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978-0-521-04007-5 - Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India

Sara Dickey

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This pathbreaking study of the Indian cinema is concerned particularly with cinema-goers in Madurai, a city in Tamil Nadu, South India. Sara Dickey reviews the history of Tamil film, explains the structure of the industry, and presents the perspective of the filmmakers. But the core of the book is an analysis of the films themselves and the place they have in the lives of poor people, who organize fan clubs, discuss the films and the actors, and in various ways relate these fantasy worlds to their own lives. Dickey argues that the effect of these films is ultimately conservative, for they glorify poverty while holding out the hope of a better future. Her rich ethnography makes an original contribution to the study of film in India and, more generally, to the understanding of popular culture in an Indian city.

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92

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CINEMA AND THE URBAN POOR IN SOUTH INDIA

SARA DICKEY

Bowdoin College, Maine



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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Note on transliteration</i>	xiii
 PART I	
1 Introduction	3
2 Lives in Madurai	15
3 Activities and attitudes	36
 PART II	
4 History of Tamil cinema	47
5 Films	57
6 Film themes	89
 PART III	
7 Filmmakers	119
8 Audiences	134
9 Fan clubs and politics	148
10 Conclusions	173
Appendix	177
 <i>Notes</i>	 179
<i>List of references</i>	195
<i>Index</i>	203

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04007-5 - Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India

Sara Dickey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Illustrations

Map

India and Sri Lanka (map by Cathy E. Brann). *page 4*

Plates

1. Decorated autorickshaw (photo by Raja Enok). 7
2. Movie billboards (photo by Sara Dickey). 16
3. A street in downtown Madurai (photo by Sara Dickey). 30
4. Line outside a Madras film theater (photo by Raja Enok). 38
5. Film paraphernalia vendor (photo by Raja Enok). 41
6. Rajnikanth in an opticals shop signboard (photo by Sara Dickey). 62
7. Bharatiraja in a Madras billboard (photo by Raja Enok). 125
8. Kamalhasan fan club signboard and two club officers (photo by Sara Dickey). 149
9. The stage for an MGR fan club's presentation ceremony (photo by Sara Dickey). 162
10. Jayalalitha cutout in Madras (photo by Raja Enok). 166
11. Jayalalitha in an old film poster (photo by Raja Enok). 167

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04007-5 - Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India

Sara Dickey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)x *Acknowledgements*

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04007-5 - Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India

Sara Dickey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgements* xi

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04007-5 - Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India

Sara Dickey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)xii *Acknowledgements*

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Note on transliteration

The following notes are meant as an aid to readers unfamiliar with Tamil transliteration systems. In order to keep the text as readable as possible, diacritics have been restricted to instances where they affect pronunciation.

- 1 Almost all Tamil vowels have both short and long forms, rendered here by single (“a”) and double (“aa”) vowels respectively.
- 2 Stops (written, in correspondence with Tamil orthographic conventions, as “k,” “c,” “t,” “p”) are voiceless when they occur at the beginning of a word, doubled within a word, or combined with another stop; otherwise they are usually voiced. Thus *koncam* is pronounced “konjam,” and *makaacakti* as “magaa-sakti” or “mahaasakti.”
- 3 In Tamil, “t,” “n,” and “l” have both retroflex and dental forms. The dental forms are unmarked; the retroflex forms are represented here as “ṭ,” “ṇ,” and “ḷ.”

These three rules cover most of the Tamil words in this text. The following are necessary for the remainder:

- 4 The constant transliterated as “zh” is unique to Tamil and pronounced similarly to Standard American English “r” (though formed further back in the mouth) in literary or “high” Tamil but pronounced as a retroflex “ḷ” in spoken or colloquial Tamil. “Tamil” itself would be transliterated *tamizh*.
- 5 When “n” precedes “k” it is pronounced “ng.”
- 6 In this text, any time the combination “nr” appears it is pronounced “ndr”; thus *manram* is “mandram.”
- 7 The “sh” sound, which is not indigenous to Tamil, is written as in English.

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Sara Dickey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv *Note on transliteration*

Film names are transliterated according to this system except for several famous films with established romanized spellings, and those based on proper names. Examples include *Parasakthi* (which I would otherwise transliterate *Paraacakti*), *Nadodi Mannan* (*Naaṭoṭi Mannan*), and *Sindhu Bairavi* (*Cintu Pairavi*). Other words with common English spellings, such as *jati*, *bhakti*, *guru*, and *puja*, retain these spellings.