**CONTENTS**

Preface  
List of Illustrations

Introduction  
Indira Viswanathan Peterson and Davesh Soneji

**PART I: CANONS AND CANONIZATION**

1. Embracing the Canonical  
   Identity, Tradition, and Modernity in Karnatak Music  
   Lakshmiji Subramaniam

2. Inscribing Practice  
   Reconfigurations and Textualizations of Devadasi Repertoire in Nineteenth and Early-twentieth Century South India  
   Hari Krishnan

3. Standardize, Classicize, and Nationalize  
   The Scientific Work of the Music Academy of Madras, 1930–52  
   Matthew Allen

**PART II: THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL: REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PASTS**

4. Temple Stage as Historical Allegory in Bharatanatyam  
   Rukmini Devi as Dancer-historian  
   Avanti Meduri

5. Serving Two Masters?  
   Bharatanatyam and Tamil Cultural Production  
   Janet O’Shea

**PART III: VIEWS FROM WITHIN: SELF-CONSCIOUS REFLECTIONS ON TRADITION**

6. Marabu, the Inherent Flexibility of the Karnatak Tradition  
   The Example of Bharatanatyam  
   Saskia Kerstenboom

7. In Search of the Guru  
   Technology and Authenticity in Karnatak Music  
   Amanda Jane Weidman

8. Rewriting Cultural History through the Novel  
   Music and Dance as Tamil Tradition in Kalaimani’s Tillana Mohanambal  
   Indira Viswanathan Peterson

**PART IV: IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, RESISTANCE: IMAGINING ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITION**

9. Memory and the Recovery of Identity  
   Living Histories and the Kalavantulu of Coastal Andhra Pradesh  
   Davesh Soneji

10. One Kirttanai, Three Songs  
    Zoe C. Sherran

List of Indian Names and Terms  
List of Contributors

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This volume is a path-breaking collection of unpublished essays that critically interrogates colonialism and nationalism in the context of the ‘invention’ of south India’s performing arts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The essays deal with the tension between modernity and tradition that is produced in the context of metropolitan discourse. From the nineteenth-century textualization of court dance repertoire to twentieth-century Dalit Christian renderings of a Karnatak kirttanai, each essay critically examines the making and contestation of cultural categories in relation to the performing arts at specific socio-historical conjunctures. The essays demonstrate that inventions of tradition in south Indian music and dance are effected by continuous negotiations among agents of diverse caste, class, and gender affiliations with varying degrees of power and authority. The variety of interpretive approaches — textual, historical, anthropological — employed in the essays facilitates fruitful dialogue among them. The volume highlights the need for critical, multidisciplinary histories of the performing arts in south Asia. The introduction to this volume offers a concise and critical historical overview of south Indian classical music and dance that will be useful to uninitiated reader as well as to scholarly audiences who are interested in Bharatanatyam, Karnatak music, and the major south Indian classical forms.

Readership: This book will interest scholars, teachers, researchers, and students of modern Indian history, particularly those concerned with dance, music, and cultural history of south India. It will also interest sociologists, anthropologists, and gender historians.