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## Hierarchical Construction of Art Under the Rubric of Sanskritisation

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### ABSTRACT

The very term Sanskritization denotes the process of cultural change towards the twice- born caste and posits upper caste culture as superior. The process of sanskritization provokes the lower caste people to seek hierarchy by emulating higher caste culture and practices. This paper focuses on Sanskritization -as a tool to revive certain art forms that enables lower castes to shift to a lifestyle, culture and art form to a more prestigious one. The rich Sanskritization of the art forms have ensured to sustain religious beliefs of the masses that helped the upper caste to gain religious and political eminence. Art forms like Bharatanatyam is Sanskritised by upper class to make the art form inaccessible to lower caste which also made them gain control through art. Representation of inequality in art forms in the tamil movie "Sangamam" explores the discrimination faced by a folk dancer to marry his beloved who practices art form of the upper class (Bharatanatyam) and their successful union brings together the two dance forms there by creating Sangamam of folk dance and Bharatanatyam. Sanskritization of art forms has pushed the subordinates to a position where they fail to recognise their own state of inequality which karl Marx called as the state of false consciousness. while it is still hidden that the art forms like Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music that is owned by upper caste are borrowed for free from the lower castes and have destroyed the basic art forms that they've borrowed from to impose their power on the other castes. Thus, Sanitising and Sanskritising the natural elements of the art form foster a community to take over the society- politically, culturally and religiously. This paper brings out the complexities of caste in art forms and the realities of caste power structures brought by the process of sanskritization in art forms like Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam.

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### INTRODUCTION

India is known for its cultural diversity with varieties of language, culture, art forms, dance and music. Religions and castes have crafted these different cultures, practices and art forms. These art forms are layered on the basis of the stratification of people performing it. The notion of pollution and purity played a major role in the alienation of certain art forms and the dignity of the others. This emulation of hierarchy in art forms are because of the dominant caste's emulation of preserving their ritual purity. To substantiate certain art forms as pure, some others were shown as impure and polluted. This lead to the endangered state of many art forms In India.

Speaking about sanskritization,. The term sankritization was introduced by M.N.Srinivas in his book, "Religion and variety among the coorgs of south India" and he defines the term as "Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste." In this book, he says that the tribes practiced upper caste rituals to gain dignity and respect and He used the term Brahminization. Further he went on to call it "Sanskritization". This paper examines how Marx's idea of False consciousness formulate the concept of Sanskritization of arts. This paper also examines the movie "Sangamam" to expose the conflict between art forms.

Every art form has its own sense of aesthetics. The politics of dominant castes on art forms to gain power has paved the way for the sanskritization of arts. Certain artforms like Carnatic music are inherited as a privilege while the others are de-sanctified. Art forms are considered as patrimony and thereby is restricted to be accessible to all. The covert ideology of stratification of art forms based on caste is clearly a political strategy devised for the prevention of annihilation of caste. The stratification of artforms were all formulated by the upper castes who wants to maintain the social distance between them and the lower castes using art as a medium.

Yajnavalkya smriti is one of the most important Hindu texts in Sanskrit says, "The one who is well versed in veena, one who has the knowledge of srutis and one who is adept in tala, attains liberation (moksha) without doubt". There are instances in other ancient epics like silapadigaram , Mahabharatha and Ramayana depicting the dignity of arts like Carnatic music and Bharathanatyam .Chennai is considered to be a locus of Carnatic music now whereas its native art forms like thappattam, karagattam and several folk art forms are on the verge of extinction. This is because dignified and respected art forms like Carnatic music and bharathanatyam has gained fascination and interest among people.

“If you take Carnatic music, they won’t let us near the stage. At these gatherings, We have gone to many places and asked them to listen to us. They respond ‘you play music at funerals and I have to bath just because I spoke to you’ because we play in the funeral, they look upon with shame.”, says Sarath ,A member of the group of the ensembled band of local musicians from marginalised communities called the “the casteless collective” This major instance to shows how certain art forms are considered to be polluted .

Thappattam also called paraiyattam is a folk dance performed with a drum like instrument. Thappattam is played in occasions like funerals and religious processions. Though these artists beat the drum and perform for the deity, they are not allowed inside the temple and are restricted to even touch the doors of the temples. According to Marx, “the process whereby the worker is made to feel foreign to the product of his or her labour” is alienation. These folk artists are alienated to what they are performing their art for. There is this instant where a folk art called Thappattam was banned in Madurai and lives of nearly 2000 dalit youths who practiced thappattam as a profession was questioned. At the same time it was reported that another musical instrument called Melam which is considered to be a high class musical instrument was allowed to be played in processions. This is one of the few reasons that led to the sanskritization of arts. A professional who sings Carnatic music or a Bharathanatyam dancer will want to pass on the inherited art form to the next generation whereas a professional folk artist will not want to pass on their humiliation to their next generation. Sanskritization of art forms is mainly due to the discrimination faced by the folk art forms.

According to Marx concept of social class, a concept of False consciousness is the process served by thought in the collective life of humanity. This concept of False consciousness is what labels and divides art forms into upper class art forms and lower caste art forms. The concept of systematic misrepresentation of dominant art forms in the conscious of people and subordinate art forms is the false consciousness. The ideology of sanskritization of arts evolved with the idea of disparagement of folk arts.

This paper examines the Tamil language movie, “Sangamam” to show the dispute between two art forms of dance style and music. This movie was directed by Suresh Krishna and starred by Rahman, Vindhya, Manivannan, and Vijayakumar in the lead roles. The movie speaks about the rivalry between the classical Indian artforms Bharathanatyam and classical music on one hand and the folk dance and song on the other hand. Rahman is the son of Manivannan , a folk dance artist and goes to perform in a temple dance festival. He meets Vindhya there, a Bharatanatyam artist, daughter of a famous dancer, Vijayakumar. Love blooms between the two young dancers in the temple festival in “Thillana Mohanambal” style. Manivannan is supportive to their relationship, as is Srividya, Vindhya’s mother.

Vijayakumar insults Manivannan when he requests for his daughter hand in wedding for his son Rahman. Vijayakumar believes that rural dance form is inferior to Bharatanatyam and therefore Manivannan which instigates the dispute between the families. The rest of the story is about how no one art or dance form is superior or inferior to the other.

Vijayakumar uses the idea of humiliation of the folk art form to elevate the dignity of his artform. Manivannan represents a folk artist in the movie and his character showcases the humiliations faced by all the folk artists in actuality of his kind. He goes to the extent of sacrificing his life for his rural art forms. Though the movie ends with the sangamam of two art forms, reality is not that fruitful. The film revolves around the rural folk artists protesting to preserve their art form. But in reality, they are not financially and culturally upright to fight for their artforms. They either leave their art form or disposed to learn another art form that treats them as humans and proffers dignity.

The movie constantly portrays Vijayakumar boasting about the wealth and honour of Bharathanatyam and classical music. There is one scene where Vijayakumar expresses his wish to build a mani mandapam and Radharavi insults Manivannan saying that he doesn't know the value of the classical art forms and humiliates his artform

The notion that art is not just seen as art form but as agents of dignity and honour leads to the discrimination of arts. We need to think about the idea of imitation when we speak about sanskritization. To increase their status and dignity, they tend to imitate those who already possess the dignity and status. Sanskritization of arts does not only include borrowing or imitating the artforms of lower caste but also the used to dominate other caste in the particular society. For example, westernization of art forms is as prevalent as the sanskritization of art forms now. People westernize to make themselves superior. The same idea goes with sanskritization. Lower caste people who practice rural folk art form sanskritize to attain superiority. The idea of false consciousness fits in here where people are made to believe that certain art forms and the artists practicing those art forms are superior. This pseudo idea of false consciousness is what brings about sanskritization.

The class bias in art forms is brought out in the book "the karnatic" story written by T.M.Krishna. T.M.Krishna argues that the word 'kutcheri' which originated from the Hindi word "Kachehri" refers to court but then in the later years ,the word has come to define carnatic music that is dominated by brahmins. The word instead of referring to performance, it indirectly reflects the practices, tastes, attitude of the brahmin community who are responsible for sanskritisation. T.M.Krishna says that the word kutcheri ignores neglects an important art community in south India. They are the nagasvara vidvans. These highly

talented vidvans are not given any seat in kutcheri because these artist come from a community called isai vellalars. The brahmins were into making pure form of karnatic music where these isai vellalars found It difficult to find an identity. Just like the portrayal of Manivannan's character in the film Sangamam who fights for equal respects for their art, Rajarathinam pillai is one real fighter from the isai velallar community and is a renowned nagasvara vidvan. It is also surprising to note that MS Subbulakshmi who hailed from a devadasi community married a brahmin and undergoes sanskritisation just to gain a respectable position among the other Carnatic singers. MS Subbulakshmi had to undergo sanskritisation to find a space in the most dominated art world. Tracing back the roots of south Indian Carnatic music, it is seen that isai vellalars, devadasis and brahmins were a part of Carnatic music but in the brahmins used their royalty as tool to sanskritize the art form thereby taking it away from the other communities and used their powerful positions in the temples to become the blessers of the art form. As the art form was taken over by the brahmins, the purity and sanctity attributed to the vedic culture. Although the temples in tamilnadu are taken over by the government, the government itself has failed to contribute to the betterment of the isai vellalars. The lack of support has put them in a endangered position. Similarly, the devadasis in temples who were serious practitioners of the bharatnatyam were seen as prostitutes by men. They had to sacrifice their art to escape from the exploitation. In a kutcheri stage, the singer, pakavadya, upa-pakkavadya became the synonyms for brahmins. As the devadasis vanished to save themselves, Nattuvanars took over to teach bharatnatyam to brahmin girls. Although brahmins were too dominating to take over all the art forms there were subsequent changes happening in the socio-political scenario of that time in south india. There are many rural and folk artforms throughout the country that have diminished because of the migration of the people. Pakkanar kali and mudiyattam are two such dances performed by the Dalit communities in Kerela. Though these art forms are performed traditionally in some places, they have almost become endangered because of the fact that people migrated to a better socio cultural life to escape discrimination. Will the people who moved away from a place to escape dehumanization continue to practice an art form that will expose their identity is a question. In a democratic country like India, every citizen has the right to choose whatever they want and everyone will opt to choose what gives them respect. This leads to more space for sanskritization.

We sort of identify a solution that sanskritization of art happens with the intention to escape the humiliation faced because of the present art form. The argument that westernization impacts and influences Indian culture and art forms to extinction makes us think of what sanskritization does to our culture.

Desanskritization is the process where The higher caste borrow culture and practices from the lower castes. When we take the history of Bharatanatyam, it was said to start from Devadasi girls, girls who were servants in temples. And then, During British rule, Bharatanatyam was one of the few art forms that were discouraged and ridiculed. In fact the British rule labelled it as a erotic practice. In 1910, British government banned temple dance and the tradition of Bharatanatyam with Hindu temples. From there , Bharatanatyam has been desankritized to become the art form of elites.

Although the arrival of cinema reduced sanskritisation of the art forms, the field was still dominated by brahmins. In today's south Indian cinema, we find directors like Pa Ranjith who are giving a great support to Kattu and Chatti players along with gana singers to come up with music album titled "the casteless collective". The singers of the casteless collective have actually claimed that they have been driven out of sabhas – the place where Carnatic music has been living for years. These sabhas are majorly dominated by brahmins even today. It is seen that the practice of Carnatic music and bharatnatyam has never been egalitarian.

Although the instruments like mridanga, kanjira, ghata that support Carnatic music are made by the oppressed, they never get a chance to learn the instruments and are completely alienated from their own products. There's a clear separation of labour from his product that Karl Marx refers as alienation of labour.

Its ironic to note that the art of devadasi's have become the art of the elite class and the original art practitioners have been exploited. Apart from the exploitation of devadasi women, during the freedom struggle these women were tangled by the web of multiple social agendas. From Dravidianist to hindu-sanskritist used the devadasi issue as a tool to expand their political ends. These art forms primarily dedicated as a service to the god and goddess but then these art form stuck in the coil of caste and gender issues has led to the extinction of authentic practitioners of the art form.

These artforms purposed to serve god and goddess is taken by the upper caste monopoly by the religious authority. The artform becomes caste ridden thereby making it unavailable to the other castes. It is disheartening to know that the original practitioners of are pushed to the marginalised position.

Today the word devadasi is inflected as thevdichis that is misused to refer prostitutes. This leaves out the intellectual, sacred and devotional art form that their practice. Just because a artform enters temple, it cannot become inaccessible to people who have no power in temple. The moment the art form enters temple, they are sanskritised and are no longer available to

the common man. This term sanskritisation posit a culture as a superior form than the other art forms.

Although we've come a long way from the age old caste discrimination, not all kinds of music are accepted in sabhas. The real change will come when there is a Gana singer performing in rhythm with instruments like chatti and katte. Therefore, No art form can be restricted to a community and music is not caste ridden but it's our minds where caste is ridden. It is the experiential emotion that takes over the individual and not the caste. The pure experientialism of the art form belongs to anyone who wishes to take it and Every art is for every person.

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