

Aftermath of Musician Caste Crystallization in the Census and *Nautch*-related Issues of British India: Focusing on *Mīrāsī* and *Tawā'if*

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This presentation describes an anthropological and socio-historical study that examines how hereditary musicians in modern India have been building their socio-musical identity. The study specifically examines how the caste-based census and *nautch*-related issues, i.e. looking down on hereditary musicians who accompanied *nautch*/dancing girls, in British-ruled India have affected the identification of musicians today.

The particular point is the connection between the oral narratives of musicians about “themselves” and “others”, and the relevant history. From the twentieth century, Hindustani musicians in larger cities started talking about “themselves” as *Seniyā* and “others” as *Mīrāsī* in some cases. *Seniyās* were the descendants of Miyan Tansen in the court of Akbar (reign 1556–1605), the third Mughal Emperor. In contrast, the current definition of *Mīrāsī* by Ashok Ranade in *Keywords and Concepts Hindustani Classical Music* (1990) is the following: One who accompanies courtesans or ‘*nautch*’ girls on string or membrane-covered instruments is described as *mirasi*. Today the term has come to mean an inferior musician accompanying a vocalist.

Finding any mention of the category of *Mīrāsī* as a court musician in the materials of the Mughal period is difficult. This presentation specifically examines the *Mīrāsī* and *Tawā'if*. *Mīrāsīs* were regarded as crystallized in the caste-based census of British-ruled India and the process by which they came to be generally regarded as accompanists and assistants of *Tawā'if* as dancing girls, i.e., prostitutes.

The author undertook clarification of how the caste-based census and the aftermath of *nautch*-related issues have affected the reflexive identification of musicians today, and why the Hindustani musicians are striving to eliminate any connection with *Mīrāsī* and *Tawā'if* as a caste.