

Research Article

## The Linguistic Reluctance of Karnatik Music: From Tamil to Madras Tamil

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### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the linguistic dynamics of Karnatik music by tracing the development and acceptance of high-prestige dialect varieties of Tamil as a major compositional language of Karnatik music and contrasts it with the recent effort to use Madras Tamil to compose in the Karnatik style in *Chennai Poromboke Paadal*, a music video. The paper using Juri Lotman's semiotic theories discusses the general reluctance of the cultural framework of this musical tradition to accept languages or their varieties other than its four major compositional languages into its system. This, the paper would demonstrate through analysis of online discussions and the general audience response to the use of Madras Tamil dialect in *Poromboke paadal*.

**Keywords:** Karnatak Music, Linguistic, High-Prestige, Semiosphere, Standardization, Tamil

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### INTRODUCTION

In today's performance scenario, Karnatik music<sup>1</sup> has come to embrace Tamil as one of its most commonly accepted compositional languages – a privilege that it holds only next to Sanskrit, Telugu and seldom Kannada. Although Tamil is one of the earliest and most significant contributors to the development of the Indian classical music system, attaining this stature in the performance scenario which was largely dominated by Telugu and Sanskrit has been a result of several ideological and cultural movements. Following

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<sup>1</sup>Karnatik music or South Indian Classical music is an aesthetic and scientific genre of Indian music. See Sambamoorthy (1960)

the Tamil *Isai* movement in the 1940s and the resulting cultural discords it caused, Tamil compositions regained their rightful place in the Karnatik music performance scene with efforts made to compose new Tamil compositions and to set to music centuries old Tamil poems, hymns and verses.

Even while this remains the case, the current paper looks at how a recent effort to bring Madras Tamil—a particular low – prestige variety of Tamil dialect – into Karnatik music through a socially motivated music video *Poromboke Paadal*, has been received with a mixed response, largely negative, from the traditionalist *rasikas* or connoisseurs of Karnatik music. This opens up the debate at two levels, namely, (1) how the purer and high – prestige varieties of a few languages have been comfortably placed in the elite pedestal of Karnatik music and (2) how the cultural meaning making of music changes when a low-prestige variety of the same language is used in its lyrics.

Apart from discussing the aforementioned linguistic revolution in detail, the paper using theories of language variation from linguistics and Juri Lotman’s semiotic and cultural theories to analyze the structural characteristics of *Poromboke paadal* and a few of the comments and discussions it has sparked in the internet forums to come to its conclusions. The research discusses the cultural favoritism held by the high – prestige language varieties and how culture, tradition and community resist incoming language “invasions” (Lotman, 1992) which are looked upon as threats to its internal stability. This reluctance towards linguistic inclusion, this study finds as a consistent pattern, that it already followed in the case of Tamil, which has now risen in its musical prestige value.

### **Standardization of Language and Cultural Identity**

Language and culture are deeply intertwined and several social scientists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Umberto Eco, Juri Lotman and Levi Strauss, among others, have discussed about how “language shapes culture” (Lotman, 1992). Similarly, scholars like Edward Said, Roland Barthes and others have studied the relationship between music, identity and culture. For instance, Eero Tarasti says that in music one searches for “values, nothingness, meaning...spirituality, truth, logic” and identity (Tarasti, 2012). Several studies have looked at how music shapes national and cultural identity. In Indian context alone, Subramanian (1999); Asthana (2003) and Bhakle (2011), among others, have analyzed the role of Indian classical music in developing a pan Indian-national identity. But ethno-musicological studies that deal with the dynamics of language and music are comparatively less in number. Studies such as Erol (2015) and Wang (2016), among others, deal with how the choice of dialects in pop – music influences the cultural

identity of the music. Touhy (2003) is an interesting study analyzes how consensus on the language chosen for singing the traditional *Hua'er* songs in China were institutionalized through the cultural myth that these were “songs coming from the heaven that were sung in Chinese”. This can be compared to the myths of the quasi – devotional Karnatik music where several myths deal with the divine origin of the musical form (Sathyanarayana, 1987).

It is important for the present study to describe the dynamics of standard language in the creation of identity. Rajagopalan (2001) says in his essay that a linguistic identity is “forged out of an exclusionary gesture” constructed on the “symbolic presence of the Other for its permanence” (Ibid.). The cultural identity of a language or an art form is arrived at through several such identity negotiations where cultural units are defined by the existence of “another one which is opposed of it” (Eco, 1976) and valuing it on the basis of the other. This identity dynamics is brought about through the negotiation between the “Standard and the non – standard” varieties which according to Nikolas Coupland is “an issue for hearers as well as for speakers, singers, rappers” as identity emerges dialogically and inter-discursively” (Coupland, 2009).

Standardization in language limits vernacular varieties by preferring the prestige dialects and attributing superior status to the speakers of these dialects (Milroy, 2001). This lets language and speech act as a tool “with which the higher social class can maintain the gap between itself and the rest of the society” (Chambers, 1995). Consequently, Grondelaers *et al.* (2011) argue that a language retains its standard as a high prestige variant through social consensus where “one variety is more prestigious, more appropriate for formal interaction, and more beautiful than the others.” (Grondelaers *et al.*, 2011).

### **The ‘Standardized’ Languages of Karnatik Music**

Till the 1940s, the Karnatik concert milieu consisted largely of Telugu and Sanskrit compositions (Gangatharan, 2007). These were the compositions of saint composers from the late seventeenth century to the mid – eighteenth-century. Prominent among them are the compositions of the musical trinity also known as the Tiruvarur trinity<sup>2</sup> namely, Thyagaraja, Muddusamy Dikshitar and Shyama Sastri (Raghavan, 2007; Krishna, 2015). Compositions in Tamil language were reserved for miscellaneous concert items mainly because musically rich compositions in Tamil were very few in number

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<sup>2</sup>All of the trinity hails from Tiruvarur, Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu and their compositions are venerated as the ideal compositions of supreme aesthetic quality. See Krishna (2015)

(Gangatharan, 2002; Subramanian, 2004) and “the language itself was considered unsuitable for Carnatic music” (Sriram, 2010).

With the close association between Karnatik music and the Hindu religion (Weidman 2006), Sanskrit, the chief language of Hindu texts shared its religious and divine status with Karnatik music too, where several Sanskrit texts on music, being associated with myths of divine origins (Sambamoorthy, 1960; Satyanarayana, 1987). Apart from compositions of composers like Mudduswamy Dikshitar and Narayana Theertha being largely in Sanskrit, the dominance of Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada in Karnatik concerts can also be extrapolated to the *Bhakthi* movement which blossomed between the fourteenth and seventeenth Centuries. The *Bhakthi* movement through *Bhajana Sampradaya* “congregational singing of the divine name and the compositions of Saint – composers” (Sambamoorthy, 2006) utilized Indian Classical music as the vehicle to propagate its religious philosophy.

Telugu which has been hailed by musicians and composers are the most beautiful and musically sweet sounding language (Krishna, 2015) in due course became the ideal language for Karnatik music with even Tamil composers writing in Telugu. Though all three of the musical trinity were born in Tamil Nadu and were well versed with the language (Krishna, 2015), the number of their compositions in Tamil is just a handful. This could be attributed to the fact that Telugu enjoyed the privileged status of being the “state language of Thanjavur for over 300 years” (Krishna, 2015). While Thyagaraja was born into a Telugu family in Tanjavur, he also found his musical inspiration in the saint – composer Bhadrachala Ramadas (Sambamoorthy, 1960) who was a prolific Telugu composer. Thus, there is not much surprise in Thyagaraja’s voluminous body of Telugu compositions. Interestingly, as would be seen in the later parts of the paper, this was also one of the arguments raised by the pro – tamil advocates of the Tamil Isai movement who while accepting the supremacy of Thyagaraja’s musical brilliance argued “Thyagaraja composed in his mother tongue, should not the Tamilian be doing so too?” (Krishna, 2015).

### **The Emergence and Acceptance of Tamil in Karnatik Concerts**

Both culturally and commercially, Karnatik music has its roots spread deep in Tamil Nadu as the language and its culture has contributed much to its aesthetic development and in its commercial sustenance with Tamil Nadu being the cultural centre of Karnatik music where the art and its artistes thrived due to the large number of sabhas and organizations (Ghosh, 2012). With the establishment of the Madras Music Academy in 1928 (Ghosh, 2012; Gangatharan, 2002) and with several music organizations holding music conferences and concert series that featured pioneering musicians perform in

the traditional Karnatik formats, often eschewing Tamil compositions, the advocates of Tamil identity demanded for an organized approach to make sure Tamil music was featured in Karnatic concerts (Terada, 2008; Subramanian, 2004). They felt that with the performing artistes and the audience being speakers of Tamil, the dominance of other languages in concerts meant that their mother tongue did not get its due respect in Karnatik concerts (Subramaniam, 2007; Gangatharan, 2002). They argued that concerts became “meaningless intellectual exercises which did not touch the minds of the audience” (Gangatharan, 2002) as both the artistes and the audience were involved in the musical dialogue without proper understanding of the lyrics. This echoes with the views of Subrahmnaya Bharathi, the revolutionary Tamil poet and nationalist leader of the freedom struggle who in 1910 said:

The musician goes on singing in a tongue unintelligible to both the performer and the listeners, thereby making the music a mockery of *manodharmasangita*<sup>3</sup>. This must be done away with, otherwise the people of this nation (Tamil speakers) would lose imaginative power and intuitive skill for generating new melody types and improvisational techniques.” (Subrahmanya Bharathi quoted in Gangatharan, 2002)

While for Bharathi, language was the chief tool to instill patriotism in the audience, for the advocates of Tamil music, it was purely a matter of one language over the other (Krishna, 2015). This slowly led to the Tamil Isai movement or the Tamil music movement which took the Karnatik field by an ideological storm.

The demand to revive Tamil songs was also backed by the history of the rich and voluminous contribution of Tamil to the science and aesthetics of music (Terada, 2008). Some proponents of the Tamil Isai movement argued that South Indian classical music was “originally Tamil Isai or Tamil classical music” (Subramanian, 2004) which was *sanskritized* and appropriated by the Aryans. As Gangatharan (2002) says, several scholars “believed that the basis of modern Carnatic music was mainly corrupted by Aryans to make it appear as if it did not correspond to the Tamil musical system” (ibid.). According to Krishna (2015), to support this theory, these scholars enlisted several musical references from *Silappathigaram*— a Tamil literary work dating back to sixth century (Gangatharan, 2002) - that they claimed to be corresponding to later Sanskrit treatises on music (Krishna, 2015). Though such claims were only speculative – as Indian classical music developed simultaneously in North and South and “expecting a clear separation between Tamil and Sanskrit music is not sensible” (Krishna, 2015) – the existence of several ancient religious musical texts such as the Thevaram and Tiruppugazh added strength to these arguments (Gangatharan, 2002).

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<sup>3</sup>Melodic and rhythmic improvisational aspects of Karnatik music

With this background, “the non-brahmin higher castes, led by prominent chettiers and mudaliars began the Tamil Isai movement” (Krishna, 2015) in the 1930s aimed at “creating a parallel ‘classical identity’ for Karnatik music that was based on Tamil compositions” (Krishna, 2015). Led by the renowned social figure C. Rajagopalachari and Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiyar who founded the Annamalai University, the Tamil Isai movement began as academic effort to boost research in Tamil musicology (Sriram, 2010). Annamalai University had already been doing a sizable work towards promoting musical research in the areas of Tamil religious texts apart from organizing conferences on Tamil panns<sup>4</sup> and the aesthetics of music and dance as described in *Silappathigaram* and other *Sangam* period literature (Subramanian, 2004). The academic perspective was replaced by an action oriented ideology with the Tamil Isai conference of August 1941 which called for immediate changes in the Karnatik scene to give due prominence to Tamil language and Tamil music. The conference had prominent Karnatik musicians presenting Karnatik music concerts in Tamil and discourses on “the greatness of Tamil Music and its songs” (Sriram, 2010). The conference also passed few significant resolutions that included demands to sabhas and All India Radio to make sure that the musicians included a majority of Tamil compositions in their concerts and fewer “compositions in other languages” (Sriram, 2010).

Interestingly, the movement also garnered political momentum through the ongoing political/ ideological movement often referred to as the Tamil Renaissance/ Self-respect movement (Krishna 2015; Terada, 2008). Social leaders who subscribed to the Dravidian political ideology found fault with the supposedly Brahmin dominated Karnatik music in side lining non-brahmin artistes and Tamil music. They are also pitted the languages to suit their ideological positions, namely, the dominant Aryan Sanskrit, the brahminic Telugu and the non-aryan and Dravidian Tamil (Gangatharan, 2002). However, this attempt to politicize the cultural dialogue of Tamil Isai movement ended prematurely as the movement “began to grow with the participation of many Brahmin scholars” (Krishna, 2015).

One of the major challenges faced by the Tamil Isai proponents according to Sriram (2010), was “the absence of a large repertoire of Tamil songs with authentic notations” (Sriram, 2010) as the works of the Tamil composers of the earlier centuries “survived as lyrics sans music” (Ibid.). This aspect was one of the chief defending arguments for the traditionalist musicians in their disagreement to accept the resolutions of the Tamil Isai Conference. They also felt that the song selection was ultimately the freedom of the

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<sup>4</sup>Pann is comparable to raga or a melodic scale. Several ancient Tamil treatises mention in detail about such Panns which often pre-date the ragas. See Sambamoorthy (1960)

performer and such enforcements deterred the musicians from giving their intellectual best in concerts (Krishna, 2015). The Music academy for instance defended the existing format saying that music should not be confined to linguistic boundaries with it going ahead to assert in their journal that “it should be the aim of all musicians and lovers of music to preserve and maintain the highest standard of classical Carnatic music and that no consideration of language should be imported so as to lower or impair that standard” (Music Academy Journal, 1941).

In 1943, Annamalai Chettiyar, in these times of ideological turbulence in the music scene, went ahead with the founding of Tamil Isai Sangam, an organization dedicated to promote and propagate Tamil compositions (Gangatharan, 2002; Subramanian, 2002; Sriram 2010). The sangam “held its own music conference parallel to those of the Music Academy and the Indian Fine Arts society” (Sriram, 2010) featuring big names of the music field such as M. S. Subbalakshmi, G. N. Balasubramaniam and Madurai Mani Iyer, among others. In due course of time, ideological differences between the traditionalist sabhas and the Tamil Isaisangam settled down leading to negotiations from both sides on relaxing their rigid language norms (Krishna, 2015). The establishment of the Tamil Isai Sangam remains one of the biggest landmarks of the Tamil Isai movement.

## DISCUSSION

This cultural dialogue can be compared to the boundaries of Semiosphere<sup>5</sup> as defined by Juri Lotman in his Semiosphere model of Semiotics. Lotman (1992) describes boundaries as the “outer limit” of a sub-culture. Any activity that happens at the periphery of the boundary, especially elements from across the boundary permeating the periphery, is seen as an “invasion that affects the world-view” (ibid.) of that particular cultural semiosphere. Anything within the boundary is perceived as “cultured and safe” and anything from beyond the boundary is perceived as “alien and as a threat” to the stability of the culture. The linguistic revolution of the 1940s in Karnatik scene can be compared to “rebellion that arises when two methods of encoding are at conflict” (Lotman, 1992).

Incidentally, Lotman also describes the stages in which a new text that comes from outside is received into a cultural semiosphere. In the first stage he says, imported texts that “hold a high position in the scale of values” are considered as texts of “divine origins” (Lotman, 1992). He further says, “already existing texts in one’s own language, and that language itself” are considered of lower value “being classed as untrue, coarse and uncultured” (Ibid).

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<sup>5</sup>Juri Lotman proposed the concept of Semiosphere which he defined as the whole semiotic space of the culture in question. See Lotman (2012)

Thus, traditional norms that have existed for years that safeguarded the culture from “invasion” of external elements are disturbed even when a culturally significant language, which also happens to be the mother tongue of most of the traditionalist musicians threaten to intrude into the system thus breaking the boundary. Though belonging to the Karnatik system, Tamil was looked down upon because it was valued inferior in comparison to the incoming Sanskrit and Telugu, which could also be due to the lesser number of serious art music compositions in the given language. In the last stage Lotman says that the “receiving culture” now transforms into “a transmitting culture” where it starts producing new texts, much like how new kritis in Tamil came to be composed to suit the requirement following the Tamil Isai movement. As Sriram (2010) says, several composers such as Papanasam Sivan, Dandapani Desikar, Harikeshanallur Muthaiah Bhagavathar and Periyasamy Thooran, among others, started composing in Tamil which was soon absorbed into the mainstream classical identity.

Also it can be seen that in the course of Tamil being accepted as a standard Karnatik language fit for containing its classicism, it resulted in an inclusive linguistic de-standardisation. The rigid norms of high – prestige standard language choices gave way to include Tamil albeit in its high – prestige varieties.

### **Poromboke Paadal: A Structural Analysis**

In 2017, *Poromboke Paadala* Karnatik music video, was released as a Youtube single as a part of a larger campaign to address the environmental hazard caused by the “rampant flyash pollution” (Jayaraman, 2017) of the Thermal Power plant situated in the heart of Ennore creek, a wetland and an eco-sensitive area in Chennai. The music video is unique in several ways. It featured a song set to music in simple Karnatik style by renowned Karnatik musician R.K. Sriramkumar and featured T.M. Krishna, yet another acclaimed Karnatik musician rendering the same. While even the visuals of this video does not abide by the general pattern of visualizing Karnatik music, this study would focus only on the linguistic, musical and structural characteristics of the song.

Musically, the song is composed as a *ragamalika* or as a string of multiple *ragas* featuring traditional Karnatik ragas and is performed with traditional Karnatik accompanying instruments, namely the violin, the *mridangam* and the *kanjira*. The song is also interspersed with *swara* interludes that follow a traditional structure with them gliding from one raga to another smoothly marking high musical aesthetics. There is no ambiguity regarding the Karnatik identity of the song if analyzed purely based on its musical merit.

Whereas, the lyrics are written in Madras Tamil, a low – prestige variety of Tamil, and are marked by the conspicuous absence of the high – prestige or “pure” Tamil that as discussed earlier is the accepted standard Tamil seen in Karnatik compositions. According to Krishna, “This is the first time a Karnatik song has been sung in Madras Tamil, and

the first one to deal with a contemporary local environmental issue” (Jayaraman, 2017). He further says in an interview, “there is only one kind of Tamil in Carnatic music now. There are so many kinds of Tamil spoken, which can actually be used to deliver Carnatic music” (Krishna, 2016). While being apprehensive about how the traditionalist rasikas of Karnatik music would respond to this video, (Perumal Murugan, 2019) renowned Tamil writer says in a newspaper review, “And to add to it, he employs slangs such as ‘*vadasuduran*’ (spins yarns), challenging the orthodox view that the Chennai Tamil dialect is demeaning” (Murugan, 2017). This is also echoed by film critic Baradwaj Rangan, who says, “Kaber Vasuki’s lyrics reach for slang spoken by the common man. Imagine Eminem’s words set to a Chopin nocturne... a Carnatic raga and lyrics from the street-side. It mixes an art traditionally associated with one class of society with language typically associated with another, and says this is no time for barriers.” (Rangan, 2017).

The lyrics at the discourse level depart from the traditional norms of kritis which are either devotional paeans on Hindu deities, describing a religious philosophy or structured as a patriotic song. Here the lyric pronounced by its verbal wordplay function as a sarcastic criticism of the government in its inefficient handling of environmental issues. As Singh *et al.* (2017) say, “these lines and the clever wordplay by Kaber Vasuki in the now viral song on Ennore, Chennai Poromboke Paadal, capture the veracity of the present model of growth in India”.

The lyrics are characterized by idioms and usages such as “*vadasuduvan*” (spins yarns), “*vettisakku*” (lame excuses or empty words) that are specific to the colloquial Tamil dialect. The linguistic characteristics of the lyrics include language mixing, a trait of Chennai Tamil as noted by Nakassis (2010) in his study of Chennai slang as a youth identity marker. English words such as “Concrete building” find their way into the lyrics. An entire linguistic analysis is beyond the scope the current paper.

The titling of *Poromboke Paadal* is also culturally provocative. While *Paadal* means song, *Poromboke* has several connotations. While the intended meaning of the word Poromboke is “shared community lands such as water bodies, graze lands and the like that are not assessed for tax-purposes” (Jayaraman, 2017), it in the Madras dialect is a “pejorative used to describe worthless people” (Ibid.). Thus, at several semiotic levels the quasi-devotional Karnatik identity is stripped and replaced by culturally provocative signs.

### **Analyses of the Responses in Social Media**

The responses to *Poromboke Paadal* discussed below are non-exhaustive as an analysis of the whole volume of comments and discussions is beyond the scope of the current

paper. The analyzed comments were selected randomly from the following pages: (1) The comments under the Youtube video page of *Poromboke Paadal*, (2) Comments under T.M. Krishna's Facebook page under the post of *Poromboke Paadal* and (3) Discussions from the website [www.rasikas.org](http://www.rasikas.org)<sup>6</sup>

The only criteria for the selection of the comments or discussions were that they mention either about the linguistic or social context of the music video; that they are not personal attacks on the musician or on the video; and that they are not commentaries on the political position of *Poromboke paadal*.

Primarily, there are several positive comments on the *Porombokepaadal* video which says among other things, "Carnatic revolution", "about time carnatic music like other forms (of) art, be used to comment on modern society and government", "hats off to the team. Genuine music is one of the most effective tool for changing people's mind...eyes got filled with tears", and "awesome on the loop!! Perfect way to save carnatic music from extinction by making it for masses". Of these positive comments, only very few depict the listeners extending solidarity with the use of Madras Tamil in the video. Some of them include, "Amazing. I don't understand the language but I am totally in love with the song", "Whatever the slang is, whether it matches the raga or not, it surely communicates the concept. Beautiful play with words by the lyricist", and "Love it. The combination of the colloquial Thamizh within classical music and the use of *Poromboke* in all its iteration and political message of saving wetlands – gives me chills. Don't stop."

While there are hundreds of negative comments, a small section of them would be listed here that are pertaining to the subject of discussion. A comment, "*sindhu bhairavi thanni thottipa adalyeanonina ivikkuvarugirathu*" (this reminds me of the song "Thannithotti" from the film *Sindhubhairavi*) draws parallels between *Poromboke paadal* and a song from the film *Sindhubhairvai* which features an inebriated Karnatik musician singing in low-prestige Madras Tamil). In the context of the use of the word *Poromboke* in the song and its derogatory cultural connotation, a face book user who is also a renowned Karnatik musician says, "It is always convenient to show a words meaning from a dictionary. But the real usage now is more important than which existed years ago. Lot of bad words used now also have some different meaning now. Needless to say that in a few years' time bad words in tamil will creep in Carnatic music by this mafia group". Some other comments on the language include, "Somebody sings a song in Madras Tamizh, nice kAmbodhi, nice Anandabhairavi...Job well done. Carnatic Music reached

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<sup>6</sup>Rasikas.org is an online forum dedicated for discussions on Karnatik music and reviewing recent concerts.

common man on the street. Applause. That is it?"; and "Madras thamizh with divine Carnatic music. Pathetic." Yet another user in *rasikas.org* says, "and he is singing in Madras Tamizh to us – the CM (Carnatic music) audience – so we can be sensitized about this?" A final comment which can summarize the issue being discussed in the paper goes, "He (T.M. Krishna) need not offend the sentiments of 'traditionalists' and I feel that if he sticks to the venerated traditions of Carnatic classical music and its stalwarts of the past, he will get unanimous support from all lovers of CM all over the world and raise a huge sum for his 'philanthropic' and 'social issues'."

## DISCUSSION

Primarily, Krishna's statement that there has only been one Tamil in Karnatik music is debatable. While it is clear that he mentions that there are only high – prestige varieties of Tamil in the Karnatik scene today, it can be said that these high – prestige variants too are diverse. For instance, it can be argued that compositions across centuries have used several varieties of Tamil with the Tamil used in a *Tevaram*<sup>7</sup> by a Saint – composer of the seventh century being entirely contrasting to the Tamil used by composers like Arunachalakavi, among others, who have used simpler varieties of Tamil that is easy for the layman to understand. There are also stylistic variations, an example for which is the compositional form called *Kavadi Chindu* or *Killikkani* (Sambamoorthy 1960). The music for *Kavadichindu* songs are simpler when compared to *kritis* or larger compositions and are derived from common folk tunes (Mahalakshmi, 2012). This also reflects in the simpler and colloquial Tamil (*ibid*) in such compositional forms though none of them belong to any low-prestige dialect. Interestingly, the compositional variety called *Padams* which are revered for the complex musicality often have explicit symbolic references to emotions such as lust and sexual desire in their lyrics, and are looked down upon for their lyrical "impurity" and are "not generally sung in Temple concerts" (Krishna, 2015). Thus, though it can be said that the chances of encountering low – prestige varieties of Tamil in Karnatik compositions are very thin, there still are myriad variations of Tamil within Karnatik music.

While this remains the case, the analysis of the social media interactions of the *rasikas* clearly depicts the linguistic dilemma that the music fraternity faces. At one hand, like Subrahmanya Bharathi who used Karnatik music to address social issues, it wishes to appreciate the effort of using Karnatik music to address environmental issues as is evident from the last comment discussed in the previous section. On the other hand, the extreme reactions by members of the music fraternity quoted in the above sections

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<sup>7</sup>Thevaram is part of ancient Saiva devotional literature called Tirumurai. See Krishna (2015)

depict the linguistic insecurity experienced by the “cultured high prestige speakers” who are threatened by the combination of Karnatik music with coarse and uncultured Tamil slang and the strange rhetoric of the lyrics. This is especially evident in the comment which has the *rasika* saying “he is singing in Madras Tamizh to us – the CM (Carnatic music) audience – so we can be sensitized about this”. This comment clearly pits the Madras Tamil speakers as ‘they’ or the ‘Other’ and the Karnatik music *rasikas* as ‘us’.

According to Grondelaers *et al.* (2001), the four criteria for a language to attain standardness are: (1) ‘Speaker prestige’, where “standard dialect speakers are considered superior to the non-standard dialect speakers” (Ibid); (2) ‘Accent Status’, where “not only the speakers of a specific variety which can be accorded prestige, but also the variety *itself*”; (3) ‘Beauty of the language’, where in the standard dialect is perceived as beautiful compared to the non standard dialect thus situating the standard language as ideal for cultural dialogues, and; (4) ‘Communal consent’ where the community comes to a gradual consensus on the standardness of a dialect. If this is compared to the Tamil Isai movement, it can be inferred that even though Tamil is known for its antiquity and beauty (Gangatharan, 2002), Tamil was considered a non – standard language for Karnatik music also because Telugu was considered to be an ideal and beautiful language choice for Karnatik Music (Krishna, 2015). Tamil in due course of time attained all the four requirements for being considered a standard language.

Whereas, in Poramboke Paadal, the initial skepticism of the text producers themselves on how the Madras Tamil song would be accepted (Murugan, 2017) and the analyzed negative reactions from the *rasikas* could be related to the same points. Madras Tamil being a non-prestige dialect is at present not considered standard enough for the cultural dialogue involving a classical art form because its native speakers are considered socially inferior to the standard dialect speakers (Nakassis, 2010); the dialect itself holds a low ‘Accent status’ with no history of literary works composed in the language; the language sounds coarse, non – cultured and unaesthetic thus lacking the ‘beauty standards’ and also, the dialect does not hold a ‘Communal consent’. The culture shock as mentioned earlier is looked upon as an invasion to the cultural semiosphere that holds Karnatik music thus resulting in a “rebellion” due to the conflict between the two systems of encoding, one the incoming new code and two, the existing traditional code.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion clearly shows the presence of a linguistic dilemma and a cultural reluctance to accept linguistic plurality in classical music. This reluctance is not a specific prejudice directed only towards the ‘low – prestige Tamil’. It shows up every time a

new change threatens the established rigid conventions of a culture. When such reluctance came up during the Tamil Isai movement, Tamil was standardized and absorbed into the high-prestige Karnatik languages. This is akin to Milroy's (1985) description, "Standardisation is motivated in the first place by various social, political and commercial needs and is pro-moted in various ways".

Although such an attainment of standardness does not seem to be an imminent possibility for the Madras Tamil dialect considering its low – prestige level and related identity associations. This improbability can also be associated to the classical status of Karnatik music and its culturally coded musical grammar which limits within its semiosphere, the free movement of even the musically rich *Padams* due to their suggestive lyrics. Nevertheless, the sudden culture shock brought about by its inclusion is evident from the responses of the *rasikas* thus letting the culture exhibit its structural conflict.

The analysis and discussion are not exhaustive and are only segments that can lead to closure. While the researcher is wary of the fact that discussions following the introduction of a culture shock in an existing system could result in extreme responses (Lotman, 1992) and that such dialogues and rebelling voices alone would evolve into a possible restructuring of the system, the responses that has been analyzed nevertheless showcase the immediate reactions of the traditionalist *rasikas*. A detailed analysis of the whole volume of responses coupled with in-depth interviews with *rasikas* and musicians can shed more light into this subject. Also, it would be interesting to study how variations in the language work at individual levels and if community membership/ identity factors contribute to code-switching at micro levels.

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