

Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology (Ethnomusicology Multimedia)

By Zoe C. Sherinian

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Zoe C. Sherinian shows how Christian Dalits (once known as untouchables or outcastes) in southern India have employed music to protest social oppression and as a vehicle of liberation. Her focus is on the life and theology of a charismatic composer and leader, Reverend J. Theophilus Appavoo, who drew on Tamil folk music to create a distinctive form of indigenized Christian music. Appavoo composed songs and liturgy infused with messages linking Christian theology with critiques of social inequality. Sherinian traces the history of Christian music in India and introduces us to a community of Tamil Dalit Christian villagers, seminary students, activists, and theologians who have been inspired by Appavoo's music to work for social justice. Multimedia components available online include video and audio recordings of musical performances, religious services, and community rituals.

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Review

"Sherinian’s book is of obvious interest to ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other socially oriented scholars focused on South India and on Christianity, as well as being relevant for students of theology in a global frame (and liberation theology).... It also breaks ground as an ethnomusicological study of an individual, because it not only presents a musical biography but also structures its ethnomusicological analyses around the theoretical framework developed by that individual." ?Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith

"[T]his book makes a huge contribution to knowledge of a socially significant genre just as neglected, until now, as the people who perform it.... Highly recommended." ?Choice

"Tamil Folk Music as Liberation Theology helps us to understand what is at stake for people making a transformative choice to reclaim local folk music in a particular community and liturgical setting. It powerfully and eloquently traces a complicated history of caste oppression, missionary activity, the internalization of hegemonic attitudes, and loss of identity." ?Asian Ethnology

"[O]riginal and well written.... [S]hould be of interest to South Asianists, especially students and scholars of Dalit studies, [and other readers interested in] South Indian music, global Christianity, and ethnomusicology." ?Peter Manuel, CUNY Graduate Center

About the Author

Zoe C. Sherinian is Associate Professor and Chair of Ethnomusicology at the University of Oklahoma. A percussionist and filmmaker, her ethnographic film on the changing status of Dalit drummers is titled This is a Music: Reclaiming an Untouchable Drum.

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