

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXXIII No. 18

January 1-15, 2024

INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- Kalidas – Part III
- The Season 75 years ago
- When Gavaskar surpassed Bradman's long-standing record

Who protects the Heritage of Fort St George?

In our issue of *Madras Musings* dated December 16, 2023, we reported on the sad collapse of *Last House* on Snob's Alley in Fort St George. Ostensibly under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India, the structure, one of the oldest in the Fort, had been steadily neglected to a point of no return. It has now joined a long line of fallen buildings in the precinct. The ASI has maintained a studious silence on the matter. Considering that there are buildings supposedly protected by the same body which are nothing more than debris inside the Fort and which have remained that way for years, we expect no further action on this matter as well.

The ASI probably thinks it can get away with this. There being multiple owners of the Fort, nobody is really account-

able, and so the ASI thinks right. The Army controls a part, the Navy yet another, the ASI has some portions under itself, and the Government of Tamil Nadu has the rest. Can we ever imagine these august bodies coming together to

• by **Sriram V.**

protect the Fort? Most unlikely. As a result, each one gets away with neglect.

Reliable sources within the Army and the Navy are of the view that the ASI has no locus standi when it comes to the Fort's protection. They point out that the record of the ASI is not edifying in this regard, and they are not wrong. After all, when the Government began scouting for land in the

1980s for putting up a new Secretariat building, it was the ASI that readily caved in. It denotified an entire section of the Fort and demolished all that stood there to make way for the hideous *Namakkal Kavignar Maligai*. And apart from maintaining the Church of St. Mary's, the Fort Museum, and its own office (*Admiralty Building*), it has done precious little. Source within the Army claim that the ASI has for long been pressing for it to hand over the *King's Barracks*, but the former is reluctant to do so. "What is the guarantee that they will not denotify that also and hand over the space to the State Government," asks an army officer. "After all, *King's Barracks* is 100,000 square feet of space and so is valuable real estate

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH

'Beautifying' The Marina



Driving by the beach the other day, this rockery caught your deputy editor's eye. While much of the beach is in a shambles, this entirely artificial creation seems to be flourishing. You would normally expect anything put by a previous regime to be neglected by its successor in our State but not so this rockery. It was gleaming in the sunlight and further enquiry revealed that it is a working fountain in the evening.

The rest of our beach however is not so fortunate. The sands are quite dirty and the number of food stalls seems to have increased quite a bit. Stray dogs have therefore multiplied too, as have pigeons. The latter are a direct consequence of morning feeders who spread grain on the beach. While we have nothing against strays and birds, some control is advisable. It is ironic that the State Government is forever spending money on beautifying the Marina when it is neglecting what really would beautify the place – allowing Nature to flourish.

GCC sets up Regional Enforcement Team to monitor and curb dumping of waste in water bodies

In November last year, it was reported that the Greater Chennai Corporation removed 600 tonnes of garbage and 250 tonnes of debris from water-bodies over the course of four months. The operation was a part of the desilting works undertaken by the administrative body to enhance the storm-water flow capabilities of main canals. While it is not the

sole reason for flooding during heavy spells of rain, unruly waste disposal leads to clogged

• by **Varsha V.**

drain inlets and polluted water bodies that exacerbate stagnation. In fact, healthy water bodies can help tackle both water scarcity and flooding crises.

The GCC oversees 33 canals totalling to a length of 53,241 metres. While desilting is carried out on a regular basis throughout the year, the growing scale of the problem suggests that maintenance cannot be sustainable without co-operation from the public – for instance, an August 2023 piece in *The Times of India* carried a devastating account of the dif-

ferent types of garbage thrown into the Buckingham Canal in Mylapore, ranging from food and plastic to rubber and wood. As urban, industrial and infrastructural development pick up pace, the city's water bodies are at risk of severe pollution. Many have become dumping grounds for waste ranging from household garbage and do-

mestic sewage to construction debris and industrial effluents.

So it was good to learn from recent news reports that the GCC has announced the formation of a Regional Enforcement Team to monitor the dumping of waste and debris in the Cooum, Adyar and

(Continued on page 2)

WHO PROTECTS THE HERITAGE OF FORT ST GEORGE?

(Continued from page 1)

inside the Fort premises." The State Government, according to the Army is continuously looking out for more space within the Fort.

That said, the record of the Army and the Navy is not great either. For all their reluctance to hand over *King's Barracks*, the Army has done precious little to maintain the place. Parts of the roof have fallen in, and rest of the space is used as a dump. The Navy has forever been talking about restoring what is called Clive's Library but with little to show for it. The building is now like something out of Indiana Jones, enveloped by a tree that is prop-

ping up its walls. How then can the Army and Navy claim to be protecting the Fort's heritage? As for the State Government, very little needs to be said about their commitment to the Fort's upkeep. When all else fails, they can always say they are not interested in protecting colonial heritage.

And so things look bleak for Fort St George. It ideally needs an overarching umbrella organisation with members from the various owner bodies that can maintain the place. It can even have a Chief Executive who can be given revenue targets from tourism income. Only then will the Fort see better days.

GCC sets up Regional Enforcement Team to monitor and curb dumping of waste in water bodies

(Continued from page 1)

other canals coming under its purview. The team will be led by Zonal Assistant Executive engineers and will also include solid waste management and conservancy supervisors, salary inspectors, tax collectors and workers. A digital monitoring system has also been set up at 97 locations that were identified as vulnerable. The Solid Waste Management (SWM) department is reportedly filing complaints with the police to curb violations. It is presumed that the monitoring will include non-individual and commercial undertakings as well.

While the move is to be welcomed, one hopes that a detailed audit of Chennai's water bodies will also be conducted as part of the operations. It will serve the city well to understand how many water bodies it contains; and of these, how many are in good ecological shape, and how many require attention. Water bodies that have turned into defacto dumping grounds – legitimate or otherwise – can benefit from a renewed study from the administrative body. Take the Pallikaranai marshland, for instance, which is a designated Corporation dumpyard. Recently tagged as a Ramsar site, the Pallikaranai marshland has shrunk so much that reports

say it covers not more than 10 per cent of its original 5,500 hectares. On the other hand, the ecologically sensitive area hosts a constantly expanding dumpyard that covers hundreds of hectares. It is a resource that can help the city soak up water, but it is bogged down by solid waste pollution. A proper study can help the city identify and tackle known offenses on priority – the Nollambur canal, for example, is dumped with several tonnes of garbage and food waste.

Guidelines from the National Green Tribunal suggest going beyond the levying of fines to the creation of a green belt around the water resources. Per a June 2019 article in *Mongabay*, the belt is to comprise a buffer zone of 50-100 metres which is to be maintained as a 'no activity zone.' The guidelines also suggest disseminating information about the water body at its entrance, so that the public can learn about the importance of the natural resource in their locality. The NGT also suggests that ponds and lakes can be converted into recreational centres with boating activities, walkways and benches; this, it says, can help create a revenue stream that helps fund the operation and maintenance of the body. These seem to be good ideas – while fines can help prevent

The End of Music is Nigh

The December Music Season is on its way out. Or put another way on its last legs. Or in terminal decline. Or is moribund. *The Man from Madras Musings* is not saying all this. He is speaking of a certain section of our media world which seems to take ghoulish delight in saying that the world of Carnatic Music is finished for good. And it draws a ready nod of delight from a section of the reading public which no doubt opens the newspapers each morning only to read the obituary column. Thereafter it is merely a question of locating the online link to the article decrying the music season and forwarding it to everyone else. Very often the others are sending it back to the same people and so a lot of clogging happens on the Internet highway. Come January, these articles will be forgotten, until the next December that is, when the

have for arresting the decline and they will be flummoxed. Their only idea is to keep re-iterating the problem in a manner that is described as ad nauseum. Their job is chiefly composing jeremiads. Now, why is MMM so irritated with this lot? Mainly because many of these negative tracts get forwarded to him. As some of you regulars are aware, come December, MMM becomes the Man of Musical Musings and he wanders around some of his favourite locations, listening to music here, exchanging gossip there and eating snacks at a canteen somewhere else. And he enjoys it all. Yes, he is aware that the art has a few serious challenges facing it and he does his bit to mitigate some of the issues, but he does not go around pulling long faces and crying doomsday.

Pondering over this,

to get audiences to pay. At present most artistes and a large chunk of the audience seems to imagine that Carnatic Music is funded by some cloud solution to borrow a tech term. It is at present the freebie to end all freebies with everyone, performers and audiences included, live happily in a Lala land of YouTube links. The sooner they get out of that world of hits (and no revenues) and begin focusing on real life problems of ticket sales, royalties and artiste remuneration the better. And it will help if the Cassandras can give ideas instead of just lamenting.

When MMM is heard by the high and mighty

The flood waters (how long ago it all seems now) have receded and

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

same writers will retrieve the same stuff from the mothballs and get the same story re-published. And so it has been for 97 years.

Ask any of these people as to what solution they

offenses in the short-term, behavioural change is best won through a strong sense of community ownership to protect and sustain.

There needs to be a lasting collaboration between the administration and the public to restore and protect the city's water bodies. It must be acknowledged that these resources are a critical cog in preventing the severity of water crises, whether of scarcity or flooding – they cannot be topics that are discussed merely during the monsoons and high summer months and forgotten otherwise. Everyone has a duty towards these common resources, whether citizen, business or government. It is hoped that the Regional Enforcement Team will gradually go beyond the levying of fines to bring about true change.

MMM has come to the conclusion that there must be something seriously wrong with the psyche of such people. In any other community receiving a Creative City tag from UNESCO would have been a matter of rejoicing or at worst a quiet acceptance of it. Chennai's Carnatic Music world seems to be at its apologist best while talking of this. Firstly there will be a group that will cry itself hoarse as to why the city does not deserve it. The next is a smaller lot that will be at pains to explain that music here is not only Carnatic music but lots of other forms as well (now who said that was not so?). A third lot will decry that this art is elitist without even bothering to go into the reasons why it is perceived to be so. And then you have this naysaying group that forever laments the decline and fall of the art form. If MMM were in UNESCO's place he would withdraw the recognition at once. At least that way some these people will be happy.

That said, the art form, like so many others, is faced with an onslaught of challenges. The chief among these is the question of how

much of the damage caused is forgotten. At least by the media. *The Man from Madras Musings* however remembers, rather in the manner of elephants. There is a neat flood line drawn all around the ground floor of his house. The damage will need some outlay of funds to rectify, and the Rs 6,000 the State Government has offered is not going to help much. And so it is MMM to himself as he is sure is the case with countless others.

There was a time when MMM seriously questioned as to why he should not sue the State Government for damages considering that he is not at fault for a storm water drain laid the wrong way. But then, on calmer consideration MMM realised that much of his life would be spent fighting the matter in courts and the compensation if any would probably go to some lawyer or the other and so he backed off. But in the heat of the moment he did send out a message on social media asking as to why the Corporation Councillors

(Continued on page 3)

An accounting academian who left a lasting impression on whoever interacted with him

R. Sivakumar, noted chartered accountant who passed away recently wore many hats with consummate ease. A man with a tremendous philanthropic bent of mind, many a social and religious cause greatly benefited from his commitment towards their objectives. His call to support a cause resonated with several of his colleagues and well-wishers, thus creating a larger impact for the society at large. With his tireless work ethic and spirit, he rose above personal challenges to leave a lasting impression on all those who had an opportunity to interact with him. This is a brief tribute to the multi-faceted personality.

Born on June 30, 1953, R. Sivakumar was the fifth of six siblings, born to M.K. Raman and N. Annapoorni. The couple originally hailed from Kerala and had settled in Madras in the 1940s. In 1960, when Sivakumar was around seven years of age, the family became one of the earliest residents of the then newly developed East Abhiramapuram locality in Mylapore. Sivakumar completed his schooling at the P.S. High School, before going on to graduate from the Vivekananda College with a degree in commerce. He also later obtained a Master's Degree in the subject from A.M. Jain College. He qualified as a chartered accountant in 1976, apprenticing at the legendary D. Rangaswamy & Co and later became a cost accountant as well. Post qualification, he had a brief stint with M/s. Ashok Leyland, before starting practice with M/s. Karra and Co in 1982.

Teaching was however his biggest calling. Starting with the 1980s, he became renowned as a faculty for professional courses, especially the CA and CMA programmes. Costing and management accounting were his forte. His style of teaching was aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of the subjects, more than just an academic pursuit to pass the examinations. He adapted problems from renowned foreign authors such as C.T. Horngren, often adding his own twist to them, thus encouraging students to think out of the box to arrive at solutions. He was a visiting faculty at various colleges and training institutes and served as an academic council member of the MOP Vaishnav College, Nungambakkam. The overall welfare of the student community was central to his teaching career. His guidance and words of motivation great-

ly enabled several students who had faced failures to bounce back successfully. Many deserving students, who hailed from economically backward backgrounds were beneficiaries of his personal munificence. He also arranged for scholarships for their studies.

Apart from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, where he was involved as a faculty member and also as an examiner, Sivakumar was best-known for his close association with the country's oldest body for accounting, audit and tax professionals, the ninety-year-old Society of Auditors. Over the course of his association, which lasted more than four decades, he was



was also associated with the illustrious *Kalaimagal* magazine and was part of its 90th year celebrations committee. He was also involved with the YMIA.

Sivakumar's grand-aunt was the illustrious R. Sivabhogam, the first woman-chartered ac-

● by Karthik Bhatt

actively involved in successfully organising many seminars and conferences for the benefit of students and members and also the various jubilee celebrations. He also played an important role in the body purchasing its own premises in 2006, when one of his mentors C.A.K. Ananthachari was the President. He served as the President of the body between 2014 and 2017. His wish for a woman at the helm of affairs of the prestigious body was fulfilled with the election of his student C.A. Anusha Sreenivasan to the post in 2022. In recognition of his services to the Society, he was designated Chief Mentor of the body.

Sivakumar was involved in a wide range of social activities. He was a staunch devotee of the Ramakrishna Order. He was involved in a professional capacity as an auditor for a few centres of the organisation for a few years. He later on actively worked to raise funds for many activities of the Chennai Math. He made it a point to buy and present the publications of the Math on various occasions as a means of supporting their outstanding work and also spreading the teachings of the Order. He was a member of the managing committee and treasurer of the Vivekananda College for a long time. He was also a devotee of the Shakatapuram and Kanchi Mutts and an ardent supporter of the Anjaneya Temple in Alamelu Manga Puram in Mylapore. In 2013, he was inducted as an honorary member of the P.S. Educational Society and served as a correspondent of the P.S. High School (North) and P.S. Senior Secondary School. He

countant of our country. He documented her inspiring life and journey and wrote about her in various publications. It was thanks to his efforts that a small booklet chronicling her life was brought out in 2006 on the occasion of her birth centenary. It was published by the D. Rangaswamy Academy for Fiscal Research, a body setup to promote research in various aspects of finance, accounting and taxation, of which he was one of the founding members.

In recent years, Sivakumar along with his colleague V. Pattabhiram, chartered accountant, teacher and writer authored a series of books documenting the inspiring lives of achievers who were chartered accountants. *Compassionate Accountant*, a biography of his guru D. Rangaswamy, who rose to become the President of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal was published in 2016. *Flying High* featured a dozen formidable success stories of chartered accountants such as Carnatic musician Sanjay Subrahmanyam (who was also one of his students), G. Narayanaswamy, a stalwart of the profession and R.V. Easwar, former judge of the Delhi High Court. *The Nightingales*, a three-part series featured notable women-chartered accountant achievers such as Vishaka Hari, harikatha artiste, Dr. Revathy Sriram, pioneer in the field of Information Systems Audit, educational entrepreneur Sarada Sriram and Sridevi Balasubramanian, noted chef.

Sivakumar's demise has left an indelible void in the lives of numerous students, chartered accountants and the society at large.

OUR READERS WRITE



Grin and bear it!

I read the caption Traffic arrangement on Anna Salai likely to stay 'permanently temporary' in a Chennai daily dated November 7, 2023. The use of 'permanently temporary' made me chuckle. Such oxymoronic usage occurs in native English-speaking countries, but they use this expression while referring to migrants or migration ('permanently temporary migrants') – the phrase is largely restricted to legal terminology.

Reading the paper caption, I was reminded of the signage 'Private Public Phones' that was liberally used in 1990s Madras, a time when public telephones in red wood-glass booths gave way to public call

facilities at the showrooms of small traders. My understanding of this practice was that it ensured the safety of the instrument from vandalism. I find the fun-eliciting signage of 'Private Public Phones' rather akin to concepts like 'Permanently Temporary Traffic'!

Nothing is quite incorrect, after all, considering that William Shakespeare himself uses oxymora such as 'cold fire', 'wolfish lamb', and 'loving hate' (Romeo & Juliet)! The same English language provides us scope to seek shelter in William Hickey's famous expression 'Grin and bear it' (*Memoirs*, 1749-1775)!

Raman, Anantanarayanan
anant@raman.id.au

Short 'N' Snappy

(Continued from page 2)

were doing nothing while it was the State cabinet and the bureaucrats who seemed to be all over the place. MMM did not expect anything to happen thereafter but there he was wrong.

Apparently, someone somewhere did read MMM's post and it touched a raw nerve. So the next thing MMM knew was a plethora of posts from several of the spin doctors of the party in power. Photographs were shared of councillors in action. One of them was seen neck deep in a drain channel trying to remove a block. MMM could only sympathise with the man, but he could not help wondering as to why this councillor, if he was indeed such a man of duty, had allowed the drain to choke. It seemed to be filled with plastic and surely the man must have seen it every day that way without doing anything about it. Now he was jumping in and being a hero when the question to be asked was why good old routine maintenance was not done and why the local populace was not asked to take care of its rubbish. Obviously regular upkeep does not make for photo opportunity while firefighting does. MMM made bold to ask this question and was immediately branded a stooge of the Opposition. Not that he was any closer to becoming the darling of that group. They had not liked his commenting on their right to criticise flood handling when 2015 is still fresh in everyone's mind.

The Councillors however were the more determined lot for MMM received quite a few pictures thereafter and then, as the flood waters receded, so did the flood of action photographs. MMM has one consolation – clearly social media has an impact, for if not, these people would have been least bothered, until the next election comes around that is.

Tailpiece

And so, yet another year has come to pass. *The Man from Madras Musings* wishes you all a Happy and Healthy 2024 and joining him in wishing you all is Editor, Deputy Editor, Associate Editor, She Who Must Be Obeyed, *The Woman from Madras Musings* and just about everyone else who keeps this paper running.

– MMM

Kalidas – Part III

Please refer to Vol. XXXIII No. 9, August 16-31, 2023 and Vol. XXXIII No. 12, October 1-15, 2023 for earlier articles about *Kalidas*.

In those days, there were many remarks that Kalidas contained 'patriotic songs and *keerthanas* that had little to do with the film's story.' However, the truth is that along with the tale of the titular *Kalidas*, the film also contained two other segments which were short features in their own right. We have seen earlier that the story of *Kalidas* appeared in the second segment in the film. In this article, we will examine the clues left behind about the third segment, the kurathi dance.

The Kurathi Dance

Per observations made by Theodore Baskaran, the 1931 feature *Kurathi Paatum Dansum* was the first Tamil talkie ever produced. This, in fact, is the short feature *Kurathi Dance* that was screened as part of the film *Kalidas*. As a matter of fact, this talkie was produced before *Kalidas*, but it is unclear whether it was screened to public audiences before the film's release. If it had been screened, it would have clinched the honour of being the first Tamil talkie. Since the first recorded appearance of the feature is as part of *Kalidas*, the latter won the honour instead.

The reviews and advertisements of *Kalidas* that appeared in the magazine *Swadesamitran* make mention of the *kurathi* dance:

The film also contains a *kurathi* dance performed by Ms. Jhansi Bai and Mr. RD. It is a must-watch for audiences.

There are many documented passages and photographs available of the North Indian actresses of that period who acted in silent films. However, there is no information about Jhansi Bai. The same goes for Mr. RD, too.

Who were Jhansi Bai and RD?

A never-before-seen 1931 advertisement for *Kalidas* has been procured by the writer of this column. The ad was found in a foreign daily, filling about half a page of its contents. Misapprehensions about potential copyright issues prevent him from sharing details about the daily or a copy of the ad; he is able to share only the information it contains. But the advertisement is an important piece of evidence since it was a contemporary of the times that *Kalidas* was screened in. It also carries stills from the *kurathi* dance that have not been seen for the past 92 years and have made way for a few well-supported assessments.

The still from the *kurathi* dance that was carried in the *Kalidas* advertisement makes it patently clear that the dancer



ALSO PRESENTING:
KURATHI DANCE
Miss Rajalakshmi's most successful act on the Stage.
KIRTANAM
LOVE LYRICS—ETC.

A still from T.P. Rajalakshmi's kurathi dance.



First Tamil Talkie in Madras:—Scene from 'Kalidas' a talkie produced by the Imperial Film Co. which includes Tamil and Telugu songs with Miss T. P. Rajalakshmi in leading role, to be screened at the Kinema Central from to-morrow.

An unclear but rare still of a scene from *Kalidas*. Courtesy: The Hindu archives.

seen alongside the *kuravan* is T.P. Rajalakshmi – in other words, Jhansi Bai is none other than

T.P. Rajalakshmi! The figure and features seen in the image enable the identification.

“KALIDAS”

100% Talking, Singing and Dancing.

PROGRAMME OF CONSISTS OF :-

- 3 Reels of National Songs, Kirtanam, love songs and dance.
- 2 Reels of Kurathi dance enacted by Miss T. P. Rajalakshmi, one of her successful acts on the stage and
- 4 Reels of “Kalidas” one of his comedies and love portion of his life.

Best Music, enchanting dances and gorgeous settings, sound recording at its best.

A page from the *Kalidas* songbook.

The first attempt to produce a Tamil talkie was undertaken by the Bombay-based Sagar Movietone company in 1931. As a result, the four-reel short-film *Kurathi Paatum Dansum* performed by the woman artiste Jhansi Bai was produced for the first time ever in Tamil.

Thus wrote Theodore Baskaran in his book *Em Thamizhar Seitha Padam*. His observations are based on irrefutable proof. Thus it was that in the past, doubts lingered about this person called Jhansi Bai. The book *Message Bearers*, also by Theodore Baskaran, helps put the matter to rest – in it, there is a reference that T.P. Rajalakshmi acted in a short film called *Kurathi Paatum Dansum* produced by Sagar Movietone. Then there is T.P. Rajalakshmi's remarks in a later interview, where she said, “I performed a *kurathi* dance in the multi-feature *Kalidas*.” All these evidences taken together confirm that Rajalakshmi and Jhansi Bai are one and the same person.

The name Rajalakshmi was already famous in those days in stage dramas and silent films. It is entirely possible that Jhansi Bai had been adopted as trendy screen name for cinema. It is this writer's assessment that

the 4-reel long *Kurathi Paatum Dansum* produced by Sagar Movietone was later shortened to 2 reels and screened as a part of *Kalidas*. The *kurathi* dance shown in both features are the same. Though the director of the piece is unknown, it is a fact that Ardeshir Irani had business interests in both Sagar Movietone and Imperial Company. According to the writer's estimate, this is the reason why this short feature was shown as part of the Imperial Company's *Kalidas*.

There is also a reference that the person who danced with Jhansi Bai was RD. Who was RD? No information can be procured about anyone of that name. But, there was an actor called Hadi in those days. This Hadi – S. Mohammad Hadi, to be precise – was a supporting actor and his name keeps coming up in references to early Hindi talkies. It makes one wonder whether it was him in fact that *Swadesamitran* referred to when they said RD. After all, we have already seen a few examples of the mistakes that appeared in the advertisements carried in *Swadesamitran*. The author believes that the men seen in both the images presented here – one, a still from the *kurathi* dance in *Kalidas* and the other, a still of S.M. Hadi – are the same person. The likeness of features is unmistakable. So *Swadesamitran* had to have meant him when they referred to RD. Kalki's remark that the *kuravan* in the *kurathi* dance had a paunch also matches with the assessment.

We will now turn to fresh information that has emerged from the English daily. It carries an entry dated 16.12.1931, which says that *Kalidas* was 'brought directly from Chennai.' When Chennai's Kinema Central theatre released the film for Deepavali celebrations on 31.10.1931, it was announced that it would run for only one week; did *Kalidas* perhaps have more screenings beyond that? How many copies of the film were made? These questions remain unanswered.

The number of seats that Kinema Central had in those days were about 650, and there were about two to three screenings a day. It should be kept in mind that until 1928, the films with long run times at Kinema Central averaged about two weeks of screenings. Even after talkies appeared on the screen, run-times ranging to a couple of weeks were notable achievements. *Raja Harishchandra* was released in Kinema Central theatre in April 1932 and clocked a run time of 4 weeks, according to available documentation – that was a remarkable triumph of the times.



S.M. Hadi

Unlike silent films, talkies were adapted to local audiences. So it is possible that *Kalidas* was screened only in places where Tamil and Telugu were widely spoken. Also, it must be remembered that theatres with the facility to showcase audio were available only in big cities like the metros, and even these were scant in number.

In Chennai, it was at the Elphinstone theatre on 13.4.1929 that the facility for audio was established for the very first time.

many people of those days got to see *Kalidas*.

There is also evidence that *Kalidas* was released in Malay countries. It must have been released in Rangoon – now Myanmar – too.

A 12-page booklet containing stills from the film and all the songs was distributed for free. It was also provided at no charge to clubs and associations in India and Ceylon.

That 12-page booklet referred to above is most proba-

Today, *Kalidas* is lost and the people who saw the film are no longer around. Only the available documentation helps us learn more about the film. If further evidence emerges in the form of published or audio data from the film, this topic can be explored further. In fact, there are chances to get such evidence from other countries where *Kalidas* was released as well. The English archives of *The Hindu* carry advertisements not only for *Kalidas* but also for other films that followed. Those who are interested in the subject and who can access the archives of *The Madras Mail*, *Madras Times*, *The Hindu* and *Ananda Vikatan* can explore the documents.

A key reason behind the sharing of the author's research process and findings is to learn from the approaches and conclusions of fellow cinephiles. Readers are thus welcome to write to him and share their opinions and thoughts about this article.

We saw that there was much hesitation in dubbing *Kalidas* as the first Tamil talkie. This begs the question – which film, then, was called the first Tamil talkie without any hesitation whatsoever? Nearly everyone until now says the honour goes to *Galavarishi*. But the film that followed *Kalidas* was *Raja Harishchandra*. We shall, in the next segment, explore documentation relating to this film.

● by S. Muthuvel
muthuvelsa@gmail.com

It was around this time that the facility became available in Colombo, too – this is confirmed by T.V. Ramnath, the editor of the magazine *Pesum Padam*. In Coimbatore, the establishment of Samikannu Vincent's Kovai Variety Hall was wired for sound for the first time on 14.4.1930; that *Kalidas* was screened in Coimbatore is also confirmed by Gundooosi Gopal as an evergreen memory.

As for travelling cinema tents, only a few were wired for sound in those days, and there is no information whether *Kalidas* was screened through these. With such available information at hand, one can imagine how

bly the songbook that we talk about today. The cover page of the *Kalidas* songbook carries a printed mention of the Kinema Central release along with the date. Inside, there is an advertisement for a Chennai clothing shop, which fills about two and a half pages. This was rather unusual for songbooks. *Kalidas*' songbook appears to have been an arrangement to not only promote the film but also carry advertisements for investing parties. Also, since this was the first film songbook in a South Indian language, it was quite unlike its predecessors from the drama, gramophone and cinema herald backgrounds.

The Season 75 years ago

One more December Music Season has come to an end. And as usual the statistics will be churned out about how 60 and more organisations put up 2000 music and dance performances, funded entirely by private initiative, etc, etc, etc. Way back in 1948, it was a lot easier. There were only three organisations celebrating the arts – the Music Academy, the Indian Fine Arts Society and the Tamil Isai Sangam. That year, a fourth – the Thyagabrahma Gana Sabha (TBGS) at Vani Mahal tested the season waters for the first time. There are sadly no details available about this maiden attempt. For the record, the Sabha remained an outlier as far as the Season was concerned in later years, becoming an active participant only from the 1980s.

Rented Homes

Ironically, among the four players, it was only the youngest, namely the TBGS that had a home of its own. The Music Academy was still at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore. The Indian Fine Arts Society (IFAS) was holding its events at Gokhale Hall, Armenian Street. The Tamil Isai Sangam concerts were held at the St. Mary's Co-Cathedral Parish Hall, Armenian Street, cheek by jowl with the IFAS venue. The Catholic Centre stands on this site today.

Inaugurations and Speeches

There were certain practices that had become standardised by then across the three organisations and which would be faithfully copied by later entrants. The first of these was

an inauguration with a prominent figure in Indian perception being invited to do the honours. At the Academy it was the then Governor of Madras, His Highness Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavsinhji, Maharajah of Bhavnagar. The Tamil Isai Sangam had its season inaugurated by Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar, the then Chief Minister of Madras. At the IFAS it was Justice ASP Iyer of the High Court of Madras. Thus, the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary had been respectively and rather nicely divided across the three Sabhas.

The second aspect was having a musician preside over the annual conference. This had been the practice since inception at the Academy and the IFAS but the Sangam did not adopt it. At the Academy, the President of the Conference was conferred the Sangita Kalanidhi title since 1942 and in 1948, the musician selected for presiding and being so honoured was the veteran violinist Kumbakonam Rajamanikkam Pillai. At the IFAS, though its title of Sangita Kala Shikhamani was yet to come into existence, the musician invited to preside over the conference was Prof R Srinivasan, an academic from Thiruvananthapuram who was also well-known for his patronage of the arts.

The Central College of Carnatic Music

All three festivals it would seem began on the 24th of December and ended on early in January, the Sangam and IFAS concluding theirs on the first while the Academy went on till the second. The hot topic that year was the estab-

lishment of a music university in South India by the Central Government, for which Prof P Sambamoorthy had worked on the syllabus. Speakers at all three venues dwelt at length on their views on musical education. *The Hindu* in its editorial (those were days when newspapers wrote serious editorials on our December festival) felt that the purpose of such an institution was limited. It drew extensively from Kumbakonam Rajamanikkam Pillai's speech at the Academy wherein he said that manodharma was something that had to be learnt by closely observing the guru.

● by Sriram V

Was this even possible through a music college wondered *The Hindu*. The newspaper was also strongly anti Tamil Isai at this time. At the opening of the Sangam's Conference the Premier O.P. Ramaswami Reddy had said that good music is something that ought to appeal to the heart and not the head. A little later, he also said that music ought to appeal to everyone. *The Hindu* disagreed on both counts. Good music need not be what appeals to everyone it said. In a way the newspaper was critiquing the Tamil Isai Sangam itself, which as was commonly said of it those days, was democratising music by insisting on songs in Tamil. This was not to the liking of the elitists who thronged the Music Academy, whose champion *The Hindu* was.

nar (Chief Justice, High Court of Madras), K. Srinivasan (Vice President Music Academy and Editor, *The Hindu*), Rao Bahadur K.V. Krishnaswami Iyer (President, Music Academy), T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar (noted Tamil scholar), Prof P. Sambamoorthy, S. Venkateswaran ICS and Tiger K. Varadachariar. Thereafter Prof. Sambamoorthy, had as stated earlier, worked on the syllabus and the big question hanging over the college was about its administration. The Music Academy evidently fancied its chances and said as much in its address of welcome to the Governor, the Maharajah of Bhavnagar. Kalki criticised this presumption on the part of the Academy and questioned its claim of fostering the arts when it had all along been against Tamil Isai. Eventually, as is well known, the college came up under the auspices of the Central Government and later the State Government. It now functions under the Tamil Nadu Music and Fine Arts University.

The Performing Artists

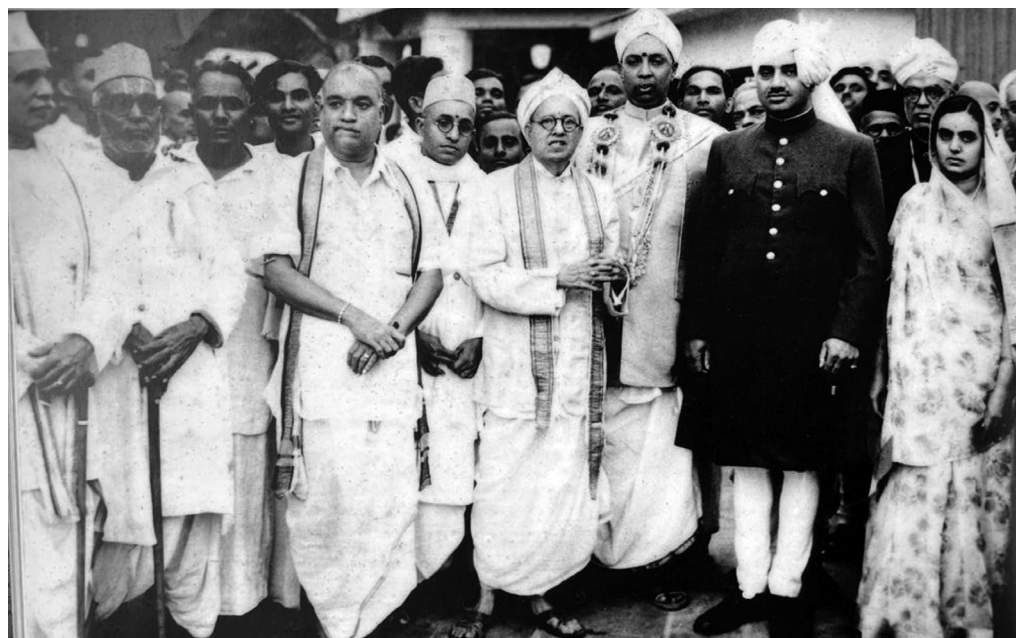
Unfortunately for us, the Indian Fine Arts Society's souvenir for the year has not survived. It is at least not in the public domain. We therefore do not know who sang for this Sabha in 1948 and what their song lists were. But the souvenirs of the Tamil Isai Sangam and the Music Academy are with us. At the former institution, this being the first year without its patron-in-chief, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, his absence loomed large and the souvenir itself begins with a heartfelt tribute to him, with particular reference to Tamil

Isai, penned by T.S. Kachapikessa Mudaliar, a long-time associate. The Sangam also welcomed its new President, Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetty, then Finance Minister, Government of India. The lead article in the souvenir is by Kavimani Desika Vinayakam Pillai, and a song by him follows with notation. The tune is accredited to Thanjavur K.P. Krishnamurthy Pillai.

The list of programmes features artistes such as M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, GNB, M.S. Subbulakshmi, Madurai Mani Iyer, Anandi and Radha (dance with music by MSS), Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, N.C. Vasanthakokilam, Chittoor Subramania Pillai and M.M. Dandapani Desigar.

A perusal of the songs lists reveals that this was an era when the Sangam was still permitting songs in languages other than Tamil to be sung at its concerts. Several Telugu and Sanskrit songs appear in the bills of fare. What is interesting is that from each of the song lists and just below it on each page, one Tamil piece has been selected and its lyrics have been given in full. Sadly for us, the notations are absent.

The Music Academy's souvenir opens with articles by three stalwarts – T.V. Subba Rao on Veena Dhanam, Dr. V. Raghavan on Muthuswami Dikshitar and E. Krishna Iyer on Bharata Natyam. There were two slots by then at the Academy – the junior slot was from 3.30 to 5.00 pm and the senior from 5.00 pm onwards. The latter in turn featured two performances, the first from 5.00 to 8.00 pm and the second from 9.00 to 11.00 pm. The junior list features V.R. Chandra Ramamoorthy (who seems to have sung with an all-women ensemble), Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar, K.V. Narayanaswami, Thirupattur Chellammal and S. Balasubramaniam (it is not possible to state clearly if this is Sethalathiy Balasubramaniam). The senior list has Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (with the year's awardee Rajamanikkam Pillai on the violin), T.R. Mahalingam, GNB, K.P. Sivanandam, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Madurai Mani Iyer, Dwaram Venkatasami Naidu, D.K. Pattammal, Brinda & Muktha, the Alathoor Brothers, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai. There were two Hindustani performances – Faiaz Khan and Bismilla Khan scheduled but both were cancelled at the last minute. The sole Harikatha presentation at the Academy



Music Academy Season 1948. An assembly of notables and worthies outside Sundareswarar Hall. 1st from left: R.B. Ramakrishna Raju, 2nd 'Tiger' Varadachariar, from 4th P. Ramachandriah, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, KVK, Kumbhakonam Rajamanikkam Pillai (Sangita Kalanidhi designate), Maharajah of Bhavnagar, T.L. Venkatarama Iyer and Maharani of Bhavnagar.

was by Embar Vijayaraghavachariar.

There were two dance programmes – one each by Kumari Kamala and Kumari Kausalya.

This was Kamala's first performance at the Music Academy and her dance on December 29 saw tickets fully sold. She thereafter danced regularly under the auspices of the Academy and generated a lot of funds for it. Years later, she was recognised by the institution with a special award. Though her name is absent in 1948, M.S. Subbulakshmi, like Kamala, was to remain a regular and great fund raiser for the Music Academy. The Academy had parted ways with her in 1943 over her championing Tamil Isai but had diplomatically made peace in 1947, when she performed again for it.

A prominent name in the Academy's conduct of the season was that of T.T. Krishnamachari's. He had parted ways with the institution over unknown reasons and a letter which he had written in 1942, which though not traceable was recorded to have been full of objectionable words. In 1948,

peace was made with him, and he returned, to become Vice President and steer the Academy's mega project, of building an auditorium on land which it had purchased in 1946.

The Academy Lecdems

The lecture demonstrations of the Academy happened at the Lady Sivaswami Iyer Girls School, just opposite the R.R. Sabha. That year's conference being held in collaboration with the Indian Section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, there was a sizeable Hindustani contingent at the conference. Pt. Ratanjankar, Geeta Sarabhai and Prof D.C. Vedi presented papers. The academic sessions began at 12.00 noon on all days and seem to have gone on till the evening in a leisurely fashion. There was considerable time given to discussions on raga lakshanas, those of Manji, Shuddha Desi, Dvijavanti, Huseni and Kannada being taken up. Manji dominated the season, with many views being expressed and no consensus emerging. There were besides lectures on composers, rare tala-s and Pallavi singing. There was also

a resolution passed to ensure that 'magnetic wire recording' be done of all the senior vidwans so that the world at large would have an idea of how they sang. All of this was to the good, commented Kalki, but he said the Academy was powerless to implement the very resolutions it passed in the mornings in its performances in the evenings! Recording concerts was a good idea he said but the musicians ought to listen to their singing before they formally recorded so that they could correct their flaws he wrote.

The conference concluded on January 2, with the sadas, presided over by Justice P.V. Rajamannar taking place that evening. Rajamanikkam Pillai was conferred the Sangita Kalanidhi. In his speech the justice compared the sruti perfection that Hindustani musicians had and hoped that Carnatic counterparts would achieve the same. Kalki agreed and cited the performance of Pt. S.N. Ratanjankar as an example though he faulted the latter's tendency to sing the syllables naayi naayi naayi repeatedly, which to a Tamilian he felt, sounded terrible.

Competitions

In parallel to its music conference, the Academy held competitions. Among the prize winners that evening we see the names of Mani Perundevi (later Mani Krishnaswami), T.R. Subramanyam, D. Pasupati and S.R. Janakiraman, all to become celebrated names in the world of music. At the Sangam too, competitions were held, with Madurai Mani Iyer and Thirupamburam Swaminatha Pillai being judges. The Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar prize, for singing Gopalakrishna Bharathi compositions was given to R. Vedavalli. It was a handsome tambura.

Reviews of 1948

The Kalki reviews of the season of 1948 make for interesting reading. As a critic Kalki, writing under the pseudonym Karnatakam continued to remain a staunch supporter of Tamil Isai but he was clearly tiring of the Sangam's relentless attempts at creating new Tamil songs. He found fault with this and felt that the organisation ought to focus on popularising the works of composers such as the Sirkazhi Moovar and Gopalakrishna Bharathi. He also criticised the tendency to set some of the new songs in unheard of ragas. This barb was clearly aimed at M.M. Dandapani Desigar. This was the year when All India Radio began to broadcast the senior concerts live and a grateful Kalki clearly tuned in from home rather than go from venue to venue. In his assessment, GNB was the hero of the season, his performances at IFAS,



Sangam and Music Academy being top class. Ariyakkudi he opined was showing signs of ageing but still holding on. Chembai got by with his powerful voice and habit of livening his performances with much humour and commentary. The Alathoor Brothers got a rating of 3/5. Poor Madurai Mani Iyer suffered from health issues and his performances were marked by his accompanists chipping in to make the concert experience wholesome. Kalki also rated audiences – the Gokhale Hall (IFAS) was the best with frequent applause thereby encouraging the artistes. The Sangam came next, followed by the Academy where deathly silence was the sole response artistes got.

All three season souvenirs – the IFAS, the Sangam and the Academy's – got thumbs down from Kalki. He rated the quality of design, the paper on which they were printed and the content as below par. That we now consider these as valuable reference material is another matter altogether!

Tickets vs Freebies

The debate over free vs ticketed concerts was on even then. A reading of Kalki reveals that the Sangam had loudspeakers to broadcast its music live to people who happened to be on Armenian Street. This was obviously for free and Kalki praised it as a method of propagating music. He on the other hand faulted the Academy for not following suit and insisting of having its concerts behind closed doors, only for ticket holders. Kalki noted the segregation of Academy rows for donors and daily ticket holders

(forerunners of today's Patron, Donor, Life and Ordinary Members) and asked as to whether the donor was in any way more knowledgeable about music than the two-rupee daily ticket holder. He also wrote of how the donors rarely came, and their seats remained empty.

Looking back today, it is difficult to agree with Kalki. The Sangam had big business money behind it, while the Academy though it did have powerful backers did not benefit from their purse. Its President K.V. Krishnaswami Iyer was a martinet when it came to discipline, and he was of the view that audiences had to pay for how else could the organisation survive. And how much free service is to be done for propagating Carnatic music? The debate continues today – with demands for free YouTube links gaining ground over ticket purchases.

And so the season of 1948 wound to a close. It was not a very eventful year but it did mark yet another step towards the continuity of the December Music Festival that we take for granted today. – (Courtesy: Sruti.)

This article was written with assistance from the following:

- The Library, the Music Academy Madras and its librarian M.K. Jagadish.
- The Library, the Tamil Isai Sangam, and the Sangam's Vice President Valli Arun and Secretary Nachaiyappan.
- The Kalki Archives accessed online.
- The Hindu Archives of the season with the Music Academy.

You can contribute to CHENNAI HERITAGE

As a token of your support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, you can subscribe to *Madras Musings* – the annual subscription is Rs 100 and we welcome additional donations too to keep us going. You can make your payments to our bank account as below:

Chennai Heritage
Indian Bank, Alwarpet Branch
CA No. 413158606 IFSC : IDIB000A013

Please make sure you send an email to Chennaiheritage2017@gmail.com with transfer details so that we can acknowledge receipt.

If you are a new subscriber, you need to send us details of your name and address as well. If you are renewing your subscription make sure you quote your subscription number as reference. This is the number that is on the wrapper of your copy of *Madras Musings*.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Readers,

Please email all your letters, comments, additional remarks, brickbats and bouquets to editor@madrasmusings.com

– THE EDITOR

When Gavaskar surpassed Bradman's long-standing record

For 35 years it had remained Test cricket's most famous record. Don Bradman made the last of his 29 Test hundreds (in only 52 matches) in July 1948. Since then even with the proliferation of Test matches no one had close to surpassing it, the nearest being 26 notched up by Gary Sobers in 93 Tests. Finally on December 28 1983 at the MA Chidambaram stadium in Madras it was time to say "move over Don, it's Sunny now."

With his technical expertise and insatiable hunger for runs and big scores Sunil Gavaskar always looked in with a chance to get past Bradman's tally. At the start of 1983 he had notched up 25 hundreds but with many Test matches to be played that year could he finally surpass the great man's long-standing record was the question uppermost in the minds of Indian cricket fans.

Gavaskar got his 26th century in Pakistan in January and notched up No 27 in the West Indies in March. In the return series at home against Pakistan he hit his 28th century at Bangalore and by now as only to be expected there was tremendous excitement. Could he surpass or at least draw level with Bradman in the six-Test return series against West Indies?

In the first Test at Kanpur he was out for 0 and 7 and the manner of his dismissals

suggested that at 34 the old reflexes were not there and it would be difficult to get a hundred against the likes of Malcolm Marshall, Michael Holding and Andy Roberts. But he promptly bounced back with an electrifying 121 in the next Test at New Delhi and this drew him alongside Bradman on 29. Now when and where would he go past Bradman was the question. He did come close to it in the next Test at Ahmedabad when he got to 90 before he was out. In the process he became the leading run getter in Tests going past Geoff Boycott's record tally of 8,114 runs.

Gavaskar failed at both Bombay and Calcutta and so there was one last chance when the teams came to Chepauk for the final Test. With the opening day being washed out because of rain the Test was reduced to four days. West Indies after winning the toss scored 313. Gavaskar, drained out after opening the innings almost continuously since his debut in 1971 opted to come down the order. But Marshall dismissed Anshuman Gaekwad and Dilip Vengsarkar with successive deliveries without a run on the board. Gavaskar who had put on his gloves and pads and other protective gear in a hurry slowly wended his way to the crease to be met by Vivian Richards who told him

"Man, it makes no difference coming lower down the order; the score is still zero."

Slowly Gavaskar and Navjot Sidhu started a recovery before the latter was out for 20 at 54. Ashok Malhotra did not last long and at 67 for four India were shakily placed. Shivlal Yadav came in as night watchman and at stumps India were 69 for four with Gavaskar on 36.

Yadav left at 92 the following morning and Ravi Shastri joined Gavaskar. The Bombay duo settled down comfortably and made runs freely against



Sunil Gavaskar in action. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

● by
Partab Ramchand

the pace quartet of Holding, Marshall, Roberts and Winston Davis. Gavaskar brought up his half century and now the near capacity crowd were cheering every run fully aware that they could be witnessing history. And indeed history was created in mid afternoon when Gavaskar at 99 drove Davis to the onside for a single and the spectators rose to give him a standing ovation which was loud and long. At the tea interval as he came in he presented the precious bat to West Indies wicketkeeper Jeff Dujon fulfilling a promise he had made to him earlier in the series.

Gavaskar and Shastri con-

tinued in the same vein after the interval till the latter was out to the last ball of the day for 72 after the partnership had added 170 runs for the sixth wicket. Gavaskar was 149 at stumps and while the match was written off as a draw with India 262 for six, interest centered around Gavaskar on the final morning. How much more could he get and more important could he get to his double hundred. No batsman had got three double hundreds against West Indies and though Roger Binny and Kapil Dev left to make India 308 for eight, Gavaskar found an able partner in Syed Kirmani in whose company he did reach 200.

That landmark over and done with, Gavaskar now could look forward to another important record – Vinoo

Mankad's 231 as the highest by an Indian in Test cricket. That also had been notched up at Madras in January 1956 but at the corporation stadium. Even after over ten hours at the crease Gavaskar was concentration and determination personified and shortly after tea he went past Mankad's score and remained unbeaten with 236 when Kapil declared the innings closed at 451 for eight with Kirmani on 63. In all Gavaskar batted 644 minutes, negotiated 425 balls and hit 23 fours. In his 99th Test and 174th innings Gavaskar finally stood on the pedestal one ahead of Bradman. Exactly 40 years have passed but for those lucky enough to be present at the MAC stadium the memories will linger on forever.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations


Amalgamations Group

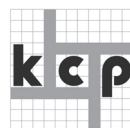

ASHOK LEYLAND
Koi Manzil Door Nahin


Brakes India Private Limited


CHATNATH TRUST


IIFL SECURITIES

THE HINDU
The Hindu
Group of Publications


KCP


LOKAVANI


MRF murugappa



NIPPO


Rane Group


RAYALA GROUP


SAINT-GOBAIN


SANMAR


sify


SUNDARAM FINANCE
Enduring values. New age thinking.


SUPER AUTO FORGE
Forging Ahead into Future


Sundram Fasteners Limited


Hotels Resorts and Palaces


TAKE
Enabling Business Efficiencies


TCS TATA
CONSULTANCY
SERVICES


TVS MOTOR COMPANY


WILD GARDEN
Cafe at Amethyst

Since 1856,
patently leaders –
A WELLWISHER