Musical practices of South Indian film in Singapore

Introduction

References to music of Indian popular film in Singapore are located in two entries. The first of them is in a 1954 publication, **Arts of Malaya**, where Tony Beamish observed *Hindustani music…[was]…popular far beyond the confines of the Indian…communities…interesting experiments in Western orchestration can now be heard in both. At the same time, traditional skill is being maintained and the more esoteric forms of communal music continue to be played in Malaya. Of these, Carnatic songs… have an enthusiastic following in the country, and are supported not only by local arts societies but by the occasional visits of distinguished performers from…India and other parts of South-East Asia.*[1]

Given that Malaya in 1954 included Singapore, the practice of music of Indian popular film in Singapore is notable not so much by its presence but by its brevity of description. Moreover, Beamish's articulation of the popularity of Hindustani music is curious. Was it Hindustani classical, folk or film music? How did Carnatic songs have an enthusiastic following when Hindustani music was popular beyond the Indian community? What are the interesting experiments in Western orchestration that Beamish observed in Hindustani music? How did this popularity come about if an Indian community comprised no more than 12% of the entire immigrant and indigenous population in Singapore, not to mention a South Indian majority within this small proportion?[2]

A later entry by Lee Tong Soon on Music in Singapore in the Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians makes the following observations:
The majority of Indians in Singapore speak Tamil, while other large groups include the Malayalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Bengalis, and Gujaratis. Temple music from the Carnatic tradition, featuring the nagasaram (oboe) and tavil (double-headed barrel drum) is performed to announce daily prayer times and during festivals such as Thaipusam and Thimithi. Other genres include bhajanas (Sanskrit bhajans), film music and Hindustani and Carnatic classical music.[3]

Film music (we are not informed of its particularity, i.e., North or South Indian) is juxtaposed between Sanskrit bhajans and Hindustani and Carnatic classical music. There is little, either in description or scholarship, to inform a reader of the

diversity or uniqueness that characterises the presence and practice of music of Indian popular film in Singapore. Apart from Joseph Peters' noteworthy contribution on classical and folk culture of the Indian community with the ASEAN context,[4] the Groves' entry contains no single bibliographical reference in English, Tamil or Hindi for anyone wishing to research music making in the Indian community.

A third entry located in a chapter on film production in Southeast Asia by Tamaki Matsuoka Kanda has opening paragraph articulates sites of cultural exchange between India and Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s; not so much through diplomatic ties but through film:

One of the centres was Singapore. Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. As S. Ramanathan said, "It was a really cosmopolitan atmosphere." [5]

The fourth account, John Lent's chapter, corroborates Tamaki's accounts with the broader context of the film industry in Malaysia and Singapore, hence drawing on a historical unity of the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore leading to the latter's independence in 1965 and slightly beyond.[6]

Brief Chronology

South Indian classical tradition (Carnatic) and Tamil film emerge as influences for musical practice of South Indian film in Singapore. Classical traditions and music by implication appear in the early films of the 20th century in the form of folk and Hindu mythology. The classical tradition seems to have been prevalent, by implication, in temple grounds and in rituals throughout the year. This then suggests the practice of the South Indian classical tradition in Singapore as early as the 19th century.[7] Oral accounts suggest two areas of considerable influence; Indian classical tradition and popular film. The classical tradition seems to have been prevalent, by implication, in early 19th century Singapore. By 1821, there were 132 Indians; excluding those in the garrison and camp-followers which would have totalled 4727 in Singapore. The Sri Mariamman Temple was reportedly built by Indian convicts in 1828.[8] The Singapore Chronicle bears witness to some of these activities with particular concern expressed of the practice of what approximates in time as the fire-walking ceremony[9] while an incident during Thaipusam in 1896 becomes the subject of concern with police intervention and enforcement at a religious festival.[10]

Into the 20th century, around the years 1925 and 1926, oral interviewees relate the presence of Indian dances, dramas and folk performing arts which were popular in

Selegie and were performed free for the public. The actors and directors came all the way from India. The length of their performances was dependent upon their popularity reflected by the size of the crowd, thus the bigger the crowd, the longer they performed.[11] Dances such as 'Silambu', 'Karan', and 'Kalai Nigalchi', a combination of themed dramatic art and gestures, were the favourites. Silambu is the name of the age old Indian (Tamil) art of self-defence whereby a staff (long, wooden pole) is used in defence or attacking opponents.[12] Stories such as the Ramayana and the Tamil epics were also acted. The Ramayana tells the history of Sri Rama-chandra, the son of King Dasaratha and his wife Sita and his brothers. This work tells much about the Hindus of that time, their customs, their way of life, their arts and their technology. The Ramayana (or Life of Rama) is generally regarded as the first poetical work of purely human origin and legend has it that its author, Valmiki, was originally an ignorant highway robber whose life and character were transformed through meditation after he was instructed by the great sage Narada. From this incident, he received his name 'Valmiki' which means 'born of an ant hill'.[13] When the Chariot was carried from the temple during Thaipusam, the Silambu dance would follow sometimes with the horse and tiger dance, a popular folk art among Tamil Indians. Visitors from as far as Johor Bahru and Kuantan would travel to Selegie just to watch these performances. However, at one point, the government banned these performances on the streets as they were too rowdy.[14]

We are informed that drama troupes came by a ship known as the **Rajullah** in the 1930s and docked at **Naval Base**. Historical and epic dramas were staged at Alexandra Hall while Kathakali drama was staged at Sembawang. Posters on horse coaches, big notices, newspaper advertisements on drama titles were also ways of organising publicity for dramas while Tanjong Pagar, Potong Pasir and Serangoon Road were the main sites for such publicity.[15] Accounts indicated strength of audience support for shows and there is arguably the first reference to *band music* for dramatic purposes. Practitioners recall being part of a musical ensemble referred to as **Music and Dramatic Society**.[16] What they identified as Band music was played by members of a music party;[17] a musical ensemble within a dramatic troupe which was to become an independent group. Gregory Booth's study of the Madras Corporation Band identifies the wind band ensemble in a 1911 recording as the Tanjore Band which had become by the early 20th century something of a status symbol. Wind bands had become a new processional requirement as the public of central Tamil Nadu gradually learned to combine music ensembles and their concomitant layers of cultural meaning. This extended to public and private, religious and secular processions where nagasvaram-tavil musicians in their dhotis were seen to appear side by side with wind band musicians in their military-style

uniforms. In HMV recordings of 1911 of Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band for instance, the instrumentation comprised: 2 B^b clarinets; probably an E^b clarinet; either two cornets or one cornet and an alto horn; a valve trombone and/or euphonium; a bagpipe used as a drone; a large thin pair of Indian talam or a small pair of European (Turkish in this case) cymbals; and a drum (not a tavil). They played varnams and kritis, listed by the Gramophone Company brochure by title, ragam and sometimes by appellation – Tamil tune, Telegu tune (Ithuva Tillaisthalam..Kafi-krithi, Jampey; Kirvani…Tamil Tune…English tune here seems by Booth's estimation as strains from at least two British marches. The Gramophone Company certainly had a clearly-established marketing category in their catalogue (Bands) for those runs by Balakrishnan and Govindaswami Dasu. The Tanjore Band became by and large a private processional ensemble for hire which in itself represented an important milestone in a process of on-going musical and cultural change in southern India. However, by 1933, HMV recordings on their Black Label series had each performance recorded by title and ragam; with the exception of one listed as "Rama-Bhakthi: - presumably a devotional song such as kirtanam but the rest were kritis. Most of the compositions are by Sri Tyagaraja, although two are by Patnam Subramania Iyer, who also appears as a composer in the 1911 HMV releases. The quality of musicianship in the 1933 recordings is somehow stronger with brighter and quicker tempi. The change for us here is the group is identified as Balakrishnan and Party – Tanjore Band.[18]

Names of musical band parties[19] in the 1950s and 1960s were identified together with notable musicians, MP Gurusamy and Pundit Ramalingam who were identified in oral accounts as those synonymous with the South Indian classical tradition as well as a semi-classical tradition. One explanation offered for the term *semi-classical* referred to the degree of conformity to the raga or mode of the song/music. In the South Indian classical context, some modes had very specific contexts, times and occasions. Music or songs which deviated from this convention could be found in semi-classical or light classical settings. Songs of South Indian film were such examples and this was a known practice in south Indian film.[20]

Christina Edmund recalls how her father, Edmund Appau, a Hindu Tamil by birth and later convert to Catholicism upon marriage, remembered visiting temples with his father to watch Indian classical music in his growing years. The New World Park was also the site where various Indian dramatic productions were performed. The Singapore Indian Artistes Association, for instance, had Tamil plays put up from the late 1940s till the 1960s.[21] In 1948, together with the late Mr V Sinniah, a tabla player, Edmund Appau founded arguably the first Indian musical group in

Singapore known as the **New Indian Amateur Orchestra**;[22] known essentially as an Indian classical ensemble, more specifically of the Carnatic tradition.

Reference to *band music*[23] is found in its supporting role in drama, particularly Indian classical derivation. S.Sivam recalls how in the post WWII period… *even ladies washing clothes or washing rice would stop to listen to* ***Thiagaraja Bhagavathar*** *singing… and songs by* ***T.R. Mahalingam****, who were from the Carnatic tradition and semi-classical as well.*[24] Repertoire reportedly consisted of *cinema songs...early MGR films, films about gods and goddesses with songs by* ***Thiagaraja****,* ***A Kittapa*** *and* ***K. Ramasamy****…*[25] *Mythological movies were great favourites running to packed houses with films such as* ***Thiruvilaiyaadal****,* ***Saraswathi Sabadam****,* ***Kanthan Karunai****, and* ***Aathi Parashakthi*** *to name a few. It had classical Indian music and it educated many of us on our religious background. At that time they used play the gramophone with the label* ***His Master's Voice****…people from the elite class learned classical music and* ***Bharatha Natyam*** *from* ***Bhaskar's Dance Academy*** *and* ***Singapore Indian Fine Arts****; especially the Ceylonese Tamils and the Brahmin Tamils.*[26] *The Tamils who were from the middle class went to small time teachers who taught dance for film music.*[27] *Hindu Temples played a big part in promoting music and dance then and even now. There were performances of Carnatic vocal and instrumental music on the first half of the evening and all dances on the second half. It is interesting to note the dancers performed popular dance numbers from the films, either as solo or duet or groups.*[28]

Narratives in Indian mythology formed a common bond between music of South Indian classical (and semi-classical) tradition and early films from India screened in Singapore. According to a local consumer and observer of Tamil cinema, Balakrishnan Veerapan (2003), "Mythological movies were great favourites here…ran to packed houses. They had [Indian] classical music and it educated many of us on our religious background. We practically saw all the "Hindu Mythological figures" on screen."[29]

The proliferation of Tamil language and culture seems to have had somewhat of a boost in the post Japanese Occupation period of the 1950s. In terms of a greater awareness of both forces of attraction and repulsion in the Indian community in Singapore, at least two factions are noted. The first is the division of Tamil and Hindi in the separation of North and South Indian groups. Within the South Indian community, there were two groups, according to A. Mani, **Tamil-using Indians** and **Tamil-losing Indians**.[30] The Tamil-using community was led by G. Sarangapani who went on to create a Malayan Tamil identity, with the *Thamizhar*

Thirunal (Tamils Festival), which had ramifications even further afield in Thailand and Indonesia. This movement largely affected the Tamil-using middle and working class Indians. *The Tamil language was used as a unifying factor even when the individuals were separated by caste and religion.*[31] When the **Goh Report**, published in 1978, emphasised the need to pass in a second language, the Ministry of Education's response for the Indian community was to increase the number of schools offering Tamil as a second language.[32]

Mr. Sarangapani's efforts had immediate ramifications culturally and musically. In the year 1953, the very first Tamil Festival was performed at the Happy World Stadium at Jalan Besar, catering to the many Indians around that area. The Tamil Festival is actually the 'Pongal Festival' or the Harvest Festival in English. It was a celebration not only for the Tamilians, but also for all Indians who spoke the Tamil language.[33] Dr. Seetha Lakshmi notes that *after 1952* (with the establishment of the Tamils Representative Council), *Mr Sarangapani initiated the Thamizhar Thirunal which was celebrated as the Harvest Festival (pongal) in India. This was very popular and about 350 participants took part in a talentime organised by Mr Sarangapani*.[34] SIMP members attribute the proliferation of Tamil Music Parties to Mr. Sarangapani:

…that's where we had this inter-band competition…bands sprouted everywhere…they wanted to win…every year there would be a big fight between ***SIMP*** *and* ***Chitra****…then came* ***Roshni Jeevans*** *and* ***Febra****…at Rangoon Road…during this period of the festival…music bands would be most active… we didn't have housing estates… but any corner you went there was a roadshow organised by Radio Singapore…we used to go to* ***Fort Canning****—the old drama centre—for the band competitions during Bertie's time (Bertie Fernando was their former band leader)…SIMP every year would win…those days there was total commitment…they were more interested in music…during those days, people had titles….if you mentioned a clarinettist—Joseph; saxophone—Karunan; tabla—Shanmugam from SIMP…*[35]

The presence of these band competitions drew in non-Tamil musical groups and continued with radio and television broadcast. Amar Singh, leader and singer of Hindi band Roshni Jeevans recalls:

…there was an invitation to all the bands to participate in a competition…only bands….this was in 1965…the producers and directors were from RTS, Philippines, Malaysia…we had to do three songs…instrumental….Hindi Song Hava…then we had a Tamil song…with Krishna on Hawaiian guitar…..he played Satyam…one more was our own composition…I can't remember now…there were altogether 12 bands…we were second…first was Singapore Indians…we got our

prize, then we got a contract…every month on some shows on TV or Radio…we became busy and very popular …we lasted for 7 years…1965-1972…I was given a chance to sing on TV and Radio until 1980…at the same time, when there were requests for a good Hindi Band for weddings and functions they would recommend our band…although Roshni Jeevans is a Hindi band we did Tamil (music and songs) *for radio and TV.*[36]

What emerges from these accounts is the way in which songs of South Indian film are re-created or adapted by using different lyrics or different tunes or a combination. The nature of these exchanges and settings lends the impression of a change in South Indian film from its initial Indian classical settings. The juxtaposition of rhythm and tempo with apparently enthusiastic response from the youth does suggest much livelier music and song, and perhaps dance.

Even clearer indication of change appears in an observation by Balakrishnan Veerapan (2003) of a different kind of music of South Indian film that permeated the Indian community in pre-television Singapore through the organisation and presentation of these events:

Film music was very popular since the screening of movies in Singapore I believe. In the 60s, at the wedding dinners and other functions, film music was a must. They had bands playing the music and locals singing film songs. I saw guitars, saxophone, clarinet, accordion, jazz drums, along with the tabla and dholak…they were very entertaining.[37]

This last excerpt not only describes the musical instruments on display but probably the spectacle to be anticipated and enjoyed. Print culture helped to fan the flames of a growing interest in this 'entertaining' style of Indian cinemas in Singapore: **Movie News**, published locally featuring Tamil and Hindi movies; and, **Pesum Padam**, which was imported from India and had gossip, latest releases, interviews with actors and actresses, and even lyrics of popular songs.

Although names, events, dates and times are not provided, we are offered clues through two photographs of musicians with their instruments. The first features a generation of SIMP musicians and their instruments which included a fife/piccolo, shakers, double bass, tambourine, accordion, bulbul-tara (Nagoya harp), clarinet, bongos and guitar.

PICTURE

Fig 1. SIMP; by kind permission of Edmund Appau family, undated.

A second picture from this period appears to be a student ensemble with the curious title "Singapore Indians Students Orchestra" (some letters are missing) across the bass drum of the drum kit alongside bongos, congas, saxophone and clarinet (played by one person), accordion, guitar, tabla and what looks like a dholak and small percussion

PICTURE

Fig.2 Singapore Indian Students Orchestra; by kind permission of Mohd. Rafee, undated.

While both musical configurations of South Indian classical modes of performance as well as western popular culture seem diametrically opposed, there is a site where both seem to co-exist; the Hindu temple. Mohammed Ali Nilavu (1994:89), makes the observation that, "on each day of Navarattiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs *(the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band)*".[38] Oral accounts corroborate this observation and added the temple priests had not objected to the presentation of devotional material with a western-style accompaniment.

The introduction of television in Singapore became another significant moment when the various live shows supported by the Indian community in Singapore, were transferred onto an even larger public platform. Local performers of songs of South Indian film had a Singapore-wide audience through television. Balakrishnan Veerapan (2003) offers us more details:
There were variety shows which had classical, modern songs and dances. Local singers who were popular were the late V. Ramachandran, Betty Jones, Rajamani Francis, Rukmani and Dr Uma Rajan…the Singapore Indians Music Party was a leading band in the TV shows. There were also locally written songs. Songs were mainly penned by the late Kavingnar Ka Perumal and ESJ Chandran (now based in India). Music was composed by Late Pundit M Ramalingam…there were two prominent magazines which promoted films. [39]

One more notable event took place through recorded media. Local practitioner Christina Edmund (June 2004) remembered being the first local singer to be featured in a record release of Tamil songs:
In 1967, the first local Tamil record was made in Singapore. Four songs were composed and written by a lyricist from India, Mr Banuthasam. Two local singers, S. Thanaletchumi and myself recorded the songs at Kintex Studios. It was recorded

by a Chinese company called TNA Records. The 4 local songs were very well received and were very popular in Singapore and Malaysia. They were always requested by the public over the radio.40

PICTURE

Fig. 3. Cover of first local Tamil record; by kind permission of Christina Edmund.

Oral accounts indicate many youth were encouraged to participate in these programmes because their parents believed it would help them in the development of their language and culture as well as leisure time wisely spent. Parental support enabled local practitioners like Mohd. Rafee (who currently works for film music director A. R. Rahman in India) and Ravi Shanker to be introduced to broadcast media at very early ages of ten and eight respectively.

We are informed that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, most of the music-making continued to be active in the public sphere through a well-established network of community activities and social events as well as radio and television broadcast. The playlist and frequently requested songs at functions, weddings and other community events now extended beyond music of Tamil and Hindustani film.

From about the 1990s, the opening of a number of night-clubs offered these musicians' opportunities to recreate songs of South Indian film in these settings. Curiously we are also informed that the 1990s was a period which saw a decline in support for this practice as well as changes in the ways entertainment affected practice. Oral accounts indicate that in the present, very few live-band musicians continue a practice within the same spheres of activity and endeavour which propelled them into prominence about fifty years ago.

Locations of Practice

According to Kernial Singh Sandhu, the concentration of Indian communities in Singapore reflect *the efforts of the British administrators to plan urban development and fit the indigenous and foreign populations into convenient moulds* besides other factors such as *the siting of government labour lines close to the labourers' place of work and the traditional Indian tendency to congregate in homogeneous communities.*[41]

Of the various concentrations of Indian communities, one group consisting mainly of Tamil shopkeepers was to be found around the Farrer Road and Serangoon Road area (the centre of the city during the 19th century and better known as **Little India** today) while another concentration could be found close to railways and docks; the logical growth of settlements along main transport routes. Post 1920s, the British, in anticipation of further Japanese military expansions, developed the northern part of the island as a naval base (hence the name of one location **Naval Base**), building a military base in Sembawang and an airbase in Changi. By 1962, the number of Indians living in Chong Pang, Jalan Kayu, Nee Soon and Yew Tee villages near the military establishments far outnumbered the Malay population there.[42] Given the changes post 1968 with the British withdrawal and an exodus of Indians, new towns like Ang Mo Kio, Toa Payoh, Queenstown, Macpherson and Woodlands became new focal points for the South Indian community in the 1960s and 1970s. Further out-migration also resulted in Indians making home in Yishun, Hougang, Tampines and Jurong.[43]

Divisions in practice—Hindi and Tamil

Mohd. Bagushair, a singer with the **Al-Wehdah** Arab musical ensemble in Singapore, observed how during his time and even now it was prevalent among the Malay community to enjoy Hindustani songs because of their love for Hindustani movies which were usually screened at theatres like **Garrick**, **Haz**, **Singapura** and **Queens**, where they also screened Malay films produced by Shaw Brothers. Tamil films were shown at ***Alhambara, Capitol***, ***Cathay, Diamond***, ***Royal***, ***Rex*** and ***State*** theatres, among others.[44] Sivam's contemporaries, members of the **Singapore Indians Music Party** (**SIMP** for short), also recall a Hindustani musical group, **Chandiniraat**, who *played modern music using clarinet, saxophone, accordion (which was the main)…playing music mainly from Hindi films…so all the programmes along Geylang side went to them…Malays had an obsession for Hindi music…**Chandiniraat** was very good and it was very difficult for us* (Tamil bands)

to get into that area…[45]Mohd. Bagushair, a singer from the **Al-Wehdah** ensemble from the Arab community in Singapore, recalls how his brother Omar, a violinist, was the leader of the **Mujum** orchestra playing Malay, English and Hindustani songs for weddings and functions while continuing his commitment to **Samra al' Fan** from the Arab community in Singapore with very different repertoire serving devotional functions. While following his brother, Omar, Mohd. Bagushair came across Hindi musical groups like **Shah Jehan** and ***Chandiniraat,*** *the most popular Hindi band located at Geylang, playing Malay, English and Hindustani songs, led by Halim Marican, the* ***Mohammad Rafi*** *of Singapore.*[46] **SIMP** members admitted to their difficulty in being able to play Hindi songs, let alone Tamil songs, in the predominantly-Malay populated Geylang area. Mohd. Rafee, no stranger to both practices, offers his views:

The division came about because there were Tamil bands that were very good at doing Tamil songs but whenever they played Hindi music, it didn't have that feel or flavour…also, Hindi bands would never play Tamil songs…Hindi music caught on very well with the Malay community and Indians who married Malays in Singapore.[47]

Why was there this penchant for music of Hindustani film in the first instance considering a South Indian (Tamil) majority in Singapore?[48] Mohd. Rafee, currently working with film director **A.R.Rahman** in Chennai, India, recalls how in his father's days and even in his time, *the Malays were crazy about Hindi music and songs and we had a very strong following…you have to remember Malay film* [in Singapore] *was spearheaded by Indian film directors and producers…that's why they carried on the tradition…*[49]

Yusnor Ef, a lyric writer who worked alongside the prolific P. Ramlee, points out in the Malay film industry, *composers came from Indonesia but those songs were mostly of Indian influence…and the technical side of the Malay film industry was Indian.*[50] John Lent goes much further: *Usually, the Indian directors just translated Indian scripts into Malay, the result being that the films had all the Indian nuances, cultural idiosyncracies and mannerisms, and very little that was truly Malay.*[51]

Rafee's father was the leader of a group called **Jeevans** in the 1960s (later **Roshni Jeevans**) and they played a lot of popular comical Hindi songs. *My father didn't mind the mix of both Hindi and Tamil songs…that was an exception and we had a very strong following…as musicians we saw it* (the ability to play mixed repertoire) *as an opportunity.*[52] Ravi Shanker, Rafee's contemporary who took over leadership of **Maru Malarchi** from his father S. Sivam, points out *about 20% of our*

performances have Hindi songs… when you have Indian Muslim weddings, they prefer more Hindi songs to Tamil songs…when they book the band they will ask whether we can play Hindi songs….[53]

In the sphere of broadcast media post-1965, however, it was probably the reverse and Rafee recalled his difficulties: *There were many Tamil bands like Febra and Maru Malarchi Tamil band...my father knew a lot of Hindi songs but he did not play a lot of Tamil songs. As we were growing up he wanted us to play music and one channel for playing music was to play for radio. At the time, radio was only highlighting Tamil…not much Hindi… I started by learning Hindi songs…slowly, because of TV and radio, we started playing Tamil music…South Indian styles...we wouldn't have done it otherwise…*[54]

Amar Singh shares similar sentiments:
…although Roshni Jeevans is a Hindi band we did Tamil (music and songs) *for radio and TV…normally RTS producers will select their own singers…maybe 10 songs, 1 Hindi and the others Tamil…only we didn't have a main Tamil singer…so John Mammen and Christina Edmund* (Edmund Appau's daughter and her husband) *and many other singers used to come over to practice…that is how we play Tamil songs…if my band was performing, I would definitely get one Hindi song even though we played mainly Tamil songs.*[55]

A view of Malay film as a translation of Indian film in all but language is curious. Why is there an affinity expressed between Malay film and Hindustani film but not Tamil film? Phani Majumdar, Chisty, Baldev Singh Rajhans, S. Ramanathan, Lakshmana Krishnan and B.N Rao, counted among the pioneering directors of Malay film, reveal such a range of diversity of Indian-ness that it would be difficult to predict a predominantly Hindustani translation. Support for Hindustani film, and by extension Hindustani film songs, by the Malay community can only invite further research at this point.

Transitions in Musical Style—classical to popular culture

Accounts of an emergent musical style of Tamil film are made by Balasekaran Veerapan's accounts via its emergence in more public settings:
During the 1960s, film music was a "must-play" during wedding dinners and other functions. Local bands played these musical numbers and sang songs from popular Indian film. I saw guitars, saxophone, clarinet, accordion, jazz drums, along with Indian instruments like the tabla and dholak. They were very entertaining.[56]

What emerges from a description of practice is the presence of film music which reveal stylistic elements of pop and rock culture and those employed in Hollywood, dance music of both jazz and Latin culture. Again we are not given more information as to the nature of the film music, Hindustani or Tamil. In his historical overview of Indian film culture up to 1975 in India, Peter Manuel provides some background information here on the North Indian film practice:
Most film songs combine Western and indigenous elements. Imported instruments like congas, synthesizers, horns, and especially violins are used alongside tabla and dholak drums and melodic instruments like sitar and sarod. Instrumental accompaniments typically contain nontraditional features like chordal harmonies and sectional ensemble passages in contrasting orchestral timbres. Such elaborate arrangements reflect a precomposed and notated (i.e., written) approach to music composition and performance which is quite distinct from most forms of Indian folk music. While many melodies are quite Western-sounding in their tonal organization, most are distinctly Indian, using characteristic modes and melodies akin to those of folk or light-classical music. Cuban and disco rhythms are not uncommon, but far more typical is a quadruple meter essentially equivalent to the kaherva tal ubiquitous in North Indian folk and light music. However, the most conspicuously indigenous feature, as with most non-Western popular musics, is the vocal style, which exhibits characteristically South Asian ornamentation and timbre.[57]

Mohd Rafee points out that *anything that came out of India in the 50s and 60s was just replicated here…whatever happens there, happens here….given the delay in transmission.*[58] There is consensus among practitioners in Singapore that much of the elements in popular culture, musical and extra-musical, found in Tamil film in the post-classical phase (and one might add post-war period) pointed to the influence of music from Hindustani film. However, if the initial configuration of Tamil musical ensembles was of South Indian classical or even light- or semi-classical orientation, how did Tamil popular film emerge?

S. Sivam, former leader of **Venus Music Party** and later **Maru Malarchi**, believes that influences of popular culture were primarily Northern Indian. Sivam experienced the transition from Indian Classical to what he considered a 'modern' musical style from about 1957-1960:
…not 100% modern but just a few new ones…some of the songs moved from Hindi to Tamil became hot—the boogie-woogie style as found in the song ***Meena Meena Deeka***.[59] Sivam also attributed the source of change in Singapore to its subscription by the local Malay *community…you see this modern music was started by Malays in Singapore in the Geylang area…bands playing Hindustani*

music at weddings…these music groups comprised Malays, Indian Muslims or their wives were Malay or some were Urdu speaking Muslims… these groups wrote in the lyrics in Romanised Hindustani words…there were so many of these groups like ***Suara Bahru****,* ***Melati Putih****.*[60]

With respect to this ease of transition, musicians from SIMP remembered their early introduction to popular culture:
…there was also a change from tabla to bongos to African drums and to jazz drum…first inhaled by Hindustani musicians…when the bongos were in… this style was totally inhaled by the South Indian musicians… … …then the rhythms like cha-cha, mambo and samba which started in Northern Indian films caught on… slowly but gradually we moved into Tamil cinema songs …[61]

There is no difficulty in understanding this influence; of subscription at the immediate level to music of Hindustani film by the Malay community. At another level, however, the Malay film industry which enjoyed immense popularity, was driven primarily by technical directors from the Northern Indian film domain. Yusnor Ef, a lyric writer for Malay film music, pointed out that those songs were mostly of Indian influence. He recalled being in **Pancaragam Aneka** after being in the **Harmonica Party** and remembers groups like **Sri Pemuda Harmonium Parti**, **Pancharagam Kampung Glam**. The repertoire in question was undoubtedly songs from Malay film but Yusnor also recalled how much in fashion songs from Hindi film were as well as the competition with groups like **Chandiniraat** and **Naujahan Music Parties**.[62]
The question here is one of directness of impact, largely because of the speed of reception and response to popular culture through Hindi film among Tamil musical ensembles. Mohd Rafee points out that *anything that came out of India in the 50s and 60s was just replicated here…its like a speaker…whatever happens there, happens here….given the delay in transmission.*[63]

Oral accounts that emerge suggest not quite a simple translation. The crucial question focuses not so much on the speed of response which is obvious but the speed in emulation, which may not have been such a simple task. If Sivam is correct in his assumption, then while the immediacy of reception was a given, the ease with which Tamil music parties gained from influences of popular culture found in Hindi film had two sources, the Hindi music parties and musical influences from India on the Malay film industry which provided further resource. It is possible that the Malay music scene which came into full prominence around the 1950s may have been instrumental in facilitating the ease the transition into

popular culture among the Tamil music parties but this needs to be explored in further scholarship.

Group Configuration and dynamics

The very first Indian musical group **New Indian Amateur Orchestra** was formed like a classical orchestra. The instruments included tabla, bulbul tara (Nagoya Harp), two violins, clarinet, harmonium, guitar and some percussion (Fig 1). A second picture of SIMP included a fife/piccolo, shakers, double bass, tambourine, accordion, bul bul tara, clarinet, bongos and guitar (Fig 2). A third picture appears to have bongos, congas, saxophone and clarinet (played by one person), accordion, guitar, and drum kit, tabla and what looks like a dholak and small percussion (Fig. 3). As the accordion player Ramu from **New Indian Amateur Orchestra** left the band to go overseas, Edmund Appau took up a short course at **Foorman's Studio** to learn to play the accordion. With a new batch of trained musicians, he formed the **Singapore Indians Music Party** popularly known as **SIMP**;[64] a classical music party. Oral accounts yield three phases of transition from New Indians to SIMP. S. Sivam seems to have remembered some of the processes of change:

Milan were beginning to develop a greater interest in Malay music…not only P Ramlee music…the government had given them some importance…Malay became the main language so they wanted to play Malay music.. so they broke…E. Lal stayed with the Malay band..Karunan, Ramdas and another guy went on to form Singapore Indians Music party… second generation… modern…not the classical version of the Singapore Indians…mrdangam Ramachandran, Menson Davies…Raju (Gemini)…Accordion Suppiah was helping Chitra Music Party…at the same time playing for Singapore Indians Music Party. [65]

The second generation of **SIMP** musicians had adapted to include music of Indian popular film, more Tamil than Hindi, although the infusion of popular elements had begun to emerge. By the emergence of the third and current phase of **SIMP**, musicians had learnt to incorporate popular tunes from Malay and Chinese traditions into their repertoire as well as popular elements from Hindustani film. Some of the instruments in a 15-person ensemble were the accordion, guitar, bongos, saxophone, clarinet, mandolin/ukulele (Fig 4).

S.Sivam offers careful details of the instrumentation of musical ensembles Gemini and Milan Music Parties:

Gemini was a new group….Some of the people from the classical SIMP…they went to join Mr. Raju and formed Gemini music party…Raju on harmonium, a clarinet player Soyemalai, Haidrus and Purushotaman on violin and Shanmugam on lead

*guitar, Maniam played bongo, Sekaran was a singer and tabla player, Joseph played percussion….all of them went to join **Gemini**…one of the harmonium players in the **Singapore Indians music party** was Suppiah—called **Accordion Suppiah**, he is a Malaysian but Singapore citizen….there was another E. Lal bongos, Karunan flute, Ramdas played guitar—very good rhythm guitar…these musicians got together with some Malay musicians in Geylang and formed **Milan Music party**…Milan were beginning to develop a greater interest in Malay music…not only P Ramlee music…the government had given them some importance…Malay became the main language so they wanted to play Malay music…they broke up.*[66]

Raymond from SIMP III recalls how his first group Genoa Music Party was formed:
Those days there were very few bands in Singapore….around Sembawang area, there was no band at all…when someone wants an Indian band to play for a wedding…its either Chitra, Gemini or Singapore Indian Music party…Sembawang side…they were all bachelors…someone had the idea of forming a band instead of loafing around…earn the money…put in a subscription on a weekly basis…bought instruments. We had a good patron…when we bought instruments, he was our guarantor.[67]

While Edmund Appau and a few others retained some measure of group stability, **SIMP** continued to remain in flux comprising members from other groups and an uneven mix of short and long-term relationships within the musical ensemble. With a further split in SIMP, Edmund Appau joined Clarinetist Joseph to form the Edmund Joseph party and when Joseph parted company, it became Edmund Music party. Raymond who joined **SIMP** in his late teens, was first an accordion player with **Genoa Music Party** (formed in 1957) imbibing music of South Indian classical tradition…[68]George, formerly of **Usha Music Party** recalls, *in March 1963, the comedian and dramatist, Mr. Nathan from Radio Singapore, brought the boys from **Usha Music Party** to join **Singapore Indians Music Party** and the rest is history…I played the guitar with **Singapore Indians** and we played for radio and television.*[69]

S. Sivam had a different sort of beginning:
…I bought a guitar in 1953…didn't know where to learn….when I saw the English (language) films I saw young boys play the guitar and the chords…cowboy pictures like Roy Rodgers and singers like Gene Autry at Capitol theatre…they used to play (described the sounds he made as **jing jang**)*…I thought this was the way to play…didn't know there were chords…my father's friend John Muthu was*

my first teacher…I used to sling it (guitar) over like a cowboy, riding my bicycle over to John Muthu's place for my lessons…I took the trouble to learn more by myself and improve…when people watched me, they liked the way I played…anywhere I went, somebody would ask me to play with them. In those days ***party*** *referred to a group of people…not because they were playing in parties…I formed my band* ***Venus Music Party****…Venus, Goddess of Love.*[70]

Sivam's abilities not only made him equally mobile across Hindi and Tamil parameters but extended into Malay and music of western popular culture:
I was not only the leader of the band, I was also coach, teacher and stand-by player if needed…not only my band but other bands as well…if any band needed a guitarist, they would call me…I used to go and play for Muslim bands…like ***Shahjehan****…when some of the bands in Geylang needed a guitarist they'd call me…you see for Muslims, when their fathers or somebody closely related passed away, they had to mourn and were not supposed to play for 40 days for any programmes so I used to play if I was free…then I played with a group at the British Military Hospital (Alexandra Hospital today). Philip Arikan (Lead guitar) who was my second teacher, myself (doublebass), Tommy—he married Philip Ariken's sister (drums) and Hugo (Filipino used to play rhythm guitar)…we used to play together…we didn't have a name….anyway the NCOs only wanted some group to play English songs…we played three days a week…beginning 1962…we would start at 8pm and finish at 3am…drink and dance evenings…Thursdays was ladies evening…Wednesday and Saturday for guys…*[71]

Given the richness of this endeavour, there were inevitably negative aspects of this configuration:
Our group Genoa Music party started practices and programmes and all that….and then the band leader of another Music Party used to hang around the window and watch us playing…and he went to form his own group…I will never forget one incident…we were supposed to play at a wedding programme…before we got to the house, this earlier mentioned group was already there playing music…they played for half an hour…whatever songs we practised, they were already playing…[72]

At one level, there was no code of conduct written or agreed upon in practice to prevent rival groups from picking up repertoire from other groups. On the other hand, this ability to pick up tunes by observing other groups practice was no small indication of the deftness of oral and aural abilities of these musicians. The rivalry was expressed in different ways. Christina Edmund recalls:

…anybody was free to play what they wanted to play…..so there was nothing to stop copying of songs and a lot of group rivalry and jealousy. Our band was always the target. In the temple each group was supposed to play once…..but they (temple authorities) kept calling us more than once…so certain musicians were not happy.[73]

Some members joined a band to play an instrument of their choice, failing which they would wait for an opportunity to leave for another band to fulfil that choice. Inter Band rivalry as well as short-life spans of musical groups formed part of the soundscape. One SIMP member, Joseph, recalls, *I entered into the Music world via* ***Usha Music Party*** *in 1962 … a couple of boys left it to form* ***Shanti Music Party****…there were two Chinese boys, the bandleader was Eurasian…then we formed the* ***Van Cliff Rhythm Boys****…you remember* ***Cliff Richard and the Shadows****? We copied it and called ourselves Van Cliff…there were competitions for band to take part…we took part as an English band….and we came in first…we broke up after that…*[74]

Many musicians interviewed who experienced frequent changes in band personnel offer their views:
As a family band we were tight….we stayed together as a family band and stayed that way…. But SIMP and other bands, they changed personnel …when they wanted to leave the band they just disappeared …short or long term disruptions but the most beautiful thing was when they wanted to return they would use another person…a mediator…maybe when they left and probably found out that things were not quite the same with the new band they wanted to come back…[75]

SIMP musicians recall:
People joined the music party for hobby, pastime…slowly went for monetary gains….there were young boys who complained that they came for practice but didn't get a chance to play in front of television…then, for instance, I wanted to join a band to play bongos…no chance…if I wanted, they would either buy a guitar for me or I would buy one….So I was forced to play guitar…in those days there used to be regulations…like if you are going for this band, you cannot play in another band… sort of inter-band rules…[76]

In his own group, Sivam set about the process of teaching and learning:
I used to teach them…I taught them mandolin…I had a keyboard player…sometimes I used the keyboard I had to show him…those days no organ…no electronics….only accordion…pianica and accordion…I had to go and stand near the microphone and play…I played the mandolin and guitar…we

started in 1957 playing regularly until 1968 then most of my boys switched to English music…then the other boys started leaving for other bands…some were poached by other bands…in 1969, I changed my band name to Maru Malarchi (Reincarnation)…since we had 12 people, we started Maru Malarchi Orchestra: saxophone, keyboard (Tiger by Farfisa), violin, 2 guitars, congas and bongos, drum kit, with minor percussion instruments, and singers, one male and one female…those days it was very hard to get female singers….not all of them like to sing…and their parents difficult to negotiate…we played all modern Tamil songs; for Navarathiri we played devotional and semi classical songs…[77]

Repertoire

In the beginning, the repertoire of these music parties consisted largely of songs from Tamil film. Here again, the initial repertoire was Indian Classical. S. Sivam remembers M.S.Viswanathan and Illayaraja as those who *wrote a lot of melodies…and very beautiful*.[78] Raymond from SIMP recalls, *we used to go for classical rehearsals at Katong side…all professional ladies…they have the xylophone with the water… violinist, flutist, tabla and I would do the chord work with the accordion…and that is where you learn typical South Indian classical music with the Malayaragam, Kalayaragam* (ragam—modes).[79] With the eventual influence from Hindi popular film, *the song* ***Aiya Samy*** *(samba rhythm)…this was in the 1960s…Chandra Babu sang a song* ***Ah Gemini Papa*** *(Mexican Shuffle)…Then Doris Day's* ***Que Sera Sera*** *was used in* ***Sinna ponna la pothu****…I never thought a waltz rhythm could be played on the tabla…first time I heard it I was amazed*.[80]

What caused them to move to music of Indian popular film? According to SIMP members, *the movies showed a change in the trend and they followed suit…so like the latest fashion, we played the latest music. SIMP had already reached a third generation where their repertoire had extended beyond Indian Classical, through the latest songs in Tamil popular film to playing Malay, Chinese and English tunes…when did that change take place…when the TV producers gave National Day programmes to SIMP, they wanted four different languages to be made into one song…the multinational stuff came from road shows…we would go and perform a Chinese tune, a Malay song…I remembered we played in Queenstown…the request came to play a Chinese song… we played the famous Spring song…immediately after that we got a hongbau… If you are given this kind of situation, what would you do? I said we better improve, Chinese, Malay, anything. If we played at an Indian wedding and even if there were at the most three Malays, we'd play one Malay song. We believed the word would get around.*

Even if we saw one Chinese person at a function we would play a Chinese song. For instance at Joseph's son's wedding, we played a Chinese song because his daughter-in-law is Chinese.[81]

Music of Hindustani film had started to gain prominence and in Hindustani music there were influences from another culture. S. Sivam found himself playing more than just Hindi and Tamil music:
By this time we were playing popular material…my band liked to play all the latest numbers….when I saw a picture…I was able to play all the songs from that picture…I liked to play the guitar….bought a guitar in 1953…didn't know where to learn….when I saw the English (language) films I saw young boys play the guitar and the chords…cowboy pictures like Roy Rodgers and singers like Gene Autry.[82]

La Cumparsita, La Paloma, Come September, Besame Mucho, The Young Ones as well as selected Beatles numbers joined the list of frequently requested and therefore played songs at functions, weddings and other celebratory events. Ravi Shanker, who played in the junior Maru Malarchi ensemble, recalls how in the 1970s:
…we used to play English songs….like Bee Gees numbers…You should be dancing, Tragedy and even Hotel California and Careless Whisper.[83] Ravi's contemporary, Mohd. Rafee, who works for film music director A.R. Rahman, went a little further in his musical preferences:
…when I was growing up I liked English music…until Jazz came about…jazz is different area …early rock groups I liked listening to rock…Uriah Heep, Deep Purple…but I didn't play rock… I couldn't become a rocker because I never felt like that image…but we went a little further….we were listening to Kool and the Gang, Commodores…next to rock came the Motown groups…the funky stuff…the brass instruments and everything…to me Man, this was it!….and they were cool…different…they had a new image…that you never saw before…we clung on to that…we started playing our songs like that…we've been doing that all the time…doing Hindi and Tamil songs with a lot of brass arrangements….but nobody understood…we were doing all the funky stuff...no one else, no other bands (in Singapore) were doing it…[84]

One generally assumes that the repertoire of these Indian Music parties served secular interests. However, during the *Navarattiri* (Nine Nights Festival) preparation to the annual Fire-walking Festival *Timiti*, every Tamil band had an opportunity to play at various Hindu Temples around the island. Music for devotional reflection by band members who played there revealed that it consisted of music from popular film but which had a correspondence with the sort of

devotional spirit required of them…*on each day/night of Navarattiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band).*[85] Oral interviews suggest no conflict of interest or devotional ideals. The family of Edmund Appau as well as Ravi Shanker of **Maru Malarchi** indicated little difficulty as the priests simply booked their services. It is curious that temple priests did not prescribe repertoire or type of instrumentation. Interviewees claimed that when the Western-style instruments came to be set up, it generated a greater deal of interest among the temple worshippers. One explanation offered was that having listened to the very severe classical tradition via sitar and tabla, music via western-style instrumentation provided the necessary relief.[86]

Appearances in the public sphere

For Gregory Booth, the suggestion of the new Corporation of Madras City should have its own wind band, the city commissioners were following a precedent established by the regions's last independent Indian ruler and maintained quite naturally by the British for whom the garrison band of Fort. St. George served a similar function. In a historical sense, the proposal that the Nanthamuni Band, playing a repertoire of primarily Indian music, played on European instruments, and dressed in European uniforms, should be transformed into the Madras Corporation Band condensed these Indian and British symbols of state and civic prestige into a single entity. By choosing the Nanthamuni Band whose repertoire was dominated by kritis, thevarams, kirtans, etc., rather than an Indian army ensemble, (likely more march-oriented), the city commissioners made it clear that they were selecting a musical identity that was suitably Indian to represent their newly independent city. The offer was made in 1946 and the Nanthamuni brothers refused, possibly because they were making too much money as a private concern and the Madras city commission offer seemed not a good enough offer. Moreover, if they had, the Nanthamuni family would have had to relinquish control of their business to the city….Repertoire is still predominantly Tyagaraja's compositions from the Karnatik classical repertoire. A few British melodies, marches and waltzes have survived at least 40 post-colonial years in oral tradition. State patronage here empowers and enables the Madras Corporation Band to select their repertoire largely according to their own taste and tradition, with little concern for popular trends in Indian music. Unlike most South Asian bandsmen, who perceive themselves at the mercy of the modern popular taste for film music, patronage has allowed MCB to ignore the barrage of popular music generated by the Indian film industries.[87] Tamil film songs make up the majority of the film-related part of the repertoire, although at any given time, Hindi film songs may be heard at an

evening's programme. In the hands of the MCB, film songs sound like lighthearted kritis. This is possible with MCB's depth of musical resource – their classical training, as well as their traditional performance styles, stationary performance contexts, and function as an entertainment, rather than a processional and dance music ensemble.[88]

Many of the Band practitioners participated in the band contest organised by Mr. Sarangapani in his Tamil Festival from 1953 onwards and groups that won or were highly placed could look forward to many engagements for the band. It was also considered a status to belong to a well known band and SIMP was the most popular band in the Indian community. Later more bands like **Gemini**, **Shah Jehan**, **Venus** and **Newton Bharath** music parties started forming and competitions started at *ponggal* (harvest festival) held at certain areas like Rangoon Road. There were band competitions and in the words of the Edmund Appau family, *we were so proud to see our father, the first president of SIMP, go up to the stage to collect the champion trophy.*[89] Mr. Amar Singh[90], a singer from the group, Roshni Jeevans, a Hindi band, recalls a competition for live bands organised and held at the RTS auditorium in 1965. 12 groups participated for the top three spots…*the producers and directors from RTS, Philippines, Malaysia…were the judges…we had to do three songs…an instrumental from a Hindi Song* ***Hava****…then we had a Tamil song….with Krishna on Hawaiian guitar…..he played* ***Satyam****…one more was our own composition…I can't remember…*[91] Engagements were usually arranged when a group garnered sufficient reputation, one of which would have been winning a band competition. Being placed among the top three in this RTS competition gave **Roshni Jeevans** a large number of engagements including playing at Khalsa Association during the mid-1960s. At present, most of the bands play at pubs and night clubs. Vasantham played at the Taj until 1994,[92] while Maru Malarchi played at NTUC-Shenton Way for 2½ years from 1997 and were replaced by a splinter group from Maru-Malarchi called Bayrevi.[93]

Radio and television became significant platforms for these musicians' re-creative expression. As early as the 1950s, the radio had become for these practitioners a very important source and resource for practitioners because of the potential body of subscribers. Repertoire for other occasions was largely determined by paying attention to the request programmes on the radio and drawing up a list of pieces to be played at functions. Very little risks were taken as expectations seem to have determined the sort of repertoire to be performed. S. Sivam noted that initially, very few programmes involving music were acceptable on radio and they were

largely music from the Indian classical tradition. However, repertoire changes incorporating music of popular western and Indian film meant a greater variety of songs were made available. Christina Edmund recalls:
…actually we had the main radio in Singapore and Rediffusion…we listened more to the Malaysian radio…it seemed that on Singapore radio, there was more talking, so when there was more talking, channels were switched to Malaysian radio……particularly the request station to be able to hear more music…a song would be a great song hearing the number of times it was requested…sometimes twice a day, even three times a day…..morning, afternoon, and even night…actually it was mainly our parents….for us, once we had TV we listened less to the radio…[94]

During those early days, well known musicians had a say in the selection of singers for radio/TV singers. Training was provided for the singer if he or she had problem with the songs during music practice sessions. According to my father, sound recordings for radio programmes were done at Cathay Building and there was only the main radio and Rediffusion. Recordings for radio programmes then moved to Radio Singapore at Caldecott Hill. Recordings for programmes took hours; they would start at 7pm and end at about 11pm. When the recordings were on weekdays, the musicians had to rush from their place of work to my father's place where they would collect all the instruments and proceed to Radio Singapore.[95]

According to SIMP members:
*Radio in Singapore was first located at Cathay building before WWII and after some time as well when it move to Caldecott Hill. There was a Tamil programme called Kalapaddam (meaning mixture)…the producer used to ask any one to do a solo…no one had been able to play TR Mahalingham's song—**Nee say Tamil nee saythe Sarthalay**…but it was done by our tabla Shanmugam's father Mrdangam Methay.*[96]

Amar Singh had a slightly different problem:
…although Roshni Jeevans is a Hindi band we did Tamil (music and songs) *for radio and TV…normally RTS producers will select their own singers…maybe 10 songs, 1 Hindi and the others Tamil….then they will call all the singers for discussion with the band on the songs…. And the name of the song and singer….then they will contact me and tell me when the rehearsals and practices will be…..they will come for rehearsals and the producers tell you when the recording will be held…..so we have to be ready.. and we go over to RTS to record….only we didn't have a main Tamil singer…so John Mammen and*

Christina Edmund (Edmund Appau's daughter and her husband) *used to come over to practice.*[97]

S. Sivam was offered a place to perform on variety shows on television *…1962 I played on RTS and radio variety shows as well…*[98]
His son, Ravi, born in 1963 recalls his first experience of his father:
I was about 5 years old in 1968…my father was playing on TV…I was very excited…I waved to him thinking he can see me and wave back…he was quite famous so he appeared about twice a month…the programme happened on Saturday nights…around 8pm at night…our dad was a star…performing…he even used to sing on TV…[99]Ravi himself was nine when he performed on television:
I started playing in 1972….I was playing triple conga with the seniors….the congas were higher than me so they adjusted the congas lower….1972 was my first performance on TV.[100]His contemporary Mohd Rafee also began as a child of ten on television some two years earlier than Ravi.

There were little opportunities for musicians to cut albums. However, Christina Edmund had the distinction of being the first local singer to be featured in two record releases of Tamil songs:
I was introduced to singing by two musicians, Mr Bertie Fernando, a saxophonist and Deva Sagayam, a mandolin player in SIM and in 1967, the first local Tamil record was made in Singapore. 4 songs were composed and written by a lyricist from India, Mr Banuthasam. My father was not involved in this record. 2 local singers, S. Thanaletshumi and myself recorded the songs at Kintex Studios. It was recorded by a Chinese company called TNA Records. The 4 local songs were very well received and were very popular in Singapore and Malaysia. They were always requested by the public over the radio…when I did my second record, it was backed by the ***Esquires*** *(another local western pop group)…there was also a pianist by the name of Ramdas who played English music at nightclubs.*[101]

Not all of it was entirely successful as Mohd Rafee recalls:
I went into the Indian music scene on a fully professional basis…playing Indian music but with the sounds of Kool and the Gang and the younger crowd loved what we did at live performances. I did an album in Tamil with Reggie Verghese (from the Quests) as my producer. When we did our first song he said Indian music doesn't sound like this…I told him its ***going*** *to sound like this…he took the sound around to small drink shops, pubs, his friends and they said "this doesn't sound like Indian song"…cannot sell…Reggie got afraid…I was forced to do Indian film songs.*[102]

Eventually, what made these groups of musicians special and endeared them to the community was their live performances. They played for many functions such as weddings, birthday parties, engagements, dramas and even entertained prisoners at Changi prison and functions at the Istana, talentime presentations at Victoria Theatre where popular singers such as L.Vijayendran, Eswaran and Sarada Shanker took part. They played for stage shows in Singapore and Malaysia, weddings and **Navaratirri** programmes in the temples. As Edmund had converted to Roman Catholicism, on Christmas eve night, they would play music on board a lorry with Christmas decorations, visiting churches with significant Tamil parishioners, especially those who attended the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes at Ophir Road. People got excited when they heard the sound of the bongo, tambourine, announcing the arrival of the "Christmas lorry".[103]

Issues of Authenticity in Music for film

Learning songs from Tamil and Hindi popular film took on another dimension. While it was a common practice for musical groups to re-create songs from films and their own songs using film tunes, many recall the difficulty with instrumentation. Mohd Rafee describes some of this in detail:

….even up to 1980s, up to 1982, 1983, we were still copying and playing, trying to get to hold of how these guys were doing it…you see, we are not in the film industry, we didn't have predecessors, there was no one before us showing us what to do….we couldn't get an opportunity to watch orchestras play…how did they create this piece, how did they play…because we were in Singapore….all we got from the film was one hero, one heroine…singing, running around and singing…we didn't see bands…so whatever bands we saw were the ones which we saw playing here on their own…so they mixed and matched…take a Latin tune…copy it in Hindi, play it with bongos, congas, drums, maraccas, cowbells, cabasas, castanets…we have these instruments, we can play with them but how to play these instruments is another thing….there is a way to play the drums and you start playing it differently, over the years it takes a form…that happened in a lot of Hindi songs..[104]

Simplistically, in the absence of any informed view of the practice other than oral and aural transmission, whatever could work in the most practical way was the eventual solution. Increasingly, there was a move to adapt tunes from Indian film and have the lyrics altered to a new context by Tamil poets in Singapore, despite the resistance to the authenticity and altered meanings. However, it wasn't as simple as that:

A lot of old Indian films are inspired by Latin elements..sounds very Latin…but the way they depicted Latin playing…we learnt it that way… my brother played Hindi

music exactly the way the Hindi guys did it on tape or on record…but when he started learning Latin, playing in the circuit with mainstream artists in pop and jazz circuits…cowbells were played different, congas were tuned/played differently…he thought this was the way to play it…what happened was it had a form of its own and was copied here by people who called themselves Hindi musicians… but that's the way they played it.[105]

Even the older musicians from the third phase of SIMP admit to the paradox when they were active in the late 1950s through the 1960s:
…the bongos used to be tuned to the pitch so it never sounded like a real Latin bongo…actually they used the instruments like the clarinet, saxophone, violin with the Indian classical touch…when we listen to the songs being played, we would take note of the instruments used…that's how we picked things up…if they used a bongo…we would
need to use a bongo….there had always been an accordion…[106]

Oral accounts suggest the effect A.R.Rahman had on music in Tamil film was that melody and song were relegated to the music which had always been in the background:
A.R. Rahman…I don't know how he can become so famous..but I don't appreciate his music…noisy…so people following his style like Yuan Sankeraja and Karthikraja…sons of Illayaraja[107] (a music director in Tamil popular film, not unlike M.S. Viswanathan). There is however, acknowledgement that the sound associated with A.R. Rahman has gained currency among Tamil youth. Sivam laments the fact that with this new fad, melody and song, a characteristic of earlier Tamil film is of lesser concern than the soundscape that was in the background of such films.

Points of Intersection with other musical endeavour
To suggest this practice as an insular activity available and consumed by only the Tamil-speaking/Tamil conversant community might seem blindingly obvious. This is probably true if the musicians had been working in the Indian Classical performance mode. The transition to music of popular culture also would have signaled a commensurate change. Oral accounts from the practitioners suggest some rather interesting aspects of these musicians. Beginning with S. Sivam and continuing till today, practitioners found themselves playing in events outside of their Tamil-conversant domain and playing Tamil repertoire alongside non-Indian performers. Mohd. Rafee's father encouraged him to learn Tamil repertoire to gain access to broadcast opportunities.

But a number of these musicians were also involved in musical endeavour and performance modes which had nothing to do with music of Indian popular film. S.Sivam's prowess with the guitar enabled him to use those skills beyond his role in **Venus Music Party**:

…you see after John Muthu (my first guitar teacher) left, my second teacher was Philip Arikan, a Eurasian from the Blue Hawaiian Band. The leader was a Mr. Andrew and they used to practice in Zion Road. Philip Ariken (lead guitar), myself (bass), Tommy (a drummer who married Philip's sister) and Hugo (Filipino used to play rhythm guitar) and myself on bass used to play at the British Military Hospital (Alexandra Hospital today) NCO Club…our group didn't have a name…anyway the NCOs only wanted some group to play English music and songs. We used to play three days a week in 1962. We would start at 8pm and finish at 3am….these nurses all liked to dance….Thursdays was ladies evening….Wednesday and Saturday for guys…[108]

The interaction was not uni-directional. George, a guitarist who joined SIMP, recalls:

*I only came into the scene with **Usha Music party** in 1962…then a couple of boys went off to form **Shanti Music Party**. We then formed the **Van Cliff Rhythm Boys**; two Chinese boys and the band leader who was Eurasian…you remember Cliff Richard and the Shadows? We copied it and called ourselves Van Cliff…there were competitions and we took part as an English band. We came in first and we broke up after that.*[109]

Edmund Appau's children and band members were equally conversant in music of western popular culture. His eldest daughter Christina recalls:

*By this time, my brothers were old enough to join the percussion side, Jesson, playing the bongo, and Hermann, playing the maracus. Jesson Edmund started playing the drums. He also started an English group called **Blues Inc.** and became the lead singer and drummer for that group. Hermann went on to play the trumpet and Lawrence* (another brother) *joined the English scene as a drummer. They all started playing English music in night clubs, but at the same time, they used to play Indian music too.*[110]

Christina Edmund recalls one of the members of SIMP:

*Joe Chandran who later became popular with the **X'periments** (a local western pop group)was a member of SIMP…when I did my second record, it was backed by the **Esquires** (another local western pop group)…there was also a pianist by the name of Ramdas who played English music at nightclubs.*[111]

Support systems of everyday life

The New Indians Amateur Orchestra had their rehearsals at Edmund Appau's residence at 34 Short Street. Edmund Appau's residence became the rehearsal studio even as the family moved to Race Course Road, Rangoon Road with one exception when they rehearsed at a clubhouse at Norris Road, even across the personnel transitions from **SIMP** to Edmund Joseph Music Party, Edmund Music Party and later Edmund Appau Orchestra.[112] **Singapore Indians Music Party** III practised at Owen Road, Kamala Club near Middleton hospital, Moulmein Road, Jervois Road and used to rent a house for $70 a month. Some of these groups had sponsors, even advisors, some were sustained via subscriptions from group members.

Another space that encouraged and sustained these musicians' activities was the community centre. It is a practice that continues to this day. These community centres or clubs are part of a larger grouping known as the People's Association and are home to considerably diverse cultural and arts activities. According to Koh Tai Ann, *to achieve more direct contact with the people, a statutory body, the People's Association, was created on July 1 1960. It took over the existing twenty-eight Community Centres (CCs) hitherto run by the Social Welfare Department…it was noted that the twenty eight CCs before June 1 1959 had "no unified policy or central leadership". There was therefore a need for the People's Association "to assist the government in organising and promoting…healthy, cultural, recreational and other organised activities for quality", with the "task of socially integrating our multiracial society"* [113]

In reciprocation, these groups provide music for a variety of functions organised by the various community centres, from celebrations of the main cultural festivals, Deepavali or Pongal (harvest festival) to larger more cohesive events like National Day or functions involving national campaigns. S. Sivam's **Venus Music Party** rehearsed at Queenstown CC and provided music for whatever community club functions Queenstown CC asked of them. **SIMP III** is currently resident at Bukit Batok Community Club.[114] **Maru Malarchi** rehearse at Marsiling CC, **Oothayha githam** at West Coast CC alongside AV-Connections who are more minus-one oriented. A much younger group calling themselves **Jeevans**, (but not connected to a live-band of the 1960s with the same name) were known to practise at Braddell CC.[115]

According to current SIMP members, when it comes to economics…*its big band, small money*….[116] That phrase has historical resonance for the Edmund Appau family:

Money was not a big thing those days, they (musicians) were not paid much. It was more for the love of music. SIMP entertained the Indian community with light Indian music at a time when most Indian music entertainment was in the form of classical music. Also SIMP played mostly songs from films, popular films starring Sivaji or MGR, semi classical music, English, Malay and later, even popular Chinese songs at public functions.[117]

Oral accounts indicate music-making in this endeavour did not emerge as a full-time professional commitment. Virtually all interviewees had full-time jobs, although some may have lost their jobs or changed jobs because of their passion for this form of music-making. However, being part of such a musical ensemble was no ordinary membership:

During those times, it was considered a status to belong to a well known band and SIMP was the most popular band in the Indian community. My father (with the first SIMP), played for many functions such as weddings, birthday parties, engagements, dramas and even entertained prisoners at Changi prison and Istana functions. My father played at Naval Base functions, weddings…there were very few Tamil bands…it went around the community that if you got SIMP, you got the best…… people came from all over to book this band. If they couldn't get SIMP they would be very disappointed but sometimes my father had to turn them down…[118]

This affirmation went beyond the Indian community:

A show was organised and coordinated by Mr. T. T. Dorai, coinciding with the formation of the National Sports Promotion Board. All the actors and actresses from Tamil film, M.G. Ramachandran, Nagesh, Jayalaleetha, playback singers Soundarajan, P. Susheela and Chandra Babu were all flown to Singapore…I remember it was in June 1972…we were all stationed at Hotel Imperial Oberoi (now demolished). *On this occasion, RTS selected Singapore Indians Music Party for the whole show…we were the main band …no payment…but we had a final dinner at the Shangri-La…and after the performance each got a ride home on a Mercedes home provided by Mr. Jumabhoy…that is one unforgettable experience… we also got to play at the National Day programmes.*[119]

S. Sivam recalls:

We used to play for weddings, birthdays, parties, functions, events, stage shows…other special occasions…when we practised at Queenstown CC we didn't have to pay any rent but any event which we played for at the CC had to be free…even until now they are still with that arrangement… normally, we do Deepavali shows..so Tamil and Hindustani songs….if its National Day function,

we'll play Tamil and Hindustani songs…and there will be a group for Malay classical dance…I started with Queenstown in the 1960s with the Goodwill community dinner…this happened after the Prophet Mohammed riots…we were, I think, the first band to agree to play at this dinner.[120]

Teaching and Learning

Very few of these performers knew how to read musical staff notation. Modes of learning were primarily oral and aural, listening to cassettes, records and at time televised performances. Enterprising band leaders then took the trouble to teach the others the melody by using the accordion or guitar to those who needed to know how to fill in the bass parts or the chords. Because the mode of learning was primarily oral and aural, anyone with good enough musical acuity had little difficulty fitting in. Often performers had very little prior formal training and in this domain, seniors played a crucial role. Joseph of SIMP *studied classical Indian training….but I could read only Tamil notes…tabla notation…scalic notation…I learnt from Mr. Pandit Ramalingam…*[121] Some of the pioneer members of **SIMP** had classical training, read Tamil and tabla notation. Raymond from Genoa Music Party recalls: *Mr. T.P. Balakrishnan, Mr. Ramachandran and Mr. Bhaskar…they bought an accordion for me and formed a band in old Nee Soon, in 1958….near the post office, police station…1200 Upper Thomson Road…that is where we started practising….I need not pay any subscription as I was still schooling…they even sent me to Foorman Studios and paid for my lessons…then we started developing and moved into wedding programmes….and our patron was a doctor who had clinic in Nee Soon.*[122]

Christina Edmund notes that her father also went to Foorman Studios to learn to play the accordion properly and used that knowledge to form the first Singapore Indians Music Party. In other aspects she did not notice any prior training except his keen interest in Indian classical music practices in the temples he visited with his father in Penang, where Edmund was born. But she did remember that:

Music was picked up using the gramophone. The records were played over and over again to perfect each player's part. From a very early age, music was instilled into the minds of us as children who listened to the music during practice sessions. In those days, each player played an instrument…a maracas player, a tambourine player (today a tabla player will handle all the smaller percussion instruments). Although he had no formal training in music, he was very particular about tuning the instruments. Even a slight fault in tuning would make him stop the musician responsible.[123]

S. Sivam describes his processes of learning and teaching in a bit more detail:

As soon as the film comes to Singapore, we'll probably buy the records and by hearing, because I don't read notes or anything, I can get the songs…I normally pick up everything first with the mandolin or guitar…then I'll reassign the parts teaching them from the mandolin or guitar…sometimes I used the keyboard to show…those days no organ…no electronics….only accordion…pianica and accordion…I had to go and stand near the microphone and play….myself I played the mandolin and guitar…in the music—lets say the song—they have three positions for violins…first violin, second and third violin…this sort of thing we don't have and definitely can't play…anyway once we arrange this for my band, we get the main idea of the music…it is clean not faulty…so when people hear it, it sounds like the song…in those days, when people come for a party, wedding or function or something like that, unless they are professional musicians, then only they will know this is a different arrangement or something like that….these people when they sing, normally they will want to hear what the singer singing…mainly can hear, the band is playing along OK…we were playing music from the latest film before other bands…wherever we went to play, people from other bands would come and listen…my bands (Venus, Maru Malarchi) and Shahjehan were the first to have electrical guitars….electric mandolin, electric accordion.[124]

Mohd. Rafee remembers his lessons: *I started by learning mainly Hindi songs…he would teach me from the harmonium and I'd pick it up on the guitar… he would tell me where to place my fingers and in which positions… I had to listen and he would teach me how to play all the picks…Before the guitar, I learnt the mandolin which my father had the mandolin and gave to me…to play it, I had to watch Nana Mouskouri on TV…I learnt to play the mandolin during the show...and my father used to make me watch the show and learn how to play the mandolin…*[125] His contemporary Ravi Shanker also recalls how his father, S.Sivam, had practice sessions at his residence and he grew up watching the rehearsals. His account of entry into his father's band is rather unusual:
They were having a practice session at our house… ….before they practised they used to listen to the record…one of the percussion players was playing the wrong beat for a Hindi song…the bongo player wasn't listening to the song or the beat…I could tell he was playing the wrong beat…I play by listening…so I went to play the bongo…my dad said since you can play bongos, why don't you play in the band…I was 8 years old then.[126] Since his father was not a percussion player, Ravi was trained by his seniors in Maru Malarchi. Ravi recalled his father was more a guitarist and although he could not read notes, he could read and write guitar chords.

Gerry Farrell informs us of the impact the gramophone had on Indian musicians as articulated by Fred Gaisberg in 1942:
Songs for festivals and weddings were already in our catalogue and new artists were learning their repertoire from gramophone records.[127]

Farrell points out that:
*As a way of disseminating musical material the gramophone was unprecedented, and it was inevitable that artists would copy songs from records. Indeed recording was a perfect tool for such endea*vours. *A record could be played repeatedly and mimicked without recourse to a teacher or notation.*[128] In imbibing of such a practice through the gramophone as medium, local musicians operated at two layers of meaning. First it was assumed that the source was authentic and respectable enough to engage in a copy. Farrell is quick to point out that the gramophone caused sufficient anxiety for the more celebrated performers of Indian music refused to be recorded because they found recording to be contrary to the spirit of their art. The result was that features of Indian musical form were *poured through the sieve of recording technology and time limitations until only the essentials remain* [ed].[129]

Secondly, while local musicians would have liked to present their performances in as authentic as possible setting, this was not practical as there were instruments they were unable to obtain for reasons more financial than practical. When the financial aspects were surmounted, the practicality of instrumentation status quo of the ensemble meant a more exiguous form that would suffice.

The Present, Challenges and Prospects
Yet the phrase by SIMP, big band small money, bears a harsher reality. Unlike their English pop counterparts, most of them have full-time jobs and such gigs are part-time endeavour. As a result of this present state of affairs, there are very few live-bands performing music of Indian popular film in Singapore. According to oral accounts:
…only 4 major bands active, SIMP, Maru Malarchi, Bai Rayvee, Febra, Oothayha githam …all other bands are using sequenced music, minus one…Jeevans are now using minus-ones…another one called AV-connections…Mostly popular requests….[130] As a result of a fully committed and passionate activity being run a part-time endeavour, sustainability remains a growing and fragile concern. Technology, particularly its use, has been a factor affecting their sustainability. When asked to compare variety shows of the past with the present Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi, who also plays in a percussion group called Rhythm Masala articulated the problem:

…what is happening now is mostly minus-one type of shows…no more live bands on TV…recently when we did a performance with Rhythm Masala…there was quite a bit of interest because there were live bands and plenty of percussion instruments…the feedback was that with minus-one, there was no impact…that is what the live bands can give the real impact.[131]

The arrival of sequenced music or minus-one technology is just one aspect of technology that seems to have challenged the very existence of live bands. Ravi observed minus-one entry around 1995…*audiences still wanted live band but for some pubs the minus one dropped the cost by ½ …*[132] This has not only affected their ability to be visual and aural in broadcast spheres of music-making but also affected their means of doing gigs at nightclubs and entertainment spots. Minus-ones have created a need for only a singer. In practice, different pubs and clubs have differing needs and in some cases, dissatisfaction with minus-one formats have ensured survival of the bands. On the other hand, the presence of a minus-one offers any cost-saving means to be implemented and management of clubs and pubs have not been averse to that option. When such entertainment spots are affected by slowing business or an economic slowdown, live-bands become casualties. A newer and equally problematic issue is that of the presence of Malaysian bands. This ease of influx of foreign bands into the entertainment scene in Singapore affected local English pop groups as early as the 1970s, worsening in the 1980s. According to interviewees in the Tamil pop scene, a gap in the proficiency levels in the past ensured their survival but changes in the standards of performance, the use of minus-ones and performance fees are some of the challenges local Tamil bands face. The current exchange rate of S$1 to M2.29 Ringgit is a cruial factor. As Ravi points out: *we went to a wedding last week…they had two bands from JB…they are much cheaper than we are…they are paid 1000+ Ringgit which becomes S$400-500…for local groups, we charge S$900/950…*[133]

Politics in the entertainment spots were also cited with live-bands discovering to their disadvantage the adhoc burden placed on them during their gigs:
…SIMP III last played at a pub called ***Happy Days*** *every Monday almost for a year in 2002. We were drawing good crowds for a Monday…then they started complaining they weren't selling more beer…they blamed the band…but we play the music…we are not responsible for the selling of beer…*[134]
Maru Malarchi played at *NTUC Shenton Way in 1997 every first Monday of the month..then it became first and third of the month…we were there for 2½ years….now a new band has taken over……they wanted a change of band…another band was favoured…rumour linked committee members and friends who were in the favoured band…before us another group was playing there*

for about 8 months…but all the while we were playing, our contract was extended….to be frank, we were the longest band for 2½ years…we were succeeded by Bairayvee (actually a split group from Maru Malarchi Juniors)…anyway its not our rice-bowl…we have already shown our stuff to the audience…let them judge…just finished one gig in February…now its very hard…in 1997/8 we could do 30 performances….but this year so far only 2……a lot of people undercutting and another thing…a lot of minus-one CDs…[135]

Inclusion and exclusion in relation to Indianness and male-ness were some of the issues that emerged. Christina Edmund recalls the way she and the group were treated at an audition at RTS:

...its funny you mention male-dominated…..because when we went for an RTS audition…they failed us as a group…then there was a Ramiah who said that our band doesn't know how to handle the instruments…..my father wrote to Radio Singapore to seek clarification and got a reply saying that no one in the band was capable of handling the instruments except my father (himself).....In any case he (my father) told us to disregard it and just carry on…this took place in the 1970s…my father's advice was to redouble effort instead of complaining….that actually put us off any more auditions or broadcast efforts…so in fact before Mohd. Rafee came on the scene, we, my brothers and I should have been on the scene first…..we were shut down…Rafee was quite lucky that Kalaichelvan came in during his time...for a while, certain people at RTS had a funny kind of attitude towards people from other religions...there was a very good singer by the name of Roshan……not given many chances even though my father tried to put him up for programmes…those days they had this rather negative attitude about those who didn't carry fully Indian names although we played Indian music…we got the impression it wasn't enough for them.[136]

Perhaps one problem that has and will continue to engender controversy is the reported lack of infrastructure and support at the most fundamental level. Mohd. Rafee explains why despite being a child performer at RTS and countless variety shows, he joined the ranks of the lesser priviledged:

…at my age I went into the Indian music scene on a fully professional basis…we were playing Indian music but with the sounds of Kool and the Gang… I was born and bred in Singapore and exposed to all kinds of music…I felt that Indian music was depicted in such a way that made it difficult for others to digest…I wanted to make it more accessible…so we started improvising, playing songs entirely differently and the younger crowd liked it. Then I started to play at the Taj, the first Indian nightclub at Syed Alwi Road in 1991…when we took the Tamil songs and did brass jabs we couldn't get players to play…basically it just didn't happen for us until we met this guy called A.R.Rahman …exactly what we were doing with

Indian music 15 years ago in Singapore is happening in India today… Rahman himself knows…fortunately he's at the right place and right time…India didn't have the musicians…the only way was that I went to India…sang in the movies, started arranging for Rahman…I've been playing on the radio since I was ten…and even after my work with Rahman I was told my materials cannot be played locally because I'm local…that's sad…if that's the case, how are to show our brand?[137]

That is similarly voiced by SIMP III musicians who know Rafee:
…today in Singapore, you can't even make a living as an artist. For Indian music, Indians are better and cheaper than Singaporeans…that's why some of our best musicians are all abroad…one of our former guitarists Benjamin who played the ukelele is living in Europe presently…the other thing is that there was very little encouragement for Tamil music in Singapore…for example Mohd. Rafee—he has gone and played for A.R Rahman in India but why were his songs not played or supported in broadcast? You have to encourage local artists…[138]

Finally, slowly gaining ground is a much younger group of heavy metal musicians who totally reject their predecessors in the Indian popular film practice. A new phenomenon in the 1990s, Indian heavy metal groups sing in English as well but identify their sound as a uniquely Indian sound, albeit metal sound. The group Rudra, which has been given air-play space and voted among the top-40 bands in Singapore, explain:
…We have always been interested in metal although traditional music does appeal we have utilised it in ***Rudra****. I reckon traditional music defines the Hindu essence in us.*[139]

For another metal group, Narasimha,
For an Indian in Singapore to start his own musical band or group is very rare… we are influenced largely by Indian movies and its soundtracks…in terms of musical entertainment, we depend on Indian movie-makers to give it to us. Indian metal bands grew up listening to Indian film songs and English heavy metal bands from Black Sabbath from the sixties to its peak in the 80s…this was how our group Narasimha was formed…I got to listen to Rudra, the first ever band in Singapore to officially release a full length album. The music in Rudra really fascinated me. Loud and the heavy distorted sound of the guitars mixed with the aggressive drum beats with the touch of the Indian melody did fascinated me. We started going down to gigs and got to know people down there. And from there, we got to know other Indians who are also in this scene. Everyone of us had different bands influences, but still united in heavy metal. Well, the birth of heavy metal among

Indians down here could be caused by similar experiences like this. And, in Narasimha, the vision is one which is the Indian culture. We never went off the line of our culture and we incorporate the Indian philosophy in our music. We never sing about love, because it's already common among the Indian film songs. Even in the music we compose, the Indian Carnatic or Hindustani style is inherent.[140] *It is about time the Indian community starts breaking away from the more widely listened to movie songs and make stuff of their own. Originality is what sells and is appreciated.*[141]

At least one outcome of this exploration is the discovery of a practice obvious to its supporters, lesser in written discourse but virtually unknown in other circles. When articulated through oral and e-interviews with practitioners and supporters, knowledge *of* and *about* musical practices of south Indian film in Singapore creates an open site for awareness, documentation and discussion. The problems, issues and challenges in a search for answers provide seed for further and future scholarship.

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2 Kernial Singh Sandhu, Indian Immigration and Settlement in Singapore, in Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, edited by K.S.Sandhu and A.Mani (eds), ISEAS, Times Academic Press, 1993, p.777.

3 Lee Tong Soon, Singapore, Volume 23, pp.421-423, in Sadie, Stanley and Tyrrell, John (eds.), The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, New York, N.Y.: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000. 2001 edition.

4 Joseph Peters (ed.), Evolving Traditions: Presentations at the 2nd ASEAN Composers Forum on Traditional Music, Singapore 1993, specifically the Chapter on Singapore.

5 Tamaki Marsuoka Kanda, Indian Film Directors in Malaya, pp.43-50, p.43, in Vasudev, Aruna (ed.) Frames of Mind; Reflections on Indian Cinema, UBS Publishers, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1995. Tamaki cites four reasons (p.50) for the presence of Indian directors in Singapore:
A much earlier developed Indian film industry;
Much cheaper to employ than Hollywood directors;
English as a language well-employed by the Indian directors; and
Familiarity with the Malay Peninsula because of the large number of Indian immigrants.

6 Lent, John, et al., The Asian Film Industry, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990, pp. 185—200.

7 Singapore Chronicle, October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44, Letter to the Editor. The letter expresses particular concerns of fire and safety with an event which approximates the ritual of the fire-walking ceremony. Later, the Singapore Free Press, 31 January 1896, reports the confiscating of musical instruments used in the Thaipusam ritual at a temple at Tank Road by the police.

8 Kernial Singh Sandhu, op.cit, pp.774-775.

9 Letter to the Editor, Singapore Chronicle October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44. Unfortunately, this was referred to as a Kling festival. In most social exchange, this is a derogatory reference to members of the Indian community.

10 The Singapore Free Press 31 January 1896. Oddly, it is referred to as the Tai-pusam or harvest thanksgiving festival. Paradoxically, the festival of Thaipusam became a point of considerable debate in the late 1970s; see Vineeta Sinha, Hinduism in Contemporary Singapore, pp.826-846, pp. 832-833, quoted in Kernial Singh Sandhu, Indian Immigration and Settlement in Singapore, in Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, edited by K.S.Sandhu and A.Mani (eds), ISEAS, Times Academic Press, 1993.

11 Oral Interview A00896/7 Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu and Chandrakasan Dharmalingam A001300). I am indebted to Clement Liew for his invaluable assistance in providing me with this brief summary based on his research.

12 Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam and Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu A00896/7.

13 Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam and Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu A00896/7 and Omkara, The Hindu Centre, February 1983 (Omkara 1983)

14 Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam and Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu A00896/7.

15 From the Synopsis of an Oral Interview with Purushothaman Thambyah, Oral History Board. Accession No. 1342. The oral interview is in Tamil.

16 Interview with SIMP, March 2004. George a guitarist recalls, *I joined in 1962, Usha Music Party…which was actually known as Usha Music and Dramatic Society.* SIMP members recall how their predecessors were considered part of music and dramatic society configuration.

17 Booth, Gregory D. The Madras Corporation Band: A Story of social change and indigenization, Asian Music Vol. XXVIII, no.1, Fall/Winter 1996/7, pp.61-86, p.67-68.
18 Ibid., p.67-68.

19 Ibid. According to oral interviewees, musical band parties were synonymous with music parties.

20 Personal correspondence with Radha Vijayan from the Peoples Association Lifeskills Branch, January 2005.

21 The Singapore Indian Artistes Association — Microfilm number NA2345.

22 Most of the interviewees were of similar opinion that SIMP was a pioneer group but none seemed to be aware of the presence of the New Indian Amateur Orchestra. However, interviewees note that New Indian Orchestra and the first SIMP notwithstanding, repertoire at first was predominantly Indian Classical Music, specifically Carnatic.

23 From the Synopsis of an Oral Interview with Purushothaman Thambyah, Oral History Board. Accession No. 1342. The oral interview is in Tamil. The term band here will require much further clarification but in the context of this synopsis, band is used to identify musical groups. The synopsis also includes names of musical band parties in 1950s and 1960s and includes names of famous musicians, MP Gurusamy, Pundit Ramalingam.

24 Interview with S.Sivam, 10 March 2004. Semi-classical is not clarified.

25 Interview with Singapore Indians Music Party, March 2004.

26 A.Mani's chapter, Indians in Singapore Society, pp.788-809, p.796, in Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, edited by K.S.Sandhu and A.Mani (eds), ISEAS, Times Academic Press, 1993. Mani notes a gulf in the South Indian community caused partly out of caste and community differences as well as notions of economic class. Additionally, the Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamils and Malayalees saw themselves well-oriented towards the use of the English language and colonial culture. In both senses, the subscription to Indian classical traditions as well as fine arts of the western tradition would have sufficed for elitism.

27 Ibid., p.796. Mani points out that with the establishment of the Tamils Representative Council of 1952, the Tamil language was promoted in literature, mass media, particularly newspapers, and cultural issues. The Tamil language had for its support base Tamil-using and working class Indians.

28 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

29 Ibid.

30 A.Mani op.cit., p.796. Mani cites examples of Tamils, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils who belonged to the administrative and clerical sectors of the colonial economy who were content to patronize Anglicized forms of colonial culture, English-medium schools for their children, their women learning fine arts…like Englishmen with Indian colorations.

31 Ibid., p. 796. The Malayalees went their own way and formed organisations for themselves. The pullout of the British forces from Singapore also resulted in an outflow of Malayalees. In the face of fragmentation of language, religion or caste prevalent in the Indian population in Singapore in the 1960s and beyond, the Tamil language teacher emerged as the new catalyst to community orientation. This can be traced to a movement called the Dravidian movement which in Malaya and Singapore was essentially a working class movement against Brahminic domination of Indian society beyond India.

32 Ibid., p.807. This is not longer the situation where Hindi has become, increasingly so in the last decade, the Indian language many parents subscribe to at the expense of Tamil and it has become a concern for the Tamil Teachers Association of Singapore.

33 Oral Interview with S. Varathan – A001000/8. These festivities still occur today in the form of a Deepavali Festival Village that lasts 21 days and is similar to a street carnival. This provides a showcase for the best of Indian culture featuring pushcarts displaying and selling a variety of costumes, jewellery and accessories, food, paintings, handicrafts, spices and carpets. The carts will line Campbell Lane, from Serangoon Road to Clive Street and the roads will be closed to traffic throughout the 21 days. (STB) There will also be performances by local talents and foreign artistes presenting a rare mixture of South and North Indian cultures over a period of three weeks (except Sundays) until the eve of Deepavali. To add to the colour, the Silver Chariot of Sri Mariamman Temple will make its visit to the Festival Village enroute its traditional journey for the Fire Walking Ceremony on 1 November. (STB)

34 E-correspondence with Dr. Seetha Lakshmi, Saturday, August 24, 2002, 10:50 am.

35 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

36 Interview with Amar Singh, former leader of Roshni Jeevans, 22 June 2004.

37 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

38 Parenthesis and emphasis in original. Navarattiri involves a nine-day preparation for the fire-walking ceremony.

39 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

40 E-correspondence with the Edmund Appau family, particularly Christina Edmund, dated 1 June 2004.

41 Ibid., p.778.

42 Fung 1975, p.,17, cited in A. Mani. op.cit., p.793-794, particularly the statistics Table 31.2.

43 Ibid., p.794.

44 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

45 Interview with SIMP members March 2004.

46 Interview with Mohd. Bagushair, 25 April 2004, Kent Vale. Mohammad Rafi is one of the few playback singers in Hindustani film from the 1940s to the 1980s and is mentioned in Peter Manuel's study of popular music and technology in North India.

47 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004. Mohd. Rafee's father was an Urdu-speaking native of the Deccan Plateau while his mother was Tamil.

48 Kernial Singh Sandhu, Indian Immigration and Settlement in Singapore, pp.774—809, p.777, in Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, edited by K.S.Sandhu and A.Mani (eds), ISEAS, Times Academic Press, 1993.

49 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, 2004.

50 Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 December 2003.

51 Lent, John, et al., The Asian Film Industry, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990, pp. 185—200, p.189.

52 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004.

53 Interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi Band. By the time he was active, however, Ravi Shanker's repertoire was extended, by choice, to playing Bee Gees numbers like Tragedy, You should be Dancing and Careless Whisper…

54 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004.

55 Interview with Amar Singh, former leader of Roshni Jeevans, 22 June 2004. Compare this with

56 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.
In the 50s, 60s and 70s, films were the only pastime for the Tamils here. I remember, as a child, the theatres which screened Tamil movies; Capitol, Cathay, Alhambara, Royal, Diamond, State, Rex, etc. They screened all the Tamil movies along with English & Mandarin and Chinese dialect movies. I believe even the Malayalee community had no choice but to watch Tamil movies. Singapura and Galaxy Theatres in the Geylang area screened Hindi movies. In my view, film music was very popular since the screening of movies in Singapore. They were watched by people from all walks of life and had a great influence on people here. We understood the music, knew about fashion and there were sarees sold here which were named after a particular film or actress. In the 60s, film music was a "must-play" during wedding dinners and other functions. Local bands played these musical numbers and sang songs from popular Indian film. I saw guitars, saxophone, clarinet, accordion, jazz drums, along with Indian instruments like the tabla and dholak. They were very entertaining. South Indian actors like MGR and Sivaji were big names during the 1960s and 1970s. Many locals here sang songs by playback singers P.Suseela and T.M.Sounderajan in stage shows, TV etc. There were two prominent magazines which promoted films; Movie News, a local magazine which catered to Tamil as well as Hindi movies and Pesum Padam which was imported from India. The latter had all the ingredients which the movies goers were crazy about; gossip, latest releases, interviews with actors and actresses and even lyrics of popular songs. With the advent of television, there were variety shows which had classical, modern songs and dances.

57 Peter Manuel, op. cit., p.50.

58 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004.

59 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.

60 Ibid.

61 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

62 Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 and 16 December 2003.

63 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004.

64 I am grateful to the Edmund Appau family, particularly Christina Edmund, for providing me with a write-up on her father in correspondence dated 1 June 2004.

65 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.

66 Ibid.

67 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Interview with S.Sivam, 10 March 2004.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Interview with Edmund Appau family June 2004.

74 Oral Interview with Joseph of SIMP.

75 Interview with Edmund Appau family, June 2004.

76 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

77 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.

78 Ibid.

79 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Interview with S.Sivam, March 10 2004.

83 Interview with Ravi Shanker, May 2004.

84 Interview with Mohd Rafee, February 2004.

85 Mohammed Ali, Nilavu, Mother-Goddess worship: practice and Practitioners in Three Hindu temples, pp.47-103, p.89, in Walker, Anthony R. (eds.), New Places, Old Ways, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1994. The interesting observation is made, On each day of Navaraththiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band). Parenthesis and emphasis in original.

86 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

87 Booth, Gregory, op.cit., pp.81-82.

88 Ibid., p.82.

89 E-interview with Christina Edmund of Edmund Appau family.

90 Oral interview with Amar Singh, blk 22, Sin Ming Road, 21 June 2004, 2030 hours.

91 Ibid.

92 Oral Interview with Mohd. Rafee.

93 Oral interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi.

94 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

95 E-Interview with Edmund Appau family.

96 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

97 Interview with Amar Singh, former leader of Roshni Jeevans, 22 June 2004.

98 Interview with Si.Sivam, 10 March 2004.

99 Interview with Ravi Shanker, 8 June 2004.

100 Ibid.

101 E-interview with Edmund Appau family, 2004.

102 Interview with Mohd Rafee, Febuary 2004. July 2004 marked a remarkable change in Rafee's fortunes and there has been a more positive reception to his musical styles and songs.

103 Mohammed Ali, Nilavu, op.cit., p.89. An interesting observation is made, *On each day of Navaraththiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band).*

104 Interview with Mohd Rafee March 2004.

105 Ibid.

106 Oral Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

107 Oral Interview with S. Sivam, March 10, 2004.

108 Ibid.

109 Interview with George of SIMP, March 2004.

110 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

111 Ibid.

112 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

113 Koh Tai Ann, Culture and the Arts, pp. 710-748, p.719, in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.) Management of success, the moulding of modern Singapore, ISEAS, Singapore, 1989. We are informed that the Peoples Association was "the community development arm of the Prime Minister's Office (p.885) and later in Koh's article (p.720), we discover that in 1985, the Ministry of Community Development was created incorporating the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture and the People's Association…by Koh's accounts, "a logical development".

114 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

115 Oral interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi,

116 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

117 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

118 Correspondence with Edmund Appau family, 2004.

119 Interview with Raymond of SIMP, March 2004.

120 Interview with S. Sivam, March 2004.

121 Interview with Joseph of SIMP, March 2004.

122 Interview with Raymond of SIMP, March 2004.

123 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

124 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.

125 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004.

126 Interview with Ravi Shanker, 8 June 2004.

127 Farrell, Gerry, The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India; Historical, Social and Musical Perspectives, pp. 57-82, p.74, in Leyshon, Andrew, Matless, David, and Revill, George (eds.) The Place of Music, The Guilford Press, New York and London, 1998.

128 Ibid., p.74.

129 Ibid., p.74.
130 Interviews with SIMP and Ravi Shanker (Maru Malarchi) yielded these names.

131 Interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi, 8 June 2004.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 Interview with Errol of SIMP, March 2004.

135 Interview with Ravi Shanker, 8 June 2004.

136 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

137 Interview with Mohd Rafee, Febuary 2004. July 2004 marked a remarkable change in Rafee's fortunes and there has been a more positive reception to his musical styles and songs.

138 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

139 E-interview with Rudra, October 2002.

140 E-interview with Narasimha, November 2002.

141 E-interview with Rudra, October 2002.