

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Mylapore for World Heritage status?

(By A Special Correspondent)

The last month saw print and social media report on a city-based think tank demanding that Mylapore be given world heritage status. While this is not a tag that is given out for the asking and, so, is not likely to happen any time soon, the question is does Mylapore deserve such a status and, more importantly, can it live up to the discipline that such an accreditation demands?

If, indeed, it is the dominant presence of the temple at the heart of the locality that has spurred this suggestion, then there are several others that can compete for this even within Tamil Nadu. Take for instance the Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai. Would that not qualify better? Or, for that matter, Srirangam? Both of these shrines have created an ecosystem around them that depend on the central attractions for survival. There is, consequently, a lot of effort on maintaining tradition. Even the commercial establishments around have realised this and are doing what little they can to participate, something that cannot be said of Mylapore.

True, the temple does form a focus here as well. But there is lot more to the place than just that. There are multiple religions that claim a share in its antiquity. That again is an attribute that towns such as Nagapattinam and Trichy can lay claim to. Can Mylapore stand up to be counted?

The next question is, what exactly of its heritage has Mylapore retained? In terms of its antiquity, there is not much. Not even the present Kapaliswarar shrine or for that matter the San Thomé basilica, can claim a physical connect to a very ancient past. This is partly due to historical reasons but also in part due to rampant modernisation that has taken place within the shrines. Among the older but less-

(Continued on page 8)



A beautiful picture by Dr. VIJAY SRIRAM of sunset over the Adyar River – NOT seen from the aircraft above but from the north bank.

Lessons to learn from Kolkata

The Durga Puja festival in Kolkata has just come to an end. The city witnessed around 36,000 different pandals being put up, for the duration of five days, all in public places – street corners, parks and sidewalks.

These temporary structures and their contents, chiefly icons and friezes, cost a whopping Rs 600 crore in a rough estimate, making it one of the biggest religious events celebrated in public. The five-day extravaganza witnessed a huge degree of public-private partnership in making it a success and ensuring it passed off peacefully. There is much that a city like Chennai can learn from this experience.

One of the big advantages that Durga Puja has over anything even remotely like it in Chennai is that it is a public event, celebrated all across Kolkata. It, therefore, becomes a time when shops, establishments and schools close, thereby bringing down regular traffic by a significant percentage. However, there are several regulations that still need to be

in place to ensure that the people are not put to much inconvenience on the roads. That is where the Government comes in. It ensures that public transport operates in full right through the nights on the important days of the festival. It also cordons off entire streets, making them accessible only by foot. There are certain hotspots

idea and helped people plan their visit itineraries.

These lessons were not learnt in a day. Just last year a particularly sensational pandal made a huge section of the city out of bounds owing to the numbers that visited it. There have been fire accidents and stampedes. But with a vigilant administration taking care of

the December Music Festival or the Mylapore Festival. It could begin with special public transport arrangements. This was a feature for years during the December festival of the 1970s when buses would ply from point to point till late at night. This can be easily revived. Another aspect is to make certain areas accessible only on foot. After all, when we can cordon off entire areas for VIP movement, why can the same not be done in the name of culture? The four Mada Streets during Navaratri or Arupathu Moovar would make for a great attraction. There will be an increase in business for the commercial establishments all around. For celebrations such as Madras Week or the December festival we could have printed maps and guides to help people get around.

With Tamil Nadu topping the nation in terms of tourist inflow and Chennai taking the lead within the State, even such small steps could make a big impact. Is anyone in the administration thinking about this?

● by A Special Correspondent

– some well known locations where some star pandals come up year after year that thousands of people go to see. These areas have queue systems in place, by means of enclosed walkways and an ample police presence to make sure people use only these routes and not the main roads.

The private aspect comes in the organisations of these pandals and also the provision of amenities – first aid, access for the disabled and the feeding of the public. The publication of a map, giving the locations of prominent pandals was a great

such pain points, even the driving rain this year could not cause much dislocation. The benefits are evident to all – there has been a marked rise in tourist attendance. The restaurants and hotels have seen good patronage. The heritage spots in the city have seen a marked increase in visitors.

It is true that Chennai does not have a citywide festival, barring perhaps, on a limited scale, Madras Week. But there is much that the Government can do to make an impact with events such as the Arupathu Moovar festival at Mylapore,

Some oil on Cauvery waters

The Cauvery Water dispute has a long and chequered history. Tamil Nadu lacks a perennial river and, until 1974, the State had a lion's share of the Cauvery waters. This was reduced when Karnataka expanded its consumption of water by constructing a number of dams and expanding its canal system. When the 50-year-long earlier agreement ended in 1974, the issue heated up. Chauvinistic attitudes of political parties in both the States and an indifferent Centre contributed to the issue smouldering for over four decades. In the absence of agreement on the part of the political leadership, the only course left was to take recourse to a judicial remedy.

Tamil Nadu's former Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran, maintained cordial relations with the leaders of the Centre and the neighbouring States. Remember the huge success of his efforts to get Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra to agree to providing 15 tmcft of water from the Krishna river to quench the thirst of Chennai metro? It was a rare and unique occasion to witness the Prime Minister of the country, Indira Gandhi, presiding over a meeting addressed by Chief Ministers of five States and the Union Territory of Puducherry!

The DMK was represented in the three coalition governments of the 1990s. DMK supremo Karunanidhi did enjoy clout with the NDA I government. Under the UPA I, Tamil Nadu had 13 ministers in the Central cabinet handling vital portfolios including Finance. Sadly, this clout was not used effectively to get over the Cauvery issue.

● S. Viswanathan

The AIADMK has not maintained cordial relation with the NDA and UPA I & II, due to its arch rival DMK being part of these governments. The relationship was adversarial.

There was the other political factor of Karnataka electing Congress or BJP governments. Both the parties are non-entities in Tamil Nadu. BJP has no base in the State. In the present Modi cabinet, there is just a Minister of State from Tamil Nadu. Congress has been riding piggy back on the DMK or the AIADMK and has also been riven with intense rivalry among its different leaders. This situation made for the Centre being more zealous in wooing its vote bank in Karnataka.

The original award given in 1991 was not acceptable to both the States. In the absence of any political clout with the Centre, time and again, Tamil Nadu has in recent years resorted to seeking a judicial remedy.

After 16 long years the final award was given by the Cauvery Water Dispute Tribunal (CWDT) in 2007. This provided 419 tmcft for Tamil Nadu, 270 tmcft for Karnataka, 30 tmcft for Kerala and 7 tmcft for Puducherry.

The Centre, for reasons mentioned above, did not bother to notify the award in the *Gazette* till 2013 and constitute the Cauvery Management Board. This is manifestly a serious dereliction of responsibility on the part of the Centre and its failure to resolve the decade-long issue.

We cite the experience of smooth resolution of such inter-State water disputes earlier through the constitution of statutory authorities. The Bhakra-Beas Management Board (BBMB) was formed to ensure fair allocation of water from the Beas, Sutlej and Ravi rivers to the States of Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi and Chandigarh UT. BBMB supplies 28 million acre ft of water for irrigation and drinking, including 12.50 million acre ft for agricultural land in the four States. It has 28 power generation units with an installed capacity of 2865 MW. These plants generate 10,000 million units to 14,000 million units of cheap power and supply it at just 20 paise per unit.

Likewise, after the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (NWDT) was constituted by the Government of India, there has been agreement over sharing of water by the riparian States. Against this background, the direction of the Supreme Court to the Government to set up the Cauvery Management Board within four weeks should leave the management to experts who would allocate water as per the judgment of Supreme Court. Hopefully this would ensure a lasting solution to this dispute.

Farmers in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka continue to raise water-guzzling crops like rice and sugarcane and insist on multiple cropping. In the context of much higher demand for pulses, oilseeds, corn and vegetables, which demand much less water, a systematic campaign to move away from paddy and sugarcane should be attempted. Wisdom demands making the best use of available water – (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*).

When MMM goes to college

The *Man from Madras Musings* is a sucker for these things – invite him to speak and he will accept at once. His good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, believes that this is some kind of an addiction, a complete dependence on the microphone and a large-ish audience looking up at the podium. In all her years of playing Simon Legree to MMM's Uncle Tom, the good lady has cured him of many things. Making strange noises while eating, not blocking the mouth while yawning, and resisting the urge to sing at all odd hours being are just a few (MMM is certain that the good lady can add several more to the list). But this tendency to accept invitations to speak is one that even she, despite her iron hand in the velvet glove, has been unable to rid MMM of. And so we have MMM hurrying from speech to speech, rather like politicians at election time.

What is the point of this extensive preamble you wonder. MMM can also see the Chief gritting his teeth as he, green pen in hand, proceeds to read the above tract. "Get on with it," is probably what the

of the marble regulation pen stand that he had clutched as a weapon of defence, was not impressed. Why had MMM come, he asked. Did MMM not know that he the Dean did not meet anyone without an appointment? And if MMM was seeking admission for his ward then he, the Dean, would like to inform him, MMM, that it was rather too late. By then, what MMM in the dim light took to be a potted palm became animated and revealed itself as a peon. MMM turned to him and asked for the professor who had called him to the college in the first place. The peon left to find the person and in the meanwhile, peace of some kind having been restored, MMM explained to the Dean that he was the chief guest for the prize distribution. The man, who clearly had no idea as to who had been invited, immediately turned on a smile that revealed several more teeth than the usual number. He asked MMM to take a seat. Would MMM like to have coffee or tea or coconut water, he enquired. MMM opted for the last named.

In the meanwhile, the inviting professor came rushing in

reminded by that, the Dean leaned across to MMM and said that it would be best if he, MMM spoke in Tamil as that is what the students would understand better. MMM agreed. There was still no sign of the coconut water.

The professor's speech of welcome was in English. Then came the Dean's turn. He would be brief, he said, for he was certain that everyone had gathered to hear the great OOO who had come to speak at the college despite his busy schedule. The moment MMM heard that, his heart sank into his shoes. Experience has shown MMM that any speaker who says he/she will be brief means exactly the opposite. This was entirely true of the Dean as well. Speaking at length (in English), he embarked on a long description of the happenings at the institution in the past one year. He spoke of honourable ministers, MPs, MLAs, bureaucrats and others who had paid visits to the institution. He paid the usual encomiums to the power that is, failing which no doubt, as MMM reflected, he the dean, ran the risk of his power being turned off at the main,

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Chief mutters on such occasions, and so MMM will get on with it. The reason why MMM brought all this up is a prize-giving event at a college that specialises in architecture and planning, that he was invited to. The professor who called MMM was an acquaintance of longstanding and MMM could not refuse. On the appointed day, MMM drove up at the appointed hour and after, as is usual in such places, having explained the reason why he had come to a most sceptical security officer who had never been kept informed of MMM's visit, he entered the august portals of the institution.

Staggered into the place would be more appropriate. For one, the steps were not of uniform rise and tread, which was rather surprising for a college that specialises in architecture. MMM, having lifted his foot to the extent that the earlier steps had risen, found himself stubbed on the last one which was much taller, and so shot forward as if from a cannon. Having clutched at a potted plant he found that he had fast-forwarded into the Dean's office where everything was shrouded in darkness. It was as though a solar eclipse was in progress. The good officer was at his desk, thinking dark thoughts no doubt and on seeing MMM bound in with what appeared to be murderous intent he was naturally startled.

MMM introduced himself. The Dean, who had stopped palpating by then and let go

and, in a highly flustered voice, did the formal introductions. Surely the Dean had read what MMM wrote about, said the professor to the Dean, accompanying it with a winning smile and an arch look that indicated that the Dean had better say 'yes'. The Dean got the cue and nodded his head vigorously, adding that it was a great pleasure to have finally met up with the great LLL.

The long wait

"MMM," corrected the prof. The dean apologised to *The Man from Madras Musings* and thereafter referred to him as NNN right through. The power, he said, had just been turned off owing to some technical glitch. It was a good thing, he added, that the prize-giving was fixed at the open courtyard and not inside the auditorium. MMM balked at this, for what with the temperature being what it was and the fact that he was getting thirstier than the Thanjavur region, this looked like torture of the first water. Anyway, MMM, Dean and professor trooped into the open courtyard. The head table was on a platform and down below, in the well of the open space, the students sat at the far end, no doubt keeping as much distance as possible between themselves and the speakers. The coconut water had not come as yet.

The meeting got to order with the singing of the obligatory song on the glory of the local language. As though

rather like the college's electricity. The coconut water was yet to make its appearance.

MMM found his thoughts wandering. He realised vaguely that the Dean was singing his (the Dean's) glories in the third person. The students were also in a stupor-like state. After several more minutes of the Dean's speech, the man finally sat down, stating that the college student union leader would read out the bio-data of Mr QQQ, who actually needs no introduction. And, by the way, you guessed it, no sign of the coconut water.

If you are still awake at this stage, MMM will let you get on with it by stating briefly (and he means that in the fullest sense), that MMM spoke in Tamil and was well received. Just as he began, a miracle took place – a microphone working on battery was delivered to MMM and so he was heard. The coconut water, however, never came.

Tailpiece

The speech concluded, it was time for *The Man from Madras Musings* to flee. But not before wanting to use the toilet. This seemingly innocuous request had the Dean disturbed. With much hesitation he informed MMM that the toilets of the building were pitch dark when the power fails, as they were provided with no windows. Would MMM mind taking a candle along?

– MMM



Tannery effects

Prof. M.S. Swaminathan has stated (MM, October 1st) "The conflict between environment and development can be ended only if we can stop economic greed."

In an Award passed by the Loss of Ecology (Prevention of pollution and Payments of Compensation) Authority constituted by the Central government on the orders of the Supreme Court in the Writ Petition filed by Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum, it was revealed that hundreds of dyeing units had polluted the Noyyal river, a tributary of the Cauvery, and had damaged 28,49,816 hectares of fertile farm lands in seven taluks of Coimbatore, Erode and Karur Districts. An Award was also passed by the Ecology Authority against 547 tannery owners for having damaged thousands of hectares of fertile lands which became unproductive, affecting the livelihood of 29,193 individual farmers.

The affected farmers and individuals were awarded compensation for the damage of their land, but it was very meagre when compared to the actual loss suffered by them.

I wrote to Prof. M.S. Swaminathan pointing out the heavy loss of crops due to the pollution caused by tannery effluents and in a letter dated 17-11-1989 he stated,

"My dear Subrahmanian, I thank you for your letter of November 14th. I am grateful to you for the papers you have sent. I agree with you that we must find methods of preventing damage to agricultural lands from tannery effluents. I shall do whatever I can in this matter."

On 6-3-1992 the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University,

The Jesuit seekers of knowledge

In my article published in *Madras Musings* on September 16th and October 1st, I have mentioned only some of the Jesuits who lived and worked in Madras and in Tamil Nadu. But then these individuals are not to be seen in isolation. They belong to a corporate body, The Society of Jesus. So, some general comments on their work in India are in order.

Today the secular historians are highly critical about the missionaries in general and the Jesuits in particular. One historian calls them simply the "Jesuit travellers" and groups them as those who traveled in Asia for *inspiring* Asia and those who traveled in Asia for *discovering* Asia.

By 'inspiring' is meant to preach the Gospel values, studying local languages, making Christian literature available in these languages, while appreciating local cultures and religions. By 'discovering' is understood the traveling to the hitherto unexplored geographical regions of Asia, noting down the astronomical locations of various cities and towns, jotting down the happenings of their surroundings, contributing to the body of scientific knowledge of Asia.

This type of transference of knowledge and method of study was a part of the larger process of discovering and constructing India in a colonial setting, in which the role of the Jesuits was significant. But after the colonial experience of the subjugated nations, the term "discovery" becomes a loaded one. The so-called 'discovery' led to a particular way of constructing the image of the 'discovered' people. Through their scholarly researches and ethnographic writings a new India emerged in the minds of the Europeans and also created a new self-understanding among the Indians themselves.

Though the categories of Jesuit 'inspirers' and 'discoverers' overlap in the case of many Jesuits, their contribution to literature and science has been substantial and significant. The substantial number of Jesuit literary contributors include Henry Henriques (1520-1600), Thomas Stephens (1549-1619), Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), Joseph Beschi (1680-1747), Ernest Hanxleden (1689-1732), Heinrich Roth (1620-1668), Jean Francois Pons (1698-1752), Gaston Coeurdoux (1691-1779), Jean Calmette (1693-1739) and Joseph Tieffenthaler (1710-1785).

During the period between the 16th and 19th Centuries, priority was given to practical astronomy, due to the increasing navigational needs of those in search of new territories for commerce and colonisation. Navigation required accurate maps of harbours, coasts and islands, which in turn necessitated accurate observations of the position of certain stars and planets and the determination of longitudes and latitudes of locations. Many missionaries were cartographers and had the necessary equipment in their hands. There were over 25 Jesuits in expeditions to various parts of India, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan and China during the 17th and 18th Centuries. Notable among them were Bento



Bouchet's Map.

de Goes (1562-1607), Francis de Azevedo (1578-1660), Antonio de Andrada (1580-1634), Johann Grueber (1623-1680), Albert D'Orville (1621-1662) and Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733). They have left valuable sources for an ethnographical and geographical study of India.

Jean-Venant Bouchet (1655-1732) was responsible for the first dependable map of the interior of the southern peninsula. Bouchet, who arrived in India in February 1689, covered the Coromandel coast on foot, made astronomical observations at Pondicherry and prepared maps and sketches. His map of the southern peninsula was published in 1737 and was followed by his famous *Carte de l'Inde* in 1752.

Bouchet, a French Jesuit, was known as Sanjvi Nathar in Tamil. Four of his works in Tamil are still available. *Jnana Sanjivi* was one of them.

In Madras and the Tamil regions, where they worked, the Jesuits played a great role at a particular time of history. They have left a large amount of writings in Tamil, which form part of the Tamil literary heritage, which is acknowledged by the scholars.

They may not remain in the "communicative memory" of the Tamil people which goes back perhaps to some 80 years or so at the most, but in the "cultural memory" which goes back to several centuries. They have found a place in Tamil tradition.

— Dr. Anand Amaladss
Dhyana Ashram

Coimbatore, released a report stating 35,000 to 40,000 hectares of fertile farmland were destroyed by tannery effluents. Not much has changed.

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Candidates needed

Even though the High Court has cancelled the civic polls, what MM said in its October 1st issue remains valid.

What do voters expect from candidates, be it from civic bodies, state legislatures or parliament?

A political party must ensure that its candidate has a passion to serve the public without expectations and a hidden agenda.

The candidate's track record of public service must be closely examined before putting up the candidate for election.

If the candidate is seeking election for a second or more times, his or her performance in the previous periods must be closely audited.

The candidate must be capable and reliable and understand his/her role and the importance of public service.

The candidate must have an adequate knowledge and feel for the voters' problems and issues and attempt to solve them during the period of his/her tenure.

The candidate must never promise while campaigning what he/she cannot fulfill.

All the election promises of the candidates must be well documented/recorded and published and tested after their election/selection, periodically, and published for the benefit of the public/voter. Target vs actual performance must be visible in a transparent/quantifiable manner.

The Marketing principle, "Never promise what you cannot deliver and always deliver more than what was promised and more than customer expectations", must be adopted by the candidate.

The candidate's capability/ability to serve voters must be quantified and be data-based, not opinion-based.

The candidate's money power must be minimised and the hunger for popularity/power must be diminished.

The candidate must understand that voters keep watching his/her performances throughout.

There must be appropriate remedial course of action for defaulting councillors and this must be made known to the candidate when seeking election.

Candidates when elected must have adequate time and interest to meet and listen to voters' problems and issues. They must have time for voters and share their contact details with voters through newspapers and should visit voters once in a fortnight and inform them what good they have done thus far and what they would do before their next visit.

The candidate must be free from vested interests and hunger for popularity and power.

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Jumble resolved

In the last issue of *Madras Musings* the Printer's Devil had scrambled the first paragraph of Partab Ramchand's 'September memory'. This is how it should have read. We regret the error.

—The Editor

Thirty years ago, on September 22, 1986, at M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chepauk, Maninder Singh is given out lbw at 5.18 p.m. and the Test between India and Australia ends in a tie — only the second such result in 1052 matches.

OUR ADDRESSES

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Madras Musings now has its own email ID. Letters to the editor can be sent via email to editor@madrasmusings.com.

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

— THE EDITOR

Making the ugly walls of Madras...

We are in the 21st Century. There are many gadgets, whatsapps and several other modes to communicate messages. Yet, painting on the walls by political parties and pasting of posters by politicians, film-makers and individuals continue as an eyesore in Chennai. These communicators are yet to come out of these primitive ways of conveying messages. Why do the movie-makers indulge in pasting large posters on the walls, electricity junction boxes, telephone junction boxes and even road signboards, as if people go to films only after looking at these posters?

Magazines have now followed the trend. Instead of displaying their weekly or monthly magazine posters in the newsstands, they blatantly paste them on the walls of houses of unknown people, making the walls ugly.

There are posters to announce the marriage or death of someone in some unknown colony. The huge pillars below the flyovers are also not left free. Posters of all political parties dominate them. At one of the flyovers, the beams bear the political leader's name and face prominently and the local area leaders' names are painted in colours that hit you in the face.

Do political parties think that the public is admiring this artwork, or the huge banners that block the pavements, while standing on the road?

One Traffic Ramasamy is not enough for Chennai to fight against this menace of targetting

public walls, pillars and beams. Swachh Bharat also means clean walls and pillars.

We, the general public, do not know whether the Corporation has any control over this menace that makes the city look ugly. No other country, I believe, has allowed the use of walls of private individuals to such abuse.

If the throwing of household wastes in the corner of the street is one kind of attack on the cleanliness of the city, these posters and paintings are another kind of 'acid attack'.

Another menace is fixing of 'No Parking' boards with the advertisers' names on the gates of private apartments and buildings. There are a minimum five to six boards of various shapes and sizes hung on each gate. Other than advertising without permission the services or products, these boards serve no purpose. The irony is more vehicles are parked in front of the gates than before!

The Chennai Corporation authorities should do something to eliminate this ugly use of public spaces. A clean city is what local residents and visitors look for.

Some years ago, there was an ad by the Corporation of Madras, saying 'Be Proud of Madras'. The editor of *The Mail* then wrote: 'We are proud, in spite of the Corporation!'

Charukesi charukesiviswanathan@yahoo.co.in

... look better – with streetscape ideas

The grandly-planned streetscape for Luz Church Road – wide pavements, central pavement median, displays of heritage spots of Luz and Mylapore, special lighting and street furniture – is now history.

Some Mylaporeans challenged the idea, especially the central median plan and Chennai Corporation dropped the plan the next day, leaving no space for other people to debate the whole project.

Today, the wide pavements on either side of the road are being hijacked by hawkers. Some spots remain. And one such spot on the north pavement, opposite Amrutanjan and next to Nalli's, is being designed. It will host a neighbourhood map and photos of local heritage and have street furniture. Work by contractors of the civic body has begun.

Architect Kavitha Selvaraj who designed the Luz Church Road re-design project hopes local residents can further enrich this spot. "People can line the wall with potted plants, for example," she suggests.

As an extension of this streetscape spot on this road, Kavitha hopes to re-design the walls that wrap the local TANGEDCO and BSNL telephone exchange offices that flank Nageswara Rao Park and the street leading to Our Lady of Light Church, Luz.

Just now, one corner is an open urinal and some parts of the rear wall has BSNL's promos painted on it.

"Can we use simple murals to showcase local heritage on these walls on both sides?" asks Kavitha.

As an experiment, her colleagues have designed a mayil (peacock) mural image on the wall on the edge of the BSNL office fronting the Park's main gate.

"If we convince BSNL and others who use these walls and get Corporation to fund murals,



The rear wall of the BSNL Mylapore telephone exchange office (top); a sample mural created on the wall on Luz Church Road, opposite Nageswara Rao Park (above). We can change the streetscape here," says Kavitha.

– Mylapore Times reporter

Murthy – the surfing champion

From an undistinguished boy who surfed the waves using flotsam and styrofoam boards, to becoming a champion surfer-boarder, Murthy Megavan has come a long way. He is at the centre of an upcoming surf school serving as a source of inspiration for aspiring surfers, trainers, community builders and humanity – lifting the lives of many, like a rising tide does.

India has a long coastline and plenty of beaches. Citizens of the country, and visitors too, have daily access to many parts of the coast along the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Yet, it is rare to hear about water-sports enthusiasts in this cricket-frenzied country. This is exactly why the story of Murthy Megavan is so remarkable.

Born in the late 1970s into a poor fishing family living in a small settlement on Kovalam (Covelong) beach near Chennai (not to be confused with Kovalam beach, Kerala), Murthy dropped out of school in order to provide for his family. His father left the family due to a feud and Murthy had to shoulder the responsibility of providing for his grandmother, mother and sister. This was not unusual then. Many youth in his place and with his background would have done the same.

But it was unusual that the young son of a fisherman didn't limit himself to catching fish. He wanted to ride the waves.

Kovalam is essentially a fishing village although it is known for its beach culture as well. The daily catch Murthy brought in was just about enough to feed his family. He had nothing in excess to equip himself with in order to indulge his passion for surfing. So, wooden planks and flotsam served as his first surfboards. He taught himself to surf by trying and trying again.

In the beginning, he didn't know any surfing techniques. Nor did he have a trainer. He simply aligned his body with the plank to ride a wave.

He would practice for hours and observe different types of waves. He says he made mental notes to correct his own mistakes and perfected the art of surfing through sheer hours spent in the sea. He's not sure if it was his passion for catching waves or his innate ability to ride them that brought improvement.

The person accredited with starting the surf movement in India is Jack Hebner, an American who was drawn to India's spiritual side. At a time when surfing was unheard of in India, he realised that different parts of the country's coastline lent themselves well to surfing in different seasons.



Murthy holds a surf board with Arun Vasu and Jhony Rhodes on his right and T.M. Krishna on his left.

Hebner set up a surf school that combined spirituality with surfing, consequently winning himself the nickname 'Surfing Swami.'

The surf school Hebner started in 2004 in Mangalore was a key milestone in India's surf movement. Cleverly combining spirituality with surfing, the Surf Swami brought a significant number of surfers from the world over to India. The surf movement has been growing since, although slowly. The best places to surf in India are Mangalore, Kovalam in Kerala, Goa, Chennai, Pondicherry, and the islands of the Andamans. India's top surf schools are in these places. Every school offers training and accommodation. The trend these days is to combine yoga on the beach before and after surfing to enhance mind-body coordination.

Murthy had the chance to meet the Surfing Swami at Kovalam beach, Chennai, in 2001. He borrowed the Swami's surf board and took only a few minutes to adapt to it. In just a short time he rode every swell like a pro, showing no traces of having used wooden planks until then to pursue the sport. The Swami was instantly impressed. He left his phone number, urging Murthy to get in touch with him. But a not-so-literate Murthy didn't know the city codes and dial-in format to use that number. So, for a few more years, he continued to remain undiscovered by the rest of the world. But the few minutes spent on a real surfboard inspired Murthy, against his family's wishes, to use all the family's meagre savings to buy one.

Fishing and surfing were the dual aspects of his life until

Kovalam beach, like the rest of the Coramandel coast on the Indian Ocean, was hit by a tsunami in 2004. Having lived through (or perhaps, surfed through) that natural disaster right at his doorstep, Murthy devoted much of his time towards community building. He enrolled at a local NGO and offered his time to improve the lives of the not-so-privileged around his home.

His family had very little but he says there were many around him who had even less – this motivated him to be a giver.

In the years that followed Murthy's tryst with the Surfing Swami, more and more people discovered Chennai's surf spots – some well-to-do locals, some visiting Australians, a few Israelis, Americans, and Europeans. Every single surfer who came to Kovalam beach noticed Murthy for two reasons: he was a remarkably dexterous surfer and he was a devoted social worker. He had a genuine concern for people and was helping build a self-reliant community despite his own poor economic background.

Naturally, with this ability to make such a fantastic first impression, Murthy struck up great relationships and friendships with people from around the world. Some surfers shared their surf techniques with him, some shared fancy chocolates from their home countries, some gifted him their old surfboards, and some went on to use their own professions and talents to spotlight Murthy's talent.

One of the first surfers to discover Murthy was Tobias Hartmann, a German expat in India. Tobias says, "I met Murthy in the summer of 2007 at Covelong Point, which was unknown at the time. I had started

to surf there with our sons Jakob and Viktor. I remember the second visit, when this young Indian villager (Murthy) ran towards us with an old surfboard under his arm. He was an incredible surf enthusiast. Mind set on surfing, we shared a lot of waves with Murthy and an increasing num-

ber of young village boys who were surfing with anything they could find to catch a wave – timber boards, styrofoam boards – anything that would float. These talented youth were missing a few decent boards. Fortunately, we met Yotam Agam at that same time. Yotam organised a proper surfboard as a present for Murthy. That was the start of Murthy and the Covelong Point surf saga..."

Like a true sportsman, for every new surfboard he received as a gift, Murthy passed on his old surfboard to an aspiring surfer in his village. There were many youngsters in the village who liked the sport but just couldn't afford surfboards.

This was a boon for the boys at Kovalam fishing village – learning to surf and being able to instruct others opened up entirely new opportunities to support their erratic fishing livelihoods.

Yotam Agam, a well known Israeli entrepreneur in Chennai, took an immense liking to Murthy. He liked the boy's attitude. He found him ingenious, optimistic and also considerate towards others. Murthy never approached visiting surfers for

help or a loan, which he could have, given the excellent rapport he had with most of them. Instead, he just enjoyed surfing and hanging out with them without any strings attached.

An impressed Yotam Agam offered to make a video about Murthy to share on YouTube – a video that went on to win the young fisherman a lot of fans, both online and on the shore.

Soon, the print media followed with their own articles about this gem of a sportsman and the benefactor hidden on Chennai's shores. These articles in the local dailies got the attention of many locals who wanted to give the sport a try. Kovalam beach, which is about 40 kilometres from Chennai, gradually saw an increase in their numbers on the weekends.

Visiting surfers came to Kovalam beach looking for Murthy. They loved surfing with him and sharing their stories. More importantly, they loved his story.

A prominent businessman and sports aficionado in Chennai, Arun Vasu, also took notice of Murthy's talent. Murthy was already on a winning spree then. He had won coveted

places in many Asian surfing competitions in Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia, which were hotly contested by people from around the world. He had a growing network of international fans.

Arun Vasu decided to invest in Murthy. This was a huge turning point for the surfer. The patron generously offered to build a surf school around Murthy's talent and to support it until the school was able to generate its own running costs.

So, Covelong Point Surf School opened its doors in November 2012 (Covelong is an English interpretation of Kovalam).

The surf season in Chennai starts in the pre-monsoon month of April and continues until the end of the monsoon season in September. Covelong Point is an exposed beach and reef break that has pretty reliable surf. Off-shore winds are from the west northwest.

The ideal swell direction is from the east southeast. Typically, this coast inherits the wave conditions in Bali two or three days later. Waves at the beach break both left and right and there is a right hand reef break too. Surfing here means negoti-



Murthy Megavan.

ating dangerous rips but it also means that a surfer can surf a relatively uncrowded peak.

Built with modern facilities, the Covelong Point Surfing School stands testimony to the saying: "Follow your passion and people follow you." The school offers a lovely view of the sea, a clean and promising restaurant that serves up daily catches in delectable dishes, and a few rooms to accommodate surfers coming from far and wide. In less than three years, Covelong Point has had over 300 students. The school has full-time staff to teach kayaking, kite surfing, and wind surfing, besides surfing itself.

Every single teacher in the school is a local fisherman, hand-picked and trained by Murthy. These boys – Murthy's boys – now excel at national competitions!

What sets Murthy's team apart from other surf schools in the country is its service to the community. Murthy intends to attract sports-minded (as opposed to money-minded) people

with a sense of social service to the community. The teachers at Covelong Point regularly lead beach clean-ups. In the recent past, they also organised health camps and eye check-ups for the locals who have no access to reliable health care. They have a no smoking, no drugs, no alcohol policy to propagate clean and healthy sporting habits. They host a spectacular three-day eclectic music and yoga festival that brings budding musicians, artists and sportspeople together against the backdrop of the ocean, sun and sand.

The school sees a stream of surfers from Germany, Japan, Israel, France, and the US to keep it busy throughout the year. Surf schools like Covelong Point alter the city's (and even the nation's) beach culture in significant ways.

In this growing surf culture there are many who ride a wave and some more who can turn the tide in their favour, but very few like Murthy who lift the lives of others.

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Quizzin'
with
Ram'n'an

(Current Affairs questions are from the period September 16th to 30th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Which Indian airport has become Asia-Pacific's only airport, and one of the world's few, to achieve a carbon neutral status?

2. Name the Nobel Laureate, former PM and President of Israel, who passed away recently.

3. What is the official name of Gurgaon today?

4. India will purchase 36 Rafale fighter jets from France. Who makes the jets?

5. What honour has been accorded by the Union Government to 105-year-old Kunwar Bai from Chhatisgarh's Dhamtari District?

6. Land Rover commissioned the world's largest Lego sculpture of a London monument, created with 5,805,846 pieces, to launch its new vehicle 'Discovery'. What is this edifice?

7. Which Asian online giant is planning to launch the world's first e-commerce satellite next year to provide people with the best vegetables?

8. Who is to be the inaugural recipient of the annual Jesse Owens Olympic Spirit Award for a person who has served as an inspiration in society?

9. Lok Kalyan Marg is the new name of which road in Lutyens' Delhi?

10. Name Google's new messaging app, intended to rival WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, that was launched recently.

* * *

11. Which Tamil film has been selected as India's official entry for the 89th Academy Awards for Foreign Language Film category?

12. Where in Ramanathapuram District was the world's largest solar power plant at a single location, with an installed capacity of 648MW, commissioned recently?

13. The Asian Development Bank has approved a \$631 million loan for building India's first coastal industrial corridor between Chennai and which city?

14. Apart from Madurai and Thanjavur, which other two Tamil Nadu cities have been shortlisted by the Union Ministry of Urban Development in the third batch of Smart Cities Mission?

15. Which paddler from the State became the second Indian to win an ITTF event (after A. Sharath Kamal) by clinching the men's singles title at the Belgium Open?

16. Name the famous Bengali poet who took up a teaching assignment at the Male Orphan Asylum in Egmore in 1848.

17. Which market in Chennai is named after the Telugu term for a tiger's cage?

18. Who wrote the detailed *Southem India: Its History, People, Commerce and Industrial Resources*, one of the most popular reference books on the history of Madras?

19. On which busy Chennai thoroughfare is the Sri Balasubramania Bhakta Jana Sabhai, synonymous with Thiru Vi. Ka located?

20. Nimynbacka, Lingumbauca and Moongumbaukum are some of the variants that occur in the South India Company records of which bustling, present-day Chennai locality?

(Answers on page 7)

Besant to Vasantha



Annie Besant.

"I was a student of Besant Theosophical School during 1938-50, a school Annie Besant had helped to establish." She was greatly admired by the people of India for her contribution to the freedom movement as well as her devotion to education. She established the Vasantha Press with her own funds, outside the Theosophical Society (TS) compound, to publish her political writings as well as all the publications of the TS. She herself published some 300 books.

Annie Besant became the President of The Theosophical Society in 1907 (till 1933). But, was Vasantha the real name of the press when it was started in 1908? We do not know who gave the apt name, Vasantha. However, at the end of the day, Besant gifted it to the TS and this acquisition was sold by the TS in 1973.

The Besant School's prayer song was composed by Papa-

mittee, spoke first and he was followed by an inspiring speech by Dr. G.S. Arundale, the then President of the TS. Papanasam Sivan, the music composer and musician, known as the Thyagaraja of the 20th Century, composed Devi Vasanthie as a tribute to Dr. Annie Besant at no one's behest. His devotion to her had impelled him to do it. He has heard her soul-stirring lectures several times. Though he did not know English, he understood her, as she conveyed her message to the *atman*." This prayer song could have been sung on the very first day of the school.

When Papanasam Sivan first arrived at Madras in 1929, it was Rukmini Devi who was the first person to recognise his genius. His association with her matured to his becoming the composer and musician when the School started functioning. Kalakshetra was soon afterwards formed, in 1936.

● by K.V.S. Krishna

nasam Sivan with the words *Devi Vasanthae* and the Besant School magazine published annually, was named *Vasantha*, with students contributing to it. Similarly the School's Scout movement was named 'The Vasantha Boy Scouts and Guides'. Even the Krishnamurthi Foundation premises is named Vasantha Vihar. This building came up on 6.5 acres off Greenways Road. It was designed by an architect friend of Rabindranath Tagore and given by Annie Besant in 1928 to J. Krishnamurthi, for his residence. He used it for five decades.

N. Sriram was a devoted Assistant Editor of *New India* and a right hand for Annie Besant. His eldest son was born on October 1, 1922, which is also the birthday of Annie Besant, So, he named his son Vasanth Nilakanta in her honour. Similarly, a Theosophist devoted to Annie Besant, N. Swaminathan, named his daughter as Vasantha.

Papanasam Sivan was the first teacher of music when the Besant Memorial School was founded by G.S. Arundale with K. Sankara Menon as its Headmaster and P.S. Krishnaswamy and K. Venkatala Sastry, the other two teachers. It was inaugurated on June 27, 1934. G. Sundari writes in the book *South of the Adyar River*, "I was five years old and was sitting on my father's lap. N.Sriram, the Chairman of the School Com-

About the first anniversary of the School, G. Swaminathan writes, "My proudest moment was on the School Day in 1935, when I received – for proficiency in English, Mathematics and Cricket – lotus petals from the Chief Guest, the Revered Rabindranath Tagore." The first SSLC batch had just nine students who appeared for the exams in 1937, but only two passed the exams. The school now has got more than 1000 students, though the name has been changed to The Besant Theosophical School.

Captain G. Swaminathan, the other student who passed in the first batch in 1937, showed me some years back in 2007, his Scouts Scarf, which was a silk square of violet with a border in yellow. Dr. G.S. Arundale was the Commissioner for Scouts in India in 1934 to 40.

Annie Besant's last wish expressed to Dr. Arundale before she passed away in 1933 was to establish a school in Adyar, as the one she had earlier established was gifted to J. Krishnamurti at his request, so that he could start The Rishi Valley School at Madanapalle, his native village. Dr. Arundale carried out his promise to her and established the Besant Memorial School in 1934 in Adyar.

"I contacted my classmate (1950) Prof C.V. Chandrasekhar and he translated the school prayer song and sent it to me with his brief views".

My book in a bookstore

Today I am on cloud nine! *The journey skywards* started last September when my book *Seeing in the Dark*, a translation of R. Chudamani's short stories, was released. If you have ever seen a determined woman peering closely at airport bookshelves in the months since then, it was me. The first anything is special, the first child, the first love, the first teacher, the first salary... make your choice. It is not that the next is less precious. The first writes on a clean slate. This was my first book.

The circle of family and friends loyally attended the book release function. The said circle also loyally asked for my signature. One special member of the audience was my six year old grandson who sat patiently listening to the speeches just to see his Paatti stand up. Then began the saga of 'The Search of the Bookshelves'. I really don't know what I expected. I only know I was sorely disappointed not to see a single copy of my book anywhere. Then I told myself that perhaps the first edition had sold out... completely. But as in the old black and white movies where two K.R. Vijayas or Saroja Devis appeared with flowing hair, one in black saree and one in white sari arguing with each other, my black sari image appeared and dampeningly told me "Prabha, you've got a hope!"

Today I went to Star Mark at the Express Mall to buy books for my grandchildren in the US. Ruskin Bond seemed the right choice for my grand-daughter. I picked up two of his and then went around the store. I returned to Ruskin Bond. There... I could not believe my eyes... were my books, *Seeing in the Dark*, nestling between Ruskin Bond and Amitav Ghosh. Not bad company at all. I was thrilled. A slender sales girl was quietly rearranging the books. I told her, "Do you know.. that is mine!" She didn't know, it would seem, judging by the way she was dropping her jaw. What was this grey haired lady in a grey cotton saree trying to say?

"Ma'am , are you saying you are the writer?"

"Yes, yes."

I picked up the book and showed the last page where I was beaming from a picture.

"Ma'am, shall I shift them all to the top shelf?"

"You will?" And I rushed away.

I don't think she had ever seen anything like this.

Then I went up to the cashier.

"You know what? You have my book!"

"What, Ma'am?" Second jaw dropped.

"The book I wrote... you have it there." I took a deep breath.

"Oh! Cash or card, Ma'am?"

I will be more composed and dignified when my second book hits the shelf!

– Justice Prabha Sridevan

"Regarding the song composed by Bramhasri Papanasam Sivan on Dr. Besant, it still continues to be sung in all the institutions under the Kalakshetra Foundation on all special occasions of the institution. I had the good fortune of learning from him an *Ashtapadi* from poet Jayadeva's *Geetagovindam*, for which Rukmini Devi composed the dance for my *arangetram* in 1950.

The song on Dr. Besant which was written and tuned by Sivan goes thus

Devi Vasanthie. Ragam: Vasantha, Talam: Adi
Translation

Pallavi: *Oh Goddess Vasantha, Hail to you, Hail to your compassion*

Anupallavi: *The queen of speech, you work tirelessly, you have hoisted.*

The standard (flag) in the world, establishing the greatness of truth, equality,

And wisdom through the right path, and celebrated by the rulers of the world.

Charanam: *Condemning ego, you joined hands with the poor, helpless and downtrodden, you established the Religion of Truth as the highest religion.*

A fitting tribute to Dr. Annie Wood Besant. She never elaborated on her maiden name, Annie Wood. However, the book *South of the Adyar River* has a picture of thickly wooded forest in its backcover!

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at www.madrasmusings.com

– THE EDITOR

An indigenous look at Madras history

Dr. V. Raghavan, while contributing to the Madras tercentenary volume in 1939, could only quote two sources of Sanskrit literature about Madras, though he knew about the existence of yet another but which he could not lay his hands on at the time. The two that he quoted were *Visagunadarsa Campu* and *Anandaranga Vijaya Campu*, both notices of Madras in Sanskrit works. Much later, he discovered the manuscript of *Sarva Deva Vilasa*, in 86 palm leaves stored in the Adyar Library and a more important work on the social conditions of 17th Century Madras.

A well-known Sanskrit poet of the late 17th Century, Venkathadharin, living in Arasani-palai near Kanchipuram, composed the *Visagunadarsa Campu*, meaning 'holding a mirror to the universe'. A *campu kavya* is in prose and poetry form and in this narration two semi-divine characters travel over India in an aerial vehicle observing the land below and offering a commentary on what they observe. Krisnau and Visvasu are the two *Gandharva*-s, one a cynic and the other a positive thinker. After crossing North India, they reach Tirupathi and then come to Thiruvallur where the Viraraghava temple engages their attention. Then, after passing over Sriperumpudur, they come to Thiruvallikkeni. In Sanskrit, the tank is called *Kairavani*, meaning 'the pond of lilies'. At that point of time in history, the pond was south of where a tank exists today. (The old tank area is now a residential area named Vedavallipuram). Here there is an interesting discussion between the two. Visvasu, being a positive thinker, speaks well of the temple, place and people while Krisnau faults everything. He says that while the temple and place may be good, the place is vitiated by the foreigners (he refers to them as *hunas*) who "don't even wash themselves after calls of nature." But Visvasu describes the foreigners as having some virtues. "They do not lie and are just," says he, probably taking into account the judgement meted out during Right-hand and Left-hand caste disputes. He also notes the difference between Muslim invaders and the English in respect of temples.

The second treatise Dr. Raghavan mentions is the

Anandaranga Vijaya Campu composed in 1752 by poet Srinivasa to celebrate the lives of Thiruvengadam Pillai and his son Anandarangam Pillai. The original palm leaf manuscript of this work was obtained by Professors K.A.N. Sastry and S. Vaiyapuri Pillai from the house of Anandarangam Pillai in Puducherry. In this work, Srinivasa traces the family of Anandarangam Pillai to one of its very early members, Garbhadaraka (in Tamil Karuvendan), who lived in Ayanapura, today's Ayyanavaram. A generous

man, he was visited by poets from Andhra Desa. It appears from the manuscript that Garbhadaraka was invited by the King of Golconda. There is a corresponding work in Telugu, *Anandarangarat Chandamu*, by one Kasturi Rangayya, which says that Ayyanavaram was in Pattana Rajya, obviously meaning Madras. From both these works, it is understood that the King of Golconda made Garbhadaraka the lord of Vetrapura. *Vetra* in Sanskrit is cane (in Tamil *pirambu*) and therefore Vetrapura is today's Perambur.

The *Anandaranga Campu* says, Garbhadaraka had three sons named Solai, Uttara (Vadamalai) and Sridhara (Thirumalai). The family lineage is traced in the *campu*, which says Solai had a son Bommayya who in turn had two sons and a daughter. The second son was Thiruvengkata, who was the father of Anandaranga. The Telugu work eulogises Thiruvengkata saying that he was a linguist and had even studied Christianity, so that he could argue with missionaries.



Anandarangam Pillai.



Vedachala Mudaliar*



Devanayaga Mudaliar.

According to the *campu*, Anandaranga was born in Sarvadhari year Phalguna month, corresponding to March 1709.

The *campu* narrates the story of Thiruvengkata living among the merchants and moving to Chennapattina with his two sons and then on to Navapura. Obviously this means Puducherry, *nava* meaning 'new' (in Tamil *puđu*). Madras is mentioned in this *campu* as Chennapattina and Chennakesavapura.

former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Bakthavatsalam was a descendant of the family. Similarly, he has traced the family of Vedachala and got a portrait from one of the descendants, an Abhirama Mudaliar. Vedachala Mudali was the son of Kesava Mudali who is mentioned in colonial references. He appears to be from *Kalasai* (now Thottikalai) and his grandfather is noted in a poem of Thottikalai Subramania Muni in his *Kalasaikovai*, a work in Tamil.

Devanayaga Mudali is also mentioned in Company records as Dharmakartha of the Agasteeswarar temple of Nungambakkam. His grandfather was a *dubash* in Eyre Coote's time. Though a staunch Vasihnaveite, he supported other temples too and a portrait of him was found by Dr. Raghavan in a temple. Incidentally, there is a Madras District Record entry dated June 6, 1820, where his signature appears as S. Davy Naigum.

The colourful procession is described and shows how these merchants vied with each other to show off their wealth and power. Their mistresses accompanying them were talented in their respective arts, like music and dance, and were noteworthy for their beauty. All these merchants, according to the poet divine, bathed with their mistresses in the pond so that the public could see them!

This narrative is important to the present day historian as it reconstructs the social conditions existing then, and the equations between the Company officials and the merchants. The Company was interested in having a loyal subservient class who would manage the local population, a management technique most suited at that time. The English knew that temples were the nodal points for society and the rich men wanted to have control over them to show their supremacy. In appointing the *dharmakartha*-s, the English ensured that they had a set of loyal people who would carry out the will of the governing authority.

The English are referred to as *hunas* and the wise one says that these foreigners are destroying the culture and the traditions of the locals, while the

wiser one, here too, replies that the foreigners are just and have better modern equipment and arms. The foreigners are referred to as *Svethamukhis*, white-faced ones, similar to American Indians calling the white 'paleface'.

While there is a certain amount of cynical remarks about the English and their behaviour, the narrative also mentions that certain merchants stood up to the English.

The topography of the town of Chennapuri is clear from the text. There was a wall which has historic importance for a tax that was never collected and is indicated as *prakara*. Other places indicated in the text are Viksaranya (Tiruvellore), Kalasai (Tottikalai), Nungapuri (Nungambakkam), Toyadri (Tiruneermalai), Adhipuri (Tiruvottriyur), Pravalanagari (Coral Merchant Street) and Navasthala (Puduppakkam – new place). Persons mentioned in the text are Manali Venkatakrisna (son of Muthukrishna) Mudaliar, Ravanappa, and Colla Ravanappa Chetti, who built the Kotwal Market and the Kanyaka Parameswari temple in 1803-4 from his own funds and owned a house inside the Fort in 1822, in addition to a property belonging to him.

Other indigenous writing on the English include several folk songs booklets of the events that took place during the English rule in Madras, while a much better Tamil poem by one Varadaraja Pillai was published in his *India* by Bharati on the crash of the Arbuthnot Bank. Other folklore written in ungrammatical and colloquial Tamil describe events like the fire in Peoples' Park, the first flight in Madras, and the *Emden* shelling of the harbour. The information found in them is reliable in constructing the history of Madras.

The best written record is, of course, that of the diarist Anandarangam Pillai, which is well known.

* Dr. Raghavan obtained this picture from one Abhirama Mudaliar, a descendant.

● by K.R.A. Narasiah

When Dr. Raghavan got the Sanskrit manuscript of *Sarva Deva Vilasa*, he wrote a commentary on it. The narrative here is more descriptive of the place and persons and talks about the social conditions of the then Madras. All the characters in the work are real and, therefore, historically this work is more important while studying 18th Century Madras and its social construct.

Sarva Deva Vilasa, meaning 'the dwelling place of all Gods', that is, Madras to the anonymous poet, talks of the important merchants of the city. Here too the structure of the text is in prose and poetry, but is not of classical Sanskrit. Using as it does in Sanskrit the transliterated Tamil idioms and phrases, show that the author was of Tamil origin but had learned Sanskrit. Once again the narrative is in the form of dialogue between two celestial figures, Vivekin and Ativivekin (wise one and wiser one).

They follow the processions of the great merchants who in them ostentatiously show off their power, wealth and virility. At the start itself the poet declares the four merchants he is dealing with are greater than Bhojaraja – *bhojadhik*. The four are called Kalingaraya, Sriranga, Vedachala and Devanayaga. They were all persons who actually lived in Madras and find mention in the works of colonial historians as well.

Dr. Raghavan has traced the family of Sriranga and says the

Answers to Quiz

1. Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi; 2. Shimon Peres; 3. Gurugram; 4. Dassault; 5. She has been chosen the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' mascot; 6. Tower Bridge; 7. Alibaba; 8. Muhammad Ali; 9. Race Course Road, where the PM's residence is located; 10. Allo.

* * *

11. *Visaranai*; 12. Kamuthi; 13. Visakhapatnam; 14. Vellore and Salem; 15. G. Sathiyam; 16. Michael Madhusudan Dutt; 17. Puli bone (bonu) bazaar in Triplicane; 18. Somerset Playne; 19. TTK Road; 20. Nungambakkam.

Memories of films past

• Some random reflections of a film buff turned film critic about the English and Hindi movie scene in the city over the last half century and more.

From a teenage film buff in the early 1960s to being a film critic for a city newspaper for about 25 years, I have been a close observer of the movie scene in Madras over the last half century and more, specialising in English and Hindi films. And what vivid memories they bring back for me even as I continue to watch old classics on YouTube.

One of my earliest recollections is seeing *Ben Hur* at Odeon (later Melody) in 1961. Movies then used to be shown in the city a year or two after their initial release abroad and this was not just confined to English movies. Even Hindi movies were released some months (or perhaps even a year) after their release in Bombay and northern towns.

That same year I saw *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hain* and *Gunga Jumna*, both at Midland (later Jayaprada) and *Hum Dono* at Star Talkies. The three were prestige home releases of the three biggest stars at the time, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and Dev Anand. Naturally, they drew big crowds and had highly successful runs.

The most enduring memory of 1963 was seeing *Taj Mahal* at Midland and *Mere Mehboob* at Star. Both films in colour (a trend picking up at a time, when most movies were still being shot in black and white) and boasting super hit music by Roshan and Naushad. Predictably, they celebrated silver jubilee runs.

If there was one early phenomenon among movies that ran in the city it would be *Aradhana*. It enjoyed a golden jubilee run in 1969-70 at Little Anand. Rajesh Khanna was elevated to superstar status, Sharmila Tagore's performance earned her a Filmfare award and S.D. Burman's foot-tapping music was being hummed all over town. It mattered little to moviegoers that Shakthi Samanta's film was a remake of *To Each his Own*, a 1946 Hollywood tearjerker that brought Olivia de Havilland the first of her two Oscars for best actress.

And can I forget the "friendly" competition between *Bobby* and *Yaadon Ki Baraat* in 1973-74? Raj Kapoor's blockbuster was released at Midland and Nazir Hussain's entertainer was on show at Star. Released about the same time, the two films celebrated their silver jubilees and then their golden jubilees. The dialogue and the music was played repeatedly on the juke boxes in restaurants.

But perhaps the most enduring memory will be the serpentine queues outside Sathyam theatre during the long run of *Sholay* in 1975-76. The queues were seen day after day, week after week as the popularity of Ramesh Sippy's magnum opus never ceased. Amjad Khan's dialogues, now part of filmy folklore, was on everyone's lips.

With the coming of television, which made its debut in the city in August 1975, it was inevitable that there would be some sort of dip in the popularity of films. People preferred to sit and see the news and entertainment programmes at home. These were insipid and limited to a few hours, but TV being a novelty quite a few people became addicted to it even in the early years. Sure, an Amitabh Bachchan starrer still drew crowds, but there was little

doubt that serpentine queues over an extended period as well as silver jubilee runs of films were going to be a thing of the past. The coming of cable TV in the 1990s ensured that.

The English movie scene was a bit different. Films sometimes were shown in the city a year or so after their original release and if there were censorship problems then it could even result in a longer wait. So city film-goers who loved English films had to be patient before they could see *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, *Doctor Zhivago*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Graduate*, *Jaws*, *The Godfather* and so on. The most popular were the James Bond movies which always drew crowds and had successful runs whether 007 was played by Sean Connery or Roger Moore. And in the 1980s and 90s, moviegoers made a beeline for the action films of Stallone and Schwarzenegger.

A phenomenon among English movies released in the city was *MacKenna's Gold*. Nothing matched the popularity of this Gregory Peck-Omar Sharif starrer and it demanded a return viewing for countless moviegoers more than once. Released in 1970 at Devi it ran for some 40 weeks – something unheard of for an English movie – and people talked about the action scenes, the stunts and the stunning photography for years afterwards. It certainly struck a chord with the movie going public in the city like few films before or since.

Partab Ramchand

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Dates for Your Diary

Till October 30: *Stellar Memories* – an exhibition of abstract paintings by V. Hariram (at Varija Gallery, DakshinaChitra).

Till October 30: An exhibition of artworks by Nupur Chatterjee on Bengal Cats (at Kadambari Gallery, DakshinaChitra).

November 5-30: *Traditions of Tamil Nadu* – an exhibition of portraits by Antony Raj and Ramu (at Kadambari Gallery, DakshinaChitra).

November 5-30: *I see what I pant* – an exhibition of artworks by Anamika V. (at Varija Gallery, DakshinaChitra).

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Workshops

For Children

November 19: Bookmark making. 8-14 years (at DakshinaChitra).

For Adults

November 12-13 & 19: Terracotta jewellery (at DakshinaChitra, 10.30 a.m.-5.30 p.m.).

Mylapore for World Heritage status?

(Continued from page 1)

known spots, it is perhaps Luz Church that is really a survivor from the past in terms of its structure. There is, of course, much that is intangible in Mylapore that forms a link to the past, but that alone cannot make for world heritage status.

The recent experience of making out a case for Fort St George to be declared a world heritage monument, and one that was unsuccessful, throws some light on what exactly is needed for a favourable hearing. The spot so chosen needs to have some tradition or an architectural feature or some impact on the world by way of history or culture to merit preservation

in its entirety. Mylapore would not stand up to much scrutiny. Yes, it does have temple processions, a live shrine in worship and is perceived as the home of South Indian culture but, then, so do others. As for its architecture, there is not much of it that is left. Most of the four Mada Streets are now filled with the ugliest possible commercial structures. What world heritage status are we talking about?

Lastly, even if such a status is bestowed on Mylapore, it will be accompanied by stringent guidelines that will have to be adhered to. Failing this, the accreditation can be withdrawn. Mylapore is now an example of urban chaos. The four Mada Streets do not even have regulated traffic or parking arrange-

ments. The shops and commercial establishments have so far thwarted all attempts at enforcing discipline. When even such basic aspects of discipline are resisted, what price such UN stipulations as uniform signage, cleanliness and, above all, removal of all visual elements that distract from the heritage to be preserved? Can any property owner in Mylapore countenance that?

It is best that Mylapore and the rest of Chennai focus on preserving what little of heritage that is left, and work towards improving the quality of life. World heritage status is a wild goose chase at this point of time and at our levels of appreciation of our past.

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