

CHAPTER TWO

LOUDSPEAKER BROADCASTS AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SPACE

Introduction.

When Helen and I first looked at the house we ended up living in while we were in Thrissur, the owners, who occupied the upstairs flat when they periodically returned from their employment in Dubai (United Arab Emirates), made a point of reassuring us that the music from the nearby temple was much quieter now than it used to be. They were referring to the practice in nearly all temples and churches in Kerala of broadcasting studio recorded, commercially released devotional songs over loudspeakers for forty-five minutes to an hour at the beginning of each day, starting before dawn, announcing the morning *pūja* or church services going on. Churches hold their rituals only in the morning, but temples broadcast songs in the late afternoon as well, at the time of *dīpārādhana* ['worship with lamps'], the last ritual of the day. Our landlords needn't have feared that the broadcasts would frighten us off, however, since they were precisely what I had come to study.

Loudspeakers these days have pride of place at Hindu temples. They are sometimes simply attached to existing structures, but very often a pole or simple tower has been constructed solely for the purpose of mounting speakers, and nearly always the speaker is spatially higher than any other part of the temple. This spatial deployment serves an acoustic purpose, to be sure, but it is also tempting to read this placement as iconically signifying the status of amplified sound with respect to temple practices. Indeed, many devotees consider their service to be essential to the temple, and are unwilling to imagine a temple 'without songs'. While for some critics, the long history of Hindu devotional practices without the aid of loudspeakers indicates that loudspeakers are unnecessary, the fact remains that they are now an expected norm, fully integrated into the life of nearly every temple. The problem that this chapter addresses, then, is twofold. First, how has this electronic audio technology become an essential part of temple practices? And second, how do these broadcasts function in the socio-spatial context of contemporary Thrissur's diverse and densely populated neighborhoods?

In addressing these questions, I find the notion of 'cultural models' to be a useful one (e.g., Shore 1996; D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987). This is the idea that culture is best understood "as an extensive and heterogeneous collection of 'models,' models that exist both as public artifacts 'in the world' and as cognitive constructs 'in the mind' of members of a community" (Shore 1996:44). Culture does not consist simply of a set of understandings or of knowledge about the world, nor is it made up only of learned patterns of behavior. A definition offered by Richard Shweder

encompasses both of these aspects of being human: culture is "a reality lit up by a morally enforceable conceptual scheme composed of values (desirable goals) and causal beliefs (including ideas about means-ends connections) that is exemplified or instantiated in practice" (1996:20). Culture is both internal and external, and irrevocably and inseparably so. The idea of cultural models is that one can gain understanding of the internal workings of culture, or culture 'in the mind', by paying close attention to the way it is 'instantiated in practice'. Thus as Shore describes,

As external and public forms, cultural models point to a great variety of human institutions that are the projections of conventional understandings of reality set in time and space, for all to experience as artifacts of a community's life. [1996:44]

These models can be either general or specific in their application. Shore uses the term 'foundational schema' to refer to a very general cultural model which serves as an organizing principle for a variety of specific practices (Shore's 'instituted models') or mental constructs ('mental models') (1996:45).

Broadcasts, which we may call an instituted model, have become a normal part of daily life in Kerala because they are an extension of cultural models already operative. The practice is related to a foundational schema wherein *greatness* is signified by *loudness*. Rooted in a universal synaesthetic perception, this schema has been highly elaborated in the context of Indian religious practices. For example, In her study of the social constitution of a Tamil village, Diane Mines devotes considerable attention to the conceptual correlation between "density" and *perumai* ('bigness', 'greatness') (1995:242-300).

By "density" she refers to what J. Bernard Bate (2000:145) calls "saturation of the visual and aural fields"; its semiotic relation to *perumai* is one of iconicity. In the context of a temple festival, she vividly describes the plethora of ritual objects and the prominence of loud music coming from the *pēriya mēḷam*¹ and from loudspeakers, and argues that worshippers understand such density or material excess as indicative (or more precisely, perhaps, as iconically indexical) of value, or relative greatness (*perumai*). That this relation can be considered part of a foundational schema is supported by examples she provides from other cultural domains of the polysemic interrelations between density, display, and bigness, and the ways their qualities project along several social dimensions.

In all of these cases, promoting density, by ensuring that the *koṭai* [temple festival] is well-organized and as grand as possible, is part of the process of creating *perumai* for oneself and one's community. Spatial extension signalled in part by the music blasted from temples across the night air is no small matter, but another way of locating the village, community, and person at the center of an extending source of power (the power of the loudspeaker announces that of the god). [Mines 1995:299]

The traditional association of loudness with importance and prosperity leads not only to temple broadcasts, but also to notable uses of heavy amplification in other domains, such as classical music performances and presentations of traditional Kerala dance-dramas such as *kathakaḷi*.

1. This is the pan-South Indian Hindu temple ensemble which consists usually of *nāgasvaram* (double-reed instrument, similar to oboe, but larger and louder) and *takil* (double-headed drum, struck with stick and finger caps; called *tāvil* in Tamil). It is outdoor music, and these instruments maximize high volume. Variations of the ensemble can be found from state to state; in Karnataka, for example, the ensemble commonly includes the alto saxophone.

As Mines suggests above, amplified sound is implicated in South Asian concerns about space, and how space is to be shared. A close examination of the practice of broadcasts thus is valuable not only for what we can learn about music and musical practices in Kerala, but also for what those practices can tell us about local categories and understandings of shared space; in this sense the project is an ethnosociological one, in Marriott's sense 1989). Urban spaces become experientially characterized, and social alliances and tensions alike are highlighted, when shared spaces are filled with amplified sound whose source is specific, but whose reception is quite general. Broadcasting sound through loudspeakers in an urban environment causes space to be subjectively demarcated. Such broadcasts are therefore implicated in what Western social theorists have called the social production or construction of space (Low 1996; Gottdeiner 1994; Lefebvre 1991). According to Setha Low, although the two terms really define the parameters of a single concept, the social *production* of space is subtly distinguished from the social *construction* of space in that the first has a materialist emphasis, and is more concerned with the political and economic formation of urban space. In contrast, the social *construction* of space blends this materialism with an approach to culture which evokes its intentional and performative aspects. It refers to the

phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control. Thus the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space – through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning. [Low 1996:861-862]

Because broadcasts highlight both traditional and more recent local notions of how space is to be shared -- and the conflicts between these -- they also have implications for local notions of personal boundedness, of privacy, and so on. Such notions are changing as new models emerge as more appropriate for a world where, as a result of reforms instituted by the communist government, nuclear family living arrangements have taken the place of joint families, and neighborhoods are vastly more densely and diversely populated than in the past.

Thus the goal of this chapter is to provide a cultural account of the prominent place of amplification in shared spaces, an account that takes traditional cultural models concerning loudness and space as points of departure. The account goes on to consider broadcasts with respect to newer models or strategies for constituting social spaces which have emerged, for example as a result of the extensive social and economic reforms in the past half century, as well as of the changing uses and availability of audio technology. This account furthermore explores the conflicts that necessarily arise between these models, and their uneasy coexistence.

Section 1. Broadcasts.

1.1 'We prefer to use loudspeakers.'

Throughout India, one way in which people transform shared space is through extensive use of loudspeakers, which are very much a part of daily life in many areas. The situation is well-

represented by Diwan and Diwan, authors of a book published in New Delhi on environmental law:

Since we in India are fond of loud sounds, the most used source of man-made noise is loudspeakers on all occasions, and on any and every occasion, we prefer to use loudspeakers. Whether it is advertisement of new film or of dramatic performance or circus, we are fond of using loudspeakers. In worships, too we use them. *Jagratas*, *Akhandpaths*, Musical nights, religious sermons, marriage processions, political and non-political meetings, no programme will be held unless we use loudspeakers.
[1998:224]

In Kerala's neighbor states of Karnataka and Tamilnadu, political rallies and festivals are marked by broadcasting speeches and music through horn speakers strung up and down streets and alleyways, for blocks, completely taking over an entire area (cf. Bate 2000:132-182; Mines 1995). In those states, weddings too are celebrated with boisterous processions involving brass bands and amplified keyboard, amplifiers powered by a generator in tow. Such use of loudspeakers is not only celebratory but also a part of routine daily practices. I remember walking early one morning in 1996 around the small town of Kumbakkonam, Tamilnadu, having to cover my ears because of the unbearably loud songs being played from horn speakers apparently placed permanently on the street by a nearby temple. I watched incredulously as none of the many others on the street around me made any outward appearance of even noticing it.

In Kerala, such extravagant uses of loudspeakers are not found in urban areas, although the situation may be different in villages.² A Muslim man who had spent time working in Bangalore,

2. Although I spent very little time in village areas, my impression from brief visits and from conversations with others is that

Karnataka, felt that the difference in loudspeaker use between Kerala and Karnataka was due to the higher level of education in Kerala than in other states. His opinion was that loudspeakers were definitely overused in Karnataka, and that Malayālis "are changing as they get more educated.... Because culture [samskāram] is changing." A public indicator of this change is that a 1992 Kerala High Court decision completely banned all use of horn-type loudspeakers under any circumstances.³

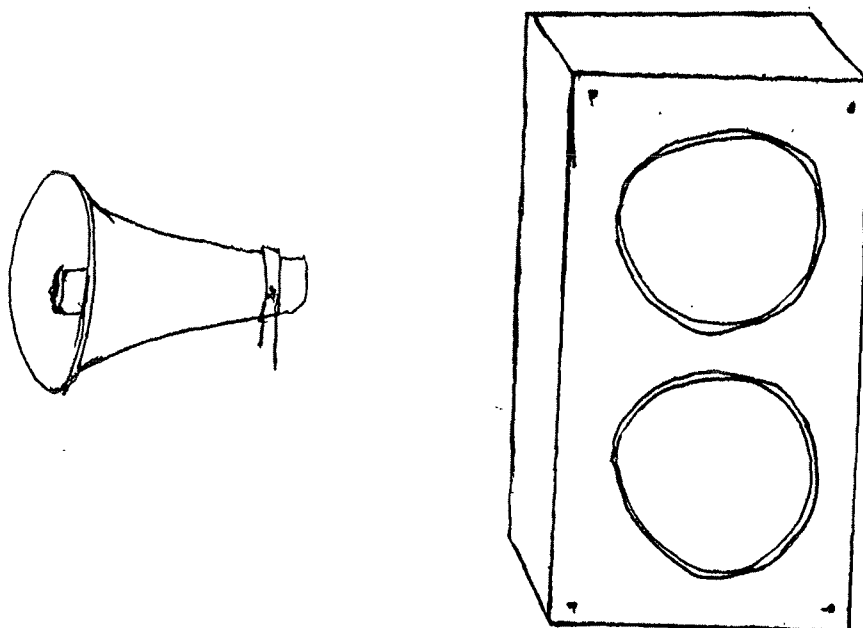


Figure 2.1 A horn speaker and a box speaker.

Despite that ruling, loudspeakers -- very much including horn-type speakers -- and amplified sound remain a salient part

amplifiers may be turned up louder and used with more abandon in villages than in cities.

3. Jacob v. Superintendent of Police, 1992, KLT (Kerala Law Times) 238.

of civilization's soundscape in Kerala. The ban against horn-speakers has had almost no effect on relatively permanent installations such as those at temples, churches, and mosques, nearly all of which continue to use horn-type speakers exclusively. Its effect has apparently been mainly to prevent the above-mentioned scenes of rampant loudspeaker usage which are common in Tamilnadu and Karnataka, and to force 'sound electricals' companies to rely on the more expensive and less efficient (yet higher fidelity) box-shaped speakers when they supply sound systems for public events.⁴ Sound electricals companies are bitterly opposed to the ban, and argue that because horn speakers are so efficient, they are useful if properly controlled. The state-wide association of sound workers organized a protest against the ban at the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala's capital, in December of 2000, but to my knowledge, the ban remains in place.

Loudspeakers are used to convey information to the public. To this end, sound electricals companies provide 'mobile sound systems': jeeps piled high with loudspeakers announce the latest cinema offerings, store openings, and the like, throughout the town. Especially during the season of the Ōṇam festival, a very popular secular statewide harvest celebration that places emphasis on gift-giving,⁵ these 'announcement cars'

4. Many horn speakers can be powered by a single low-wattage amplifier, but box speakers, in contrast, require more power and thus do not lend themselves to the same kind of spatial coverage.

5. Ōṇam is celebrated in *cinkam* month (August-September), the month of harvest. It is based on the legend that at this time Mahābali, "the legendary king who ruled over Kerala in an age of plenty and was pushed down to the infernal regions by Vishnu in the form of Vamana," returns to visit his people (Sreedhara Menon 1996a:65). In

go about advertising clothes, ornaments, jewellery, and other items. During the monsoon season, I heard vehicles out advertising umbrellas.

Not only private companies, but also the city of Thrissur itself relies on loudspeaker-laden vehicles to go about spreading urgent public service messages. For example, while I was there, as a part of a national campaign to eradicate polio, advertisements appeared on television, in the newspapers, and also on banners displayed around Thrissur's central hub, known as 'the Round', and in railway stations. Thrissur Corporation supplemented the campaign with an announcement jeep, piled with box-type speakers, informing the public that the next day, children of a certain age were to go to designated places to receive polio drops at no charge.

Probably most frequently announced over mobile loudspeakers, though, are the sounds of politics. During election periods (elections for different levels of government are held at various times of year), these jeeps piled with loudspeakers are almost constantly to be seen going around the Round and other major streets, advertising their parties and their candidates.

The loudspeakers convey not only political speeches and endorsements, but also music: each party plays songs which are associated with its political history and outlook. The Left Democratic Front (LDF), a leftist coalition which includes both

recognition of the value of having a (relatively) secular holiday which could unite Malayālis as citizens of Kerala, regardless of religion or caste, the state government took up the celebration of Ōṇam as a national festival in 1961 (ibid.).

the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the larger Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), may broadcast excerpts of poems from the great revolutionary poets O.N.V. Kurup or Vayalar Rama Varma, both of whom play central roles in the development of Kerala society since midcentury. They may also play songs of the Communist Party-affiliated Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC, about which more will be said in Chapters Three and Four), which emphasize the ethos of the proletariat (e.g. "We are the laborers, we have nothing to lose; from the drops of blood of one laborer, thousands of laborers come"). The Congress Party-led United Democratic Front (UDF), which won a statewide election when I was there, plays old nationalist and patriotic songs, embodying their nationalist spirit. Their car-top broadcasts on the streets of Thrissur may also include excerpts from the speeches of national Congress Party leaders Indira Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru expressing sentiments such as "I am ready to spare my life for the nation." Mobile broadcasts by the Bharatiya Janata Parishad (BJP), the right-wing Hindu nationalist and 'fundamentalist' party which is currently in control of the national government -- but which has won less than 10% of the vote in recent Kerala state-level elections -- incorporates recordings of *mantras* or verses from the Bhagavad Gītā, for example Kṛṣṇa asserting that "when *dharma* has decayed, I will come again to correct it", spreading the message that they are working to build a Hindu nation.

Given the development of communist principles in Kerala, workers are well-organized, and demands are often reinforced by calling general strikes [*harttāls*]. Employing loudspeaker-laden jeeps was a frequent strategy for announcing such strikes for the next day, including those being called by government

offices. These communications appeared to be effective: the day after hearing such a call, the streets would be empty.

1.2 The spread of electronic sound technology.

The ability to broadcast sound obviously depends upon having the appropriate audio technology at one's disposal. Sound electricals companies are the source of large public address systems, but today nearly every household owns its own means of playing music through speakers, whether those of a cassette player, radio, or most prominently in recent years, television. Well within living memory in Thrissur, however, it was very rare for a household to have its own radio or cassette player, and those who were lucky enough to have their own set usually didn't mind sharing by playing their sets loudly enough for neighbors to hear. The sound of radios, and more recently televisions, was the sound of prosperity and high status, representing cultural capital in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, according to the values of an increasingly technologizing society. Today, although the sheer novelty of readily available sound technology has worn off to a certain extent, some of my neighbors say they continue to enjoy hearing the sound of music drifting in from their neighbors' houses, as I discuss later in this chapter. The point I wish to emphasize here is simply that from the earliest days of their use in Kerala, radios and cassette machines were played loudly, in order to function both as a service to neighbors and as a display of one's own status.

Before privately owned sets became common, the sounds of radio were provided from centralized locations by local or

regional governments. Public broadcasts via loudspeaker were first introduced in continuity with a cultural model of public service. This model is derived from the history in Kerala of a strong, widespread social emphasis on the virtues of education, increasing public awareness, and grassroots social movements. Following this model, 'village libraries' or *vāyanaśālas* began to be established even preceding the election of the Communist government in 1957, in what was known as the *granthaśālapraṣṭhānam*, or library movement (cf. Kannan 2000:60-61). These libraries were supplied with radio sets by both the state government and local *pañcāyattū*s in order to supplement the news which was available in print. My neighbor, D. Sasindran,⁶ a 50-year-old professor of English at a nearby college, had a job when he was a student in 1968-69 as a "librarian-cum-radio operator" in a nearby village area which is now, due to population growth, fully incorporated as a neighborhood within Thrissur. In his words:

DS: So, my duty was this: At 5:30 [in the afternoon] I have to open the library, village library, and take the big horn speaker, place it on the window, then pull the wires and connect them to the radio; the radio set didn't have a [built-in] speaker. It was distributed by the Kerala Government; the Government distributed this to libraries. And we have to tune the Thrissur station. We will tune the Thrissur station, and sit idle, and then the people will come for changing news; the news and everything will be given to the public. I can show you the library; it still functions like that -- no, now there is TV. It is a TV set.

EK: And how loudly would you play the radio?

6. All names used in this dissertation, with the exception of names of those deemed public figures, are pseudonyms.

DS: Very loud I think [laughs]. I would put on the volume to the maximum I think. Far and near people would be listening. People would be reading newspapers, but when there was news [being broadcast] they would fold the newspapers and listen to the news. Not the box-type [speaker], horn-type!

In addition to village libraries, radios were also installed in other public areas. For example, near our house there was a small overgrown public park next to a main road, on one side of which a small concrete building stood unused; from small windows on all four sides, four cone speakers pointed out silently. Neighbors told me that fifteen years ago, when the area was still a separate village and had not yet been incorporated into Thrissur town, radio was played from these speakers too, as a public service of the *pañcāyattū*.⁷

1.3 Devotional song broadcasts.

Amplified advertisements come and go, and the sounds of politics fill the air during election times, but the main sources of amplified sound to be heard on a daily basis in Thrissur are Hindu temples, Christian churches, and Muslim mosques. Many areas of Thrissur are dotted with small temples,

7. When televisions were new to Kerala some twenty-five years ago, they too were centralized. Sasindran told me that in the 1970s, he remembers going to the Round at the center of town, where a television set had been installed in the Children's Park area of the Tekkinkāṭu Maidān, "just like an exhibition."

In contrast to the radios in village libraries, the televisions were intended to limit citizen's knowledge of politics and the outside world rather than to expand it: the installing of televisions in every town center was a part of Indira Gandhi's Emergency Period, June of 1975 to April of 1977, when the government imposed a media blackout. The televisions broadcast the only channel available, the Government's Doordarshan, which according to Sasindran, was used for propagandistic purposes.

such that it is uncommon to be very far from one, and nearly all have loudspeakers mounted. Churches tend to have speakers mounted near the church bell in a cement bell-tower, and mosques of course have loudspeakers mounted in a minaret. In all of these cases, the vast majority of speakers are of the horn type, despite the fact that they have been legally banned for years. And in all cases, loudspeakers are mounted in such a way that they are quite obviously directed more toward listeners outside than inside the premises.

Beginning in the early morning, generally around 5:00 a.m. (give or take a half-hour), at each temple someone comes in, switches on an amplifier and a cassette player, and presses 'play'. Devotional songs are played for between a half-hour and an hour, between the time of opening the temple and the time to begin the first *pūja* of the day, at which time the cassette is switched off, often abruptly in the middle of a song. At temples which are not in an economic position to support musicians -- in other words, the vast majority of temples -- *pūja* is accompanied by another cassette of music appropriate for ritual, either (as in our nearby temple) *pēriya mēḷam* or an indigenous Kerala temple form based on drumming such as *tāyampaka*, *pañcavādyam*, or *ceṇṭa mēḷam*.⁸ When the *pūja* is finished, the cassette is again switched off as abruptly as it was started, and the air hangs empty, the sound of birds chirping suddenly exposed. In the meantime the sun has risen, and the day has begun.

8. These forms will be introduced in Chapter Three.

Churches appear to have followed temples in taking up the same practice, and play Christian devotional songs for a half to one hour each morning, often while simultaneously tolling the church bell. At temples, the pattern of the broadcast is the same in the evening as in the morning: devotional songs for some time, and then at the time of *dīpārādhana*, the *pēriya mēlam* cassette is put on. Again, the cassettes are started and stopped not between songs, but rather according only to the timings of the *pūja*. Mosques in Thrissur, as in other Muslim areas of the world, broadcast the call to prayer, or *vāṅkū viḷi*, at five times during the day. In contrast to the emanations from temples and churches, which can go on for an hour or more, the calls to prayer are very brief, lasting only two or three minutes. The exact timings vary according to the time of year; at the mosque I could hear from our house in Thrissur, the first call of the day was as early as 4:30 a.m., and the last one in the evening as late as 9:00 p.m. Rather than using prerecorded cassettes, Thrissur *imāms* use a microphone and perform each call live.

The question remains of how this practice of broadcasting cassettes at temple originated. As I have outlined in Chapter One, the result of Land Reforms was that Hindu temples went from controlling enormous wealth to being utterly without resources. According to some accounts, temples were allowed to fall by the wayside because, as outdated, now impoverished institutions, they did not signify the direction that the state was felt to be moving. The many social and economic reforms taking place at that time led to the expectation of rapid development in the state, and among young people like my neighbor Sasindran, there was widespread idealism and hope for the future. And yet

temples were not in step with the rapid social change which was happening. According to my neighbors, some 30-35 years ago many temples in the area closed their doors, and did not light their lamps; in some temples the idols were broken.

Despite these rapid changes, idealism soon faded somewhat as it became evident that the development was not as drastic as it had been hoped. For those believers who were striving to bring themselves and their communities to a higher economic plane, seeing temples sitting decrepit in their midst may have caused some cognitive dissonance. I say this because there is a cultural model prevalent in South India whereby the power [*śakti*] of divinity radiates outwards (cf. Mines 1995:299, quoted above), and by extension, the energy of a temple radiates outwards into the surrounding community, with potentially either positive or negative effects (Karel 1997; Janaki 1988:xviii). As one of my neighbors put it, before long people "felt a spiritual void" and began turning back to the temples. Those who had begun to achieve some economic success, often by working abroad in the Persian Gulf countries, wanted to return something to the temples, and to reinvigorate them.

For a Hindu temple, a primary signifier of life and activity is sound, and the energy of the divine is most readily instantiated in the form of sound (Karel 1997; Beck 1993; Alper 1989). Therefore, in order to allow the temple to declare itself alive and to radiate its positive energy in the form of sound, devotees returning from employment in the Gulf brought back with them turntables (and later cassette decks) and amplifiers to donate. According to most estimates, by the mid-1980s, almost all temples had sound systems. These allowed

temples to display renewed vitality by broadcasting devotional music out into the community, a mode which became well-established as a display not only of the generosity of its patrons, but also of the prosperity and high status of the temple. Given the historically close cultural affinity between Hindus and Christians, before long this practice was adopted by churches also.

1.4 Broadcasting *bhaktigānam*.

As I have mentioned, except during the actual *pūja*, the songs played by the temple fall into the category of devotional songs, or *bhaktigānam*. These songs are produced in a studio for commercial release on cassette. Musically, devotional songs generally owe more to the development of light music [*lālitasaṅgītam*] and Malayāḷam film songs than they do to older Hindu devotional genres such as *bhajana*, or the indigenous Kerala temple genre of *sōpānasaṅgītam*.⁹ This overlap with film song aesthetics is illustrated by the fact that the same handful of very popular Malayāḷam singers is ubiquitous on cassettes of both film songs and devotional songs, principally including K.J. Yesudas and P. Jayachandran.¹⁰

9. *Sōpānasaṅgītam* is ritual music performed by the Mārār temple musician caste at the stone steps [*sōpānam*] leading up to the central shrine. It is based on *rāgams*, most of which are identical to Karnāṭak *rāgams* and others specific to Kerala, and encompasses the vocal genres of *tyāṇi* [from the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, 'meditation'], *aṣṭapadi* ['eight lines'], and *kīrttanam* [devotional songs, similar in form to the genre of Hindu group singing known as *kīrtan*] (Groesbeck 1995:183-188). See also Omcherry (1999).

10. The fact that Yesudas is Christian does not detract from his popularity among Hindus at all; in fact, Yesudas proclaims his devotion

The paradigmatic *bhaktigānam* -- the standard against which devotional songs are generally measured -- is 'semi-classical', which means that it is based upon a Karnātak *rāgam*, albeit sometimes loosely; it may also contain some Western-style harmonizations. Overall, it is simple and traditional in its instrumentation, featuring only harmonium and *tabala* [*tablā*] with instrumental interludes generally on flute or sometimes *vīṇa*; its vocal melody is flowing and simple, yet with appropriate *gamakas* or ornamentations, and its sentiment is direct and affecting. These are the songs at which Yesudas and Jayachandran excel, and for which they are most famous. Track 1 on the CD is a song sung by Yesudas which was broadcast often from our temple, and which was a favorite for some of my neighbors.¹¹

But there are many variations or types of devotional songs which have evolved over the years, which are heard as having taken on characteristics either of regional musics, commercial cinema music, Western music, or any combination of the above, depending on whom one asks. For example, the central deity of our neighborhood temple is Murukan, and so devotional songs to Murukan were often played. Although Murukan has been incorporated into the Brāhmanical pantheon as Subramaniam, he is generally perceived as a Dravidian (*Śūdra*) rather than an Āryan

to Hindu deities, and Hindus say they hear his devotion in his interpretations. Even at the famous pilgrimage site at Sabari Mala, at the end of every day 'Harivarāsanam' is played as a lullaby for the deity, and I was told that only the recording by Yesudas is played, and that nothing else is acceptable.

11. The song is 'Vaṭakkunātha', and expresses devotion toward the form of Śivan enshrined at Thrissur's Śrī Vaṭakkunāthan Temple. The music director is T.S. Radhakrishnan, the lyricist P.C. Aravindan; the song was released on a cassette entitled *Gangātīrttam*.

(Brāhmanical) deity, which means that he is sometimes referred to as 'Tamil'. Devotional songs to Murukan are in fact more commonly found in Tamil language and with Tamil musical influences. Track 2 is a Tamil song that was played regularly at our temple.¹² Tamil practices such as *kāvaṭi* dancing, a form of penance or vow fulfillment generally associated with trance states and accompanied by fast and loud drumming, are associated with his worship, and thus Tamil devotional songs to Murukan such as this one refer musically to *kāvaṭi* dancing by featuring heavy beats and fast rhythms. Heavy beats and excited singing are also common characteristics of songs of the deity Ayyappan, who is also thought of as a Dravidian or low-caste deity (Groesbeck 1995:93).¹³ During the two month *mandalam* period when men undertake the pilgrimage to Ayyappan's temple at Sabari Mala, the temple played almost nothing but Ayyappan songs.

Where things get complicated is that heavy beats or fast rhythms can also signify the influence of new cinema song styles, for example the electronic innovations of the contemporary Tamil film composer A.R. Rahman. Furthermore, such influences are also felt by some listeners to index the

12. I was unable to find someone who could identify this song, other than to say that it is a Tamil song. The cassette it was on was an unlabeled dub, which had been donated to the temple by a devotee.

13. I would speculate that one reason songs for Ayyappan are characterized by heavy beats, shouting, and so on, is that they express the hypermasculinity which is fundamental to the Ayyappan cult, and which is expressed also through the vow of celibacy which is undertaken in preparation for the pilgrimage, and through the fact that women capable of childbearing are excluded from the pilgrimage. As Sarah Caldwell notes,

The cult of Ayyappan is surely motivated in part by a desire to overcome the perceived sexual power of women, a power which seems to threaten male solidarity and well-being. [1999:137]

influence of Western popular music. Both of these influences -- cinema and the West -- are generally considered undesirable in devotional songs that are played from the temple, although they may be appreciated in songs which are played at home.

Not long after the *mandalam* pilgrimage period drew to a close, at the end of February, there was a change in personnel at the temple, which interestingly resulted in a change in the types of devotional songs that were broadcast in the morning. The son of the *kazhakakkāran* [priest's assistant], a young man who had been helping his father by opening and closing the temple, managing the cassettes, cleaning, and doing other jobs around the temple, was abruptly fired after allegedly drinking alcohol in the temple after hours. One of the committee members then volunteered his services in what was supposed to be a brief interim period, but which stretched on for months. This man brought a new sensibility to the temple broadcasts. Before he took over, we heard the same kinds of songs both in the morning and the afternoon, which were often fast and heavily rhythmic such as the ones heard above. Now, following the change, the music in the morning differed from that in the afternoon. In the early morning, we now heard soft, meditative songs, such as M.S. Subbulakshmi's famous recording of the *Śrī Venkatēśa Suprabhātam*, an excerpt of which is on Track 3 of the CD. The more energetic songs continued to be played in the afternoon.

As we will see in Chapter Four, Christian devotional songs, which are broadcast from churches in the morning, are historically more closely connected with *lālitasaṅgītam* and cinema music. Although Christian history in Kerala is long and deep, Christians did not develop an independent musical culture

until the 1960s, when a Christian music began being developed in parallel with the development of Malayālam cinema music. In early morning church broadcasts, one can hear a continuum from gentle *lālitasāṅgītam* to songs that have more in common with contemporary cinema music. In general, Christian devotional music does not reference Hindu devotional genres such as *bhajana*, although there are exceptions. For example, one Christian family's favorite devotional cassette to hear in the morning was one by Thrissur Kalāsadan, an orchestra that is associated with the Catholic Church, which features a version of the *Suprabhātam* with Christian lyrics.

Broadcasts from mosques other than the call to prayer are rare. Except for one mosque in Thrissur which occasionally broadcast chanted group prayers on Friday evenings which were audible for a radius of at least two kilometers, the only time at which broadcasts were heard from all mosques was on the annual holiday of Bakrid, also called Id-ul-Azha. Beginning at 5:00 a.m., I heard the sound of cone-speaker-inflected voices coming from over the coconut trees, which I described in a journal entry as "minimally melodic, maximally repetitive, very pleasant." The prayer is called *takbīr*, and the day's events were described in an article in the next day's newspaper as following:

Men, women and children alike, dressed in new clothes, were seen moving to the mosques and Id-Gahs since early morning, as hymns of 'Thakbeer' coming from loudspeakers filled the air. After the Id Juma, people were seen warmly embracing one another, consolidating the concept of brotherhood, and exchanging Id greetings. ['Bakrid celebrated with religious fervor', *The Hindu*, 7 March 2001]

1.5 Distortion and perception.

It is important to note that the loudspeakers themselves are not transparent in these broadcasts. In other words, the sound that pervades the area around a temple or a church is not the clear sound that the recording and mixing engineers heard through their studio monitors, but rather a sound that has been duplicated onto analog cassette tape, subjected to the wear of repeated play and possible mold growth in the tropical climate,¹⁴ and transmitted through an amplifier of uncertain vintage to horn speakers kept in the open air year-round. All of these factors affect the sound quality, and can introduce distortion. The quality of sound from the speakers at our temple was often quite distorted, and based upon my observations, such a situation was not uncommon.¹⁵ As noted above, reflex-type horn speakers are designed for efficiency in spreading a message over great distances at the expense of fuller fidelity. They are optimized for the relatively narrow frequency range necessary to understand human voices, whose principal range is 300-3,000 Hertz (Rossing 1990:622), and not for music, which can occupy a much wider frequency spectrum.

To my surprise, most of my neighbors seemed almost not to notice the distortion. When I played back recordings like Track 2 (above), which I had recorded from temple broadcasts, my

14. At one temple, when I was being shown the cassette player and the cassettes, some of the cassette boxes were found to be filled with ants who were busy eating the oil or ghee which had gotten onto the tapes after being handled by the priest's assistant.

15. Track 4 on the accompanying CD gives an example of the worst of this distortion. This quality of sound persisted for about a month. At other times, sound quality could vary widely.

neighbors either didn't hear or (consciously or unconsciously) disregarded what I heard as rather extreme distortion. They seemed to be able to 'listen through' the distortion, and to appreciate the song, as long as they already knew and liked the song. In this way my findings matched those of Greene (1995), who found that when Tamil villagers listened to distorting cassette playback, that they

generally tried to hear through these difficulties to a musical performance that is represented, even if imperfectly, on the cassette. It is the *represented* performance in which villagers expressed an interest, not so much sound qualities introduced by the playback technology. [1995:174]

In the case of my neighbors in Thrissur, it was only in the cases where the song was less than known to them, or especially if the lyrics were rendered unintelligible, that the distortion interfered with their appreciation.

1.6 Community teashop as makeshift temple.

Cassettes played at a teashop served a similar purpose to that of temple or church broadcasts. My early morning walks through an economically poor, low-caste 'colony' adjacent to my neighborhood were accompanied by amplified sound coming from a number of homes. The loudest and most consistently playing emanated from a tiny teashop, which has for forty years served as a social gathering place for men in the neighborhood. The teashop is built onto the front of the proprietor's house, and is just large enough for a place for him to stand and prepare tea on one side, and a small booth for a few men to sit on the

other.¹⁶ The dark walls are covered with aging images of deities, some with tiny red lightbulbs wired in front of them; through the doorway, in the house, I see more old and faded posters behind small glowing bulbs. One customer, a man who used to work as a wage-laborer but is now unemployed because of an unspecified injury, commented that even a small temple may not have so many lights. Also hanging at the top of the wall, against the low ceiling, is one of two small speakers; the other is mounted on the other side of the tea preparation area, oriented so that it plays out into the neighborhood.

The broadcast schedule of the teashop is closely aligned with a common temple schedule, and indeed, the teashop seems almost to play the part of a temple in the lives of its neighbors and regular customers. The proprietor, Siddhārtthan, arises each morning at 3:00 a.m. when he hears the popgun explosion [*veṭikkeṭṭu*] from Vaṭakkunāthan Temple at the center of Thrissur, several kilometers away. This popgun, the first sound of the day, is apparently a signal to the priest to awaken and to come to the temple to begin the day at 4:00 a.m. The teashop owner, too, begins his day at 4:00 a.m. by putting a cassette on through the loudspeakers; he and customers of his that I spoke to emphasized that it was always the same cassette, M.S. Subbulakshmi's *Śrī Venkatēśa Suprabhātam*.¹⁷ The cassette

16. Women may come and buy something from outside, but don't enter.

17. At the time I first asked about this, however, he put on the cassette for me, and it wasn't the *Suprabhātam* that I heard; after a moment of confusion I realized that it was the B-side of the published cassette, which includes Karnātak *kritis* by Swati Tirunal and Muthuswami Dikshitar. The temple in my neighborhood, nearby but beyond earshot, also alternated between the *Suprabhātam* and its B-side.

that would be put on next varied according to the day of the week (see Figure 2.2). The pattern is a well-known, normative one that is used also by some temples to choose cassettes.

<i>Monday</i> Śivan	<i>Tuesday</i> Dēvi ¹⁸	<i>Wednesday</i> Ayyappan	
<i>Thursday</i> Subramaniam ¹⁹	<i>Friday</i> Dēvi	<i>Saturday</i> Ayyappan	<i>Sunday</i> Christian

Figure 2.2 The teashop's morning devotional cassette schedule.

When this schedule was being described to me, the men sitting at the table said first that on Friday, Muslim devotional songs are played. Siddhārtthan, however, said that he doesn't have any Muslim cassettes, and that he plays Dēvi songs.²⁰ Whether the

18. For Dēvi (the goddess), Siddhārtthan plays a cassette of *bharani* songs sung by Kalābhavan Mani. This is an odd choice for a devotional cassette, because the *bharani* festival is one which is infamous for the obscene songs which are sung at that time (Caldwell 1999:95,165-167), and Kalābhavan Mani is a comedian known for raunchy humor; the cassette is a kind of parody. On the cover of this cassette, as on posters advertising it which were plastered around the Round, Kalābhavan Mani is depicted holding a sickle -- an emblem of the goddess -- and with blood dripping down his bald head. The song Siddhārtthan plays for me is in contemporary cinema style; in fact the melody and rhythm are very similar to that of a currently popular song from the hit movie, *Tenkāśipatṭanam*.

On the issue of why Tuesdays and Fridays are sacred to the goddess, see Caldwell (1999:134).

19. Siddhārtthan used the Sanskritic name Subramaniam rather than the more Dravidian or Tamil name Murukan.

At one Bhagavati temple, cassettes of songs for Kṛṣṇa, rather than Subramaniam, were played on Thursday.

20. I came upon a similar case of prescription replacing description when two people in my neighborhood told me that the local temple follows the pattern given in Figure 2.2 for playing devotional cassettes, when in fact it did not.

men were simply mistaken or were trying to mislead me (which I doubt), their error speaks to the socially widespread endorsement of Kerala's religious pluralism. Furthermore, regarding playing Christian songs on Sunday mornings, Siddhārtthan said that there are four or five Christian families in the colony, and when I asked if they enjoy hearing the Christian songs on Sunday, a Hindu customer said that everyone, not just the Christians, likes hearing them. Thus playing Christian songs, or the imagined playing of Muslim songs, is done not as a favor to a specific target audience, but as a way of proclaiming and even celebrating a theology and a sociology of openness.

Siddhārtthan plays cassettes only from 4:00 until 6:00 in the morning. Then he plays the Thrissur AM radio station²¹ through the speakers, from 6:00 until 8:30, again for a couple of hours at noon, and finally again in the late afternoon until closing at 7:00 p.m., for mixed programming of general interest including news in Malayālam, Hindi, Sanskrit, and English, and of course film songs. In the pre-dawn morning, customers come and sit without speaking while they have their tea, listening to the devotional songs. In the *mandalam* period of preparations for the pilgrimage to Sabari Mala, the stall is full by 4:00 a.m. of men dressed in their prescribed black dhotis who have already had their prescribed morning bath. Although only a small group of men come and sit in the small shop, its loudspeakers stake out a large social space in the colony.

21. The Thrissur station comes under the jurisdiction of All India Radio, a government enterprise based in New Delhi, which is generally referred to as *ākāśa vāṇi*, or 'the sound of the *ākāśa* [aether]'.

Section 2. Preparing the way for broadcasts: Cultural models of loudness and space.

Broadcasts from temples and churches play a complex role in contemporary Thrissur society, not least because they occupy a historical moment in Thrissur which is characterized more by flux than by constancy, by virtue of radical changes stemming from both within and outside the culture. In such a situation, values and priorities emergent in a society which has undergone significant economic and social reform, and which has been and is increasingly in close contact with a global economy and global media, may come into conflict with values that were suited to a more traditional, agrarian society.

Before analyzing these emergent conflicts by addressing the question of the meanings broadcasts have for inhabitants of Thrissur, in this section I am concerned with the broader cultural context in which broadcasting originated. I demonstrate that cultural models were in place which set the stage for the particular kind of use that amplification technology has been put in Kerala. I first take up local notions of space and notions of the 'shareability' of spaces, and explore cultural models of the mutual implicatedness of sound and space. I then examine the ways in which 'loudness' may be seen as a cultural model, the ways in which loudness itself is valued, particularly in domains of religious observations.

2.1 Space and *ākāśa*.

Music is commonly thought of as something which exists and unfolds experientially in time, but the substance of music, sound, is equally or perhaps even more accurately conceived of as existing in space. Space is often thought of as negative, as the gap between things which really exist: the space between two words, or the space between two houses. It can also be considered as positive, as a sort of stuff in which we move and do what we do, as a presence which gives definition to the things within it. Classical notions of space in Sanskrit and Tamil texts allow for both of these aspects, describing space as *ākāśa*, or aether, the fifth and most subtle of the five elements [*bhuta*]. It has been described as 'the Void' by a priest at the temple in Chidambaram, Tamilnadu, where Siva is worshiped in the form of the *ākāśa līngam* (Deekshithar 1997). It is also thought of as an all-pervasive presence between things which is understood to be the medium of sound. In Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy, "The proof of *ākāśa*'s existence is exclusively from the facts about sounds." (Potter 1977:90; see also Saraswati 1999).²² One function of sound, then, is to take a negative space, or an absence of connection between people, and to create in its place a positive space, a continuum which realizes a connection between people which is thus both physically and subjectively real.

In what follows I take up this notion of the intrinsic connection between sound and space. I begin with an account of

22. The notion of *ākāśa* as the medium of sound is especially important in the Tamil Śaiva classic, Tirumular's *Tirumantiram* (Natarajan 1991; Natarajan 1994:253; see also Karel 1997).

social space in historical perspective. I then examine two different conceptions of space, each of which is definable by the kinds of sounds which either constitute or fill it. The first concept, or model, is that of space as something vast which is overcome by means of loud sound. The loud sounds that can fill or transcend this space include explosives or 'popguns' and large drum orchestras, such as *pañcavādyam*. Due in large part to the contribution of one of the instruments of the *pañcavādyam*, the *kompū* or horn, that ensemble straddles both the first and the second concepts of space. The second concept of space is what I call a sonic immersion model. This model considers space less as a physical or objective area as in *ākāśa*, but rather as a kind of shared consciousness. It is something intimate which is created and entered into intersubjectively, by means of sharing in religious sound, such as the sounds of *mantra* or *bhajana*. Implicated in both of these concepts of space is a cultural model of loudness, whereby loudness signifies greatness, power, connections between people, and celebration. Before bringing sound and loudness into the discussion, however, I begin by sketching the nature of social space in Kerala from a historical perspective.

2.2 Social space in historical perspective.

Although today Kerala is one of the most densely populated regions on the planet [Kannan 2000:44], old Kerala²³ was notable for its spaciousness. Even as late as the 1970s, Fuller writes,

The settlement pattern in almost all of Kerala is dispersed; the houses are scattered across the countryside more or less haphazardly, rather than arranged in streets and clustered together in nucleated villages, as is the case in most of the rest of India. [1976:25]

Not only were houses not concentrated together, but houses of people of different *jātis* also seem to have been rather haphazardly interspersed. The area in which we lived at the edge of Thrissur can be taken as representative of settlement patterns, in an area that a generation ago consisted mostly of paddy fields that was a separate *pañcāyattū* outside of the city of Thrissur. The area now consists of streets lined with houses, but almost all have been built within the past twenty-five years. There are only a few older houses, and these houses belonged in the past to people of different *jātis* and religions: next to the temple is a Brāhman *mana*;²⁴ the area which our house had been built upon was formerly a Nāyar *taṛavāṭṭu*; an old Muslim

23. By 'old Kerala', I echo the usage of Jeffrey (1992:19-33) and refer to Kerala up to the first half of the 20th century, by which time the stage was set for the communist government to be elected and radical social changes to be implemented. Thulaseedharan (1977) similarly uses the term "traditional Kerala" to refer to the first decade of the 20th century:

It was the time when the rays of a new dawn had begun to fall on Kerala society. Many of the traditional aspects which had gone unchallenged for centuries came to be seriously questioned, although it took time for changes to set in. [1977:xi]

24. The *mana* and *taṛavāṭṭu* are the joint family 'house and land units' (Moore 1983), which have now been legally dissolved. Their properties have now been partitioned, often several times over.

house lies a furlong or two west;²⁵ an Īzhava *taravāṭṭu* lies to the north; and an old Christian house is to the northeast. In contrast to the area's present appearance of small houses crowding together on small plots of land, the area was in the not-so-distant past perhaps characterized more by the spaces between the houses than the houses themselves.

Even though the houses were not close together, people of all kinds were to some degree navigating the same spaces in the surrounding area. The space was not shared easily, however, as the practice of 'distance pollution' makes clear. Concomitant with the unusual settlement pattern, in Kerala there also existed an unusually severe implementation of caste distinctions. Unlike the rest of India, where the touch of someone of a 'low' *jāti* pollutes someone of a 'high' *jāti*, in Kerala such pollution could be contracted merely through spatial proximity; touch was not requisite. This phenomenon is known as distance pollution [*tīṇṭal*]. Thulaseedharan (1977) and Fuller (1976:35) cite exact measurements at which one kind of person pollutes another. As Fuller notes, such measurements in feet were not absolute -- indeed, one wonders from where these various sources derived them -- but can only be understood relative to the lived spaces in which people interacted (or avoided interacting), such as the gate of a compound, a courtyard, or the first step of a verandah (1976:43-44). Thus a Nāyar landlord would stand on the verandah and shout instructions to 'untouchable' workers who remained outside the compound wall (Fuller 1976:44). I quote Thulaseedharan not

25. A furlong is one-eighth of a mile. This unit of measurement is in common use in Malayālam.

because the specific caste or sub-caste names and relationships are important for this study, but rather simply to provide a sense of the complexity of the 'system' as it existed a century ago:

The approach of the eleven polluting castes from Izhavan to Paravan within thirty six feet polluted the Brahmins. The Izhavas were said to pollute a Nayar from twelve paces. The Kanakkans had to keep at a distance of forty eight feet from high caste Hindus. They polluted Izhavas by touch. They also polluted the Kammalans and the Valans, but at a short distance. They were not allowed to approach the temples controlled by the upper castes. The Kutans also had to keep at a distance of forty eight feet from the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, high caste Nayars and the Antaralas. They were polluted by Pulayas, Nayatis and Ullatans. They had to stand at some distance from them. In the southern parts of the erstwhile Cochin State, the Pulayas had to keep at a distance of ninety feet from Brahmins and sixty four feet from Nayars.... The Parayas were asked to keep at 128 feet distance from Brahmins.... [A] Vetan polluted the road while he was on it, but a Pulayan polluted the road by which he had gone. [Thulaseedharan 1977:74-75]

Social space is not static, but moves or changes shape and meaning according to the ways in which human beings move about in it or through it. In order to avoid being polluted while walking along shared roads, Nāyars and other upper *jātis* of a century ago would announce their approach by shouting out '*pō!*' ['go', nonpolite imperative] in order to warn those of lower *jātis* to get out of the way. Usha Chettur's report on conditions in the same period is of interest in that it highlights the role that audible announcements played in the system:

A Nayar must keep a minimum distance of 16 feet from a Nambutiri, an Ezhava 16 feet from a Nayar, and Pulaya 48 feet from him. Besides one can get polluted by breathing the same air as a lower caste -- a windy day could wreak pure havoc. A Nayar could also get polluted by just seeing someone who was lower than a Nayar. In the interior of Malabar, where even today palanquins are used to carry people from one *tarawad* to another, the palanquin-bearers

used to chant "Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha" every weary step on the way. This was a warning to lower beings that a Nayar was approaching. The Izhavas, Parias, and others answered with "Hom, Hom, Hom" to let them know that they were there and keeping their prescribed distances. [1970, cited in Thulaseedharan 1977:75-76]

Furthermore, the arrangement was upheld by the threat and application of deadly force: if a Pulaya failed to heed the announced warning or was met accidentally on the road by a Nāyar, the Nāyar had the right to kill him on the spot, an occurrence which has been reported by visitors to Kerala for hundreds of years (Fuller 1976:12-13).

Distance pollution is no longer practiced in such an extreme form.²⁶ Even if the idea of it were not now considered distasteful, it has been rendered impossible in practice, in that mode of dress no longer reflects *jāti*,²⁷ modes of contemporary mass transportation require tight crowding, and so on (as Groesbeck (1995:122 also points out). But knowledge of the history of distance pollution in Kerala may help us to understand some contemporary practices involving loud sounds. For example, as will be discussed further below, space continues to be socially defined by transient, dynamic human presences in the practice of processions which are a crucial part of temple

26. One remnant of distance pollution was still apparent in Thrissur, in that some who go house to house begging will observe such distances. Instead of opening the gate of the compound, coming to the door, and ringing the bell, as door-to-door salespersons would do, beggars who came to our house would call out from outside of the gate, and wait out there. Some would even move behind the gate posts when we came out; we were told that it was so that we could avoid having to see them.

27. A European missionary wrote in 1884 that "Anyone after living a little while in the country can at first glance tell to what caste a stranger belongs by the way he or she wears the hair or their garments" (quoted in Jeffrey 1992:20).

festivals and Catholic feasts. The model of announcing the arrival of a 'superior' being, or signifying military or political power, carries over into festival processions. In Brāhmanical Hindu processions in Tamilnadu, a chariot bearing the deity is accompanied by the so-called *maṅgalavādyam* ['auspicious instruments'] or *pēriya mēḷam*, the ensemble of *nāgasvaram* and *takil*, but far out in front of them, an ensemble of *paṛayan* ['pariah'] drummers will announce the procession, preparing the way for their passage. Relatedly, but perhaps with different caste connotations, Christian processions in Kerala are sometimes still preceded by the beating of a very large kettledrum called the *nakāra*, which due to its size must be pulled on a wooden cart, at the very beginning of the procession. This drum was formerly "played at the gates of royal palaces . . . at dawn and sunset as a sign of royalty" (Rajagopalan 1974:49).²⁸

2.3 Explosives, shared space, and the love of noise.

One can very frequently hear the sounds of firecrackers and larger explosives in Thrissur. Explosives are a key part not only of Christian and Hindu festival celebrations and Christian processions, but also of daily devotional practice in many temples, where they serve as an offering to the deity. Outside the front gate of Śrī Vaṭakkunāthan Temple at the center of Thrissur, for example, a red banner and a red metal sign with

28. Variations of this drum are common elsewhere in South Asia (e.g., Tingey 1992), as well as across Asia and into Europe (Philip Bohlman, personal communication). In Kerala, its sole remaining use is in these Catholic processions.

Śivan's mantra *Om nama śivāya* at the top both alert visitors in Malayālam, Tamil, and English²⁹ that the "MAIN OFFERING TO SREE VADAKKUNATHAN" [*śrī vaṭakkunāthanu pradhāna vazhipāṭu*] is "POPGUN FIRING" [*veṭivazhipāṭu*]. The *katinaveṭi* are set off there every morning at 3:00 a.m. as well as following each *pūja*.

Explosives are also blown off at times of elections, weddings, and any number of other occasions. Near the beginning of our stay in Thrissur, I asked an acquaintance about the firecrackers I was hearing:

EK: It seems like almost every day I hear firecrackers coming from somewhere, morning and evening. Some festival somewhere?

PM: Yeah. Small elections. Not only for festivals, for election, for marriage; everything they will --

EK: Why, do you think?

PM: Just to make the other people know that something is happening here. [When you hear] that some crackers is going on, naturally your interest will come out to know what is going on. So you will go and ask.

EK: That's true, it works!³⁰

Explosives are clearly about traversing space, about announcing an event to as great an audience as possible. When I was asking about the purposes of celebratory or religious explosives, one origin story I heard more than once clearly

29. The sign is in these languages for the benefit of visitors from Tamilnadu and from North India, not for foreign tourists; the temple is open for entry only to Hindus.

30. At least it 'worked' for me, in that I generally did try to find out what was going on. However, I have many examples on tape of conversations I was having which were interrupted by massive explosions coming from somewhere nearby which I found very jarring -- and my interlocutor didn't even blink, but just continued speaking, as if absolutely nothing had happened.

indicated a very specific relationship to social space, and historical anxieties surrounding the idea of many different categories of people sharing close quarters. This account began by reiterating the fact that in earlier days people didn't live as they do today, crowded in cities, that instead they lived at great distances from each other, spread out throughout the land. Thus the only time people got together in large groups was for temple festivals. People who weren't used to close contact with others might not have strong immune systems, and so disease could spread easily. According to this account, igniting gunpowder releases sulphur, which has the capacity to clear or 'purify' the atmosphere, to destroy germs, and thus to prevent against the spread of infectious diseases. Therefore, the reason that fireworks were blown off at large gatherings was not the resulting sound, but rather the explosion's effect as essentially a public health measure. In a slight variation of this story, *veṭikkeṭṭu* are blown off on a daily basis at temples like Śrī Vaṭakkunāthan for the same reason.

What is interesting about this account is that the language of 'pollution' which may have been used in the past has been replaced by a medicalized language of 'infection'. Whether the biomedical language is Hindu or Western, however, it is clear that what is at issue is minimizing the consequences of transactions between people, in Marriott's (1990, 1976) sense, when they are gathered together closely and contact is unavoidable. This account falls short, however, because it lacks any reference to the actual *sound* of the explosions, which is certainly more than incidental.

Although the words *kaṭinaveṭi* and *veṭikkeṭṭu* are generally translated as 'popguns' or 'firecrackers', I have been referring to them here as 'explosives' in order to indicate the magnitude of sonic power which is sought after and achieved by their use, but which is not conveyed by the word 'crackers'. The force of explosions that one hears, especially within large temple festivals, is intense. The frame of reference for such explosives is the famous Thrissur *pūram* festival, where a so-called 'fireworks display' which is one of the main attractions. This display places no emphasis on visual dazzle; the bright flashes are incidental, and what is valued are high decibel levels. Residents of Thrissur practically boast about the fact that many storefronts around the Round will have their windows shattered by the magnitude of the explosions; all of the proprietors tape their windows to try to prevent it. The evening before the main 'fireworks display', which occurs at 3:00 a.m., a 'sample display' is held so that families (i.e., women and children) can attend. The sample display has all the magnitude of the actual display, and indeed, although I did not attend, I could physically feel the shockwaves from our house approximately five kilometers away. The thunderous sound of this display from five kilometers distance can be heard on Track 5 of the CD.

Thrissur *pūram* is an extreme example, but with that festival as a point of comparison, no explosives are too loud for other celebrations. The Malayāḷam new year's holiday, Viṣu, celebrated on 14 April in 2001, began promptly at 4:00 a.m. with firecrackers being blown off in all directions, continuing more or less constantly for several hours. Near and far, one's hearing was full of explosions, some regular, describing the

speed at which someone could light one, then another, then another, and some going off in clusters, describing the interwindings of fuses in a package. As a part of Christian processions, too, where the procession accompanied by a brass band stops at each sponsoring home on its route, fireworks and explosives are used very liberally at each stop. In the following journal entry, I describe my experience of one of these nighttime processions in a village area on the outskirts of Thrissur, as I was walking away from it:

As I walked farther, the screaming clarinets and trumpets and pounding drums stayed with me; they covered quite a distance out there away from traffic noises. With the clarinets and trumpets spreading throughout the sound environment, much larger explosions began. It was a constant roar, punctuated with steady, louder, pops, and it sent a plume of smoke gradually into the air, higher and higher. It rose and spread, larger and larger as the fireworks continued, reflecting and refracting the flashes from the ground. After the noises stopped, the cloud continued spreading over the area, and I was reminded of the idea that sulphur in the air is supposed to halt bacteria, to purify the air.

G.S. Paul, a well-known music critic who writes on Karnātak and traditional Kerala music for *The Hindu* newspaper, thought of Malayāḷis as "noise-loving", attributing this essential quality to the characteristics of the natural environment. In the following conversation, I have been asking about the widespread use of popguns as offerings, and firecrackers at festivals. In response, G.S. Paul suggests that festivals 'reproduce' the noise and loudness which he associates with thunder and other natural phenomena not only in the ubiquitous explosives, but also in the performing arts:

GSP: That's why people assemble, to see and listen to this noise. Everywhere in Thrissur, *pūram*, *Vaṭakkāñceri*, even at churches. People are noise-loving, no doubt.

The geographical features also. Look at the rains that we have. The thunder and lightning.

EK: Is there a lot of loud thunder?³¹

GSP: Oh [yes], June July August, heavy heavy rains and the sound it produces. And also the seashore, the waves. All these things must have affected. And the forest, the wind, everything -- such factors are there naturally. They are reproducing the whole thing in the temple festival, that's what I have felt.... The geographical features have influenced the performing arts, the artistic outlook of Kerala.

2.4 *Pañcavādyam*: 'maximum sound'.

It has been widely observed that Kerala's indigenous arts are based fundamentally on drumming and rhythmic compositions. G.S. Paul's sentiment, expressed above, sheds light on a key aspect of the music of Kerala from an experiential point of view. Beginning with the topic of explosives, he articulates a sympathy between these and the loudness of natural phenomena such as thunder; the recording of the *pūram* 'sample fireworks display' in the distance on Track 5 is certainly illustrative of this connection. He then sees such qualities as a basis for Kerala's indigenous temple festival arts, i.e., noise in its more organized form as *mēḷams*, or drumming ensembles.³²

Such felt connections indicate that the significance and impact of Kerala musics cannot be explained with reference only

31. At the time of this interview, I had not yet experienced the monsoon in Kerala.

32. I use the word 'organized' with reference to John Blacking's famous definition of music as "sound that is organized into socially acceptable patterns" (1995:33).

to analyses of their complex rhythmic structures, or in other words, to the way the music unfolds in time. Instead, a cultural account of indigenous Kerala drumming ensembles must include an understanding of the way they exist in space. Specifically, by virtue of the central role played by sheer loudness, the sound of these ensembles is capable of bridging or transcending open spaces. By virtue of what the ethnomusicologist Charles Keil (1994b [1987]) has called 'participatory discrepancies', their music can furthermore create a subjective space of sonic immersion. In this section I seek to provide the beginning of such an account with specific reference to the role of the *kompū* ['horn'] in Kerala drumming ensembles.

G.S. Paul's above quote expresses an aspect of 'Malayāḷiness' which I heard talked about elsewhere as well. While *kathakālī* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* may be the artforms that represent Kerala on the world stage, within Kerala the *pañcavādyam* orchestra seems to be a more potent sign of a Kerala cultural distinctiveness.³³ The *pañcavādyam* has its origins as a

33. A *mēḷam* such as *pañcavādyam* can include up to 150 musicians or more, who assemble on the grounds surrounding a temple. *Pañcavādyam* is Sanskrit for 'five instruments', and the ensemble accordingly features five kinds of instruments, but many of each. Three of the instruments are classified as *avanadha* or membranophonic: *maddalam*, *iṭaykka*, and *timila*. The *ilattālam* or cymbals are *ghanam* or idiophonic, and finally the lone wind instrument, or *suṣiram*, is the *kompū*. Finally, the beginning of each performance is marked by a blow on the conch, or *śankham*, which is usually performed by one of the *iṭaykka* players. Prescriptive numbers of each instruments are given as follows:

There are major and minor groups. The minor group has eleven *thimilas*, five *maddalams*, eleven *elathalams*, eleven *kombus*, two *edakkas* and one *sankham*, while the major set has fifteen *thimilas*, eight *maddalams*, fifteen *elathalams*, fifteen *kombus*, two or more *edakkas* and one or more *sankhams*. [Omcherry 1999:173]

crucial part of any major temple festival, but has come so much to signify a defining feature of Kerala culture in an inclusive, state-level sense, that *pañcavādyam* musicians now get a large percentage of their work playing for state festivities such as Republic Day and Independence Day parades, for political rallies, and for dedication ceremonies or advertising campaigns for newly opening jewellery shops, TV shops, financing companies, and so on. That the genre now transcends its Hindu origins is shown by the fact that it has also become a key part of many Christian church festivals and even large Christian weddings.

The distinguished musicologist L.S. Rajagopalan, as well as musicians that I knew, often made sense of Kerala's traditionally drum-based music by similarly positing something like a musical 'national character' among Malayālis, such that listeners are concerned more with rhythmic energy and noise than they are with melody or intonation. To support this claim they point to notable absences in Kerala's musical culture. First, Karnātak music, the 'classical' music of South India, is in fact considered to be foreign to Kerala. Its centers are in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka; its history in Kerala dates back only 250 years to the rule of Swati Tirunal in Thiruvananthapuram. The second absence is the impoverished development of string or wind instruments in Kerala compared to within the Karnātak or Hindustani traditions elsewhere in India. Instead, I was told, Kerala's musical genius has expressed

These numbers are not absolute in practice, although the general proportions tend to remain similar. Furthermore, smaller groups are common for smaller-scale events.

itself in the extended and complex rhythmic patterns and interplays upon which the temple music traditions such as *tāyampaka* and *pañcavādyam* are based. In fact, the legend of Karnātak music's introduction to Kerala depends upon this rhythmic achievement. Two and a half centuries ago, Swati Tirunal -- who while perhaps an ineffectual ruler was a very prolific composer and skilled musician -- wanted to bring the renowned composer and saint, Tyāgarāja, from Tanjavur to his palace in Thiruvananthapuram, in order to learn from the master. In order to entice him to come, he sent the legendary drummer, Ṣaṭkāla Govinda Mārār, from the Kerala Mārār *jāti* which specializes in drumming, as a messenger. But the devotee and saint Tyāgarāja was not interested in going to any palace, and refused. That evening Ṣaṭkāla Govinda Mārār performed for Tyāgarāja, and he sang one *aṣṭapadi* in six tempos [*ṣaṭkāla*], which astounded and won over Tyāgarāja. Even now, one storyteller said, three is the maximum, but this Mārār was able to reach six tempos because he belonged to the drumming profession and community.

And yet this cultural rhythmic genius is not separable from the production of sheer loudness, and commentators such as G.S. Paul quickly stray from the realm of what is strictly 'musical' in their discussions about it. Emphasizing the point that Malayālis are inherently rhythmically inclined, G.S. Paul furthermore noted:

The greatest *mṛdaṅgam* artist that India has ever seen was a Keralite, Palakkad Mani Iyer. Only recently I mentioned [in an article in *The Hindu*] his contributions. Because, perhaps the main contribution of Kerala is this: because of the geography, season, climate, torrential rains -- sound! noise! So, all the percussion ensembles, *mēḷams*, produce maximum sound. A hundred chendas, sometimes 120

chendas are there! Look at the noise that is coming out! But that is a different art. So here, the Kerala people are more rhythm oriented, and they know how to produce an art with noise. I will always say noise. Because, forget about 100 chendas, with five chendas you cannot tune them to the same *śruti* [pitch].

In his consideration of the issue of why drumming is so central in the music of Kerala, Groesbeck (1995:147-164) traces Kerala music and instruments back to the Tamil Śaṅkam literature of the first few centuries CE, before Malayāḷam became a separate language, and finds close parallels. In Śaṅkam literature, we find that *tūmpu* ['horn'] has a status equal to that of *kompū* ['horn'] in contemporary Kerala genres, i.e., it is used as a rhythmic instrument, and that *kuzhal* [a simple double-reed instrument] is also significant in both. Furthermore, in both the Śaṅkam literature and in contemporary Malayāḷam, he notes that there is no general word for 'drum', and that instead, drums and horns fall into the same category. Groesbeck surmises, and I agree, that the fact that these instruments fall into the same category indicates that

the most important criterion for the instruments ... must have been their loudness, and most, but not all, of the loudest instruments were drums. ... [T]he combination of drums with *kuzals* and *kompūs* (in *mēLam*), as in Sangam literature, suggests the importance of noise for its own sake. [1995:161, 275-76]

2.5 *Kompū* as icon of amplification.

If we take up the suggestion of G.S. Paul, L.S. Rajagopalan, and others, that there is a culturally-rooted disposition for noise as noise, or a fondness for loudness, then we needn't look further than the *kompū* as an important musical instrument which embodies sheer amplification. The *kompū*

(literally 'horn' in Malayāḷam and Tamil, as in the horn of an animal; see Figure 2.3) plays a unique and crucial role in this rhythm section.

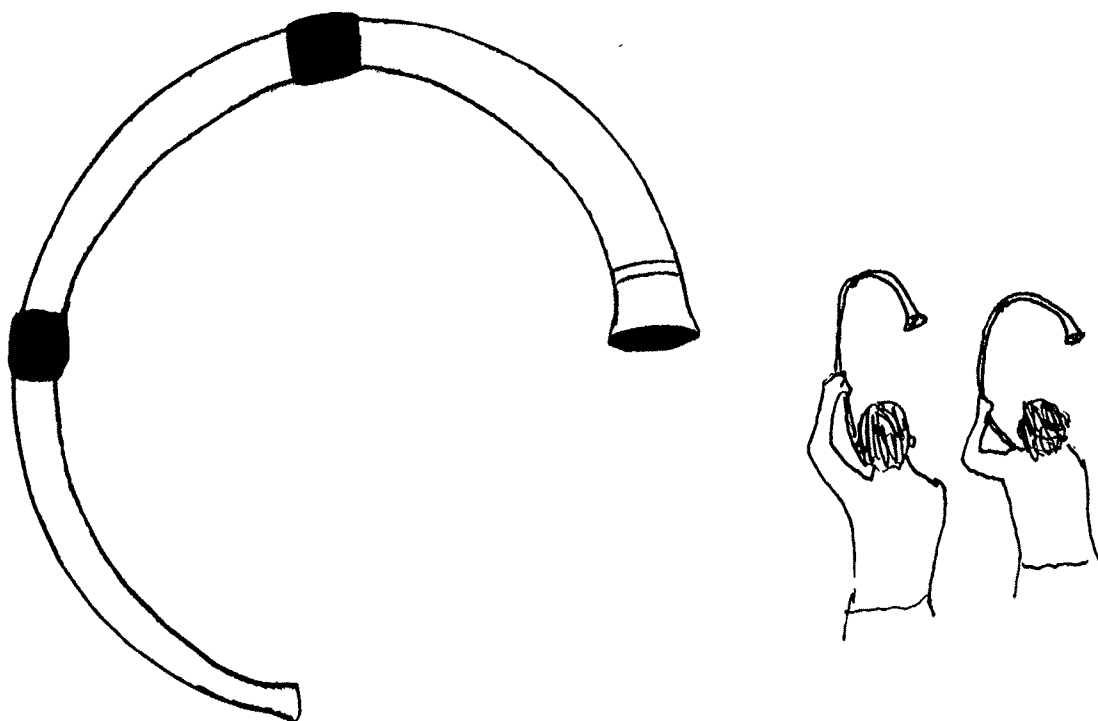


Figure 2.3 A *kompū*.

The *kompū* is roughly in the shape of the letter C, with a total length of about 160 centimeters and a diameter of about 72 centimeters, and is held up over the head, supported by the left arm extended nearly straight upwards and the right hand gripping it near the mouthpiece. It is made of bell-metal, is conical, and is built of three pieces which are fitted together and sealed with wax. At present there is only one *kompū* maker in

all of Kerala, P.V. Rāman of Pērāmaṅgalam in Thrissur District.³⁴ There are two sizes for different purposes, the smaller *timiri* and the larger *bari*, the latter of which is in more common usage today, and which is used almost exclusively in *pañcavādyam*.³⁵ The horn is played much like a trumpet or bugle, by blowing while buzzing the lips into the mouthpiece. The pitches most easily accessible are the harmonics at the bottom of the overtone series, in particular the second and third harmonics, which correspond to *pa* and *sa*, or in the terms of Western music theory, dominant and tonic. *Kompū* players use these two pitches exclusively as they play along with the *pañcavādyam* orchestra. *Pa* is generally used as a springboard to *sa*, and *sa* is repeated in different rhythmic patterns depending upon the stage of the *mēḷam*.

Thus, as L.S. Rajagopalan points out below, although the *kompū* is a *suṣiravādyam* or wind instrument, it serves a rhythmic function. Note that Rajagopalan suggests at the same time that the appropriation of a wind instrument for rhythmic purposes owes itself to something essential about 'the Keralite':

unlike other wind instruments this is not used for melody but only as a Laya ['rhythm'] or Tala ['meter'] instrument.... The Keralite has a special aptitude for Laya and he has raised this instrument from its primitive

34. I visited him in order to have a *kompū* made myself. As a trumpet player, I had an affinity for the instrument.

35. L.S. Rajagopalan notes the following:

Formerly only the Thimiri instruments were being used in temples. The Bari instrument is comparatively of recent origin. It came into prominence with the development and refinement of Pancha Vadya by Venkichan Swamy. Of late Bari instrument is mainly used, the Thimiri is found more with Harijans who use it for their folk festivals. [1973:173]

levels to that of a classical instrument for Laya.
[Rajagopalan 1973:170,174]

While the instrument's pitch content may be irrelevant in theory, it is by no means irrelevant to its total effect. Instead, I am arguing that the differences in pitch between multiple *kompūs* played in unison create 'participatory discrepancies', in Keil's (1994b) sense. According to Keil,

The power of music lies in its participatory discrepancies, and these are basically of two kinds: processual and textural. Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be 'out of time' and 'out of tune'.
[1994b:96].

By 'processual', he refers to aspects of rhythm such as 'beat', 'vital drive', or 'swing', and by 'textural' he refers to the timbre or tonal qualities of a sound. Regarding the former, he argues that it is the inaccuracies in rhythm which propel music rhythmically; for example, in straight-ahead jazz music, he suggests that the fact that the walking bass and the snare drum are slightly off from each other accounts for the perception that the music 'swings' (Keil 1994a [1967], 1995). For my present argument regarding *kompūs*, the latter textural or timbral aspect is more of interest. Keil bases his theory on observations of paired rather than solo trumpets in polka bands, pairs of reeds in accordions, and paired trumpets and shawms in Tibetan Buddhist ritual music. In the case of the Tibetan example, he says the following in a conversation with Steven Feld:

I began to wonder what was at stake with this music. These monks have been practicing up there for eight hundred years, every day, and this is what they have come up with. It is very timbral and textural, with an emphasis on harmonics and overtones. And I realized that their pairing of the conch shells, pairing of the shin-bone trumpets, pairing of the shawms, pairing of the bass trumpets, that all those pairings of instruments share one goal: to

maximize overtones, harmonics, and 'beats,' the throbbing of pitches rubbing against each other. I think that is one goal of music, to maximize timbres, textures, overtones, and harmonics. [Keil and Feld 1994:168-169]

As can be heard on the recording on Track 6, the intensity of the sound created by multiple *kompùs* playing in unison is due in large part to a very similar phenomenon. First, it must be noted that the instrument is almost never heard playing solo, but always in a group of at least two, and usually more.³⁶ Second, because each instrument is made by hand, there are natural variations in pitch from instrument to instrument. Individual playing style renders the pitch of any instrument naturally variable also, depending on such factors as lip tension and air pressure. The result of this variability is that no two *kompù* players are ever playing precisely the same *śrutī*, or pitch. The discrepancies in pitch which tend to exist between *kompùs* can be described in terms of Western music theory as ranging from between a quarter-tone and a minor third; in general, hearing *kompùs* approximately one to two half-steps apart is quite common.

36. The only time a *kompù* might be heard by itself is if only one *kompù* player is available for the performance of *kompùpattù*, which accompanies certain temple rituals. Prescriptively, however, this form calls for several *kompù* players to play together, and is generally played by two, with accompaniment by cymbals [*ilattālam*] (Groesbeck 1995:177).

Another occasion where the *kompù* is featured is during the Maccāṭu Māmāṅkam festival procession near Vaṭakkāñceri, Thrissur District, each year. It is described in a press release from that festival's committee as follows:

Another distinct feature with the parayeduppu [procession] is the absence of the traditional drum which is an inseparable part of the parayeduppu processions of other temples. Here, in Thiruvannikkavu, it is the horn-like wind instrument 'Kombu' in accompaniment with Kuzhal that are mandatorily played. The shrill clarion of Kombu played in its classical rhythm, unmistakably announcing the approach of the parayeduppu procession, will reverberate in one's mind for days together.

Aside from the issue of *śruti*, which as I have said is not explicitly theorized within the system, the role of the *kompū* is to increase energy and volume, where 'volume' includes the senses of three-dimensional space and of amplitude. Indeed, the *kompū* essentially acts as an amplifier. At the point at which the *kompūs* join in, at the climactic final section of each stage in the composition, or *kalāśam*, they amplify the part of the *timila* drum, mirroring it rhythmically, but raising and spreading the overall sound of the group. When the *pañcavādyam* is playing along with an elephant procession, the moment is synaesthetically amplified by the visual flourishes which L.S. Rajagopalan describes as follows:

Before the start of the Kalasam all the *Kombus* will get ready by blowing the lower note. The people on top of the elephants holding the Alavattom (peacock-feather fan) and Venchamaram (Yak tail Swish) will take their cue and stand up holding their fan and swish ready. When the Kalasam is played the swish is waved. This is one of the most picturesque sights of the elephant procession in Kerala.
[1973:175]

At large festivals, *pañcavādyams* are always surrounded by crowds of men (never women) who pack in tightly and enthusiastically wave their arms along with the rhythms. At the moment at which the *kompūs* begin playing, cheers inevitably arise from the crowd; the blasting horns, frequencies beating against each other microtonally, raise the total sound to the next energy level, in terms of both affect and decibels.

The *pañcavādyam* thus embodies two kinds of space-making. On one hand it traverses great distances, and announces an occurrence, as explosions do. The extra loudness provided by the *kompūs* at specific moments in the composition increase the ensemble's ability to project itself across the open spaces of

empty paddy fields which were its traditional performance situations. By filling this space, the sound announces the festivities to all who inhabit it, thereby establishing a connection between the temple whose festival is being celebrated and each hearer, and thus adding to the grandeur and reputation of the temple. On the other hand, and at the same time, the 'dissonance' or diffuse pitch area of the *kompù* contributes crucially to heightened emotional effect for the men gathered close by, by creating a kind of immersive psychic space. The sound of five, or seven, or nine, or more *kompùs* playing in unison but 'out of tune' is filled with participatory discrepancies whose effect on those gathered closely around is one of sonic immersion. This cultural model of sonic immersion is taken up further in the following discussion of *bhajana*.

2.6 *Bhajan*as and the construction of psychological space.

Sound is commonly used to transform a space where people are already gathered into a specific kind of shared subjective space. Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have long noted the ubiquity of some kind of organized sound in rituals around the world, although they haven't always agreed on how to interpret or understand it (e.g., Needham 1967; Blacking 1968; Rouget 1985). Delineating a religious space with sound is a well-elaborated cultural model within Indian religious practices, especially Hinduism, but carrying over into Christian practices as well (see Chapter Four).

In certain Hindu philosophies, such as Śaiva Siddhānta, the primordial godhead is described as being in the form of sound,

or *nāda brahman* (Beck 1993; Dhavamony 1971; Soni 1989). The manifest world is the outward vibration of this primordial *nāda*, and by extension, there is an inherent connection between a name (conceived as a particular sound) and that which is named. As a result, a name of god is understood as itself a manifestation of divinity; chanting the name(s) of god(s) in the form of *mantra* is thus to fuse oneself directly with the divine (Alper 1989; Coward and Goa 1991). Understood in psychological rather than spiritual terms, chanting *mantra* is a technique of using sound to focus one's concentration on the idea of the divine.

This theory of *mantra* also underlies the practice of *bhajana* singing. *Bhajan*s are repetitious songs which consist of little more than the names of deities, sung by a group of devotees with the express intent to transform their subjective experience into one which allows for the interpenetration of devotional or divine essences into themselves. In this way, a specific kind of psychological or spiritual space is created.

Bhajana is a functional music. The function of *bhajana* is to create a particularly exclusive space, a space which is characterized by including only the desired object of concentration, and excluding everything from outside, a space which is postulated and valorized by the religion and performed by members of the religious community. The focus of *bhajana* singing is on those doing the singing, rather than on an audience. It is a form of meditation, not far removed from that of chanting mantras, but one that relies even more on the ability of sound to carry the full weight of one's concentration, by virtue of the model of sonic immersion.

In Thrissur, *bhajana* singing continues to hold an important place in temple practices, though one which has changed significantly in recent years. A generation ago, it was relatively common for individuals to gather at a neighborhood temple either in the morning or evening in order to sing *bhajan*s together. A group of men I spoke with at a Nāyar-owned Subramaniam temple in Thrissur spoke of the old days where people of the surrounding area would meet at the temple to sing *bhajan*s together for an hour after *dīpārādhana*, the closing *pūja* of the day. Given today's economic realities, however, the practice has disappeared, something these men saw as an unambiguous sign of cultural decline:

When you're working in companies, you won't be able to return home by 5:30 or so [for singing *bhajan*s], and the new generation is not taking an active interest. They are supposed to be doing this [*cheyyantatāna*], but they are not. We are working and unable to come back in time. Our great culture is eroding day by day.

Today, the only *bhajan*s to be heard at mainstream temples on a regular basis are played back on cassette tape. At festival time, some committees may hire professional troupes to perform a stage program, either on the same stage which has been set up for the *gānamēḷa* (cinema song) program, or on a smaller stage nearer to the temple.³⁷ Here, the model is one of entertainment rather than of participation.

However, participant-centered *bhajana* singing remains a central practice of a few specific cults. The most popular of these is the cult of Ayyappan, for which a large percentage of Hindu men undertake the 41-day period of fasting, celibacy, and

37. The significance of spatial configurations/significations of temple festival performances is discussed in Chapter Three.

other self-regulatory behaviors before making a pilgrimage to the temple of Ayyappan at Sabari Mala (see Daniel 1984 for a detailed analysis of this pilgrimage). During the *mandalam* period when the pilgrimage happens,³⁸ Ayyappan *bhajan*as can be heard blaring over temple loudspeakers, and groups of pilgrims can often be heard singing *bhajan*as themselves, sometimes at temples but more often at specially-erected *paṇṭals* both during the period of preparation as well as en route. The aid of microphones and amplification is generally held to be crucial.

Sonic immersion through the singing of *bhajan*as is also a central practice of two other cults of great popularity in Kerala, both of which are led by charismatic leaders: that of Mātā Amṛtānandamāyi, and the Art of Living movement of Sri Sri Ravishankar. Sri Sri Ravishankar is a guru-type figure, while Mātā Amṛtānandamāyi, a woman from a poor Kerala village who is also known as the 'hugging mother' or simply as Amma ['mother'], is actually worshiped as an incarnation of the goddess.³⁹ At the Mātā Amṛtānandamāyi Maṭham in Thrissur, one of many throughout Kerala and other parts of India, devotees gather each Sunday morning at 8:00 to engage in group meditation and prayer. The major part of the gathering consists of singing *bhajan*as or chanting mantras together, while playing on rhythm instruments. To add to the effect, microphones are used and the mantras are highly amplified, and delay and reverb effects are used to add grandeur. The Art of Living movement emphasizes silent

38. The *mandalam* period begins on the first day of *vṛścikam* month, in mid-November.

39. For a recent hagiography of Mātā Amṛtānandamāyi, see Cornell (2001). For Sri Sri Ravishankar, see URL <http://www.artofliving.org>.

meditation, but *bhajan*as are also a regular part of their practice. At the regular meetings held in a hall above a supermarket in Thrissur, microphones and loudspeakers help those gathered to be fully enveloped in the *bhajan*as they are singing.

Both groups held large-scale gatherings attracting thousands to the Tekkinkāṭu Maidān, the large area surrounding Śrī Vaṭakkunāthan Temple, while I was in Thrissur. The main attraction of Amma's gatherings is that she hugs and blesses each of her devotees, which can take all night. But the most palpable outward sign of her presence was the massively amplified, trance-inducing *bhajan*as that went on and on for hours and hours, as Amma hugged her devotees one by one. Sri Sri Ravishankar's event was a very interesting mixture of silent meditations, pithy pronouncements about the universality of humanity, and hugely amplified *bhajan*as. In fact, I was at our house about five kilometers away when the meeting started, and heard it from there. I left the house to see where the music was coming from, and to my astonishment, I followed the sound on my bicycle all the way to the Round at the center of town. The sound operators told me afterwards that they were using 20,000 watts of amplification. In the case of both gatherings, the sonic immersion model was plainly in operation.

2.7 Processions.

Another paradigmatic conjunction of loudness and shared space is the procession. India has a highly developed cultural model of processions; they are an integral part of religious functions of all kinds as well as life-stage celebrations such

as weddings, and in Tamilnadu they have also become a feature of temple festival-like political extravaganzas (Bate 2000:132-182). In Kerala, Catholic Christian 'feasts', too, are celebrated with processions.

One function of a temple festival procession is to transform the space which it traverses from the mundane space of daily business and comings and goings, to a sacred space. The mechanics of how this works is analogous in inverse fashion to the archaic practices concerning distance pollution described above. Recall that according to some reports from the past, 'untouchables' could not only pollute a high-caste person through proximity, but actually polluted the road itself while they traversed it (Thulaseedharan 1977:75); the space itself was transformed by virtue of the perceived nature of the beings occupying it.

An important means by which processions transform the space they traverse is loud sound. Processions are never silent affairs, but are rather always as loud as possible, announcing their approach and their passage far and wide.⁴⁰ We have already seen that *pañcavādyam* is used to such an effect in certain Hindu processions. Christian processions are by no means outdone by their Hindu counterparts when it comes to maximizing sonic presence. For example, the occasion of St. Sebastian's Feast, often referred to as *ampū perunṇāl*, is celebrated at every church. For this festival, the arrow [*ampū*] of St. Sebastian is carried out in procession to all Christian homes -- and many

40. This aspect of processions also brings to mind the days of distance pollution, specifically the high-caste practices of audibly announcing their approach, as discussed above.

Hindu homes -- in the vicinity of the church, with the accompaniment of a brass band or 'bandset', or less commonly, *śīnkāri mēḷam*.⁴¹ Bandsets, which are discussed more fully in Chapter Three, consist of trumpets, clarinets, euphonium, and drums, and perform arrangements of the popular cinema songs of the day at top volume. At each home, the bandset plays a song or two, and firecrackers and small explosives are discharged as the procession moves on to the next. Each neighborhood forms a committee which is responsible for sponsoring its own procession, and thus there are many processions going on simultaneously, all of which meet up at the church sometime after midnight. On Track 7, for example, after the processions have all joined together, several bandsets can be heard simultaneously, to Ivesian effect.

Section 3. Hearing broadcasts.

The lengthy excursion of the previous section has, I hope, provided a sense of the cultural and musical context in which technology of the twentieth century has enabled temples and churches, among others, to broadcast sound through outwardly directed loudspeakers, into shared lived environments. We now return to the issue of these broadcasts, and address the questions of what the amplified broadcasts signify and how they

41. *Śīnkāri mēḷam* is a recent innovation for an ensemble of *ceṇṭas* and *ilattāḷam* which involves cyclically increasing and decreasing tempos, and choreographed movements by the drummers. It is not performed by *Mārārs*, the traditional Hindu drumming *jāti*, and *Mārārs* I knew spoke disparagingly of this genre.

function in the perception of those who live in their surrounding community.

3.1 The semiotics of broadcasts.

Amplified sound coming from temples every morning and every afternoon signifies above all that a temple is alive and well, although the world which the broadcasts now confront is a more complicated one in many ways than the world in they began. The broadcasts from temples must be seen in the context of social, political and economic changes that have been taking place in Kerala for a half-century. The most significant economic changes faced by temples were those brought on by Land Reforms, after the final implementations of which in 1970, temples were left with nothing more than the plot of land occupied by the temple itself.⁴²

Following these radical economic shifts, when temples began to be revived, it was under circumstances that reflected democratic rather than 'feudal' values. This is to say that the affairs of each temple are managed by committees made up of representatives from the immediate area of the temple, rather than autocratically by the Nampūtiri (Brāhman) or Nāyar family which may have run the temple previously.⁴³ Thus the temple was

42. The ramifications of land reforms for the structure of patronage of traditionally temple-based artforms are addressed in Chapter Three.

43. Temples in Thrissur are managed bureaucratically by the Cochin Devaswom Board; in the south the governing body is the Travancore Devaswom Board.

now explicitly oriented towards and depended for its survival upon the community, rather than a single family. Furthermore, the community which a temple served was explicitly diverse, in terms of *jāti*: state law specifies that committees of temples which come under the Devaswom Board must contain a modest number of representatives from different caste communities, specifically including Īzhavas.⁴⁴

At the broadest level of generality, then, and on a level at which nearly everyone would agree, the broadcasts signify renewed life and prosperity. They announce not only that 'rituals are happening at this temple', but that the temple has supporters who are prosperous enough to have provided a sound system. As noted earlier, temple sound systems are linked in many people's minds to the flow of Malayāḷi laborers to the Gulf; when I would inquire about temples' sound systems, people would often casually suppose that someone had brought it from the Gulf and donated it to the temple. Of course, amplifiers and cassette players are and have been made in India as well, but what is notable is what appears to be a widespread assumption that the technology is explicitly foreign, and furthermore, derived from wealth accumulated outside the state. Indeed, its foreignness may have added to its perceived value at the time it was introduced to the temples.

44. However, a minority of temples which remain in private hands need not follow such guidelines, and may have committees that are made up very exclusively of Nāyars, as was the case with Śaṅkaramkuḷaṅgara Temple, whose festival is discussed in Chapter Three. In addition, temples run by the Īzhava-based SNDP (Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Pariṣad) will likewise have committees consisting only of Īzhavas.

It is important to note that the prosperity signified by cassette broadcasts is definitely a *limited* prosperity. Playing cassettes is recognized to be a cheap second to actually having musicians to play instruments at the time of *pūja*, which only the biggest temples can afford. Cassette machines, amplifiers and loudspeakers allow any temple to play music, and temple-goers feel that it's better to have some music than no music at all. Peter Manuel (1993) shows that cassettes have had democratizing effects on regional musics in India. In an analogous way, the ability to play music from cassettes also has a levelling effect on temples, in that with the aid of a cassette player, amplifier, and loudspeakers, even a small neighborhood temple can now (re)create the sounds and vitality of a full-featured *pūja*.

The music from temples does not only signify prosperity, but according to temple committees, it helps to ensure continued prosperity. In one interview with committee members at a privately-owned Nāyar temple, after establishing that the broadcasts function in their minds as a sort of 'public service' to the surrounding community, I asked if they also benefit the temple. One member replied,

Of course! They donate to us! For our festival, the December and October and January festival, and when festival comes, people donate. We get nearly three lakhs [three hundred thousand rupees] of donation. With donation only we celebrate our festival.

Although this committee member and others rejected any likeness to advertising, in some ways it appears that a comparison may be made.

3.2 Morning music as part of an intentional world.

This ability to control the aural environment without the economic burden of supporting musicians becomes a valuable one, and electronic sound reproduction technology thus offers a new solution to an old desire. Those in control of the temple can 'engineer' the acoustic environment of the community using such technology, simply by switching on a cassette player and amplifier (Greene 1999). And for at least some of those living nearby, the sounds from the temple become a meaningful part of a culturally-constituted reality which may be described as an 'intentional' world, or in other words, a world which is

real, factual, and forceful, but only so long as there exists a community of persons whose beliefs, desires, emotions, purposes, and other mental representations are directed at, and thereby influenced by, it. [Shweder 1991:74]

The sounds contribute to an intentional world because, as I describe in this section, for those who live in it, the sounds are intimately connected with those things which are true, good, and beautiful about the world (Shweder 1991). The temple is successful in creating a shared social space among those who share the values of the temple culture.

The morning music is appreciated not just as a reminder that the temple is alive, but also because the sound causes the area to be pervaded with a devotional [*bhakti*] feeling, which has positive physiological and even environmental effects. Many of my neighbors, both Nāyars and Īzhavas, talked about how much they loved living so near to a temple, and the broadcasts were a central part of that awareness. I heard many expressions of feelings that hearing the music provides in the morning, such as

that it "gives energy", it makes a "peaceful atmosphere", and "it feels like good *bhakti*". One participant in Sri Sri Ravishankar's Art of Living movement went so far as to say that, "If you hear a very beautiful song in the morning, it is very good for your health." One temple committee member took this notion a step further, citing a 'Hindu belief' according to which the sounds of prayer or *bhajana* will "entertain or be appreciated by all the creatures in the nature", making the point that the sounds are not only intended for human benefit but for that of the whole environment.

There is something about hearing the songs in the early morning, rather than at another time, which gives them their power. Early morning seems to constitute what we might call a particular intentional zone. In the early morning, there is quiet. A day in Thrissur closes gradually, and it takes a while for the dust and smog of the day's business to clear away. But all night, the roads are nearly empty of traffic, shops are closed, and streets and neighborhoods are silent. So it is in the early morning that people can awaken and find the day fresh, rested, and new. The sweltering heat of the day has not yet come; the blindingly hot sun has not yet begun to rise. One can go outside in comfort. The roads are not yet full of pounding trucks and buses, their horns screaming, their catalytic converterless engines pouring choking smog into the air. The air has had all night to cleanse itself from these disturbances, and most people rise well before dawn in order to bathe, to worship, to take advantage of the opportunity that morning, unlike any other time of day, affords. Only some younger, college-age men and women admitted -- and then usually with an embarrassed laugh -- that they sleep until 7:00 a.m. This is

commonly seen as sleeping late, as going against an expected norm, as choosing not to participate in one aspect of a cultural reality.

Beginning the day well before dawn is an established part of Indian tradition. Hindu temples often open at four or five o'clock. In some of the most prominent temples, such as Śrī Vaṭakkunāthan Temple in the very center of Thrissur, the practice persists of firing off explosive 'popguns' [veṭivazhipāṭu] at 3:00 a.m., which hour is seen not as late at night, but as early in the morning. Such explosions are audible for a great distance in the cool, empty morning air -- up to ten kilometers, perhaps farther. It is traditionally normative for temple caste Hindus to begin the day with a bath and a trip to the temple. Pre-dawn activities thus echo the quiet and emptiness of the air by focusing on purifying the person.

The morning is the first time of day, in the sense that firstness is imbued with great import in Hindu traditions. For example, a Brāhman friend of mine would never write on a page without first writing, at the top of the page, a small insignia of Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed son of Śivan and Pārvvati, presider over beginnings. Beginnings of any endeavor are a time of vulnerability and risk, and one must be careful to allow in only auspicious influences. When we awaken in the morning, we come out of sleep and are open to influences from the environment around us. I was told that, if possible, the first thing we see, the first thing that enters us through our open eyes should be auspicious; ideally the first thing we see is an

image of the divine.⁴⁵ For this purpose, many cautious Hindus will keep an image of a deity near their sleeping area.

These parallel cultural models of firstness and of vulnerability to influences are also implicated in sonic practices. One's ears are open even before one's eyes are, lacking as we do earlids, as McLuhan pointed out (McLuhan and Fiore 1967:111). Equivalent to seeing the image of a god upon awakening is hearing the god's name. Thus for many of my neighbors, hearing devotional songs first thing in the morning allowed them to start the day with a mental peacefulness, energy, and devotion. For this reason, in previous (pre-amplification) generations, Brāhmans and other 'temple caste' Hindus found it auspicious to chant the mantra known as the *Śrī Venkatēśa Suprabhātam* in the morning. After the celebrated female vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi recorded a beautiful version of this on cassette in 1964, it was marketed and began being played widely through temple loudspeakers.⁴⁶ It became popular in high-caste households as well. According to the owner of Kerala Sound Electricals, the largest sound system rental company in Thrissur, this particular cassette and its widespread popularity in morning temple broadcasts contributed greatly to the growth of the devotional cassette industry as a whole.

Hearing songs from a nearby temple or church has also integrated itself into local ways of marking time, cuing domestic ritual observances such as lighting the lamp as well as

45. On the importance of sight and seeing the divine in Hinduism, see Eck (1981).

46. It is still very widely played. As mentioned earlier, this cassette was played both at our local temple and the teashop in the nearby colony.

mundane passing of time. As described by a woman in her thirties who runs a small shop near our local temple,

When it is played in the temple we know that it is time to light the lamp, that it is evening, that we have to complete all the works quickly, and so on. We need not look at the watch. Early morning at 5:00 the songs will be played in the temple and church. No one has to wake me up.

It seemed a relatively common practice in both Īzhava and Nāyar homes to bolster the music from the temple with a cassette in one's own house. In the evening, for example, the cassette would be put on following domestic rites such as the lighting of the lamp. In this way a temporal as well as a spatial continuity is experientially forged between temple broadcasts and domestic observances.

Temple broadcasts have become so incorporated into daily routine that their (very rare) absence was felt by a few of my neighbors as an unpleasant lack. Śārada, an elderly woman living in a tiny house on the other side of the temple emphasized how much she and her family like hearing music from the temple (and from her neighbors' houses) by declaring that in fact, if they *don't* hear the music from the temple, then they won't feel quite right, that "there won't be a satisfaction":

We will stay thinking, 'Oh! why is the music not heard today?' if we don't hear any songs. We wake up at 5:00 listening to it. We wake up hearing the songs of the Lord. There won't be satisfaction on the day when it is not heard. We will wake up then, saying we haven't heard any *nāmam* ['names'] of the Lord, we haven't heard any songs of the Lord. Our Lord Murukan is protecting us. So we feel disappointed when we don't hear the songs of Lord Murukan.

Universalism of religion is very much part of public discourse in Thrissur, and the propensity to accept religious sentiments of any denomination carries over to the experience of devotional songs. Given the communal harmony existing in

Kerala, people of different religions seem to appreciate devotional sentiment, regardless of what religion it is centered on. Of course, this mainly applies to members of the minority religions, Christianity and Islam, since it is they who are more likely to be in an area of Hindu broadcasts. As a 36 year old Christian man said, "Whether we are Christians or Hindus we see the songs of God as same."⁴⁷

3.3 Issues and conflicts in the reception of broadcasts.

In the ways just discussed and more, many people I spoke to talked about their appreciation of the temple's broadcasts. And yet I often suspected or was given to understand that a significant percentage of my neighbors were less than fond of the sounds' incursion into surrounding homes. I now shift my analysis to some of the problems or conflicts involved with the broadcasts. The broadcasts do not simply outline a single intentional world of shared understandings of what is true, good, and beautiful, but also highlight tensions which are emergent in contemporary Kerala society. It is in the nature of urbanization and 'modernization' that new cultural models come into play, some of which may conflict with preexistent models.

47. The Hindu woman Śārada, quoted above, also communicates a version of religious universalism, but a somewhat misguided one where "everyone believes in Lord Muruka":

Here we don't have religion or caste. People from every religion will go out only after praying before Lord Muruka. There is nothing like Christian, Muslim, or vēṭṭuvan ['hunter', a hill tribe]. Everyone is devoted to Lord Muruka. Everyone believes in Lord Muruka.

When enough variables are introduced, even high wattage cannot create a unified social space.

In most of the conversations I had with people about the devotional music played at the temple, two aspects were continually emphasized: first, that it's music, and second, that it's devotional. In other words, how could anyone possibly object to it? Anyone who would object may be accused of either not liking music, or worse, of being opposed to the free practice of religion. But more to the point, the very notion of a modern Indian society very self-consciously includes a notion of pluralistic cooperation, which seems especially salient in Kerala. Malayāḷis are proud of their record of a relatively low level of intercaste or intercommunal conflict, and seem to take pains to maintain at least the appearance of harmony in conversations with an inquisitive foreigner, in most cases quite convincingly.

What's true in conversation is also true on paper. In a written, Malayāḷam-language survey of 82 people selected more or less at random -- or those to whom I and my assistants could easily distribute them -- only six respondents couldn't hear broadcasts at all from their homes. 57 people could hear at least a church or temple (the survey did not distinguish between them), and had positive feelings about hearing it. Only eight people could hear but were indifferent or did not comment, and only six registered any kind of negative feeling about them. While I'm certain that many people do in fact find the morning broadcasts from temples and churches inspiring, conversations I had also suggested to me that the survey results indicated the kinds of answers people are likely to give to a foreign

researcher they don't know, that is, the socially acceptable response.

There were a number of ways in which people I spoke with objected to the broadcasts, almost all of them voiced with careful attention not to be taken to be objecting either to music or to the free expression of religion. The objections voiced were of two general kinds. First, some objected not to the practice of broadcasting, but only to the specific kinds of songs being played at this particular temple. Their criticisms were not simply aesthetic, but drew attention to still-existent group allegiances and affinities, including those based on caste.

I then take up the much more commonly voiced objections which either pointed out that the nature of social space has changed and may conflict with that presumed by the practice of broadcasts, or appealed to values or models which are emergent in the process of what might be called 'modernization', with which the broadcasts may conflict. These include the idea that the broadcasts may interfere with students' ability to pursue their studies in peace, and also recent anti-'noise pollution' movements which take up a language of health and safety to campaign against the overuse of loudspeakers in general.

3.3.1 Political implications.

We have seen that members of different *jātis* and religions now live in close proximity to each other in many urban neighborhoods, and further, that for many of my neighbors, both

Hindu and non-Hindu, one function of the broadcasts is to enact a sense of community or unity in the area surrounding the temple; certainly such a purpose would appear to be intended or presupposed in the practice of broadcasting from a temple or church. And yet, although the society at large is making efforts to minimize caste differences, for some in my neighborhood, the temple's sonic transformation of space into social space had an effect opposite of what was intended: it drew attention to caste consciousness rather than smoothed it over. Conversations with families on the western side of the temple, which is characterized by a higher concentration of upper-caste Nāyar households,⁴⁸ revealed that the sounds of songs from the temple were intertwined in their hearing with recent temple politics, in which caste is a major issue.

Apparently, some months before we arrived, membership in the temple committee had turned over. The former committee was made up mostly of Nāyars, but with the required quota of Īzhavas. Following allegations of misuse and misappropriation of temple funds, a new committee made up almost completely of Īzhavas took over control of the temple. One Nāyar neighbor, for example, in perceiving that there was some 'disturbance' in the sound, or in other words that it was distorted (which was a perception that I shared), and that the songs were not being played on a strict schedule (which was not a perception that I shared), blamed these occurrences on the fact that "our own

48. Although there are more Nāyar-level families on the western side (or 'our side' as they called it, as opposed to 'that side'), there was still diversity: some families were Christian, like our next-door neighbors, and some, including the family we rented our house from, were of the Īzhava caste.

persons" were no longer on the committee. "Now everything is in disorder," she said.

Broadcasts have purportedly been used in some areas as a political weapon. I say 'purportedly' because I was never able to document a case of this happening, but what is just as significant is the existence of the *belief* on the part of my informants that it was. In one village area, for example, a temple with support from the RSS was blaring its music at very high volume into a majority Muslim area. In another village, a mosque and a temple played music at each other for days, at the beginning of Ramadan. In Thrissur, there was a story that a church was blaring music to try to oust a Hindu RSS man who lived next door, so that the church could acquire his property. In this last case, the church had yielded to pressure from the community group I discuss below to cease its broadcasts the previous year; I was unable to substantiate the claim that the church's music was intended to persuade its neighbor to vacate.

3.3.2 Schizophonia and 'involvement'.

One neighbor articulated a rare critique of the very enterprise of playing cassettes. His critique revolves around the phenomenon which R. Murray Schafer (1977:88) has termed 'schizophonia', or the separation of sounds from the contexts of their creation via recording and subsequent playback in a new context. My neighbor S. Madhavan is a well-educated man in his early 40s, fluent in English, and was a good friend of the president of the temple committee. His wife teaches in the English department at a local college, and he has two children.

According to Madhavan, playing a cassette during the time of *pūja* in the temple actually prevents the temple from achieving its purposes. At our temple, his analysis goes, because they use the same *nāgasvaram* cassette for the evening *pūja*, they play the same *rāgam* every day. An actual *nāgasvaram* player, in contrast, will change the *rāgam*, depending on a huge variety of factors, such as the day of the week, the weather, whether the moon is out, and so on. "Their *involvement* is there," he said.

Because when the original *nāgasvaram* is played by this artist [as opposed to replaying a cassette recording], without his knowledge the atmosphere is controlling him, that special atmosphere of that day or evening is controlling him. Whatever is the *rāga* he plays, that *involvement* is there. That's very important.

We feel these changes, the changes of the seasons, and changes in ourselves, in this music when a musician is there. But on tape, there is no variation. At the time of *dīpārādhana*, the cassette goes its way, and the *pūjārī* and the devotees each go their own way. There is no harmony between them.

Music performed by musicians, in contrast, would create harmony between all participants. Crucially, only if there is this harmony can one expect to receive the wonders one prays for, he said. "Everyone comes to the temple with their problems and seeks relief, but this temple fails to create harmony, and so people don't get relief."

3.3.3 Changing forms of social space.

The broadcasts presume a shared social space or intentional world, and one of the many aspects of this presumed social space is the uniformity of sleep schedule characteristic of an agrarian society, and the early morning 'intentional zone'

described above. However, several of my neighbors pointed out that the assumption that everyone will awaken before dawn is simply no longer accurate in the city that Thrissur has become. A small grocery owner from a Brāhman family, who sells snacks from a cart on the Round while his wife minds the shop, pointed out that it is in the nature of a city that people have different kinds of jobs, with different kinds of schedules, and that they have a hard time sleeping in the early morning if the music is too loud.

Temple broadcasts today are competing for their audience with spreading home use of media and media technology.⁴⁹ When temples began broadcasting, there was a certain exclusivity about the practice, in that as I discuss above, such audio technology was rare and thus highly valued. Now, the technology has become common, not just in the sense of being widespread or prevalent, but also, increasingly, in the sense of being without specialness. Muralīdharan, a 40 year old Hindu man, summarizes this situation at his home on the edge of Thrissur:

Ten years back, it was a very rural area, so this amplifier and tape recorder were very rare. So all the people around this temple or church, whatever it may be, were feeling good, because to hear these songs. Now it's all changed. Every family has got amplifiers, TVs, radios, everything.

The spread of media and media technology that Muralīdharan describes also entail new forms of social space, which may not be compatible with the old. The traditional and most straightforward model for a social space is one which is coincident with a physical, objective space, or in other words,

49. But not as directly as their festivals are competing with mass entertainment, as I describe in Chapter Three.

where the participants are in contiguous physical proximity, as in the example of *bhajana* singing. This is the model in which temple broadcasts operate. But with today's electronic media technology, social spaces are formed which transcend physical proximity. In the case of cinema, for example, until recently viewers of a film shared together in the experience by virtue of inhabiting the same physical space, namely that of the theater. Today in Thrissur, however, audiences watch films on the television 'mini-screen', at the same time but in different physical spaces: at noon on a Saturday one can walk down a residential street and hear the soundtrack of the same film emanating from many different houses, as it is broadcast on the government's Doordarshan channel. The physical space of each house is coterminous with its own social space, and a larger, temporally coterminous social space is formed through the broadcast of these weekend movies that is not equivalent with any particular physical space.⁵⁰

In an analogous way, households today can put on their own cassettes in the morning, in their separate spaces, if they so desire, independently of what sounds may be outside. Given that nuclear family arrangements have generally replaced joint family arrangements, the households of contemporary Kerala are more separate than at any point in the past. The manner in which space is shared has been radically affected by social reforms which have changed the nature of family structures and living

50. Soon Lee (1999) describes an analogous use of radio broadcasting to form a 'virtual' community of Muslims in Singapore. Rather than broadcasting calls to prayer from minarets, they are instead broadcast over the radio, forming an entirely voluntary and spatially dissipated community of people whose shared space is not a physical one.

arrangements. Today, people of all *jātis* live in small nuclear family arrangements, and land is divided up into small plots which are each big enough for one small house; remaining land continues to be partitioned with each new generation.

Subdividing properties and the increase in nuclear families may also have contributed to an increased emphasis on individuation and separation, on focusing inwards, into the house, rather than outwards, on larger structures of social interdependence which have traditionally characterized Indian society (Marriott 1976). This inward focus is mirrored in the fact that many families -- not only the middle class, but increasingly families which may own little else -- have the technology at their disposal that they can watch movies in their own houses, and they can put on their own devotional cassettes; they can create their own sonic environment independent from that existing outside. All of this causes some to question the relevance of the temple or church broadcasts.

The strategy most consistently used by residents of Thrissur allowed them to object to the broadcasts without criticizing either religious practices or music: by appealing to a universally shared, emergent value of Kerala's secular democratic state, that of education. Kerala society has considered education to be a high priority for over a century, and today education is more highly valued than ever.⁵¹ Today, competition is stiff for degrees that will lead to highly

51. For a history of Kerala's progress in education, see V.K. Ramachandran 2000 and 1997; Nair 1983.

desirable white-collar jobs, outside the state if possible.⁵² Because of this, children often receive group tuition outside of school from an early age, and must spend long hours studying for batteries of exams that last for days if not weeks. The results of these exams determine the fields into which each student will be allowed to continue.

The most frequent comment that my assistant Ambika and I heard whenever anyone felt bold enough to imply that the temple broadcasts are not always completely welcome was that it can interfere with the project of education by causing troubles for young people who are studying for their exams early in the morning. While it may be socially or even cognitively problematic to suggest that songs that are of a devotional nature can also be annoying, it is unambiguously unproblematic in contemporary Kerala to support students' abilities to further their education to the highest extent possible.

However, after hearing this scores of times, Ambika and I both began to feel that it was often something people said as a socially acceptable way of voicing objections to the practice of broadcasting which may 'actually' have been grounded in a number of other issues, such as those explored here. Part of the reason we became skeptical was that the concern that the broadcasts are disturbing to children studying for their exams came from many people who didn't have young children.

52. Citing poor prospects for employment in Government or private sectors in Kerala, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Dr. Alexander Jacob, advised those attending a career guidance seminar in Thrissur that "Keralites should discard all fancies about sticking on to the State and finding placements, and instead vigorously continue the pursuit of jobs outside the State" ("Look for jobs outside state'", *The Hindu*, 30 May 2001).

Furthermore, most students that we spoke to said that they didn't study in the early morning anyway, although clearly such was the practice of the older generation.

3.4 'Sound pollution' and health.

As ambient sound levels get higher in urban areas in general -- with temple and church broadcasts as only one example -- the issue has been reframed not only in Thrissur, but throughout India, with respect to notions of health, both mental and physical, and environmental pollution. Thus various efforts have been made from the standpoint of enacting laws and enforcement to approach what is increasingly placed in the category of a public health problem.⁵³ However, the progress has been slow. As the authors of a text on environmental protection published in Allahabad comment,

[T]he movement against noise pollution seems to be not [as strong] in India as in other countries, the reason, according to environmental experts, being that most of the people in India do not consider noise as pollution but as part of routine life. [Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi 1996:54]

In Thrissur, I found that although the language of 'sound pollution' has entered into common parlance, the concept does not seem to influence behavior: for most occasions involving loudspeakers, amplifiers remain set at maximum levels.

Around five or six years ago, some residents of Thrissur started a grass-roots movement to counter what they saw as

53. This stands in ironic contrast to the idea discussed earlier in the chapter that igniting explosives in fact protects public health.

serious noise pollution in their own areas. The men who make up this group are generally well-educated, upper or upper-middle class, retired individuals who, according to one of the group's founders, want to give something back to society. They formed a group called Citizens for Better Living, or CIBEL (pronounced like 'Sybil'), to address what they perceived to be problems in the society, including traffic safety, and most extensively, noise pollution. One of the founders told the story of the groups origins as follows:

G: Looking around, we found this noise pollution is going all over the country. People are not aware that it is very damaging, creates tension, raises blood pressure and all that. As a matter of habit they do it. So we thought we could create awareness about the dangers of noise pollution, the sources of noise pollution, and the dangers.

. . . And these loudspeakers, you know, basically they are for addressing an audience, or used during the police during emergencies like fire riots etc, for quick communication with the public, to be fitted to mobile vans. Otherwise they are no use. But nobody knows, see, temples start blaring, mosques they blare five times a day, and the churches they also started, because competing with one another. See, you must compete in doing good, not in doing something bad.

EK: Temples think they are doing something good.

G: Yeah, that's what they think! [laughs]. And they think this is connected with some religious affair, so nobody dare protest. Something connected with god, how can you protest? You can't. With the religion is a very sensitive issue here. So how can you protest? So we met together, some 25 of us, and we started this CIBEL.

Working together with the Rotary Club of Thrissur, they began by creating leaflets in both Malayālam and English to educate people about the issues of sound pollution. They distributed

about 20,000 of these leaflets as an insert in people's morning newspapers throughout Thrissur and its suburbs.

The first of these leaflets bears the headline, 'REDUCE THAT NOISE - LOUD SOUND IS SLOW POISON', or in the Malayālam version, '*śabdaśalyam ozhivākkuka potujanārōgyam samrakṣikkuka!*' This leaflet targets the use of both loudspeakers and air-horns.⁵⁴ The text of the leaflet uses language of public health, individual rights, and 'civilized life', in order to make its arguments. The following excerpt illustrates its approach:

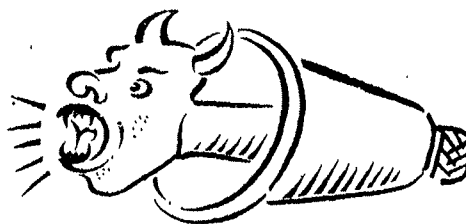
OUR CONSTITUTION guarantees the right of free speech and worship. But there is no such right to use loudspeakers during prayers, or as calls to prayer, to play songs or hymns and disturb neighbours, who have their own rights to PEACE AND QUIET. Besides, why keep these emanations LOUD AND HARSH by fitting bullhorn type speakers at the top, when they can be made SOFT AND PLEASANT by fitting box speakers inside? Many places of worship have already effected this REFORM and avoided harassment of neighbours.

The second leaflet uses even more provocative language. I first became aware of it when it was shown to me by the proprietor of a sound electricals shop. At the top of the page, there is a drawing of a horn-type loudspeaker with a devil-like head with horns and pointy teeth coming out of it, and lines indicating sound coming from its mouth. The heading reads: '*nān maikkāsuran! sūkṣiccōḷū!*' or, 'BEWARE! I AM DEMON MIKE!'⁵⁵ The text is in the first person, from the demonic loudspeaker's point of view. I reproduce it here in its entirety, because it provides an excellent account of the group's perception of the

54. Nearly all trucks and busses throughout India are outfitted with air-horns, which are blasted almost constantly and at earsplitting (and technically illegal) levels of above 110 dB.

55. The word 'mike' is commonly used to refer to loudspeakers, rather than to microphones, in Malayālam (and Tamil) usage.

**BEWARE !
I AM DEMON MIKE !**



I'm Demon Mike popularly known as **MIKASURA** or **MIKE DEMON**. I was born about 60 years back. Since then, see how I have grown and grown. There are hundreds and thousands of me, asuras (demons), all over the place and more are coming. **No family planning for me !**

Originally I was created to address large gatherings or for instant communication with the public by law enforcement agencies, in times of fire, floods, riots, etc., when I am fitted to mobile vans. But this limitation went long back.

I have diversified my activities. Now I am blaring from street corners, atop moving vehicles and lottery bicycles, **loud m-u-sic (make-you-sick)** inside buses, vans and railway platforms and from places of worship.

People think they are using me but actually I am using them. I affect all people whether they are aware of this or not. I interfere with their work and rest. I cause irritation and tension, high blood pressure, tension head ache and nervous trouble. I disturb the working of schools, hospitals, offices and housewives in their kitchen. People lose peace of mind and get depression and even lose their sanity. **I am a significant contributing factor in the incidence of mental illness and suicides.** Along with my brother air-horn and other high tone and musical horns, who give ear-piercing shrieks, I have inflicted enormous damage on humanity and continue to do so. It is not for nothing I am called **MIKASURA**, the **MIKE DEMON**.

People think when they go to churches, mosques and temples, they are going to worship God. **But many of them actually worship me, they are MIKE worshippers, because I am installed outside much higher than the deity or the podium !** I am fully active from the early morning hours, disturbing the people of the locality by prayers, calls to prayers, songs and hymns.

The Indian Constitution guarantees only the right of free speech, expression and worship. There is no right to install me and use me and disturb others, who have their own right to peace and quiet! But see how I have been defying the Constitution itself ! It's not for nothing I'm known as **MIKASURA**, the **MIKE DEMON**.

Though man has conquered scourges like smallpox and plague, he is yet to conquer me. However, the position is different in advanced countries like the U.K. or U.S., where a person is simply not permitted to disturb others by using me. There they have realised my powers for damage and put me behind bars. My brother can not even whimper there. **I dread the day when such a situation may arise here also, when the people will come to enjoy peace and quiet, and of course, BETTER HEALTH.**

But till then, O MIKE WORSHIPPERS, UNITE AND BE DAMNED !

*MIKASURA creates nervous trouble, leading to depression, mental illness and suicide. It is not LDF or UDF ruling us. It is the very demon MIKASURA. It is not the elite who are affected by MIKASURA as they can protect themselves. It is mainly the poor and the common people who are badly affected. Should we let MIKASURA roam our streets, our sweet homes, hospitals and offices and disturb peace and quiet ?
DECIDE FOR YOUR SELF !*

- Dr. P. K. SUKUMARAN, Psychiatrist, Thrissur -4

Figure 2.4 Demon Mike: Flyer distributed by Citizens for Better Living (CIBEL), Thrissur.

uses of loudspeakers and their strategies for combating them (see Figure 2.4). The flyer strongly frames the issue as a mental health concern, which position is emphasized by including a quote from a psychiatrist at the bottom, who declares that "MIKASURA [demon mike] creates nervous trouble, leading to depression, mental illness and suicide."

In addition to distributing these leaflets, CIBEL held seminars to discuss the problem with local civic and community leaders. According to one of the organizers, those invited included:

headmasters of schools, and chambers of commerce, and some of the important people, principals of colleges and all that, and presidents of the other clubs, Rotary Club, Lions Club and all that.... Bishop, Hindu, all that we invited. They generally don't come. Also the police and the collector, those people. Police don't come, because they fear they will get brickbats in the meeting. [laughs]

They also invited proprietors of the major sound electricals companies in Thrissur, such as Kerala Sound Electricals. The purpose of the meetings, according to this organizer, was simply to inform people about and to discuss the dangers of high sound levels. It is difficult to measure any effect their organization may have had, but through these leaflets, seminars, and regular letters to the editor of local papers, they continue to try to educate and to reduce noise levels in urban areas.

Although some legislation against noise pollution has been passed in recent years, significant challenges have been faced not only in enforcing laws but even in passing them in the first place. Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi point out that passing laws against sound pollution has been difficult from a legal point of view because in India, in contrast to in the UK, "the use of

loudspeaker assumes the status of a fundamental right by virtue of Article 19(1) and Article 25 of the Constitution" (1996:51).⁵⁶ Because of this wording of the Constitution, they argue that "probably nothing short of a constitutional amendment redefining the right of speech and propagation could come to the rescue from noise pollution" (ibid.:53).

Given my discussion of sound as a spatial phenomenon in this chapter, which made use of the old Hindu notion that *ākāśa* is the medium of sound, it is very interesting to note that the first national legislation which addressed noise pollution was the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, which was passed in the wake of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, was able to include noise under the category of an 'air pollutant', where an 'air pollutant' is defined as "any solid, liquid, or gaseous substance (including noise) present in the atmosphere" (Rosencranz, Diwan, and Noble 1991:68). In any case, the passing of this Act paved the way for the 1989 amendment of the Environment (Protection) Rules, which established prescriptive "ambient air quality standards in respect of noise" (ibid.:70) in terms of permissible decibel levels.

In recent years, however, cases have come before high courts which address the conflict between the need to protect people from noise pollution and the right to religious freedom. In a case before the Calcutta High Court, for example, the court

56. Article 19(1) "provides that all citizens have the right: (a) to freedom of speech and expression; (b) to assemble peaceably and without arms; (c) to form associations or unions; (d) to move freely throughout the territory of India." Article 25 protects "the freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion". [Chaturvedi & Chaturvedi 1996:51-52, 53]

decided that the imposition of restrictions on the use of microphones and loudspeakers for the Muslim call to prayer was not in violation of Article 25 of the constitution. The court decision noted the following:

Azan [call to prayer] is certainly an essential and integral part of Islam but use of microphone and loudspeakers are not an essential and an integral part. Microphone is a gift of technological ages, its adverse effect is well felt all over the world. It is not only a source of pollution but it is also a source which causes several health hazards. Traditionally and according to the religious order, Azan has to be given by the Imam or the person in charge of the Mosques through their own voice, this is sanctioned under the religious order. [A.I.R. 1999 Calcutta 15]

On the law enforcement level, noise pollution is controlled under the Kerala Police Act of 1956, under which the Local Inspector has the authority to grant permission to use loudspeakers. Parties who wish to rent sound equipment for mobile announcements are required to get permission from the Police and present to the sound electricals company the license form which is reproduced in Figure 2.5. However, such requirements appear not to be effective, because the situation that Diwan and Diwan note in Mumbai is also apparently the case in Thrissur:

[U]nder the Bombay Police Act no loudspeakers can be used without police permission. But irony is that permission to use loudspeakers is given as a matter of course. [Diwan and Diwan 1998:232]

Furthermore, permits contain highly ambiguous guidelines such as specifying that the use of amplified sound "should not be [a] nuisance", with no specification of what constitutes a nuisance (see condition no. 3 of the license). The District Police Order on use of loudspeakers also specifies that "the sound amplifier should not be used when the vehicle is in motion" (condition no.

No. G2(b) RF. 4/2000/R.

District Police Office,
Thrissur, Dt. 23-11-2000

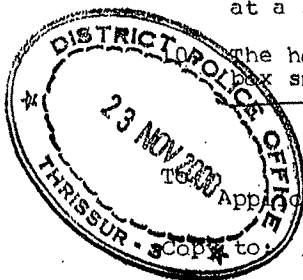
Recd:- Petition dated 23-11-2000

from General Secretary,
Catholic Syrian Bunk
Staff Federation,
BR.O R D E R

Where the licensee named below applied for a licence for use of sound amplifier. The said person is allowed to install and use the sound amplifier fitted with KRR-1481 to conduct publicity of All India Catholic Syrian Bunk Staff Conference, on 23-11-2000 at the Thrissur District only.

1. The sound amplifier or apparatus shall not face or be used within 500 yards of hospital, place of worship, educational institution or public office.
2. The use of the sound amplifier should not be nuisance or obstruction to the inhabitants or persons dwelling or occupying the immediate vicinity.
3. Any sound amplifier or loud speaker installed in any place should be kept in such volume that the sound does not become a nuisance beyond the limits to the property of the party using the loud speaker.
4. The licensee shall stop the use of the sound amplifier or shall remove the sound amplifier when directed by any Police Officer on duty not below the rank of SI of Police on the ground that the use of the apparatus is a nuisance or obstruction or account of the time, place and manner in which the sound amplifier is being used subsequent to grant of licence.
5. Any Police Officer on duty not below the rank of the SI may seize any sound amplifier or other instruments used in contravention of any of the conditions of the licence.
6. The sound amplifier should not be used when the vehicle is in motion.
7. The sound amplifier should not be used between hours of 10 PM and 6 AM in any Municipal area and in any busy through fares and in a building of place near such through fares and throughout day and night near hostels attached to educational institutions.
8. The sound amplifier should not be used at or near the venue of any public meeting or in the vicinity of any Jatha organised by any party other than the party to which the licence belongs.
9. The sound amplifier should not be used more than 2 hours at a stretch.

The horn type sound amplifier should not be used. Only small type mike set should be used.



Applicant

CI, SI.

Sm.
General Secretary
Catholic Syrian Bunk
Staff Federation
BR.

For Supdt. of Police,
Thrissur.

aks 15 11

Figure 2.5 Permission from the District Police Office to use sound amplifier, collected from Kerala Sound Electricals, Thrissur.

6), which of course is completely ignored as a matter of course. Rules like this appear designed to allow police officials to stop the use of the loudspeakers for any reason, or also to permit their use, and according to representatives of Sound Electricals shops I spoke to, enforcement of noise pollution rules is generally subject to the political affiliations of those involved.

Summary.

Broadcasts of devotional songs through temple and church loudspeakers are an example of the social construction, or one might even say the performance, of space. Loudness is implicated in the construction of social and intersubjective space in Kerala by virtue of longstanding cultural models. Sound is used in Kerala practices as a means of transcending the vast geographical spaces which were traditionally a part of the cultural landscape, as exemplified by large drumming ensembles such as *pañcavādyam* or *ceṇṭa mēḷam*, and by the centrality of fireworks or explosives in many religious observances. Sound also draws people into shared subjective spaces, as exemplified by the role of *kompū* in *pañcavādyam*, and especially by *bhajana*. Electronically amplified sound is used in ways which extend these cultural models in the contemporary context. With the aid of this technology, temples generate loud sound not only during festival times but each and every day. The sounds from their loudspeakers imply a unified social space which establishes a continuum between the peacefulness of the early morning and the

sentiments of religious devotion signified by broadcast devotional songs.

Temple broadcasts may have played a very important role in the rejuvenation of temples after their period of decline following the implementation of Land Reforms, and the broadcasts continue to be a meaningful aspect of the intentional worlds of many who reside within the social space they delineate. At the same time, however, broadcasts draw attention to the tensions involved in temples' strategies for maintaining relevance in contemporary society. Ongoing social changes -- including those resulting from changed residential arrangements, changing notions of community, adaptations of music playback technology, and others I have discussed -- have resulted in a multiplicity of overlapping social spaces. The emergent incongruities between these spaces and that upon which the broadcasts are implicitly predicated are indicative of broader processes of change in Kerala's public culture. As areas like Thrissur urbanize, shared spaces come to be inhabited -- and conceptualized -- in increasingly diverse ways.