

Diasporas and Interculturalism in Asian Performing Arts

Translating traditions

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6 *Arangetrams* and manufacturing identity

The changing role of a bharata natyam dancer's solo debut in the context of the diaspora

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Introduction

In November 1999, I attended a free performance of the South Indian dance style, bharata natyam.¹ The performance was hosted in the Logan Hall – a venue with the capacity to seat over a thousand people, situated in Bloomsbury in the heart of London. As each audience member entered the hall, we were handed a glossy brochure with photographs of the dancer on the front and back covers. Inside was the programme for the performance, along with letters of congratulation, credits, information giving the context of the performance and a note of thanks from the dancer. The performance lasted a couple of hours with a short interval. When it ended and the 700-odd audience members trooped out of the hall, we were each handed a wrapped package of food – comprising a full South Indian meal. The performance in question was the *arangetram* of a 15-year-old girl, just about to go into upper school.

The ninth-century Tamil verse epic, the Cilappatikaram,² contains a description of another *arangetram*. In a section of the poem entitled the '*Arangerrukatai*' – or the 'story of the *arangetram*', the young dancer Matavi is described giving her first performance before the king. She is 12 years old and has trained for seven years. In return for her performance the king presents her with a wreath and 8,000 gold coins. With this ceremonial performance, she officially becomes a fully fledged dancer. The story is fictional – but it is fair to assume that it has some basis in fact.

What is an *arangetram*? The simplest explanation, and the one most commonly found in the brochures of the style distributed at our London show, is that it is a 'solo debut performance'. As the brochures will generally go on to say, '*arangetram*' is a term derived from two Tamil words '*arangam*' and '*erru*' to be translated literally as 'the ascent of the stage'. A popular dictionary of modern Tamil defines '*arangetram*' as 'a première or debut' or as 'presenting one's work before a learned assembly'.³ It is a term most

commonly used for a *bharata natyam* dancer's debut, though its use is not restricted to this dance tradition.⁴

So far as this definition applies then, the two performances described above are parallel events, except that one occurred in the ninth century and the other in the twentieth. But what did, and what does, such a debut really entail? Is there a genuine link between one *arangetram* performed by a dancer in a small town in medieval South India and another by a dancer in one of the world's largest cities over a thousand years later?

Cogently, why is the performance of an *arangetram* today – as hinted at in the first paragraph – such a very costly business? While the cost of putting on the occasion described was not widely advertised, it is unlikely to have been less than a sum most people earn in a year. Furthermore, for *arangetrams*, this expenditure is normally met entirely by the family, without support from either governmental or commercial sponsorship.⁵ As first performances, they are customarily free, so there is no cost recouped through ticket sales. Despite this, the *arangetram* is one of the most common forms of South Asian dance performance to be found in Britain today. What is it that makes people prepared to spend such large sums of money on presenting these performances? Or, more bluntly, what leads a fairly average middle-class family to spend a good proportion of their annual income on a dance performance by a teenager?

These questions, both about the background and about the present extravagance of such performances, are some of those that I asked myself while preparing for my own *arangetram* in August 1999. They are some of the questions that I have continued to ask as a researcher looking at South Asian dance forms in Britain, and they are the questions that this chapter sets out to explore. What does an *arangetram* as performed in Britain today really signify? What can its performance tell us about the wider picture of South Asian dance and culture in Britain?⁶

Bharata natyam and the historical context of the *arangetram*

Bharata natyam, the dance style with which the *arangetram* is now most commonly associated, has only recently emerged as 'bharata natyam' in the forms and with the name we know today. Until the mid-1930s, the dance from which *bharata natyam* developed was known variously as *sadir*, *chinna melam*, *dasi attam* and *nautch*. Since at least the seventh century, as attested to by various religious and secular texts, inscriptional records and travellers' accounts, dancers of one kind or another have been associated with courts and temples in South India.⁷ In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the organization of such dancers was powerfully influenced by the political climate which intensified the relationship between temple and court, and led to the development of the *devadasi* as commonly understood today – a temple woman characterized by 'skill in

dance and a hereditary right to support and temple privileges' (Orr 2000: 177).⁸ It is this temple woman and her art that stands as the direct antecedent to today's *bharata natyam* practitioner.

In order to qualify as such a temple woman, it was necessary to go through a dedication ritual, which later appears to have assumed many of the elements of a marriage ceremony.⁹ The woman was thereby committed to the god's service or, as became commonly accepted, officially married to the god. This dedication prevented her from getting married in the mundane world, though she was still allowed to have sexual liaisons with men and to have children. Within this tradition, the *arangetram* represented not only the debut performance, but also the culminating ceremony of her dedication into temple service. The *arangetram* was effectively a rite of passage signifying the *dasi*'s cross over from traineeship to professionalism. It also served as an important occasion on which to attract the attention of potential patrons. In this respect, as can be seen from the passage in the *Cilappatikaram*, the nineteenth-century *arangetram* continued to perform a very similar role to that it performed for the court dancer of the ninth century, though in the earlier case, there is nothing to suggest any association with a marriage ritual.

All this changed in the first half of the last century. The *dasīs* and their profession had long been subject to the censure of various parties, including missionaries, social reformers (both British and Indian) and reformist Hindus, all of whom condemned the *devadasi* system as exploitative of both women and children.¹⁰ In the early to mid-twentieth century, these years of opposition emerged in a lobby sufficiently organized to effect a prohibition on their way of life. In 1947, the year that India achieved independence, the 'dedication of *devadasis*' was officially banned in the Madras State, an influential precedent, soon followed elsewhere. Stripped of their means of livelihood, this ban spelt the end for the majority of *devadasis*, and with them, one might have supposed, their dance form and the rituals associated with it.

This was not the case, however. At the same time that the lobby opposing the *devadasis* gained strength, so too did a counter lobby associated with the agitation for Indian independence, which sought to preserve and cherish the indigenous cultural traditions. Initial attempts to preserve the form were made by the likes of E. Krishna Iyer who continued to host performances by *devadasis*, but in 'more respectable venues', like the Madras Music Academy. Such performances failed to take off – and by 1940 most of the dancers from the 'traditional' community of dancers had stopped performing publicly – with the notable exception of Balasaraswati. The performances succeeded in at least one respect however – in terms of inculcating an interest for the dance among the Brahmin middle classes. In 1925, Bala, the last *dasi* to perform publicly, had her *arangetram* in the Kamakshi Amman temple in Kanchipuram. In 1935, Rukmini Devi Arundale, the first Brahmin woman to perform dance publicly, performed

her *arangetram* for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the Theosophical Society.

At the time that Rukmini Devi performed her *arangetram*, she caused quite a scandal in respectable Madras society. Learning the dance form was bad enough, but to give an *arangetram* – a performance still linked to the dedication rites of the *dasi* – was going too far even for families who countenanced their daughters learning the art form.¹¹ Such attitudes shifted in a dramatically short space of time. A fondly cherished hope of Rukmini Devi had been that the dance would one day be performed by children from ‘good families’ and not only by ‘a small clan . . . the usual class of people’.¹² She did not have to wait long. As Matthew Allen points out, by the mid-1940s, ‘the appropriation and domestication of *bharata natyam* by “middle class” dancers was virtually complete’ (Allen 1997: 83). Educated, well-to-do and primarily Brahmin, the situation of the new dancers could hardly have been further removed from their low caste and often impoverished *dasi* counterparts.

Since that time there has been a steady growth of interest in *bharata natyam*, not only across India, but throughout the world. The vast majority of *bharata natyam* dancers fall into the same bracket as the ‘new dancers’ of the 1930s and 1940s. They are middle class, well educated and in a position to be able to afford the substantial fees and accoutrements (as well as the time) to study *bharata natyam*. And, for the majority, dance is not a way of making a living.

The *arangetram* – its contemporary significance

What then does an *arangetram* signify today? If historically the *arangetram* is associated with a graduation to professionalism, with the culmination of a dedication ritual, and with an opportunity to attract patronage, what role does this performance play when the majority of those who perform *arangetrams* do not then go on to make dance their career? Or to put the question another way – the *arangetram* was traditionally intimately bound up with the dancer’s economic status – with her livelihood. When a dancer is not performing for a living what then is the role of a debut?

Arangetram as examination

The most commonly found rationale for the *arangetram* is that it is performed when ‘the Guru decides that the student has achieved the required degree of excellence and knowledge to develop her own dance skills’ (Brochure for a London *arangetram*, 1995). In other words, the *arangetram* marks the transition from the period of being a dancer in training to that of being a performer. This rationale is clearly linked to the explanation for a *dasi*’s *arangetram* in the sense of marking a graduation from trainee to fully

fledged status as a dancer. Performing an *arangetram*, then, continues to state, as it did in the ninth century, that one has reached a certain level of knowledge and competence in dance. As an illustration of how the *arangetram* works as a benchmark of achievement, a number of the senior dance teachers in Chennai (Madras) will not accept students unless they have completed one.

In this context the *arangetram* effectively represents an examination – where the assessors are not specially appointed, but are represented by the audience – an audience that includes, ideally, a number of senior dance practitioners and other bharata natyam savants. Indeed, in order to serve its purpose, as a senior dance teacher in London commented in a recent debate on the subject, the presence of a discerning audience for an *arangetram* is crucial (Chandratheva 1999: 21). When performing to such an audience of connoisseurs, teachers and critics, the danger of ‘failing the performance’ becomes real. The dancer Valli Subbiah interviewed about her *arangetram* from the Chennai-based bharata natyam dance school Kalakshetra felt that had she made a mess of that first performance, she would not have been given a second chance.¹³

Understood in this way, an *arangetram* is a genuinely special performance – a performance that symbolically unites the artistic community in the pursuit of artistic excellence. The guru is publicly acknowledged for all the hard work in training the dancer. The audience acknowledges and judges the dancer critically, but not too harshly, as after all it is a first performance. The dancer performs a first solo *margam* (or full bharata natyam repertoire) – and this can prove a significant boost to his or her confidence as a performer. One young dancer described her *arangetram* as being ‘the most wonderful night’ of her life as she suddenly felt ‘I can do it’. It is for these reasons – to attain a recognizable standard, to proclaim a transition to professionalism, to introduce oneself to the artistic community, and to gain confidence – that the majority of those performing *arangetrams* will claim that they are doing so. It was for these reasons that I felt it important to complete my own *arangetram*.

This brings us some way towards answering the questions posed at the beginning of this discussion. Up to this point it would seem that there is, indeed, an element of continuity between the *arangetrams* of medieval India and twenty-first-century London – in that they are both supposed to mark a rite of passage into professionalism in dance. A very important distinction is that the dancer and her family now foot the bill, without any equivalent to the gold coins in recompense given to the Cilappatikaram’s Matavi. Which brings us back once more to the questions raised at the beginning of the essay: why have these performances become so expensive – and why, given that the alleged passage to ‘professionalism’ no longer ensures economic returns, are so many families prepared to countenance this expense?¹⁴

Arangetram as cultural commodity

The most obvious answer to these questions, of course, is that the *arangetram*, along with all other social occasions from weddings to bar mitzvahs, has become a great opportunity for conspicuous consumption. Any excuse will serve to flaunt success – and the *arangetram* is much more than ‘any excuse’. The six changes of silk costume with matching jewels, the 12-page glossy brochure, the size of the hall, the extravagance of the food provided and the elaborate gifts to those involved in helping with the performance, all proclaim the wealth and well-being of the family involved.¹⁵ Once such a precedent has been set it is difficult to break the mould even if one would rather not spend one’s money in this way, or if one does not have such money to spend in the first place. Musicians have established rates, including a substantial hike for *arangetrams* (despite the fact that the work involved is near identical to that of other performances)¹⁶ and this is not something that can be argued with. In any case, many people would not want to argue with it. As one dance teacher commented, ‘if one person does it at the Logan Hall, they all want to do it there – they want to do it “properly” or not at all’.¹⁷ Such is the commodity value of the *arangetram* that it is interesting to watch the new elaborations develop, much as you might look out for the latest gimmicks on a new TV or washing machine. One *arangetram* I attended featured a huge *rangoli* pattern at the hall entrance made entirely of flower petals. Another had life-size photo images of the dancer to welcome guests, like a bizarre bharata natyam take on the cardboard Konica girls. The bharata natyam dancer Anita Ratnam summed up the commodification trend at a recent conference – ‘my cousin in California asked her daughter “Do you want an *arangetram* or do you want a new car?” ... An *arangetram* has become not just an initiation in to a cultural practice, but a social symbol with a heavy cost attached.’¹⁸

Perhaps, the parallel between an *arangetram* and a car is slightly misleading, as there is culturally far more at issue – the *arangetram* also offering the opportunity for cultural reinforcement, even ‘cultural display’. This is true wherever performed, but gains a particular significance for *arangetrams* of the diaspora.

To understand the full implications of the *arangetram* as a means for ‘cultural display’, it is necessary once again to take a step back and look at the context of the *arangetram*’s ‘re-emergence’. The reinvention of ‘bharata natyam’ from *dasi attam*, as described earlier, was very deliberate. It occurred within the context of an Indian nationalist movement which sought to ‘revive’ Indian high culture and which was, itself, as Matthew Allen points out, ‘grounded substantially in Orientalist thought and Victorian morality’ (Allen 1997: 94). Meduri relates how her dance teachers told a story ‘they were never tired of repeating’ – that the dance form was once performed in the ‘sacred precincts of the temple’, but then the *devadasi* turned ‘corrupt’ (Meduri 1988: 1). The same story, with variations,

was related to me in the course of my training both in India and in Britain. My 'theory' notes from 1990, when I was a student at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (the Institute of Indian Culture) in London record:

Rukmini Devi was an invaluable contributant to the rebirth of Bharata Natyam as an accepted dance form, removing the unpleasant eroticism of *dasi attam*, and like Queen Santala of the eleventh century, showing that dance is a means of expression for all and is a true form of beauty.

The links with an Orientalist vision of the 'good Orient' – 'invariably a classical period somewhere in long gone India' (Said 1995: 99) are clear. The choice of the name 'bharata natyam', however it was made, was certainly no accident. The two Sanskrit words immediately mark a break from the collection of earlier names for the form (none of them Sanskrit). The term Bharata serves both to conjure the image of the mythical sage Bharata, supposed author of the *Natyasastra*, as well as the image of an Indian golden age (notably, a Hindu golden age).¹⁹

The domestication of bharata natyam not only involved the switch from *dasis* to middle-class Brahmins as the chief performers, but also a radical shift in the aesthetic of the form. Costumes and movements were modified to be more palatable to the sensibilities of the Westernized Indian middle and upper classes and, as part of this, the expression of devotion through the portrayal of erotic love was replaced by an agapeic emphasis. In line with this, Siva-Nataraja replaced Kṛṣṇa and Muruga as the chief subject for dance, and was accorded a centrality to the art form that is simply not questioned today. In actual fact, to quote Allen once again, the introduction of Siva as the central deity to the form, a god who incinerates impurity, introduced to bharata natyam a 'modality quite outside that of the *devadasi* dance, a dance preoccupied with cataloguing the infinite shadings of feeling in love' (Allen 1997: 77). These changes arose in line with a broader overhaul of Indian identity at the time of independence, when, as Pallabi Chakravorty points out, the indigenous elite 'embraced the Western ideals of rationalism and historicism to define the incipient Indian state' (Chakravorty 2000). The result was the removal or downplaying of ritual, sensuality and, indeed, anything that jarred against the then Western ideal, and bharata natyam was recreated squarely within this framework.

This redefined dance form became and remains perceived as the form that 'encapsulates the phenomenon and depth of the spiritual and artistic heritage of India' (London *arangetram* brochure, 1995). The *arangetram* as the distinguishing performance of bharata natyam (now thoroughly rid of any disturbing associations with *dasi* rituals) has, in turn, become a symbol par excellence of ethnic heritage. As Greenstein puts it in her paper

considering *arangetrams* in California, 'the dance tradition and its package deal debut have become points around which Indian families rally to guarantee the continuity of Indian values, to reconfirm their Indianness to themselves . . . and to prepare their daughters to enter middle class Indian-American life' (Greenstein and Bharadvaj 1998).

The successful completion of an *arangetram*, as Gerry Farrell comments with respect to musical *arangetrams* – and it applies equally to dance – 'confers *cultural* and artistic acceptance within the wider community' (Farrell *et al.* 1999: 18, own emphasis). While the audience may admire how well the dancer has mastered the *nrtta* (steps) and the *abhinaya* (expressional) aspects of *bharata natyam*, they also note her knowledge of the stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana, as well as her adherence to, and acceptance of, the values of respect for the *guru*, parents and elders. The congratulatory speeches typically applaud the value of keeping in touch with one's roots. The *arangetram* offers an opportunity not only for economic display, but also an opportunity to display how far you and your child are in touch with the 'home' culture. Hence, the *arangetram* not only as commodity, but also as 'cultural commodity'.

This perception of the *arangetram* is strengthened by the fact that in many cases they become ends in themselves. Every *arangetram* chief guest will reiterate that the performance is only a starting point. Yet, so great is the pattern for young dancers to perform their *arangetram* and stop, that people can say with genuine surprise, 'it's so good to see someone dancing after their *arangetram*'. Greenstein comments 'Sadir sold as Bharata natyam now becomes a commodity package of heritage training – the *arangetram* is the node of ascension in that training' (Greenstein and Bharadvaj 1998). Once this 'node of ascension' has been reached, many clearly see no reason to continue dancing.

This brings us to the ironic situation that an occasion represented as archetypically Indian, as an opportunity to 'get in touch with one's roots' and for reinforcing cultural values buys in almost without question to a 1930s' reconstitution of a supposed classical ideal – and an Orientalist reconstitution at that. The image of Siva on the *arangetram* invitations or brochures, the deities positioned on the stage, the dance item dedicated to Dancing Lord Nataraja, the costumes, even the dance moves themselves all derive, as discussed, from a reformulation of an earlier dance form self-consciously moulded in line with Western sensibilities. This reformulation has long been contested by scholars and practitioners both from India and abroad. It is a reformulation that was rejected outright by Balasaraswati, the last great practitioner of the very dance form that it sought to preserve. Yet, if we are to extrapolate from the observations of these *arangetrams*, this deeply problematic interpretation of India, its history and its art forms is one that is favoured by a significant section of the middle-class South Asian diaspora.

Arangetrams and the manufacturing of identity

Does the role of the *arangetram* as commodity or 'cultural commodity' represent a problem? In terms of the expense, people can surely spend their money as they choose, and all the extravagance certainly helps to make the *arangetram* a colourful and memorable affair. One would never dream of instructing people as to how to conduct their weddings, so why is it different with *arangetrams*? Similarly in terms of cultural display, which artistic event is free of a cultural dimension? All art forms inevitably reflect to some extent the culture in which they are born, which is why it is so difficult to unpack the distinctions between what is artistic and what is cultural and why culture and art are words that are so easily interchanged. Nevertheless, *arangetrams*, or at least the current trends in the performance of *arangetrams*, have come in for considerable criticism in recent years, both in India and in the diaspora.

The most common concern is understandably related to the level of expense – or as Chandratheva puts it, 'the expensive trappings seen in present day *arangetrams*'. Cost is obviously a problem in that it makes it near impossible for many younger dancers to perform an *arangetram* and, thereby, in the eyes of many, to continue their careers. Furthermore, if as Chandratheva maintains, the 'critical yet appreciative' audience has a 'crucial role to play', as unofficial 'public examiners', stunning them with a splendid display, and feeding them a good dinner could be argued to be likely to cloud their critical faculties. It is the South Asian dance world's equivalent to the fêted Hollywood film critics.

A related issue is that while *arangetrams* may now be perceived to privilege economic or cultural display over artistic achievement, performing an *arangetram* is still considered by many as turning the trainee into a professional (even if this professionalism brings no economic returns). The result is that many young dancers end up considering themselves as 'professional', and setting up their own classes when the level of rigour that would really merit that description is far from having been achieved. Particularly in the diaspora, the *arangetram*'s role as a means to uphold and reinforce cultural practice quite often seems to overwhelm the *arangetram* as a serious artistic occasion. Flaws like shuffling footwork and crooked bodylines that would be censured in Chennai or Colombo, in the diaspora are noted but forgiven. Well the dance is not perfect, but after all, the child is growing up in a foreign culture. At least the dance training has ensured some knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil and has inculcated a more thorough understanding of the *Dasavataram* (the ten incarnations or avatars of Visnu). Chandratheva sums up this attitude:

The children learning bharata natyam in the West are doing so against several odds. They are in the midst of an alien culture and do not learn dance full-time. . . . There is of course no excuse for

compromising on basic requirements and standards; but our expectations should be tempered with realism.

(Chandratheva 1999)

In the light of these concerns, in Britain, there is a voice that says that *arange-trams* should be scrapped, and that the newly instituted ISTD or Imperial Society for Training in Dance exams for South Asian dance should be used instead as a way to assess standards. There has even been a suggestion that the Arts Council step in to regulate the performances.

While adopting these measures may serve a purpose, there will be no lasting change until the root of these problems is addressed, which is, I believe, the identification of bharata natyam (and thereby *arange-trams*) as an ethnic rather than a transnational form. Chandratheva asks us to be 'realistic' in our expectations of children learning bharata natyam in an 'alien environment'. Britain is undoubtedly an environment alien to that within which bharata natyam developed. But then so is modern day India. This may affect the approach to the dance form, but should it affect the standards of performance? This would be to imply that good ballet could only be performed in France. The implication is also that bharata natyam, while taught, practised and performed transnationally, is still a form bound to a particular geographical area, which can make no real claim to be a transnational art form. In an era of rapid globalization, such identifications of geography with a particular culture are increasingly questionable. Grau makes the point that ballet, a transnational art form, is perceived as being 'universal and as such a-cultural'. Yet, she continues 'bharata natyam which is also transnational remains rooted in a specific image of an ancient Indian culture' (Grau 2001: 5) – with the result that a bharata natyam performance becomes the 'artistic representative of "Indianness", an ethnic display, rather than a serious artistic product contributing to the larger framework of theatre dance within a culturally diverse society' (ibid.: 6).

There is a still more insidious consequence of the total identification of an art form with a particular culture. Clearly, art reflects culture. However, surely art should not only represent, but should also transcend and challenge a culture. When it does not do this it can slip into propaganda. This is a particularly real danger when the culture represented is one, as we have seen, that was quite self-consciously manufactured in the early twentieth century. *Arange-trams*, and likewise the type of performance presented by an English counties arts festival in the 'Eastern Arts tent', equally present an idealized vision of a culture now left behind, which in fact no longer exists in India, if it ever did. The presentation of bharata natyam as a form received from the golden age of ancient times, tarnished for a while, but now triumphantly revived plays straight in to the myth of the timeless Orient, and as we have seen, does a gross injustice to the true depth and complexity of the form. Likewise, the presentation of bharata natyam,

through *arangetrams* and elsewhere, as 'encapsulating' Indianness defines 'Indianness' within a painfully narrow parameter, one that automatically excludes the folk and tribal heritages of India, as well as the contributions to Indian culture from other religions (notably Islam).

The use of *bharata natyam* as such an 'emblem of Indianness' is particularly unwelcome at a time when the Indian government, led by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), already privileges the Hindu culture and history of India at the expense of minority faiths. The depiction of this Indianness as suffused with 'ancient continuities' (effectively an 'Oriental timelessness') is particularly unhelpful when the 'war against terrorism' is already used to lend validity to polarized, ignorant and facile distinctions between East and West that play straight in to such stereotypes. The challenge for *bharata natyam* now is to establish its identity as an art form originating from, but not bound by, a particular cultural context, and to challenge rather than reinforce the black and white world we are so often encouraged to inhabit.

Notes

- 1 The research that this chapter draws on most immediately is work conducted for a two-year project entitled 'South Asian Dance in Britain: Negotiating Cultural Identity through Dance', funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The project is based at the Centre for Dance Research at the University of Surrey, Roehampton, and is directed by Dr Andrée Grau with Dr Alessandra Lopez y Royo Iyer as the senior researcher and myself as the fieldworker. In the course of my fieldwork I have attended almost a hundred different performances, lecture demonstrations and rehearsals of many different styles of South Asian dance across Britain, including *arangetrams*. I have observed classes, taken part in the day-to-day running of South Asian dance organizations, and have interviewed over 50 dancers, venue managers, promoters and others connected with developing South Asian dance in Britain. The chapter also draws on over 20 years of personal involvement with *bharata natyam*, a form I have studied since I was six years old, growing up as a child in India and now practise and perform professionally.
- 2 This text has commonly been dated to the Tamil Sangam period of the second and third centuries CE (see Daniélou 1993 and Dikshitar 1939). The Tamil scholar Vaiyapuripillai argued convincingly as far back as 1956 that the language, customs and other works referred to in the text rather suggest a ninth-century work. It would seem that this argument has been largely ignored for reasons connected with Tamil nationalism (see Dominic Goodall's discussion of this in Goodall 1998: xxxvii, footnote 85).
- 3 Subramaniam (1997), *Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil* (Tamil–Tamil–English), Chennai.
- 4 One can also have a musical *arangetram* – for *mrdangam* (drum), for instance, or *vena* (lute). There are also equivalents to the other classical Indian dance traditions – for example, the *rangapravesh* for kathak, one of the dance styles originating from north India, or the *rangmanchpravesh* for odissi, a dance style from the eastern state of Orissa.
- 5 Occasionally *arangetram* brochures feature advertisements for local businesses. However, in over a dozen *arangetrams* that I have studied, only two made use of such commercial support.
- 6 The term 'South Asian' was originally used with respect to 'South Asian' art forms in Britain by the arts funding system, as a useful tool by which 'to encompass the political distinctions in the Indian Sub-continent of India, Pakistan,

Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, whilst seeking to underline the cultural continuity of the area' (Farrell *et al.* 1999: 2). It is a problematic term, but is one commonly used within the 'South Asian' dance community, which is why I have continued to use it in this chapter. The use of the terms 'India' and 'Indianness' later on in the chapter is deliberate, as while *bharata natyam* is often claimed to represent India (and possibly Tamil Sri Lanka), it is not claimed to represent Pakistan, Nepal or Bangladesh in a similar way.

- 7 There were, of course, professional performers and dancers working in South India long before this – though there is no evidence to show that they were attached to temples in any structured way.
- 8 There are references to *devadasis* from the second century BCE – but there is nothing to suggest that these early *dasis* shared the characteristics of the *devadasi* as she is now understood. Equally, there were women performing in temples from at least the seventh century, but again, we cannot be certain as to the organization and character of these early temple dancers. See Orr (2000) for a fuller account of the role of the early temple woman and her transition into the *devadasi* as we understand her today.
- 9 See Kersenboom 1987 *passim*. See also Gorringe 1998 for a detailed study of one dedication ceremony as described in the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth century text, the *Kamikagama*.
- 10 As the *devadasis* were often dedicated at a young age, the institution met with criticism similar to that lodged against child marriage. *Devadasis* were presented as 'prostitutes', somewhat of a misnomer for the long-term relationships with one man, which appears to have been the norm for many *dasis*. Possibly what tipped the balance against the *dasis* was that the institution was seen as incompatible with the reconstructed Hinduism promoted by reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, which sought to re-invent Hinduism from the *sastras*, in a manner deeply influenced by European values and sensibilities. The temple dancer 'married to the god' and living with a man did not fit comfortably within this streamlined 'new Hinduism'.
- 11 Thus, Anne Marie Gaston relates how K. Lalita, a Brahmin woman studying *bharata natyam* in the 1930s, was not allowed by her family to give her *arangetram* because of its associations with *dasis* (Gaston 1996: 182).
- 12 In S. Sarada, *Kalakshetra Rukmini Devi: Reminiscences* by S. Sarada, Madras 1985 (cited in Allen 1997: 65).
- 13 Valli Subbiah, interviewed for 1984 Channel 4 TV production, 'Siva's Disciples', narrated by Richard Attenborough.
- 14 The issue of professionalism within South Asian dance in Britain is another contested area. As indicated, many believe that the completion of an *arangetram* automatically means 'professionalism' – when the present context of an *arangetram* means that this is often very far from the case. Equally, many South Asian dancers claim to be professional dancers while pursuing full-time careers in other areas. A recent copy of the *Law Society Gazette* for instance announced the switch of 'professional South Indian dancer' from a full-time job as a solicitor in one firm to another full-time post in another firm. At the same time, there are South Asian dancers in Britain who spend the whole of their time and make all their income from dance. Yet, they appear in the same 'professional' bracket as this dancing solicitor!
- 15 I was once given a gold pendant simply for making announcements at an *arangetram*.
- 16 Thus, four rehearsals and a performance can cost between £250 and £300 for a *mrdangam* player – a sum which becomes £500–600 for an *arangetram*. Indeed, for many musicians (and the majority of dance teachers), the sums paid out at *arangetrams* – substantially more than would be paid for an equivalent number of classes under other circumstances – represent a key source of annual income. I have heard teachers comment on how they would prefer not to conduct another

- arangetram in one year, but are persuaded to do so by considering their mortgage. See also Gaston (1996: 225–7) for further detail on this subject.
- 17 Dance teacher interviewed as part of the SADiB project on South Asian dance in Britain, January 2001.
 - 18 Anita Ratnam in Navadisha 2000 – a SAMPAD conference held in Birmingham, UK.
 - 19 The term Bharata has manifold associations. A cursory look at the Monier Williams Sanskrit–English dictionary lists it as, among other things, the name of ‘the celebrated hero and monarch of India . . . the first of 12 *Cakravartins* or universal emperors’; ‘the devoted younger brother of Rama’; ‘another name for Agni’; ‘a priest’. Bharata with a long first ‘a’ is also, of course, a name for the country India.

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7 South Asian music in Britain

*Gerry Farrell with Jayeeta Bhowmick and
Graham Welch*

Introduction

In this chapter¹ we explore South Asian music in contemporary Britain.² A study of South Asian music in Britain is timely. In recent years, chiefly in the field of cultural studies, there has been an upsurge of interest in ideas of identity, ethnicity and place, often with music as a central constituent (Slobin 1992; Stokes 1994; Sharma *et al.* 1996; Woodward 1997; Leyshon *et al.* 1998; McCarthy *et al.* 1999). Such work draws largely on a post-modernist view of cultural formations in which concepts of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, diaspora and nationality are in a constant state of flux, never entirely defined, nor wholly defineable. In these types of analytical frameworks, places are no longer merely the physical or geographical locations of specific peoples or individuals, rather, they may have a central function as dimensions of what Appadurai has termed 'imagined world' and 'ethnoscapes' (Appadurai 1990). The ethnomusicologist John Baily has observed: 'Issues of cultural identity seem likely to constitute some of the major problems confronting humanity in the twenty first century', going on to note that it is the very disintegration of nation-states and empires that displays the 'tenacity of this phenomenon we call "culture"' (Baily 1994: 45). From this perspective, notions of identity and place linked to music are of particular relevance to studies of immigrants or displaced groups such as political and economic refugees. South Asian music in Britain can, therefore, be approached from cultural, musical and geographical perspectives – musical identities cross and mingle, are discarded and reconstituted, and musical styles are in a constant state of change and adaptation.

However, part of the difficulty inherent in discussing South Asian music in Britain is that it cannot be viewed only within a local context restricted to British cities and communities. The relationship between local and global manifestations of South Asian music in Britain is dauntingly complex. By definition, this music has its roots in the diverse musical cultures of the Indian Sub-continent and – particularly in its popular forms – has a global market with far-reaching cultural implications. The recent

upsurge of mainstream interest in South Asian popular music in Britain is replicated by an interest in the same music in the Indian Sub-continent. We are beginning to see, perhaps for the first time on any appreciable scale, a process of re-exportation of South Asian diaspora music to India that is having a significant influence on the popular Indian music industry. Therefore, any study of South Asian music in Britain must attempt to take a global, as well as local, perspective. Music, both for creator and consumer, is increasingly electronically mediated, and the distance between Southall and Mumbai (Bombay) is measured in the digitalized transfer of images, songs and musical commodities as well as miles.

South Asian music in Britain is a music of homes, schools, community centres, temples, cinemas, recording studios, clubs, stadia, websites – it does not have one stylistic identity, but many. Sometimes it is not heard outside the bounds of particular communities; at other times it is in the Top Ten. It is big business, or small business, or no business; mainstream and specialized. It is a music of many tongues: Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Sylheti, Tamil, English, and many patois and fashionable argots – Punjabi and West Indian, English and Punjabi, Hindi and Punjabi. It is devotional, classical, popular, folk, world, and a vehicle for political and social comment about the place of Blacks and Asians in contemporary Britain, with all its complex problems of identity and, often, alienation.³

Despite the apparent richness and diversity of South Asian music in Britain it is, perhaps, surprising that it has as yet received little attention in the literature of ethnomusicology. Notable exceptions are Oliver on Black music in Britain (1990); Banerji and Baumann on *bhangra* (1988, 1990); and Baily on *qawwali* in Bradford, and music in three British Muslim communities (1990, 1995). In the wake of the rise in prominence of South Asian music on the British popular music scene in the late 1990s, recent work has focused on specific British artists such as Sheila Chandra and Apache Indian and their place in the world music industry (Taylor 1997; Asher 1999), as well as in cultural studies, the social and political meaning of emerging South Asian dance and popular musics in a British context (Sharma *et al.* 1996).

However, despite the value of such work in providing 'snapshots' of the place of South Asian music in Britain, no single study has attempted to draw a broader picture of the South Asian community in Britain and explore the complex connections between language, religion, regional background, demography and musical genres. Significantly, in sociological studies of South Asians in Britain, there is little discussion of music, despite its apparent importance as a form of cultural identity and a symbol of both continuity and change. A central purpose of the present research has been to begin to fill this gap in the literature of ethnomusicology and to provide a wider theoretical framework for more in-depth musical studies of specific communities.

South Asian music in Britain: demographic perspectives

The idea of viewing South Asian music in Britain from the perspective of locations and demography emerged from an analysis of findings of the UK Office for National Statistics on ethnic communities in Britain (Coleman and Salt 1996) and the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (see Modood and Berthoud 1997). A question on ethnicity was first included in the 1991 Census. Those with South Asian origin numbered some 1,479,645 people or 2.7 per cent of the population of Britain (Owen 1996: 88). Based on the resulting statistical information, maps of the South Asian communities in Britain showed regional breakdown derived from states of origin: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but not for Nepal or Sri Lanka as separate categories (Owen 1996: 101–2). Nevertheless, from these data several areas emerged as having concentrations of South Asian communities: greater London, which had the highest percentage, some 7.8 per cent of the resident population; the West Midlands, particularly Birmingham, and greater Manchester and West Yorkshire (*ibid.*: 93–5). Northern Ireland does not feature in these figures, or in the present research. The choice of locations for our research was based primarily on an analysis of these data. Figure 7.1 shows these locations and the number of South Asian musical genres identified throughout the country (see the Glossary for an explanation of the musical terms). With the exception of one location (Devon), these correlated with particular densities of South Asian communities. The cities of London, Birmingham and Manchester emerged as areas of special interest because of the diversity of musical genres performed and taught there.⁴

Although census data were invaluable in giving a general picture of the geographic distribution of South Asian communities in Britain, breakdown by country of descent cannot reveal the cultural complexity inherent within it. South Asian communities in Britain are linguistically, regionally and culturally diverse and, as the census findings indicated, certain areas of Britain and specific localities of particular large urban districts may have widely differing regional compositions in their South Asian communities.

Despite these cultural ambiguities, which are not explicitly discussed in the census data, this information, nevertheless, provided a useful starting point for viewing locations as frameworks for musical investigation, or (in a more abstract sense) as possible maps of musical activity. For as Finnegan (1990) and others have shown, certain locations, because of a number of demographic, economic and cultural factors, may define the pathways of musical activity that take place within them and contribute to the development of musical networks and identities. Stokes (1994) has noted that music is also a crucial factor in defining or creating a sense of place or identity – not only existing within a context but creating,

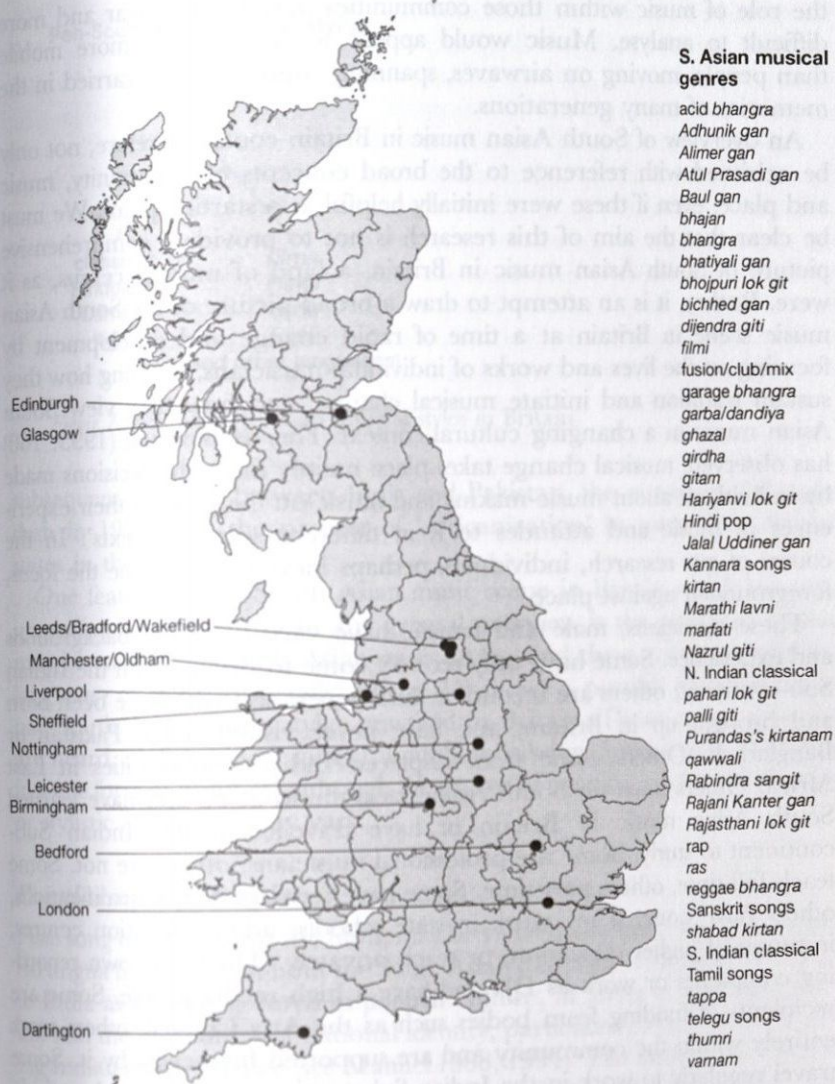


Figure 7.1 South Asian music in Britain: research locations and musical genres

shaping and changing that context, or defining it as part of the cultural or artistic imagination.⁵

But, clearly, a musical map cannot simply be superimposed over a demographic one. People come to live in particular locations for a variety of historical, social and economic reasons. Culture weaves and grows around and through these locations and it is in the cultural detail that music resides. Although, through demographic information like census figures, communities can be located in physical, geographic and economic space,

the role of music within those communities may be less clear and more difficult to analyse. Music would appear to be infinitely more mobile than people, moving on airwaves, spanning continents and carried in the memories of many generations.

An overview of South Asian music in Britain could, therefore, not only be achieved with reference to the broad concepts of community, music and place, even if these were initially helpful as a starting point. We must be clear that the aim of this research is not to provide a comprehensive picture of South Asian music in Britain, a kind of musical census, as it were. Rather, it is an attempt to draw a broad picture of the South Asian music scene in Britain at a time of rapid change and development by focusing on the lives and works of individual musicians, showing how they sustain tradition and initiate musical change, and how they view South Asian music in a changing cultural context. For, as Blacking (1995: 160) has observed, musical change takes place mainly through 'decisions made by individuals about music-making and music on the basis of their experiences of music and attitudes to it in different social contexts'. In the course of our research, individuals, perhaps inevitably, became the focus, foregrounded against place.

These musicians, male and female, have varied musical backgrounds and experience. Some have only recently come to Britain from the Indian Sub-continent; others are second or third generation who have been born and brought up in Britain, and have never visited India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Others come from displaced Indian communities in East Africa. Others have no South Asian background at all and have learned South Asian music in Britain or have travelled to the Indian Sub-continent to study. Some are professional musicians, others are not. Some teach full-time, others part-time. Some have formal musical qualifications, others have none. They work in state schools, adult education centres, institutes of higher education, or teach privately. They may own recording companies or work as DJs and have a high media profile. Some are recipients of funding from bodies such as the Arts Council, others work entirely within the community and are supported financially by it. Some travel regularly to work in the Indian Sub-continent, others work entirely in Britain. It is their lives and stories that have influenced and shaped contemporary South Asian music in Britain.

Pan-South Asian musical genres in Britain

Patterns of post-war immigration have significantly shaped the present musical picture.⁶ These are a direct consequence of a number of political and economic situations occurring in the Indian Sub-continent and East Africa over the last five decades. In the main, South Asian immigrants to Britain came from the northern part of the Indian Sub-continent, which had been subject to radical upheavals. These include partition in 1947,

Pan-South Asian musical styles

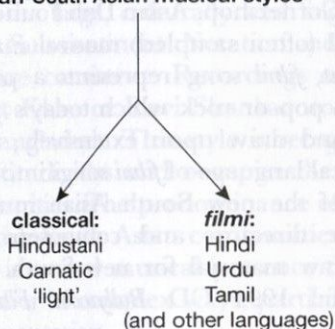


Figure 7.2 Pan-South Asian musical styles in Britain

subsequent conflicts between India and Pakistan, the secession of Bangladesh in 1972, and the process of 'Africanization' in some East African states in the 1970s.

One feature of the South Asian music scene in Britain which becomes immediately apparent from any general overview is the presence of what may be called pan-South Asian music styles, and those which are region-, language- or religion-specific. Figure 7.2 shows a possible formulation for pan-South Asian music styles practised in Britain. These genres of music are heard, performed or taught in all South Asian communities in Britain in some form or another, although the degree of training, professionalization or stylistic continuity may vary.

Popular music: *filmi*

Filmi song or songs from the films, may be viewed as a kind of popular musical lingua franca throughout the South Asian diaspora. This parallels its role in India as a unifying force in popular culture, in terms of language, fashion and the promotion of national identity, particularly in the years following Indian independence (see Manuel 1988, 1994). The massive distribution network of the Bombay film industry assures that, as the latest Indian hits are disseminated throughout the Indian Sub-continent, they are simultaneously heard in Britain. In turn, *bhangra*, which in its popular form developed in Britain, has had a significant impact on the language of Indian film music, and British *bhangra* bands are regularly featured on Zee TV, AsiaNet and other media, alongside the film hits of the day. Indian popular music directors visit Britain to use technical facilities, or perhaps to mix previously recorded material. British South Asian musicians and producers now play a central role in creating music that is later consumed both in India and Britain.

Crucially, it is the language and structure of *filmi* song that have been an important musical and aesthetic reference point for emerging popular

South Asian musicians in Britain in recent years, including Najma Akhtar, Sangeeta, Apache Indian, Bally Sagoo, Cornershop, Asian Dub Foundation and others. Either in the use of actual (often sampled) musical material or as a wider cultural reference point, *filmi* song represents a parallel popular musical culture to mainstream pop or rock which today's young South Asian musicians acknowledge and draw upon extensively, if not exclusively. The translation of the musical language of *filmi* songs into other forms has become a central feature of the new South Asian music in Britain. The music of famous music directors and composers from Bollywood's 'golden era' is often the raw material for new South Asian music. Bally Sagoo's widely successful 1994 CD *Bollywood Flashback* contained the following dedication:

BOLLYWOOD FLASHBACK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE AND GREAT R. D. BURMAN. 'The music you gave the world, will live forever'. Thank you B. S.

(Sagoo 1994: liner notes)

Najma Akhtar's album *Forbidden Kiss* also re-worked Burman's music. Cornershop's 1998 no. 1 hit 'Brimful of Asha' was a nostalgic paean to Asha Bhosle, one of India's leading playback singers. This and other work from British South Asian artists has brought Indian pop music into the world music scene in a new and different way and, more importantly, through a different musical route.

Classical music genres

The other pan-South Asian styles that are indicated in Figure 7.2 are those of North (Hindustani) and South (Carnatic) Indian classical music. Although these styles are over-arching systems of music developed in India over many centuries, their representation in Britain demonstrates one clear demographic/musical feature. The predominant classical style of South Asian music in Britain is that of Hindustani, or North Indian music.

The Hindustani tradition is found across the whole of the northern part of the Sub-continent, encompassing Pakistan, North India and Bangladesh. Elements of this system are also present in the musical cultures of Afghanistan to the west and Nepal to the north (Baily 1988; Grandin 1989). In contrast, the Southern or Carnatic system of Indian music is practised mainly in an area from Central India to the south, including Sri Lanka. Although these two musical systems share many similarities such as the structure of ensembles, forms of notation and some elements of modal organization and instrumentation, there are also, for historical reasons, important differences of style and musical expression. They may, therefore, be viewed as distinct, though related, musical systems (Wade 1979; Pesch 1999).

The Hindustani classical tradition is remarkable for its stylistic continuity across the large, culturally and linguistically diverse area of the northern Indian Sub-continent. Notation and instrumentation, though not standardized, are consistent. Recordings of great Hindustani musicians such as Vilayat Khan or Ravi Shankar would sell equally well in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. This style is recognized as crossing ethnic, religious and linguistic divides and occupies the same position in British South Asian communities. The predominance of immigrants with North Indian origins in British South Asian communities has meant that North Indian classical music is a vital musical presence that informs other musical activities in a number of complex ways, particularly in the types of notation used and instrumentation.

Carnatic (South Indian) classical music does not have the same distribution across the Indian Sub-continent and is similarly less prevalent in Britain. Again, this is directly linked to the composition of South Asian communities in Britain. Even in the most authoritative demographic and statistical data available on ethnic minorities in Britain, the distinctive cultural identity of South Indians and Sri Lankans – who are largely Tamil-speaking and concentrated in Greater London – is rarely, if ever mentioned or discussed (see, for example, Coleman and Salt 1996; Modood and Berthoud 1997). However, their musical identity is clear, and contrasts in style, form, and teaching methodology to Hindustani music, underlining the fact that the classical systems of South Asian music in Britain do not represent an homogeneous musical culture.

The community organization of North and South Indian music in Britain

South Indian music in Britain occupies a very different cultural milieu from its northern counterpart. Perhaps what is most striking is the level of community organization of Carnatic music teaching and performance, and the importance of the *arangetram*, or graduation, for musicians and dancers. This is a South Indian tradition which literally means 'ascending onto the stage'. It has no direct equivalent in the North, but it has transferred to Britain as an important cultural expression of musical skills and standards within communities with origins in South India. As Pesch puts it, the *arangetram* is: 'the culmination of several years of training which helps the candidate and others to gauge whether or not the requirements for a successful career can be met' (Pesch 1999: 80). In South India the *arangetram* applies to both music and dance performances. The successful completion of an *arangetram* confers cultural and artistic acceptance within the wider community of musicians and audiences. The musical and social complexity of the *arangetram* procedure, and its high economic cost, were described by one musician and teacher of the *mrdangam* in the Tamil community of London:

In dance we say Arangetram so we do the same Arangetram for violin, veena and all other instruments . . . Once he [the student] goes on to the stage in front of two thousand people he should know all thirty five talas [metrical cycles]. He has to play for three hours of full concert . . . he can play whatever he feels like, but at the same time he has to understand what is he playing, that is very important. He has to improvise his music. When he knows that he is doing wrong – that is the graduation level . . . We invite a few judges on those days – a person who is expert in this field who tells the people what he has done, and the mistakes [he has made] then he is the one who gives the certificate . . . At the same time they have to think that it is not like India . . . In India when he joins the school itself he will already know what Carnatic music is. Here they join the school just to keep up our culture. Later on he gets involved with the music . . . They spend 10 to 15 thousand pounds for the Arangetram to book the hall, musicians from India or locally, getting the rehearsal done. You may have seen minimum 500 hundred students who have done the Arangetram in this country.

(Personal communication 1997)

Glossy brochures are published advertising the *arangetram*. The format of the brochure is strict and traditional emphasizing the values of hard work and dedication to music, the close and respectful bond between the *guru* (master/teacher) and the *shishya* (disciple/student), and the importance of cultural continuity in the wider community. The brochures are lavishly illustrated with photographs of student and teacher, details of the programme, lists of sponsors and commendations from local community figures including teachers and politicians. The text is usually in both English and Tamil.

The organization of South Indian music teaching and performance in Britain contrasts sharply with that of North Indian classical music which is often characterized by the musicians themselves as under-funded, unsystematic and lacking in coherent strategy in a general way, not necessarily only in contrast to South Indian music. Musicians agree that the lack of funding from both within the community and from statutory bodies such as local education authorities and arts organizations has made the development of North Indian music in Britain, at education level and as a performing art, erratic and unpredictable. There are many complex reasons for this, not least that there are no qualifications for teaching North (or South) Indian music that are accepted as equivalent to teaching qualifications in other forms of music. This has led, for example, to peripatetic teachers of Indian instruments in schools being paid less for doing the equivalent jobs of colleagues teaching other instruments. Several teachers of North Indian music who were interviewed were clear in their views on how North Indian music had developed in Britain. As one teacher with

many years experience of teaching *sitar* in London schools put it: 'Now whatever is happening is a very little tokenism and piecemeal work. There is no co-ordinated effort.' This was not an uncommon view. It was apparent that the way in which North Indian classical music is manifest in the community was very different from that of South Indian, even though the former has a vastly greater distribution across Britain. There was no evidence that there was a mingling of South and North Indian musical styles in British South Asian communities, rather, the musical identities remained distinct. This, however, may not be the case for South Indian and North Indian dance styles (also see Farnell 1990, 1994, 1997b).

Apart from these broad musical and stylistic categories, in some areas of Britain particular cultural groupings predominate, with related musical cultures, although these are subject to complex patterns of musical change. For example, before *bhangra* became a South Asian popular music form, it was (and still is) a folk music from the Punjab. But what was more important for its future as a popular music was that it was a music of the Punjabi community in Britain – in particular of the west London suburb of Southall and the midlands city of Birmingham. In its earliest popular incarnations *bhangra* was inextricably linked to the Punjabi communities in these areas. It even became known as the 'Southall Beat' (Baumann 1990). But it was also the wider musical environments of large cities like London and Birmingham, the venues, recording studios and musical distribution networks, that allowed *bhangra* to become a mass market, global pop music and, after *filmi* music, the most widespread popular South Asian music in Britain.

Music in South Asian communities: location

It was evident from our research that location plays an important role in the construction of histories and myths about South Asian popular music in Britain. For example, when musicians speak of the origins of pop *bhangra* in Britain, they often talk in terms of places where important bands began or venues where the music took root, sometimes contrasting styles of playing in terms of place. Some musicians say Birmingham is the focus of *bhangra*, others London. Musicians also underlined how fashions changed and the focus shifted between London and Birmingham. Birmingham was considered to be more traditional, especially in recent years, whereas London was the locus for hybridity and diversification. This contrast may also be expressed in terms of what constitutes popular or classical in traditional music. Several musicians contrasted the sound and meaning of London and Birmingham *bhangra*. For example, a leading Birmingham musician observed:

London was first because Deepak Khazanchi was there. They released a good product. It depends upon the producers. Channi and Heera

were there. Now all the good singers are here [Birmingham] like Malkit [Singh], Apna Sangeet, DCS – they all live in West Midlands. It [bhangra in London] is not for the community. Londoners are the biggest community, but I can't find very good producers there who could release a very good album which can appeal to the youngsters and the older generation. There are many good musicians in London who are doing different things, they are playing with classical music, people are doing Mehfil [small musical gatherings] type private shows. I think Londoners are more into classical than bhangra.

(Personal communication 1998)

Another musician from Birmingham underlined this point:

[in Birmingham] it is just like the olden days when Heera, Alaap, Holle Holle from London used to perform. They mixed Western Instruments and music a lot, but the Birmingham bands are traditional.

(Personal communication 1998)

Another striking feature of South Asian music in Britain was the manner in which widely differing musical forms, specific to particular communities, may be present in the same geographic location. For example, in London, although Punjabi musical forms may be a central feature of life in Southall, in the east London borough of Tower Hamlets, particular kinds of Bengali and Sylheti language-specific music such as *palli giti*, *bhatiyali*, *bichhed*, *Baul*, *Jalal Uddin* and *Alim* songs are performed regularly in homes and at cultural gatherings, but are rarely heard outside the community, or have any place in a wider British South Asian music. This often has to do with language or religion, and the preservation of language through music. This issue will be addressed in more detail below.

These broad formulations of South Asian musical styles in Britain describe outlines of musical cultures that are subject to subtle variations of expression because of a number of factors including language, religion and regional background.

Language, religion and region as reflected in music

The linguistic, religious and regional complexity of the South Asian community in Britain has been noted in a number of recent studies: 'The Indian population arrived as a mosaic of groups from different parts of the sub-continent or from East Africa practising different religions, speaking different languages and drawn from different social and economic backgrounds' (Robinson 1996: 119). It would be expected that such cultural diversity would be reflected in music, and this, to an extent, is the case. However, the rise of popular South Asian musical forms in recent

decades has also meant that cultural identities, particularly for youth, have undergone significant changes, where clear differences between language, religion and region are no longer clearly discernible. Although language and region cannot be separated and reflect each other closely, this is not always directly replicated musically in Britain.

Of the languages spoken in South Asian communities in Britain, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Punjabi and Bengali are the most prevalent, once again reflecting the North Indian roots of British South Asian communities. However, other languages are significant such as Sylheti which was a major regional language among the wider Bengali community, particularly in Tower Hamlets (Modood and Berthoud 1997: 309). Tamil was another major language of South Indian communities. Discounting the divide between North and South Indian language groups, it is usually the case in Britain that at least Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati are comprehensible and intermingle in usage across a wide spectrum of the communities, despite regional origins (*ibid.*: 309–10), making for a kind of Hindustani lingua franca, which is often spoken with elements of English included.

Our research has shown that music is often viewed as one vehicle for the preservation of language. Language is the most central facet of group identity in immigrant communities, and is valued as a way of preserving tradition and culture across generations, and in the midst of rapid and often radical change. The lessening of importance of the mother tongue is often considered a major cultural dislocation and a symbol of loss of identity. Music can be important for the preservation of language. One Bengali singer and teacher related the complexities of this situation:

I was involved with both young and old. I used to love and enjoy teaching the younger generation and many of them became involved. When we came first to this country, we found that the people especially from West Bengal were ashamed of talking in Bengali and even they were speaking in English with their children. Their idea was if they talk in English with their children they will be able to pick up English very quickly and therefore will be able to learn things quickly in school. But this idea was wrong . . . someone can only pick-up other languages quickly if they are strong in their own mother tongue. During teaching songs we realized that they [the children] did not know Bengali at all and their pronunciation was rather like English. As a result we established a Bengali school in order to first teach them Bengali language.

(Personal communication 1997)

This quote also underlines the differences that exist between generations in relation to language. Another musician put it this way:

I have lost my identity, I am not totally Indian, I would like to think I am, but in my heart I know I am not and my kids are even less Indian and their kids will be even less. So what is happening we are very possessive. We are forcing our kids to adapt to Indian ways, to learn Indian music, to do Indian rituals and festivals in Indian way because we want them to pass it on to their children.

(Personal communication 1997)

The dissonance between the need for the preservation of culture and the inevitability of change is exemplified in this statement. Music, like language, is a central symbol of tradition and yet it is also a cultural domain where tradition can be challenged, and change can be negotiated, discussed and understood. This is particularly evident in the rise of new South Asian popular musics in Britain and how these reflect changing generational attitudes to concepts of tradition and cultural identity. One young musician observed:

If we keep doing it [*bhangra*], they will be together with our culture and our language. I think *bhangra* music helped a lot to keep the youngsters in control and keep them together with the language. Even if they don't understand the lyrics fully, they enjoy the music and the beat.

(Personal communication 1998)

Music continues to be a central facet of religious worship throughout South Asian communities in Britain. Religious worship also provides a context where music can be learned in an informal manner, as in Sikh *gurdwaras* (temples). Several religious or devotional musical genres have a wide distribution that crosses religious divides. Generic devotional forms such as *bhajan* and *kirtan* are common across Sikh and Hindu communities; the form and aesthetics of the *ghazal*, essentially North Indian in origin and sung in Urdu, are now common in a number of religious and popular musics. *Qawwali*, a form of Sufi devotional song sung in Urdu, has less prevalence in Britain as a community music, but has a wide distribution as a South Asian popular music, and in the world music scene. This is exclusively due to the massive popularity of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.⁷

Concepts of 'classical' and 'popular', 'tradition' and 'change'

Within any sphere of musical activities there are definitions of musical style and genre that are used and understood by performers, listeners and learners. Such definitions may be more or less explicit, with varying degrees of rigidity or fluidity in their usage. Among musicians the definition of a

musical style as 'classical', 'popular' 'traditional' or 'devotional' will have a number of outcomes for the way in which that music is taught, performed, distributed and ultimately perceived in the wider community. In the case of South Asian music in Britain, the way in which a minority music is viewed in relation to wider currents of musical life within society also has an important effect on perceptions of that music by its practitioners.

Adaptation of traditional musical forms so that they may function within a changing social context is a complex process. In analysing this process, the natures of musical systems need to be discussed, and attention should be paid, primarily, to the procedures by which systems may be altered or 'fine-tuned' to suit a particular situation. The responsibility for such changes in a system often lies with an individual musician working within a specific situation that demands adjustments to suit community requirements, audience tastes or the needs of learners.

In Indian culture a conceptual divide has long existed between classical and folk music. This is expressed by the terms *shastriya sangit* (classical) and *lok sangit* (folk). These terms and their particular meanings in Indian aesthetics cannot be easily transferred as reference points for analysis of South Asian music in contemporary Britain. However, the terms 'classical' and 'popular' were frequently used by musicians interviewed in the course of this research, as were the concepts of 'traditional' and 'Western'. Such terminology and its application to music within often rapidly changing cultural circumstances require continual interrogation and scrutiny. These terms may or may not refer to clear stylistic categories – more often they may be markers of status or fashion, delineating a hierarchy of musical values, real or imagined.

Among second- and third-generation South Asian musicians in Britain, our research has shown that knowledge of, or training in, classical music is not the norm. There are a number of reasons for this, but the main one is that formal structures have not yet developed for the teaching of Indian classical music in Britain. Therefore, musical learning takes place at the interface of a number of formal and informal learning situations: within the community, at religious worship, in schools, colleges and adult education centres, in clubs and recording studios. The musical languages that develop in such contexts often stem primarily from exposure to South Asian popular musical forms rather than classical systems.

Several musicians noted how popular music was often the way into wider or more in-depth musical learning for the young; and young musicians themselves, if learning classical music, often translated their knowledge into their own music, by adapting classical compositions and structures. It is these types of processes that have resulted in the development of new forms of South Asian music in Britain in recent years. This is part of a wider current of cultural change in which notions of 'Asianness' and 'Britishness' are negotiated through music. This situation was summed up well by one young musician:

I will use a lot of Indian classical traditions or ideas or influences in certain parts of my music, quite often not at all. But sometimes I will use them in a way to actually get across what I want to say because it feels more natural to the ambivalent lifestyle that you have as a British Asian person growing up here. For instance, you have one life style at home and another one at school when you are a child. In order to integrate those two things you have to find your personal vocabulary in your personal way of expressing, because you are neither one thing nor the other. If I go to India I will never be accepted as Indian, if I am here white people will not accept me as white. There is a sense of displacement that actually demands its own vocabulary musically and artistically in any way, so to try to adopt wholesale any other form of music is the wrong thing to try because I think that would be inappropriate to what you are trying to express as a British Asian.

(Personal communication 1997)

Another musician, who performed *bhangra*, noted how difficult a balancing act it could be to negotiate tradition and change, and how the mix of elements from different musical systems in his own music reflected this:

Our *bhangra* is not traditional, not modern as well. It is in the middle. I listen to lot[s] of English music. Sometimes certain chords, structure that we use it sometimes can be a bit more Western than the basic *bhangra* percussion. We will try to do something what we hear on the Radio One perhaps. You can pick that out when we play. It represents our youth culture . . . It is nice if it can be traditional. To exist it needs a touch of it [tradition]. It has to be there because if it is not there it will be something else, not *bhangra*. Without the dhol or tabla it won't be *bhangra*. Because it won't have the beat there to drive it. In our [music] it won't be one hundred per cent there, but we will have five or ten per cent there.

(Personal communication 1998)

Young musicians in Manchester who were learning classical music and who also had their own band playing popular music had a range of interesting perspectives on questions of tradition and change, classical and popular. In their terminology 'classical' referred to specific genres like *khyal* and *dhrupad*, but also functioned by extension, it appeared, to any music that was more interesting or complex musically than accepted forms of Indian popular music such as *ghazal* or *filmi*:

In our rehearsals if we find something we say, 'Oh, that sounds really English'. Sometimes we hear something in the Top of the Pops, then we say that sounds classical. We say the tune is similar. If I want to be

a singer and if I have to choose I will pick the classical. Because its got lots of scales. I enjoy classical more. Definitely it is more challenging than film music.

(Personal communication 1998)

This extract also reflects our finding that terminology regarding classical and popular music was subject to change, and that there existed a complex continuum of musical reference points linking traditional South Asian musical forms and their manifestation in contemporary Britain.

Another interesting finding related to the role which musicians of non-South Asian origin played in preserving classical musical styles, primarily North Indian, in Britain. This situation is too complex to go into in detail here, but suffice it to say that a significant number of non-South Asians have studied Indian music to a high level, often with long periods of study in India, and now teach and perform extensively in Britain. Their stories and the routes through which they have reached Indian music would constitute a separate study on its own.

New popular South Asian musics in Britain: influences

During one interview for this research, a young *bhangra* musician remarked, 'We are building the road and then walking upon it'. This comment seemed to sum up a widespread attitude among young second-generation South Asian musicians in Britain. Whereas previous manifestations of Indian music in the West in the sphere of popular music were closely connected with the classical traditions of India (see Farrell 1997a), the development among young British Asians of new popular forms draws almost completely on existing popular music forms, whether Western or South Asian. Young musicians have rarely had formal training in Indian music, and have learned in the spectrum of informal contexts – ways usually associated with popular music. A young *bhangra* musician explained the attitude towards music and the learning environment in one large northern British city:

Basically we have all got talent. If a band on stage can do it, why can't we do it? I have always been involved in music. I started playing tabla first of all, never took professional lesson[s]. I played with a few English bands in Bradford. That helped me. I knew basics of how to get a band together, do gigs now and then. We are totally self-taught musicians. We listen to all of the bands who are doing well and who are not doing that well. We have good relationship with the other bands. We ask their help and opinion and most of them are quite helpful.

(Personal communication 1998)

The ways in which tradition and change are negotiated in British South Asian popular music are varied and complex, as are the influences that have come to shape it, and do not fall into any particular pattern. Tradition, on occasions, may be regarded as restrictive or retrogressive, or as the foundation on which change can be based.

The period of this research coincided with rapid and unprecedented developments in the profile of South Asian music in British popular culture. Bands such as Cornershop and Asian Dub Foundation broke into mainstream British popular music, and artists like Nitin Sawhney and Talvin Singh became important figures in jazz, drum 'n' bass and experimental music. New Asian music in Britain received a massive boost in profile when Talvin Singh won the coveted Mercury Award in 1999.

Bhangra, since its rise to prominence in the Asian community in the early to mid-1980s, has now occupied a central place in South Asian popular music in Britain (see Banerji 1988; Baumann 1990; Banerji and Baumann 1990). Although the original forms of pop *bhangra* have changed and developed, *bhangra* retains a singular importance in the South Asian pop scene. Figure 7.3 shows a 12-month sample, taken between August 1997 and August 1998, of South Asian musical events in Britain. This sample indicates how popular *bhangra* remained and also how other musical developments were related to it. However, there are problems of terminology related to the manner in which musics are advertised. The dominance of club music is clear, as is the proliferation of styles in what may broadly be called 'fusion'. Such music also represents a growing sense of cultural identity in Britain, whereby Asian youth links itself with trends in Black music and fashion. It is difficult to ascertain whether many of these categories represent distinct musical styles; rather, they are created by musicians as badges of identity, differentiating particular musicians and fans from others, in a continually shifting scene of sub-cultures and fashion. The proliferation of categories and sub-categories evident here is a common feature of all popular music culture.

The connection between such new categories of South Asian music and traditional forms was an issue for several of the musicians interviewed. One prominent *bhangra* musician in Birmingham remarked:

Traditional music has got a long life. All these new music came along like Jungle music, Ragga, Rap and they didn't stay for long. People get fed up of that. Traditional music gives you freshness all the time. Whether it is Bengali music or Gujarati music, or Punjabi, any tradition from any country or state has a long life. You can mix it sensibly.
(Personal communication 1997)

Yet, other British South Asian musicians see the dominance of *bhangra*, in particular, as a kind of musical strait-jacket which has led to it being perceived as *the* Asian music in Britain at the expense of all other, possibly

12-month sample of South Asian concerts in Britain

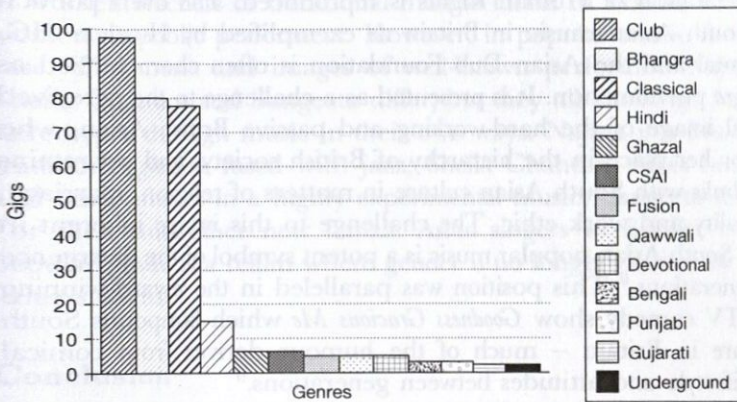


Figure 7.3 Mapping South Asian music in Britain

Notes: Club includes hip-hop, soul, bhangra, reggae, dj, swing, rap, jungle, jazz, hindi tunes etc. CSAI = Contemporary South Asian Influenced. Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati = Language-specific regional.

Sources: *Eastern Eye* and miscellaneous publicity materials, August 1997–August 1998.

more experimental, or innovative forms. One musician who is well known for his work with Indian music, jazz and world music was unequivocal in taking a critical view:

The media and journalists have picked up on the term *bhangra* and will apply to anything. I saw Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in the *bhangra* section and Sheila Chandra in the *bhangra* section. It doesn't even make sense. The term bhangra has become widely used term by white people here to actually embrace anything that is Asian. They will probably stick Ravi Shankar on the *bhangra* section in the shops ... Musicianship is incredibly low in *bhangra*. I have to say I find it embarrassing at times.

(Personal communication 1997)

He also noted how he had written to *Eastern Eye* (an English-language Asian newspaper) expressing this view and had received an angry response from its readers.

Another striking feature of the new British South Asian popular music, is its often overtly political tone, promoting a viewpoint linking Blacks and Asians as victims of racism and discrimination in contemporary Britain and reflecting this through a fusion of musical styles, such as the amalgamation of *bhangra* and reggae, rap and *bhangra*, and Asian 'grooves' with drum 'n' bass. The political resonances may go beyond Britain, with a global perspective on contentious issues like calls for unity between Pakistan and India, or the rise of Muslim fundamentalism. For example, in the

insert notes of *Erotic Terrorism* by Fun-da-Mental, the whole of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is reproduced. The overt politicization of South Asian music in Britain as exemplified by Hustlers HC, Fun-da-Mental and the Asian Dub Foundation is often characterized as a post-*bhangra* phenomenon. It is presented as a challenge to the perceived stereotypical image of the hard-working and passive British Asian, who knows his or her place in the hierarchy of British society, and yet retains traditional links with South Asian culture in matters of religion, marriage, sexual morality and work ethic. The challenge to this image inherent in new British South Asian popular music is a potent symbol of the divergence between generations.⁸ This position was paralleled in the award-winning radio and TV comedy show *Goodness Gracious Me* which lampoons South Asian culture in Britain – much of the humour derives from comical clashes of lifestyle and attitudes between generations.⁹

Gender is another area where stereotypical images of Asians are consciously challenged through the medium of music. In traditional musical genres there is often a complicated sexual division of labour, which is not always explicit or clearly defined. For example, certain classical vocal genres like *dhrupad* have long been the province of men, as are devotional styles such as *qawwali*, whereas *khyal* is performed by both men and women. In instrumental music, particular instruments like the *tabla* and *sarangi* have traditionally been played only by men, whereas the *sitar* is commonly taught to women in educational institutions in India, although few will go on to be professional players. *Bhangra* has typically been male dominated, with a female counterpart in *girdha*. There are complex historical, social, religious and cultural reasons for many of these gender divisions that cannot be discussed in full here. Suffice it to say that throughout the course of the present research it has been clear that many of these divisions still pertain in Britain, though in forms altered in myriad subtle ways. One female singer put it this way:

Music is male dominated here [in Britain]. Females on their own here can't do much. There are plenty of people to take advantage of you. So every female here is presented by a male person, be it an organizer, be it a promoter, brother, husband or it could be a mother as well promoting her daughter. On their own they haven't any chance. As I said, the crowd is not literate [*sic*]. So a female fears for her dignity as well. For us if we do a show, first we want to know what kind of crowd it is. Even today we are trying to hold on to our culture, we want to teach our girls the way we do in India, protected, sheltered, whereas boys have freedom to go out, girls don't. Parents would rather like the girls to learn the Indian music, to be on the Indian side, than go towards the English music and be more Westernised. That's how they will learn the language. Whereas boys come with choice.

(Personal communication 1997)

This view was supported by our research: there is a predominance of women teachers of traditional musical forms in Britain, with far fewer women as public performers. However, in popular music this is not the case. The music and images of well-known performers Najma Akhtar, Sheila Chandra and Sangeeta differ, but they all challenge Asian gender stereotypes through music in their own ways. Najma is a Muslim singing traditional *ghazals* fused with jazz; Sheila Chandra mixes Indian, Celtic and other musics in a highly experimental music; Sangeeta sings *bhangra*. For these and other new female Asian singers in Britain, mass-market popular music is a realm where gender is no longer defined by traditional value systems.¹⁰

Conclusion

Our research indicates that there is wide diversity of South Asian music in contemporary Britain. This music exists in a complex and rapidly changing social and cultural context.

South Asian musical genres present in Britain are, to a significant extent, linked to demographic trends in immigration over the last four decades. This is particularly in the predominance of musical genres and procedures from the northern area of the Indian Sub-continent. Reflecting this connection between music and wider patterns of immigration, close and clearly discernible links remain between religion, language, region and music. Although there is evidence that music is still perceived as a means of preserving language, this link may be loosening, because of the changing attitudes of second and third generations. Religious worship still functions as an important focus for playing and learning traditional South Asian music styles. A large body of region-specific music is still practised. Location has played an important role in the development of new South Asian music in Britain, particularly *bhangra*. For example, London and Birmingham *bhangra* were often contrasted by musicians in terms of musical style.

In terms of musical genres, pan-South Asian musical genres such as *filmi* songs and North Indian classical music have a wide distribution in Britain whereas South Indian classical music is less well represented – again a direct reflection of patterns of immigration. *Filmi* music represents a kind of musical lingua franca across all communities and has proved to be an important musical reference for new generations of musicians. For these musicians definitions of ‘classical’ and ‘popular’ in music have undergone changes in the British South Asian musical context. These terms have become more fluid indicating an increasing cross-fertilization of musical styles. During the period of our research new South Asian music in Britain has had a significant impact on the general popular music scene of Britain. In recent years a new generation of musicians has used music as a way to speak about identity, racism, gender and many other issues.

Moving away from traditional forms, this music also represents a generational shift in attitudes through which notions of tradition, 'Asianess' and 'Britishness' are contested.

The continuing importance of music in life in South Asian communities in Britain was succinctly summed up by one well-known London *sitar* player:

Music is learning and listening. Music is very much cultural, which people develop depending on their beliefs, quite a lot on their religion. All sorts of things get integrated in music and then it is the whole art. It has to be a part of people's life.

(Personal communication 1997)

Glossary

acid bhangra Fusion between elements of *bhanga* and acid rock in British popular music culture.

Adhunik gan Modern (non-filmi) Bengali songs.

Alimer gan Bengali songs sung by a famous Bengali folk singer Abdul Alim (1933–75). Songs include mainly Islamic devotional music.

Atul Prasadi gan Bengali songs written by Atul Prasad Sen (1891–1934). Songs describe emotion aroused in the heart in the separation from the ultimate one. Songs can be divided into five parts including devotion, nature, patriotic, humane and various.

Baul gan Devotional songs of *Baul* community in Bengal (a religious sect which espouses a humanistic religious view). Widespread in West Bengal. *Baul* songs are accompanied by *ektara* (one-stringed plucked instrument) and other instruments. These songs have melodies which use distinctive modes that are not necessarily linked to other widespread modal systems of melodic organization in South Asia.

bhajan Devotional song form common in many South Asian communities. Derived from the Hindi verb *bhajna* (to join). Although the subject matter of *bhajans* are traditional devotional themes they have flexible form and instrumentation, and can be adapted to many musical situations, and for different numbers of performers. May be based on classical music or other genres.

bhangra Punjabi folk song and dance performed at harvest time. In Britain in the last three decades it has been transformed into a new form of popular dance music that mixes traditional musical elements with elements from Indian and Western pop music. Characterized by a driving eight-beat syncopated rhythm.

bhatiayali gan Bengali folk songs (*lok sangit*) of boatmen and fishermen. Songs mainly describe the separation from loved ones.

bhojpuri lok git Folk songs of Uttar Pradesh, India, in Bhojpuri dialect.

bichhed gan Love and separation songs sung in different dialects in Bangladesh.

dijendra giti Bengali songs written by Dijendralal Ray (1861–1913), a contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore.

filmi Popular songs from the Indian cinema, which incorporate a diversity of musical styles both Indian and Western. Has wide distribution throughout the Indian Sub-continent. Mainly sung in Hindi and Urdu, but also in many other languages.

- fusion/club/mix** Generic terms for a number of popular and experimental musical genres, which employ state-of-the-art technology and are stylistically diverse.
- garage bhangra** Fusion of *bhanga* and 'garage' music, a technology-based popular club music.
- garba/dandiya** Folk song/dance of Gujarat, India. *Garba* dance is performed by women only.
- ghazal** A Persian poetic form that developed as a musical genre in the courts of North India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is now widespread as a light classical and popular musical form.
- girdha** Punjabi folk songs sung by females in a fast rhythmic tempo, similar to *bhanga*.
- gitam** South Indian generic term for song.
- Hariyani lok git** Folk songs of Hariyana, a province of Northern India.
- Hindi pop** Hindi language songs derived from various styles of South Asian popular music.
- Jalal Uddiner gan** Bengali Islamic devotional songs written by Jalal Uddin.
- Kannara songs** Songs in Kannara language, from South India.
- kirtan** A Bengali devotional genre. Originated in the Vaishnav religious sect in India. Accompanied by *khol* and *mandira/kartal* (instruments).
- Marathi lavni** Folk songs in Marathi language, sung in Maharashtra province of India.
- marfati** Bengali Islamic devotional songs.
- Nazrul giti** Bengali songs written by Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), a contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore. He wrote more than 5,000 songs in his creative period of 13 years. Themes range from the political to the devotional.
- North Indian classical** Also known as Hindustani classical music. The classical music of the Northern part of the Indian Sub-continent: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Also played extensively in Afghanistan and Nepal.
- pahari lok git** Different language/dialect songs of people who live in mountain and tribal areas of India.
- palli giti** Songs of village people describing their social customs, culture and nature.
- Purandas's kirtanam** Genre of South Indian devotional songs.
- qawwali** Sufi devotional music, popular in Pakistan and North India. Well known as a popular music in the West, particularly in world music.
- Rabindra sangit** Bengali songs by writer, musician, painter, philosopher and educationalist Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). This large body of work (some 2,000 songs) covers a wide range of subject matter including devotional and patriotic themes. Many are influenced by the language and imagery of *Baul* song (see above).
- Rajani Kanter gan** Bengali devotional songs written by Rajanikanta Sen (1865–1910).
- Rajasthani lok git** Folk songs of Rajasthan, India.
- rap** Afro-American popular music form, characterized by 'rapping' against repetitive beats. In recent years British South Asian musicians have fused rap and Asian styles.
- ras** A popular folk-dance of Gujarat.
- reggae bhangra** Fusion of Jamaican reggae and Punjabi *bhanga*. This trend has been exemplified in the 1990s by artists such as Apache Indian.
- Sanskrit songs** Songs (Stotra) in Sanskrit. Mainly from Gita, Vedas, Puranas etc.

- shabad kirtan** Sikh devotional composition generally sung in classical *rag* with the appropriate *tal*.
- South Indian classical** Also called Carnatic music. The classical musical system of the Southern part of the Indian Sub-continent.
- Tamil songs** Songs in Tamil language, one of the South Indian languages of the Dravidian family.
- tappa** Genre of semi-classical North Indian vocal music.
- telegu songs** Songs in Telegu language, one of the South Indian languages of the Dravidian family.
- thumri** Genre of North Indian classical vocal music.
- varnam** South Indian composed vocal genre for initiating a dance, or music concert.

Notes

- 1 We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Leverhulme Trust for making this research possible. Thanks are due to the many musicians and organizations who have given their time to help us with this project, and to my colleague Dr Annegret Fauser for detailed and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. Also to the students at City University, and especially Yumi Cawkwell, for their interesting insights and observations on South Asian music in Britain during the course of several modules that Gerry Farrell taught on the subject.
- 2 The generic term 'South Asian' in reference to communities in Britain with origins in the Indian Sub-continent is controversial. It is essentially a geographical term which encompasses the political distinctions in the Indian Sub-continent of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, while also seeking to underline the cultural continuity of the area. Undoubtedly, at one level it is clearly too broad – a blanket term for irreducible and complex cultural diversity. But in another way it is more specific than the term 'Asian' which is often used by people themselves who come from these communities. It also has a neutrality in terms of cultural description seeking to identify over-arching cultural continuities and traditions which may contrast with other groups and identities within British society. The term is used throughout this chapter with these qualifications in mind.
- 3 See Sharma *et al.* (1996) for a collection of strident, angry and fashionably anti-academic essays on the new Asian dance music. Interestingly, in the introduction the writers are clear that their discussion is not for 'an ever-eager academic audience and other agencies of control' (p. 2). However, in the acknowledgements, thanks are given to the International Centre for Contemporary Cultural Research, and the Economic and Social Research Council.
- 4 We felt that it was important to reflect the growing interest in South Asian music in Britain by those who have no South Asian background. A number of such musicians were included in the data collection process; hence, the inclusion of Dartington as an area for investigation. Dartington College of Arts in Totnes, South Devon, holds a special place in the history of South Asian music in Britain. It was established by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, and was greatly influenced by the work of Rabindranath Tagore, and his school in Santiniketan, West Bengal. From the 1930s to the 1990s, Dartington has been one of the very few centres for learning Indian music in Britain, and during this period produced a significant number of non-Indian players of Indian music some of

whom are now professional performers and have worked as teachers of Indian music in Britain and abroad.

- 5 See also Baily (1988) on music in Heart, Neuman (1990) on North Indian classical music in Delhi, and Berliner (1994) on jazz in New York.
- 6 For discussions of the earlier history of the Indian communities in Britain and their musical activities, see Visram (1986), Oliver (1990) and Farrell (1997a).
- 7 See Farrell (1997a) for a discussion of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's popularity in the West.
- 8 See Sharma *et al.* (1996).
- 9 In an inspired reversal of roles, a now famous sketch from *Goodness Gracious Me* shows two Indian parents urging their son, who is determined to have a proper career as a doctor, to become a pop star instead, because being Asian is now 'cool'.
- 10 See Farrell (1997a) and Taylor (1997) for further discussions of Najma Akhtar and Sheila Chandra.

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