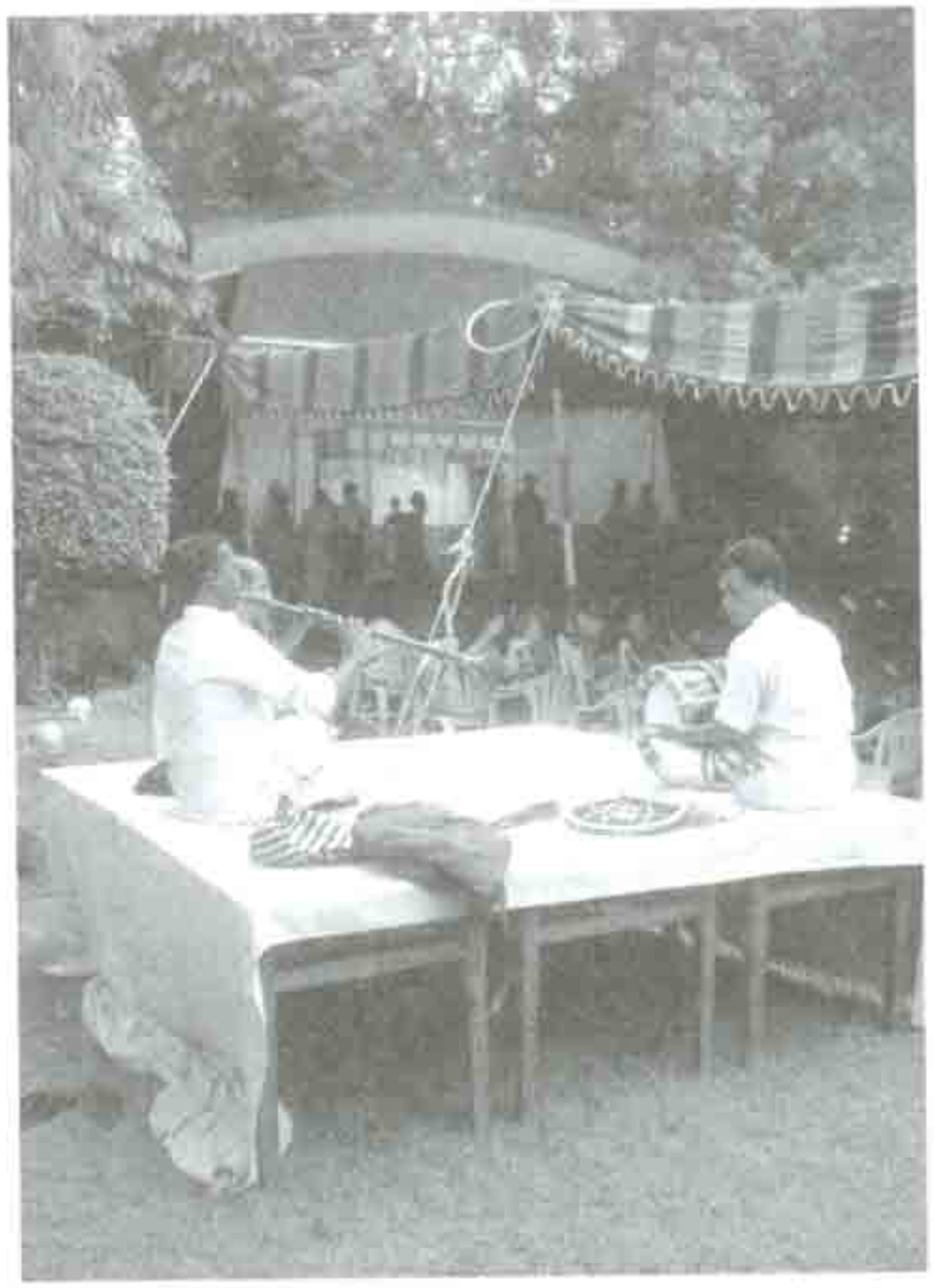

Photo 3: A *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble performing on a dais during the *muhūrttam* (Chennai, 2004)

The sound to protect transition

A type of musical fanfare known as *geṭṭimēḷam* is played by the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble to mark some important moments during the *muhūrttam*. The main purpose of playing the *geṭṭimēḷam* is to protect these particularly vulnerable moments during the ceremony from inauspicious sound which might otherwise be heard.[33] In the *geṭṭimēḷam*, *nāgasvaram* musicians play high-pitched tremolo mainly on tonic and dominant pitches (*sa* and *pa* in Indian solfage respectively) while *tavil* players execute rapid alternations of selected strokes, both in a rather loud and frenzied manner. Musicians start playing the *geṭṭimēḷam* as soon as they notice the cue from the priest or those who surround the couple and watch the ceremony closely, no matter what they may be playing at that moment.[34]

The *geṭṭimēḷam* usually lasts only between thirty seconds to one minute, and when the particular moment in the ritual calling for it is over, musicians resume what was previously being played. An important aspect to be observed here is that the *geṭṭimēḷam* is a noise (unstructured sound) outside the system of *rāgam* and *tāḷam* which defines South Indian classical music. The use of noise to fill in the break in the cosmological sequence or in the life-cycle transition is widely exercised (Needham 1967; Levi-Strauss 1969; Attali 1985; Yamaguchi 1988).

The consecration of marriage

Two important rituals during the *muhūrttam* which require the *geṭṭimēḷam* are *kūṟai aṇidal* (presenting marriage *sari*) and *tāli kaṭṭudal* (tying of marriage necklace). The *kūṟai aṇidal* is the ritual in which the bridegroom gives the marriage *sari* made of costly silk (*kūṟai poḍavai*) to the bride. Upon receiving the *sari*, the bride goes back to her dressing room to change into the *sari* just presented, and then returns to the dais for the *tāli kaṭṭudal* ritual. The *kūṟai poḍavai* is considered, along with the *tāli* described next, the symbol of their marital bond with *sakti* (embodied power) invested in it.[35] After the *muhūrttam*, it is to be kept in her possession throughout the rest of her life, and is to be worn at important ritual occasions such as *āvaṇiaviṭṭam* (the annual changing of sacred thread).

The tying of the marriage necklace (*tāli*) is the final and most decisive act of consecrating the marriage, forming the climax of the entire ceremony.[36] After putting on the *kūṟai poḍavai*, the bride returns to the dais and sits on her father's lap. The bridegroom and one of his sisters tie the *tāli* around her neck,[37] while all of the guests at the ceremony bless the couple by throwing rice, which has been distributed on a tray by the priest shortly prior to the ritual (cf. Chatterjee 1978: 179-80). At the moment that the bridegroom starts tying the *tāli*, the musicians begin playing the *geṭṭimēḷam* for about one minute or longer until the ritual is over. It is generally agreed that *Nāṭakurinji rāgam* should be heard at the time of *tāli kaṭṭudal* before the *geṭṭimēḷam* is played.[38] Kaliyaperumal states that *Nāṭakurinji rāgam* should be played during the

muhūrttam, so that the guests standing outside of the hall come inside hearing this *rāgam* as a sign of the commencement of the ritual (1980: 125-126).

Musicians usually start playing *Nāṭakurinji rāgam* sometime before the *tāli kaṭṭudal* to ensure that this *rāgam* will be heard going into the ritual. The extensive *ālāpaṉai* elaboration followed by *pallavi* in *Nāṭakurinji rāgam* was commonly heard during the *muhūrttam* in the past, and even the *rakti mēḷam* was occasionally played on the request of the host.[39] These forms involving extensive improvisation have been replaced by shorter *ālāpaṉai* and *kīrttaṉai*-s.

The *tāli kaṭṭudal* marks the end of the *muhūrttam*, immediately after which a composition type known as *āṉandam* (bliss) is played with great pomp. The successful completion of the event which required many months of preparation, care and coordination, often brings smiles of accomplishment and relief on the faces of the newlyweds and their parents. The exhilarated guests approach the dais and individually congratulate the couple. The *āṉandam* played by the *Periya Mēḷam* fills the entire marriage hall with vibrant exuberance. The *āṉandam* composition most frequently performed today is the one in *Kāpi*, which is also considered an auspicious *rāgam*.[40] After the *āṉandam*, the musicians either play several short compositions or play the *maṅgaḷam* and a short exposition of *Madyamāvati rāgam* to end the performance.[41] After the musicians finish playing, recorded music is played.

When the marriage ceremony lasted for four to five days, a ritual known as *nalaṅgu* (anointing) was performed in the evenings. It was a ritual in which the couple sat on the floor and smeared the paste made with saffron, turmeric and oil onto each other's legs, while women surrounding them sang *nalaṅgu* songs (Jagadisa Ayyar 1925: 60-61). The *nalaṅgu* is now performed in the afternoon of the *muhūrttam* day since, as will be discussed in the following section, the reception usually takes place that same evening. Few women today know these songs, and usually *nāgasvaram* musicians play them without rhythmic accompaniment.

Reception

In addition to the marriage related rituals, the hosts give a reception *(varavēṛpu)* frequently with a musical recital on the evening of the *muhūrttam.* When either the bridegroom's or bride's family live far away from where the *muhūrttam* takes place, and are unable to invite their guests to it, an additional reception is provided at the location of their residence at a later date. The reception offers guests an opportunity to congratulate the newly wedded couple who position themselves at the designated area in the hall, as well as to enjoy the music. The musical party may be the same *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble which played for the *muhūrttam*, another *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble which is better known than the first, or more frequently a Karnatak music ensemble featuring either a vocalist or an instrumental soloist. More than one group may occasionally be invited by those hosts who are enthusiastic fans of classical music and are wealthy enough to do so.

The wedding reception is a custom initiated by Brahmans presumably after a western model, and the English term 'reception' has passed into South Indian languages. Although Srinivas emphasizes the increased secularization of traditional culture as the chief reason for the great popularity of the reception (1971: 126), it should not be forgotten that the reception is also a kind of adaptive strategy for the Brahmans' new economic role while maintaining traditional ritual purity. Many Brahmans had business relationships with the British as *dubāsh* ('two languages' in Sanskrit, translators) and with wealthy non-Brahmans. The social necessity to invite guests from among wider caste, religious and national identities who might be ritually polluting is met by separating the ceremony into two segments, ritual and secular. Yet, it soon became fashionable even among those with no ritual necessity for the separation, since it proved to be a perfect context to display the status and influence of the two families involved. For this reason, the professional standing of the musicians is important for the host as part of their power display, and the remuneration for well-known musicians can be quite high (Srinivas 1971: 126). The extraordinary sums of remuneration that famous musicians received at highly

publicized weddings hosted by dignitaries of South India are still topics of discussion among performers and patrons of *Periya Mēḷam* music. Tumilan reports, for example, that a legendary nagasvaram player, T.N. Rajarattinam Pillai, received a total of Rs. 10,000 in the 1950s when he played for the wedding of the daughter of S.S. Vasan, a celebrated film director and founder of the Tamil weekly, *Ananda Vikadan* (1988: 131-132).[42]

For the same reason, a Bharata Natyam dance recital, which occurs much less frequently, is greatly valued due to its elaborateness and implied expense. Dancing by *dēvadāsi*-s (literally 'servants of god', dancers attached to temples) was an important and popular part of the marriage ceremony of wealthy families until their public dancing became increasing stigmatized in the early decades of the twentieth century (Arudra 1986/87: 32).[43]

When a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble plays for a reception, more emphasis is placed upon the improvisational portion of music (*manōdharma sangīta*) than compositions. Musicians have an opportunity to display their skills to a more attentive audience without the interruptions caused by ritual requirements, as in the case of the *muhūrttam.*

Arrangement and Remuneration

The responsibility to arrange the marriage ceremony and cover its entire expenses rests on the bride's family, and that includes the engagement of the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble for the occasion. While some families have a specific *nāgasvaram* player and his ensemble whom they hire for all their domestic rituals requiring *Periya Mēḷam*, others make inquiries into potential players whenever necessary. With the decreasing number of domestic rituals requiring *Periya Mēḷam* and more frequent relocations of patrons in recent years, an ensemble is sought when the occasion arises. Some *kalyāṇa maṇḍapam*-s, and more recently western style hotels, arrange or recommend a *nāgasvaram* player as part of their service to assist their customers. The business cards of *nāgasvaram* musicians may also be seen at the office of the marriage halls.

Figure 1: Advertisement for wedding *sari*-s (*The Hindu*, 1991)

Figure 2: Wedding announcement in Tamil (1989) the *nāgasvaram* player's name is mentioned in the second line from the bottom.

Upon finalizing the date of the ceremony, the bride's parents send for the *nāgasvaram* player to inform him of their interest in hiring his ensemble for the occasion.[44] The musician visits the bride's family to discuss the scheduled date, the details of performance requirement, and the remuneration for the performance. When the musician lives far away, the initial contact may be made through the mail. If the arrangement is finalized, advance money *(munpaṇam)* is paid to the *nāgasvaram* player either at their first meeting or when the formal invitation is hand-delivered to the musician. Although not fixed in any formal way, the amount of the advance ranges anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of the entire remuneration. The rest is paid in cash as soon as the ceremony is over. The remuneration is given to the leader of the ensemble, who then distributes the money to its members at the rate prescribed to the group.

Engaging a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble has to be done well in advance, as with other

Figure 3: Caricature of *nāgasvaram* musician (*Kalki*, January 26, 1969 issue).

arrangements such as renting a marriage hall *(kalyāṇa maṇḍapam)*, hiring an officiating priest *(purōhidar)*, and engaging the kitchen crew. Hindu astrology prohibits the performance of marriage ceremonies at inauspicious times of the year or month, and this enhances the congestion of ceremonies during the limited auspicious season. Summer months and the month of Tai (January-February) are considered best suited for auspicious functions, while the months of Aippasi (October-November) and Margaṛi (December-January) are inauspicious; few marriage ceremonies take place during these two months (Subramaniam 1974: 90-91). This creates an uneven work load and income for the musicians throughout the year. During the months most suited for marriage, established musicians tend to get more performance offers than they can accept, while the same musicians may sometimes find it hard to make ends meet during the slack months.[45] An almost identical situation is reported concerning the position of *purōhidar*-s (priests) who also depend upon the remuneration from domestic rituals for the major portion of their income (Subramaniam 1974: 52-91).

Some musicians have a fixed rate for the performance, while others accept an offer within a certain range, depending upon the economic standing of and their relationship with the sponsor as well as the location of the performance.[46] A few top *nāgasvaram* musicians in the past, such as Mannargudi Chinna Pakkiri (1869-1915), are said to have requested a certain percentage of the entire budget allocated for the ceremony.

The notion of monetary remuneration is problematic for classical musicians. On one hand, the idea of selling music like a commodity is regarded as antithetical to the Hindu ideal of saintly musicians, and is thus not appreciated at least publicly. Musicians, therefore, often hesitate to take the initiative in discussing performance fees. On the other hand, the monetary remuneration is intricately woven into the artistic hierarchy among musicians. The logic goes that the more one gets, the better one is and vice versa. A musician may adamantly request one rupee more given to him/her to maintain superiority over others, as I have heard in a few instances.[47]

The ongoing rate for a musician is relatively easy to find out even when he is not one's regular musician because he is usually sought through oneís relatives and friends. Therefore, the engaging party has a good estimate of what is expected by the time of their first meeting with the musician. The negotiation may take the form of the hosts suggesting the amount, which the *nāgasvaram* musician gratefully accepts. This format of negotiation reduces the embarrassment the musician may have in displaying his interest in monetary matters, thus deviating from the ideal type of the saintly musician. The dilemma of being caught between the need to manifest, or more importantly to project the image of this ideal type and making a living in a capitalistic modern world is more immediate to *Periya Mēḷam* musicians who continue to hold the ritually sanctified status as god's servants at temples.

The *nāgasvaram* player can accommodate a low-budget engagement by changing the size of his ensemble, while maintaining his own expected fee. The second *tavil* player and the second *nāgasvaram* player are sometimes omitted for this purpose. Musicians who perform under these circumstances are not held in a high esteem due to the implied low payment which signifies a low standard of musicianship.

The remuneration is expected to be considerably higher for the engagement involving long distance travel. The musicians in the Tanjavur area travel great distances during the marriage ceremony season. The invitation is often made to Tanjavur musicians by those who have emigrated from Tanjavur to their respective areas. Brahmans and high caste non-Brahmans

who have settled in Chennai and other urban centers in northern Tamil Nadu tend to have reservations about hiring *Periya Mēḷam* musicians from barber castes, since barber (*Pariyāri*) musicians of the Tanjavur area play only for the lifetime rituals of low caste non-Brahmans. They often invite musicians of the *Isai Vēḷāḷar* caste from their own ancestral village or town if their budget permits.[48] Some Tanjavur *nāgasvaram* players have a contact person as a kind of performance agent in Chennai to facilitate engagements. Several *nāgasvaram* and *tavil* musicians have moved from the Tanjavur area to Chennai,[49] and they are sought after by the immigrants from the same area for the same reason.

When they travel to other areas, musicians stay either at their relative's house or in a room at the marriage hall where they are scheduled to perform. In some unusual cases, luxury hotel rooms are offered for visiting musicians. Even in such cases, musicians tend to decline the offer as a courtesy to their host, insisting on staying at the marriage hall. Travel expenses are included in the remuneration, and musicians usually travel in the most economical way.

Upon finalizing all the necessary arrangements, the wedding invitation that mentions the time and place of the function is printed out and either mailed or personally delivered to the guests. The invitation card is called *tirumaṉa aṟaippu* (wedding invitation in Tamil), or more formerly *vivāha suba muhūrttap pattirihai* (the invitation to the auspicious marriage ceremony in Sanskrit). Two different sets of invitation cards are made, one for the bride's side and the other for the bridegroom's guests. The bride's family is responsible for making both sets. Each card is inserted into an envelope, four corners of which are often smeared with turmeric symbolizing the auspicious occasion. The names of the participating musicians are mentioned, sometimes prominently, on the invitation card when they are famous and their presence is considered to bring prestige to the host (Figure 2).

In addition to the agreed remuneration, *Periya Mēḷam* musicians are customarily given a *vētti* (lower garment) together with the final payment by the bride's family. If the performance was much appreciated by the host, some extra money, an expensive shawl with gold embroidery

(poṉṉāḍai), or even a gold coin *(padakkam)* may be presented to the *nāgasvaram* musician as a token of their appreciation. These items are treasured by the musician, who wears the shawl at important festival engagements and attaches the gold coin to his *nāgasvaram*. Expensive garments and the number and size of gold coins attached to the instrument are two of the eloquent visual representations of a *nāgasvaram* musician's status among his peers. Figure 3 is a caricature in a popular magazine of *a nāgasvaram* musician's desire to display many gold coins attached to their instruments. The occasion and hosts associated with these gifts (*aṉbaḷippu*) are remembered fondly for the rest of his life. The bridegroom's family occasionally gives money as a gift to the musicians separately from that presented by the bride's family, but the amount tends to be within a certain range so as not to overpower and thus embarrass the bride's family.

As mentioned earlier, the remuneration from marriage ceremonies constitutes the largest portion of most *Periya Mēḷam* musicians' income. In fact, playing for these functions can be extremely lucrative for established *Periya Mēḷam* musicians. Jagadisa Ayyar, for example, reports with astonishment that as much as Rs. 300 was paid for one day's engagement (1925: 41), an extraordinary figure, given Rangaramanuja Ayyangaris statement that no musicians, including those of Karnatak music, received more than Rs. 200 until 1926 (1977: 22). At the time of my research in the late 1980s, the remuneration of the top-ranking *nāgasvaram* musicians and their ensembles for a marriage ceremony engagement was around Rs. 3,000. This roughly corresponded to a month's salary of a mid-level white collar worker or a college professor. The majority of *Periya Mēḷam* ensembles received Rs. 500 to Rs. 2,000 per engagement.

Non-Brahman Marriage Ceremony

While the marriage ceremony differs in details among non-Brahman castes, its basic format, including the constituent rituals and their sequence, remains largely identical. For this reason, non-Brahman marriage ceremonies will be discussed as a unit, to be distinguished from their

Brahman counterpart. The most important structural difference between these two in relation to the *Periya Mēḷam* music is the absence of the *ūñjal* (swing) ritual at the non-Brahman ceremonies. The tradition of singing marriage songs is confined to older Brahman women at present, and it may be replaced by the rendition on *nāgasvaram* or may be totally forgotten in the next generation.[50]

The dichotomy of the ceremony into Brahman and non-Brahman reflects the different musical predilection of both groups, as seen by the *Periya Mēḷam* musicians themselves. The Brahman's preference toward Karnatak music is contrasted to the immense popularity of film songs among non-Brahmans. Both old and currently popular film songs may be requested by the hosts and guests. Popular film songs in recent years may be set in the *rāgam*-s previously considered inappropriate for auspicious occasions, and *Periya Mēḷam* musicians deplore the current popularity of such film songs, which they consider the evil source of the decline of classical music among the general public.[51]

In addition to requesting a *Periya Mēḷam* group to play film songs, instrumental ensembles specializing in such songs are often engaged by wealthy non-Brahmans at their ceremonies. There are two types: a light music group and a 'Band' (or Band Set, *bāṇḍu vāttiyam*). The former, often engaged during the reception, has instrumentation typical of film music including several electric instruments, a trap set, *tablā* and South Indian flute. It features at least two singers, one male and one female, and sometimes even a dancer. Hiring a light music group is expensive, and popular only among wealthy non-Brahman castes, especially Chettiars who are reputed to display their wealth ostentatiously.

A western style 'Band' may be hired along with a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble on the *muhūrttam* day. The typical instrumentation of such bands is 1 clarinet (leader), 1 to 2 alto saxophones, 1 to 2 trumpets, 1 snare drum, and 1 bass drum.[52] They usually play film songs and popular light classical compositions before the ceremony begins to welcome arriving guests. A *Periya Mēḷam*

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ensemble and a 'Band' are sometimes heard playing their respective music simultaneously, sounding as if they are trying to outdo each other. The bright colored western style uniforms of the 'Band' members also create a sharp visual contrast to the traditional attire of the *Periya Mēḷam* musicians in white *vēṭṭi* and white or light yellow shirts. Although *nāgasvaram* musicians themselves have veered away from traditional appearance by starting to wear western style shirts since the 1940s, their shirts tend to remain white or light colored.

A 'Band' called Nadamuni Band was immensely popular at both Brahman and non-Brahman weddings during the early decades of the twentieth century. Their popularity hinged upon the dexterity of the band leader and clarinet player, Balaraman, and their skillful rendition of classical compositions. Currently, bands only play film songs and light classical pieces. Neither a film music group nor a 'Band' is to be seen at Brahman *muhūrttam*-s. In fact, many Brahmans express their disgust for the increased presence of such ensembles. Yet, a 'Band' is sometimes hired for the *māppiḷai aṟaippu* at the Brahman marriage ceremony. This may be a precursor of further changes. A 'Band' is also a common feature at Muslim and Christian marriage ceremonies, for which the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble is not commonly engaged.[53]

Concluding Remarks

The auspicious quality of the *Periya Mēḷam* music is the reason for its inclusion in various domestic occasions. Although the degree to which the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble is utilized during the domestic functions has decreased in recent years, its presence at selected important ceremonies continues to be mandatory. A codified system of performance exists for *Periya Mēḷam* music on the *muhūrttam* day including a special repertoire exclusive to the ritual. Apart from performance skill, the understanding of the ritual process and their role in it is essential for active musicianship. For *Periya Mēḷam* musicians, the marriage ceremony is extremely important as it provides them with their major source of income. Nevertheless, they may not find the performance venue to be the most challenging or satisfying because of the

general indifference of the audience, limited scope for extensive improvisation, and interruptions due to necessary coordination with ritual sequences.

While the inclusion of a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble at the marriage ceremony is still considered a necessity, the degree of its involvement has gradually declined. When the marriage ceremony lasted for four to five days, wealthy patrons hired a different *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble for each day, thus creating more performing opportunities for musicians. Although normally no two groups played side by side on the same day, the presence of accomplished musicians in the audience created a competitive atmosphere, often triggering an exciting performance. Even when many well-known musicians were hired for a marriage ceremony, a local player was customarily engaged at least for one day regardless of his playing skill and reputation. This practice of giving due respect to a local player (*uḷḷūr vittuvāṉ*) was also faithfully followed in the engagement of *Periya Mēḷam* ensembles during annual temple festivals. In contrast, only one *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble is hired for the ceremony today, with a remote possibility of a second group for the reception. The reception roughly corresponds in function to the last three or four days of the past marriage ceremony, when a variety of entertainments were provided for the guests.

The future of *Periya Mēḷam* music at domestic functions is uncertain. Although considered indispensable, an ensemble is hired today more as a social obligation than for the ritual merit of the music or the majesty and flamboyance of *nāgasvaram* musicians who once graced the occasion with their auspicious quality. This phenomenon corresponds to the overall decrease in interest in *Periya Mēḷam* music with the passing of the great exponents of the genre. Older fans nostalgically reflect upon the golden days in the past, but their rhetoric on the idealized past appears to approve the status quo and the lack of support for the art form (Terada 1996).

The spread of sound reproduction technology has also greatly affected the *Periya Mēḷam* music. Cassette tapes became a powerful medium of music transmission when the mass

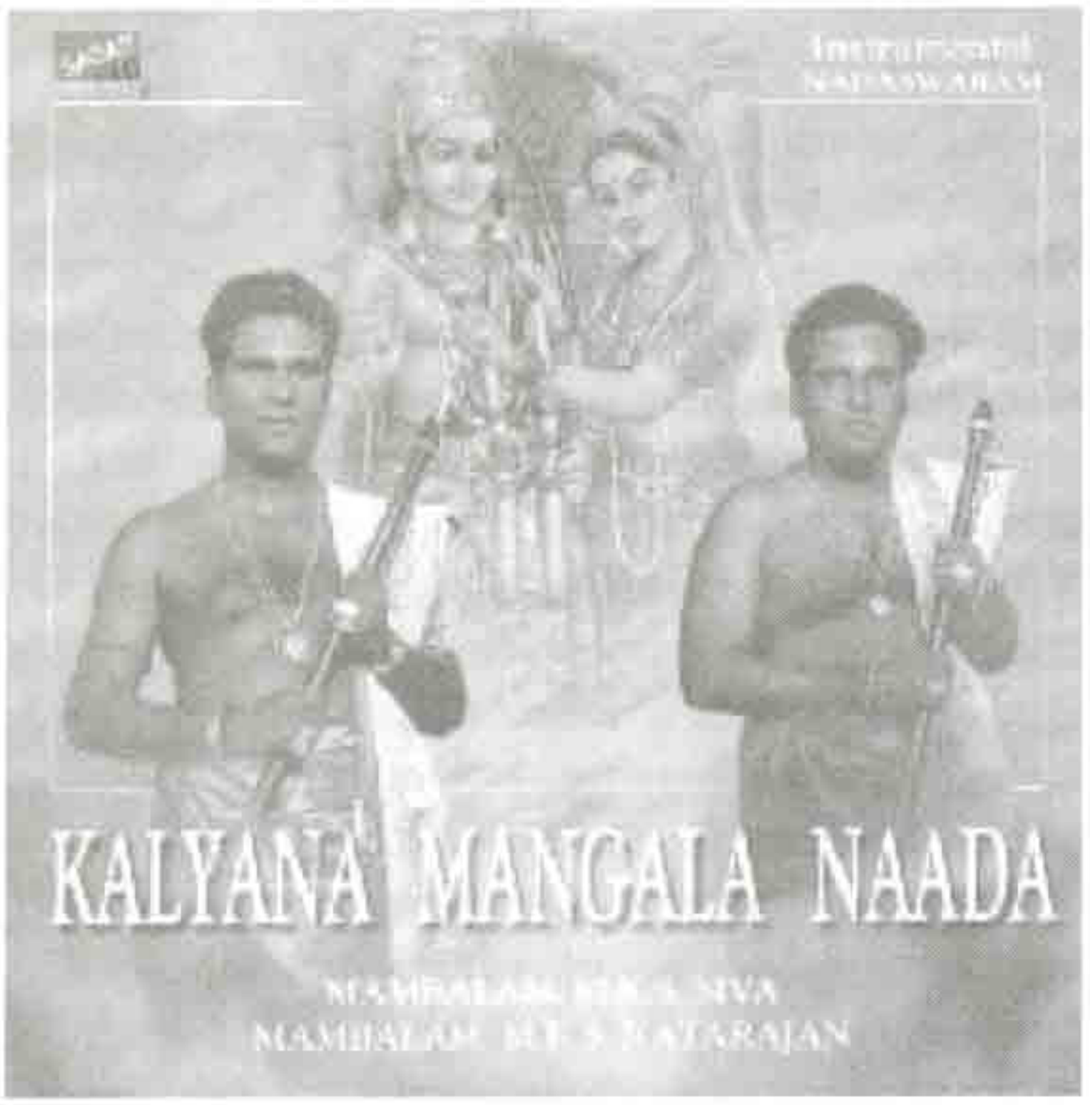

Photo 4: Kalyana Mangala Naada (Auspicious Sound for Wedding) by Mambalam M.K.S. Siva and his group.

production of cheap cassette began in the late 1970s and the import tariffs were reduced in the early 1980s (Manuel 1988: 190). The impact of cassette tapes is most prominent in film and other popular forms of music, but *Periya Mēḷam* music is no exception. *Nāgasvaram* musicians are producing cassette tapes (and more recently CDs) at a rate never seen before. Reissues of the old 78rpm recordings in the form of cassette tapes have also become important sources of learning for young players who never had a chance to listen to master musicians of the past. [54] Here, the technology connects the younger generation with the musical world of the first half of the twentieth century that is often described as the 'golden era' of *nāgasvaram* music (Terada 1996). More immediate to the performance contexts discussed in this article, a growing number of *nāgasvaram* musicians have learnt film songs from cassette tapes to meet the patrons' demands at life-cycle rituals despite their ambivalence toward this genre. It has become a common practice to include a few film songs, particularly at non-Brahman weddings.

While some musicians acquire more popularity by producing cassette tapes and CDs, easy access to these recordings has also prompted the replacement of a live *Periya Mēḷam* performance at many less important life-cycle rituals such as pregnancy rituals and the first birthday of a

child with prerecorded music. There also is a growing tendency for the use of cassette tapes and CDs during the marriage reception, thus depriving jobs from many musicians.

Photo 5: *Kalyāṇaūp Paḍalgaḷ* (Wedding Songs) by Sūheik Chinna Moulana and his group.

Cassette tapes containing the compositions for various stages of the *muhūrttam* were readily available in the 1980s, but they were mainly purchased as gifts of token or as a reminder of the happy occasion. There were not played to accompany the ceremony.[54] Disc recordings of marriage songs were made as early as the 1930s. For example, a set of four records of *nalaṅgu* and *ūñjal* songs with *nāgasvaram* accompaniment were released in 1936 from Hutchins & Company. However, these early recordings were presented as gifts to the newlyweds, rather than with the intent to replace the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble (*The Hindu*, October 24, 1935; April 30, 1936).

This was, at least partly, due to the technical difficulty of playing the music on the cassette tape to coincide with respective stages of the ceremony. The increasing availability of CD players in recent years, however, has solved the problem of matching a particular piece of music with a ritual action, and this new development may accelerate the replacement of live

performances with prerecorded music. Accordingly, more CDs of marriage songs and music are available today, often featuring well-known musicians who would be prohibitively expensive for many to hire (Photos 5-6). One scenario of the near future (a pessimistic one from the viewpoint of musicians) is that we will witness the emergence of sound system operators who, with their nimble fingers on CD players, supply appropriate music for each stage of the marriage ceremony, even on the *muhūrttam* day when a close ritual-music correspondence is so far prescribed. If this becomes prevalent, the entire community of *Periya Mēḷam* musicians will suffer from the significant loss of income and may even face virtual extinction. While *Periya Mēḷam* musicians and some of their patrons continue to remark emphatically on the auspicious nature of their music, and insist on its inclusion at marriage rituals, it remains to be seen to what extent the aura of live music and musicians can continue to monopolize the auspicious quality that is valued for marriage rituals, and if such auspiciousness can be digitally reproduced.

NOTES

[1] While the sound produced by the entire ensemble is considered auspicious, the association of the *nāgasvaram* with this quality appears particularly strong. The *tavil* is also described as an auspicious instrument (*maṅgalavāttiyam*) occasionally, whereas the *tāḷam* and *sruti peṭṭi* are never characterized as such individually.

[2] Jagadisa Ayyar paraphrases this function of *Periya Mēḷam* music as scaring undesirable invisible beings away both from the marriage dais and the premises (1925: 63).

[3] The four main categories used in the list are adopted from Pandey (1969: ix). This list is by no means exhaustive, and only a handful of important rituals of our immediate concern are listed in order to avoid the enormous detail necessary for the description. For details, see Pandey (1969), Kane (1968) and Chatterjee

(1978). See Pandian (1987: 126-128) for an example of non-Brahman customs.

[4] The *vaḷaikkāpu* (bangle protection) is a ritual in which many bangles are placed on the wrists of the pregnant woman (Reynolds 1980: 48).

[5] The *sīmandam* is a ritual performed usually on the seventh month of pregnancy to pray for the birth of a male child.

[6] The child's ears are pierced during this ritual. For this ritual, it is also known as *kādukkuttudal* (piercing of ears).

[7] It was originally performed when the boy was taught the Veda for the first time. It is performed today when he first goes to school.

[8] The *upanayaṉam* is the ceremony in which a boy is initiated into Gayatri mantra, and the sacred thread (*pūṇūl*) is invested on him.

[9] This term is used by *Periya Mēḷam* musicians. Brahmans generally prefer to use the term *jānavāsam* for the same ritual. Among some non-Brahman castes, the bride is taken for a procession rather than the bridegroom, and the ritual is called *peṇ aṟaippu* (invitation of a girl/bride).

[10] Rangaramanuja Ayyangar suggests that the four day wedding was a norm before 1930 (1977: 5). Though referring to the custom in the Telugu speaking areas, Padfield gives no hint of aberration from the five day marriage ceremony (1975: 94-118). A one day marriage ceremony was already common in the 1950s, as reported by Baliga (1957: 140).

[11] The wedding scene in films is ubiquitously accompanied by the music of *Periya Mēḷam*, whether musicians appear on the screen or not.

[12] Karnatak music is a classical music system of south India based on the modal principles of *rāgam* (melody) and *tāḷam* (rhythm). In its most archetypal form, a vocalist is accompanied by violin and *mridaṅgam* (drum).

[13] The bridegroom would receive an expensive *vēṭṭi* (lower garment for men) in the past, but it is usually a western style suit that is presented today.

[14] The red sports car appears to be a modern adaptation of the wedding cart with a red-curtained dome shaped top which was used in the past (Stevenson 1971: 66-67).

[15] In some lavishly organized marriage ceremonies, a truck is hired for the musicians who sit on the back side and perform facing the bridegroom throughout the procession.

[16] 'English Note' or 'Note' (*nōṭṭu*) refers to preexisting English brass band compositions to which Sanskrit text is added, or compositions inspired by them. They are composed in *Sankarābharanam rāgam* which is explained as corresponding to the Western major scale, or in its derivatives such as *Kundaḷavarāḷi rāgam* (Sambamurthy 1971: 37; Raghavan 1977: iv).

[17] Only those who cannot afford renting a hall have the ceremony at their house. As explained later, the marriage halls are in high demand in its season, and if a ceremony has to take place in a short time, the hall may not be available.

[18] Tyagaraja (1767-1847) is the most beloved composer in South Indian classical music, and his compositions continue to be performed frequently in concerts today. Another composition played occasionally at this stage of the wedding is *Jānakīrama* by Tyagaraja in *Suddasīmantini rāgam* (Interview with T.V.S. Sivasubramanya Pillai, 1987). However, although the use of these compositions during the *kāsiyāttirai* ritual is prevalent today, this performance practice may be of recent origin. Some older musicians believe that only *Nāṭakurinji rāgam* was played during marriage ceremony.

[19] However, some musicians consider *Asāvēri* one of several *rāgam*-s not appropriate for auspicious occasions, and oppose its use at marriage ceremony (Interview with S.R.D. Muthukumaraswami Pillai, 1987).

[20] The text of this composition reads as, "Oh Raghuvira, Tyagarajaís Blessedness! Pray, come to my house; I bow to you. Bless me. I cannot bear the separation any longer. Till now, with unfulfilled desire, I have been in long and vexatious search for you. Pray, do come today at least, in your glory. My purpose in seeking you is to implore you every morning to teach me, to have the privilege of the Darsan of your enchanting face, to stand by your side and worship you every day, and thus be blessed. Believing that you alone are my refuge, I have allowed myself to be in your grip. Why do you forget this and why do you not come to me promptly?" (Ramanujachari 1966: 303). Also see Jackson (1988: 25).

[21] When the child marriage was prevalent, a young bridegroom and bride were placed on the shoulders of their respective maternal uncles during this ritual (Jagadisa Ayyar 1925: 55-57).

[22] The exchange of garlands symbolizes the wish for a prosperous life based on mutual care and dependence (Sujatha 1987: 110).

[23] Both *ūñjal* and *lāli* songs were an important part of *dēvadāsi* repertoire. These songs were sung by them at *paḷḷiyaṟai sēvai*, the last of the daily rituals at temples in which the deity is placed in the bed chamber (*paḷḷiyaṟai*) and lulled to sleep (Kersenboom-Story 1987). It is unknown whether Brahman women took over the *dēvadāsi* tradition of singing these songs when the institution of *dēvadāsi* was abolished. Thurston reports that Brahman women learned the marriage songs from childhood (1909, vol.1: 290). At present, only older Brahman women know them.

[24] The categories are determined by the context rather than musical structure or content.

[25] Tyagaraja has composed several songs for this category. Seven of his compositions have been published with notation by S. Ramanathan (1984: 21-41). The most commonly heard *ūñjal* song today, however, is a Tamil composition, *Kaṇṇūñjal*, in *Ānandabhairavi rāgam*. This *rāgam* is believed to lift the listener to a state of bliss (*ānandam*) (Rajam 1988: 41-43).

[26] It is said that women used to be accompanied by *nāgasvaram* when they sang marriage songs (personal communication with Michael Nixon, 1989). The descent of the pitch of *nāgasvaram* may be a reason for the discontinuation of this custom. The tonic pitch of *nāgasvaram* was 4 or 5 (F or G) until around the 1920, corresponding to the range of female voice, but it has come down since then to 2 and 3 (D and E) today, which is too low a pitch for many women (Terada 1992).

[27] The *rasa*, often simplistically translated as mood, emotion, or sentiment, is a complex aesthetic concept which permeates and provides the underlying unity of all artistic expression in India. See Raghavan (1975) for the history of *rasa* concept, and Vatsyayan (1968: 5-22), Prajnanananda (1973: 237-263), and Sambamurthy (1982:160-182) for the *rasa* concept as applied in music and dance.

[28] See Seetha (1973), Berberich (1974: 168), Chellam Iyengar (1982), Rajam (1986: 51), and Nijenhuis and Gupta (1987: 203) for the auspicious nature of these two *rāgam*-s. Although the marriage ceremony takes place in the morning, *Kalyāṇi* is usually considered an evening *rāgam* (Sambamurthy 1959: 289; Thyagarajan 1968: 23).

[29] *Muhāri rāgam* is believed to have *sōham* (sorrow) and *karuna* (pity, pathos) *rasa*-s (Subba Rao 1984: 163-64). Apart from the *rasa* theory, the *Muhāri* has become synonymous with sadness and pessimism even for those who are unaware of what *Muhāri rāgam* sounds like. An idiomatic expression in Tamil, "*Muhāri pādāde*" which literally means "Don't sing *Muhāri*, signifies figuratively, "Don't be pessimistic" or "Don't be sad" (personal communication with K. Narayanan, 1989). This notion is probably derived from or at least influenced by the association of *Muhāri rāgam* with death. *Muhāri rāgam* was sung or played at the funeral ritual (*karumādi).* Additionally, *Muhāri rāgam* is also prominent in the scenes of the *terukkūttu* dance drama, when a wide range of melancholy and sadness are to be depicted (Frasca 1990: 82).

[30] This exclusion of *Āhiri rāgam* is not only because of its association with pathos, but also due to the popular belief that if this *rāgam* is to be played in the morning, the musician will be deprived of his food for the day (Sambamurthy 1952:10).

[31] In recent years, a Telugu composition in *Rēvati rāgam* by Annamacharya (b.1424), *Nānāti Baduku*, has been popular at marriage ceremonies. It may serve as a good example of the weakening sense of the *rāgam-rasa* relationship. While *Rēvati rāgam* has *soham rasa* and the text of this particular composition related to the uncertainty of life, the catchy melody has given the composition its current popularity at marriage ceremonies.

[32] These *rāgam*-s are known to portray only a single *rasa*, whereas others like *Tōḍi*, *Kalyāṇi* and *Sankarābharanam* have potentials for a variety of *rasa*-s including *sōham rasa*, depending on the way they are rendered. Some musicians, however, claim that no *rāgam*-s should be excluded on the ground that they were all created and given by the god (interview with Sikkal Natarajasundaram Pillai, 1987).

[33] Although Sambamurthy reported that the *geṭṭimēḷam* was also played by a brass band (1959: 186), I have never witnessed the *geṭṭimēḷam* played by anything but *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble.

[34] The officiating priest always gives a signal first, but he can often not be seen by the musicians because of the people surrounding the marriage dais.

[35] The traditional *kūṟaipoḍavai* is a nine yard red *sari* with a gold border.

[36] Tying a *tāli* around the brideís neck is a very important marriage rite in almost all parts of India except Bengal, although this custom is not mentioned in the Vedas or Sutras (Chatterjee 1978: 243-5, 300-2).

[37] Three knots are tied, the first two by the bridegroom, and the last by his sister.

[39] The *pallavi* employs a single line of text, often set in an unusual and difficult rhythmic cycle as the basis of extensive improvisation. The *rakti mēḷam* is part of a repertoire associated with temple festivals and exclusive to *Periya Mēḷam* musicians. It uses the set rhythmic formula (*tin taka ta dit tai*) within which numerous melodic and rhythmic variations are played in Misra Chapu talam (3+2+2). Both the *pallavi* and *rakti mēḷam* are forms in which a musicianis technical skills and knowledge for improvisation are effectively tested.

[40] The *āṉandam* in different *rāgam*-s were played until the 1960s, especially the one in *Bhairavi rāgam* (interview with Kodandaram, 1987, and Sivasubramaniam, 1987; also see Sambamurthy 1952:149). The reason for the present popularity of the *āṉandam* in *Kāpi rāgam* is unknown.

[41] The *maṅgaḷam* is a song of salutation, and it is the composition to conclude the performance in Karnatak music. In *Periya Mēḷam* music, the *maṅgaḷam* is sometimes omitted. Whether or not the *maṅgaḷam* is performed, musicians play a short improvisation on *Madyamāvati rāgam* to end their performance.

[42] Ten thousand rupees was an enormous sum of money, considering that the average monthly income for the family of a middle class government employee in the city of Madras was a mere Rs. 163.9 in the mid-1940s (*Report on an Enquiry into the Family Budgets of Middle Class Employees of the Central Government* 1949: 979) Rajarattinam Pillai (1898-1956) dominated the world of *nāgasvaram* music in the first half of the twentieth century. His participation at highly publicized marriage ceremonies by political figures, business tycoons, and cultural dignitaries made him even more popular among those who aspired to move upwards socially. Rajarattinam Pillai was so popular, it is often said, that some families decided the date of marriage ceremony only after securing his consent to perform (Terada 2000).

[43] Although the official ban on the temple dance was implemented in 1947 in Madras Presidency (Madras Devadasi Prevention of Dedication Act of 1947), the effect of the anti-Nautch movement which began in the late nineteenth century started to be felt much earlier. For the detailed analysis of anti-Nautch movement and the transformation of Nautch into Bharata Natyam, see Srinivasan (1985), Allen (1997) and Natarajan (1997).

[44] Well-known *nāgasvaram* musicians expect the interested party to visit them, refusing to make a visit themselves.

[46] When a *Periya Mēḷam* musician sponsors a marriage ceremony for his daughter, fees are often not fixed because musicians regard their participation as a courtesy to the hosts who are often their relatives.

[47] A similar incident has been reported about a musician who insisted on getting paid one rupee more than his rivals for his radio programs (Luthra 1986: 300).

[48] *Isai Vēḷāḷar*-s are the musicians most closely identified with *Periya Mēḷam* among the many different caste groups associated with it. They are the ritual music specialists prominent in central districts of Tamil Nadu, and particularly concentrated in Tanjavur district.

[49] The reasons for migration vary from assuming an appointment at the Government College of Music as an instructor or at temples in town as *dēvastāṉa vittuvāṉ*-s, to providing educational opportunities for their offspring.

[50] Brahman women in the past learned a number of these marriage songs from their childhood (Thurston 1909, vol.1: 290). The number of its practitioners is much smaller today, and the size of the repertoire is diminishing as well with fewer songs actually sung during the ceremony.

[51] The use of film songs during the marriage ceremony and the reaction of a *nāgasvaram* musician are depicted as an example of changing times in a short fiction (Saranya 1988).

[52] The hiring of a western-style ensemble for weddings and other social occasions is common in other parts of India (Henry 1988: 218; Booth 1990, 1996/97).

[53] When a *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble is engaged for Muslim or Christian weddings, it only provides welcoming music prior to the ceremony for arriving guests as a 'Band' does.

[54] Disc recordings of marriage songs were made as early as the 1930s. For example, a set of four records of *nalaṅgu* and *ūñjal* songs with *nāgasvaram* accompaniment were released in 1936 from Hutchins & Company. However, these early recordings were presented as gifts to the newlyweds, rather than with the intent to replace the *Periya Mēḷam* ensemble (*The Hindu*, October 24, 1935; April 30, 1936).

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