

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- The Mints of Madras – Part I
- The man behind the Chennai Storytelling Festival
- R. Desikan of Max Mueller Bhavan (Madras)

It is election time – guard your compound walls

By the time this issue reaches the readers, the dates of the general election to the 18th Lok Sabha will most likely have been announced. Which means the model code of conduct would have kicked in. Which in turn means compound walls of private and public properties cannot be defaced by poll graffiti and posters. That at least is so on paper. Ground reality of course is completely different. It is amazing that Chennai which is often prefixed by the word Singara by political dispensations is in reality treated very differently.

Chances are that your walls have already seen the worst.

For realising that the model code is a deterrent of sorts (only if the affected party complains by the way), the slug fest in terms of posters happens just as talk of elections gather momentum, reaches

• by **Sriram V.**

a peak before the announcement of dates and declines to an extent during the actual campaigning process. In this the peak coincides with the phase when political leaders, those in power that is, embark on a foundation stone laying and inaugural plaque unveiling spree while those in Opposition

vent their spleen at such goings on knowing fully well that they would do the same thing when in power.

But to get back to the posters and graffiti. As always, there is a law that protects private property owners from such defacement. “No Political Party or candidate shall permit its or his followers to make use of any individual’s land, building, compound wall etc., without his permission, for erecting flag-staffs, suspending banners, pasting notices, writing slogans etc.” says clause 6 of the Model Code of Conduct for Political Parties and their Candidates,

(Continued on page 2)

‘Chennai needs more buses’: OMI Foundation’s ‘Ease of Moving Index’

With Mobility a key item on the administration’s docket, the city’s local bodies are conducting a large-scale study to understand how the people of Chennai move. The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) together with other local bodies such as the Chennai Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (CUMTA) is conducting a survey of 50,000 households in the Chennai Metropolitan Area to map travel patterns. The latest media reports on the initiative state that 26,000 households have been covered so far, and that 70 workers have been roped in to expedite the process.

The project stands to be enormously helpful for Chennai as it can enable efficient

utilization of resources in building a public transportation network. Survey results will feed into improving the accuracy of big data analytics in transportation and will also guide the preparation of a comprehensive mobility plan to integrate land use and trans-

• by **Varsha V.**

port planning for the next 25 years. In a quote to The Hindu earlier in January, CUMTA Special Officer I Jeyakumar said, “CUMTA will also start public consultation for mobility in each area in the CMA after the survey is completed. The CMP for Chennai will be prepared in June.” In short, the administration’s mobility

survey is the starting point of a mega civic plan that will help Chennai make commutes that are quicker, cheaper, safer, and more reliable. But the results are late in the coming - the survey report was initially given a deadline in January, but it was not met due to the December floods; it was later announced that it would be available in February, and this deadline does not appear to have been met, either. In the meantime, the OMI Foundation in collaboration with IIT Madras recently released the results of its year-long mobility survey covering 3,100 respondents, dubbed ‘The Ease of Moving Index – Chennai City Profile.’ The findings are interesting, to say the least.

Around 90 per cent of reg-

HERITAGE WATCH

High Court notices that Heritage Act is yet to be acted upon



The High Court of Madras, late in February took note of and expressed its distress over the TN Government not bringing into force its Heritage Act of 2012. Twelve years in cold storage is not exactly a long period of time when it comes to government functioning. After all did not Florence Nightingale remark that ‘At once’ in Madras was measured in ‘periods of Indian cosmogony’? That was in connection with drainage work in the city and we guess heritage ranks roughly the same in terms of priority. But the sad fact remains – we have a Heritage Act, but it is not yet in force. And that means our heritage structures remain at the mercy of their owners. They stand no protection under law.

The irony is that in the last 12 years the government itself has emerged as a champion of heritage, taking up repair and maintenance of historic edifices under its control. But private buildings are not so lucky. Many have vanished and we cannot blame the owners for this – after all what do they stand to gain by protecting them? That is precisely what a Heritage Act in force ought to address. Till then, historic edifices in private hands will survive only if they are lucky.

One such building, roofless for 14 years now and hanging on by a thread is Gokhale Hall on Armenian Street (see pic above). In any other country such a building would have been nationalised and preserved. Not so here. But we hope for the best.

ular public transport users in the city own a motor vehicle but choose alternate modes such as public transport or cabs and autos due to greater reliability and cheaper costs. A significant portion of the city also patronizes active transport modes such as walking or cycling as well as shared transport

modes such as public transport and share autos. The main conclusion from the survey results corroborates the views of past reports published in newspapers, including that of Madras Musings - while Chennai has done a good job in providing

(Continued on page 2)

It is election time – guard your compound walls

(Continued from page 1)

released by the Election Commission of India. And even if that were not yet in effect, the State of Tamil Nadu has another law. This is the Tamil Nadu Open Places (Prevention of Disfigurement) Act, 1959, as per which graffiti on private walls are not permissible at any point of time, elections or not. Now try telling our political parties this.

It is not just defacement of walls. There are other forms of damage, the most common one being driving down wooden poles into footpaths so that vinyl hoardings can be erected for political meetings. And we also will have political bunting strung across streets making it hazardous for two-wheeler riders in particular. In addition noise pollution by way of installing outsize amplifiers and speakers at venues are other nuisances. Thankfully these days, electoral meetings at least in the city wind up by 10.00 pm owing to strict monitoring. And cone speakers seem to have vanished. These apparently still flourish in the mofussil.

It is ultimately the Greater Chennai Corporation that is

left to carry the can. As it is the body that is responsible for the conduct of the elections, it also is tasked with removing all the posters when the code of conduct comes into effect. It also has to cover all graffiti on private walls with its regulation pink paint. And when elections are over, counting is done and the celebrations have been held, it has to repair the damage to all footpaths and public locations in general. All of which costs money and which in turn means funds for some other essential activity such as education or health or sanitation are reduced.

It is high time that conduct outside of poll season and responsible behaviour during campaigning becomes part of our political system. And the Election Commission needs to develop the wherewithal to check such violations apart from its overall responsibility to curb other bending of rules. Or is this a not-so-subtle message to the effect that the middle classes, the bulk of the tax-paying populace and the most affected by defacement of property and invasion of tranquillity do not matter at all in the electoral scheme of things?

‘Chennai Needs More Buses’: OMI Foundation’s ‘Ease of Moving Index’

(Continued from page 1)

affordable transport to its people, the scale of mobility is restrained by limited infrastructure. For one, the city does not have enough buses to serve its populace. Not only does the fleet need expansion, but – as pointed out by Aishwarya Raman, Executive Director of the OMI Foundation – it needs to add more vehicles that will meet the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities. The commuting experience also has room to improve – with digital solutions finding ready adopters today, facilities such as cashless ticketing and real-time information can revitalise bus patronage.

Second, first and last mile connectivity – known constraints to the adoption of public transport – must be addressed with better feeder services. A sustainable inclusion of shared transport modes such as shared autos or cabs can also be explored; for instance, 42 per cent of the survey respondents say that public sharing schemes would

encourage them to cycle short distances. The city can also do much more to increase road safety for vulnerable commuters – the current state and length of pavements don't do justice to its pedestrians; and cyclists sharing the road with motorized vehicles continue to be at risk without dedicated bike lanes.

To wit, Chennai's mobility challenges lie in its inadequate infrastructure and network. That these need to be scaled is well known. Mobility studies, however, stand to provide crucial insights that can guide an integrated design of transport infrastructure. The city has already made multiple investments in this sector – an expansion of the metro rail is in the works; the bus fleet is set to grow; there are propositions to build more flyovers, too. It would have been ideal if the administration had conducted the survey beforehand, for these plans could have been better informed. One hopes that the results will be incorporated into current projects when they're available, at least.

Goodbye, old friends

The Woman from Madras Musings, much like Mary's little lamb, likes to stick to a habitual route for her daily commute. Chief among the reasons are two sights along the way that she delights in looking upon. One is a graffiti in the environs of Adyar. It adorns the wall of a small, independent house tucked away near a turning, and features a rather impish young man winking at onlookers. It's a rather clever piece of art, for a leafy plant growing behind the compound wall transforms into the youth's afro. The chap's hairdo changes with the seasons – in spring and summer, the fellow sports a shockingly unruly mane of green; he grows cheerfully bald as the rains progress, no doubt confident that he will regain his crown as he does every year. The other sight is that of a small statue of an old monk balanced carefully on an apartment ledge facing a street, somewhere near RA

doesn't look quite as impish; he charms no longer. There are some who are happy at this turn of events, though – namely, the fellow passengers who have been attempting to persuade a change of route for quite some time now. (Wo)MMM is now on the lookout for new sights along the new route.

Q & Hey!

The Woman from Madras Musings was rather enjoying an auto ride to the Eternals' when she realized she was about 10 bucks short of the fare. A phone call was made to the Mater in the hope of acquiring said funds, but (Wo)MMM soon found herself trapped in a numbing interrogation. In hindsight, it was her fault really, to expect unquestioning aid when the Indian spirit is so fond of cross-examination at any given time. (Wo)MMM had hardly greeted the Mater when she was asked why there seemed to be a great

could she have (Wo)MMM's old phone if she was not using it? (Wo)MMM asked why, to which the Mater told her not to endlessly question people when they ask for help and rung off.

The auto had reached the Eternals' by this time. Swinging an arm around his seat, the auto driver turned back to (Wo)MMM, visibly moved by the recent ordeal she had been put through. In a gentlemanly gesture, he insisted on foregoing the ten rupees that (Wo)MMM was in deficit of, and earnestly wished her the best of the day ahead before the auto trundled away.

An apple a day

The Woman from Madras Musings wasn't always so distrustful, if you can believe it. Once, she listened to her elders believing them to be her betters. A childhood incident – a story for another day – brought the realization that most adults approxi-

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Puram. It is about the size of a hand, but striking nevertheless – the features are so exquisite that (Wo)MMM can almost trick herself into believing that she is looking at a very tiny saint lost in meditation. He is not always found in the same position either – sometimes he faces the street and sometimes, he gazes at a small temple at the corner of the lane. The saint sits there night and day, in rain and sun, absorbed in contemplation. (Wo)MMM has, over the years, grown to consider as friends both the young man and the saint. So she is rather sad to report that she has, in recent times, had to bid them both goodbye.

The saint is now nowhere to be seen, not since the December showers. (Wo)MMM had rather hoped that he had been given shelter from the rain and that he would re-appear on the ledge soon enough; but alas, no such luck so far. As for the young man, (Wo)MMM discovered last week that the leafy plant has been cleared away from behind the compound wall. His beautiful, leafy wig gone, the young man wink

deal of wind about her; on learning that she was in an auto, she was asked where the better half was, and besides, what about the pink buses? Had she tried riding the pink buses? (Wo)MMM was forced to admit that she had not, whereupon she was forcibly regaled with the story of an acquaintance who once rode a pink bus and had reported that she'd rather liked it at the time. (Wo)MMM tried, once again, to bring up the topic of her auto fare, but the words were hardly out of her mouth when the topic swung back to the better half. Where was he? Left early for work? How come? And what about (Wo)MMM? Why hadn't she woken up early? What had she been up to last night? That (Wo)MMM had stayed up late working was met with a snort of incredulity. Why didn't she have auto fare, anyway? What about Google Pay and the like? Why on earth was she dragging her feet on setting those up in her phone? (Wo)MMM learned that her cousin – younger at that, by a full year – had not only set it up on her phone but had done it for her mother, too. Speaking of which,

mate their way through life and that their recommendations aren't always a sensible course. That it is prudent to seek second opinions or do one's own research was proven yet again during a recent incident.

Last week, (Wo)MMM and the better half found themselves in need of a medical consultation; there were a few questions that needed addressing, and (Wo)MMM felt it was better to talk to a professional than gather answers from the internet. It so happened that an elderly acquaintance got wind of the situation and enthusiastically recommended a doctor who he assured was the best in the business. In fact, he went ahead and got his secretary to book an appointment for us. And that is how (Wo)MMM and the better half found themselves across the table from a new doctor the very next day. By the end of the fifteen-minute consult, (Wo)MMM – who had simply wanted some sound medical advice – was handed an appallingly long prescription which she was

(Continued on page 3)

OUR READERS WRITE



World Heritage day

As we celebrate World Heritage Day on 18 April, we need to understand that heritage is something that is passed down to future generations from our earlier generations. Heritage sites which show the cultural diversity of our planet are treasures of the past and gifts that are handed down to us. It becomes the duty of every citizen of every country to protect the heritage sites irrespective of the location of the sites.

T.S. Karthik
Kilpauk, Chennai

On street names

I read with interest the mention in a couple of *Madras Musings* issues about name changes to streets in old Madras. The one that caught my eye was Rundall Road. From December 1964 to July 1965, as a foreign student from the US, I lived in a small boarding house at 3 Rundalls (that is how I spelled it then) Road run by Mrs. Hilda Raghavachari. She was, if memory serves, a graduate of Madras Christian College.

I was in Madras to study modern India history and politics. After I met with my contact at the university, a political science professor, in early January 1965, I began a reading course with him. As it turned out my real lesson in politics took place outside of the university and on the streets of Madras. I refer here to the anti-Hindi riots of early 1965. They closed down the

school and brought students and activists to the streets as well as police with their lathi sticks. The police did their best to control the protesters but were not always successful. On one occasion I found myself in the midst of a wave of students being chased by police. I simply stood still as the crowds surged around me and was not harmed. One of the more interesting signs the student activists held up sent a message that said: "Down with Hindi Imperialism." Though during this time we were under government instruction not to go out, my intrepid landlady, Mrs. Ragh, curious about what was going on, hopped into her car, and she and I and her daughter Radha, drove around the city checking out an eerily silent Madras. When things calmed down I bought a bike and made my way around town on a regular basis--to the university, to the American Library, and to various other Madras destinations (including restaurants where I learned to enjoy, and still do, Indian food). I remember well biking south on a road north of St. Andrew's Church, and risking life and limb to turn left onto Poonamalle High Road with the church on my right.

My stay was sponsored by Rotarians who sent me on speaking tours around South India (e.g., Bangalore, Mysore, Salem, Cochin, and so on). One of many highlights of my stay was the day a couple of Rotarians from Madras West Rotary Club took me to tour the ruins of Mahabalipuram. In addition

to seeing the fabulous statues, etc., I also for the first and only time, so far, drank coconut milk directly from the shell. On another trip I toured the temple carved into a rock near Madurai. The temple was enormously impressive. Two other good and memorable times: visiting hill station Ooty to speak at a Rotary Club, and Kodai to vacation with a Rotary family.

Now, back to where I started. Can you tell me the result of the inquiry into changing name of Rundall Road? On Google Maps I can't find it so I assume it was changed. Can you tell me the new name?

John M. Carland
Arlington, VA
USA

Rundall's Road is now EVK Sampath Road.

— The Editor

About TANGEDCO

This refers to the news item under the caption "Tangedo dubs consumers power thieves, pockets crores" in *Times of India* dated Feb 21, 2024. It was stated while TANGEDCO is supposed to disconnect power supply in case of failure to pay the charges on due date and restore supply after dues along with reconnection charges are paid, TANGEDCO does not follow the rules of disconnecting the supply citing manpower shortage and instead, treats the power consumed after the due date as 'theft' and imposes hefty penalty.

The present modus operandi is that if a consumer fails to pay the dues, besides the payment of the dues, he has to not only pay the reconnection charges but also the hefty charges for power theft. The report stated that the practice of TANGEDCO branding consumers as energy thieves has been rampant in city and suburbs, of late.

The practice is atrocious and authoritarian and deserves condemnation. The pilferage of energy can be construed only if the consumption does not get recorded in the meter. When the consumption gets duly recorded, how can a consumer be branded as thief and imposed penalty?

While TANGEDCO is mandated to disconnect power supply in case of failure to pay the charges on due date, why does it not follow rules? The ruse that it does not have manpower to do so, is ridiculous. Its failure to do its duty results in consumers being dubbed as power thieves. In other words it is because of the dereliction

of duty by its officials that a consumer is forced to pay whopping amounts, which, in the normal course would have been the amount due plus the reconnection charges. For the inefficiency, inertia and lethargy of the officials, the consumers should not be made to pay. The TANGEDCO should give up such obnoxious practices.

V.S. Jayaraman
31 Motilal Street
Chennai 600 017

Information needed

I am doing a Thesis on 'Collector of Customs' for Chennai formerly Madras around the 1880s and forward. I found the name of the Collector of Customs 'Joseph Armstrong' during that period but can't go further finding anything else on Joseph Armstrong, Collector of Customs Chennai/Madras which I need for my Thesis. I'll be grateful if you could please assist me find anything else on Joseph Armstrong, Collector of Customs.

Kerry King
yknt91@yahoo.ca

Flower Show

The account given by Sri-ram V. about the flower show (*Flower shows at the Agricultural Society in MM*,

Feb. 16th, 2024) was delightful. It gave me an opportunity to have a glimpse of the days when I used to frequent the renowned drive-in restaurant "Woodlands". That was a place for meeting my friends some of whom are no more. It is good that the flower show was reinstated after a long time. The fascinating photos of flowers before the article and the other article followed but connected with the flower show by Vinita Sidhartha ("A floral delight for senior citizens") also were enchanting for a senior citizen like me now far away from the location. A bouquet of kudos to MM.

K. Rajendran
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Shedding light on the picture

In the last issue, the article titled *City Beautiful Then, Singara Chennai Now* had a pic that was published without a caption. The people in it are (l to r) Raja Sir M.A. Muthiah Chettiar, first Indian Mayor of the city, V. Narayanan, the then Mayor, R.P. Sarathy, then President of the Rotary Club of Madras and C.A. Ramakrishnan, ICS, then Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu.

— The Editor

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

(Continued from page 2)

told to hand over to the pharmacy on premises. It included, among other things, a course of antibiotics to 'flush out' germs. (Wo)MMM was also strongly encouraged to acquiesce to an invasive surgery ("just outpatient – it will not require staying overnight at the hospital...") to help rule out a condition that may "complicate matters later". (Wo)MMM is rather proud to say that she kept a straight face through all of this. She managed to remain quite calm until she spied the exit, whereupon she hightailed it out of the joint, better half in tow.

What about the questions, you ask? (Wo)MMM ended up reaching out to the family doctor. Though not a specialist in the field, he understood where (Wo)MMM was coming from and furnished the sound medical advice she needed – vitamin supplements, increased water consumption and eight hours of sleep. May his tribe increase.

— (Wo)MMM

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I hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd. Rohini Ramesh
(Publisher)

The Mints of Madras – Part I

Any person with passing interest in the city's history will tell you that Mint Street is so named because the Madras Mint was once located on it. And they will also add most helpfully that it is known as Thangasalai Theru in Tamil because gold was melted at the mint for striking coins. Well, they would be correct as far as the English name went but the Tamil explanation could not be more wrong. Tankashala is the Sanskrit term for mint – the root being Tanka which means a stamped coin. And so, Tankashala Theru must be the correct name of our Mint Street. But then it is a Sanskrit word and oh well... etc etc.

Not many may be aware that the facility that once stood at the northern end of Mint Street was the last of many mints our city had. This article attempts to trace the various such coineries that existed here over two centuries. The first few editions were, as is to be expected, inside Fort St. George and the later ones in the city, the last being the best known and at the end of what became Mint Street.

Mints were in fact among the early priorities of the English when they came to Madras. The grant of 1639 giving them this region had a clause that they "shall perpetually Injoy the privileges of mintage without paying any Dues or duties whatsoever, more then the ordinary wages or hire unto those that shall Quoyne the moneys." (all spellings as in original). When C.V. Boraiyya translated in 1802 for Collin Mackenzie a Marathi document on the establishment of Madras in 1639, he made careful note of how a Dar-ul-zarab (house of striking coins) was one of the privileges given.

H.D. Love notes that minting was probably among the first activities taken up by the British, for "no complex plant was needed. As soon as the dies were cut, any native goldsmith was capable of refining the metal, casting pellets of the correct weight, and striking the coins." And in keeping with that, we find that the English got by in initial years by sub-contracting the activity. Gold came by ship from England and the Arya Vysyas converted the metal into coins for a commission of 4 to 5 per cent. The coining seems to have taken place at their own workshops, which was probably located at their residences, all of



Left: British India Coins, Madras Presidency Half Pagoda 1808-1811 and on right: Madras Presidency 1-2 Pagoda 1808-1811.

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

which stood on Market Street in Old Black Town (the area where the High Court now stands). Apparently, this system continued for a while and a good time was had by all – the Company servants making personal profits, with two notorious dubashes Beri Timanna and Kasi Veeranna being the conduits. But it would seem that even within this circle of corruption the natives siphoned out more than what was their due and by the 1650s it was necessary to have Europeans appointed to supervise.

It is not clear as to when the English took over minting but by the 1660s the mint was within the Fort. In 1675, the Company applied for permission from Golconda, the new ruling dispensation, to strike silver coins and copper pice. This was granted and Golconda tankas began to come from Madras. It was during this period that we have from Talboys Wheeler's *Madras in the Olden Time* the description of an accident in the mint which gives us an idea of the process involved. Gold was alloyed with 4/5th part of silver and 1/5th of copper in an earthen pot heated over a wood fire. The alloy was then cooled by pouring it into another pot that contained water mixed with cow dung. On this occasion, there was a tremendous explosion and both

pots – the one that contained the molten alloy and the other the water with cow dung – flew away never to be seen again. The molten metal was splattered all over the walls and had to be scraped off. Around 40 of the 170 ounces was lost. It was clearly a very inefficient process, and probably dangerous as well.

But the British were not for giving up on what was a profitable activity, both officially and outside of it. In 1686, they obtained a patent from King James II and established a silver mint inside the Fort, which began issuing coin "of the same form, fineness and device as those current in Mogul country." By 1692, with Golconda taken over by the Mughals, permission was granted by Prince Kam Baksh, son of Aurangzeb for the mint at Fort St George to strike coins. It is interesting to note that the standards by way of iron stamps came from the Mughal court – two each for gold mohurs, pagodas and silver rupees and were received with due ceremonial.

The mint itself needed repeated refurbishment, owing to the crudeness of the process. In 1695, a new mint came up on the south-western side of the Fort, near where Charles Street presently is. The earlier one it is recorded was so bad that the workers were conducting oper-

ations in the open much to the inconvenience of the soldiers. The new facility was a gold and silver mint but in 1711, the silver part of it was moved to the north-west angle of the Fort while the gold mint moved closer to Fort House, to a precinct called the Inner Fort. This seems to have been the space now occupied by the old Secretariat behind the Assembly building. The silver mint needed reconstruction by 1722 and a 'house' was built for it at the same site, with the lower floor designed for storing and weighing the precious metal and the upper as quarters for the Assaye-master. There were grounds around it for workshops for "melters, refiners and coiners." It is interesting to note that the northwest bastion of the Fort is still referred to as the Mint Bastion though it is sadly out of bounds for those outside of the army.

All these mints, though deep inside Fort St George, were open to the public. Anyone who had gold to be converted to coinage could come and get it done for a fee. At a time when there was no standard currency, coins from other kingdoms and principalities and often those of the same kind but from other mints, had to be melted and reissued as coins that were locally acceptable.

There was however no standardisation as far as the actual

process even at the Fort mint was concerned. There was considerable scope for adulteration, as is evident from a letter dating to 1742, wherein Sidney Foxall, Mint Master laments over how minting was still a manual process in Madras, as opposed to the Tower of London where gold bars "ran through flatting mills, the money cut with an engine, milled and stamped". Apart from adulteration at the mint itself, there were problems of sub-standard country mints that produced fakes and brought them into circulation. On more than one occasion, the residents of Madras were warned about coins from Pulicat and at least once, during the 1730s there was a demonetisation exercise of sorts, when coins were called back to be melted and reissued with some security features. It was a complete failure.

The list of mint functionaries also makes for curious reading. Apart from the Assaye-master and his team of Europeans, there was a set of 'Mint Brahmins' though their exact function remains unknown. There were also apart from the melters, coiners and refiners mentioned above, goldsmiths and gold washers, apart from those involved in menial tasks such as stoking the fires and cleaning the place.

By the mid 18th century however, changes were afoot and it was time to move the Mint again, this time to somewhere in the city, outside the Fort.

(To be continued next fortnight)

R. Desikan: the spirit and cheer of Max Mueller Bhavan (Madras) between 1964 and 1992

To promote a dynamic cross-cultural relationship between India and Germany, the Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB, Goethe-Institut) came into existence in the later years of the 1950s, celebrating the life and works of Friedrich Max Mueller (1823–1900), an eminent Indologist, philologist, and philosopher. Concurrently with the start of MMB-s in New Delhi, Bombay, Poona, Calcutta, and Bangalore, an MMB in Madras (Chennai presently; MMB-M) was established by Bertram Werwie on 20 August 1960. From that moment, the MMB-M has remained a vibrant centre for the youth of the erstwhile Madras city and the present Chennai. Similar to the MMB-s in other Indian cities, the MMB-M shared Germany's heritage and culture with its patrons and enabled many of them to learn German language. On the language-learning side, over time, several Madras residents gained mastery by achieving the highest academic certificate – *Oberstufe* – issued by the MMB. Some of the *Oberstufe* achievers joined the MMB-M as teachers enabled with supplementary training in Germany, teaching both basic and advanced levels of German language and literature to later cohorts of students. For more than six decades, the MMB-M has been intricately intertwined with the growth and development of Madras.

One pillar of the MMB-M, until 1992, was the sparkingly lively and ever-smiling Rangachari Desikan. I would deem Desikan's cheerful face – his

characteristic bone-metal-frame spectacles adding a charming glitz to his smiling face – as the visage of MMB-M until his untimely death in 1992, succumbing to rheumatic-heart-valvular disease. Anyone entering the main office of MMB-M would, invariably, meet him first, who made the visitor – either a new student or a casual guest – feel at home by his extraordinary warmth and cordiality. His spontaneity in helping people had no match. I can say so from my experience as a learner at MMB-M and as a frequent visitor in later days. During my early days as a lecturer at Loyola College, Madras, I was preparing a scientific manuscript for publication in a professional journal published by Duncker & Humblot GmbH, Berlin, which required a German summary. I looked up to Desikan; he extemporaneously responded with one. I walked out of MMB-M, gleefully in the next 30 min, holding a neatly type-written summary of my article in German ready to be submitted to Duncker & Humblot.

Desikan was born to Rangachari-Tirumamagal couple in Karaikudi on 23 December 1930. He completed his schooling in Karaikudi. After earning a BSc (Chemistry) degree from the University of Madras, studying through St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli in 1948-1950, he joined the Accountant General's (AG's) Office, Madras. While working there, he gained the friendship of Kailasam Balachander, renowned Tamil-film director and producer.



A scene from *Woyzeck* staged at the Museum Theatre, Egmore, 1965. A stern Desikan (sans his characteristic bone-metal-frame specs) as 'Franz Woyzeck' pairing with Kalyani Janakiram as 'Marie'. (Photo courtesy: Geetha Vedaraman, MMB-M).



by Anantanarayanan Raman
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Desikan's formal association with MMB-M started in 1960; he joined the newly established MMB-M to learn German language in 1960. In 1964, Bertram Werwie asked Desikan to join as the Administrative Officer. Much against his father's wish of continuing his employment at the AG's Office, Desikan joined the fledgling MMB-M. From then, Desikan served MMB-M with devotion and commitment, supporting a long string of Directors, including the acclaimed ontologist and epistemologist Herbert Herring, who had commented on *Vedanta* in the 1970s.

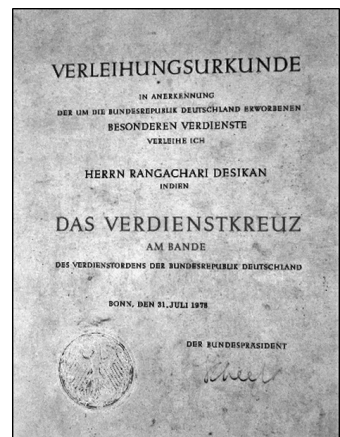
While working on this tribute, I met with Desikan's wife Ranganayaki and their daughter Kalyani in Chennai in late August 2023. They shared many details paraphrased in this section. Desikan was an ardent *rasika*. He had an immense knowledge of both Carnatic and Hindustani Music, in addition to Western classical. He was an active member of *Sampradaya*, Madras. He was a versatile theatre artist and he performed in stage plays. In 1965, the MMB-M staged Georg Büchner's play *Woyzeck* at the Museum Theatre, Egmore. Desikan played Franz Woyzeck in this presentation. He was an avid admirer of the Madras philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti

(JK). He spoke and wrote German with facility, much like a German. He fluently conversed in Telugu and Hindi as well. Desikan translated the popular Tamil author Akilan's (Perungalur Vaithialingam Akilandam, 1922-1988) *Moonru Velai* into German, under the title *Die drei reichen Mahlzeiten der Bettlerin Subbalakshmi*. This German edition was published by Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi in 1965.

Recognising his meritorious service to MMB-M and the German-cultural service in India, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany honoured Desikan with their highest recognition das *Verdienstkreuz am Bande des Verdienstordens der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (der Bundesverdienstorden); the Cross of Merit on the Band of the Order of Merit) signed by the Federal President of Germany Walter Scheel on 31 July 1978.

One popular meaning to the Sanskrit term *desika* is *acharya*, teacher. Rangachari Desikan lived an absolutely meaningful life providing substance to his name 'Desikan' given to him by the Rangachari-Tirumamagal couple by being an *acharya* to many who sought his benevolence and support, including myself. He lived as a complete human in its truest sense.

On the occasion of bidding farewell to Bertram Werwie and Mrs. Werwie (with garlands). Desikan at the extreme right, next to Bertram Werwie, 1 September 1965. Srinivasa Sarma, a teacher at MMB-M in the middle holding the small boy. (Photo courtesy: Geetha Vedaraman, MMB-M).



Verdienstkreuz am Bande des Verdienstordens received by Desikan from Walter Scheel, President of Federal Republic of Germany, in July 1978 – (Photo courtesy: Ranganayaki Desikan and Kalyani Desikan, Chennai).

This article was made possible through personal conversations with Ranganayaki Desikan and Kalyani Desikan of Thyagaraya Nagar, Chennai and email conversations with Uma Mohan, formerly of the Max Mueller Bhavan, Chennai. My sincerest thanks to them for their kindness and co-operation.

Dr. Eric Miller – the man behind the Chennai Storytelling Festival

The Chennai Storytelling Festival 2024, held in February this year, was an enormous success! It attracted more than 100 storytellers, and hundreds more storytelling aficionados, from around the globe. The event, which occurred fully via videoconferencing, was masterminded by an American settled in Chennai. Yes, I am talking about Dr. Eric Miller who is a big name in the world of storytelling. A man who is responsible for training hundreds of storytellers in India.

Dr. Eric Miller is a native New Yorker and earned a Ph.D. in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia). He has taught college courses in Folklore, Expository Writing, Creative Writing, Analysing Literature, Public Speaking, and Storytelling at St. John's University, Fordham University, and New York University (all in NYC). In Chennai, he has taught at IIT-Madras; the Image College of Animation, Arts, and Technology; and the University of Madras (Dept of Communication and Journalism). In 2007 Eric co-founded the World Storytelling Institute, which he directs. He also directs the annual Chennai Storytelling Festival, which began in 2013.

When I asked Dr. Eric what made him choose storytelling as a profession, he replied,

"Since my father was a playwright and a theatre critic, I used to visit the theatre often. I naturally became fascinated with drama and as a teenager wrote several plays. Then at the age of 17 years, I met Laura Simms, who was a Professional Storyteller. I learned about Professional Storytelling from her. Storytelling appeared easier than theatre! Storytelling seemed to me to be a kind of theatre in which one could be all-in-one – playwright, director, and actor – and there was no need for a stage, sets, a full cast of actors, costumes, and makeup. I also liked the crystalline structure of fairytales, as I learned about them from Laura Simms."

Why India and why Chennai?

"Both my parents were in the fields of the Arts, and Arts Journalism (my mother was the editor-in-chief of a national magazine about dance when I was growing up). As a result, in my late teens, I decided to study

story and the performing arts in an ancient culture. My options came down to Ireland or India. I chose India as it was further away and not as modernized. I also chose India as I was interested in Goddess Culture, not as religion, but as culture and as models for behavior. A Professor of religion at the College I was attending handed me an English translation of the Silappathikaram (the Epic of the Ankle Bracelet), written by Prince Ilango Adigal. This version of the story is linguistically dated to have been written in Tamil 1500 years ago. I read the story and liked it very much. The content of the story – one woman who would go to a King and present her case and the King would listen to her – amazed me!

I first came to India in 1988, to do research for my Master's degree. At that time I went to Poompuhar, the place Kannagi grew up, and walked the same path as Kannagi, from Poompuhar to Madurai, around 200km, and then later from Madurai to the mountains, another 200km. I authored a book about the walk and gave the first copy to M. Karunanidhi, the 5-time Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. I came back to India in 2002 to do research with Tribal people in the Anaimalai mountains for my Ph.D. in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. After that, I decided to settle in Chennai."

Dr. Eric was lucky to find his spouse Magdalene in Chennai. Magdalene is a Therapist specialising in using Drama and the other Arts for Therapy. Eric and Magdalene were married in 2006 and have a daughter Kamala, who is now 17 years old. Along with Magdalene and Storyteller Jeeva Raghunath, he started the World Storytelling Institute in 2007. He started offering Storytelling Workshops from then on. Today there are 58 registered Professional Storytellers in Chennai, many of whom have studied with Dr. Eric.

Apart from Chennai, Dr. Eric has helped to start Storytelling Associations in Trichy, Madurai, Coimbatore, Salem, and Ahmedabad.

In 2011, he and Geeta Ramanujam (the senior leader of the Storytelling Revival in India) started the Indian Storytelling Network. Dr. Eric assists the 130 members of the ISN in editing and updating their

ISN listings (which include their bio-data and descriptions of storytelling-related services they offer to the public).

Dr. Eric says, "Storytelling is not just a performance. It is also a secular ritual in which people get in touch with themselves, others, and the Universe. I conduct workshops in telling stories such as folktales, fairytales (one kind of folktale), epics, legends, and myths – as well as personal-experience stories, and stories that I help people create. As I see it, role play is an important part of storytelling. By speaking and moving as a character would, and addressing listeners as if they were other characters in the story, the storyteller enlists the audience to participate in the story. I believe storytellers should not overact. They should be gentle, invite the listeners in, and activate their imaginations. The style I work

Video conferencing has allowed storytellers from around the globe, along with storytellers throughout India, to participate in the CSF. There are participants from Russia, Europe, Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and beyond who are interested in sharing and learning storytelling best practices. All sessions in the editions of CSF from 2021 to 2024 have been free of charge!

The theme for Chennai Storytelling Festival 2024 was Growing and Maturing through Storytelling and will include Transforming in CSF 2025. On the recommendation of several members of the Chennai Storytellers group (of which Dr. Eric is also a member), CSF 2024 had a few sessions of storytelling by and for children. Dr. Eric says this was a new and wonderful experience! CSF 2024 also included a discussion session on



Dr. Eric Miller.

of man-hours spent on emails, short-listing workshop leaders, curating events, and drawing up schedules for 4 different time zones – a facet that was well-appreciated – culminated in a memorable Festival. Takeaways included great networking from right where you are, lots of new ideas and new stories to discover, and exposure to a variety of narrative styles – this and much more was what Chennai Storytelling Festival 2024 was all about".

When I asked Dr. Eric about his future plans apart from curating the CSF, he mentioned several things. He said he will continue to give training in Storytelling, Creative Writing, and Storytelling Therapy, a field he has helped to pioneer (he earned a Master's degree in Psychology from the University of Madras in 2018). He will also continue to host the "First Monday of the Month" sessions of storytelling by and for adults (May to January) which are also free to participate in and observe (via Zoom). There are more than 200 video recordings of storytelling in this series uploaded on YouTube. He is also the Dean of Rojavanam International School in Nagercoil and visits there for some days each month.

Dr. Eric has scripted a fictional movie with singing and dancing entitled "Words From the Forest", which is about a group of high school students from New York City who come to visit some tribal people in Tamil Nadu's Anaimalai Mountains. He says this story takes up where the story of Kannagi leaves off, and he hopes "Words From the Forest" will soon be brought to the silver screen.

Let us wish Dr. Eric success in this ambitious project. He can be contacted at eric@storytellinginstitute.org.

● by R.V. Rajan

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with is conversational. We don't memorize, we make eye contact at times, and we tell from our imagination. It is a visual experience – the teller and the listener can visualise a story as it is being told. This way a storyteller can bring a story to life".

Based on a suggestion from a Chennai-based storyteller Sandhya Ruben, who had attended a storytelling festival in Singapore, he started the Chennai Storytelling Festival in 2013. He was familiar with Storytelling Festivals, having assisted Laura Simms organize them in NYC. From the start, the Chennai Storytelling Festival was positioned as a Teaching and Learning Storytelling Festival. For the first 8 years, the CSF occurred almost in person.

Dr. Eric has been fascinated with and has been an enthusiastic user of, video conferencing since the mid-1990s. Since around that time, his website has been www.storytellingand-videoconferencing.com. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, he was ready to shift all his storytelling activities into video conferencing mode. Post the pandemic, CSF sessions have included a few hybrid sessions, with a mix of live and online participants.

ways the Dravidian Movement has used stories to communicate its messages, especially through drama, modified folk art forms, movies, novels, and short stories.

Sudha Umashanker, a journalist, author, storytelling student of Dr. Eric, and an active participant in all of the editions of the Chennai Storytelling Festival, curates a Tamil storytelling event as one of the regional language storytelling events that occurs in the CSF. On Sunday 11th February 2024 her storytelling outfit, Storycorner at Bookmine, hosted the eighth edition of "Tamizhil Kathaigal Ketpom" ("Let's Listen to Stories in Tamizh"), via Zoom. This popular event has a faithful following of young and old. Eleven Storytellers presented a wide range of stories in a variety of styles in "Tamizhil Kathaigal Ketpom" in CSF 2024.

Commenting on CSF 2024 Sudha says, "Big names such as Laura Simms, mentor of Dr. Eric Miller, delighted participants with workshops and performances. Chennai Storytellers Pretigaya Haran of Story Sack, and Sheetal Rayathatha of Square Heads, doubled as hosts of the Festival's 12 two-hour Storytelling Sessions. Hundreds

Danger – Talking Greyheads Ahead

You know how it is with us senior/ super-senior citizens... we like to talk.

We have stories to tell, memories to share ... as we should.

But perhaps we need some rules in place? Especially since self-regulation is such a laughable concept for us most times.

Like while reminiscing, for instance.

Stories that have been repeatedly told to almost the same set of people, (give or take a few NRI relatives, and certain unwary newbies who tend to randomly float in and out) - such stories should come with an expiry date, no? If a story has been told ten times in five years, then that's it - you cannot repeat that story anymore - or not for another five years at least.

A system of alarms would prove useful - could the much-mentioned AI whizzes help here? Bells ringing, sirens going off the second Poes-Garden Perappa goes, "Back in the summer of...". Wouldn't that be neat?

But nothing too loud or sudden - vital organs that have been around for a while can't handle the shock. Something gentle, yet sharp enough for failing ears. The Raconteur Police would then appear and

gently move the still-babbling, anecdote-ing senior away to a safe distance.

How about numbering each story? This way, others are spared the torture of having to listen to the entire saga...again.

You quaver: 'Number 57!', and everyone laughs uproariously, reminding each other what a blast that was, with a few succumbing to an ill-advised fit of the giggles, putting themselves in imminent danger of either twisting their gut or swallowing their recently acquired front teeth.

Of course, there would be objections, only to be expected at a senior gathering, especially if it's family.

"Not 57." Goes Chetpet Chithi, who must always know one better than everyone else. "That was either 65 or 66. We were still in St Mary's Road."

"No." A voice pipes up. "You were in T Nagar at the time."

Long argument between C Chitthi and Piper-Voice about C Chitthi's residence, with P-V deliberately ignoring the fact that perhaps C Chitthi is a better authority on where she

stayed when.

Well, the convictions of seniors are absolute.

Of course, those who don't normally hang out with this lot may be a touch mystified by this method, but in a group dominated by senior citizens, a bit of leeway is always offered.

And now for a truly important rule.

If a younger relative wants to share a light-hearted anecdote, she must be allowed to do so without constant interruptions.

Seniors, please note: the keyword in being part of conversations is 'part' - as in 'not whole'.

So, the temptation to mutate into conversation bullies must be resisted.

Let's assume this Younger

cided to change jobs, I'll never know. How much I advised him.

Senior 2: Must have been That Woman. His mother. Have known her from school. Appah - ego means E.G.O. (Spreading her hands out) Always interfering.

Senior 5 leaves the table, cell phone to ear.

Senior 2: Feel so sorry for his wife. Such a nice family she comes from.

YR: (biting her lower lip during this exchange) ... and they were telling me all about their shopping experience at Must-be-seen-at-Boutique...

Senior 1: Always thought that kid needed a guide.

Senior 5: (returning to table) Who died?

Senior 1: Huh? No one.

by Ranjitha Ashok

Relative's story goes like this: Guess what? You remember I had dinner with old friends Bangalore-Couple a few nights ago? And they were telling me all about their shopping experience at Must-be-seen-at-Boutique? I ran into Next-Door Aunt's daughter yesterday, and she was wearing this lovely outfit, and she told me that's where she had picked it up, and when I told her that someone I met recently was also raving about this place, she immediately asked if it was Bangalore-Couple, because she saw them there and it turns out that she did post-grad with Female-Bangalore-Couple, while her husband happened to know the Male-Half from way back. Small world, no?

Simple, right?

Pretty standard over-a-meal-at-the-dining-table conversation?

So you think.

But in reality...

Now, Younger Relative (YR), since learning how to talk, has never really known what it's like to speak a series of sentences without leaping over interruptions and dodging sudden introductions of side topics.

A pretty common experience while dealing with this bunch for most...but there she goes, braving all.

YR: Guess what? You remember I had dinner with old friends Bangalore-Couple a few nights ago...

Senior 1: Why that boy de-

What are you talking?

Senior 5: You only said someone died.

Senior 1: I didn't but ultimately, we all will, no?

(Laughs uproariously while everyone else gives him the stink eye)

YR: (desperately) Must-be-seen-at-Boutique...

Senior 5 leaves the table, cell phone to ear.

Senior 3: (with a sly smile) You know who owns that over-expensive place, no?

YR: (raising her voice in an attempt to control the situation): I RAN INTO NEXT-DOOR AUNT'S DAUGHTER...

Nope.

Futile.

Doesn't make the tiniest dent in this collective mass of toughened senior skin.

Senior 4: Huh! What I can tell you about owner-girl's mother. 3rd Cross Street Kamalakshi. Used to be V B Kamalakshi. Then got all 'society', straightened her hair, and emerged as Kamal V Balu. (Sneering) Kamal V Balu, it seems. Smart daughter though. Very good business head.

YR: (refusing to give up) ... yesterday, and she was wearing this lovely....

Senior 6: Yes, yes, saw her and Next-Door Shobha two days ago. Daughter is here for a couple of weeks, it seems? Wasn't she in college with you, YR?

YR: (long-suffering sigh):

Yes...

Senior 6: (laughing) Remember when the parents were going around secretly, and we used to help them meet? Old man Subbu, Shobha's Dad, found out, and chased all of us, including his future son-in-law, down Sriramnagar 5th Street. We had to hide in corner Bhuma Stores, much to owner Kooling-Glass-Kanaka's amusement.

For a second, YR is distracted.

YR: Really? Shobha Aunt and Ramu Uncle?

Senior 2: (laughing) Yep! Shows it can be done!

Senior 1: Kooling Glass Kanaka! 'With a K'. Haven't heard that name in decades.

Senior 4: Used to get the best kadalai-urundai there. Perfect, melt-in-mouth.

YR (getting back on track - and deciding now to rush her fences): ...and-she-was-wearing-this-lovely-outfit-and-she-told-me-that's-where-she-had-picked-it-up-and-when-I-told-her-that-someone-I-met-recently-was-also-raving-about-this-place-she-immediately-asked-if-it-was-Bangalore-Couple-because-she-saw-them-there-and-it-turns-out-that-she-did-post-grad-with-Female-Bangalore-Couple-while-her-husband-happened-to-know-the-Male-Half-from-way-back-Small-world-no?

She pauses to catch her breath.

Senior 2: Small-a? I'll tell you how small. They 'saw' Male-Half's father for Shobha. No chance! She stood on one leg and insisted only Ramu. 'Lovvu' - 'o'-'Lovvu'!

The seniors roar with laughter.

YR (muttering): I think it's sweet.

At that moment, Senior 5 returns, and says, "What 'lovvu'? Who Male-Half? Which Shobha?"

YR's forehead hits the dining table with a small thud as she doubles up in despair, rattling all the tableware, especially the steel tumblers.

Seniors, please note. Your memories have no business intruding into someone else's narrative.

Remember all those eye rolls you exchanged with your peers back when your elders prattled on and on?

Well, you, who once thought you were born to be wild, have become your seniors.

That rumbling you hear?

That's the sound of all the eye rolls heading your way.

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- THE EDITOR

Meet Keerthana, a leg-spinner from TN bagged by Mumbai Indians

It was only since the 2016 edition of the Men's T20 Indian Premier League (IPL) that leg spinners, akin to pace bowlers, began to be recognised as potential match winners by various franchises. Now, the Women's Premier League (WPL) launched by the Indian Cricket Board last year has brought into the limelight S.B. Keerthana, a 23-year-old leg spinner and all-rounder from Tamil Nadu. Coached by TNCA (Tamil Nadu Cricket Association) coach T.S. Mukund – himself a leg spinner and a batsman during his playing days – Keerthana was picked up by the Mumbai Indians for the second edition of the WPL that began on February 23rd at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru. She was bought for a base price of Rs. 10 lakhs.

In her own words, Keerthana's tryst with Cricket was not quite planned. She began to play the sport purely as a means to engage in physical activity alongside her studies. It eventually became a passion and Keerthana began to nurse ambitions of representing state and country. Her spectacular journey in Cricket took flight when she was 13, after she first honed the basics at a Cricket academy owned by the father of Indian spinner Washington Sundar, as well as at the MAC

Spin Foundation under former cricketer Peter Fernandez. "I owe my success in Cricket to my school Sacred Heart MHSS and my college MOP Vaishnav in Chennai, where I did my UG and PG," adds Keerthana. "They were so supportive." She eventually shifted to coach with T.S. Mukundan and Nirmal Kumar at their academy. "Mukund sir focused on variations in my leg spin bowling," she said.

Her remarkable talents in leg-break bowling and batting came to the fore, and she went on to represent the State in the Under-16 category at the age of 10, and later at 13, she played in the Under-19 State team as well. "I got a good season with the ball bowling a good leg spin," she smiles. The performance saw her picked to play in Zonal and Inter-Zonal matches. Soon, Keerthana found herself at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bangalore, where she further honed her skills at leg-spin bowling; from there, she rose to represent and captain India Blue in the Under-19 category, India Red in the Under-23 and India Green in Senior categories for the Woman's National Championships.

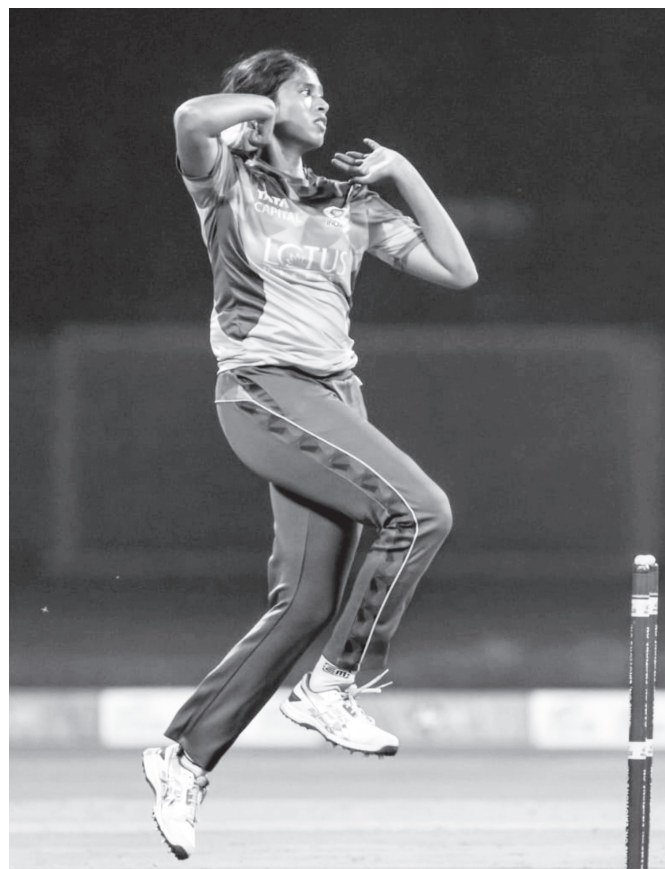
Keerthana feels confident about her performance with the Mumbai Indians, though the women's team already has a

leg-spin bowler who is senior to her. "I first went to the Mumbai Indians WPL team selection trials for a week. As luck would have it, I was picked for the team for a good base price," she said. Her confidence comes on the back of a proven track record – three of her best performances include a stunning bowling spell of 10-3-16-5 in a Senior One-Day limited overs National championship match against Saurashtra; a meaty century knock of 123 in the U-16 State championship match against Karnataka; and another commendable score of 114 in the U-19 One-Day

● by
V. Venkataramana

championship against Saurashtra, again. Keerthana aims to continue to perform well as a leg spinner, a rare breed of talent in Cricket considering that it is a notoriously difficult art to master – the small number of leg-spinners is testimony to this fact. She also intends to do well by the bat and hopes to represent India at the earliest.

T.S. Mukund, her present coach, remarks that she has a unique slinging bowling action that is hard to face. "Unpredictability is the forte of her bowling skill," he added. "She



keeps the batsman guessing by varying her pace, length and line." It is crucial, points out Mukund, to maintain consistency in deliveries with a unique bowling action such as hers. Keerthana, to form, displays tremendous consistency in line and length. As a leg spinner, she has an excellent top spin and googly.

To paraphrase Mukund, now that the development of women's Cricket in Tamil Nadu is "good," it is entirely possible that more such talents like Keerthana's can emerge in the future. Shining days ahead, then, for women's Cricket in the State.

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