

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

Vol. XXIII No. 12

October 1-15, 2013

# The tragedy that is Chepauk

(By The Editor)

Will Chepauk Palace survive? That is the question foremost in the minds of all conservationists. In January 2012, one wing of the precinct – Khalsa Mahal – was gutted in a fire. Now, a portion of the other wing, Humayun Mahal, has collapsed. Sadly, those in charge appear clueless on what needs to be done. Given the state of the buildings, can we afford such lethargy and ignorance?

The Khalsa Mahal fire could have taken everyone by surprise though, given the volume of stacked files, broken furniture and exposed wiring, it was a sure-fire recipe for such an occurrence. But surely the Humayun Mahal collapse was something that everyone knew was coming sooner than later. A part of the building had already had a roof collapse and yet, as we reported in this publication then, Government departments were carrying on with their routine work regardless, all around the crater left behind by the fallen roof! It speaks volumes of the indifference with which our bureaucracy functions – it extends the same insensitivity to its working environment as well.

The Public Works Department (PWD) was quick to cover its tracks following the second and more recent roof collapse. It said that it had already issued warnings to the Government departments in occupation that the building was in an enfeebled condition and could fall any time. It implied by this that it had done all that was in its capacity and if the departments did not vacate it was their fault. But is the issuance of a quit notice the only action that the PWD ought to have taken when faced with a heritage structure that is facing collapse?

And yet apparently that is quite true, for the PWD has more or less admitted that it has no idea as to how to save a heritage building. This confession came to light when sections of the press raised a question as to why nothing had been done on Khalsa Mahal almost two years after it was burned, with even the debris continuing to remain on site. To this the PWD has

responded stating that there is considerable uncertainty on the procedures that are to be followed for restoration.

The truth is, there is none. The PWD's tendering systems are all very clearly focussed towards new construction, with its rates being well defined for items such as vitrified tiles, plastic sheets and plate glass. Which is why the PWD is more comfortable demolishing old buildings and putting up modern structures in their place. Reconstructing an edifice like Chepauk Palace is a new experience for the PWD and it has no experts on board to take up the task. And there is the bureaucratic reluctance to consult with experts outside the purview of Government. It is no wonder then that Khalsa Mahal continues to languish. Humayun Mahal will now be providing it company.

It was last heard in June 2012 that the Government was wanting to make the restoration of Chepauk Palace an example of how heritage conservation was to be done. It invited 'expressions of interest' from conservation architects wishing to work on Khalsa Mahal. It was also understood that the Government would be happy to get the restoration done on rates and methods that were not

those of the PWD's. This indicated that the Government was willing to consider that heritage conservation cannot be on the same lines as new construction. But what has happened since then is a mystery, for there is complete silence. It is reliably

learnt that there was no response to the invitation of interest, as the terms were difficult to comply with. What then is to happen to Chepauk Palace? The mystery continues. Watch this space for more news.

## Mylapore to become pedestrian-friendly

There is a glimmer of hope. After years of allowing the entire area to go to seed, thanks to rampant encroachments, unplanned construction and lack of traffic regulation of any kind, the administration has woken up. A public consultation was recently held to consider converting parts of Mylapore into pedestrian zones and the scheme met with overwhelming support. The idea will, hopefully, soon be implemented, thereby providing a new lease of life to one of the oldest parts of Chennai. Much will, however, depend on the way it is executed.

On paper at least, the plan looks worthwhile. It aims at providing greater pedestrian comfort around the four Mada Streets and Luz Church Road. The latter, now that it is a one-way stretch, is a broad thoroughfare, at least between Nageswara Rao Park and Kutchery Road junction. It is in this stretch that the Corporation is

planning an eight-metre wide promenade running along the centre. There will be six-metre carriageways on either side of the walkway and beyond these, at the periphery, there will be three-metre footpaths.

The Mada Streets are to become one-ways, with access from RK Mutt Road into North Mada Street from where the traffic will have to move around the tank and exit from South Mada Street on to RK Mutt Road. The two Mada Streets,

● by A Special Correspondent

North and South, will have a six-metre carriageway with four-metre footpaths and two-metre parking spaces on either side.

The plans will mean that parking space, currently catering to around 700 four-wheelers in the entire area, will come down by 15%. This is to be made up by providing parking

facilities inside the MRTS station for around 300 cars.

The entire idea, while commendable, has certain potential pitfalls that need to be focussed on. Firstly, the median on Luz Church Road is planned to be extended all the way through Kutchery Road up to San Thomé Basilica. But what is overlooked is that Kutchery Road is a much narrower thoroughfare as compared to Luz Church Road. Moreover, it has two-way traffic plying on it and so will not be able to accommodate such a wide median. Clearly, an alternative will have to be thought of.

Secondly, on the Mada Streets, an important annual feature is the temple festival which will witness the chariots being brought out in procession. The proposed road structure should not in any way impede this. While taking the temple cars down a six-metre carriageway may not be a problem,

(Continued on page 3)



The auto driver said, it's easier for me to run to my destination than for him to run the meter!

# Electrifying Tamil journalism

(Continued from last fortnight)

When *Dinamani* made its appearance in 1934, it electrified the atmosphere of Tamil journalism. It was a low-priced newspaper (six pice) but it was different from its rivals in presentation of news and views. Within a month of its publication its circulation shot up and it was more than the combined circulation of all other Tamil papers. *Dinamani* had originally been started by S. Sadanand who purchased the *Indian Express* from Varadarajulu Naidu. Both the papers later came into the possession of Ramnath Goenka. The first editor of *Dinamani* was T.S. Chockalingam, an ardent Congressman and a powerful writer. With him as joint editor was A.N. Sivaraman who was later to set new records in Tamil journalism. Both Chockalingam and Sivaraman were close associates even before they came to *Dinamani*. They had jointly produced a quarter anna tri-weekly with news and views on the Satyagraha movement and very critical of the government. Along with *Swatantra Sanghu*, another quarter-anna weekly edited by Sangu Ganesan, it became a rage at the height of the Satyagraha movement and sold like hot cakes. Chockalingam left the *Dinamani* in 1943 and started a daily of his own, *Dinasari*, in 1944. And the burden of running *Dinamani* fell on Sivaraman.

Sivaraman, the most distinguished Tamil journalist, often referred to as the Bhisma of Tamil journalism, did not have much of an education in the conventional sense. He passed the secondary school course and joined a college in Tirunelveli but left it after six months. He was attracted by the Congress movement, especially by the ideals of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and he took it upon himself to carry on the movement started by the Congress. Although he had discontinued college education, he began educating himself through wide and purposive reading. Reading at all hours and far into the night became his habit. He was a prominent Congress volunteer in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 and went to prison. He strayed into journalism when he joined Chockalingam in producing the tri-weekly *Gandhi*. After joining *Dinamani*, he switched to its sister paper, *Indian Express*, for some years. He covered the San Francisco Conference for his paper and remained in the US for some years as its correspondent. He wrote articles on science and technology, agriculture and industry, political and economics in a way which the common man could easily understand. He was a teacher and guide for his readers and felt that his mission was to educate his readers to be good citizens and educated patriots.

In 1942, S.B. Adityan, a barrister and a staunch Congressman, started a daily, *Dina Thanthi*, in Madurai, deliberately aimed at the working classes and the semi-literate population. The paper indulged in sensationalism and its four pages were filled with stories of crime, violence and cinema, all written in an easy style and language. He provided readers what they liked to be fed on and they lapped it up.

The paper's circulation increased manifold and Adityan brought out editions from Madras and other centres. As the Dravidian parties, the Dravida Kazhagam (under E.V. Ramaswami Naicker) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (under C.N. Annadurai) began to dominate the political scene in post-independence Madras State (before it was renamed Tamil Nadu), Adityan resigned from the Congress and joined the Dravidian movement. His contribution to Tamil journalism was that he took the newspaper to the doorstep of the poor and the downtrodden. Over the years, *Dina Thanthi* and its sister publications have not changed much in the type of journalism it began with. Neither has its popularity waned. – (Courtesy: *Vidura*, published by the Press Institute of India.)

– Mrinal Chatterjee  
(To be concluded)

## CHENNAI HERITAGE

No. 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014  
I am already on your mailing list (Mailing List No.....) / I have just seen *Madras Musings* and would like to receive it hereafter.

• I/We enclose cheque/demand draft/money order for Rs. 100 (Rupees One hundred) payable to **CHENNAI HERITAGE, MADRAS**, as **subscription to Madras Musings** for the year 2013-14.

• As token of my support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that **Madras Musings** espouses, I send Chennai Heritage an additional Rs..... (Rupees.....) Please keep / put me on your mailing list.

Name : .....

Address: .....

All cheques to 'Chennai Heritage'. DD/Cheque should be sent by Speed Post only.

# The rule of the law

The awful majesty of the law straddled Beach Road and *The Man from Madras Musings* quailed before it. The custodian of pax Madrasiana waved MMM's car to one side and tapped on the windscreen, indicating that he would like MMM to roll it down. MMM duly did and was asked to please get out and step this way.

MMM bets that all of you are imagining that what happened next was that the gendarme flourished a balloon and asked MMM to blow into it. Nothing of that sort occurred and even if it did, MMM would have emerged unscathed for he is abstemious to a degree. But what actually did take place was that in paying complete and total attention to his good

small electronic gadget with a tiny attached printer was then brought out and the constable or whatever he was then proceeded to write on the screen with a stylus. He then pressed a button and said that the receipt would be soon on its way. Only it did not and showed no signs of emerging after a goodish bit of waiting.

MMM suggested that someone looks inside to see if there was a paper roll. This was stoutly resisted to begin with amidst much scoffing and pooh-poohing together with claims that hundreds had been fined since morning and had been given receipts. When the receipt did not come after much coaxing and cajoling, the paper compartment was opened to reveal that it did not

could MMM take her around? What did she take MMM for? Jack the Ripper? Yet another wanted to know if MMM could fill her in on historic colleges that had statues and heritage buildings in their campuses. And when MMM asked her if she knew about WCC she replied that MMM need not be rude just because she was new to the topic.

Having grown wiser over the years, MMM asked the young 'un who had called regarding place names as to what homework she had done on the subject. Well, she said, she had not done any. Whereupon MMM said rather coldly that he was not so jobless as to be doing her work for her and could she please call him after she had done some original re-

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

lady (also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed) while she held forth on something, MMM had driven along jumping a traffic light whereupon the cops had bestirred themselves and asked MMM to stop and then step their way.

Firmly (for once) asking his good lady to remain in the car, for she was all for getting down and engaging in single-handed combat, MMM stepped forth. The policeman looked up and down as if assessing MMM. He then proceeded to inform him, MMM, that he, MMM, had jumped the signal. MMM said that was true. He, the policeman, then asked MMM as to what would happen to the city and its law and order if educated people like MMM disregarded signals with impunity. To which MMM meekly replied that he, MMM, knew that he, MMM, was guilty and could only attribute it to a temporary diversion of attention. The law looked displeased at this meek acceptance. The fine for such misdemeanours, it growled, was high, namely Rs. 500 and demanded to see MMM's licence. It also indicated that in case MMM was without licence, penalties would be severe. At this, MMM fished out his valid driving licence.

The scowl of displeasure deepened. It grew even more when MMM took out his wallet and having counted Rs. 500 held it in his hand and said that he did not mind paying but could he please have a receipt. There was considerable humming and hawing at this and MMM was asked if madam was not getting impatient waiting in the car, to which MMM replied that madam could take a few roughs with the smooth. A

have any print roll, and, what's more, going by the air of emptiness in it, appeared to have never ever had one in it. Its bed, clearly, had never been slept in.

It was the cop's turn to become meek. He then asked MMM petulantly as to why he, MMM, had not argued with him, the policeman. Everyone else, said the cop, usually denied having done any wrong; they usually then asked the policemen rather truculently if they stopped Government vehicles and police cars that jumped signals. To which MMM replied that he, MMM, had erred and would not like to enter into an argument.

The cop held out his hand. MMM assumed it was an indication that 'something' ought to be placed in it. But it was MMM who had erred this time too. "Just shake my hand, Sir," said the constable. "You can go. Fine waived on account of good behaviour!"

### A Triplicane trip

"Uncle," cried the young one in distress. "Only you can help." It was another of those damsels who are harried by heartless editors to turn out 600 words within twenty minutes on subjects they know nothing about. This lass was asked to send in a story on place names in Chennai that had been corrupted from their English originals. And she had decided to apply to her newfound uncle-at-large, namely the Maama, sorry, *The Man from Madras Musings*.

It is always the same every Madras Week. MMM is besieged by such calls. One lady said she had a day to cover locations where murders had taken place in Madras and

search? This did not go down very well, but there was nothing to be done against MMM's obdurate stance and so the conversation ended. A parting request was whether MMM could please explain what Thiru Alli Keni meant. MMM said that it denoted a sacred lily tank. This did not sound very convincing to the party of the other part and so perhaps she asked for a second opinion. Sure enough the story appeared the next day and there was Triplicane, now metamorphosed to Thiru Valli Keni. It also had an explanation in parenthesis – (Murugan's CONCERT Tank). Quite a musical god, our quick gun Murugan.

### The Chief's wife

It is not often that *The Man from Madras Musings* writes in sombre vein, but the passing of the Chief's beloved lady has saddened MMM. In her sudden departure, MMM has lost a true friend who had a whacky sense of humour. Some of the ideas for this column came from her observations on daily life and MMM is going to miss her. The welcoming smile, the warm offer of coffee or buttermilk or rasam or... the list was practically endless. More importantly, it was she who made out the list of payments to be made each month to contributors to *Madras Musings* and, therefore, ensured that they got their cheques. The Chief, on the other hand, mostly assumed that people got by on the strength of their love for the city.

Adieu to you, dear lady, and may flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

– MMM

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



### Curly Wee lovers

I am one of those persons brought up in Madras that is now Chennai when *The Madras Mail* was being published. The *Mail* used to carry a cartoon strip (it will be heresy to call it a comic) called Curly Wee on all days except Sundays. I have a fairly good collection of the strips which I have cut and pasted in a scrap book. I have digitised most of my collection and filled in the missing ones from the Google newspaper archives of *The Melbourne Age*.

This letter is to make an appeal to other Curly Wee lovers to help find the episodes missing in my collection.

I am also willing to share my digitised collection with other Curly Wee fans in Chennai.

Please contact me at pbkhema@gmail.com

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### Founding contributors

This is with reference to the Quiz column in the August 1st issue of *Madras Musings*. Regarding question 16 on the founders of the cultural institution on the ECR, I would like to add that, along with Debbie Thiagarajan, who is undoubtedly the 'face' of Dakshina-Chitra, and Gita Ram, Mrs. Indira Kothari was also among the three initial contributors who pooled in Rs. 10,000 each to begin with, to initiate the founding of this institution.

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### 'God's garden'

On the first Sunday of Madras Week, Deepa Sekar conducted an interesting Heritage walk in Kilpauk.

I would like to point out that my ancestral house is called 'Devar Solai' and not Deva Kottai.

It was called 'Devar Solai' due to the beautiful garden created by my grandfather T. Vasu. As a matter of fact, he even designed the name slabs with his own signature in marble. 'Devar

### READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i's' and crossing the 't's'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

- THE EDITOR

# Cataloguing the heritage of Kilpauk



Santhanam Chetty, a descendant of Beri Thimmappa, addressing the participants during the Kilpauk Walk.

"I am not a history buff," confesses Deepa Sekar, who has been organising a heritage walk around Kilpauk during Madras Week for the past three years – and one that this year proved a great success. The highlight of this walk is that she has been able to take the participants inside eight premises of historic importance and get some of the residents of those buildings to explain their significance. Revathi Ram, YOCee founder and a keen participant in Madras Week celebrations, inspired Deepa "to do something in this part of the town during Madras Week" when both collaborated for a Street Festival for Children in Kilpauk. When Deepa started looking around Kilpauk, she found places of historic significance and also found people open to talking about their residences. The walk included eight premises: Votive Shrine Church, St. George's School, Pachaiyappa's College, Kushal Das Gardens, Seetha Kingston School, Kalki Gardens, Devar Solai (residence of Timeri N. Murari, journalist and author), and Bashyam Naidu Park. Chennai Photowalkers joined the walk this year and captured every single location vividly on the camera.

"I felt Kilpauk is as much more about its people and stories as about its monuments," she says of her experience after meeting Timeri N. Murari whose once vast estate Devar Solai has only 10 per cent left of its original space. When the enthusiasts enter Devar Solai, they are treated to its history by the family members. Deepa's grandparents were among the first residents of Kilpauk. Sculptor Nagappa's family also lives in the same locality, but Deepa has not been able to get to talk to them as yet.

Deepa learnt that her neighbour Urmila Sathyanarayana, the accomplished Bharata Natyam exponent, belongs to the Beri Thimmappa lineage. When Deepa sought Urmila's help in understanding more about the family, she was pointed to Urmila's uncle Santhanam Chetty, a resident of Appah Gardens, who has a collection of photographs. Santhanam Chetty was more than glad to help Deepa in her endeavour and speak to participants during the heritage tour at Appah Gardens.

She approached Seetha Ravi, former editor of the Tamil magazine Kalki, to get to know about Kalki Gardens. "I wanted something more than what is documented," says Deepa and Seetha helped with a lot of personal information such as about the cook,

Solai' means God's garden and it indeed was.

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### Madras baashai

The Madras Week was, as always, a huge success. Among the many write-ups and speeches, many Madras expressions and stock in trade words were celebrated. The founding father of what is called Madras baashai was the late king of comedy, veteran actor J.P. Chandrababu. All the writeups and speeches on the Madras baashai are deemed tributes to him while commemorating Madras.

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# MYLAPORE TO BECOME PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY

(Continued from page 1)  
getting them to negotiate corners will be a tricky proposition if there are any permanent structures put up by way of pedestrian facilities.

Thirdly, the new plan is opening up a lot of space that has immense potential for misuse. There can be encroachment by vendors, political parties, vehicle owners and, above all, our utilities, which put up junction boxes and transformers in any area that is found available. How are these to be regulated? And what is the

guarantee that hoardings and cut-outs will not overrun these medians and footpaths whenever there is a public meeting at Mangollai? In the name of providing space for pedestrians, what if we are really handing over precious land for misuse? Time and again the Corporation has shown us that it has no mechanism to nip these problems in the bud. It usually allows them to grow and then comes up with palliative schemes that please none of the stakeholders. Will the experience be any different this time?

Lastly, the plan is entirely focussed on the itinerant population. What of the local residents? Where are they to park their vehicles in case the frontage is to be taken over by Corporation parking lots? With most buildings in the Mada Streets still being of the ground floor commercial, first floor residential variety, will these residents not oppose the plan? The scheme will need local support if it is to become a success and it may, therefore, be best if these stakeholders are taken into confidence.

# There was so much about the City at the 'Murugappa Madras Quotient Quiz'



The participants seen with the quizmaster Dr. Navin Jayakumar during the third edition of the 'Murugappa Madras Quotient Quiz'.

(By A Special Correspondent)

Did you know that Madras was threatened with evacuation in 1975? This claim by WikiLeaks cannot be confirmed, but it is true that when the city was then fighting severe drought, silver iodide used for cloud seeding by Atmospherics Incorporated, a Fresno, California firm, to induce rains, saved the day for Madras. Not many know that the first village donated by the Nawab of the Carnatic, Zulfikar Khan, to the East India Company was Triplicane in 1672. These questions and others – some long and some in audio and video format – related to the city's Past, Present, and on the theme Madras for Ever, were posed by ace quizmaster Dr. Navin Jayakumar during the third edition of Murugappa Madras Quotient Quiz, in which 59 city schools fielded 242 teams, each consisting of three students. A preliminary written round featuring 25 questions brought the competing teams down to six finalists.

The finals had three main themes – Madras Past, Present and Forever. Madras Past focussed on different aspects of the city's history – Where was Armagon factory located? (Pulicat); Who gave the small strip of sand to the British (which eventually became the city of Madras)? (Damarla Brothers); How were the people south of the Vindhyas referred to and why? (Madrasis because they came under the Madras Presidency). Madras Present looked at the current scenarios and the Madras Forever round was about everything associated with the city.

"Whenever people talk about a quiz on Madras, they always think it has to be about its history. But there's so much about today's Madras too. So, Madras Forever featured customs and traditions that make the city what it is. Madras is seen as a city rooted in tradition but amenable to change," said Navin.

The final six were P.S. Senior Secondary School, Vidya Mandir (both from Mylapore), AMM School (Kotturpuram), National Public School (Gopalapuram), Maharishi Vidya Mandir (Chetpet) and DAV Boys School (Mogappair). The questions thrown by Dr. Navin were answered confidently most of the time. Even their wild guesses at times were indicative of their knowledge of the city's past. They were undaunted by some seemingly long questions, which provided lesser known facts for a well-known answer. But at times, the teams slipped on what seemed to be an easy answer (for example, relating Chinnaswami Rajam and Abdul Kalam to come up with the answer MIT). On the other hand the video round, which had film scenes featuring prominent landmarks of the city, had the AMM School identify seven of the ten landmarks.

P.S. Senior Secondary School surged ahead in the second round and consistently maintained the lead to win the quiz with 107 points. Its members were Sankrith, Nishanth, and Arjun Aravind. Defending champions Vidya Mandir, which was within striking distance of the title, couldn't close the lead in the buzzer round and had to be content with being the runner-up (91 points). National Public School, which scored solidly in the buzzer round, was the second runner-up (85 points).

The astonishing energy levels of the students had to be seen to be believed and they didn't lag behind in their creativity by coming up with wacky names for their teams. Some teams found Tamil to be ideal for expressing themselves. If Idli Vada Sambar was



## WHAT'S YOUR mQ?

Madras Week's 'Murugappa Madras Quotient Quiz' began with a 25-question elimination round. The questions which were posed to the 242 schools participating in the quiz were the following:

1. On what date was Madras founded?
2. The fortified warehouse that Francis Day built was completed on April 23, 1640. In the Christian calendar, this day is dedicated to which religious figure?
3. Who lives in a palatial mansion once called Guindy Lodge?
4. Identify this person who was briefly in Chennai in August and will be seen in action in a world championship later this year.
5. Which Viceroy of India between 1880-1884 introduced local government in India during his tenure? Hint: He is remembered by a prominent building and a statue in Chennai.
6. Two cricket stadiums in Chennai have hosted Test matches. One is the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium at Chepauk. Which is the other ground?
7. Who did American Heritage magazine dub, in 1999, as the Most Overrated Philanthropist, arguing that the institution that bears his name was actually due to the benevolence of one Jeremiah Dummer, but he got the credit only because they did not want to use the name Dummer which could be confused for 'dumber' which, for that kind of institution, would be a disaster?
8. A well-known Chennai organisation was started by this person in 1989 to find excellent, novel and radical ideas to solve problems by involving those who cause the problem in the first place. (a) Name him and (b) the organisation.
9. This is the logo of which 'Pride of Chennai'?
10. What building is seen here in this 1913 photograph?
11. Which building inside Fort St George has a roof that is 5 feet thick? The army stocked its artillery here and it was considered the only bomb-proof building inside the Fort.
12. (a) Which branch of the Indian Army has its HQ in this building in (b) which southern hill station?
13. T.K.S. Elangovan (North) and Chitlapakkam C. Rajendran (South) are two of the three Lok Sabha MPs from Chennai constituencies. Name the third who represents Central Madras.
14. Founded to promote the teachings of the saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, this sect has a temple on a road in Royapettah named after the temple. Name the road/temple. Hint: Hotel Ponnuswamy is located on this road!
15. In the Middle Ages this word referred to any person (Arabs, Turks, etc.) who was of Islamic faith. Through the Crusaders, the name spread into Europe, where it was long in general use and has survived until modern times. The word, also used in architecture, is familiar to Chennai residents as well. What word?
16. (a) Whose statue? (b) Which eminent filmmaker of yesteryear is said to have been the main force behind the raising of the statue?
17. The Metropolitan Area of Chennai extends into which two neighbouring districts?
18. Which famous political figure of Madras was described by Gandhiji as "my conscience keeper"?
19. There are nine bridges and two causeways across the Cooum River in the city. What are the two names (proper name and popular name) of the last bridge under which the Cooum flows before it ends in the Bay of Bengal?
20. Lt. Col. Dr. Gurdial Singh \_\_\_\_\_ was the jailor when Rajaji was incarcerated in Vellore prison. On Rajaji's advice, he settled in Madras and his family over a couple of generations has built a number of institutions. There is even a locality in the family's name. Fill in the blank with the surname of this family?
21. (a) \_\_\_\_\_, an educationist, is considered the father of the (b) \_\_\_\_\_ system of education prevailing in Chennai, as it did in the early part of the 19th Century when education was imparted by senior pupils who educated juniors.
22. What is the first two-word search result obtained if you enter the following words in Google Search (a) Madras; (b) Chennai.



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# Cricket, Carnatic music and Coffee

Before I go on to speak of musicians interested in, even fanatical about, cricket, let me declare with pride that the founders of *Sruuti*, the magazine I edit, were all cricketers of some quality. The founding editor, N. Pattabhi Raman, was the youngest of three brothers. Despite being a polio victim, he was an active cricketer at the local level, while his brothers P.N. Sundaresan, my *periyappa*, and P.N. Venkatraman, my father, both on the *Sruuti* board, were stalwarts of Mylapore Recreation Club, famously engaged in Madras's own 'War of the Roses' it fought annually against Triplicane Cricket Club. While many of the Buchi Babu clan and distinguished sons of Madras, like the diplomat G P, represented MRC (run by C.R. Pattabhiraman, son of C.P. Ramaswami Iyer), TCC had more than its share of stars – like double international M.J. Gopalan and fast bowler C.R. Rangachari. My cousin P.S. Narayanan, the publisher of *Sruuti*, was a brilliant opening batsman of the 1960s and 1970s. He started with MRC and then went on to play for Jolly Rovers, the team sponsored by the Sanmar Group.

Another MRC star, my father's uncle, P.S. Ramachandran who once took 10 for 18 in a single innings in the 'War of the Roses', was a member of the executive committee of The Music Academy. I am sure some of his colleagues in the committee were also club cricketers. Tamil Nadu has developed a unique model of sports promo-

T.V. Sankaranarayanan, a Sangita Kalanidhi like his uncle, who played cricket while at Vivekananda College and follows the game closely. Mannargudi Eswaran, the *mridanga vidwan* has played cricket, too. On the dis-taff side, the younger of the Priya Sisters, Shanmukhapriya and Haripriya, represented her State in the national cricket competition.

There is this fabulous story about Sangita Kalanidhi D.K. Jayaraman's interest in the game.

17. The Metropolitan Area of Chennai extends into which two neighbouring districts?

18. Which famous political figure of Madras was described by Gandhiji as "my conscience keeper"?

19. There are nine bridges and two causeways across the Cooum River in the city. What are the two names (proper name and popular name) of the last bridge under which the Cooum flows before it ends in the Bay of Bengal?

20. Lt. Col. Dr. Gurdial Singh \_\_\_\_\_ was the jailor when Rajaji was incarcerated in Vellore prison. On Rajaji's advice, he settled in Madras and his family over a couple of generations has built a number of institutions. There is even a locality in the family's name. Fill in the blank with the surname of this family?

21. (a) \_\_\_\_\_, an educationist, is considered the father of the (b) \_\_\_\_\_ system of education prevailing in Chennai, as it did in the early part of the 19th Century when education was imparted by senior pupils who educated juniors.

22. What is the first two-word search result obtained if you enter the following words in Google Search (a) Madras; (b) Chennai.

Both words may be found in names of Murugappa Group companies.

(Answers on page 7)



are few and far between among cricketers, but the few I know of are diehard *rasikas*. S.J. Kedarnath, an accomplished opening batsman of yesteryear, was a trained *mridanga vidwan*, who forsook music for cricket. He is a wonderful mimic who can imitate some of Carnatic music's greats.

Fast bowler Kalyanasundaram, who once took a hat trick against Bombay, is a dedicated *rasika* whose knowledge of music is good enough for him to discuss its technical aspects with musicians and even advise them sometimes. Kalli's good friend K. Balaji, an elegant left hand batsman and a director of Kasturi & Sons, the publishers of *The Hindu*, is a regular concertgoer. His cousin and fellow director, N. Murali, a left-arm medium pacer for MRC 'B', a team run by *The Hindu* family, is now the President of the Music Academy.

Former India wicketkeeper M.O. Srinivasan was well known in music circles as the founder of Dasanjali, a one-man crusade to teach a large number of school children music, especially of the *bhajan* or light classical variety. His son M.O. Parthasarathy was a Ranji and Duleep Trophy player, who bowled fastish leg breaks with a Paul Adams-like action, except he was a right arm bowler. He was also a hard-hitting batsman, somewhat unorthodox, but extremely successful. A student of Hindustani vocal music, he has performed on the concert stage.

Violinist S.D. Sridhar is the proud father of left-arm all rounder S. Sriram who played ODIs for India. Sriram too learned the violin for a few years before the pull of cricket proved too powerful.

Former Ranji trophy cricketer S.V.S. Mani, an elegant batsman who played for Tamil Nadu and South Zone with considerable success in the 1960s, and once fielded as a reserve against England, is the son of Kothamangalam Cheenu, that talented singer, who faded away after a stint in films.

S. Radhakrishnan played for several seasons for Parry's Recreation Club in the league and Hindu Trophy. Once, a century by him in the league led to a newspaper report which said Radhakrishnan, the son of Semmangudi Srinivasar, had scored a century, thus revealing to the world at large his musical ancestry only friends had till then known about.

(To be concluded)

## MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

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

THE EDITOR



(Current Affairs questions are from the period September 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. In the world of takeovers, what came out of Project Gold Medal at the beginning of September?

2. Which city is to host the 2020 Summer Olympics after a vote at the IOC's 125th session held in Buenos Aires?

3. *Sunset at Montmajour* has now been confirmed as a large painting by which celebrated European artist?

4. Rochus Misch, who died recently aged 96, was the last surviving witness to which leader's suicide in the 1940s?

5. Why was Germany's Thomas Bach in the news recently?

6. Who was Leander Paes's partner in his U.S. Open doubles triumph?

7. Which spacecraft, it is stated, recently exited the solar system and became the first man-made object to reach interstellar space?

8. How did Mukesh Singh, Vinay Sharma, Pawan Gupta and Akshay Thakur make news on September 13th?

9. What is the value of the fund that leaders of the BRICS nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – have said they will set up to guard against financial shocks?

10. The Tatapani power project, touted as India's first geo-thermal power project, is coming up in which State?

\* \* \*

11. Which crossing near *Raj Bhavan* was named after a century-old Swedish company that made watches and typewriters?

12. Name the hero, only the second after Dilip Kumar, to have won three consecutive *Filmfare* awards for 'Best Actor' – there is a statue of him on busy Nelson Manickam Road near Mehta Nagar.

13. What is the Tamil screen legend Joseph Panimayadasan Rodriguez better known as?

14. In which institution's Coat of Arms will you see the words *Doctrina Vim Promovet Insitam*?

15. Which theatre originally stood at the place where the AGS multiplex is now located?

16. If you were at the crossing which has the Gajendra Circle, where in the city are you?

17. Which child of a National Award-winning film couple released a work titled *Contours of Leninism* at the CPI(M) summit five years ago?

18. From which constituency was MGR elected as an MLA when he contested on a DMK ticket?

19. Which distilled beverage is mixed with cranberry and orange juice to make a cocktail called 'Madras'?

20. Which future President of India was the Labour Minister from the first (1937) Madras Legislative Assembly cabinet?

(Answers on page 8)

# When the bugles blow

The very name Gemini Studios conjures up a magical world. Its sylvan location off Mount Road has since transformed into a concrete jungle, but each time you cross the area you can still imagine the glamorous stars, the huge workforce, the improbable storyline of most of its films and, above all, the enigmatic personality of its boss – S.S. Vasan.

Today's generation came in at the tail-end of Gemini's life. 'The Boss' died in 1969 and took with him most of the verve and enthusiasm for running a studio. It lingered on for a few years and then shut shop, plunging the cinema world into disbelief. Imagine life without Gemini. Vasan's palatial bungalows on Edward Elliot's (Radha-

## A look at three books by Sriram V.

krishnan) Road remained as ghostly relics for much longer. The one opposite the Music Academy made way for a multi-storeyed office complex while the other, opposite Dr. Radhakrishnan's residence, is now a vacant site, the collapsing gateposts alone feebly declaring to the world that this was where the great film-maker and studio boss once lived. But that the flyover on Mount Road is still referred to as Gemini indicates the hold the studio had, or still has, on collective memory.

For those of us who missed the glorious days of Gemini, the writings of Randor Guy have been our chief source of information. In the last decade or so, three publications have come out, each dedicated in its own way to Gemini. The first, in 2002, was *My Years with Boss at Gemini Studios*, published by Orient Longman. It is a compilation of veteran writer Asokamitran's reminiscences of his years at Gemini. These originally appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (another legend of yesteryears) in the 1980s, when, acceding to editor Prithish Nandy's request, Asokamitran jotted down his recollections. Though he served at Gemini between 1952 and 1966, the articles focussed on just five years – 1953 to 1958. But despite that, this is by far the best work on Gemini. In true Asokamitran style it is bitter-sweet, but it is a critical study of a time when the studio system was slowly giving way to star culture. Vasan was an astute reader of trends and portents and was getting his behemoth to make the transition as well. Asokamitran got a ringside view and captured it all. The

book is a mere 47 pages! But within that it gives you a wealth of information and insights – the arrivals and departures of VIPs who wanted to see films being made, the peaks and troughs in a studio's business cycle, the frustrations of those who came aspiring to be stars but ended up as office boys, the mountains of paper work that kept the studio moving and well accounted for, the stars who twinkled briefly ... all of these come and go.

The second, more lavishly produced, is the *S.S. Vasan Centenary Volume* brought out in 2003 by Vasan's other and more long-lived creation – *Ananda Vikatan*. While by its nature it is hagiographic, it has excellent black and white photographs from the Gemini archives. More importantly, it is structured as a series of articles by several people, all of whose lives Gemini and its proprietor had touched. There are Chief Ministers, political leaders and thinkers, rival studio-owners, film stars, writers (Asokamitran and Randor Guy included) and several former employees. R. Venkataraman, former



S.S. Vasan.

President of India, has written of how he was made to write by Vasan and of the latter's lifelong support for the Congress in Madras/Tamil Nadu and which party made him a Rajya Sabha MP as well. The best feature in the book, however, is a gallery of prominent employees of Gemini. It features an American, several Tamilians, Andhras, Kannadigas and Malayalis, a few Bengalis, a larger contingent of Hindi-speaking people and an Anglo-Indian or two. What a confluence of cultures the place must have been!

In its heyday, Gemini employed over 600 people, a huge number even by today's standards. And it was the studio's boast that it had never once defaulted on salaries! But it was this workforce that formed a union and eventually brought the studio system to its knees. A section devoted to 'studio services' is even more revealing. Vast armies of carpenters, tai-



The entrance of Gemini Studios.

lors, musicians and, above all, make-up men. Of this last category Asokamitran in his book has a full feature on one man who doubled up as office boy and make-up man. In the latter role he had a simple job – mix something called pancake in a bucket of water and daub it on the faces of all the extras!

The last book, *Gemini Canteen*, was published in 2003 by Shanti Padhippagam. It was film historian Theodore Bhaskaran who alerted me about it recently, and another budding film historian, the actor Mohan Raman, sourced it for me. Written by N.S.S. Manian who for years managed the Gemini canteen, first as an employee and later, following the unionisation, as a contractor, it looks at Gemini from down under. But alas! what should have been a delightful book on the view from below is a meandering and badly structured work of 112 pages. Ploughing through it, you still manage to get the odd nugget or two, but it is a painful process. There are sections, however, that make you feel hungry – especially the menu for Gemini's location shoots – sambar rice with plenty of ghee, potato chips, a curry, a deep-fried vada, curd rice made with milk, butter and a dash of curd, pickle. Tambram food at its best.

All three books write of the way Vasan publicised his films and roped in the VIP world-at-large to do its bit to ensure his films became a success. Without knowing it, even the film-hating Rajaji (according to Asokamitran, Vasan and Rajaji most cordially hated each other) had a hand in the success of *Avvaiyar*.

The Gemini motto was "When the bugles blow, there will be a show." Vasan was all this and more when it came to family events as well. Navaratri at Gemini House involved full-scale sets erected by the studio technicians. All three authors write with awe of the manner in which Vasan celebrated his children's weddings. As Asokamitran puts it, "For a whole week in 1950, citizens of Madras saw the moon at noon, the sun at midnight, men walked sideways on a hand and leg, birds stood as lampposts, the choicest music crystallised into diamonds, the smell of the most extravagant south Indian vegetarian food hung heavily on the air people breathed, the cows and buffaloes of Madras forgot to graze, the jutka carriages danced the polka and the waves of the Bay of Bengal stood still at their highest point to watch the fun."

That was true of Gemini as well, wasn't it?

## At the 'Murugappa Madras Quiz'

(Continued from page 4)

ordinary, *By The Time You Read The Name Murugan Idli, They Sold An Idli* was at its witty best. Arnab Goswami, the target of many mimics including a TV ad, wasn't spared either by a team that called itself *India Needs An Answer So Do We*. Machi, which has entered the lingo of Tamil youth irrespective of their socio-economic status, was part of the name of the runner-up Vidya Mandir team which told itself *It's OK Machi, Finals-la Pathukalam*. *Why This Kolaveri Di*, the irreverent Tanglish number that went viral on YouTube to garner more than a million views, morphed into *Why This Vetri Veri Da* for the winning P.S. Senior Secondary team. A Brahminical slant was provided by a team that proudly proclaimed itself to be *Madras Maamigalin Chennai Pasanga*. The soaring onion prices found a new expression in *The Batman Rises So Do the Onion Prices*. Chetan Bhagat, author of *Three Mistakes of My Life*, inspired a team that called itself *Three Mistakes Our School Made*. The organisers decided to give three prizes, instead of the usual one, for the best team name. *India Needs An Answer So Do We; Madras Maamigalin Chennai Pasanga*; and *By The Time You Read the Name Murugan Idli, They Sold An Idli* were the winners.

# In search of Tyagaraja



I remember my uncertainties in the darkness after many cramped hours in flight on the plane to Madras in September 1980. I had been to India for several months in 1970, and again briefly in 1977, but this time I had a specific academic task and a long-range goal – to conduct research for my Harvard University Ph.D. thesis. The topic was to be the life and works of Tyagaraja, the great singer-saint who composed hundreds of memorable songs, raising Carnatic music to new heights of artistic achievement and devotional power.

Would I meet the right guides? Would they look kindly upon me and agree to give me the help I would require to enter the culture? Did I have enough language training to be accepted and get started in this very traditional-conscious region of the earth? I felt at the mercy of a different social world and had no idea how my first large-scale research project would turn out to be. So far from home with only new acquaintances to call on, I tried to stop worrying and to hope for the best.

I need not have worried that night. The new names and addresses I had received from knowledgeable Madrasis I had met in America would start and propel my 18-month-long research project. One of those names was T. Sankaran, given to me by Jon Higgins when I visited Wesleyan University. "Your view of Tyagaraja will be very different from mine," Jon Higgins had said. "Because you study religion and I am a musicologist. But Sankaran will help you. Higgins, who was already well known in Madras, where he was sometimes called Higgins Bhagavtar for being able to sing Tyagaraja songs in the traditional manner, took me to Prof. T. Viswanathan, also at Wesleyan, and he gave me helpful information about Tyagaraja, and told me to contact his cousin, T. Sankaran, in Madras.

In Madras, after finding a place to stay, my wife Marcia and I went to look up for Sankaran. We went into an impressive antique building into an office with high ceilings and lazily turning ceiling fans, and found the office of T. Sankaran, who was the director of the Tamil Isai Sangam.

He was a small man, less than five feet tall, and he had grey hair, but he was very friendly, with a large heart and a youthful spirit. He was dressed in crisp white clothes with a scarf flung over his shoulder, which gave him an artistic flair. Sankaran was the grandson of Veena Dhanammal.

He took me directly to T.S. Parthasarathy when I told him I wanted to work on translating Tyagaraja's lyrics. That was the beginning of a series of introductions he gave me which

were very helpful in learning about South Indian culture. He opened doors to the worlds of Carnatic music giving me the ideas and providing personal guidance without ever asking for anything in return.

After a concert Sankaran showed me a book which was the text of *Oriental Music in Staff Notation*, by Chinnaswami Mudaliar. He told me: "Jon Higgins was going to try to take the great book published so long ago, with all the music to many of Tyagaraja's songs, back to America to have them copied, but in the end they were a massive pile and were disintegrating too much and he had to abandon the idea. At least you can take a copy of the introduction." I thanked him and later found that Harvard had a copy of the rare book.

Sankaran told us he was going to be travelling to Chidambaram for a conference, and invited us to travel with him, and then visit Tyagaraja's home village, Tiruvaiyaru.

We got down at Chidambaram and had breakfast, and Sankaran took us for *darshan* at the great Siva temple of Tillai Nataraja to see the *lingam* of ether. We were two skinny men, one short and one tall, humbly worshipping in the ancient temple where the invisible form of Siva is revealed.

After the conference, Sankaran took us by bus to Tiruvaiyaru, where we went right through the village to the Tyagaraja Samadhi, a white marble building in a pleasant clearing. Sankaran spoke with the priest, a Smartha Brahmin who lived in a hut on the site there with his family. The priest unlocked the samadhi and Sankaran joyfully sang Tyagaraja songs, including *Paramatmudu*. "This was Tyagaraja's swansong," he explained afterwards. The priest offered Tyagaraja Sanskrit prayers and flowers and other offerings in the samadhi, while Sankaran's Tyagaraja songs in Telugu echoed in the cool marble hall.

When we left, Sankaran said: "It is my opinion that if you heard Tyagaraja sing it would surprise you, the kind of voice he had was probably not like the voices of the most popular singers today." He also said that according to an oral tradition he had heard, just before dying, Tyagaraja requested a large amount of salt be put in the grave in which his body was to be buried. In the morning, Sankaran took me to the Kaveri river, and we walked down stone stairs to bathe, with little

fish tickling our ankles and calves as they nibbled at our skin. There in the dusk with spindly, cheerful Sankaran, it is easy to imagine Tyagaraja wading into the river at dawn and dusk, repeating the *Gayatri mantra*. We visited the old temple in the village, dedicated to Panchanadeeswara. It is said that in one hall of the temple Tyagaraja used to spend afternoons reciting his *Rama mantra*.

We visited the house where Tyagaraja lived, kept as a memorial to him. I was struck by its narrowness – shaped like some linked boxcars. "See, the division of the household really happened – Tyagaraja's brother got the other half!" At the back of the house was a typical courtyard with a well and a grinding stone. I made a sketch and pictured Thyagaraja and his disciples playing their music there.

As I took in the mood of the rooms I had the idea that someday I would like to write a historical novel based loosely on the life of Tyagaraja and his contemporaries in the region later known as Thanjavur Dis-

trict. Later, on return trips when I attended the annual Tyagaraja festival, the place would be familiar to me; at those times, parts of it would be decked out for festivities and crowds of people would throng the narrow streets and lanes, of course.

While we were in Tiruvaiyaru, Sankaran told the moving story of Bangalore Nagarathnammal. He remembered her fondly from his youth days how she faced her family sorrows, became a great artiste and devotee, how she travelled in trains with her portable *veena* to the places where she performed. She was spiritually inspired, dreaming of Tyagaraja, accepting the mission of making his rundown gravesite worthy of the saint's memory. She was the one who bought the land surrounding the Tyagaraja Samadhi and helped the factionalised followers of Thyagaraja's music join together to honour him at an annual festival.

Back in the United States, working on my thesis at Harvard in 1983, I wrote to Sankaran to ask him to write something I might include in a spectrum of voices of Madrasis on Tyagaraja. Sankaran responded by writing a letter conveying his appreciation of Tyagaraja's contributions. He stressed the ways Tyagaraja was a composer-saint

payment on his behalf; so, it is a gift, according to Sankaran, a legacy free and accessible to all who wish to claim it. The music of Tyagaraja, he said, "has simplicity as a shining point. Everyone sings it for its aesthetic appeal and for its moral values."

Noting that Tyagaraja is very popular as a composer in our era, Sankaran pointed out the extent to which the saint's music has "even invaded the dance repertoire. Tyagaraja is a money-spinner to the music industry of the modern world, because of his sterling reputation and his great popularity and the demand this creates; in every linguistic area, including north Indian ones, promoters attempt to make capital out of Tyagaraja's appeal. The law of supply and demand holds sway, and articles, books, films, and other media programmes are produced by both the learned culture makers and the business-minded entrepreneurs." Sankaran noted that the "wireless service," for example All India Radio, serves as a great patron of music, and Tyagaraja's songs enjoy a wide patronage through radio programmes. In this format and others, Tyagaraja is the favoured composer of classical South Indian music in the modern age.

The social restrictions which used to prohibit women (other than those of the traditional professional musician class) to make music and to dance are no longer valid. The dance profession and the *nagaswara*-playing profession are presently in the hands of performers who would not defy or neglect Tyagaraja, but honour him. Sankaran noted that in the late 1950s a Brahmin playing the *nagaswaram* would have been unthinkable. Today "even sensitive young girls" play that instrument, and dancers may come from the highest castes. With all the changes occurring in the 20th Century, Sankaran asserted, the fortunes of Tyagaraja have only risen, and his religious vitality increased.

(Courtesy: *Snuti*)

## Answers to Madras Quotient Quiz

1. August 22, 1639.
2. St. George.
3. The Governor of Tamil Nadu.
4. Magnus Carlsen.
5. Lord Ripon.
6. Corporation (or Nehru) Stadium.
7. Elihu Yale.
8. (a) M.B. Nirmal; (b) Exnora.
9. Namma Auto.
10. Egmore Station.
11. St. Mary's Church.
12. (a) Madras Regiment; (b) Wellington.
13. Dayanidhi Maran.
14. Gaudiya Math Road.
15. Saracen (Indo-Saracenic architecture).
16. (a) Avvaiyar; (b) S.S. Vasan.
17. Kanchipuram and Thiruvallur.
18. Rajaji.
19. Napier Bridge/Iron Bridge.
20. Gill. (Gill Nagar. Gill Adarsh School.)
21. (a) Andrew Bell (Bell's Road); (b) Madras System of Education using class monitors.
22. (a) Madras University; (b) Chennai Express.
23. (a) *Bommalattam*; (b) Cho S. Ramaswamy.
24. (a) A.R. Rahman; (b) Vanessa Mae.
25. (a) Cholamandalam; (b) Coromandel.

• The twelfth in a series of profiles by V. RAMNARAYAN of cricketers who may have made an all-time Madras\* squad.

# A most gifted left-hander

Many left-handed batsmen have served Tamil Nadu cricket splendidly. Among post-War players, A.G. Milkha Singh, Abdul Jabbar, W.V. Raman, R. Madhavan, S. Sharath, and S. Sriram have been some of the State's successful southpaws in the middle order, while P. Ramesh and S. Ramesh were extremely talented openers. Though each of these batsmen served the team well in his time, Sridharan Sharath has been the highest rungetter for Tamil Nadu to date. Another left-hander to amass runs for Tamil Nadu was Robin Singh, who fits however, into the all-rounder category.

While trying to pick a single middle order batsman from this list, I zoomed in first on Sharath and Raman (reluctantly leaving out the others, though every one of them was an excellent batsman), based not only on the runs they scored but also on the impact they had on their team's fortunes. Unfortunately, Sharath's progress was impeded by a major injury sustained in a road accident, and though he soldiered on bravely, scoring prolifically for Tamil Nadu, he never managed to convince the national selectors, perhaps because there was a question mark against his fitness. Raman, on the other hand, grabbed his opportunities at vital periods in his career to win their nod and, in fact, made an impressive Test debut against the West Indies.

## A big 'Thank You' to 7 of you

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W.V. Raman.

His was a striking presence at the crease and I, for one, admired his erect batsmanship, though disappointed that he did not quite fulfil his potential. Still, he is my choice in this list of all-time great contributors to Tamil Nadu cricket.

Like a few other successful batsmen in India, Woorkheri Venkata Raman (born in 1965) started out as a spin bowler who could bat attractively, but in time became a specialist batsman while his left-arm spin fell away. This recurring theme of bowlers-turned-batsmen is often the subject of speculation in cricket conversations, with no light of wisdom dawning at the end of the mysterious tunnel to solve one of Indian cricket's enduring riddles. Strangely, Raman was already showing signs of diminishing bowling prowess at the first class level even as he was collecting a bagful of wickets against two touring sides – England and West Indies. Yet, when he entered international cricket, he made an impression as a batsman rather than a spinner.

Genes and environment probably had a hand in the development of this brilliant cricketer. Raman's father

Nagarajan was an umpire officiating in Madras cricket in the 1960s and 70s, a familiar figure with his solar topee and khaki trousers, a mild-mannered, non-controversial figure. And, like everyone born within a ten-mile radius of the Parthasarathy Temple in the teeming residential neighbourhood of Triplicane within hailing distance of the Marina Beach, Raman grew up throwing or hitting a tennis ball with his mates on Big Street or on the beach.

In 1982, Raman was nominated School Cricketer of the Year, playing for Hindu Higher Secondary School. He was junior to schoolboy prodigy L Sivaramakrishnan of Vidya Mandir, and they both played a stellar role in the rising fortunes of Grand Prix Cricket Club, a talented young league side.

The next season saw Raman's evolution into a first class cricketer knocking on the doors of Test cricket, when he took 5 wickets against the touring West Indies team, playing for India Under-22. He made his debut in Ranji Trophy and bowled well in

all the matches, as he did in the first division league as well. He received the Tamil Nadu Sports Journalists' Collegiate Cricketer of the Year award.

The following season began on a disappointing note for Raman the spinner as he failed to take a wicket on a raging turner at Salem against Karnataka in the Ranji Trophy. His selection as a member of the South Zone squad to oppose England at Hyderabad was roundly criticised. A selector – who developed cold feet over what he believed had been a poor choice – even allegedly advised Raman to skip the match citing health reasons. Luckily, wiser counsel by friends and well-wishers prevailed and the young left arm spinner took 5 for 59 and 2 for 39 in the match. He also played two stroke-filled cameos to establish his batting credentials.

By the time the 1987-1988 season unfolded, Raman's claims for a place in the Indian team were being taken seriously by the national selectors. He acquitted himself with much credit in the one-day internationals against the touring West Indies and made a most impressive Test debut at Chepauk, when he made 83, batting at No. 3. India had a young captain in Ravi Shastri, a shrewd leader, who believed in his young team and backed them to the hilt. It was the Test in which Nari Hirwani made a startling world record Test debut, taking 16 West Indies wickets.

Raman's other outstanding batting feat in international cricket was his hundred against South Africa when India toured that country for the first time. He was a reserve player or twelfth man for many, many

Tests and ODIs. In Test matches, his 96 against New Zealand at home was his best performance.

For Tamil Nadu, Raman had an excellent record, with a triple century and double hundreds in the national championship. An imposing batsman, his cover driving was exquisite, and a crisis or a bad wicket tended to bring out the best in him. He was one of the better batsmen produced by Indian cricket, but perhaps lacked the steel of less gifted batsmen who worked on their craft harder. He was also a good close-in fielder, who, at the international level, patrolled the outfield most of the time. Had he continued to bowl well at the highest level, he would have probably played much more international cricket.

After his first class career, Raman has remained involved in the game as a much sought-after coach. He is now back as coach of the Tamil Nadu team after a hiatus during which he coached Bengal, among other roles.

\* Madras Province/Tamil Nadu.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Microsoft agreeing to buy Nokia's handset business for \$7.2 billion; 2. Tokyo; 3. Vincent van Gogh; 4. Adolf Hitler; 5. He is the new President of the International Olympic Committee; 6. Radek Stepanek; 7. Voyager 1; 8. They were given death sentences for the brutal gang rape and murder of a medical student in December 2012; 9. \$100bn (£65bn); 10. Chhattisgarh.

\* \* \*

11. Halda Junction; 12. Shobhan Babu; 13. J.P. Chandrababu; 14. University of Madras; 15. Royal; 16. Inside IIT; 17. Nandan, son of Mani Ratnam and Suhasini; 18. St. Thomas Mount; 19. Vodka; 20. V.V. Giri.

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