

Warwick Think Tank

Arts & Culture

March 14, 2024



मुंबई में भारतीय

संगीत को खत्म

होने से रोकना

**Preventing the decline of Indian
Classical Music in Mumbai**

by Zac Cash, Taran Dhillon and Veeraja Kamthe

Table of Contents

About the authors	3
Introduction	4
Briefing	5
Elitism within Indian Classical Music.	5
The disparity in appeal to an urban population.	9
The lack of recognition placed on Indian classical music.	12
Insight	15
Expanding on the elitism within Indian Classical Music.	16
Indian classical music's features makes it difficult to adapt to a urban population.	19
Lack of Media Representation of Indian Classical Music.	22
Insight Conclusion	24
Policy Recommendations	25
Action 1: Implement Institutional Reforms in Indian Classical Music Schools within Mumbai to ensure the representation of marginalised communities in their culture.	26
Action 2: Establish initiatives to effectuate an actual and perceptual shift away from classical music possessing necessarily religious and/or nationalist sentiments.	29
Action 3: Implementing Culture Classes to increase social awareness among younger generations and harnessing their interest in Indian Classical Music.	31
Conclusion	33

About the authors



Zac Cash

Zac is the Arts and Culture Research Mentor for Warwick ThinkTank Society for the 2023/24 academic year. He is in his final year of a History and Philosophy undergraduate degree, and wishes to pursue a postgraduate degree in Political Thought and/or Intellectual History after completing his current studies. Outside of university, he enjoys playing the guitar and drinking many cups of tea.



Taran Dhillon

Taran is an Arts and Culture Research Analyst Mentee for Warwick Think Tank Society for the 2023/24 academic year. She is a first year Politics and Sociology student. Her personal interests include reading, running and photography.



Veeraja Kamthe

Veeraja is one of the Arts and Culture research mentees for the 23/24 Spring term. She is a first-year Economics student who loves learning about history and literature. To balance out the mental gymnastics her degree requires, you'll find her often reading a good book, journaling or writing letters, or chitchatting in pretty cafes.

Introduction

Mumbai is a national and worldwide hotspot for music. It is the home of 'Bollywood', India's thriving and globally-popular film industry - and a large swathe of the music enjoyed by India's population originates from the soundtracks of Bollywood films. It was because of this reason that we decided to centre on Mumbai as the focal point for this 'regional challenges' policy report. Since the Mumbai music scene so heavily revolves around Bollywood music, it demonstrates perfectly the issues that another sect of Indian music - namely, Indian classical music - is currently facing. It does this on two counts. First, there are clearly damaging facets of Indian classical music that Bollywood music does not possess, and the two forms can thus be compared in this way. Second, Bollywood music itself is an obstacle to the evidently-decreasing popularity and attention provided to classical music in Mumbai.

By composing and publishing this policy report we aim to highlight, and then subsequently help to solve, the problems that currently surround Indian classical music. Indeed, while this report concentrates on Mumbai, it can nonetheless be largely applied to Indian classical music on a national scale as many issues identified are by no means exclusive to the decline of classical music within Mumbai.

This report is split into three sections. Firstly, the Briefing identifies and describes three core challenges to the survival and preservation of Indian classical music in Mumbai. Subsequently, the Insight expands on these issues and attempts to explain why they exist. Finally, the Policy Recommendation suggests three ways of action to remedy these problems.

Briefing

Elitism within Indian Classical Music.

Traditional classical music which was primarily devotional/religious assigned 'degrading' work to women and lower castes, a principle upheld by the musical Gharana system even today.

- Brahmins known as the upper caste performed the holy Sanskrit rituals whereas *devadasis* (women considered 'servants of God') danced and sang as a part of their ritual duties and lower castes were forced to undertake roles in religious activities considered "impure" such as contact with drum hides, using bodily excretions (saliva) in playing reed instruments, and musical performances in funerals that involved touching the deceased bodies.
- The caste system still makes up India's social structure and instrument-making lower castes persist in society today such as the Dalit mridangam makers¹ or Paraiyar frame drummers.²
- The Gharana (lineage) system in classical music is male-oriented. Recorded histories of gharanas have little to no mention of women performers. Meeta Pandit (currently one of the first woman heirs in a lineage) admitted that lineage (and in consequence nepotism) is "celebrated" in the system and that despite coming from a highly respected musical family she was discouraged from pursuing a career in music as a woman.³
- Upon the modernisation of Indian classical music in the early twentieth century, newly institutionalised music education remained exclusive of women and lower castes. Schools are controlled by "monopolistic male *gurus*"⁴ and there is a prevalent preference for male students to continue the legacy of a *gharana*.
- It is observable today that "a small number of hereditary professionals flourish in the upper echelons of Hindustani music culture" and over the years these

¹ The Funambulist, 2021, [The Casteist Legacy of Indian Classical Music](#),

² Sherinian, Z., 2009, [Changing Status in India's Marginal Music Communities](#), pg.3

³ Feminism in India, [In Conversation with Dr Meeta Pandit : Face of the Gwalior Gharana](#)

⁴ The Print, 2020, [Nepotism is key in musical gharanas too. But anger only for Sushant Singh Rajput.](#)

institutions became responsible for “the marginalisation of Muslim hereditary musicians and the ennobling of middle-class Hindus”.⁵

The Sanskritisation (or Sanitisation⁶) of Indian Classical Music erased the art and involvement of women and lower castes.

- In the nationalist efforts of post-colonial upper-class elites reconstructing Indian Classical music to match the same standards of Western Classical music, there was deliberate appropriation and exploitation of the artistic practices of women and lower castes.⁷
- The influence of Western Victorian values on upper caste Indians created a stigma against devadasis and other marginalised castes whose traditions were labelled as “crude” or “overly erotic” and deemed as needing to be “saved” from their inappropriate art. Their contribution to music was virtually erased post-modernisation of classical music.
- These marginal performers were forced to search for other means of survival (many of these devadasis became songstresses in “nautch” parties). This moral disapproval for “nautch” performances continues in modern times in the form of laws banning dance bars in Mumbai.⁸
- Upper caste Indians made Indian classical music a ‘high culture’ that considered the music of women and lower castes as inferior. “The most important Raga system in Indian Classical Music got developed in a male chauvinist way” and “now too women are a victim of imitation.”⁹

⁵ Katz, M., 2012, [Institutional Communalism in North Indian Classical Music](#), pg.10

⁶ Ramnath, S., 2017, [Caste, Class and the Classical : The Machineries of Symbolic Power in Carnatic Music and its Festivals](#), pg.17

⁷ Thatra, T., 2016, [Contentious \(Socio-spatial\) Relations: Tawaifs and Congress House in Contemporary Bombay/Mumbai](#)

⁸ Morcom, A., 2013, [Mumbai Dance Bars, Anti-Nautch II, and New Possibilities](#), pg.4

⁹ Mohad, S., n.d., [A New Feminine Way of Revolution in Music](#), pg.2

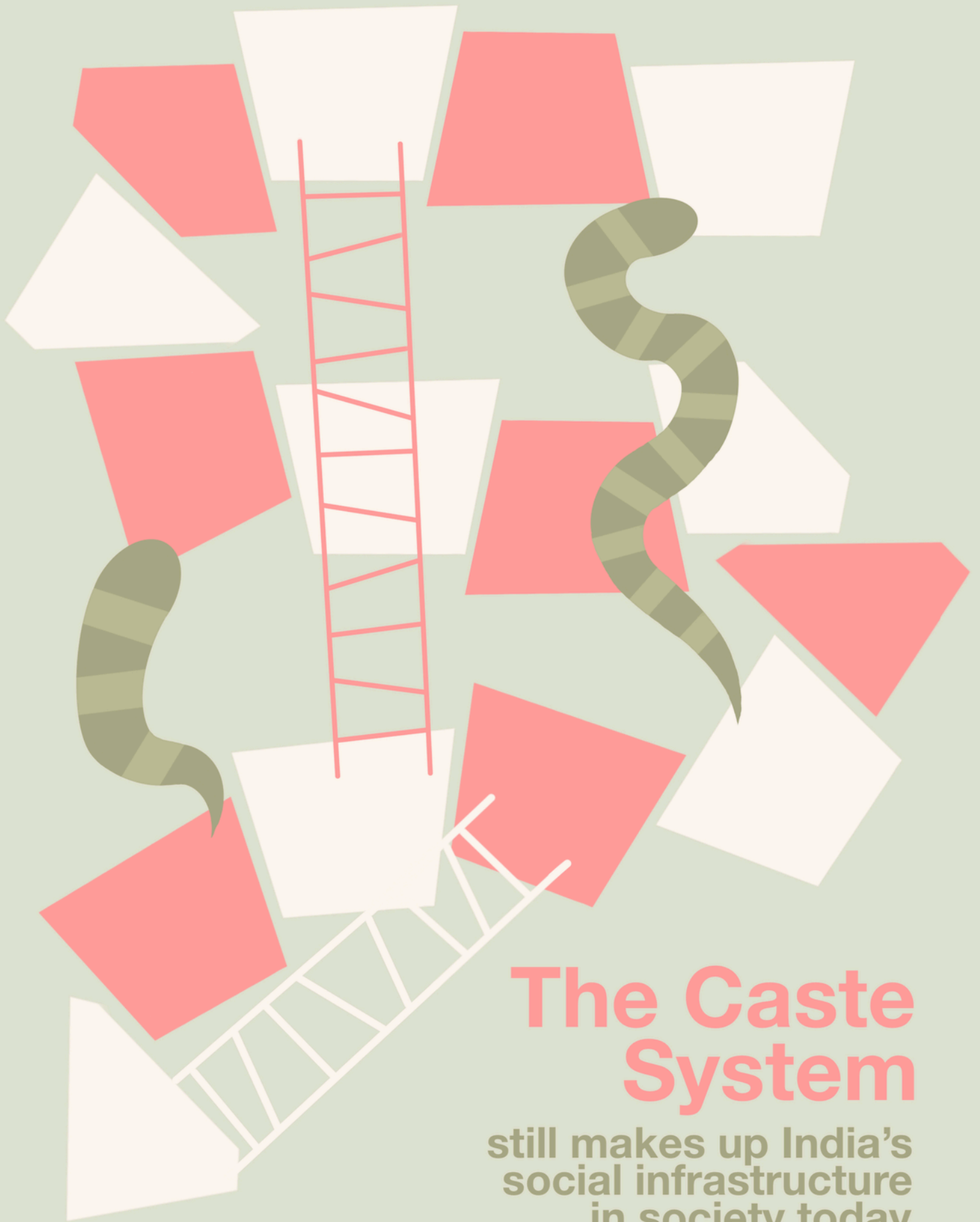
With the deconstruction of royal patronage in courts, performers and artists searched for alternate strategies for survival in urban art culture, forcing marginal artists to embrace new technologies and changing trends in music more openly than male artists.

- With the colonial annexation of princely states, performers previously supported by royal courts were forced to migrate to Bombay to seek alternative opportunities in the mercantile community (seths) in a city that was “becoming the hub of cultural commodities, including music.”¹⁰ Work undertaken by women and lower caste performers was considered inferior to the respected performances of men.
- Involvement of urban upper-caste Hindus in performing arts led to the formation of music clubs and circles in Bombay¹¹, appreciation of the performing arts was in contrast to the derogatory approach they showed to the performances of the *tawaifs* in *kothas* (spaces for commercial performances by women), which remain stigmatised in modern society as hubs of prostitution.
- Given the opportunity, women performers readily experimented with technological advances in the performing arts, dominating the thriving new gramophone recording industry in India from 1902. The “male reluctance”¹² to partake in musical practices beyond the conventional classical standards hindered their participation and popularity in the newly discovered standards of reproducibility and public access to music.

¹⁰ Nicholson, R., 2020, [A Christy Minstrel, a Harlequin, or an Ancient Persian”? Opera, Hindustani Classical Music, and the Origins of the Popular South Asian “Musical”](#)

¹¹ Das Gupta, A., 2020, [Women And Music: The Case of North India](#), pg.18

¹² Ibid., pg. 16



The Caste System

still makes up India's
social infrastructure
in society today

The disparity in appeal to an urban population.

In connection with the above section, the diverse socio-economic makeup of urban centres such as Mumbai means that classical music is only accessible to a certain sect of its population.

- Membership to the Shanmukhananda music and fine arts, a classical music body in Mumbai that boasts a main auditorium of 250 seats as well as various membership programs, ranges from 1652 rupees for a one-year membership to 8260 rupees for a five-year membership. Such fees are unobtainable for a large sect of Mumbai's population.¹³
- On the other hand, many Mumbai night clubs - which play popular music rather than classical - offer entry with no fees,¹⁴ providing a greater sense of accessibility to a larger swathe of its population.
- Moreover, Indian classical music venues are largely centred in and around south Mumbai, the city's (and India's) wealthiest precinct¹⁵, thereby providing a sense of exclusivity and inaccessibility to Mumbai's general population. Mumbai's nightclubs, however, are scattered across the city in a more egalitarian manner, enticing all its citizens.

Bollywood appeals to a younger, urban audience, which classical music cannot reach:

- Bollywood's local and global influence and impact on various economic, social, and political sectors means that classical music is easily overshadowed within a thriving and cosmopolitan urban centre such as Mumbai.¹⁶
- The style of Indian classical music is fundamentally opposed to that of Bollywood. For instance, classical music "is principally based on melody and rhythm, not on harmony, counterpoint, chords, modulation and the other basics of Western..."

¹³ Shanmukhananda music and fine arts, n.d, [Shanmukhananda music and fine arts](#)

¹⁴ Masala!, 2023, [Top 6 nightclubs in Mumbai with free entry](#)

¹⁵ By the Boutique, n.d, [Heritage Structures in South Mumbai: Their Roots and their Present-Day Utility](#)

¹⁶ Benjamin, S., 2023, [Mumbai's Film and Bollywood Culture: The Heart of Indian Cinema](#)

music". For an urban society accustomed to the latter, this adjustment can be difficult.¹⁷

- V Sriram, a historian of Carnatic music, has argued that classical music "lacks wider appeal because the lyrics draw almost exclusively from Hindu gods and worship".¹⁸ Its perceived status as religious music, therefore, preemptively excludes a younger population that is increasingly more secular.

There is an expectation that Bollywood and classical music are to be used for different ends and spaces, creating a sentiment of separation.

- The history of classical music in urban spaces paints a grim picture - in 1950s Mumbai, "the listening public defected from classical-centred radio station AIR to Radio Ceylon, whose broadcasting policy was far more in tune with consumer demand".¹⁹
- Contemporarily, the trend remains. Though venues such as the National Centre for Performing Arts provide a dedicated home for Indian classical music and offer frequent events²⁰, they pale in comparison to the hundreds of nightclubs in Mumbai serving the younger urban population.²¹
- And this has created a division in audience makeup. Classical music organisers in Mumbai expressed that "most [young people] are obsessed with popular artists. Our ecosystem has failed to create sensitive audiences who prefer quality over popularity. They have an inane and senseless fixation on celebrity musicians".²²

¹⁷ Shankar, R., n.d., [On Appreciation of Indian Classical Music](#)

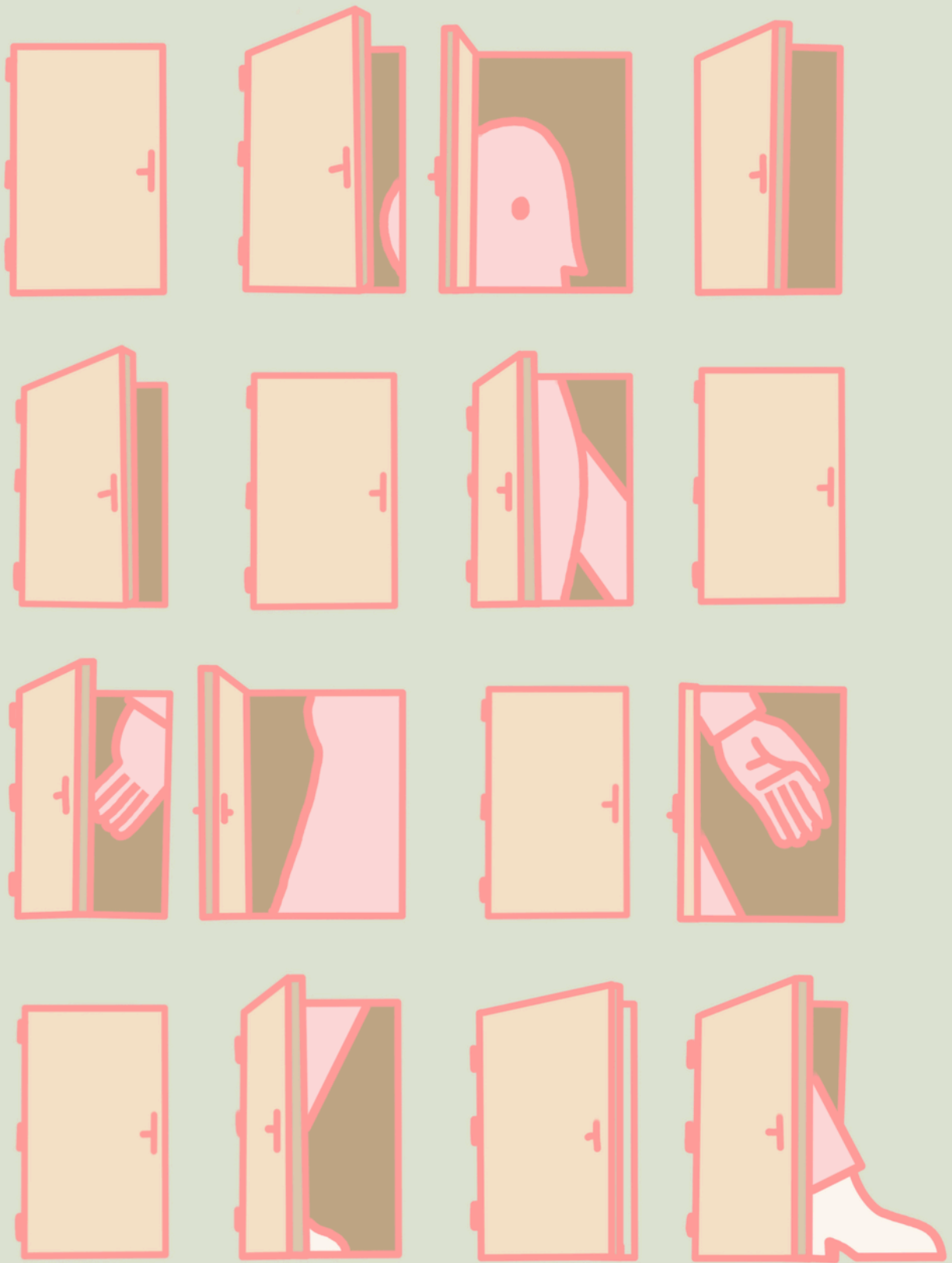
¹⁸ Scoll.in, 2018, [For Brahmins, by Brahmins: How \(and why\) Carnatic music became such an elite preoccupation](#)

¹⁹ Gopal and Moorti, S, 2008, [Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance](#), p 90

²⁰ The NCPA, n.d, [Event Calendar](#)

²¹ Rentech Digital, 2024, [How many night clubs are there in Mumbai?](#)

²² Pandit, S., 2022, [Are youngsters interested in classical music?](#)



**Indian classical music
is only accessible to
a certain sect of
its population**

The lack of recognition placed on Indian classical music:

Data from streaming services show that Indian classical music may not be receiving the attention it deserves.

- In 2020, Spotify analysed streaming data that had been collected after being launched in India after 12 months. Pop, Filmi (music from popular Indian films) and hiphop are top genres streamed in India.²³
- Furthermore, Arjit Singh, Tanishk Bagchi and Neha Kakkar are three Bollywood singers that have topped the list for the most-streamed in India in 2020, according to Spotify Wrapped data.²⁴
- On 15 August 2012, an auditorium in the Fine Arts Society in Mumbai hosted a Carnatic music concert to commemorate India's independence - around 75% of the audience may have been over the age of 60 years old.²⁵

Classical music is often not independently recognised but instead finds relevance within Bollywood music.

- Bollywood is the world's largest film industry²⁶ and is characterised by song and dance scenes, producing over 1000 films per year. The music and songs are influenced by 'various musical forms including Western pop, jazz, rock, and classical music' - highlighting the commercialisation of classical musical elements.
- Bollywood certainly takes inspiration from Indian Classical music because many songs have *ragas* (Indian melodic type, unchangeable series of notes presented as an ascending and descending scale²⁷) in their composition. However, the purpose of Bollywood songs tends to be geared towards entertainment, whereas classical musicians will say their music is for enlightenment.²⁸

²³ Spotify, 2020, [3 Major Streaming Trends From Spotify's First Year in India](#)

²⁴ Mathur, V., 2020, [Arijit Singh, Tanishk Bagchi and Neha Kakkar Are 2020's Most Streamed Artists In India On Spotify](#)

²⁵ Kusnur, N., 2012, [A Case For More Carnatic Music in Mumbai](#)

²⁶ Swaminathan, A., 2023, [The History and Evolution of Bollywood Music](#)

²⁷ Oxford Reference, n.d., [Raga - Oxford Reference](#).

²⁸ Making Music, 2018, [An Introduction to: Indian Classical Music](#)

- 80% of India's music revenue is produced by music for Bollywood films. This is significant because it highlights that classical music does not gain much popularity in its original form (not fusion style) among the vast majority.²⁹

Classical music fails to receive the equivalent degree of mainstream media attention as Bollywood music is shown in Mumbai.

- Amjad Ali Khan (a very well-known Indian classical sarod player) highlights in a book excerpt that “the kind of attention that Bollywood and the fashion industry are receiving today from mainstream media, Indian classical music got three decades ago!”³⁰ - suggesting the change in popularity in the types of genres being listened to, therefore affecting media coverage.
- A 2021 study analysed audience engagement of Indian classical music artists and dancers during lockdown through social media and found that audiences have shifted “to online spaces for the lack of watching live performances in public spaces.”³¹ Although social media engagement may have increased, Indian Classical still has elements of elitism and a niche interest - the fact there is a lack of popular live events even after lockdown shows that in media it is underrepresented.
- The lack of live spaces for classical music means that its representation in popular media may not reach the levels achieved by Bollywood music and films.³²

²⁹ Pastukhov, D., 2022, [Indian Music Industry Analysis: Streaming, Live Industry, Bollywood, 2022 Trends, and More](#)

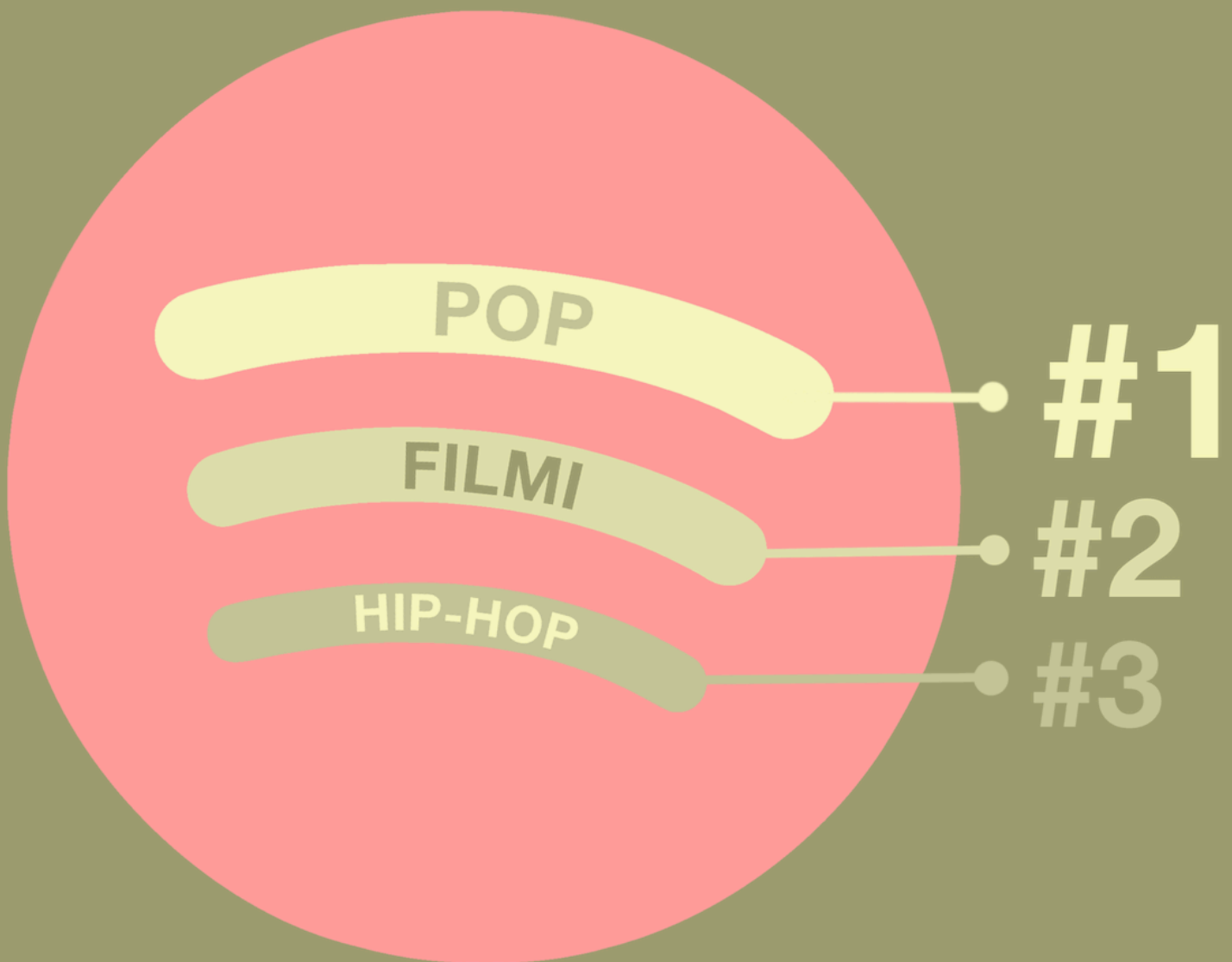
³⁰ Ali Khan, A., 2017, [Book Excerpt - How Amjad Ali Khan thinks of classical music in the pop-digital-social-media age](#)

³¹ Ravishanakar and Banerjee, 2021, [AN ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT BY INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC ARTISTS AND DANCERS DURING LOCKDOWN VIA SOCIAL MEDIA](#)

³² Ibid.

Top Genres

streamed on
Spotify 2020
in India



Arts & Culture Insight

Overview

This section aims to explain why the points covered previously in the Briefing are the case. Much like the Briefing, the Insight in full covers three main areas, but unlike the Briefing, it does not split into subsections but rather covers generally one or two of the action points discussed above.

The first section, entitled 'expanding on the elitism within Indian classical music', develops on the broad theme of female and lower-caste marginalisation that was introduced within the first Briefing section. The subsequent section takes heed of the second action point in the second Briefing element - namely, that Bollywood appeals to a younger, urban audience which Indian classical music struggles to connect with - and explores reasons behind this phenomenon. The final component of the Insight elaborates on the lack of media representation provided to classical music in India, as discussed in the final action point of the third Briefing statement.

Expanding on the elitism within Indian Classical Music.

Classical Indian music is distinguished by two distinct types – Hindustani (north Indian) and Carnatic (south Indian). In contemporary times, Hindustani is considered more inclusive and non-restrictive, however, both originate from the same ideas linked to the Hindu religion. Music was never a space for musical exchange alone, it was always designed to complement religious practices, sharing a common distribution of roles across a hierarchy³³ – with the Brahmin caste granted the highest status of performing religious duties and the lowest caste given impure jobs. The mridangam makers caste³⁴, for example, are responsible for making the ‘mridangam’ percussion using cow’s skin (considered particularly blasphemous in Hinduism). Despite several legal bans against cow slaughter and physical labour that could result in health problems, the marginalised community persists, still not dignified as professionals by the upper-caste artists but simply as menial workers.

This social structure is not enforced legally but exists ubiquitously despite progress in inclusivity. While the upper caste enjoys respect for their musical professions, the lower castes are forced into restrictive insulting traditions, like those of the brass players³⁵ who can be seen at auspicious events pan-India (in festivals, weddings, and celebrations), or the Paraiyar frame drummers of Tamil Nadu who are required to perform specific funeral traditions that involve touching deceased bodies. Pushpavathi Poypadathu³⁶ (a contemporary Carnatic singer) has talked about barriers she faced in her experience as a lower-caste student in the house of an upper-caste guru, revealing that everyday caste discriminatory practices (being shunned from eating with upper-class students, banned from drinking water in the house, etc) affected her training. The systematic denial of access to classical spaces is common to other classical arts in India, especially the dances.³⁷

Not only are backward caste practices sustained in the Gharana system, but Hinduist traditions are also rooted in Carnatic musical training. As revealed by TM Krishna (a noted classical singer), “From the way students are expected to dress to the pictures that decorate the walls, the environment informs you of what is the norm...Now, all this has very little to do with music but is bundled in as a show of respect for the music... Whenever Carnatic musicians speak about their art, they invariably invoke deities and present

³³ Encyclopedia.com, n.d., [Music: Music And Religion In India](#)

³⁴ Bhashti, D., 2020, [The caste of Karnatic music](#)

³⁵ Mansi Kedia et al., 2022, [The Untold Potential of India’s Informal Music Industry](#), pg. 11

³⁶ Counterflows, 2021, [Conversation with Pushpavathy – Lalitam Varnnam Asuram](#)

³⁷ Prakash, B., 2023, [Opinion: To truly democratise Indian art and culture, the ‘classical’ must be declared dead](#)

themselves as priests or Vedic scholars³⁸,” and, “Musicians will, more often than not, speak of the composer’s bhakti and the infallibility of these great souls.”³⁹

This indistinguishable line between religion and music becomes even bigger a concern when considering Hindustani music, well-known for its Ustads (Muslim music scholars). However, during the Sanskritisation of classical music by V.N. Bhatkhande in the early 20th century, there was a deliberate exclusion of Muslim contributions⁴⁰ in the modernisation of classical music. For Bhatkhande, Muslim musicians were not necessarily excluded because of their faith but rather looked down upon for their illiteracy, as he preferred to capture the notation of classical music and Muslims were loyal to their traditional reliance on oral transmission of music scholarship. The Hindu nationalist movement established musical academies known as Gandharva Mahavidyalayas that taught explicit Hindu curriculums, which changed the way Muslim musicians presented themselves in India. Therefore, while Hindustani music can be considered ‘secular’ due to a widespread appreciation of non-Hindu musicians, it is fundamentally a hypocritical notion as these musicians are always expected to keep their religious identities subdued.

This persistence of backward social structures in classical music is accompanied by a patriarchal tradition.⁴¹ The underlying principle of the gharanas is that men are the ones to appreciate space for artistic production and appoint male heirs to continue their musical legacy. In contrast, women artists were forced to depend on the community⁴², receiving support from spaces like *kothas* and *mehfils* that were looked down upon as prostitution-related art forms. After the demolition of the court patronage system in the late nineteenth century, women performers were forced to survive in urban markets as courtesans, forging the entertainment industry India sees today.

But even amongst the elite, women in classical music are rarely appointed as heirs of *gharanas*. A newly highlighted challenge brought up is the #MeToo movement in the Music Academy of Madras.⁴³ In the *guru-shishya* system of *gharanas*, it is easy for powerful gurus to exploit their students who are expected to be completely submissive. The problem of sexual abuse and misconduct has been around for a long time in Hindustani music but very rarely do people call out predators as they are often too

³⁸ Krishna, T.M., 2018, [How I discovered Karnatik music is caged by caste](#)

³⁹ Thomas, S., 2018, [The rhythm of caste](#)

⁴⁰ Nikhil, 2016, [Muslims in Indian classical music today](#)

⁴¹ Malu, P., 2021, [How 20th Century Indian Courtesans Changed The Way You Consume Music Today](#)

⁴² Srinivasan, A., 2020, [Nepotism is key in musical gharanas too. But anger only for Sushant Singh Rajput](#)

⁴³ Darbar Festival, 2020, [#MeToo in the Indian Classical Tradition Darbar Festival 2020](#)

powerful and untouchable for survivors to stand up for themselves, and even after much discussion regarding this issue, “there has [still] not been any initiative to create a safe environment for the survivors”. The *guru-shishya* system is very informal and blurs the line between professional and personal as many female students enter the classical music ecosystem at a young age and their guru becomes the primary relationship in life.”⁴⁴ Living in their *guru*’s house, training one-on-one, face-to-face is a traditional practice that makes it hard to define boundaries. This begs the question of whether the relationship between the *guru-shishya* should be institutionalised and regulated as if a workplace.

⁴⁴ First Edition Arts Channel, 2020, [Making the Classical Music Ecosystem Safer for Women - A Discussion](#)

Indian classical music's features makes it difficult to adapt to a urban population.

In the previous section, we identified that Indian classical music cannot appeal to an urban population as found in cosmopolitan cities such as Mumbai. Within this insight, we will expand on why Bollywood music has found an audience within urban areas, and why classical music has so far failed to reach this lofty heights - namely, by identifying two major factors which can provide an explanation for the decline of Indian classical music within urban areas. Firstly, we explicate the role of nationalism within Indian classical music, and consider how this might be received by a more liberal urban population. Secondly, we uncover the often highly-religious content of classical music within India, and contend that this is largely incompatible with the more (and ever-growing) secular population with India's urban centres.

Indian classical music, it seems, pertains to nationalism in two fundamental ways. Firstly, it speaks to nationalist sentiment in a broad sense (that is, without the concept of nationalism being infused with other facets that might be attached to the notion of what such a nation might consist of). One can think of music's role within nationalist sentiment analogously to the role of food within nationalism, and particularly how Carol Helstosky reads Pellegrino Artusi's *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*. She claims that "by making constant anecdotal references to regional differences in food and preparation, Artusi reinforced the idea of Italy as a unique and interesting collection of regions"⁴⁵. It is precisely that Italy is constituted of regions with such varied gastronomic idiosyncrasies that food was able to become such a powerful national binding force that it was (and is), for the different contributions that Italy's regions provided to the nation as a whole reinforced the idea of Italy as a collection of regions. In the same way that Italian food is understood not as widely consistent and largely similar throughout the country, but rather regionally varied and culturally specific, Indian classical music should not be thought of as a homogenous force that can be located anywhere within the nation but instead a feature that is deeply sensitive to each Indian region. And therefore, much like Italian food, these regional variations within classical music do not stifle nationalist thought but instead play a major role in fuelling ideas about India as a nation. For instance, Lakshmi Subramanian notes that the compositions of Viswanatha Sastrigal, such as the North Indian classical song 'Jayati Jayati Bharata Mata', were in turn "key to the idea of

⁴⁵ Helstosky, C., 2003, [Recipe for the Nation: Reading Italian History through La scienza in cucina and La cucina futurista](#), p. 123

a palette of national melodies and songs and in which artists like D.L.Roy and M.S Subbalakshmi, coming from diverse regions came together to participate”.⁴⁶

The second way in which Indian classical music generates nationalist conceptions of India is via religious nationalism. This is particularly pertinent within the current Indian national context due to the recent demolishing of a 600-year-old mosque by the BJP, India’s Hindu nationalist ruling party. Bob van der Linden explains that the “Hinduisation’ of Indian classical music has led to the stigmatisation and subsequent marginalisation of Muslim musicians”.⁴⁷ Both forms of nationalism within Indian classical music could instigate a negative reaction within the urban, and comparatively liberal, population of Mumbai. Indeed, the very notion of national identity seems to possess negative political connotations within the current political climate, particularly because national identity often seems to be exclusionary in some way, such as on racial, religious, or linguistic grounds. The religious nationalism as exhibited within Indian classical music by van der Linden gives tangible weighting to this claim.

Additionally, and interconnectedly, classical music in India not only propagates religious nationalism but also possesses more general religious features. This is difficult to shake off - Guy Beck states that “the tradition of Indian classical music... is fundamentally rooted in the sonic and musical dimensions of the *Vedas* [(Hindu literature)], *Upanishads* and the *Agamas*, such that Indian music has been nearly always religious in character”.⁴⁸ And both Hindustani and Carnatic classical musical traditions regard the 13th century Sanskrit text *Sangeeta-Ratnakara* of Sarangadeva as the authoritative musicological text.⁴⁹ Moreover, this religious centrality has not been left in the past, relegated to thoughts of mere historical origin. Rather, although “it continues to develop from its inception to modern times altering with the advancement of new technologies and cultural influences”, it nonetheless remains “a balance of *raga*, *tala* and *swar* for spiritual growth and personal immersion in Hinduism”.⁵⁰ The retention of religious relevance within classical music could put it at odds with Mumbai’s population on two counts. Firstly, the particularly dualist nature of the origins of Hindustani music - that is, between Hindus (whose honorific titles are Pandits) and Muslims (Ustads) - could prove to be unattractive to a state whose religious makeup, despite holding a majority of Hindus, also possesses the most amount

⁴⁶ Subramanian, L., 2017, [How the Indian nation was imagined through its songs](#)

⁴⁷ van der Linden, B., 2022, [Hindu Nationalism and North Indian Music in the Global Age](#), p 99

⁴⁸ Beck, G., 2012, [Sonic Liturgy: Ritual and Music in Hindu Tradition](#), pp 107-108

⁴⁹ Bod, R., 2013, [A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present](#), p 116

⁵⁰ Rodrigues, H., 2015, [Hindustani Classical Music and Spirituality](#)

of both Buddhists and Jains within the country.⁵¹ Furthermore, aside from issues of inter-religious disputes, Mumbai might also be plausibly regarded as an increasingly-secular city, at least for Muslims. For instance, Ari Singh Anand argues that the “ostensibly ‘religious’ domain of Islam is not necessarily the only, or even primary, basis for achieving a self-consciously ethical selfhood”. Rather, Anand claims, the religious domain of Islam within Mumbai is instead defined “largely in terms of political modernity” and is therefore “intersected by discourses and practices of the self as a political and economic agent”.⁵² And for those that remain convinced of their faith, due to the aforementioned ethno-religious envisioning of “India as a [Hindu] majoritarian nation-state, not a multicultural one”⁵³ by the BJP - and particularly as a consequence of the increasing number of Hindu nationalist rallies within the past year⁵⁴ - those who do identify as a member of the majority religion with Maharashtra could begin to feel disillusioned with the music that once represented coalescence and unity.

⁵¹ Kramer, S., 2021, [Religious Composition of India: Religious demography of Indian states and territories](#)

⁵² Anand, A.S., 2014, [Ethical selfhood and the status of the secular: Muslim identity in Mumbai](#)

⁵³ Jaffrelot, C., 2019, [The Fate of Secularism in India](#)

⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, 2023, [Spike in anti-Muslim rallies since BJP retook India's Maharashtra](#)

Lack of Media Representation of Indian Classical Music.

In comparison to Indian Fusion Music, Indian Classical music is not as popular in the media or as popular among modern audiences. For example, in an article for the ESTD, American Indian singer and YouTuber, Vidya Vox, states:

“Carnatic music is a very ancient art form that has kept its core traditions over the centuries. It will continue to thrive while being infused into contemporary music and audiences.”⁵⁵

Modern artists are keen to incorporate jazz, rock, electronic, hip-hop elements and other influences with traditional beats for current audiences, as mentioned above. Recent years have seen Indian fusion gain immense popularity. For example, the playlist on Spotify titled ‘Carnatic Fusion’ displays 60,000 followers.⁵⁶ This genre is constantly evolving as musicians experiment with different variations and styles – especially to develop a different artistic niche. For example, artists such as Anoushka Shankar skilfully combine classical sitar techniques with modern jazz elements, ‘creating a sonic landscape that transcends time and borders.’⁵⁷

Two more significant examples of modern-day Indian Fusion artists are Shankar Mahadevan (“whose powerful goals and innovative use of instruments create a mesmerising musical experience” and additionally has 20 million monthly listeners on Spotify) and A.R. Rahman (known for his soulful compositions that seamlessly combine classical Indian elements with contemporary beats and has 32.2 million monthly listeners on Spotify.) Rahman’s ‘Vande Mataram’ album is a classic example to illustrate this type of fusion.⁵⁸

Furthermore, with the development of modern electronic instruments and advancements in technology, instruments such as the electric guitar, synthesisers and electronic drum kits become much more prevalent in music. Collaborations with well-known Western artists has given rise to Indian fusion music on a global scale – therefore, placing more attention on contemporary fusions in comparison to Indian classical music in its original form.

To highlight even further how Indian fusion music and Bollywood music is the most preferred genre of music, the percentage of modern Bollywood that is streamed is at

⁵⁵ Mehta, T., 2024, [Why it took Bollywood's pan-India craze to spotlight Carnatic music's richness](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ EA Technocrats, 2023, [The Origins of Indian Fusion Music](#)

⁵⁸ Rana, P., 2023, [Evolution of Indian music](#)

49%.⁵⁹ Additionally, Bollywood film classics is the genre that is the second most streamed, at 40%.⁶⁰ Five out of ten music streaming genres in India were categorised under Bollywood. Apart from this Indian rap and hip-hop had gained popularity among listeners as indicated by 30% of respondents who streamed such music frequently.⁶¹ Another key factor as to why Bollywood holds the monopoly on what music is popular is the language used – Hindi is the most widely spoken language in the country, therefore, Bollywood music becomes the choice for many (whereas Carnatic classical compositions are in Telugu and Sanskrit.) Additionally, since the first movies that were released in India in 1931 with Alam Ara, film music quickly became the most popular genre of music because Indian film music had an appeal that was able to overcome social barriers - unlike in Western countries, where classical and popular music were often derived from different parts of society. For example, Western classical music is often associated with and enjoyed by upper classes, aristocrats and elite groups. As a result, Indian film music has become an important part of a shared cultural heritage. Indian films certainly took inspiration from Indian classical music, however, incorporated their own twists to it.⁶² These factors emphasise why Bollywood film music takes the top spot for the most represented in the media in comparison to Indian classical music.

However, there is a resurgence in popularity to preserve cultural heritage. Projected revenue in the traditional music market in India is estimated to reach US\$ 240.40m in 2024. As for the number of listeners in the Traditional music market, it is anticipated to reach 99.3 million users by 2029. According to Spotify, recent data shows that over the last two years, Indian classical music consumption has grown by nearly 500% on Spotify with more than 45% of the listeners under the age of 25.⁶³

⁵⁹ Statista, 2023, [Most consumed music streaming genres in India as of 2022](#)

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Music with Chirag, 2023, [Evolution of Indian film music](#)

⁶³ Spotify, 2023, [India's Classical Music Takes Center Stage in Spotify's Echo Campaign](#)

Insight Conclusion:

This Insight firstly explored the elitism within Indian classical music as was preliminarily highlighted in the Briefing, detailing issues pertaining to both caste and the patriarchy. Secondly, we examined the various features of Indian classical music, elements which are difficult to reconcile with a Mumbai population that is generally more secular and liberal. Moreover, the first and second sections of the Insight overlap since the features identified within the first section are the same as those discussed within the second. The final segment of the Insight explicates why Indian classical music does not garner as much media attention as Bollywood music does, thereby serving to fully bridge the gap between the Briefing and this current component of the paper.

Policy Recommendations

Overview

The aim of this final section is to put forward a selection of policies to act as a means to solve - or, at least begin to solve - the problems facing Indian classical music that we have outlined thus far in the report. When devising these policy recommendations, we had to consider a wide variety of factors, including but not limited to how realistic they were in terms of their implementation, what actors and agents would be involved in their introduction, and a general timeframe of their establishment. Such thought processes are laid out clearly within each suggestion. We focused on three policies that we believe will best help to assuage the evident decline of Indian classical music in Mumbai. The first policy is to create institutional reform within Mumbai-based classical music schools so as to make them more diverse and fairly-represented. The second concerns the formation of initiatives to encourage a shift away from religious and nationalist content that is characteristic of Indian classical music. The third and final policy recommendation proposes the beginning of 'cultural classes' within Mumbai schools to instil and increase awareness of classical music within the upcoming generation of citizens.

Action 1: Implement Institutional Reforms in Indian Classical Music Schools within Mumbai to ensure the representation of marginalised communities in their culture.

Ensuring better representation of marginalised communities in classical music institutions requires a two-sided strategy, primarily addressing internal issues of the institutions and then working on more active progressive campaigns. One side would be committing to creating a safe space for minorities in the institution itself, ensuring the institutions themselves are not systemically supporting any discrimination or elitism. This prevention-based approach would allow space for minorities, leading into the second side of the coin that involves making active efforts to include more marginalised communities within the classical music culture. The musical institutions responsible for undertaking these actions would be the musical schools dispensing classical music training- either in private or institutionalised as ‘Gandharva Mahavidyalayas’ (the first institutionalised music school established in Lahore in 1901 by P.V. Paluskar, later shifted to Bombay in 1907). The ‘Akhil Bhartiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal’⁶⁴ is the overall institution responsible for the promotion and propagation of institutionalised Indian classical culture with its main music school in Vashi, Navi Mumbai, and 29 smaller centres in Mumbai alone, 463 in Maharashtra.

For the first approach, any caste-discriminatory practices that exist in society (such as being separated from upper-caste peers, not being allowed to drink water in an upper caste person's home, etc) should not be entertained in classical music institutions. To ensure that the training system is a safe space, regardless of larger societal norms, it would be efficient to assign a designated Welfare Officer or specifically a Welfare Officer for minorities who would be responsible for ensuring no caste-based discrimination in training in all classical music schools. Similarly, following this prevention-based approach, there should be an established Guidelines and Complaints committee for each registered school that would keep in check any unequal opportunities or disadvantages women receive in training and supervise the guru’s unfair power dynamic against students. This would mean ensuring an immediate and thorough response to harassment complaints and regular supervisory checks of sessions. Discarding Paluskar’s Hindu nationalist agenda in the institutionalised Gandharva Mahavidyalaya schools by removing norms such as forcing students to perform Hindu religious rituals or devotional singing from the curriculum would make the culture more approachable. Therefore, while it would be far too bold to demand a complete reform of classical training methods and culture,

⁶⁴ Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal, n.d., [Welcome to Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal](#)

institutions can try to minimise religious sentiment in their curriculums, or at least, not make it a compulsory part of the training.

Beyond prevention, the institutions should then work on ensuring better representation by actively providing easy access to training to less-privileged students. This can involve going to public schools regularly (public schools in India are usually occupied by low-income, and thus directly, lower caste students) to provide free training sessions to students or scouting for and then recruiting public school students specifically for training in their schools, providing scholarships for lower-income students. Active scouting and recruitment can also be conducted in musical institutions previously looked down upon by the classical music culture - such as courtesans in mehfilis and marginal workers in the performing arts industry. This would require the establishment of an Outreach and Recruitment Team focused on recruiting talented students from marginalised communities, otherwise these communities would not be made aware of the opportunities they can have in classical music institutions. Apart from targeted outreach, the schools can work on using digital technology to make the Indian classical music curriculum widely available through open online courses, radio broadcasts, or hosting webinars and workshops on their online platforms. This would be a step towards breaking down the barriers supporting elitism in the community and making the art form accessible to people from all backgrounds. Reforms within the curriculum itself would include acknowledging and working to uncover the rich history of Muslim records and Devadasi art that was destroyed in the establishment of the modern Indian classical system. Karmatullah and Kaukab Khan's treatises on music theory document the participation of Muslim musicians in Hindustani music through a six-hundred-year legacy of Islamic texts on Indian music.⁶⁵ The traditional musical styles of marginal performers of all backgrounds, histories, castes, and religions should also be appreciated and studied within the curriculum. Appreciating these previously 'undignified' styles would be a big step towards breaking down the elitist nature of the classical music culture. A step further would be to support marginal communities directly involved in the culture, that is, the instrument-making industry. To avoid exploitation of this caste-based occupational segregation, classical music institutions should offer help to formalise the industry by helping establish regulated production hubs that follow legal guidelines and have standardised rules of labour. Supporting a worker's union would also allow these instrument-makers to gain agency over their identity and work.

Therefore, powerful music centres in Mumbai can use this prevention and inclusion strategy to ensure better representation of marginal communities in Indian classical

⁶⁵ Thoughts of a Bibliophile, 2021, [Review: Lineage of Loss: Counternarratives of North Indian Music by Max Katz](#)

music. While most of these actions can be implemented right away within the existing system of training and culture, it will take time to establish some of the more reformist changes such as the curriculum changes and establishment of Outreach teams and Complaint committees. However, if committed to the cause, most musical institutions can promise to be safer and more inclusive within the next three years upon establishing these recommended interventions and changes.

Action 2: Establish initiatives to effectuate an actual and perceptual shift away from classical music possessing necessarily religious and/or nationalist sentiments.

Individuals, but especially younger audiences, may be disinterested in Indian classical music purely from a stylistic point of view. This is something that is almost impossible to assuage, since it represents simply a clash of subjective preferences regarding what type of music particular people like to listen to, and this cannot be overcome without changing the very essence of the style of music that they dislike. However, as shown within the second insight theme, there are specific features within Indian classical music that act as a repellent against attracting certain sects of the population toward this genre, features that appear to be less preferentially ambiguous and more definitely targeted. Such features are its religious and nationalist elements, as well as the interplay between these two aspects. The aim of this policy recommendation is to suggest a way in which these qualities of Indian classical music can be diminished so as to therefore become more appealing to the (comparatively) progressive and secular youth of Mumbai.

It is important to firstly note that proponents of Indian classical music might rightly object that religious and nationalistic characteristics are inherent to this form of music. As shown previously, Indian classical music is historically rich both in terms of its religious foundations but also its nationalist content. This policy recommendation, being sensitive to this concern, therefore does not argue for any such systematic reform or major overhaul of Indian classical music, nor does it claim that all preceding classical music should be deemed null and void by these contemporary suggestions. Nonetheless, it is clear that in order to not be wholly overshadowed by the seemingly omnipotent force of Bollywood in Mumbai, and ensure the full extent of its popularity and relevance with the city's youth, Indian classical music must 'move with the times', and changes thus need to be made.

Thus, we recommend that initiatives are established that make connections with younger classical musicians, as well as the recording and distributing companies that they work with, to promote and push for classical music that is devoid of these previously-discussed elements. These initiatives are unlikely to possess support from the national government due to their mission being wholly counterintuitive with the ideology of the Modi-led government. Yet it may find support in pre-existing institutions within Mumbai, such as the Vyas Academy of Indian Music; despite their roots being in Indian classical music, they are evidently nonetheless somewhat open to change and progression, reflected by

their public desire to reconcile and maintain an interest in Western classical music.⁶⁶ These initiatives will firstly be composed of like-minded individuals, thus being of true grassroots origin, but upon establishing relationships with pre-existing supportive institutions it is hoped that their numbers will grow. Hence, although it may be initially challenging for agents involved within such initiatives to enact meaningful change, once the first steps have been taken and more become integrated within the project, it should become easier for them to influence the classical music world.

Furthermore, this policy recommendation complements other policy suggestions within this paper. For instance, the above idea of instigating reform within classical music schools to include women, lower-caste individuals, and other marginalised groups will aid in generating classical musicians who can offer something progressive and modern to the classical music scene within Mumbai. And the policy listed below of increasing awareness in schools to ensure wider public recognition could provide further support to this particular policy because this will hopefully coincide with the partial reform of classical music as brought about by the first two policy recommendations, thereby effectuating the perceptions of classical music just as much as the music itself.

Finally, in terms of a timeframe for this policy, we anticipate that the establishing and tentative branching out of the initiatives will likely take about 1-2 years to really take hold. However, once this initial progress has been made, it will become easier for those involved to wield more of an influence within classical music in Mumbai. We are hesitant to put an exact timestamp for 'success', partly since this will be an ongoing project that will not have a definitive end, but also because 'success' could have multiple gradients that are contingent on the overall reception of the policy. Nonetheless, if we speculate that 'success' looks like a somewhat healthier perception of Indian classical music within Mumbai within its youth, without an immediate correlation of it with negatively-viewed sentiments, then we forecast that this will take at least 5 years to achieve.

⁶⁶ Vyas Academy of Indian Music, n.d., [About Us](#)

Action 3: Implementing Culture Classes to increase social awareness among younger generations and harnessing their interest in Indian Classical Music.

According to Mint Lounge’s (online magazine that focuses on lifestyle journalism in India) webpage, the decreasing interest from younger generations in Indian Classical music over the past two decades has been put down to the genre being ‘perceived as complex, and question marks over how young musicians could make a living.’⁶⁷ Additionally, the fact that classical music fails to receive the equivalent degree of mainstream media attention as Bollywood and fusion music is an important topic to consider in the Arts and Culture space – especially, when looking at what type of policies to recommend to increase accessibility and retain culture. Previously, the lack of representation and accessibility online for young people for Indian classical music as a significant issue has been discussed. Although, Spotify has recently published data that shows that Indian classical music consumption has grown by 500% over the past two years⁶⁸, especially among young adults – this data is significant because it shows that there needs to be policy that will harness this interest helping the preservation of culture. This section aims to outline the policy recommendation that is to increase cultural awareness within schools as one part of the state-wide curriculum within Maharashtra (or even to be more specific, simply in the city of Mumbai itself to begin with). To do so, at secondary school level, a suggestion is to incorporate a ‘Culture Class’ (similar to the what Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) classes do in the UK) with the purpose of providing students with the tools to access this genre of music (through playing instruments, informed of job prospects in the music industry and even school trips to see traditional music performed live.) A variety of life experiences and being immersed in culture is imperative for everybody, no matter your background as it builds a well-rounded individual. Bringing it back to a school-level is important because it ensures that everyone has the same or similar opportunities to access this genre further as it is often associated with specific demographics within society. The main aim is to increase awareness at a school level and emphasise cultural preservation because in this digital age, Indian Classical Music is not getting the attention that it deserves. Rapid globalisation has meant that Western influences have quickly been adopted across the world, and possibly eroded cultural heritage in other areas.

Therefore, when discussing the practical elements of implementing this suggestion it is important to look at the main actors involved. For example, one of the main actors that

⁶⁷ Amin, A., 2023, [How a platform is making Indian classical music more accessible](#)

⁶⁸ Spotify, 2023, [India’s Classical Music Takes Center Stage in Spotify’s Echo Campaign](#)

would be involved in the implementation of this policy is the Ministry of School Education (ministry of the Government of Maharashtra, which is responsible for designing and implementing education-related policies for this state). Education in India is primarily managed by state-run public education systems (therefore, national reform is considered to take a long time, especially when considering topics within Arts and Culture, as these are often overlooked). Furthermore, to outline timeframe for this policy recommendation is difficult because passing new legislation often takes several years and is a long, arduous process. In a Hindustan article discussing policy legislation, the think tank Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy is quoted to have stated that it takes “261 days for parliamentary law to come into force.”⁶⁹ For this reason, an estimation for the implementation for this policy recommendation will be around 1 to 2 years.

Lastly, suggesting indicators for measuring success is imperative, especially when discussing the implementation of new policy. The first two indicators are quantitative and therefore will ease future measurement - measuring the number of students who pursue music related degrees, increased listening to Indian Classical music (data that can be observed through streaming platforms such as Spotify) among young adults and looking at if numbers of young people at live performances have increased or not. Secondly, a more quantitative approach when looking at success will be measuring the way that students are able to engage in professional conversations in interviews/other areas of life because of the well-rounded education they have received. There has always been significant stress on science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related careers/subjects, however, having an interest and well-rounded knowledge in the humanities is just as imperative which is a vital aim for these classes. We hope that the implementation of these policies can contribute towards meaningful change towards a more culturally aware society.

⁶⁹ Saha, D., 2017, [261 days: The time it takes laws approved by Parliament to be enforced](#)

Conclusion

This report has aimed to do three things. Firstly, to highlight the most prevalent issues facing Indian classical music within Mumbai - and, by some extension, the nation - within our Briefing. Secondly, the report's Insight attempted to develop on these problems explicated within the Briefing and explain why they are so prominent within this topic. Lastly, our Policy Recommendation saw some of our suggestions regarding what we can do in terms of taking action against these concerns, and presented three realistic and holistic policies which will hopefully make a difference in putting Indian classical music back on the (musical) map. We believe this policy report will effectuate great strides being taken in beginning to balance the musical landscape within Mumbai, and India more generally, and therefore provide Mumbai with a more multifaceted and egalitarian cultural scene.

**Warwick
Think Tank** 