Living in fear of heritage

(By A Special Correspondent)

This is the centenary year of the mathematics genius Srinivasa Ramanujan’s journey to the United Kingdom. This journey marked the beginning of the world sitting up and recognising his extraordinary abilities in his field and is surely a matter of pride and celebration for our city, from where he had set out. And yet, one of the commemorative plaques for him in this city has vanished. The reason? The owners of the property where it stood were afraid that this would lead to the house being taken over by the Government on the grounds that it was a heritage property!

There are, of course, plenty of other memorials to Ramanujan and, indeed, at least three other houses that he lived in in Triplicane. But this property, in Hanumantharayar Koil Street, was the only one that bore a plaque commemorating the fact, and it was from here that he set out to England. And so the plaque was particularly significant. Conversely, from the owner’s point of view, this is what put his precious real estate at risk.

This is not the only instance of such a thought process. Several years ago, a marble plaque that commemorated a Mylapore house where the Indian National Congress was founded, was broken as soon as the property changed hands, the new owners being apprehensive about the Government take-over. A restaurant in Triplicane that was built “by the British for their administration”. Considering that it was constructed in 1913 and therefore it was only 34 years old when the country became independent, surely that is somewhat of an overstatement! After all, the majority of its 100 years saw Ripon Building as the administrative headquarters of a civic body for a city in an independent India. So how British is Ripon Building?

For that matter, how British are such buildings that have been built in the colonial era? Let us first of all concede that their designs, largely Gothic, Neo Classical and Art Deco, are foreign in origin. But then so are all the modern glass, steel and concrete structures that we build now! It is a well-known fact that very, very few architects in the country have evolved an indigenous style and even fewer clients want such designds to be implemented. So how does that make modern highrises Indian?

Yes, it is true that the architects who designed the old buildings and their several clients who commissioned them (most often Government departments) were British. But does that not make a post-Independence construction for the Indian arm of a multinational, with design by an overseas architect, also an alien? How do we consider that an Indian structure? The TCS building in Siruseri was designed by a Uruguayan firm. To which country does it belong? And while on the same point, what about the German-designed Assembly building now turned multi-speciality hospital? Is it Indian or German? From its appearance it definitely looks alien as does the Siruseri office of TCS.

The colonial buildings may have been designed by British architects, but the execution was entirely in the hands of Indians. The contractors were all Indian (you can’t get more local than T Namberumal Rao and P Loganatha Mudaliar – the three men involved in the construction of Ripon Building) as were the workmen. And it was this group that really helped in ensuring that the British designs were translated into reality. After all, where would St Andrews Kirk, Central Station and Ripon Building be without the terracotta well foundations, which were very much a product of local expertise? The British did not even know of this till Major Thomas Fiott de Havilland made a study of the technique in the early 1800s.

Next let us look at the material used. Old buildings had a mix of native and imported components. The steel was often from England (and, later, increasingly from local sources), the fittings were imported as well (as they often still are) as was the stained glass. The timber was largely indigenous (as opposed to the now increasing habit of importing exotic and unsuitable varieties from other parts of the world). Floor tiles were imported by those who could afford them, the rest made do with indigenous stone. This still continues. In short, components then were a mixed bag and they still are. Stone carving has remained indigenous. Gone, however, is the...
Discovering Mylapore

Over a year ago, a small group of us floated two ventures. Both had to do with Mylapore.

The first had to do with cycle rickshaws. The second, with home-based accommodation for travellers or visitors.

While we were hosting Heritage Walks around Mylapore, a related idea began to roll in our minds. To use cycle rickshaws on local tours.

There are still a dozen or more that linger in the area and a few were keen to join us in the experiment.

That is how the Cycle Rickshaw Tour got started and it survives today because of the rickshawwallahs who are ever so keen to undertake a trip at a short notice.

The Tour is kept simple. Guests are given a simple brochure listing a dozen sights that they get to enjoy visually as the rickshaw trundles along the streets and lanes. They can get off and walk a bit at one point where a few old houses survive.

The sights vary – a procession headed to the Mundakanni Amman Temple, heated arguments between street hawkers, a golli soda vendor shuffling the bottles, and a greying aasai at work in a hole in the wall.

As an idea it did not work. It was hard to convince even a few households to offer simple accommodation to people who were passing through the city and were looking for an ‘experience’.

So we now suggest an alternative to those who seek the Mylapore experience – book yourself into Hotel Karpagam. That quiet, clean nook off South Mada Street.

• by Vincent D’Souza

Several guests have enjoyed the experience. They have chosen to walk down the mada soudis at dawn and after dusk, they had rambling chats with the priests on Tank Street, they have sat for kutcheris at the Naravarthi Mantapam inside Sri Kapali Temple, and made friends with families in the Chittrakulam zone, some even learning to draw the kolam during the Navarathri season.

Many ‘seasons’ ago our team at KucheriBuzz floated the idea of learning to draw kolam at the Navarathri Mantapam inside Sri Kapali Temple, at dawn and after dusk, they had a close up look at the kolam. Then, after days of cajoling and following, you may ask. Ah, but where are they? The women do not like the idea. You recollect, was an open book. The women do not like to reveal their year of birth. That is somewhat understandable. But what is unforgivable is how the pictures come in. The way artists overlapped their kolams. Most of these biodata will carry just the name of the fathers and the mother’s father. It is in the facts that such CVs are usually most lacking.

The second idea did not work. It was hard to convince even a few households to offer simple accommodation to people who were passing through the city and were looking for an ‘experience’.

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Musing on the Music Season

Priti (unless The Man from Madras Musings is thinking of someone else) said something about music being in the heavens, which partly indicates that she never came to this, our city, in December.

For, as we all know, come December, God is in music on earth and quite a bit of it. It affects different people differently. Many ‘seasons’ ago our team at KucheriBuzz floated the idea of learning to draw kolam at the Navarathri Mantapam inside Sri Kapali Temple, at dawn and after dusk, they had a close up look at the kolam. Then, after days of cajoling and following, you may ask. Ah, but where are they? The women do not like the idea. You recollect, was an open book. The women do not like to reveal their year of birth. That is somewhat understandable. But what is unforgivable is how the pictures come in. The way artists overlapped their kolams. Most of these biodata will carry just the name of the fathers and the mother’s father. It is in the facts that such CVs are usually most lacking.

So we now suggest an alternative to those who seek the Mylapore experience – book yourself into Hotel Karpagam. That quiet, clean nook off South Mada Street.

This he is one with She Who Must Be Obeyed.

But the Music Season is rather short.

Music Season is quite a bit of hard work as well. For, he is then CCC – the Carnatic composer. Rightly or wrongly, and more likely the latter, there are certain quarters that believe that MMM puts in quite a bit of hard work as well. For, he is then CCC – the Carnatic composer. Rightly or wrongly, and more likely the latter, there are certain quarters that believe that MMM puts in quite a bit of hard work as well. For, he is then CCC – the Carnatic composer.

The Chief, who usually reacts to music as Aurangzeb did, allows MMM quite a bit of leeway and looks on the proceedings with a benevolent eye.
December 1-15, 2013

DANGEROUS EXPANSIONS

A dangerous trend is emerging in T’Nagar, where commercial complex owners, in a bid to expand their area of operation and quench their insatiable thirst to earn further, are targeting the nearby residential dwellings. The modus operandi is that they lure the owners of the flats to sell their property by offering them hefty amounts. Once they are able to trap a few flat owners to do so, they pressure those who are hard nuts to crack.

Though the constitutional provision enjoins upon the residents the ‘right to live’, the trend is clearly in violation of equality of that right. Government must view this seriously and help the residents who have been living in T’Nagar for decades. A suitable legislation must be brought in so as to put a ‘cap’ on any kind of development by commercial complex owners in and around T’Nagar.

The shopping hub has altered beyond its size and any further tinkering at the cost of its primary stakeholders, the residents, will only help its deterioration. This should mean that no commercial complex owners should play only within their present area and no new complexes/extension/activities be allowed to come up in T’Nagar.

This must be treated as an SOS from the hapless residents of T’Nagar who are already in dire straits due to excess commercialisation leading to poor sanitation, pollution of various kinds and a host of other civic issues.

K. Harithar
20, Venkatesan Street
T’Nagar, Chennai 600 017

GROWING UP WITH ANGLO-INDIANS

The Anglo-Indians

The Indianised Anglo-Indian community was well perceived by Venkatesh alongside in the book by S. Murthiah (MM, November 1st). Anglo-Indian community does live not only in urban areas but in rural interior too. As I perceive, the identity itself, i.e. ‘Anglo-Indian’ derives from the fact that these people speak English. In other words, it means English speaking Indians. However, though hundreds years passed, they retain their own lifestyle.

Their women still maintain wearing gowns. Still I remember one family which lived at our remote village in Tiruchy district. I am told, Anglo-Indian men mostly work in Railways. They do not seem to have involved in any quarrels in society as other communities do. Two Anglo-Indian aged sisters use to visit our Bank once in a week. They smile at me on entering and enquire about my health. It shows their behaviour in public even today. Though we change our lifestyle, I see no change in Anglo-Indians. They love gardening around their dwellings. They extend help to poor people. Let their lives go on in our Indian soil for many decades to come.

S.R. Rajagopal
7/12, Peters Colony
Royapettah
Chennai 600 014.

Some resemblance?

I have not known of the Madras sculptor Murugesan nor of his impressive creations. I am ashamed of myself on that score.

The photograph featured in MM last fortnight brought to mind our (and my family) visit to the sculpture park created by Gustav Viegland in Frognor, near Oslo (Norway), while living in Germany in the early 2000s. There seems a reasonableness in the work of Murugesan and the Norwegian creator Gustav Viegland.

Both have created artwork out of wood, stone, and bronze. More importantly, both have themed human sentiments in their creations. Murugesan who was moulded into the discipline of sculpture by Viegland, who died in 1943.

The sprawling open-air display of nearly 200 life-size pieces of artwork of human emotions and behaviours by Viegland attracts even a dummy like me, who has no innate flair for any work of art, having been trained in hardcore science and only equipped to see either the black or the white.

My short visit to the ‘Viegland Park’ (as it is known) in Frognor made me feel a soft vibration in myself, awakening the subtleties of life.

As I strolled in the Viegland Park, holding the tiny palms of my daughter, my lips were involuntarily murmuring the song starting ‘Nirapathe, nidappathe...’ by Subramania Bharati. I cannot explain why I was muttering that song.

Am I thinking correctly in telling myself that ‘thought evolution’ can occur concurrently and parallels?

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CHENNAI HERITAGE

No. 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road,
Royapettah, Chennai 600 014

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The Tamil Film in 100 years of Indian Cinema

The South Indian film industry comprises four distinct film cultures, namely Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu film industries. Although developed independently for a long period of time, exchanges of film performers and technicians as well as globalisation have helped to shape this new single identity.

The first South Indian talking film was released on September 15, 1926. M.H. Reddy produced and directed Miss Kalidas Sheshadri (Telugu). This was followed by Kalidas (Tamil) on October 3, 1931. Kalidas was produced by Aarsheesh Irani and directed by M.M. Reddy. These two films were South India’s first talking movies to have a theatre release. Tamil Cinema has grown tremendously since those beginnings. Most of its films are produced in Chennai in Kodambakkam and, so, the industry is often referred to locally as Kollywood. Here are some highlights of the Tamil film industry story:

- **1927**: Miss Kalidas Sheshadri released. This was the first Tamil talking feature film.
- **1928**: Miss Kalidas, first Tamil film to receive an “Adult” certificate from the Film Censor Board.
- **1940**: Jigarthanda released. This was the first Tamil film in which MGR and Kamal Haasan acted together.
- **1945**: K. S. Sethumadhavan took over as Studio Manager for AVM Studios, South India’s first film school.
- **1948**: AVM Studios (1948) was the first film school in South India.
- **1949**: First Tamil colour movie released.
- **1951**: First release of Tamil film to receive an “Adult” certificate from the film censorship board.

**Passengers on the Buckingham Canal**

The canal is gradually approaching to a complete and efficient condition. A large estimate, over some 50 lacs of rupees, is now being worked out, which provides for completing the canal thorough and for making it a safe means of navigation. The estimate provides for abandoning all backwaters; for providing means (fixed gratit) at all river and large drainage crossovers to shut off floods and for giving the canal a proper section, by which 3 feet depth, below the lowest tide level, will be secured. The canal will thus have about 4 feet water at least during the period of the lowest tides of the year.

The total estimated cost of the project is Rs. 68,37,100 including expenditure from its component.

The different descriptions of boats plying on the canal are, the Madras toptop, the Madras open cargo boat, principally employed in the shed and firetow traffic; the Northern boat, called Dinghoo; the Northern Ralhoo; these passenger boats, but carry cargo as well, and are of various carrying capacity, and well protected. The great drawback on the canal is the want of suitable cabin boats for European travellers: there are a few bargous so called, but these boats were originally built for short passages only, so no搭乘examinations are given.

The Steam Company endeavours to do business on the canal, has gone into liquidation. The time has not arrived for introducing steam traffic on the canal.

The following are the towns and other places of consequence on the northern canal: Ennore, Pulicat, Coromandel, Dacca gapam, Kirnagam (where the Nellore traffic is shipped and unloaded). Length 61 miles). The canal, now being worked out, is expected to make the canal a very useful commerce, as it will connect the different parts of the country.

The present toll stations of canals are at Shadynagorem Loop (8 miles), Kirnagam (92), Kottapattom (178), on northern canal. On the southern canal, the most important places are Coovungur (15), Mahalapparum and Serum Pagoda (281), Madras (36).

**MADRAS MUSINGS**

**December 1-15, 2013**

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The trees of Chennai

- This feature on the trees of Chennai is based on the book *Trees and Tree Tales* by Prof K.N. Rao, a renowned botanist, published by Oxygen Books, Chennai. It speaks of the biodiversity of the city in the form of trees that have survived continuous human efforts to decimate them. Though the city has more of the showy, colourfully flowered exotic trees than the less ornamental native trees, the latter yield a variety of utilitarian products. Examples abound of the multi-purpose coconut, neem, tamarind and palmyrah, all valuable in medicine, food, construction and other areas of human use. Here is a sample of some of the trees common to Chennai, with brief descriptions.

In the service of mankind

The neem tree, *Azadirachta indica*, is found in most compounds of Chennai homes. According to Brihat Samhita, neem trees are considered the preserver of the presence of underground water. Obviously, artificial watering is unnecessary. The rains meet its water requirements.

The neem has a special place in the hearts of Chennaiavis because it flowers just before the Tamil New Year. The flowers form part of the New Year *pachadi* lending it a bitter taste and a philosophical message. The neem flower, though bitter to taste, is salutary in effect, being a vermifugal and kills worms in the intestines.

The various palms

Stand anywhere in Chennai, and look around, you are sure to see coconut trees. Such is the visibility of coconut in Chennai and, indeed, all along the coastal belt of the country. Other palm tree commonly seen in Chennai are: Fish tail palm (*Caryota urens*), Royal palm (*Orodea regia*) and Palmyrah plan (*Borassus flabellifer*).

The last of these is commonly seen on the outskirts of the city, but is not very common in the city itself.

The leguminous trees

The *Leguminosae* is a family of flowering plants that exhibits a great diversity of habit and floral organisation. The *Glicidicia* is a medium-sized tree and its leaves make excellent, rich green manure. *Glicidicia* means 'fat-destroying' and the seeds seem to possess this power. This is a tree commonly seen in all parts of Chennai, but you are likely to notice it only when it is in flower. But far the most gorgeous of the pinnaceous trees seen in Chennai are the coral tree, botanically christened *Erythrina indica*.

*Agati Maram*, botanically known as *Sesbania grandiflora*, was, till a few years ago, a very commonly grown tree in the backyards of many a Chennai home. Delonix regia is a native of Madagascar. It reached India via Mauritius. The tree is found everywhere in Chennai. Gulmohur, a close relative of Delonix (which, incidentally, is called by this generic name by some authors), is the small-sized *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* often dian laurel in English, is a much-venerated tree as it is considered the favourite of Lord Krishna.

It is a small-sized tree often grown in many a home garden in Chennai.

A fast-growing tree, called *Kattumalli* in Tamil, the cork tree with the botanical name of *Millingtonia hortensis*, gets its name from its fissured bark, which is used as an inferior substitute for cork.

Unfortunately, the peepul is a cauleplil (a plant that grows in lime-rich conditions) and is often seen growing on old walls, inviting the punishment of being uprooted. The *Senate House of Madras University* has been a victim of this tree and due to public sentiment, permitting its growth cost a tidy sum to restore that beautiful heritage building.

**Alburn umaram** in Tamil, the scientific name of the banyan is *Ficus benghalensis*. For a Chennai, the banyan tree in the gardens of the Theosophical Society at Adyar is a landmark. Some are usually dotted with dew, attracting the victim to a cloudburst and all efforts at revitalising its main trunk proved futile.

**Telukkuvarchamullai** in Tamil, *Pandanus tectorius* and *Telugu and Coral Jasmine in English*, it has a tell-tale botanical name – *Nyctanthes arbor- ristris*. *Nyctanthes* means that which blossoms at nightfall.

The flower is very attractive, with a red corolla tube bearing unequally lobed petals at its top. The petals are snowy white and are usually dotted with dew drops, for flowering occurs in December when the early hours are usually dotted with dewdrops. The tree is native of Madras University has been a victim to a cloudburst and all efforts at revitalising its main trunk proved futile.

The rain tree, which is easily distinguished by its lofty central column, which grows dead straight with branches growing in acropetal succession (the youngest branch is near the top and the oldest near the base).

The Neem tree is an evergreen tree with but one of its characteristics growing together which, for some inexplicable reason, do not feature in local customs and traditions. Many of them are excellent shade-giving trees.

First and foremost among them is the *Trumper* flower, botanically named *Stenolobium stanis.* It is a common tree growing in many home gardens. *Tabebuia rosea*, and *Tamarind* of Mexican origin, bears pale mauve flowers also somewhat trumpet-shaped. The flowers are so lightly coloured and are more noticeable on ground than on the tree.

The most common species is *Plumeria alba*, the white frangipani that often grows in the backyards of many homes in Chennai. *Thepesia populnea* is a common roadside tree in Chennai. *Capparis indica* in Tamil and Portia tree in English, this salt-tolerant tree is more commonly seen in the coastal belt.

**By A Special Correspondent**

Quite a few trees growing in Chennai are conspicuous by their flowers. It is the leaves and not the flowers that hold your attention.

*Veli Maram* or *Nettingum* in Tamil, the Mast tree, *Albizia leb- dus indica,* is seen in the compounds of many parts of Chennai. A few trees grown in the compound of the AG’s Office on Anna Salai have been there for over a half-century now.

There is a full-grown wild almond tree in Chennai on the campus of St George’s (orphanage) on Poonamalai High Road (now called EVR Sala) opposite Pachaiyappas College.

Uncommon trees

The baobab, a tree introduced from Africa by the Arabs, is also called the African calaba- bash, is *Adansonia Digitata*. Its Tamil name is *Anniapulli*. A couple of baobab trees can be found in the Chepauk cricket grounds, at the eastern end of Wallajah Road where it meets the Buckingham Canal.

Fruit-bearing trees

Called *koyy* in Tamil, this undergrowth, botanically known as *Psidium guajava*, is widely grown throughout India. It is found in many backyards of Chennai homes, receiving no particular care.

Second in popularity to the mango in Chennai is the jack. It is tasty and has medicinal and ritualistic value. The jack tree, botanically called *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, also known as *Artocarpus integrifolius* and *Palabhadan* in Tamil, is native to India. The jack is a large evergreen tree which can grow up to about 12-14m. Often seen growing in the backyards of Chennai homes, the jack exhibits a variety of peculiar features. – (Courtesy: *Midrith, the house journal of the Sannar Group*)
Empty nests re-visited

Look, you want to be a good Mom...
Okay, fine, at least a fair-to-middling one – someone’s looking for medals here.

But sometimes that role can get a bit much, causing you to leap nervously at shadows, and collapse in bitter tears if someone drops a steel tumbler.

Remember those words “...and some have greatness thrust upon them...”?

Might have been written with Mothers in mind.

So there you are, tottering unsteadily on that vast pedestal created for the Spirit of Motherhood...having no one, least of all your children, will ever find out how hopelessly lost – and clueless – you really are.

But you do it. You work on developing that all-knowing aura, and train your mind and heart to offer unconditional love – which can wear a little thin every now and then, especially when a generous portion of something eminently stainable is tossed carelessly into your brand-new-outfit lap....but

Well, it starts with the cleaning.

At what point did you become this uber-paranoid creature who longs for a magic all-purpose cleanser that can sanitise everything – from every element in your house to the streets outside, all manner of buildings and transport, the pavements, food everywhere (not just in your kitchen), all water sources, the plants, lavatories, theatre seats – the very air we breathe?

Near-psychotic?
Yeah – just a bit.

Then – the menus.

These kids, who once complained that the avakkaï pickle wasn’t spicy enough, now blanch at the sight of a single, tiny green chilli, and have eschewed coconut, root vegetables, sugar, rice, flour, wheat, and all things fried – so you’re stuffed silently.

This is particularly tough on those who have reached the ‘retired cooking’ stage and now have to start getting innovative all over again.

Then there’s the noise level.

Did you even know that you...uhm...like, really, really talk loud?

After having been “Shh-ed” for the hundredth time from, ironically, the source that was at the receiving end of “shushing” not all that long ago, your walls being the only shell of your former self, are scared to even open your mouth.

That goes for TV volume too....apparently we ‘listen too loud’. What does that mean? For a minute, you are tempted to point out that your life too has suddenly become a lot noisier than what you’ve grown accustomed to – but decide against it.

You can’t add hurt feelings to your list of must-take-care-of...it’s too exhausting.

Speaking of TV, at what point did you start feeling a little foolish and apologetic about watching your favourite ‘regional mega-sSerial’ (yes, you read that right) in the presence of those whose own channel choices weren’t exactly intense soul food back in the day when they lounged all over your house?

By the way, did you know your done-for-years ‘infir guy has always ironed clothes all wrong’

Makes you wonder what kind of image you’ve cut all over the city all these years.

This strange re-positioning from ‘kid-about-the-house’ to ‘revered guest’.

When that did happen, you wonder, succumbing to this promising dramatic poignancy for a second, just before real life intrudes. Your ‘guests’ have sprung interesting red splotches all over thanks to the mosquitos, and need solutions.

Of course, typically, your house decides to extract revenge right about now.

Internet breaks down; something goes wrong with the plumbing; the electricity gets cute and whimsical; the gas cylinder is late....and the kids knife themselves Club called: ‘How Mothers Really Feel Sometimes (And Must Be Allowed to Do So)’.

You nod gravely, silently exasperated.

He’s come back after a year... I have actually forgotten the technology needed to clean up his room!

Living In Fear of Heritage

(Continued from page 1)

as soon as it began demolition work after obtaining the permission of the High Court of Madras.

Should the owners of such properties live in such fear? Not necessarily so. There are other cities in India such as Pune and Kolkata where blue plaques and commemoration stones are commonplace, properties with heritage tags are more valuable than those of modern provenance. Why then is the situation different in Chennai?

Firstly, there is ignorance. Most owners do not know anything of the building’s past and are perhaps even less aware of what history the property had. But more to blame are Government policies concerning heritage that are vague at best and intimidating at worst. The Heritage Conservation Committee of the CMDA sent a letter to owners of the properties in the High Court’s list. The letter was more of a threat than an encouragement to them. It forbade them from making any changes to their premises, including renovations, alterations and repairs. It is no wonder that those whose properties are not listed consider themselves blessed and are actively taking steps to destroy any traces that are left of their heritage importance.

That such fears are not well founded will be evident if these owners reflect on the Government’s track record of taking over properties. In the past many years, just two premises – those of K Kamaraj and Subramania Bharati – have been taken over. All the rest, were handed over voluntarily. The Government has had to step in only on the rarest of occasions and even in such cases, has paid compensation, though on it must be admitted that the valuation is always according to Government norms and not based on market rates. In any case, Governments have a number of other things to focus on and, as is well known, heritage is one of its last priorities.

There have, however, been a few stories with happier endings. The monument dedicated to Satyagraha that stands outside the Chola Sheraton continues to be preserved. A more heart-warming story is the preservation of the memorials to Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and Dr. Sundarar Reddy. These were part of the property owned by the couple and when it changed hands, it was on the condition that the memorials would not be disturbed by the developer. The chronicler K R R Narasiah played a role in this, by explaining the importance of the stones to the buyer. They have been allowed to remain and are cared for. May the trend increase.
As I come to the 16th and last Tamil Nadu cricketer in this list of probables of the all-time State squad, I am acutely aware of the many splendid players I have had to omit. If old timers object to the absence of Milhca Singh and his younger brother Satvinder Singh, others may find baffling the omission of such stars as K R Rajagopal, B R Mohan Rai, U Prabhakar Rao, B Kalyanasundaram, T A Sekar and K Bharath Kumar, while I have also had to jettison so many brilliant cricketers of more recent origin, such as Sunil Subramaniam, D Vasu, Sadagopan Ramesh, L Balaji, Murali Vijay, R Ashwin and Ashwin Mukund.

To fill the 16th spot, I looked at an off-spinner, medium pacer and left-arm spinner, and finally zoomed in on a left-arm spinner. Three players with this specialisation came to mind: M K Muruges, S Vasudevan and Sunil Subramaniam. The first two played stellar roles in Tamil Nadu’s two Ranji Trophy triumphs, while Sunil was perhaps the best left-arm spinner of his era, very unlucky not to be selected for India. (Had I instead chosen an off-spinner, Ashwin would have been an automatic selection. His rise in international cricket has been nothing short of phenomenal, but Venkataraghavan and all-rounder A G Kripal Singh, both former Tamil Nadu captains, keep him out, for the moment. Ashwin may soon become the most successful international cricketer from Tamil Nadu, if he is not already so.)

Both Vasudevan and Sunil Subramaniam had longer runs for Tamil Nadu and won many matches for the State, which meant that Muruges, with only 20 first class appearances, had to be left out. Of the three, Vasudevan came closest to being a genuine all-rounder, though the other two could bat a bit, with Muruges playing a match-winning role in the 1954-55 final of the Ranji Trophy with 8 wickets in the match and 30 and 36 as a No. 11 batsman. Vasudevan took 214 first class wickets for Sunil Subramaniam’s 285, but was a better batsman. He too played a major part in a Ranji Trophy final – in 1987, when he led Tamil Nadu to victory over Railways, his own contribution 30 runs and nine wickets in the match, including 7/59 in the second innings. It is Vasudevan’s calm, easy-going manner and people skills (that obviously helped him in captaining the side to the Ranji triumph) that, to my eye, tilted the scales in his favour.

A more laidback cricketer may belong only to the world of fiction, but for over a decade Vasudevan was an outstanding performer for Tamil Nadu, partnering S Venkaratagahvan, his captain and senior by several years. From the moment he came into the side in 1976-1977 to the time he retired from first class cricket a year after leading Tamil Nadu to its second Ranji Trophy title, he was a thorn in the flesh of Karnataka and Hyderabad, the two strong opponents in the zone. Batsmen like Brijesh Patel, Sudhakar Rao and G R Viswanath repeatedly faltered against Vasu’s accurate, sharp spin. On the best of wickets, he made the ball hurry on after pitching, and on a bad one, he was well nigh unplayable. He had a decent arm ball, too.

Vasu was a delightful batsman too, though he often gave the impression that he was not interested in batting. Perhaps, it came too easily for him to take too much trouble over it, or he possessed a bowler’s mind, like so many others before and after him, but whatever the reason, the upshot of it was that he never fulfilled his batting potential. The century against UP was made when the frontline batsmen fell in a heap, and he rescued the team from disaster.

Vasu gave notice of his exceptional ability in university cricket. He was slightly overshadowed by fellow left-arm spinner and teammate S K Patel who broke the record for most wickets in a single Rohinton Bara season (1975-1976), but soon Vasu left his own imprint on university cricket. Succeeding Patel in the State team, just after V V Kumar quit the scene, Vasu established himself firmly in the side. He was unfortunate to belong to the South Zone, where the zone had an embarrassment of spin bowling riches, and therefore did not get to play Duleep Trophy cricket. When he was at his best, India was well served in his department, the younger Maninder Singh replacing his senior Dilip Doshi. With Ravi Shastri too contributing with the ball, Vasu was never a serious contender for a place in the Indian team, though, quality-wise, he was inferior to none.

Vasudevan’s greatest moment was when he led Tamil Nadu to the title triumph in 1987-1988.

In the league, Vasudevan was the lead spinner for Alwarpet Cricket Club for a few years, before he switched allegiance to SPIC, which team he served for over a decade with distinction. For a while, with its powerful batting line-up that included S Vairamakrishnan, P Ramesh, P C Prakash and Ravi Mishra and an all-round attack that at different times consisted of N Bharath, T A Sekar, K Arun Kumar, Ravi Mishra, Vasudevan and Sunil Subramaniam, SPIC dominated the league scene. I have enjoyed several moments of friendship and good-natured competition with him on the field.

A software professional, Vasudevan belonged to a generation of cricketers who often had an alternative career to fall back upon after their playing days. He made a successful transition from cricket to a rewarding professional career.

*Madras Province/State/Tamil Nadu.