

## Tamil drama in colonial Madras: the Parsi theatre connection

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# Tamil drama in colonial Madras: the Parsi theatre connection

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## ABSTRACT

Tamil musical theatre (*isai natakam*) became a thriving form of public entertainment in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this formative period, Parsi theatre companies from Bombay frequented Madras and staged Urdu-language spectacles before heterogeneous audiences. The legacy of historical contact between Tamil drama and Parsi theatre is visible at multiple levels: nomenclature, tale types, song genres, orchestration, troupe organization, use of the proscenium stage. The positive reception of Parsi theatre in Madras, however, was not a foregone conclusion, given the linguistic, social, and cultural boundaries to be crossed. Through an analysis of Parsi company performances, this essay shows the process of creating a multilingual theatrical public at the crossroads of urban Madras. It brings to light the patronage of an unsung sector, the community of Urdu-speaking Muslims clustered around the titular nawabs of Arcot. The sponsorship of the Begum of the Carnatic for a local troupe, the Madras Mahomedan Operatic Company, helped to disseminate the imported art, carrying it into wider networks of circulation.

## KEYWORDS

Tamil; Parsi; company drama; Urdu; Muslims

## Introduction

Towards the end of the 19th century, audiences throughout Madras Presidency flocked to the Tamil-language productions of commercial theatre troupes. Musical drama (*isai natakam*), then the prevalent theatre form, entered a phase of robust growth. The number of Tamil drama companies expanded into the hundreds. Professional actors and musicians counted in the thousands. Detailed handbills advertising local shows were distributed freely and snapped up by aficionados. The demand for live stage entertainment soared in the next few decades. The Tamil drama scene maintained its vigour well into the 20th century, beyond the advent of motion pictures.

In the same period, beginning in the 1870s, Indian drama companies managed by Parsis from Bombay travelled by land and sea to distant parts of South and Southeast Asia. To untapped audiences, they introduced the Parsi theatre, a popular hybrid form blending European stagecraft and imported genres like melodrama with Indian stories, poetry, and song types. Enthusiastically welcomed by local playgoers, Parsi theatre was transformed further as it was adapted to different environments. The novel practices of theatrical representation and troupe organization advanced by Parsi theatre companies aided the emergence of genres such as the Sinhala-language Nurthi in Colombo, the Malay Bangsawan in Penang and Singapore, and the Komedi Stamboel in Batavia and Surabaya.<sup>1</sup>

Parsi theatre troupes visited south India as well. Tamil scholars acknowledge that Parsi theatre contributed to the development of Tamil drama.<sup>2</sup> Yet little is known of the encounter between the linguistically disparate and aesthetically contrasting modes—one rooted in Indo-Islamic storytelling and Hindustani music, the other linked to Tamil ballads, myths, and the southern soundscape. The

ways in which the Tamil drama scene imitated, assimilated, or resisted the Parsi theatre have scarcely been explored.

If the interaction between Parsi theatre and Tamil drama worlds has been only superficially treated, this is in part because the measure of Parsi theatre activity in Madras has not yet been taken. When and where did Parsi troupes mount performances? What dramatic and musical fare did they offer, and to whom? What kinds of reception were they met with? These questions have been answered with some precision in other zones of intercultural contact.<sup>3</sup> But so far they have been missing from the narrative of Tamil theatrical development.

In this essay, I attempt to remedy this lack by taking three distinct yet interlinked approaches to the topic. I begin with a preliminary discussion that defines and contextualizes *isai natakam* and Parsi theatre. Then I present evidence showing, firstly, that Parsi touring companies did indeed exert a formative influence on the Tamil *isai natakam* and its allied arts. Examples of Parsi theatre impact are clearly visible in such areas as the translation of leading dramas, the naming of play texts and theatrical companies, and the adoption of melodic forms and instrumental accompaniment. The proliferation of Tamil-language drama companies and the growth of their regional and diasporic tours, moreover, testify to the power of the managerial model evolved by Parsi companies. Both kinds of changes to dramatic culture, at the levels of representation and socioeconomic organization, will be discussed.

Secondly, I aim to fill the lacuna regarding the day-to-day activities of Parsi theatre troupes in the Tamil region, specifically in urban Madras. I present a chronological summary of the first eight years of performances by Parsi theatre companies in the southern city. In those times, at the height of British rule, entertainment events were announced for the benefit of the public in English-language newspapers such as *The Madras Mail* and *The Times of India*. Fortunately, these and other historical South Asian newspapers have been digitized and made available to researchers, yielding a trove of information related to Parsi-run companies, managers, repertoires, and patrons. The archive shows the presence of Parsi theatre for several decades, among other entertainments in the colonial port. I argue that Parsi theatre created an interstitial space between the emergent Tamil drama and the English theatricals of the resident British.

In the third section, I consider how Parsi theatre set down roots and acquired a local following. Certain social groups cemented the popularity of Parsi theatre in Madras. I consider the key role of elite sponsorship, identifying the titular nawabs of Arcot as early proponents of the new art. Surprisingly, a senior lady of the royal family became a sponsor of theatrical events, elevating Parsi drama's prestige in Madras society. I also identify the significant involvement of local non-elite performers who served as mediators in the process of transplanting Parsi theatre. The support of such constituencies for an art introduced by outsiders contributed importantly to the Parsi theatre making inroads in Madras and interacting with such forms as *isai natakam*.

### Assessing *Isai Natakam*

For cultural historians, media scholars, and ethnomusicologists, among others, there are compelling reasons to consider the genealogy of *isai natakam*. The Tamil musical stage was a vigorous site of non-Brahmin cultural production. It maintained its vitality well into the 20th century, despite the efforts of upper-caste, middle-class reformists to reinvent the arts of music and dance in a neoclassical mode. Reaching across classes and far into the countryside, Tamil 'company drama', as it was often called, maintained its momentum even as performance practices underwent an ideological makeover in the nationalist period. Indeed, the Tamil popular stage often employed devadasis, non-Brahmins, Muslims, and other groups who were marginalized by the urban elite.<sup>4</sup>

The form dates to the early 1800s, when it evolved from ballads and devotional mono-dramas of the previous two centuries. It had only a distant connection to *kuravanci*, *pallu*, *nondi natakam*, and other genres. The drama texts or libretti were highly structured. Plays were literary compositions, fashioned from songs and poetic stanzas in distinct metres (*viruttam*, *taru*). Characters held

dialogues by singing stanzas back and forth to each other. The verses were sung to fixed modes (*raga*) and rhythms (*tala*) prescribed in the text, supported by percussion and melodic instruments. Prose took the form of explication (*vacanam*) spoken by the character following a stanza.<sup>5</sup>

The early textual tradition survives in palm-leaf manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> By the 1850s, libretti of popular *natakam* compositions were being printed and sold in the market. An early example, Kashi Vishvanath Mudaliar's *Dambacari Vilasam* was issued in 1851. The story of an arrogant young man ensnared by a dancer, the book went into four editions before the playwright died in 1871, and many versions appeared thereafter. By 1875, the *isai natakam* repertoire comprised 60–70 dramas on historical, social, and religious themes. Later, a veritable deluge of musical dramas issued from popular publishers. Many took the shape of poorly printed chapbooks adorned with slogans, ads, and borders, sold by hawkers in Gujili Bazaar and other downmarket areas.<sup>7</sup>

Tamil musical theatre's influence was felt far beyond the playhouse. The mainstay of *isai natakam* was vocal music, rendered by singing actors without benefit of amplification and accompanied by an instrumental ensemble. As Hughes shows, it was drama music that fuelled the early recording industry. Gramophone records brought the voices of drama artists into the private space of the home and made it possible for them to be heard over and over again. Live drama's hold on the public in turn boosted the circulation of early recordings, contributing to the commercial success of the new commodity. Top singers of the day joined the drama troupes, figures such as S. G. Kittappa, K. B. Sundarambal, and N. S. Shanmugam. Through this cross-fertilization, art music acquired a mass audience, even as theatrical versions of celebrated songs reached an expanded market.<sup>8</sup>

When Tamil sound films came along in the 1930s, singing stars and stage musicians brought their repertoires, styles, and accompaniments directly into the cinematic medium. It was not only the drama song that migrated from the older theatrical context into the exhibition spaces for film. Early Tamil films were exact reproductions of plays: some opened with a shot of the curtain going up. Dramatic format, repertoire of plays, manner of acting, costumes, painted backdrops—all were incorporated into Tamil cinema. Despite the influence of Hollywood, the idiom of Tamil drama prevailed for decades, bred in the bone of actors and directors who came out of the theatre. To an unusual degree, the legacy of late 19th-century stage conventions lives on in Tamil cinema today, to the detriment, arguably, of the art and craft of filmmaking.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from delivering entertainment, Tamil drama companies created a fertile ground for training future leaders in oratory and political leadership. Theatre troupes popularized an ornamented form of spoken Tamil that was deployed in public speech-making. According to Bate, oratory, whether in drama, religious discourse, or electioneering, was tagged as *medaitamil*, 'stage Tamil'. Tamil drama circles were active during the freedom struggle led by Gandhi. Patriotic songs, symbols, and stories appeared on stage despite government censorship, rallying crowds in support of nationalist sentiments.<sup>10</sup>

Drama companies, the Tamil cinema, and Dravidian politics formed a potent nexus that still operates. A generation of filmstars-turned-politicians was schooled in the Tamil drama companies. These actors formed the core of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the political party that took office in Tamilnadu in the 1960s and remains a bastion of power in the state. The DMK was founded in 1949 by C.N. Annadurai. M. Karunanidhi was the head of the party from 1969 to 2018. Both leaders were actors in M. R. Radha's Social Reform Company and wrote stage plays and screenplays. M.G. Ramachandran was Chief Minister of Tamilnadu from 1977 to 1987. He began his stage career at the age of six in the Madurai Original Boys Company. Numerous other party stalwarts grew up in the drama companies.<sup>11</sup>

## Parsis and Madras

Although their numbers are much reduced, the Parsis were once a prominent social and economic group in India. They constituted 6% of the population of Bombay in 1881, and their clout vastly exceeded this figure. Followers of Zoroastrianism, a pre-Islamic religion, they had immigrated from

Iran to Gujarat a thousand years earlier. During the 18th century, many Parsi families moved from their village homes to Bombay, leaving behind rural occupations of agriculture and weaving for careers in trade and finance, often in collaboration with the British. As brokers of European mercantile interests, they interacted with colonial elites and were exposed to English education. Young Parsi men took an interest in dramatics at the newly opened Elphinstone College in Bombay. They formed amateur clubs to experiment with play-acting and staging dramas after the European manner. By the late 1860s, these clubs were being turned into commercial assets by Parsi businessmen. With their entrepreneurial skills and fondness for theatrical exhibition, the Parsis ushered in the era of modern theatre in South Asia.

The designation ‘Parsi theatre’, however, remains problematic. Neither the performers nor the audience were exclusively Parsi. Parsi religion, culture, and history only occasionally were treated by playwrights. Plots were mainly borrowed from Indo-Islamic romances, European melodramas, or Shakespeare. The Parsi theatre was a hybrid formation and a product of colonialism. It was heavily overlaid with a northern character through its music, poetry, and repertoire. Originally, certain dramas were performed in Parsi-inflected Gujarati, but soon Hindustani (Urdu) became the language of choice in the Parsi theatre, until much later when Hindi assumed this position.<sup>12</sup>

These nuances carried little meaning in the Tamil context. Demographic records show that very few Parsis lived in colonial Madras in the later 19th century. Most of the locales to which Parsi troupes journeyed, including those in Southeast Asia, were part of a global Parsi diaspora. Small communities of traders, bankers, and professionals provided a core of support for travelling thespians and served as interpreters and agents. But in Madras, the situation was unique. Parsi theatre flourished without the presence of Parsis. Only in 1876 was a Parsi panchayat with five members formed. The first priest was appointed in 1906 and a fire temple dedicated only in 1910.<sup>13</sup> Madras residents therefore had little acquaintance with Parsis, and few preconceived ideas of things Parsi. The arrival of theatre troupes in 1875 provided their first exposure.

## Imprint on Tamil Drama

Parsi troupes visited Madras for decades, leaving visible traces on Tamil drama at multiple levels: textual borrowings, sonic appropriation, management practices. This discussion will focus on those aspects for which the best evidence exists. Costumes, makeup, stage design, and character types, all of which may indeed show Parsi theatre influence, are omitted because they need further study. Nor is there sufficient data to develop a timeline of changes to *isai natakam*. A more comprehensive genealogy awaits the contribution of scholars with facility in Tamil. Ideally, it should involve close reading of play texts, drama notices, Tamil-language newspapers and journals, and memoirs and autobiographies. This treatment is meant as a first step.

The most obvious instance of Parsi theatre impact is the adoption into Tamil of ‘Parsi’ to refer to a theatrical style or genre. In Madras, the Parsi community was next to non-existent, but in the drama world, ‘Parsi’ became a buzzword, a trend-setter. Losing its reference to an ethnic or religious group, the label was appropriated as a descriptor of a prestigious new art form. ‘Parsi’ even came to be used for Tamil actors and actresses and was attached to the name of Tamil drama companies.<sup>14</sup> Most notably, Tamil plays had ‘Parsi’ added as a generic marker. Drama notices announcing plays with ‘Parsi’ in the title are present in the Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai. During my visit to RMRL in late 1997, I found catalogue entries for 58 ‘Parsi’ Tamil plays. I subsequently obtained a microfilm of about one hundred Tamil drama notices and had a number of them translated. Many of these too were announcements of ‘Parsi’ plays.

Libretti in the RMRL collection bear titles beginning ‘Parsi’, e.g. Kottaru V. Udaiyar Pillai, *Parsi Nutana Kovilan Caritram* (1917). The Parsi label was not restricted to dramas of northern origin. It was applied to plays based on old Tamil legends (*Parsi Satharam*, *Parsi Lalithanki*), as well as to newer themes (*Parsi Gul-e Bakavali*).<sup>15</sup> (Figure 1.) Printed plays held in the British Library also





**Figure 2.** Tamil film song book for *Gul-e Bakavali*, 1935. Courtesy of Roja Muthiah Research Library.

Fourthly, Tamil drama companies adopted the harmonium and tabla, and this pair of instruments formed the core of the orchestra. The harmonium came into South India through Parsi theatre, according to Baskaran.<sup>21</sup> Drama notices posted the names of harmonium and tabla players under their lists of actors. Photographs taken for the purpose of marketing drama records picture these instruments. (Figure 3.) One of the great harmonium players was K. S. Devudu Iyer, hailed as Harmoniac [sic] Chakravarthi Sangeetha Rathnam ('emperor of harmonium, crown jewel of the art of music') on a drama notice for *Parsi Gul-e Bakavali*. Another was the female artiste, Madurai M. R. Vasavambal, who managed her own company.<sup>22</sup> Extant audio tracks from the period, such as those of S. G. Kittappa, confirm the use of these instruments. Vintage recordings of Vasavambal, Devudu Iyer, and Khader Batcha, preserved on YouTube.com, provide listening pleasure and insight into the stature of the harmonium in Tamil musical drama.<sup>23</sup>

Professional management of drama troupes and the growth of a commercial theatre industry comprise another area of Parsi theatre influence. Itinerant actors and musicians formerly roamed the villages in the Tamil region, seeking employment from headmen. After a fee was negotiated, the troupe performed gratis for all spectators.<sup>24</sup> Selling tickets to drama shows was a newer practice, although the impetus did not come solely from Parsi theatre. Ticketed shows were advertised in the early 1870s, suggesting that Tamil drama exhibition had already become a commodity in Madras.<sup>25</sup> The process quickened with the advent of Parsi troupes as well as travelling *natak* companies from



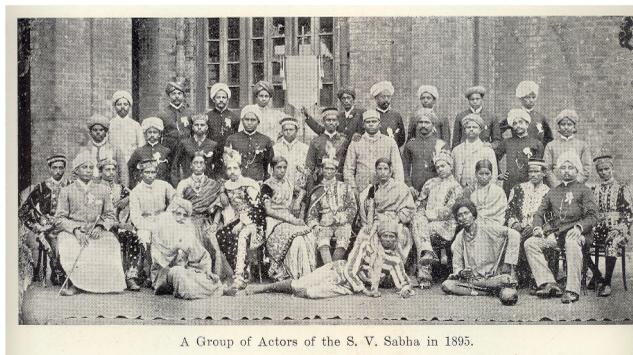
SARASWATHI STORES DRAMATIC PARTY.

**Figure 3.** Saraswathi Stores Dramatic Party.

Courtesy of Stephen Hughes, 'Music in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', reproduced with permission.

Maharashtra.<sup>26</sup> One of the first middle-class actor-managers to organize a professional Tamil company was Govindaswami Rao, a government official who took inspiration from Marathi theatre troupes.<sup>27</sup> Rao also adapted Indo-Islamic tales found in the repertoire of Parsi theatre companies, an innovation that has escaped notice until now.<sup>28</sup>

Two icons of drama history expanded the company concept and greatly enlarged the reach of Tamil drama. Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar, a social reformer and lawyer, founded the Suguna Vilasa Sabha in 1891. A prolific playwright, he adapted Shakespeare into Tamil and favoured a literary approach to dramaturgy. His long-lived company popularized musical drama among the urban elite. His activities in the Tamil diaspora deserve greater attention, in that he toured Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, and Singapore.<sup>29</sup> (Figure 4.) Sankaradas Swamigal was the second key figure, associated with the spread of professional theatre troupes outside Madras, particularly in southern Tamilnadu. He too toured abroad. His boys' companies achieved fame and led to a proliferation of this model. Both pioneers incorporated Parsi theatre style and managerial practice while promoting Tamil culture to a mass audience.



**Figure 4.** Actors of the Suguna Vilasa Sabha, 1895.  
Courtesy of Sriram V., private collection.

Finally, Parsi theatre productions raised the bar for spectacle through innovations in stagecraft and technology. Accounts that document elaborate special effects by Tamil troupes are few and far between. What the evidence does show is a shift to the proscenium stage as the preferred space for theatrical exhibition. Before the construction of European-style playhouses, a raised platform inside a *pandal*, a temporary thatched roof structure, served for the stage. *Pandals* were in common use in Madras into the 20th century, due to the dearth of proscenium theatres. Small stages for English dramatics had opened earlier in College Hall and the Banqueting Hall, but only with the completion of the Victoria Public Hall in 1887 did a purpose-built stage become available to all. This theatre was the home base of the Suguna Vilasa Sabha for thirty years and the preferred venue for foreign touring companies and official government functions. (Figure 5.) The proscenium arch, curtains, backdrops, footlights, and stage props became indexical of Tamil musical drama. Sketches representing the picture frame stage appeared in advertisements for drama records. (Figures 6, 7.)

Theatres such as the Victoria Public Hall ensured respectability for the revamped *isai natakam* through the regulation of time and space. Newspapers announced that doors opened at 8 p.m., the play began at 9, and carriages arrived at 1 a.m. to take the spectators home. This fixed sequence contrasted with the all-night viewing habits for *isai natakam*. Separation of seating by class and sex was also prescribed, guaranteeing propriety. The most expensive seats cost Rs. 2 (sofa accommodation); access to the separate gallery for ‘Hindu females’ was only six annas.<sup>30</sup>

In short, by the early decades of the 20th century, Tamil musical drama, circulating through a professionalized company system, displayed various aspects of Parsi style and practice. Local companies at times adapted the nomenclature, tale types, and melodic forms of Parsi theatre, while emulating troupe formation and structural properties of the proscenium stage. Tamil dramatists advertised their linkage to the imported art, adding ‘Parsi’ as a label to identify titles, songs, even actors. There is evidence to argue that *isai natakam* became a composite form, that a ‘Parsi-Tamil’ synthesis of sorts occurred. This appears to be the case in the acceptance of harmonium and tabla as the quintessential *natakam* orchestra. But the extent and duration of Parsi influence cannot really be evaluated without more thorough study. What this review does make clear is that playwrights, publishers, performers, and playgoers perceived ‘Parsi-ness’ in a desirable light and sought to connect their evolving project to it. How Parsi theatre came to acquire this positive aura is the concern of the next two sections, in which details of the history of Parsi troupes in Madras is presented.



Figure 5. Victoria Public Hall.  
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



RECORD NO. C A. 713

PRICE RS. 2/12

WHO WANTS TO LAUGH ?

—HEAR THIS RECORD!

Latter day developments in  
South Indian Tamil Stage  
are faithfully recorded here.

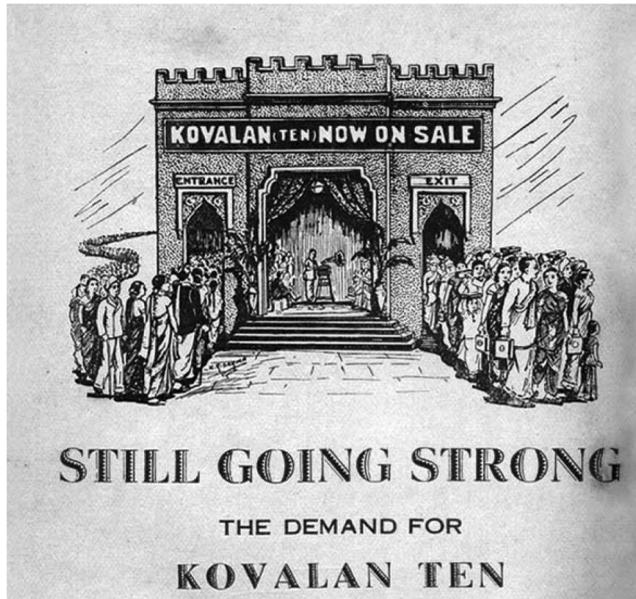
**BUY A RECORD AND ENJOY.**

**Figure 6.** Odeon record advertisement, from Saraswathi Stores catalogue, 1934. Courtesy of Stephen Hughes, 'Music in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', reproduced with permission.

### Parsi troupes come to Madras

Although Parsi theatre left obvious traces on Tamil drama, no one has examined the records that exist in regard to Parsi dramatic activity in colonial Madras. My research supplies a missing piece of Madras's cultural history. The narrative of Parsi dramatic performances described herein is based on advertisements and reviews in historical English-language newspapers.<sup>31</sup> While documentation of performances is the primary goal of this section, I am also concerned with issues of reception. My working assumption is that Parsi theatre was at first strange, even incomprehensible, to Madras audiences, on account of differences of language, story lore, poetic expression, musicality, stage conventions, and exhibition practices. Social and geographic boundaries also separated the new entertainment from older forms like *isai natakam*. How then did Parsi theatre become accessible? How did it convert its alien image into one of allure?

To answer these questions, I begin with the topography of urban performance in colonial Madras. In the 19th century, Tamil theatre was located in Georgetown and People's Park. Georgetown (known as Black Town until 1911) was a densely settled neighbourhood, a hub of commerce, and home to diverse communities—Jains, Marwaris, Armenians, and Jews, as well as Tamil and Telugu speakers. Sambanda Mudaliar mentions theatre shows being staged in Kotwal



**Figure 7.** Advertisement for *Kovalan*, ten-record set offered by Saraswathi Stores, 1934. Courtesy of Stephen Hughes, 'Music in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', reproduced with permission.

Chavadi, the wholesale vegetable market, and Chengankadai, where the company of Govindaswami Rao performed.<sup>32</sup> Newspapers cite Tamil drama occurring on Wall Tax Road, Yagatha Covil Street, Nootu Pulliar Covil Street, Trivettore High Road, Mint Street, Mafuskhan Gardens, Govindappa Naick Street, and Thathamootheappen Street, all in Georgetown or Washermanpettah to its north.

English theatricals also flourished, but in a very different part of the city. The sites varied from army barracks to private villas to secluded properties apart from bazaars and roadways. Dramatic performances took place at the Pantheon or Assembly Rooms in Egmore until 1827. The Banqueting Hall, later Rajaji Hall, was favoured for touring artists like Grace Egerton. The most important locus was College Hall near the Cooum River. From 1837, this was the stage of the Madras Dramatic Society and the place where Sambanda Mudaliar witnessed drama as a boy.<sup>33</sup> In addition to amateur theatricals, College Hall hosted the globe-trotting companies of Dave Carson, Alice May, Carry George, and Daniel Bandmann.<sup>34</sup>

Into the divide between Black Town and White Town stepped the Parsi theatre. Visiting troupes chose public spots in the central city, areas that accommodated a mix of people and were well connected via major thoroughfares. A one-off performance occurred at the palatial Royapuram Railway Terminus, north of Georgetown. The Esplanade, a broad area near the seafront, served as home to Parsi theatre for many years. Victoria Pavilion on Bell's Road, across from the Chepauk Palace, was a third venue. This area was adjacent to Triplicane, residence of many Urdu-speaking Muslims. These locations ensured access by all classes of public, even as they benefited from proximity to visible landmarks. (Figure 8.)

The Parsi actor-managers who travelled from Bombay to Madras were adventurers, intent on crossing rough terrain with large parties of men and supplies. They also were English-educated gentlemen, prepared to negotiate boundaries of race, class, religion, and language. They succeeded, rather miraculously, in both kinds of aims, and thereby created an interstitial theatrical space. Cooverji Sorabji Nazir (1846–87?) had been at the forefront of drama activities since his youth. He founded the Parsi Elphinstone Dramatic Society while at college and later transformed it into a professional company. In 1874, he led the Victoria Theatrical Company on a lengthy tour to Delhi, Lucknow, Calcutta, Banaras, and Poona.<sup>35</sup> Dadabhai Sohrabji Patel (1844–76) was the elder brother



**Figure 8.** Map showing three locations of Parsi theatre in colonial Madras. Based on *Constable's Hand Atlas of India*, 1893. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

of the famous revolutionary, Madame Bhikaiji Cama. He had been Nazir's classmate at Elphinstone College, going beyond him to earn a Master of Arts degree. (He was fondly called Dadi Patel M.A.) Patel ventured south in 1872 to the princely state of Hyderabad; his performances earned kudos from the Nizam himself.<sup>36</sup> Emboldened by these forays and driven by personal rivalry, Nazir and Patel brought their companies to Madras at the same time. Both drew from the ranks of the Victoria Theatrical Company, the leading troupe of Bombay.

*The Madras Mail* began covering the tours in the fall of 1875. Productions of *Gul-e Bakavali*, *Hatim Tai*, and *Coroner's Jury* were reported upon favourably, but the performance of the *Indar Sabha* truly hit the mark, meeting with 'very great success' from the Triplicane audience.<sup>37</sup> This pageant featured four singing fairies and was considered the epitome of aristocratic refinement, having originated in Lucknow. It became the vehicle for the ascent of Parsi theatre in Madras, starting a trend that lasted for decades and produced a plethora of iterations.

Patronage by British royalty soon followed. In late 1875, Albert, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), came to Madras on the first extensive monarchical tour of India.<sup>38</sup> Grand preparations were

made for maximum spectacle. The Parsi troupe of Dadi Patel was engaged to perform a scene from *Shakuntala* before the royal party.<sup>39</sup> A vast stage was constructed across two railway platforms at the Royapuram station. The painted curtain showed a jungle with potted ferns and stuffed bears, tigers, and monkeys arranged in poses.<sup>40</sup> The Prince and his entourage arrived at midnight and were entertained by dancing girls and instrumental musicians. Exhausted perhaps, they left at 2 a.m. without witnessing the drama, but spectators who remained were well amused.<sup>41</sup> Patel and company reprised *Shakuntala* for the general public a week later. The remainder of his southern tour was clouded by misfortune. Travelling back from Madras, he fell seriously ill. He died in Bombay in 1876, at the age of 32. After Patel's death, a new team took over and soon returned to Madras.<sup>42</sup>

For a number of seasons, the troupes linked to Nazir and Patel maintained a competition at Esplanade Pandal, also called Monument Esplanade.<sup>43</sup> The site was in an open area connecting the Fort (the old East India Company headquarters), to People's Park and Georgetown, where Tamil dramas took place. During 1876, the Victoria Company of Nazir presented *Gul-e Bakavali*, *Alladin*, and three other Indo-Islamic tales.<sup>44</sup> (Figure 9.) The so-called Original Victoria company, the offshoot started by Dadi Patel, presented *Shakuntala*, *Indar Sabha*, and *Tara* in August 1876. They repeated *Indar Sabha* to a sold-out crowd in December.<sup>45</sup>

Over the next few years, the Victoria Company came to Madras but received little press.<sup>46</sup> Nazir led an Italian opera troupe to the city in 1879.<sup>47</sup> Tours to Madras were eclipsed, perhaps, by the peregrinations of Parsi troupes to Rangoon, Penang, and Singapore. Then in 1881 Nazir brought twenty artists, rechristened the Victoria Opera Troupe, for an ambitious season.<sup>48</sup> For the opener, he chose *Romeo and Juliet*, restyled *Anjam-i Ishq* (The Ends of Love). Nazir's advertising campaign showed his strategy. While courting British officialdom and projecting an anglophilic image, he painted the Parsi theatre as a 'native' or Indian enterprise. Shakespeare would be adapted 'to suit

**Reduced prices Reduced prices.**

**ESPLANADE PANDAL.**

Opposite the Telegraph Office.

**THIS EVENING—SATURDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 1876.**

**THE PARSEE VICTORIA THEATRICAL**  
**COMPANY.**

Will perform on this occasion the Charming  
Opera of  
**ALLADIN**  
OR  
**THE WONDERFUL LAMP.**

The Plot of the Opera is taken from the very  
interesting story of  
**THE ARABIAN NIGHTS.**

**PRICES OF ADMISSION AS USUAL.**

Tickets to be had at the China-Depot of Messrs.  
**LIMJI & Co., Mount Road, and also at Old**  
**Jail Street, No. 16, from 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. and**  
**on the night of the Performance.**

**Figure 9.** Advertisement of Madras performance of *Alladin*.

*The Madras Mail*, 22 July 1876, 1, from South Asian Historical Newspapers Database, courtesy of Readex.

native tastes'. Original scenes would be inserted and 'the choicest bits of native music' added.<sup>49</sup> Nazir thereby distinguished his project from the largely inaccessible English theatre, while appropriating its timeless Bard.

At Nazir's 'Grand Farewell Performance', selections from twelve plays and three farces were presented. The final song was 'Good Bye, Madras', composed for the occasion.<sup>50</sup> But Nazir's farewell was only temporary. He was back again the next year, appearing in the posh neighbourhood of Chintadripet at the mansion of Murugappa Mudaliar.<sup>51</sup> Nazir's *pandal* was once more dubbed Victoria Pavilion. For the first time, the audience included 'some Parsee gentlemen and ladies'. During this tour, Nazir's upped the ante on spectacle with an all-female cast for the *Indar Sabha*. Even 'the comely Indur' and 'the handsome Goolfam' were played by lady artistes.<sup>52</sup> *Gul-e Bakavali* ran a tight second as the company's signature piece. *Shakuntala*, *Badr-e Munir* and *Benazir*, *Aladdin*, and *Lal and Gohar* were other favourites during Nazir's Madras tours.

Nazir and his company receive no mention in Madras newspapers after 1883, except for a report of their sojourn to London, England. This extraordinary venture met with modest critical success but resulted in litigation and financial loss.<sup>53</sup> Upon returning to India, Nazir performed in Bombay with Mary Fenton, the first white actress of the Parsi stage, after organizing the Jubilee Theatrical Company in honour of Queen Victoria. Then he slipped from the record, with no date of death known.<sup>54</sup> Other Parsi theatre groups continued to ply the circuit connecting Kerala, Mysore, Bangalore, Madras, Ootacamund, Trichinopoly, Coimbatore and other southern cities.<sup>55</sup> The Esplanade Pandal dedicated to Parsi theatre was still in use in 1903, when an arsonist tried to burn it down.<sup>56</sup> By then, local troupes had taken up Hindustani theatricals, and Tamil drama was flourishing under Parsi influence.

This section, to review, goes well beyond the vague references to Parsi theatre in histories of Tamil drama, profiling the companies, personalities, venues, and entertainments that came to Madras. In the early years, two expert troupes made frequent visits, stoking local interest as they competed against each other. Some of what they offered was already familiar to Tamils: old stories like *Shakuntala*, singing actors, buffoonery, ticket sales. But much was novel too. Parsi dramas mainly featured fairies and jinns or tragic lovers like Laila and Majnun. They invoked exotic, Islamicate locations, not the puranic landscape of Hindu gods and sages. Strange to most Madras spectators, too, were the expressive forms: the sonorous Urdu language, the metaphors of Sufi-inflected *ghazals*, the catchy song-and-dance items, the *raga*-based tunes. Above all, the raised stage with its painted backdrops, wings, curtains, and orderly timings and seating arrangements intrigued viewers and created new artistic and social possibilities.

We know from the evidence of the previous section that Tamil spectators and dramatists engaged with this new order of theatricality despite the boundary crossing that was involved. The data is dense enough to suggest how the transition began. Parsi companies pitched their *pandals* at the crossroads of urban Madras, drawing in the curious of all classes. Flamboyant, multilingual actor-managers like Nazir made repeated appeals to the public, varying the productions. The Parsi thespians reached out to elite Tamilians and Europeans by issuing English handbills and advertising in English newspapers. They ramped up spectacle and catered to both anglophilic and nativist sensibilities. Yet Parsi theatre also found a niche in one particular community in Madras. In the following section, the special relationship that developed between Parsi theatre and the city's Muslim population comes to the fore.

### Reception, cultivation, transmission

Critical to the transplantation of Parsi theatre to Madras soil were playgoers who could relish it and embrace it as a legitimate cultural expression. Colonial Madras is not usually remembered for its robust Muslim population, nor is its enclave of Indo-Muslim culture well-known. Thus it comes as a surprise that an Urdu-speaking Muslim community proved central to the early reception of Parsi theatre in Madras. In this section, I take a close look at the 'Mahomedans', as they were labelled in

the English newspapers, who attended Victoria Theatrical Company shows. Chief among them were the princes and begums who served as royal patrons, championing Urdu drama amidst the upper echelons of colonial society. These privileged cityfolk facilitated the transmission of the imported form to local performers, who imitated it and circulated it more widely.

Several different Muslim groups inhabited Madras in the later 19th century. In Madras Presidency overall, Muslims comprised 6% of the population, but their proportion in the city was much higher, approximately 15%.<sup>57</sup> The three largest Muslim groups were the Malayalam speakers, known as Mapillas; Tamil Muslims; and Urdu-speaking Muslims. It was the latter that dominated in Madras, with 92% of Muslim residents of the city claiming Hindustani, rather than Tamil or Telugu, as their mother tongue.<sup>58</sup>

Whereas the Tamil Muslim community was based in Georgetown, Urdu-speaking Muslims resided primarily in Triplicane. Their ancestors were alleged to be northern administrative and military groups, and they tended towards the aristocratic self-image of the Muslims of the north.<sup>59</sup> In the 19th century, the community clustered in the neighbourhoods inhabited by the Arcot royal family and their dependents. After Amir Mahal became the princes' quarters in 1876, a large population flourished in that area. Earlier, Shadi Mahal and Chepauk Palace had been their official residences.<sup>60</sup>

The prominence of the Urdu-speaking Muslims was closely connected to the political fortunes of the Arcot rulers. This dynasty, also known as the nawabs of the Carnatic or the Walajah nawabs, was installed by Aurangzeb in 1692 and soon became a significant force in south India. Their ancestral home was Gopamau in Hardoi District, Uttar Pradesh, far to the north. First ruling from Gingee, the nawabs shifted their capital to Arcot, 70 miles from Madras, in 1710. Under Muhammad Ali Khan Walajah (r. 1750–1795), the state reached its zenith. Its fortunes waned as the East India Company gained the upper hand in the region. The last reigning nawab was Ghulam Muhammad Ghaus Khan (1824–1855). When he died with no legitimate male heir, the British annexed the state by the doctrine of lapse. The lineage continued under titular princes who, although stripped of their power to rule, maintained large households and received sizable pensions from the British.

The cultural proclivities and patronage of the nawabs stand out as factors contributing to the Parsi theatre finding a foothold in Madras. The Arcot rulers, like the Mughal successor states, lavished money on public improvements and support of literati.<sup>61</sup> Under their stewardship, Madras became a centre of Indo-Muslim scholarship and literary production. They actively recruited poets and other learned men and themselves engaged in poetic composition. Ghulam Ghaus Khan wrote under the pen-name 'Azam' (the great) and held an erudite weekly assembly focused on debating the composition of Persian poetry. These activities were documented in the *Gulzar-e Azam* (*Azam's Rosegarden*) attributed to him and other *tazkirahs* (biographical anthologies) written during his reign.<sup>62</sup>

Alongside poetry, the nawabs cultivated music and dance as valued adjuncts to courtly life. Sponsoring recitals was integral to the social performance of kingly largesse, going back to Muhammad Ali Walajah. Hindustani artists who performed for the court are identified in Muhammad Karim's *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, the early 19th-century chronicle of the times of Nawab Umdat-ul Umra (r. 1795–1801). Closer to the period under study, the locality around Amir Mahal became known as Kanchenwada after the relocation of numerous *kanchen* (dancing girls) to the vicinity. The neighbourhood's reputation as a locus of Hindustani music, ghazal recitation, and courtesan culture continued into the 20th century, as wider publics for these arts developed with the coming of cinema.<sup>63</sup> This zone of the city, rich in practitioners with performance skills and poetic expertise, was both a training ground for artists and an entertainment hub at the time of the Parsi theatre's arrival. The British may have usurped the nawabs' political power, but their cultural tastes still held sway, and migrants and visitors were drawn by the lure of aristocratic sponsorship.

Before resuming the narrative of theatrical history, one more social actor must be introduced. The royal lady known as the Begum of the Carnatic was a major figure in the rerooting of the Parsi theatre in Madras. Her given name was Khair-un-nissa (1834–1903). She hailed from Hyderabad

and was a cousin of the last ruler, Ghulam Muhammad Ghaus Khan. She became his first wife and, after his death, assumed a lofty position as the seniormost representative of the lineage. The begum played an important ceremonial role in Madras society in the 1870s and 80s, despite the fact that she was *gosha-nashin*, living in the women's quarters in accord with her high status. She served the cause of Parsi-Urdu theatre well. To honour British dignitaries, the begum sponsored grand performances of the *Indar Sabha* in her palace. Through backing local actors and patronage of Hindustani music, dance, drama, and poetry, she contributed to their positive reception and aided the circulation of Parsi theatre among the populace at large.

Support for this argument comes, again, from the historical newspaper archive. In 1877, a troupe called the Madras Mahomedan Operatic Company burst upon the scene. The company offered two plays per night, every other night, for four months. Altogether it introduced nine Urdu dramas to the audience at the Esplanade Pandal. Led by Haider Ali and Mahamed Zubi, the company earned praise for its scenic effects and was deemed 'highly creditable'. It is likely that the actors were Madras Muslims, possibly from the vicinity of Amir Mahal.<sup>64</sup>

Their season met with unprecedented publicity. Each drama received a lengthy (and often jocular) plot summary, attributed to a 'native critic' in *The Madras Mail*. The repertoire recapitulated favourite Parsi-Urdu plays of the era: *Indar Sabha*, *Gul-e Bakavali*, *Benazir and Badremunir*, *Laila Majnun*. It included some less popular plays known to be in circulation (*Jehangir Shah*, *Tara Begam*, *Akbar Shah*). The body of work suggests that not only was the Madras Mahomedan Operatic Company inspired by the visiting Parsi dramatists, they were quite possibly instructed by them and given access to their libretti.

The Madras Mahomedans quickly attracted the attention of the Arcot princes and the Begum of the Carnatic. After five or six shows of *Indar Sabha*, the troupe announced a special performance 'under the distinguished patronage of Nawabs Oomdut-ood-Doulah, and Mozooddoula, brothers of the present Prince of Arcot'.<sup>65</sup> Although this was a public, ticketed performance, the nawabs enacted the gestures of courtly patronage, proffering shawls to the performers at the end of the play. Such a demonstration of royal approbation cemented the tie between the court and the troupe, a bond that continued to develop.

The Madras Mahomedan Operatic Company left on tour in early 1878. When it returned, the Begum of the Carnatic entertained the governor of Madras with a performance of the *Indar Sabha*. She had a theatre specially constructed in her palace in Umdah Bagh (MacLean's Garden). Scenic effects such as fairies flying with their wings on fire and Indar entering in a six-pointed star showed the hand of seasoned artists like the Madras Mahomedans. Accompaniment was provided by 'cithern' and 'tom-tom', that is, sarangi and tabla.<sup>66</sup>

Several months later, the company was commissioned again by the begum. Under the banner of 'The Madras Mahomedan Royal Theatrical Club', they played at the Monument Esplanade 'at the request of Her Highness'.<sup>67</sup> Over the next decade, she hosted at least three governors and held other soirées in honour of British officialdom. Dramatic entertainment was invariably on offer, and the *Indar Sabha* continued to be the favourite piece. In 1888, a party for Lord and Lady Connemara and the Maharaja of Travancore centred around it. As on other occasions, the begum was represented by her agent, Mirza Firoz Husain. When Husain's son, whom the begum had adopted, was feted for keeping his first fast, the *Indar Sabha* was performed in a large *pandal* at a garden party.<sup>68</sup>

In this way, the Begum of the Carnatic perpetuated her late husband's legacy as a patron of poetry, song, and dance. The Madras Mahomedan players benefitted from her personal favour, launching tours beyond Madras to Rangoon, Hyderabad, and Bellary. Her cultural ambassadorship, moreover, operated in an enlarged social network, catering to British colonial officials and the cream of society. The house of Arcot, despite having ceded their dominions to the British and being perpetually in their debt, continued to hold court, felicitating each new appointee to the Madras governership. Through exhibiting the *Indar Sabha*, a play that depicts the seeking and granting of royal approbation, relations with colonial rulers were both ludically inverted and strategically consolidated.

For the Muslims of Triplicane, then, the Parsi theatre presented an opportunity to celebrate their linguistic heritage, narrative traditions, lyric poetry, and musical arts. These forms in the public theatrical context were made respectable through association with royal patrons and British colonial agents. For Muslim performers in particular, the economic advantages were clearcut. Serving as interpreters and cultural promoters, actors like the Madras Mahomedans transmitted Indo-Muslim lore and sensibility to mixed audiences. For musicians of all backgrounds, careers opened up as tabla and harmonium moved into prominence in Tamil drama and other media. The Parsi-Muslim nexus stimulated creative energies that spilled outward and inspired artistic development in diverse communities.

## Conclusion

This study has focused attention on the formative role of Parsi theatre in the evolution of Tamil musical drama. We began with a catalogue of ‘Parsi’ traces in *isai natakam* in the early 20th century. Some of these–play titles, song types–were reported by Tamil theatre folk; others were described by scholars. What emerged from this survey was the positive valence attached to ‘Parsi’, a designation which had little to do with the Bombay community and instead indicated a fashionable medium or genre. How Parsi theatre came to acquire this positive aura was the concern of the remainder of the essay.

A retrospective tracking of Parsi troupe presence in 1870s Madras followed, based on news reports and publicity. This data gave insight into personalities, itineraries, and programmes, allowing us to gauge the appeal of the new medium and the challenges of creating an audience for it. Lastly, the mediational impact of Madras’s Urdu-speaking Muslims was highlighted. Parsi impresarios, wherever they travelled, required interlocutors who shared at least some of their cultural background. The discovery of palace parties featuring *Indar Sabha* shows, and the personal touch of an Arcot begum in arranging them, suggested that Parsi theatre represented cultural capital for local notables, and their patronage did much to sustain its prestige and popularity.

To be clear, Parsi players were not the only drama people on the move. Marathi-language troupes visited south India in the 1870s, as did Kannada and Telugu speaking companies from Mysore, Bangalore, and Bellary somewhat later.<sup>69</sup> Further research is necessary to understand the contribution of these other south Indian theatres to Tamil drama, and to assess the impact that Parsi theatre may have already exerted on their various regional drama styles. Nor does this project account for the effect of local practices, favourite legends, song types, ritual concerns, and variations that enriched Tamil drama as travelling companies absorbed inputs from all across the province. This study tells only part of the story of Tamil drama, but a significant one nonetheless. It inserts one chapter into a complex, multivocal evolutionary tale.

## Notes

1. Field, ‘Music for Inner Domains’; van der Putten, ‘Bangsawan’; and Cohen, ‘Komodie Stambel’.
2. Perumal, *Tamil Drama*; Baskaran, *History*; de Bruin, ‘History of Rural *natakam*’; Hughes, ‘Music in the Age’; Seizer, *Stigmas*; Mangai and Arasu, ‘Ushering Changes’.
3. Hansen, ‘Parsi Theatrical Networks’.
4. Baskaran, ‘Devadasi Influence’.
5. R.R.S., ‘Western Influence’, 493–4; Perumal, *Tamil Drama*, 34–5; and Ebeling, ‘Scandal of the Devadasi’.
6. Rangacharya, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 438–84.
7. Perumal, *Tamil Drama*, 221–45; and Venkatachalapathy, *Province of the Book*, 158–9.
8. Hughes, ‘Music in the Age’.
9. Baskaran, *History*, 23–42.
10. Hardgrave, ‘Politics and the Film’, 293; Bate, *Tamil Oratory*, 19; and Baskaran, *History*, 36–40.
11. Hardgrave, ‘Politics and the Film’, 295–98.
12. Hansen, ‘Languages on Stage’.
13. Mistry, ‘Parsis of Madras’.

14. Mangai and Arasu, 'Ushering Changes', 116; and Seizer, *Stigmas*, 89–92.
15. RMRL Drama Notices nos. 0030, 0032, 0061 (*Parsi Satharam*); 0038 (*Parsi Lalithanki*); 0034, 0047, 0058 (*Parsi Gul-e Bakavali*).
16. Barnett, *Supplementary Catalogue*, 183.
17. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the India Office*, 97.
18. Perumal, *Tamil Drama*, 225; and Soneji, 'Indra's Court'.
19. Mudaliar, 'Over Forty Years', 31–32.
20. Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*, 98–100.
21. Baskaran, *History*, 24.
22. Sai, *Drama Queens*, 37.
23. S. G. Kittappa, 'Kaami Satyabhama' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBtTD4bV01g> – viewed 27 January 2020. See also the Gramophone Dramatic Party's selections from several Tamil plays in the Archive of Indian Music on Soundcloud. <https://soundcloud.com/search?q=gramophone%20dramatic%20party> – viewed 28 January 2020. Additional clips from 1930s Tamil drama records can be found on YouTube (e.g., Victrophone Dramatic Party, Saraswathi Stores Dramatic Party).
24. 'Hindu Village Theatricals', MM, 21 Aug 1872, 2, and 'Popular Tamil Plays', MM, 10 Oct 1872, 2.
25. See display ads for *Dumbachari Velasum*, with three classes of tickets on offer. MM, 23 Aug 1872, 1; 30 Aug 1872, 1; 6 Sep 1872, 1.
26. The Kolhapurkar Natak Mandali and the Nutan Sanglikar Mandali both toured cities in south India, probably in the 1870s. Kosambi, *Gender, Culture and Performance*, 51–56.
27. De Bruin, 'History of Rural *natakam*', 59–60.
28. Ads for *Camalarzaman and Badora*, 'Manamohana Natakam Co.' MM, 24 July 1885, 1; and *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp*, MM, 7 July 1885, 5.
29. [https://www.sruti.com/index.php?route=archives/artist\\_details&artistId=274](https://www.sruti.com/index.php?route=archives/artist_details&artistId=274).
30. 'Victoria Public Hall, Grand Night', MM, 1 Nov 1889, 1.
31. *The Madras Mail* is held by Readex in the South Asian Newspapers database for the dates 15 December 1868 to 31 December 1889. *The Times of India* is available through ProQuest from 1838 until 2005.
32. Mudaliar, 'Over Forty Years', 29–30.
33. *Ibid.*, 26.
34. MM, 3 Aug 1877, 4; 5 Feb 1876, 3; 7 Apr 1874, 1; 20 Jan 1883, 1.
35. Gupt, *Parsi Theatre*, 117–19.
36. *Ibid.*, 115–17.
37. 'The Victoria Theatrical Company', MM, 2 Nov 1875, 2. Neither Nazir's nor Patel's name are mentioned in connection with the early performances.
38. Kaul, 'Monarchical Display', 464–9.
39. Namra, *Hindi Rangmanch*, 57–8.
40. *The Times of India*, 22 Dec 1875, 2.
41. 'It became evident that the enjoyment of the entertainment by the principal person had been sufficient, and he rose to go . . ., leaving the native drama, in four acts, to be seen by those who were determined to see, and the songs by celebrated artistes, and the concerted pieces on the vina, dol, and zither saranthé, to be heard by those who pleased to stay.' Russell, *Prince of Wales' Tour*, 338.
42. MM, 14 Aug 1876, 2.
43. The former cemetery called Monument, opposite the telegraph office on Poonamallee High Road, may have commemorated the son of Elihu Yale, the Governor of Madras. The 1871 Census says that it was erected for Yale's daughter, but both of Yale's daughters reached marriageable age, whereas a son died in Madras at age four. Cornish, *Census of Madras*, 48.
44. MM, 15 July 1876, 1; 18 July 1876, 1; 20 July 1876, 2; 22 July 1876, 1; 9 Aug 1876, 2; 21 Aug 1876, 2.
45. MM, 14 Aug 1876, 2–3; 18 Dec 1876, 2.
46. MM, 26 Aug 1878, 3; 19 May 1879, 2.
47. 'The Italian Opera Company', MM, 20 Feb 1879, 2; 25 Feb 1879, 1.
48. MM, 25 Nov 1881, 1; 27 Nov 1881, 1; 7 Dec 1881, 4; 22 Dec 1881, 3; 27 Dec 1881, 3; 31 Dec 1881, 3; 31 Jan 1882, 4; 4 Feb 1882, 4.
49. MM, 25 Nov 1881, 1.
50. MM, 4 Feb 1882, 3.
51. Murugappa Mudaliar's dwelling is mentioned as a 'grand bungalow' in a 1915 ballad. Sriram, 'Dancing All the Way'.
52. The show came from Calcutta, where 'it had to be repeated twice a week . . . in consequence of the ever increasing demand for it.' MM, 19 May 1883, 1.
53. MM, 24 June 1886, 3.
54. Gupt notes that Nazir died in Tonk while on a tour to the princely states. *Parsi Theatre*, 166, 192.

55. 'The Parsi Dramatic Company then performing at Trichinopoly, were kind enough to lend their dresses and scenery,' to help the students of S.P.G. College with a production of *King John*. 'Amateur Theatricals at Trichinopoly', MM, 12 Nov 1889, 3.
56. TOI, 16 June 1903, 5.
57. Vatuk, 'Islamic Learning', 64. 'Hindustani' was the term often used for the spoken language, encompassing a range of dialects, most notably Dakkhini Hindustani, the colloquial form prevalent in the south. Ibid., 51.
58. Based on the census of 1881. Ibid., 53.
59. McPherson, 'Muslims of Madras', 34–5. Fanselow, on the other hand, stresses the ethnic heterogeneity of the community and the assimilation of local upwardly mobile groups into the ruling class. 'Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu', 282.
60. Chepak Palace was the official residence from 1768 to 1855. Amir Mahal was built in 1798 but not occupied by the family until 1876. Before that, the Prince of Arcot lived in Shadi Mahal. Amir Mahal is still the home of the Arcot successors. Muthiah, *Madras Rediscovered*, 167–9.
61. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses*, 161.
62. Schwartz, 'Curious Case', 536–542.
63. Anwar, 'A Hindustani Tradition'.
64. The troupe was publicized as 'local': 'The Local Native Drama', MM, 22 Sep 1877, 2; 'The Local Hindustani Drama', MM, 29 Oct 1877, 2; 28 Nov 1877, 2.
65. 'Hindustani Theatre', MM, 27 Oct 1877, 3. The Prince of Arcot at the time was Zahir-ud-Daula (r. 1874–1879).
66. 'The Carnatic Begum's Entertainment', MM, 30 Jan 1879, 3. See also 'A Native Theatrical Entertainment', MM, 11 Jan 1879, 2.
67. 'The Madras Mahomedan Royal Theatrical Club', MM, 19 July 1879, 3.
68. 'The Begum's Party to the Ladies Grenville', TOI, 1 Dec 1880, 3; 'The Garden Party of H.H. The Begum', MM, 3 Feb 1885, 4; 'A Jubilee Entertainment at the Umdah Bagh', MM, 5 Mar 1887, 6; 'H.H. the Begum's Party to the Governor', MM, 1 Mar 1888, 5; 'A Garden Party', MM, 7 June 1889, 5.
69. For Marathi troupes, see Kosambi, *Gender, Culture and Performance*, 51–6. The Maharaja of Mysore's troupe made repeated visits to Tamilnadu. Ranganath, *Karnatak Theatre*, 107–112. Krishnamacharya's Telugu theatre company was a major influence on Sambanda Mudaliar. 'Over Forty Years', 29.

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