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THE MADRAS CORPORATION BAND: A STORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND INDIGENIZATION

by
Gregory D. Booth

Wind bands in South Asia are a ubiquitous and sometimes perplexing phenomenon. Their continued presence as musical symbols of status and prestige in public and private settings demonstrates an ongoing relationship with the region's colonial past, but simultaneously expresses the ability of South Asian cultures to refashion external cultural influences in ways that fit their own patterns of social organization and suit regional cultural needs. As the political and social realities of the subcontinent have changed, so naturally, have cultural needs and behaviors. This study presents a brief history of a particular wind band and considers that history in relation to changes in the band's surrounding cultural context. It raises questions regarding the processes of cultural interaction and the nature of attempts at adaptation or indigenization of foreign cultural elements in a specific South Asian culture area.

In early 19th-century India, the long-term presence and might of British interests were impinging with increasing force on South Asian consciousness. Many dependent and independent South Asian rulers sought to imitate the military and cultural attributes of the new power in the land. Military bands, and sometimes household wind bands as well, began to appear in the musical establishments of Indian royal courts. To be sure, these groups were often quite small, sometimes no more than a few bugles, fifes, and drums; such groups, nevertheless, form one important strand in the historical development of modern South Asian wind bands.

Flaes has emphasized the centrality of ex-royal and military musicians in the wind band, or wedding band, history of this region: he suggests that the earliest private wind bands "probably date from the turn of the century [i.e., circa 1900]. They were made up of musicians from princely orchestras and ex-military musicians" (1991: 66). While royal and military ensembles were influential, their initial period of influence followed the demise of the independent kingdoms of the mid-19th century (e.g., Nawabi Lucknow, Maratha Thanjavur, Sikh Lahore, etc.). It was at this point in South Asian history, when the dominance of British power was becoming increasingly clear (especially after the British victories of 1857), that private wind bands, operated and patronized by South Asians, emerged. In the example below, ex-royal bandsmen were pivotal in the dispersal of European instruments throughout much of south India.

I suggest that it was the presence of an Indian, state-sponsored wind band, and the example set by such a group, that helped motivate the subsequent indigenization and privatization of the royal Indian and British

wind band models. Although the first wind band musicians in early 19th-century India were almost certainly state-sponsored, in this particular instance the royal musicians provided a musical example for private entrepreneurship, but did not supply the initiative or all of the personnel. In the mid-20th century, the story of the Madras Corporation Band also demonstrates the reversal of the royal-private transformation of the mid-19th; this band is probably the first state-sponsored, non-military wind band in independent India.

The growing importance of wind bands in South Asia was driven by that culture's prodigious ability to incorporate the symbols of external cultures into its own network of cultural meanings. The move was fueled by the elite status of the original indigenous, royal owners of the "modern," foreign music and instruments. In part, it is because of their acceptance by Indian royalty that wind bands became symbols of wealth and prestige in processional social display. The acute business sense of many 19th-century South Asian musicians, some of whom were already engaged in the wedding music trade, quickly perceived opportunities in a new version of their centuries-old trade. In the second half of the 19th century the musicians created a supply of the new processional music that South Asians of all classes quickly learned to appreciate and demand.

Rather than a direct transformation of royal bandsmen into private bandsmen around 1900, the initiation of South Asian wind bands involved a wide variety of changing social identities, family histories, musical abilities, motivations, musical precedents, and social meanings. Each instance of the development of a 19th-century, indigenously-produced wind band offers an especially valuable example of South Asian culture's ongoing musical interaction with colonial British culture. I present here a specific instance from southern India in which a royal ensemble did, in fact, serve as a model that led directly to private enterprise. The history, performance practices, and musical repertoire of the Madras Corporation Band reflect changes in the control of political, economic, and cultural power, and in accompanying attitudes towards indigenous and colonial culture in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial South India.

In southern India, the musical interaction between British and Indian culture was quite enthusiastic. As shown in Karnatik music culture's early and overwhelming adoption of the violin, South Indians incorporated and adapted European instruments and musical materials to suit their own needs. This adaptation is also clearly illustrated by the development of at least one early wind band in this region. The three distinct stages of the Tanjore/Madras Corporation Band's social identity and professional musical career are reflections of changing social and political relationships and meanings in India as a whole.

The Royal Tanjore Band

Interest in the musical baggage of India's British invaders was manifested by rulers throughout the subcontinent soon after the British arrived in the mid-17th century. Probably the most widely and quickly adopted musical ensemble was that of the military. In southern India, painted scrolls from circa 1810-1820 show royal processions by the Maratha ruler of Thanjavur, Sarabhoj-ji II (1798-1832). He is surrounded by soldiers and musicians who are dressed in European and Indian clothing, and who are performing on European, as well as Indian, musical instruments; specifically, bugles and side-drums. While rulers may have readily absorbed the military ensembles along with the uniforms, formations, and other military hardware, an appreciation of European music itself seems to have been a taste which Indians acquired slowly. At least one British observer in Madras felt that the Indian populace was not fond of European music. In a letter to the Military Secretary of the Commander-in-Chief of Fort St. George (Madras) in 1813, Scott urged the formation of military bands in the native regiments of the East India Company Army as a means (among other things) of improving the appreciation of European music amongst the Indian population. Scott's perception was that European music was not highly regarded, "our musick [sic] not being in much repute among the Natives of India" (Scott 1813: 2).

Although a number of Indian rulers acquired military bands during the early 19th century, Sarabhoj-ji II is especially important for his patronage of what might be considered a more aesthetic application of the new instruments and musical styles. He "had a great liking for western Music. He had organised the Tanjore Band for the first time and collected western musical instruments like violin, clarinet, etc.," (Seetha 1981:111). The ensemble that Seetha calls the Tanjore Band was composed primarily of European wind (and string) instruments, with a repertoire predominantly - but not exclusively - Indian; it is the earliest-known non-military European-style ensemble on the subcontinent. The later history of the violin in South India is well known. The clarinet also became an important instrument, however; among other things, it was used at the Maratha court to accompany classical Indian dance. In addition, after the initial dominance of the bugle in processional contexts, the clarinet became a vital component of many processional music ensembles, including wind bands.

It is probably safe to assume that Sarabhoj-ji's clarinetists were either *nagasvaram* players themselves, or were members of traditional *nagasvaram* families. The double-reed *shahanai* and *nagasvaram* are the most common reed instruments in South Asia; family histories of contemporary clarinetists show that players of these double-reed instruments were the likely people to learn the new instrument. Shortly after Sarabhoj-ji's musicians acquired their clarinet-playing skills, the

clarinet's potential as a logical successor, replacement, or addition to the instrumental repertoire of South Asian double reeds was being demonstrated farther north, where some *shahanai* players in the 19th-century Lucknow court of Wazid Ali Shah were beginning to double on the British instrument (Imam, quoted in Neuman 1980:89).

Sarabhoj-ji II's royal favor may have been crucial in developing the cultural demand for wind band music that was later exploited by private groups. Seetha states explicitly that Sarabhoj-ji II "was chiefly responsible for popularising western music in Tanjore" (1981:111). He was not alone among 19th-century Indian rulers who demonstrated an interest in European music and instruments, but is one of few who actively supported the performance of indigenous music on European instruments. The court records of Sarabhoj-ji II's successor, Shivaji II (1832-1855), indicate that the patronage of western music and musicians, including the Tanjore Band, continued under this last Maratha ruler. As in other 18th- and 19th-century independent and semi-independent Indian kingdoms, western music and instruments demonstrated a ruler's increasing sophistication, his acknowledgment of British military power, and the desirability of these military and artistic symbols of British culture. By supporting the performance of European music and the performance of Indian music on European instruments, the Maratha rulers demonstrated both their ties to local culture and their acknowledgment of the new political reality.

This musical concession to British power, however, did not ultimately contribute to the survival of the Maratha kingdom. The dynasty came to an end in 1855; the following year, the British annexed the state into the growing Presidency of Madras. With the collapse of its patronage, the royal incarnation of the Tanjore Band came to an end. Seetha states that the decline of the Maratha court during the 1850s led to a dispersal of musicians to "different places like Trivandrum, Pudukkottah, Mysore, and the flourishing city of Madras" (1981:23).

Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band

In 19th-century Thanjavur, not only the royal musicians were acquiring new instrumental skills. Increasing numbers of *nagasvaram* musicians, perhaps inspired by the example of the royal musicians and responding to public acceptance if not demand, gradually replaced their traditional performance medium with the clarinet, or added the new instrument to their instrumental capabilities. These instruments were the "simple system" Müller clarinet with 13 or 14 keys, in both Bb and Eb soprano versions. The well-known South Indian clarinetist, A.K.C. Natarajan, states that the wider range of the instrument was an important

selling point, as was the novelty of the new instrument (personal communication, 1989).

Among the *nagasvaram* players learning to play the clarinet in 19th-century Thanjavur was an individual (his name is no longer known) born toward the end of Sarabhoj-ji's reign. According to his family's oral history, this individual played occasionally for the Maratha court and Thanjavur temples, but was not exclusively, or even primarily, a court musician. At some point in his career, however, he learned to play the clarinet from a British musician, also unknown, and later taught it to his sons: T. Balakrishnan (circa 1865-1925), T. Guruswami (circa 1870-1950), and T. Venkataraman (circa 1875-1945). The family information, names, and dates presented in this study are those recalled by K. Ramdass (circa 1922-1992), T. Balakrishnan's grandson.

As Seetha suggests, the later 19th century must have been a difficult period for musicians who chose or were compelled to remain in Thanjavur. The removal of both direct and indirect royal patronage and the growth of middle-class patronage in "the flourishing city of Madras" together may have contributed to a depressing patronage situation in what had been the cultural and economic center of the southern Maratha kingdom. The Balakrishnan family, however, remained in Thanjavur as wedding and temple musicians; by the time the brothers were old enough to participate with their father, the entire family was playing the clarinet, rather than the *nagasvaram*. More importantly for this study, the father and his sons were able to reincarnate the defunct royal Tanjore Band as a private wind band. Instead of performing for the Maharaja, this new band played for hire at weddings, religious processions and other public and private functions. In the family's oral history, this series of performances is described as an attempt to augment a declining patronage base; in other words, it was a primarily economic decision. In the early years of this group's history, band performance was probably a part-time undertaking, with the musicians playing other jobs as they were available.

There is no indication that this band was composed primarily or exclusively of ex-members the royal Tanjore Band or their sons, although any ex-court bandsmen who remained in Thanjavur at that time would naturally have been likely candidates. The important membership criterion seems naturally to have been a combination of skill on, and access to, a European instrument. One wonders whether Balakrishnan's father may have had access to the instruments collected by Sarabhoj-ji II, if not the bandsmen, or whether the ex-royal musicians took the instruments with them when they dispersed in search of greener pastures. No evidence exists for either conclusion. There is some evidence for a transfer of the instruments of state ensembles into the hands of private entrepreneurs in 1947, however, as I will illustrate below, so perhaps Balakrishnan's father

did manage to acquire some of the royal instruments. A final note in this list of uncertainties centers on the precise date of the band's founding. K. Ramdass believes that it was sometime in the 1870s or 80s, and that his great-grandfather was the initiator of the undertaking. If that is so, then a date in the 1870s seems the most probable. Available evidence strongly suggests that this ensemble was the first private wind band in South India. The name by which the group was identified, as late as 1911, suggests a relative scarcity of wind bands in the region; documents of The Gramophone Company from that year list them simply as "The Tanjore Band". In order to distinguish them from the royal Tanjore Band, I will refer to this group as "Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band."

The musicians of Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band combined their Indian repertoire of *kritis*, *tirupugals*, *varnams*, etc., with the repertoire of their new instruments, English marches and dance melodies, which they learned from various British musicians. Both the name, The Tanjore Band, and this syncretic repertoire appear in the documents and recordings of The Gramophone Company. The group's first recordings, made in 1905-6, do not, to my knowledge, survive, nor do a slightly earlier-made series (1904-5) made by an otherwise unknown group called Govindaswami Dasu's Band. Both bands' recordings were listed as Telugu or Tamil "tunes," which were actually classical compositions in most cases. Such listings seem to reflect The Gramophone Company's awareness of the linguistic subtleties of South Indian culture and the South Indian market more than they demonstrate their understanding of that culture's musical sophistication.

The earliest surviving recordings of Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band (and apparently of any wind band on the subcontinent) are a series of double-sided, 19-inch, 78 rpm recordings made in 1911. These were also by The Gramophone Company (HMV Nos. 10375-10380 and 10123-10130). The discs sold for three rupees each. V.A.K. Ranga Rao suggests that the group must have gone to Bangalore, where The Gramophone Company had a permanent recording studio, to make the records (personal communication).

Listening to these recordings, and considering the instrumentation of later ensembles, one can develop a fairly clear picture of the instrumentation used by the seven or eight musicians of Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band: two Bb clarinets; (probably) Eb soprano 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 (that is, Turkish) cymbals; and a drum (not a *tavil*). Balakrishnan is the leading clarinet player on this series, accompanied by his brothers. They recorded *varnams* and *kritis*, listed in The Gramophone Company brochure with a bewildering inconsistency: by title, by *ragam*, and sometimes simply

by the appellation “Tamil tune” or “Telugu tune” (e.g., “Ithuva Tillai sthalam ... Kafi-krithi, Jampey;” “Kirvani ... Tamil Tune;” etc.). Also included is one “English tune” (HMV, 1911:8-9). This last appears to be a collection of melodic strains from at least two British marches.

The Indian compositions heard in this series of recordings are performed at moderate tempos, between 68 and 110 beats per minute. We hear primarily two-part compositions; that is, the *pallavi* and *anupallavi* of the standard *kriti* or *varnam*. The band routinely performs the composed variations of these sections (*sangati*). Throughout the series, the cornetist plays the beginnings and ends of the *pallavi* and *anupallavi* phrases; in other words, the more or less syllabic sections. He routinely disappears, however, during the middle portions of phrases with increasingly complex *sangati*, leaving these more highly-ornamented and technically-challenging middle sections of the phrase to his reed-playing colleagues.

The 1911 performances also lack the sophisticated drumming that one expects of Indian classical music; the cymbals and the drum (it sounds like a simple British side drum) are limited exclusively to steady beats. These early recordings reveal clarinetists who have come to terms with their still-unusual instruments, but who are playing with other musicians still struggling to produce the melodic and rhythmic complexities of Indian music on European instruments.

There is no reason to think that these 1905-6 and 1911 discs were the only recordings made by the Tanjore Band in the early 20th century. The Gramophone Company certainly had a clearly-established marketing category in their catalogue (i.e., “Bands”) for groups such as those run by Balakrishnan and Govindaswami Dasu. The categorization suggests that by this time they had already solved the problem of where and how to list this type of ensemble and had decided that consumers would respond positively to such an appellation. Although they had chosen to remain in Thanjavur, the family and the band were finding enough patronage to allow the musicians to depend on their band performances for a significant proportion of their yearly income.

The establishment of the Tanjore Band as a private processional ensemble for hire, thus, represents an important milestone in a process of on-going musical and cultural change in southern India. In Thanjavur, and in other princely states, the presence of wind bands in the royal households had provided a model for musical change among non-royal musicians. Of perhaps greater long-term importance, however, these royal ensembles -- and the prestigious status they represented -- encouraged a cultural demand for wind bands among broader levels of Indian society. Wind bands became a new processional requirement as the public of central Tamil Nadu gradually learned to combine music ensembles and their concomitant layers

of cultural meaning. In public and private, religious and secular processions, *nagasvaram-tavil* musicians in their *dhotis* were appearing side by side with wind band musicians in their military-style uniforms.

After their 1911 recordings, the next documented appearance of the Tanjore Band is a recording series released by HMV in 1933 on their Black Label series (HMV Nos. P. 5866, 5961, 5962, 6302, 6303, and 6111). A number of important changes are evident between the 1911 and 1933 recordings. The record company was by this time more familiar with the nature of Karnatik music; each of these recordings is neatly listed by title and *ragam*; except for the last item, listed as “*Rama-Bhakthi*” (presumably a devotional song such as *kirtanam*), all the items are *kritis*. Most of the compositions are by Sri Tyagaraja, although two are by Patnam Subramania Iyer, who also appeared as a composer in the 1911 series. It is difficult to be definitive given the scarcity of information, but one suspects that HMV had clarified its understanding of the most productive consumer market for this music. Not only do the listings appear to be aimed at an Indian audience (every recording is listed in English and in Tamil), but also there are no “English Tunes” in this series. The 1933 releases are in the same format as those from 1911: double-sided ten-inch 78 rpm recordings. By 1933, however, the price had risen to 3.8 rupees each.

Many observable musical changes occurred between the 1911 and the 1933 recordings; the latter make for more musical and interesting performances. Of course, the intervening 22 years had offered Indian musicians time to improve their performance skills on the European instruments (especially the brass instruments) or to pass those skills on to younger musicians. The 1933 tempos are invariably brighter, from 116 to 140 beats per minute. Even on these three-minute performances there are snatches of improvisational *swara kalpana* in the concluding seconds of two of the surviving recordings. The clarinet, alto and sometimes baritone horn, and the cornet all play strongly throughout the performances, including the elaborate *sangati* portions. Technically, the group is much more accomplished. Although K. Ramdass listed a *talam* player as one of the 1933 bandsmen, the *tavil* is the only percussion heard in these recordings; the resulting rhythmic density and complexity are much greater than in 1911.

Another important change is readily apparent in the 1933 listings in the HMV catalogue; the group is identified with an emphasis on the eldest of the three brothers, as “BALAKRISHNAN AND PARTY - Tanjore Band” (HMV, 1933: 71). According to his grandson, and in spite of this listing, however, T. Balakrishnan is not playing on this series, having died some years earlier. It is not uncommon, of course, for South Asian wind bands to be named for deceased family members who were important in the group’s history. This labeling reinforces the possibility that there had been

other recordings between 1911 and 1933, listed under the name of the group's then-living leader, Balakrishnan. The 1933 group was actually being led by Balakrishnan's two younger brothers, Guruswami and Venkataraman. Balakrishnan's son, Godandapani (circa 1890-1958), also a clarinet player, was involved with the group at this time; but seems not to have played on the series.

The personnel on the 1933 Balakrishnan recording series were a slightly expanded version of the instrumentation heard in 1911. The 12 members of the 1933 band, as K. Ramdass recalls them, are listed in Figure 1. Like their leader, Balakrishnan, it seems that many of the original Tanjore bandsmen had died, or at least retired, by this time, and that this series, therefore, was recorded by a largely new and younger second generation of Tanjore Band. The replacements may help explain the superior musicianship of this series.

Figure 1. Instrumentation and Personnel of Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band (1933) and the Madras Corporation Band (1958, 1989, 1994). The individuals at the head of each list are the bandmasters of each group.

<u>Balakrishnan & Party</u> <u>Tanjore Band (1933)</u>	<u>MCB (1958)</u>	<u>MCB (1989)</u>	<u>MCB (1994)</u>
T. Guruswami (cl)	K. Ramdass (cl)	V. Krishnamurthi (cl)	ditto*
Venkataraman (cl)	Balraj (cl)	position empty	position empty
Ponaya (as)	Ponaya (as)	P.A. Kodundaraman (as)	ditto*
Nagaratanam (as)	Nagaratanam (as)	position empty	position empty
Krishnaswami (c)	Krishnaswami (c)	on leave	on leave
Sesaiya (eu)	N. Nagayan (eu)	P. Gajapati (eu]	ditto
?? (ah)	Sanaikesavalu (ah)	J. Venugopal (ba)	ditto
K. Kupuswami (vt)	K. Kupuswami (vt)	R. Krishnamurthi (vt)	ditto
Venugopal (bd)	Venugopal (bd)	G. Kanayan (bd)	ditto
Rajagopal (ta ?)	Papaya - (ta)	M. Rajaratanam (ta)	ditto
Ganeshan (th)	S. Velaswami (th)	A. Narayanswami (th)	ditto
Govindaswami (bp)	Govindaswami (bp)	V. Babu (bp)	postion empty

Key:

cl = clarinet, as = alto saxophone, c = cornet, eu = euphonium, ah = alto horn,
 ba = baritone horn, vt = valve trombone, bd = bass drum, ta = *talam*, th = *tavil*,
 bp = bagpipe (drones only) or *swarpeti*

* Bandsmen retiring, 1997

The identification of the group as "Balakrishnan and Party - The Tanjore Band" helped reinforce a specific identity within a growing field of

Indian wind bands. In the same catalogue that detailed their 1933 recordings, HMV also announced a recording by "The Carnatic Band of H. H. the Maharaja of Mysore, G.C.S.I." This royal group made numerous recordings in the 1930s and 40s, performing a repertoire of South Indian classical compositions. Wind bands based on the royal model had become a regular, if relatively minor, feature of South Indian music culture.

By the time of these recordings, however, the Tanjore Band was encountering competition from private groups within Tamil Nadu as well as from the relatively distant royal Mysore band. In 1930, two brothers, P. R. Nathamuni Naidu (1900-circa 1960) and P.R. Lakshmipathi Naidu (circa 1902-1990) began their own wind band in Madras, named for the elder of the brothers, the Nathamuni Band. P.R. Lakshmipathi has stated that their group was the first private wind band in Madras (personal communication, 1989). If this is so, one is left to wonder where the ensemble led by Govindaswami Dasu was based. The Naidu brothers' father and grandfather had played both *nagasvaram* and clarinet, which their grandfather, like Balakrishnan's father, had learned from a British musician. Nathamuni played clarinet, which he learned from his father, but Lakshmipathi additionally played alto saxophone and Eb clarinet, learned from yet another British musician. The importance of the British for this group, however, goes beyond instruction. In 1947, as the British were leaving India, Nathamuni was able to come to an agreement with an unnamed British Army bandmaster, who sold the family a new set of wind instruments belonging to an army band. Lakshmipathi implies that the proceeds from this agreement did not benefit the actual owners of the instruments, the British Army.

The Nathamuni Band became quite famous in Madras. They played regular public concerts on Madras' most popular public space, the beach-front Marina. The Marina has offered cooling sea breezes, congeniality, entertainment, and a variety of refreshments to generations of both British and Indian Madrasis. Individuals and families stroll, converse, picnic, and play in this space in the evenings, especially Sunday evenings, which also featured concerts by the Nathamuni Band.

Columbia Records released seven 78 rpm recordings of the Nathamuni group in 1941. Again, the majority of sides are Karnatik classical music, mostly Tyagaraja *kritis*; but one English tune (or "English Note," as the Columbia Catalogue lists it) is also included. The Nathamuni band was similar in size to the band in Thanjavur (approximately ten players), on clarinet, Eb soprano clarinet, Eb alto saxophone, cornet, trombone, possibly baritone horn, euphonium, bagpipes, *tavil*, and *talam*. Doubled instruments included saxophone, but may have also included euphonium or cornet as well. The band also included a bass instrument (apparently a low brass horn such as a tuba) which is played with great skill

and which gives the group a distinctive sound. Their performance practice is equally consistent with that of Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band, although Nathamuni plays more of a solo and improvisational role than any of the Balakrishnan bandmasters.

Among adult Madrasians of the latter 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the Nathamuni Band was a well-known ensemble. Some of those with whom I spoke in 1988 thought that the group performing in the 1980s as the Madras Corporation Band was, in fact, the Nathamuni Band. This is hardly surprising given this group's regular presence in the city. Although the Balakrishnan group may have played in Madras, the distance between Thanjavur and metropolis was too great for regular commuting; they seem not to have been well known. Nathamuni's reputation, recurrent city performances, and recordings were reasons enough for the newly-emerging Indian administration of Madras to offer the Nathamuni family the opportunity to become the official Corporation band when the city became independent in the mid-1940s.

The Madras Corporation Band

In suggesting that the new Corporation of Madras City should have its own wind band, the city commissioners were following a precedent established by the region's last independent Indian ruler (Shiva-ji II had both court and military ensembles) 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 Nathamuni 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 Nathamuni Band, whose repertoire was dominated by *kritis*, *thevarams*, *kirtans*, etc., rather than an Indian Army ensemble, which would naturally have been 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 to Nathamuni was made in 1946, although at that point, India was still British. The Nathamuni brothers, however, refused the corporation's offer. I suspect that the group was making too much money as a private concern, and that Madras' offer did not appear to be a lucrative choice. The family would also have had to relinquish control of their business to the city, which may not have been an appealing thought. Whatever their reasoning, the wisdom of this decision is moot. I expect that neither the Nathamuni nor Madras Corporation Bands will survive long into the coming century.

In response to Nathamuni's refusal, and apparently on the urging of one of their number named Chinai, the city commissioners published notices in the newspapers seeking an alternative wind band that could become the Madras Corporation Band. K. Ramdass' elder sister's husband, a *nagasvaram* player, saw the ad placed by the Madras Corporation and mentioned it to his relatives, who successfully applied for the position. As a result of this circumstance, it was Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band who moved, as a group, to Madras, where they were renamed the Madras Corporation Band (hereafter, MCB). It is highly appropriate that the Tanjore Band, which had its cultural roots in a court ensemble of the last Maratha ruler of independent India, should be reincarnated as the musical symbol of the once-more independent regional successor to the Maratha state.

The last of Balakrishnan's brothers, Guruswami, was still the nominal bandmaster of the group that moved from Thanjavur to Madras, but Balakrishnan's son, Godandapani, was undertaking most of the leadership responsibilities. About three years after the group came to the city, Guruswami died and Godandapani, together with his son, K. Ramdass, inherited the official leadership of the group. According to K. Ramdass, many of the musicians heard on the 1933 recordings were still active at that time. After Godandapani's death in 1958, K. Ramdass (Plate 1) assumed leadership of the MCB. Figure 1 shows a mixture of older musicians from the Tanjore Band together with younger men probably recruited following the incorporation of Madras.

It can be seen from Figure 1 that the official structure of the MCB retains the 12-man instrumentation that Balakrishnan's Tanjore Band had developed by 1933: clarinet (2), alto saxophone (2), cornet, euphonium, alto or baritone horn, valve trombone, *talam*, *tavil*, bass drum, and bagpipe (drones only). This instrumentation is heard on recordings made by the MCB for Columbia Gramophone Company Ltd. in 1958. K. Ramdass recalls that two or three recording sessions took place after the transformation of the group in 1947; a single recording (GE 22099) from the 1958 Columbia series is all that has surfaced thus far. The disc contains the expected pair of Tyagaraja *kritis*.

The Madras Corporation Band in the late 20th Century

Like the bandsmen of the original royal Tanjore Band (but unlike most bandsmen in India) the members of the newly-created MCB are employees of the state. This has meant (among other things) that as the members of the MCB reached their mid-60s, they were retired by the corporation and replaced by younger musicians chosen at least in part by corporation officers who were not musicians. This situation seems to have

Plate 1. K. Ramdass, clarinetist and Bandmaster - The Madras Corporation Band (retired) on right, and S. Velaswamy, taval - The Madras Corporation Band (retired), on left, 1989.



resulted in a gradual shift in the social groups from which the bandsmen are drawn. The original Tamil bandsmen appear to have been replaced to a large extent by local Telugu-speaking bandsmen whose ancestors migrated from southern Andhra Pradesh to Madras slightly after the turn of the century. The matter of communal and caste identity, however, is not yet entirely clear.

The MCB is part of the Corporation Parks Department, with their headquarters located in My Ladyes's Garden, a small park located between Nehru Stadium and Madras Central Station. They come under the supervision of the Parks Department's administrative staff, who are management-level civil servants. The group originally performed very much in the manner of a royal band, that is, only for the ruler of the state, in this case the Mayor of the Corporation. Gradually however, their duties came to include regular public performances and official Corporation functions. They may also be hired for private weddings, but this is a rare occurrence in contemporary Madras.

The bandsmen must appear at My Ladye's Garden most mornings between 9:00 and 11:00 for roll call, but are usually free during the middle of the day. The majority of their performances take place in the evenings, between 5:00 and 7:30 pm, when they perform in various of the city's parks (Figure 2). On a typical day, the men find their own way to the assigned park, where they don their MCB uniforms (Plate 2). Most arrive before 5:00, but often one or another of them will arrive after the group has begun playing. Although the group is scheduled to perform each day of the week, in practice, one or two days seem somehow to remain free of performances. The men described these simply as days with no work. Sometimes unscheduled performances for the Mayor or some other daytime civic function will preclude the scheduled evening performance. There are also weekly rehearsals (Plate 3) but as the group performs almost every day, and as their repertoire changes very slowly, there is little real need for much practice. The rehearsals have a decidedly *pro forma* air about them.

Figure 2 shows a transcription of an excerpt from the regular monthly press release announcing the MCB's daily performance schedule. In their laudable attempt to disperse the benefits of these concerts throughout Madras, the corporation managers have chosen a wide range of venues. Performances at the Gandhi Statue at the Marina (for example) take place in an almost idyllic recreational setting; the band performs in the midst of the many people who have come to stroll, picnic, or play in the cool ocean breezes. On the other hand, when the group performs at Anna Park, further north along the beach, they find themselves almost in the middle of a bus depot (Plate 4). Still other evenings find the MCB playing in dark, remote city parks where the men play to an audience largely comprised of birds and bats.

Figure 2. Press Release announcing performances of the Madras Corporation Band

CORPORATION OF MADRAS

FROM:

R. Varadarajulu, I.A.S.
Commissioner,
Corporation of Madras,
Madras - 3.

Dated: 30-12-1988

Sir,

Suo: Band - Corporation Band Programme for the period
from 1-1-1989 to 31-1-1989 - Communicated - Reg.

The corporation Band will play at the following Parks and places in the city daily from 5.00 P.M. to 7.30 P.M. on the dates noted below. It is requested that the same may be published in the engagement column of your daily and also announce the same in the local announcement and Cevai Cheidical.

1-1-1989	Gandhi Statue, Marina
2-1-1989	Terrace Garden, Ebrahimji Street
3-1-1989	Independence Day Park, Nungambakkam
4-1-1989	Napier Park, Chintadripet
5-1-1989	Sir Theagaraja Park, Washermenpet
6-1-1989	Panagal Park, T, Nagar
7-1-1989	United India Colony, Ayanavaram
8-1-1989	Wadia Park, Pattalam
9-1-1989	Tavancore Maharaja Park, Esplanade

Note: This excerpt is transcribed exactly from the original Corporation press release. Although the original is published in English, the print quality is such that it cannot be successfully reproduced.

In 1989, MCB bandsmen received about 1,000 rupees per month. This is more than many private bandsmen earned at this time (the typical bandsman in nearby Hyderabad, for example, earned approximately 600-800 rupees per month during the 4-6 month wedding season.). The MCB, however, is comprised of individuals who possess generally higher levels

Plate 2. M. Rajaratanam, MCB bandsman, sits in a Madras city park, arranging his band uniform prior to the MCB's evening performance.



of classical training than the average wedding bandsman. In addition to a reasonable wage (for a bandsman) and steady work, the MCB maintains a light performance schedule (again, relative to their northern colleagues). Consequently, an MCB position is a good job within the world of professional wind bands, especially in Madras, which cannot match the high level of demand for wedding bands found in most northern cities. G. Kanayan, the current bass drummer for the MCB, also plays the saxophone, and could probably secure a job in a private band on this instrument; he formerly played side-drum in the Nathamuni Band. Nevertheless, and although he had to shift to bass drum, Kanayan was glad to establish himself as a corporation bandsman, because, as he says, the pay and the work are regular. In the same way, even though M. Rajaratanam, who plays the small time-keeping cymbals (the *talam*) can play cornet, he accepted what might be thought of as a less challenging instrumental role in exchange for a permanent position in the MCB.

The personnel listed in Figure 1 as the 1989 MCB come from a variety of backgrounds which are nevertheless easily organized into two predominant groups: those whose families have recently converted from Indian double reed performance, and those whose families have been in the profession for two or more generations. The two reed players, Krishnamurthi and Kodundaraman, belong to the first of these categories. They are the sons of men who played both clarinet and either *nagasvaram* (P. Kodundaraman's father, Abudas) or the much smaller *mukha vina* (V. Krishnamurthi's father, V. Reddiar). In contrast, the fathers of G. Kanayan, R. Krishnamurthi, P. Gajapati, J. Venugopal, and M. Rajaratanam were all bandsmen who performed exclusively on European (mostly brass) instruments in wedding or circus bands. It should be noted here that although J. Venugopal is listed as playing baritone horn, he and P. Gajapati actually play the same instrument, which appears to be a euphonium (see Plate 3). As one might expect by this point, V. Babu's father played bagpipes, while A. Narayanswami comes from a family of *tavil* players who are temple and processional musicians.

The official instrumentation of the MCB remains as it was developed by the Balakrishnan Tanjore Band at the turn of the 20th century. Figure 1 shows, however, that by 1989 there were only nine regular musicians; the second clarinet and second saxophone positions had remained unfilled since their incumbents' retirements some years before. The rest of the group assured me that the cornet player was officially present, but he never appeared during my time in Madras. The men expressed no concern about the gaps in their ranks; the general feeling was that these would certainly be filled and that any delay was simply a reflection on the nature of the corporation bureaucracy. By 1994, however, in the face of an additional unfilled retirement (the bagpipe player), the ongoing absence of the cornetist, and the imminence of more retirements in a few years (V.

Plate 3. The Madras Corporation Band rehearses outside of Nehru Stadium, 1989. They stand in their usual circular formation. Clockwise from left: A. Narayanswami - *tavil*, M. Rajaratanam - *talam*, J. Venugopal - baritone (euphonium), P. A. Kodundaraman - alto saxophone, Bandmaster V. Krishnamurthi - clarinet, P. Gajapati - euphonium, V. Babu - bagpipes, G. Kanayan - bass drum.



Plate 4. M. Rajaratanam - *talam*, J. Venugopal - baritone (euphonium), P. A. Kodundaraman - alto saxophone, and Bandmaster V. Krishnamurthi's clarinet are shown performing in Anna Square (1989). They are surrounded by passengers coming and going on the many city buses that use Anna Square as a major stop. Note that Krishnamurthi has added a chain and sacred medallion to his instrument, in a fashion similar to that seen, and originating on, *nagaswarams*.



Krishnamurthi and P.A. Kodundaraman were both scheduled to retire in 1997), remarks regarding the pace of bureaucracy had acquired a perceptible note of anxiety. By 1995, the group had seen no new additions for at least six years, in spite of a gradually shrinking roster. Although neither their immediate supervisor nor the men themselves would acknowledge such a possibility, one could not help but wonder whether there might be an unstated policy on the part of the Corporation to let the group fade quietly into oblivion.

Repertoire

The contemporary repertoire and performance practice of the MCB are both similar to that of its earlier incarnation, the Tanjore Band. Naturally, any conclusions along these lines are based on incomplete samples: the historical groups are evaluated on the basis of their recordings, while the contemporary group is evaluated on the basis of live performance; nor is the size of the various samples equivalent. Some general comparative observations may still be of value.

The majority of any MCB performance is taken up with *kritis* (primarily those of Tyagaraja) from the Karnatik classical repertoire. The tempos have relaxed somewhat since 1933, however, and the band has developed the practice of interspersing *tavil* solos throughout their performance, usually between the *kriti's* *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *charanam* sections (Plate 5). More improvisational material appears in the modern live performances than in the recordings, but this is to be expected and may in fact represent no change from earlier live performances. In their live performances, the MCB sometimes incorporates the developmental *pratiloma* and *anuloma* techniques. Although normally heard in the *pallavi* section of the largely improvisational *ragam-tanam-pallavi* form, the band uses these reductional and expansional (respectively) melodic techniques as part of their composed ensemble *kriti* performance.

In addition to their classical repertoire, the modern MCB still retains a few British melodies, marches and waltzes, that were taught to Bandmaster Krishnamurthi by K. Ramdass, who learned them from his uncle, Guruswami, who in turn had learned them from a British musician. These artifacts of the colonial era have thus survived at least 40 post-colonial years in oral tradition.

The conversion (or re-conversion?) of the Tanjore Bandsmen into civil servants has more or less eliminated the never-ending search for musical patronage that a private band experiences. The remote nature of their ultimate patron, the Madras Corporation Commission, has further allowed the musicians to select their repertoire largely according to their

Plate 5. A. Narayanswami plays a *tavil* solo following the end of a *kriti* performance and prior to the beginning of the next *kriti* selection.



own taste and tradition, with little concern for popular trends in Indian music. Unlike most South Asian bandsmen, therefore, who perceive themselves to be very much at the mercy of the modern popular taste for film music, the patronage situation of the MCB, for the most part, allows the men to ignore the barrage of popular music generated by the Indian film industries. Nevertheless, a relatively small number of popular hits from the Tamil and Hindi films are the only recent additions to the MCB's repertoire.

Naturally, Tamil film songs make up the majority of the film-related part of the repertoire, although at any given time, two or three Hindi film songs may also be heard in an evening's program. The film songs performed by the MCB demonstrate a rather distinctive quality of adaptation in comparison to their northern colleagues: in the hands of the MCB musicians, film songs often sound rather like lighthearted *kritis*. This is due to the depth of the band's generally 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. These factors have resulted in an approach to the adaptation of mediated music that contrasts with the results I have elsewhere described for northern bandsmen (Booth, 1993).

Conclusions

As I noted in my introduction, this is a preliminary study of the Madras Corporation Band. Even this tentative history provides some insight into the distinctive nature of this social and musical phenomenon, and into the band's changing roles in South Indian (or more recently and specifically, Madrasi) culture. It should be clear that many unanswered questions remain in regards to both the theoretical frame and the factual content of the study. Some of these may be answered by additional research; to other questions there may well never be satisfactory solutions.

Most obviously, it remains to be seen whether the Madras Corporation Band will survive into the next century. I suspect that the answer will be in the negative. That an ensemble with such powerful connections to the ex-colonial culture should survive as a symbol of civic identity in a context that is equally British (the wind band as public concert entertainment) is anomalous in 21st century Madras. While there was clearly a place for a Madras Corporation Band in 1947, it is much less clear that there is a place for a Chennai Corporation Band in 1997. Inevitably, the next few years will provide an answer to this question.

Seetha's 1981 study of the music culture of the Thanjavur court is a detailed and valuable consideration of the more clearly classical aspects of that culture. The royal Tanjore Band is mentioned more or less in passing.

Whether surviving records exist that might help construct a clearer picture of the early history of this ensemble requires further investigation. Along these lines, the royal Tanjore Band and the Carnatic Band of Mysore are two well known 19th-century ensembles that developed under royal patronage. I have no knowledge of other South Indian bands with similar roots, but further research on this topic would again provide a broader picture of wind band culture in 19th- and 20th-century South India.

Mr. V.A. K. Ranga Rao has contributed to this study with copies of all the wind band recordings in his collection. As large as it is, however, even that collection has its limits. The discovery of additional recordings and record company documentation would allow a serious comparative examination of South Indian classical wind band performance practice, both between ensembles and within a single ensemble across time.

Finally, and as I have noted above, the role of the dynamics of caste in the history of the MCB are not clear. The family of T. Balakrishnan is, to the best of my knowledge, a local Tamil-speaking group. Most of the current MCB members identify themselves as Telugu-speaking Madrasis; they seem to belong to low-prestige caste groups (as is the case with most bandsmen in the north). But the relationship between this caste identity and that of the original bandsmen is unknown at present. Such information would be a valuable contribution to the study of caste roles in the development and dispersal of wind band performance. This issue is also a matter for future research.

In spite of the uncertainties enumerated here, this study does demonstrate some important basic themes in the South Asian wind band tradition. First and foremost, it offers an exceptionally clear example of the stylistic influence of royal ensembles in the development of Indian wind band culture in the second half of the 19th century. It also makes a strong case for widespread Indian participation in the development of a colonial Indian culture, in which wind bands had a recognized and valued role.

Obviously, the Tanjore and Nathamuni bands were initiated and flourished during the same periods of Britain's colonial presence in India. The combination of the colonial presence and the royal model made a very strong supportive context in which private wind bands could develop; but it was the economic changes brought about by the collapse of the independent princely states that encouraged or compelled the development of private bands. Although very specifically true for the Tanjore/Madras Corporation Band instance, a case could be made for a broader application of this model. It was after 1857 especially that a dispersal of court musicians with European instrumental skills and a shift in the location of artistic patronage from the court centers to the commercial hubs of colonial India allowed for the technical, economic, and cultural possibility of wind band performance.

The South Indian royal bands, the Tanjore Band (especially), and later the Karnatik Band of Mysore, demonstrate very early instances of the musical adaptation of the European ensembles. Both revised instrumentation and instrumental function to suit their needs and used the instruments to perform music that was meaningful to them and to their patrons. The resolution of various problems with drones (especially evident in the 1933 Balakrishnan Tanjore Band recordings), the increase in musical sophistication between 1911 and 1933, and the cornet performances heard in the 1911 recordings, all demonstrate the gradual but successful development of adaptive musical and technical skills, largely unconsidered by British bandsmen of the time.

In 1990, I suggested that the northern wedding band phenomenon seemed past its prime (Booth 1990). Six years and more field work later, I must admit that this perception seems at least overstated, if not incorrect. Whatever the future will show, however, the cultural and economic vitality of the northern wedding bands stands in sharp contrast to that of the MCB and the Nathamuni bands. Even if the MCB outlives most of its northern counterparts, it will do so in a role that has very little relationship to the living culture of modern day Madras, regardless of their repertoire. The contrast between the nine men of the MCB playing *kritis* by themselves in the twilight of a Madras city park and a raucous 50-piece wedding band playing film hits surrounded by lights, tinsel, and dancing celebrants is extreme to say the least. It emphasizes an important point regarding the dynamic relationship between wind bands, cultural context, and the film music industry, and by extension perhaps, between any musicians performing in traditional contexts and contemporary mediated culture.

In South Asia, the essential nature of the context, function, or use to which most wind bands were and are put (that is, as wedding procession accompaniment) has been more important for the survival of this tradition than the specific repertoire or style that any individual group plays. The MCB will always be slightly problematic in modern India because the group performs, not as an Indian processional ensemble, but as a British-style concert ensemble. As an ensemble whose original model was both colonial and aristocratic, its cultural bases are much more clearly colonial than are those of most wedding bands, who, regardless of a similar instrumentation, and in spite of a mass media-dictated repertoire, perform in unarguably traditional Indian contexts.

University of Auckland

Note

The field research for this study was conducted in India during 1989, 1993, 1994, and 1995. It was supported by a Senior Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies, and by the University of Auckland Research Committee. It would not have been possible without the willing cooperation of the musicians of the Madras Corporation Band (listed in Figure 1 and identified in Plate 2). Special thanks are due to Mr. V.A.K. Ranga Rao who willingly and enthusiastically provided historical documentation and background from his wonderful collection of recordings and knowledge of Indian music and the Indian recording industry.

Most Indian words are transcribed according the Library of Congress system. Personal names are spelled as they have been given to me by their owners. The South Indian city that was once home to the Maratha court is spelled here as Thanjavur, according to contemporary Indian practice. The wind band founded in that city is identified as in historical documentation, and in Seetha, as “The Tanjore Band.”

Finally, the city herein identified as Madras has been reincarnated as Chennai, in India’s ongoing elimination of the influences of colonialism. The relationship between indigenous culture and colonial culture is a central one to this study, and so it is especially appropriate that this change took place as the study was being written. Because this is largely an historical study, I have continued to use the old name for the city and the group. I have no information as to whether the MCB has changed its name or not, but one imagines that if the group still exists, it has become the Chennai Corporation Band. Such a label, however, only throws into a more extreme relief the cultural tensions surrounding the ensemble.

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