Confidence building needed for vaccination drive

With the receipt of its allotted consignment of covid vaccines earlier this month, CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami inaugurated the state’s vaccination drive in Madurai. Tamil Nadu, has reportedly received 5.56 lakh doses of the covid vaccine, split as 5.36 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine and 20,000 doses of the Covaxin vaccine. The vaccination drive will be rolled out in multiple stages. Healthcare workers such as doctors, nurses, para-medical staff and others will be vaccinated first, followed by frontline administrative workers such as the corporation staff and police officials. Next, the elderly above fifty years of age will be given priority for vaccination, followed by those below fifty years who have comorbidities. Finally, the vaccine will be rolled out to the general population. The state has already conducted dry runs of the planned vaccination drive, an effort that received appreciation from Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan.

In an interview with Citizen Matters, GCC Commissioner G. Prakash specified that multiple centres in Chennai have been identified to deliver the vaccine to the people, including the Corporation health facilities, private hospitals and medical colleges.

The preparations seem quite solid, in keeping with our state’s largely commendable track record in public health projects. However, some are concerned about the vaccines themselves – specifically, the indigenous Covaxin vaccine developed by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Virology. The Covaxin vaccine – unlike Covishield, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine developed in the UK – is still undergoing Phase 3 trials, which measures its efficacy. The regulator has tempered its approval of the Covaxin vaccine by specifying that it is to have “restricted use in emergency situations in India under the interim data from trials.”

Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan.

(Continued on page 2)

‘Master’ of recklessness

During Bhogi, old and worn-out things, ranging from torn clothes to termite-eaten furniture are discarded. But this year’s Bhogi saw something different. COVID-19 precautions were discarded in the cinema halls of Madras, to catch the ‘first-day-first-show’ (FDFS) of the film, Master on January 13, 2021. “People huddled together, forgoing social distancing. There was a huge crowd near the ticket counter. People were pushing each other in a frenzy, to get the ticket and catch the show on time,” said S. Mahizhan, 21 who ered in a frenzy, to get the ticket. People were pushing each other, foregoing social distancing. There was a huge crowd near the ticket counter. People were pushing each other in a frenzy, to get the ticket and catch the show on time,” said S. Mahizhan, 21 who watched Master on January 14, 2021 in a theatre in Porur. He saw many spectators without masks, shouting and whistling constantly in the cinema hall.

They were dancing and jumping in hysteria on the entry of the hero in the film. It was utter pandemonium, with just 50 per cent occupancy allowed inside cinema screens.

Initially 100 per cent theatre occupancy was permitted by the Tamil Nadu government on January 4, 2021. This move came after actor Vijay reportedly met the Chief Minister to request full occupancy in theatres, because there would likely not be much profit for big-budget movies, if screened at a half-filled theatre. “Fantastic to see theatres get 100 per cent occupancy permission from the Tamil Nadu government. Great to see cinema industry getting its foothold back,” tweeted actress Radhika Sarathkumar supporting this move.

“The pandemic isn’t over, and we have people dying till today to the disease. A hundred per cent theatre occupancy is a suicide attempt. Rather homicide, for none of the policy makers, or the so-called heroes are going to put themselves under the pump, to watch the movie amidst the crowd. This is a blatant barter system, trading lives for money,” read the Facebook post of Aravindh Srinivas resident doctor at JIPMER and this went viral on social media. But the 100 per cent theatre occupancy decision was slammed by the Union Home Ministry and Madras High Court and so the state government had to dial the full theatre occupancy down to 50 per cent two days later. Master has managed to reach Rs 100 crore at the box-office in Tamil Nadu

(Continued on page 3)
Confidence building needed for vaccination drive

(Continued from page 1)

view, given that the state has received only 20,000 doses of Covaxin in it’s arsenal of 5.56 lakh vaccine doses. However, it is important to protect the people’s trust in our healthcare system. It can’t be denied that some effort has been made in this regard – for instance, Dr. Manoj Murhekar (Director, National Institute of Epide-
miology, ICMR), Dr. E. Ther-
anirajan (Dean, Rajiv Gandhi General Hospital) and other healthcare providers recently received the Covaxin vaccine at the Rajiv Gandhi General Hospital in Chennai, with the aim of instilling public confidence in the vaccine. The New Indian Express quotes Dr. Theranirajan saying, “...after I took it, a few directors of various departments in the hospital, professors and others took Covaxin and more people came forward and registered for it.” While this is a step in the right direction, one feels that more can – and should – be done to educate the public on the importance and safety of the vaccination drive. It is also important to have a transparent informational system in place that answers the layman’s questions, doubts or fears around the vaccines.

As members of the public, it is crucial that we recognize our responsibility in bringing about an end to this pandemic that has claimed countless lives in our state and country. And for the public to step up to the plate, it needs support from the administration in terms of information and transparency. To defeat the coronavirus, we need to work together. It can’t be all that successful. And then, there are the uneven roads themselves, pothmarked with pits and ditches. Actually, (Wo)MM is rather one of those going riding over these, though, she imagines that it will get rather irritating once the novelty wears off. It might be admitted that none of these hamper the joys of learning to ride a bicycle. There’s a six-
year-old down the street that (Wo)MM lives on, who is also learning to ride. She feels she rather owes it to him to give it her best, given all the encouragement she receives. She has, however, asked the better half if the cycle can be replaced with something louder – a giant horn or a megaphone that she can yell into.

Learning to cycle in Chennai

The better half presented The Woman from Madras Musings with a bicycle last week. (Wo)MM was quite thrilled, having never had a cycle of her own beforehand. As she想到了, (Wo)MM is learning to ride a cycle for the first time. It’s all very exciting of course, but she is only nota-
ble able to fully appreciate the adventures that she imagines most cyclists face in our city. Most people grumble about riding in the heat – but An-
estly, that’s part for the course in Chennai. (Wo)MM has discovered a whole new set of pet peeves, now that she’s learning to cycle.

For one thing, it’s no won-
der that some cities have a dedicated bicycle lane. Without one, larger vehicles like cars, trucks and even bikes drive terrifyingly close, honking loudly for good mea-
sure. Given that (Wo)MM ensures that she keeps to the sides, she finds this habit in-
furiating. It’s not like cycles can honk back indignantly at this behaviour, either – (Wo)MM tried. Unlike vehicle horns, bicycle bells

sound charmingly cute, not aggressive. Their friendly chimes are no match for those obnoxious trumpets – they simply get drowned out in the din of traffic.

There are other dangers that lurk on our city roads, too. Dogs, for one. The very sight of a dog can inspire them to give chase, even though (Wo)MM tries her best to be as stealthy as possible around them. The better half has a theory that dogs that chase are just inspire such advice from a safe distance. Those dogs are much better than the other kind, however. When chased by animals, (Wo)MM has a clear strategy – she cy-

cle while specifying those or some such, where kind people can be expected to scare them off. It’s not that straightforward when one is hounded by people on bikes or cycles that decide to hover around, keeping pace as they whistle and grin and the like. (Wo)MM has never un-
derstood why this is a popu-

lar wooling strategy – surely

that most marketing emails carry. Do not send prohibited items, it said – an unspoken rule that one would have thought would be obvious to customers. But the world is often more brazen than (Wo)MM imagines, and this turned out to be one of those instances.

The email listed the items that were forbidden for cus-
tomers to send through their service. Alcohol, animal products and intoxicants made the list, to little surprise if one were to be honest about the matter. Exploiting service professionals is hardly new given that customer entitle-
ment is part and parcel of our business culture. (Wo)MM was, however, quite startled by the other items listed in the email – livestock, insects and animals.

For the app to send out an email, all specifying these, there must have been a sig-
ificant number of people in the past who have tried to deliver livestock, insects and animals through their service. (Wo)MM can only imagine the consternation of the de-

elivery partner when handed over a puppy or worse-given that livestock was mentioned quite clearly – a goat or a like a lotus in bloom and so wants people to call kamalam instead. (Wo)MM looked up a pictures of the dragon fruit, a fruit that she admittedly has never heard of before. It looks quite extraordinary, actually. It is bright pink-

ish red in color, with a blooming lotus – an impression accentuated by green flame-like spikes that protrude all over. (Wo)MM tried her best to see the fruit from the politi-
cian’s point of view, search-
ing for some attribute that might have suggested a lotus. No luck there. That fruit looks absolutely nothing like a blooming lotus.

(Wo)MM turned to so-
cial media – that great arbiter of pretty much every topic under the sun – to see what people thought of the matter. She wasn’t disappointed. Her most engaging tag about the topic is that of people who fervently hope that said politi-
cian doesn’t set his sight on a banana or a peach – they feel, probably quite rightly, that the world wouldn’t sur-
vive an abstract interpreta-

Short ‘n´ Snappy

The Woman from Madras Musings was crossed across an entertaining bit of news re-
cently. Apparently, a leading politician is keen to bestow a new name upon the dragon fruit – he believes it looks like a lotus in bloom and so wants people to call kamalam instead. (Wo)MM looked up a pictures of the dragon fruit, a fruit that she admittedly has never heard of before. It looks quite extraordinary, actually. It is bright pinkish red in color, with a blooming lotus – an impression accentuated by green flame-like spikes that protrude all over. (Wo)MM tried her best to see the fruit from the politician’s point of view, searching for some attribute that might have suggested a lotus. No luck there. That fruit looks absolutely nothing like a blooming lotus. (Wo)MM turned to so-
cial media – that great arbiter of pretty much every topic under the sun – to see what people thought of the matter. She wasn’t disappointed. Her most engaging tag about the topic is that of people who fervently hope that said politician doesn’t set his sight on a banana or a peach – they feel, probably quite rightly, that the world wouldn’t survive an abstract interpretation of their shapes.
A note on Temple Tanks

With reference to the article that appeared in Madras Musings January 16, 2021, I wish to make the following comments and observations:

- A temple tank should be thought of as an open (dug) well at the macro level.
- It is supposed to collect seepage water from the subsoil and hence the water level within the tank will be the same as that of the water table in its neighbourhood.
- A healthy way to see water within the temple tank is to build up the water table in its neighbourhood and not by filling it from outside.
- Of late, the management of temples, in order to retain water within the tank (for the purpose of performing the float festival) are creating an impermeable bed by filling it up with clayey soil. This is not good practice.
- The bed of the temple tank should only be native soil.
- In the recent past, the management of a few temples (Thiruvanmiyur and Mylapore Kapaliswarar) dug bore wells within the tank, pumped ground-water from below and tried to fill up the tank just for the sake of performing the float festival. This is highly objectionable since it would deplete the groundwater levels in the entire neighbourhood and may lead to saline intrusion in places like Thiruvanmiyur.
- This was even challenged in the High Court by the residents of Valmiki Nagar and the court ordered a stay to the management of temples.
- People should reconcile to the fact that if there is no water in the temple tank, there is no water. They should not try to artificially fill up the tank. A temple tank is not to be treated like a swimming pool. For example, float festival could not be performed in Kapaliswar temple for a few years since the tank did not have enough water.
- When M.G.Ramachandran was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, he arranged for cementing the entire bed of the temple tank and laid the pipes and connections. This was not easy.
- The rain falling on the roofs of these houses is drained onto the road, where no attempt was made till recent times. This was even challenged in the High Court by the residents of V almiki Nagar and the court ordered a stay to the management of temples.
- The rainwater. In spite of our best efforts and our persuasive discussions, no commercial organisation, shop, restaurant or the main temple administration cooperated. Even a prominent hotel with many branches abroad, refused to give their roof area for catching rain water. I approached the Ramakrishna Mission next door to give their roof areas. But the building design was such that rain water collection was not possible.
- I contacted ES. High School nearby on the other side of the road. The School Administration was very helpful and gave me the plan of their roof and water collection system. My team and I created the facilities on the roof for efficient rain water collection and method of drainage from the roofs.

Let’s be responsible

Referring to the article “Sachet revolution” in MM, January 1, 2021, the manufacturer takes the full responsibility for his products and supplies that the sachets are being emptied once they reach the customers in neat and healthy condition and for this he makes use of the packing technology of the present era. His responsibilities are over as soon as they are concerned end there. It is the consumer’s responsibility to see that the waste plastic container is properly handled over to the corporation waste collectors. This will reduce problems like drainage choking and livestock death.

M.K. Karthikeyan
kartikeykk@yahoo.com
East Thambaram

We had to lead the collected roof water to the temple tank and feed it. This required laying 6 inches diameter PVC pipes all the way from the catchment building to the temple tank. We had to cross the road whilst laying the pipe to feed the rain water to the tank. My team and I made a representation to M.K. Stalin, who was the Mayor of Madras (Chennai) at that time. The meeting was excellent. Mr. Stalin gave a patient hearing and our permission was granted. One day over a weekend we dug up the road and laid the pipes and completed all plumbing joints and filled the trench. By Monday morning the levelled road was ready for traffic movement. It was later metalled by the City Corporation. The piping and feeding system was ready and installed. The water moved easily from the roof top of PS. High School to the temple tank. The slope we had given to the pipeline was adequate.

In the monsoons that followed the system worked well and filled up the temple tank. I monitored the project for a couple of years.

I have within a week of its release, beating a record of actors Rajnikanth and Ajith, as reported by India.com on January 22, 2021. This was the film’s accomplishment even without the usual festive vibes. It boils down to the question of how many theatres followed the COVID-19 protocols. Some Madras theatres took the 50 per cent occupancy as a mandate, and some took it as an option. Twenty five theatres across the city have been booked for exceeding 50 per cent occupancy with a fine of Rs 5,000, as of January 16, 2021. With many theatres allegedly pricing the FDFS tickets at Rs 1,000 each, the fine amount is Rs 50,000 per offence. The City Police Commissioner warned that on repeated violations of the protocols including maintenance of 50 per cent occupancy, the licence of the theatre would be cancelled.

Deputy Commissioners of Police have been conducting surprise visits to theatres, to check if they are following the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) laid down by the government.

This process would have gone smoother and in a more efficient way if the law enforcers of the city had got the citizens to report the violations in the theatres. In other words, the police could have given a phone number or a social media handle for the people to inform the instances of violations inside the theatre premises. This would have phenomenally decreased the number of cases reported to the theatre administrations towards mandating the safety precautions.

Not only the theatre management but the feeder public must also be held accountable for violating safety guidelines.

According to the Tamil Nadu Public Health Act, 1939 (Second Amendment) Ordinance 2020, individuals not wearing a mask that covers both mouth and nose will be fined Rs 200, while spitting and not following social distancing can yield a fine of Rs 500. If public places and commercial establishments violate the standard operating procedures, a fine of Rs 5,000 can be imposed.

Theatre come under the last category. It is high time that the rules are modified, and fines are levied proportional to the turnover of the commercial establishments, for their total compliance to the COVID-19 guidelines.

We cannot afford to be complacent about the declining rate of the positive cases of coronavirus in the city. “You never know if the person sitting next to you is asymptotically affected by the virus. He/she can easily transmit the disease to you if you are close to that person for more than 15 minutes. Masks can protect you to a certain extent, but not completely. Also, vaccination can reduce fatality, but it cannot prevent the virus transmission,” warns a doctor based in Mylapore.

Not following the safety guidelines, especially when the coronavirus cases are falling, is an attempt at reopening a vista of many years. We follow social distancing and other precautions inside buses, trains and shopping areas. I do not understand why theatres are given a blanket permission without following the norms,” remarks Adhavan Joe from Tambaram.

A theatre is a closed space with very low ventilation, where the virus can remain active for more than two hours, which makes it a hotspot for the spread of the virus, elucidates the Mylapore-based doctor.

The police should increase vigil, and involve citizens to enforce the COVID-19 precautions at the grassroots, to keep the returning pandemic at bay.
The Cancer Institute, Adyar

Dr. V. Shantha – The High Priestess

The late 19th and early 20th Centuries were exciting times if you were an entrepreneur. The glass industry in Madras was on the rise, and the demand for glass bottles was increasing rapidly. It was no wonder that Scholl and Unger saw glass-making as a viable business. The Madras Glass Works went into commercial production in 1899, and the first batch of 26,000 bottles was taken out in January 1901 at an invoice price of Rs. 2. The business was a success, and the company continued to expand its operations. By 1904, the Madras Glass Works was the largest glass-making company in the city, and it had established a reputation for producing high-quality glass bottles.

A few months later I was happy with it and shared it with all my friends. We all got a kick out of the experience. By the time we were finished, the glass bottles were on the tray, and the Promotional Manager was impressed with our creativity. He told us thatwe had done a good job, and he was pleased with our work.

The Madras Glass Works was a success, and it continued to grow and prosper. In 1911, the company was incorporated as the Madras Glass Works Ltd. It was a milestone moment for the company, and it marked the beginning of a new era in glass-making in Madras. The company continued to expand its operations, and it became one of the largest glass-making companies in the city.

A few years later I was asked to write an article about the history of the Glass Industry in Madras. I decided to focus on the Madras Glass Works, and I interviewed one of the descendants of the company. It was an interesting interview, and I learned a lot about the history of the company and its impact on the glass industry in Madras. I also learned about the challenges the company faced and how it overcame them to become one of the largest glass-making companies in the city.

Dr. V. Shantha had done so to bring hope and determination to the patients. She was a true warrior against Cancer.

May her great soul rest in peace.

Rajiva Rangan

Dr. V. Shantha – The High Priestess of her ‘Temple’

The Cancer Institute, Adyar

Dr. V. Shantha for an article I wrote on the Cancer Institute of Madras. It appeared in three parts in Madras Musings Issues in June-July 2013. During the course of the interview, she admitted that she did not believe in going to temples as she considered the Cancer Institute, where she had stayed for 60 long years, as her temple. No wonder for tens of cancer patients who come with hopes in their hearts to the temple, her and her team of dedicated doctors are like ‘Gods’. When I said this to her she responded with just a smile. A diminutive lady who looked a little frail at 85, she still displayed the same enthusiasm and energy when she talked about her ‘temple’.

This was a few months after my wife passed away of colon cancer in spite of the efforts of the doctors at the Cancer Institute. Though my wife did not survive the disease I was very impressed with the transparent way the hospital treated us. Every doctor, nurse and other support staff we had to deal with were committed individuals with total focus on the patient’s needs—concerns—all under the dynamic leadership of Dr.V. Shantha who lived and breathed cancer care until her last moments in this world. In her passing away on January 19, 2012, at a ripe age of 93 our city has lost an icon. I am sharing below my family’s experience in dealing with Dr. Shantha’s ‘Temple’. This is my humble tribute to the memory of Dr. Shantha, who spent her lifetime in building the Cancer Institute as a ‘Centre of Excellence in Cancer Care’.

I was on 6th June 2012 that my wife was suffering from cancer and the doctors proved that it was cancer of the colon which had already metastasized to the liver and lungs.

It was an ineptable case. Unfortunately, the feeling of hope and determination was never lost. We still had to give her some treatment so we could continue the disease so that she could live longer than what was predicted. This choice for treatment was between two to five radiotherapy sessions over a period of six weeks.

So the decision was made; my wife would be taken to the Cancer Institute for treatment not because it was less expensive but because we were confident that the hospital is totally dedicated to treat the patients and facilities and focused treatment are available and for all types of cancer, irrespective of the stage do you get the feeling that the tests and treatment are conducted without interruption.

On the other hand at the Cancer Institute, doctors are like ‘Gods’. When I said this to her she responded with just a smile. A diminutive lady who looked a little frail at 85, she still displayed the same enthusiasm and energy when she talked about her ‘temple’.

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At home in Madras

Quizzin’ with Ram’nan

(Continued from last fortnight)

Following his stint at the Madras Corporation, Pulla Reddy was drafted for service in the First Minister of Government of Mysore, with an understanding that he would eventually be appointed as the Dewan. He was in charge of several important portfolios including Revenue, Home, Civil Supplies etc. Writing of the advancement of Bangalore, Pulla Reddy calls it “a showpiece of ‘Indian Industrial Development’, which he credits to the infrastructural developments in Mysore State brought about by the able administration of stalwarts like Dewans Sir Mirza Elmi and Sir M. Viveswarayya. He however sounds a note of caution against environmental pollution, stating that it would be “a disaster if Bangalore also is similarly encysted on account of the guards against environmental pollution and ceases to be the garden-city of India”. Prophetic words indeed.

Pulla Reddy also writes of the court-intrigues and motions how a person wielded tremendous influence over Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, the ruler. He recollects with gratitude the support and guidance of Sir S.V. Rajaji by his name. Also reverting to addressing threatening action under some nomenclature, Reddiar was reached whereupon Pulla Reddy would travel as often as was necessary to help Munshi in the matter of drafting correspondence, collecting material and advising him to refrain from attacking the character of a lady in some paper. K.M. Rajaji then requested for Pulla Reddy to release Pulla Reddy for appointment as his Deputy. The premier refused to do so and instead an agreement was reached whereupon Pulla Reddy would travel as often as necessary to help Munshi in the matter of drafting correspondence, collecting material and other related matters. He recounts that he thoroughly enjoyed the assignment, adding that these were incognito visits.

The 1952 elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly saw several stalwarts from the Indian National Congress losing the polls. The party itself was reduced to a minority, albeit IPS had earned the ire of O. Rajaswamy Reddiar, the Premier of the first tasks was to appoint the Inspector General of Police. The incumbent, L.A. Bishop, had been the head of the newly constituted IPS in 1950.

The Government then suggested appointing Pulla Reddy as the IG. However Reddy himself did not have the “necessary build, and in a para-military department like the Police, physique did count especially when taking on charge etc.” and instead recommended the appointment of C.K. Vijayaraghavan, ICS to the post.

O. Pulla Reddy... vidian ideological shared a blow-hot, blow-cold relationship with Rajaji, whom he used to refer to rather derogatorily as ‘Rudrakumar’ in the pages of his paper, Vidushali. Pulla Reddy writes that on one occasion, the attack got personal with Periyar attacking the character of a lady member of Rajaji’s family, which caused the leader great distress.

Rajaji then requested for Pulla Reddy’s help, as he himself was hesitant to proceed against Periyar for fear of being labelled communal-minded. The matter was then resolved with Pulla Reddy meeting Periyar and advising him to refrain from making personal attacks, mildly threatening action under some ordinance in the state. The attacks soon stopped, with Periyar also reverting to addressing Rajaji by his name.

Having scored a century during the infamous ‘Bodyline’ series won by India in 1982, where which bowler did Kapil Dev hit a triple hundred?

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THE EDITOR
The circle of love – does it really work for you?

The course of true love, it is said, doesn’t run smooth. And young lovers everywhere, all through the ages, have been anxious to know if they would prove to be the exception to the rule. Usually, the lovers are wary of directly seeking predictions about the future of their relationships, as this would mean giving themselves away. Instead, they resort to indirect means to figure out whether their love will flourish.

Modern-day youth play a game called Flames – Friend or Foe. Instead of giving themselves away, they resort to indirect means of finding out whether their relationship will lead to marriage or not. In olden days, too, young people were anxious to know whether they would live happily ever after with the person they’d given their hearts to. How did they try to find out? Did they have an equivalent of Flames? The short answer is, Yes.

Early Sangam Tamil literature talks of a game called Koodal Izhaithal (koodal in Tamil means join). It was also known as Suchi Izhal (meaning to draw circles) or Suchi Kenuku (circle calculations). As the name implies, the game involved drawing, or trying to draw, circles.

After praying to all her favourite gods, a girl who was in love would close her eyes and start drawing a circle on the ground with her finger tip. If the line formed a perfect circle, she could infer that she would be united with her lover. If the line didn’t meet at two ends of the line didn’t meet, failure of the affair was indicated. Another version involved drawing a number of circles in a given span of time. The circles would be counted, and an even number indicated success, while an odd number of circles meant failure in love.

The earliest reference to this game dates back to the second century, and occurs in Kalhugadi. A young girl wants to find out if she would meet her lover again. So, she starts to draw koodal lines on the ground in front of her little house. Unfortunately, the line forms a crescent, not a circle, and she hastily covers it up.

In Madhukolayiram, a third-century epic, a girl in love wants to know whether she would unite with her lover. She starts drawing a koodal line, but, fearing that it wouldn’t turn out to be a circle, she doesn’t complete the exercise, and only pretends to.

Religious literature also has references to this game. Here, the lovers aren’t men and women, but devotees, seeking union with a deity. Known as the Nayakan Navaya Bhavam, the deity is given the role of nayakan (hero) while the devotee assumes the part of the nayaki (heroine).

Kurala Karanam, a seventh-century poem, describes a scenario where a girl named Vasanthavalli tries to determine whether she would be united with her divine love, Lord Siva, by attempting to draw koodal lines.

Appar, the famous Saiva Tamil poet of the seventh century, takes on the role of a heroine when he talks about the Koodal Izhaithal game in two Tevaram drawings. In his Thiruneusagam song, a young woman worships the Puyalar God, asking him to bring her lover back to her, saying she doesn’t want to face koodal lines as she doesn’t want to face the fear and doubts about the outcome of the exercise. Like the Saiva poets, Vaishnava Tamil poets have also sung about koodal lines in their religious texts. Andal, who lived around the seventh century, had a divine love for Lord Krishna and wanted him to become her husband. In her work, Nachiyar Thirumozhi, she has sung around ten songs about drawing koodal lines, seeking a sign whether her desire for union with Lord Kirshna would be fulfilled or not.

The ninth century Tamil epic Sevavinithamum includes a scene in which a girl draws koodal lines to find out if she would be united with her brave lover or not. But the surface on which she drew the lines wasn’t ordinary ground – her land was so rich that the ground was strewn with pearls!

Koodal Izhaithal is also mentioned in Ambigapathy Kosai, a twelfth century Tamil poem. A group of young girls are playing. One of them, who is in love, feels restless and silently creeps away from the group. She tucks herself beneath a thick Thazhai (fragrant screw-pine) bush and secretly draws koodal lines to determine her love in the air.

A significant point in all these references is that Koodal Izhaithal seems to be resorted to only by girls. Were the men of those times not interested in knowing whether they would win the lady of their dreams? Be that as it may, this game is referenced throughout Sangam literature. But how many of today’s lovers play the game, or are even aware of it? That’s the question.

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*The writer, a software engineer, is interested in history and Tamil culture and has researched on Tamil Sangam Literature, Chennai history and temples. She runs a YouTube channel in her name, focused on Tamil Literature.*
A year ago, Thangarasu Natarajan was barely known outside Tamil Nadu; today, he is a household name in Indian cricket. Who would thought a young man who went to Australia as a net bowler for the Indian team would end up winning matches for the side in all three formats of the game? Yet that is exactly what happened with Natarajan, whose first innings spell (3 for 78) at the Gabba, Brisbane, played a key role in India's stunning victory that clinched the series 2-1 against the Aussies – a success hailed the world over as the greatest Indian rope trick in the history of the game. The team's brilliant win at Melbourne and stirring draw at Sydney came at a time when India had lost her key frontline bowlers to injuries, the captain had returned home on paternity leave and the team had crashed to 36 all out in the second innings of the Adelaide series opener.

Natarajan has been a game-changer in the past, with his dead-accurate yorkers winning matches for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the death overs of IPL 2020. As a result of his talent and a few fortuitous departures and even a crash landing, along the way. Wiry, slightly built, five foot nine inches-tall Natarajan strikes a positive note every time he steps on the field, with his left arm over the wicket, to angle the ball away from the right hand batsman. Disarming, whenever someone asks him to spill the secret of his prodigity for yorkers of pin-point accuracy, Natarajan invariably says, "Tennis ball cricket."

Mohammed Siraj, the other recent Test debutant of subcontinental background, was 21 years old when he graduated from tennis ball to cricket ball cricket; Natarajan was only marginally younger when he made the transition at 20. We all know that cricket eventually became Natarajan's ticket to liberation from poverty – his anna A.K. Jaiprakash (not a relative) shepherded him across villages and towns as a 'contract' player for a fee of perhaps a hundred rupees an appearance. The keen talent-spotting eye of Virendra Sehwag was responsible for Kings XI Punjab buying him for three crore rupees in the IPL auction of 2017.

Natarajan moved to Chennai with Jaiprakash's help in 2011. Starting with the BSNL Club, he made steady progress in the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association league, playing for India Cements sponsored teams in the second and first divisions before he was picked up in June 2014 by Jolly Rovers CC, the iconic team sponsored by the Sanmar Group. Apparently, when the club offered him a package of Rs. 50,000 pm, Natarajan happily accepted it believing the sum to be his annual remuneration. At Jolly Rovers, he flourished under the caring supervision of the team management which included well-known former cricketers Bharath Reddy, Ajay Kudua and Jaikumar.

If the magnus IPL contract was the first miracle to happen to Natarajan, being reported for an illegal bowling action and kept out of cricket until he corrected it was a brutal knock-out punch. He even wondered if he would have to go back to his village forgoing his monthly salary from Jolly Rovers. But the team kept his faith in him and supported him through the year-long ordeal of correction. Once he successfully achieved the near-impossible feat, he returned to action in style, with the yorker firmly in place.

Natarajan never did get to play a match for Kings XI but he stayed the course without losing heart, coming into his own with his splendid showing for the Dindigul Dragons & eventually getting picked by Sunrisers Hyderabad and rubbing shoulders with the likes of skipper David Warner, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Kane Williamson. His outstanding display of left arm medium pace bowling, especially his Yorker magic in the death overs, made him the most popular player of the team. He has not only put his village on the world cricket map, but he has also already started 'paying forward' by training young aspirants at his academy, with a special focus on the underprivileged who do not have to pay a fee.

Natarajan is perhaps the only India cricketer to speak Tamil in press meets and one-on-one interviews, but he shrinks English words freely across these interactions. He comes through as a confident but self-effacing young man with an engaging smile and a good word for each of his supporters. The hero's welcome he received in Salem and his appearances on national TV & social media have already made him a national star.

He may now be a third or fourth pace bowler in the Test team, but knowing Natarajan's work ethic, the next miracle is just waiting round the corner. He will surely strain every nerve to add enough pace, swing and seam variations to become one of the leaders of the pack.

### Answers to Quiz


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