

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## Can heritage be commemorated with plaques instead of renaming roads?

Every once in a while, our city's Corporation Council passes resolutions renaming some road or the other. While some of these are fuelled by mere whims and no logical basis, there are some renaming exercises that are undertaken with a serious view to commemorate a prominent citizen who lived in the vicinity. These are much-deserved recognitions, but the city's governing body is rapidly running out of roads to name. And this is where it needs to consider taking a leaf out of European capitals and begin the practice of placing commemorative plaques by the sites of historic

locations. There is only so much renaming that can be done.

In the beginning, it was all easy – the city was full of streets

● by The Dy. Editor

and roads commemorating colonial governors, army officers and civilians, apart from East India Company servants. Starting with 1972, the Government, via the Corporation, renamed many of these after freedom fighters, social reformers and intellectuals. That was

widely welcomed though some did feel that retaining the original names would have been best and the Indian worthies could have been commemorated in roads and streets in the newer areas of the city. That plea fell on deaf ears given that it was a minority view anyway. The city itself got a new name in 1996 and the practice has since continued.

But now we are seeing a new trend – renaming roads that were already renamed. Thus Lloyd's Road in Royapettah was renamed Avvai Shanmugam Salai in the 1980s after

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## Festival Fallout: Environmental pollution from public festivities a growing concern

According to the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), this year Chennai saw over 1,300 *pillaiyar* idols immersed in spots around Kasimedu, Thiruvottiyur, Pattinappakkam and Palavakkam, marking the end of Pillaiyar Chaturthi. The next day, the city woke up to around 50 idols and a slew of debris that had washed ashore due to low tide. The GCC swung into action with more than 300 workers to re-immersion the idols with cranes and clean the beaches. Monitored by GCC Commissioner Dr. J Radhakrishnan as well as executives from Urbaser

Sumeet, the cleaning drive is said to have collected over 190 tonnes of garbage comprising of wood, plastic, and flowers, and is still underway at the time of writing this article.

● by A Special Correspondent

This, sadly, is nothing new. Each year, a large number of idols and great amounts of refuse wash ashore from waterbodies the day after immersion because they are made of materials that are not eco-friendly. Unlike clay – in fact the tra-

ditional material of choice for *pillaiyar* idols during this season – plastic, thermocol, and plaster-of-paris are non-soluble. The paint and glitter that such idols are decorated with tend to leach into the water, turning it toxic. Natural water bodies can take back clay, *arugam* grass or *erukku* flowers, but not these. It was precisely to prevent such harm that the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) had issued guidelines a day ahead of the festival, stipulating that only idols made of natural, biodegradable, and eco-friendly raw materials could be permitted

## HERITAGE WATCH

### The Old Round Plaques in the City



'ROBERT 1ST LORD CLIVE LIVED IN THIS BUILDING IN THE YEAR 1753 TRULY GREAT IN ARMS AND IN COUNCIL HE FOUNDED AN EMPIRE.'

The adjoining editorial set us off on a search of what were the commemorative plaques that we do have in our city. There are very many, all in the need of some maintenance but what is a wonder is that most

have survived. The practice from what we could see, began with just two plaques – one being placed at *Chepauk Palace* and the other on the wall of the *Great House* on Charles Street inside Fort St. George. The two are of identical design and were put up in colonial times. That these became accepted as standards is evident when you find similar plaques in places as far as Trichy and Penukonda. It is a matter of conjecture as to why this very aesthetic design was not adopted for later plaques or why more places were not commemorated in similar fashion. Our picture, courtesy *Madras the Gracious City*, by S. Muthiah, shows a section of *Great House* with the plaque visible at the extreme left. The text on it is reproduced from Col D.M. Reid's *Story of Fort George*.

for immersion. Reminding the public of their duty to protect the environment and safeguard natural waterbodies, the administration had rightly prohibited the use of plaster-of-paris, plastic, thermocol, and single-use plastic in addition to toxic and non-biodegradable chemical dyes and oil paints. The sale of idols made of plaster-of-paris was banned. TNPCB went a step further, in fact, by strongly recommending the use of natural decorations such as natural dyes, dried flowers or straw for the idols and *pandals*. Given the after-

math, the awareness campaign has clearly not found takers among a significant portion of the celebrants.

It is unfortunate that measures to protect natural resources are not acknowledged to be the environment-friendly initiatives that they are, but instead seen as burdensome restrictions on religion and tradition. It is starkly the case with the Pillaiyar Chaturthi idols; the problem was never the immersion itself, but the toxic substances dumped into the city's waterbodies.

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## Can heritage be commemorated with plaques instead of renaming roads?

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the theatre personality who resided there. Now, a part of the same road has been renamed after V.P. Raman, the brilliant lawyer who also lived on the same road. What was once a long stretch from the beach to Mount Road (oops Anna Salai) now has two names with not a very clear demarcation as to where each begins and ends. There however can be no debate on the deservedness of V.P. Raman to have a road named after him. But now for the sake of argument if a third illustrious personality emerges from the same road in future and there is a demand to rename a part of the road after that person, will there then be three names? And thereafter four, five, and so on?

The Corporation is sometimes left with no choice. Thus Gandhi Nagar IV Main Road became B. Ramachandra Adithanar Salai and now Kumar Colony is named after Mandolin wizard U. Shrinivas. Once again, the recognitions are much deserved but what is being removed are Indian and not colonial names. There

can be no end to this exercise and after a point it will lead to truncation of streets and cause much confusion.

The Corporation can resort to an out-of-the-box solution – it can offer to place commemorative blue plaques along each thoroughfare commemorating prominent people who lived there. These can be placed on the wall of the exact site/location if that is known, or it can be on the first wall of the street in case only broad locational details are available. This is being done increasingly in most European capitals and even within India, Pune and Kolkata have made a beginning. It is high time Chennai followed suit.

If that is not an option, the Corporation can consider renaming roads that commemorate political personalities who already have plenty of roads in the city named after them. Without taking names, we can safely say that some State and Central leaders are over-represented in this city, and we could do with some variety. But that cannot even be considered, can it?

## Environmental pollution from public festivities a growing concern

(Continued from page 1)

While the ban on plaster-of-paris idols is a good start, more thought must be given to immersion guidelines in the future, including creative solutions to accommodate religious sentiments among unyielding celebrants.

For one, there is much room for standardize idols made for Pillaiyar Chathurthi. There was once a time when clay idols were the norm; surely, those days can be brought back. It would serve the administration well to involve agencies such as the Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation to not only conduct product research and design that makes use of eco-friendly materials, but also train artisans to utilize such solutions for idols of all sizes. The goods must be subject to a material check before they are sent to the market for public purchase. Decorative accessories can also be standardized to suit eco-friendly norms – after all, people have long been using materials such as *kundri mani* beads and straw

to decorate clay idols. Such practices must be brought back into vogue.

Additional solutions lie on the other side of things – the water bodies themselves. If enforcing the use of eco-friendly materials is an uphill task, perhaps measures can be taken to prevent toxic materials from making their way to natural bodies. Could artificial ponds be offered to celebrants unwilling to change? Can the system devise a check on the idols brought for immersion in designated natural water bodies?

It is surely ironic that the State finds itself facing an uncaring public even whilst in a deadlock over water resources with its neighbour. We conspire at our own destruction by making ill use of scarce natural resources. Debates over environmental concerns must cleave away from religious politics. If public awareness campaigns are unable to nurture such maturity, then perhaps punitive measures are the only path to change.

## Mails from Far and Near

It has been quite a while since *The Man from Madras Musings* penned this column. Madras Week intervened and that took up space in the paper. And MMM is happy to be back, with more news. But first, let us see what the mail bag has brought.

Readership in China, MMM is happy to report, continues to flourish. The latest missive is from Lucy Chen who even in the caption of her mail caught MMM's attention. "Are you troubled with the aesthetic surface of your parts?" she asked, and she had MMM hooked. Though blessedly free of pimples while growing up, MMM on coming to man's estate has often longed for smoother skin and with fewer dark patches. And so he read on. The mail was reassuringly addressed as Dear Friend and MMM was thrilled. Imagine, someone in faraway China was reading MM, and MMM's column and writing. The

through some of the phone calls received.

"We are from Mumbai," said a caller.

MMM was all ears.

"We are coming down to shoot you," continued the caller.

MMM asked as to what crime he had committed. The caller was quite puzzled at first and then proceeded to assure MMM that it would all be on camera and not with bullets.

And there was the student who began badgering MMM for a write up on the Thiruvanniyur temple. MMM kept ignoring the messages until they became a veritable flood. The last one, before MMM blocked the sender, was that the school assignment had an imminent deadline and so could MMM help. MMM was reminded of countless speakers at the Music Academy who would keep interspersing their 45 minute slot with the comment that they could have presented a lot more had time not been

thing else, until the ceaseless hootings of those around you, and their verbal endearments make you move on.

There are many such pieces of art around the city for you to feast your eyes on. Somewhere there is a boat, at another place there are some dancers, in yet another are a pair of warriors in combat and by the beach is one of a bull peering into the mouth of an elephant. The last one is not a tribute to dental health but actually a reproduction of an ancient Tamil temple design concept but in the absence of any explanatory plaque around it, most people have come away puzzled. Some have applied to MMM for enlightenment too.

But this peacock has MMM quite puzzled. It has considerable poundage around its waist; so much so that the stomach seems to touch the ground. Supporting it so that this does not happen are a pair of stout legs, so stout indeed that it

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

rest of the message, barring the conclusion was somewhat of an anti-climax for it had to do with expertise in "machining in the medical field," whatever that meant. But it signed off with hope – "Do you have any project in hand? you can email me the details, i believe i will make you 100% satisfy. Wish our products & services can help your business."

The above missive was closely followed by one from Helen who was interested in selling some wire mesh to MM, presumably with a view to tie its deputy editor up. Helen ended by saying she was sure MMM "will be impressed by our excellent and stable quality."

All said and done, MMM is a hit with ladies in China.

MMM will not waste your time on other mails received, which were essentially on non-receipt of MM, receipt of duplicate copies of MM and change of address of some of the recipients. Some of the magazines regulars seem to be among the Troops of Midian, they prowl around so much.

MMM having disposed off the mail, now takes you

so short. A count of these whines revealed a total of ten minutes out of the 45 had been spent on them! The same with this student – rather than sending those emails she could have got on with the assignment.

### The Pregnant Peacock

Have you ever seen a heavily pregnant peacock? And by that *The Man from Madras Musings* does not mean a peahen. Yes sir, and if you want to witness this miracle, all you need to do is to go to Royappettah – to be precise the intersection of Avvai Shanmugam/VP Raman Salai/Lloyds Road and Royappettah High Road/Thiru Vi Ka Salai. There stands a massive sculpture, one of the many that our city administration spends funds on erecting at various important junctions, roundabouts and intersections. The idea, MMM presumes, is to make sure you don't fret over the traffic chaos, the non-functioning traffic lights and the ceaseless hooting of horns around you. You see these sculptures, pause mesmerised and forget every-

thing is a wonder that the bird, if it were a real one, would move at all. And then it has an uplifted fan of a tail. MMM thinks it could well be a dove or a pigeon but he is not sure. Could it be a tribute to the dodo?

Whatever it is, it has now been installed at that afore-said intersection and from there it gazes in a somewhat surfeited fashion at the vehicles that whizz by. For days on end it remained swathed in green sheets, no doubt to protect it from the heat and dust. MMM wonders if someone even makes ceremonial offerings of food to it. It also has a protective shelter above it, something that is denied to statues of even the highest in the land. This then is some special kind of peacock/pigeon.

Then there came a day when the covers were all off. The peacock was visible to all, in all its glory. That was the day the CM was to declare a road name change in the vicinity. And no doubt the bird had to be at its best during the ceremony. The next day the bird had gone back to being veiled. MMM made enquiries and was told

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## OUR READERS WRITE



### The SMC poem

I read the reproduced poem and supplementary cartoons extracted from the Stella Maris College Annual of 1950 thanks to the efforts of Karthik. I enjoyed the reproduction. However, I wished that either Karthik or you had clarified that this artwork by Kasthuri Bai was done from the SMC then located in Santhome High Road (presently where the Rosary Matriculation School functions). SMC moved to its present location in Cathedral Road only in 1960.

Raman, Anantanarayanan  
anant@raman.id.au

While it is true that Karthik had mentioned this, we had edited it as we assumed that this was too well-known a fact to merit repetition. We thank reader Raman and writer Karthik.

– Deputy Editor

## Website comments

### Madras Week lectures, in a nutshell

(Vol. XXXIII No. 10, September 1-15, 2023)

Thanks a tonne MM, for the bird's eye view of Madras Week celebrations. It was too good and needs to be shared. God bless.

Srinivas Chari  
srinivaschar@gmail.com

### Anglo-Indians in TN Hockey

(Vol. XXXIII No. 4, June 1-15, 2023)

The Anglo-Indians of the sixties and seventies once ruled the sport – and this was true, regardless of caste or creed.

The sport was played for the love of it, with 100 per cent passion. Leading companies like Dunlop, the Railways, and banks employed these personnel. Sadly, this is not the case any more.

For some reason, field and track athletes are on the rise. The sport is picking up due to strong sponsors, but given our huge population, we should do much more.

Mark Crocker  
chefcrocker@gmail.com

### The Kuvikam Twins – Creating waves in the world of Tamil literature

(Vol. XXXIII No. 8, August 1-15, 2023)

Feeling happy to read this. My joke book was published by them last year.

V. Narayanan  
narayanansbi@gmail.com

### Lost Landmarks of Chennai – Mylapore's Lost Harbour

(Vol. XXXIII No. 9, August 16-31, 2023)

So meticulously researched, and extremely well-written. A fascinating read. Thank you, Sriram!

Sridhar  
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# Clothes and consciousness

## How an entrepreneur breathed new life into Madras fashion in the seventies

While I grew up in Bangalore, that erstwhile pensioner's paradise, it was Madras that enthralled me to no end. The city's refined culture compensated for all the humidity; the classical music and the all-pervasive scent of jasmine had me hooked. I've always been drawn to textiles – I find that the clothing people choose to wear is quite telling of their culture and background. Perhaps it is rather poor to compare, but Madras society, I discovered, was rather staid in its choice of apparel. This did not dampen my enthusiasm for the city. I loved her people and adored her culture with such passion that I was soon dubbed a traitor by friends and allies in Bangalore, the city where I was born and bred.

I embarked on a mission to acclimatise myself to Madras - I decided to learn the language and work towards playing the

role of a changemaker in the city that I had chosen to love. My path led me to a textile shop that a family friend requested me to 'run.' My mind raced endlessly with ideas, for I wanted to break jaded traditions and get conformists to begin enjoying the clothes they wore instead of simply wearing what was expected of them. Truth be told, I was quite fascinated by the clothing choices of the women of Madras. Young or old, they always wore sarees, and the mature women wore only *pattu* sarees that grew soft with constant washing in soap nut lather. The attire seemed

to be a sort of second skin; the ladies never complained about the discomfort of wearing a silk saree in hot weather. They wore it as they cooked. They wore it as they tended to their children, through all the bathing, feeding, and playing. They

● by  
Sabita Radhakrishna

even slept in the saree. Yet, there was nary a crinkle in the fabric - the sarees always hung in soft folds that caressed their bodies. The colours were gorgeous. Chemical dyes stormed the bastion of natural dyes, and any colour could be reproduced at a whim. The legendary Kalakshetra sarees were to die for, even if (in those days) they took a year to fulfill an order.

Curiously, cotton was never a common choice in Madras despite the hot climate. The only concessions were blouses made of *rubia* voile which were sold in bales and embellished with large floral prints. The women wore puff sleeves and leg of mutton sleeves (here, the sleeves came up to the elbow and had slight gathers both at the hemline and where it joined the armhole). Apart

from *khadi* which made its presence felt post-independence, the women stayed away from cotton; why, cotton handlooms were not even given a second glance. Silk gave the family status. The younger ones wore sarees with blends when the transition period of *pavadai davani* came to an end. And so, I was determined to make a dent - however small - in adding variety to daily wear for Chennai women. The men wore Western clothes when they went out, and *veshtis* at home for comfort. Many took to wearing *khadi* kurtas. But my focus remained firmly on women.

My survey of the Madras clothing scene revealed that there was no shop that catered exclusively to women's wear. The only store that I frequented and loved in those days was Varnali, which specialized in cotton Venkatagiri sarees, some plain with *zari* and some printed. Other than Varnali, there was no other place in Madras that sold exquisitely designed cottons. I realized that only women from Kerala and Andhra appreciated cotton as they were used to the fabric. They knew how to launder these sarees and had family *dhobis* who would come home to wash the household linen and clothing, sarees included.

The *dhobis* would starch the fabric ever so slightly and iron them to perfection. Alas, this breed has slipped into oblivion.

Coming back to my story, I decided to press ahead with my mission. I drove to wholesale shops in town and procured bales of soft mul and full voile, and cut them into saree lengths and blouse bits. In those days, there were two printing units that were well-known in Madras; one of them was Mohan Printers, which was where I took my bundle of textiles. Sitting on an old chair facing a creaky table, I surveyed the hand-printing blocks that they had, sketched the placements of the blocks and decided upon the colours. I was ecstatic when I picked up the completed order of printed sarees - my efforts had come to fruition as a harvest of beautiful cotton sarees, each with unique designs in the pallus and borders and in myriad colours from the use of pigment dyes, indigo sol and procion dyes.

We opened our shop *Urvashi* in the early seventies. The women of the city were shy and hesitant at first. College girls and working women were entranced by the transformation of the simple cotton saree into the new avatar that we presented. And once

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Amrapali, opening day.

# More on the film *Kalidas*

Readers may kindly note that the first part of this series on *Kalidas* by Sa Muthuvel – originally penned in Tamil – contained two errors in translation. The film *Alam Ara* was screened in Chennai, not shot in the city; and the film *Kalidas* fell short of standard in the quality of its sound, not cinematography. *Kalidas* had been produced at a time when sound recording technology was still in development.

– Associate Editor



PG Venkatesan's dual roles in *Ambikapathy* (1937).



A still from *Alam Ara*.



This deserves to be specified upfront. Even those who are quite well-informed ask, 'Have you seen the film *Kalidas*?' The primary difficulty in the study of old films is that they are largely lost to us, having not been preserved. Of the roughly 250 Tamil talkies that were released until 1940, a mere 13 remain. Only a few clips of *Pattinathar* produced by Vel Pictures can be found. Among the films that remain, the oldest are *Sathi Sulochana* (1934) directed by Pammal Sambandha Mudaliar and *Pavalakkodi* (1934) directed by K. Subramanyam. Both are trapped at Pune in the gilded cages of the National Film Archives of India, which carefully preserves the films. There is reliable information too that a couple more early films are available at the Archive; there must be a way to make these available to the public.

How does it matter whether it was a short film, full length feature or multilingual? How does it matter whether it was largely songs or dialogue? Wasn't Tamil the first language that was heard by the viewer? That certainly makes *Kalidas* the first Tamil talkie. I offer a piece of information to those who make such a claim. Film historian Theodore Baskaran has put in writing that the first Tamil talkie ever made was the 4-reel film *Kurathi Paatum Dansum* produced by the company Sagar Movietone in 1931. We shall see more about this short film later on.

When sound recording technology first appeared on the scene, it was used to record song and dance. Ardeshir Irani imported sound recording equip-

ment from foreign countries to use in the making of the films *Alam Ara* and *Kalidas*. In the past, Gundooosi Gopal has speculated that *Kalidas* was produced chiefly to attempt recording dialogues for the first time. But such an attempt had already taken place earlier, with the making of *Alam Ara*! (His statement, however, paves the way for the theory that songs did not have a place in the film *Kalidas*.)

The synopsis of the film has been printed in the *Kalidas* songbooks in Tamil, English and Telugu. In Tamil, the film title is printed as *Kalidasa*.

## Cast and crew

There are some misnomers even about the people who acted in *Kalidas* and the characters they played. References in the songbooks point to only three

people whom we can be certain played roles in the film – T.P. Rajalakshmi, Jhansi Bai and Mr. RD. In fact, since the names are printed in Tamil letters, it not known whether the actor's name was RD or RT.

To promote this first-of-its-kind talkie, the makers of the film have largely relied on Rajalakshmi's fame and talent. This is the reason why no one else was given the spotlight or accorded much publicity.

It is said that P.G. Venkatesan acted in *Kalidas*, too. But there is no truth to the claim that he was the film's hero. The hero was V.R. Gangadhar, a B.A. graduate who performed his role by speaking Telugu dialogues. Kalki has misnamed him as Gangalarao in his review. In fact, Kalki made a similar error in Rajalakshmi's case as well. Even though she was quite well-known in her time, he

printed her name as Ranilakshmi. That he was not aware of Rajalakshmi is an admission that Kalki himself has made in his review. It is an affirmed fact, however, that the hero was none

Santhanalakshmi are banded about in error. We shall see later about the research pertaining to Jhansi Bai and RD.

## Songs

Because there was no speech in Tamil but only songs, Kalki had remarked in review that the film was not 'a Tamil pechi (talkie), but a Tamil paatti (musical).' We've seen this already. But there is another theory that Kalki made such a statement because the film had fifty songs. That *Kalidas* contained fifty songs is simply not true. All three segments of the film put together had a runtime of roughly 1.5 hours. How could it have had 50 songs? The songbooks specify only a total of 8 songs, all eight

of which are sung by female characters.

It is evident that the person who sang all the songs is none other than Rajalakshmi. To explain the reasoning in detail might be a bit tedious for the reader, so we shall see a couple of arguments in the theory's favour.

The *Kalidas* songbooks carry no details about the people who sang the songs, the characters they played, or the writers.

The most famous songs from her renditions on stage can be heard in the film – *Entara Neetana and Swararaga Sudha*. Tyagaraja compositions both, they are presented in the ragas *Harikambhoji* and *Sankarabharanam*. She has sung the song *Inthiyargal Nammavargalukkul* in a good voice, as well. That the lyrics are clearly heard testifies to the superior quality of the film.

– Swadesamitran

The references in *Swadesamitran* make it clear that three songs can be credited to Rajalakshmi's voice. Apart from these, the piece that starts with the lines *Aadhiyil Namathu Avvai* and ends with *Rajalakshmiyai Kanbeere* is the opening song of the film and would have been presented at the very beginning of the feature. It is apparent that there was a practice in those days to introduce the film as well as the production house in the opening song. This was a cultural crossover from stage performances.

The songbooks also specify the folk dance performed by Jhansi Bai and RD. Underneath are printed the words *Rattinamam Gandhi Kai Baanamaam*. The placement of these words has also given rise to misnomers. Kalki confirms that the song *Rattinamam Gandhi Kai Baanamaam* makes an appearance in the first film segment and that T.P. Rajalakshmi was the artiste who performed the song and dance to it.

## Songwriters

There was no one to write Telugu *kirtanais* or songs exclusively for the film *Kalidas*. The makers took songs that were already being performed on stage and used them in the film.

The practice of hiring songwriters to write songs exclusively for a film came into being much later. The first instance was in the movie *Seetha Kalyanam* (1934), whose songs were written by Papanasam Sivan. As for *Kalidas*, only the song *Rattinamam Gandhi Kai Baanamaam* includes the name Madhurakavi Bhaskaradas in its lyrics.

In those days, songwriters had the practice of adding their own names in the songs. There was no music directors for films then, either. The same tunes that were played on stage would be recorded by an orchestra at the film studio.

Though some very old films are lost to us forever, most of their songs have survived as sound. In the beginning, film songs were not recorded on gramophone records during production itself. The artistes who had sung the songs – or other singers in some instances – would be made to perform the music on a subsequent occasion so that it could be recorded. The technology to record music directly from film recordings appeared later.

The first attempt was made in 1934 in North India, by V. Shantaram. The Tamil industry received such a chance later than even that. Songs from

such early gramophone records have now been retrieved and made available to hear on social media platforms such as YouTube, thanks to the praiseworthy efforts of social workers who undertake such tasks. In the case of *Kalidas*, however, we're faced with rather unfortunate luck – the practice of releasing cinema songs on gramophone records surfaced a few years after talkies first appeared on the scene. So we've lost the songs of the early talkies, including those of *Kalidas*.

Though there are a few more findings related to the songs of *Kalidas*, we shall bring the topic to an end, for now.

*Kalidas*' film reel – including all three film segments – ran to a total length of 10,000 feet.

Even though it was produced in Bombay, the censor certificate was issued in Madras. From records, it is seen that the certificate number was 1598. The distributor of *Kalidas* was Bangalore-based Select Pictures Circuit.

## Half Gazette Scenes?

The *Swadesamitran* archive carries another interesting error. The magazine's advertisement specifies that the presentation of the film *Kalidas* is accompanied by *Pathi Gazette*' scenes as well. Whatever could 'Half Gazette' mean?

The English daily *The Hindu* helps clarify this point through an advertisement carried in its pages for *Kalidas*.

The ad goes thus:

Also Showing...TECHNICOLOR AUDIO REVIEW AND PATHE GAZETTE –

The Hindu, 31.11.1931.

It is the phrase *Pathe Gazette* that has been confused as *Pathi Gazette*, or *Half Gazette*, in Tamil. Pathe was, in fact, a news agency of the time. It was quite a normal practice then, to show news reels produced by them. It was so typical that people – including Kalki – did not make mention of them. It was a norm even since the time of silent films to release songs in a single sequence, followed by news reels.

The advertisement in *The Hindu* also gives us an additional piece of information – that colour films were available at the time. Colour scenes were also present in the Tamil talkie *Raja Harischandra*, released on 9.4.1932. We shall see later the new discoveries that have come to the fore about the subject.



T.P. Rajalakshmi in a still from *Kalidas*.

● by  
by S.A. Muthuvel  
muthuvelsa@gmail.com

other than V.R. Gangadhar, B.A.

P.G. Venkatesan hailed from Pondicherry. He has acted in the olden films of those days as supporting characters, such as in comedy roles. P.G. Venkatesan had a good strong voice.

He had a talent for singing, and so attained fame as the 'South Indian Saigal'. He has sung and acted in other roles as well, including that of a sadhu. In appearance, P.G. Venkatesan had a flat stomach and a slim frame. Some of the movies that he has acted in are available to watch, even today. In *Kalidas*, the Gangadhar (Rao?) that we see – hazy and unclear though the visuals are – is unmistakably a veritable giant. It is also more or less a matter of fact that L.V. Prasad has acted in the film, too. But there's no information about the character he played.

A full-length feature film titled *Kavirathina Kalidas* directed by T.C. Vadivelu Nayakar was released later, in 1936. It is apparent that the earlier *Kalidas* is often confused with this one.

And so, stills from the later film as well as the name of M.R.



The *Kalidas* ad from *Swadesamitran*. The *faux pas* is seen in the last line.

# Jayendra Panchapakesan – A socially conscious filmmaker

Remember the famous ad film of yore with the jingle *Chottu neelam doi ... Regal chottu neelam doi* for Regal liquid blue? How about the Home, but not alone TV spot for the BPL range of products? Or the iconic I love you Rasna commercial for the soft drink mixes? Those memorable brand-building ad films were made by Chennai-based J.S. Films founded by two schoolmates – Jayendra Panchapakesan and P.C. Sriram, the award-winning Cinematographer.

After producing over 600 films, winning several awards, and opening the Bombay ad film market to other Chennai-based ad producers, Jayendra decided to join hands with another friend Senthil Kumar – this time, by merging JS films with Real Image, a leading provider of technology in the film, video and audio domains.

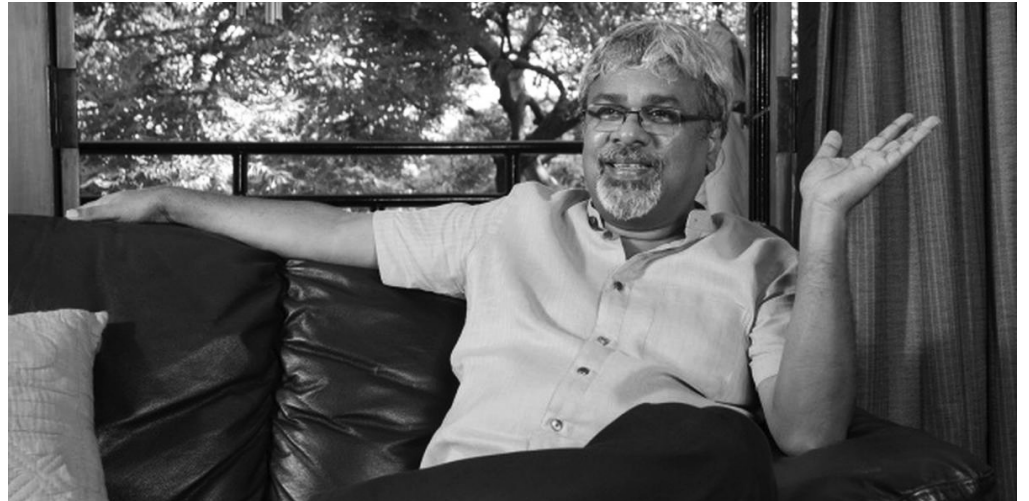
I have known Jayendra for nearly 35 years, since the time he produced a TV commercial for MRF Tractor Tyres, then a client of my employer, the agency Grant Kenyon Eckhardt. His team had produced more than a dozen films for my own ad agency Anugrah Madison over the years.

A man of few words,

soft-spoken and self-effacing, Jayendra has a penchant for experimenting with new ideas in whatever he does. He is also a perfectionist who never compromises on the quality of the job he is doing. I remember when he was doing a commercial for Shriram Chits, he was not happy with the final output of a particular sequence in a film. He reshot the entire sequence at his own cost.

Sixty-five years old Jayendra is one hundred per cent a Chennai boy. He comes from a well-respected, well-to-do family. He did his schooling at Vidya Mandir where he won many art competitions at inter-school and national levels. He received his B.Sc degree in Chemistry from Vivekananda College. While in college he dabbled in staging plays with Madhu Balaji with scripts written by Madhu's celebrity brother Crazy Mohan. He was the Secretary of the Fine Arts Club during his final year in college. Clearly, the creative spark on him was alive and thriving right from his student days. No wonder the boy with a degree in Chemistry switched to advertising. How did it happen?

Jayendra says, "While seeing movies in theaters, I would keenly watch the ads. I felt



Jayendra Panchapakesan. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

I could do a better job than what I saw. One day my friend Chakravarthy (Chax) and I walked into the Carborundum Universal office in Chennai because we thought we had an excellent slogan for Exide batteries. The manager who met us told us that, that was not the way it works and that all their advertising was handled by an advertising agency based out of Mumbai." This motivated Jayendra to think of advertising as a career.

Armed with a PG Diploma in advertising from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Jayendra started his advertising career as a trainee at Inter Publicity in Chennai. Realising that the

looked at him and went back to reading the book. After he left, a lady rushed into my room and blurted with urgency, "He is our Chairman, even if you are not busy, pretend to be busy." I stared at her, packed my bags, and left. I sent a crisp two-word resignation letter. "Previously, yours – Jayendra."

This is the point when Jayendra, bored with merely writing scripts for ads, decided to make ad films because he felt he could communicate better. On his return to Chennai, he had the unique distinction of consulting with three top agencies in Chennai at the same time – HTA, Mudra, and Sistas. As already mentioned, he joined

What made Jayendra merge a successful JS Films with Real Image?

Jayendra says, "When I started doing ads, Senthil – who was in college then – was doing graphics for me on a computer that he had built. We were pushing technology to do impossible things at that time. When Avid Technology asked him to distribute their products in India, he invited me to join him. In 1993, I teamed up with Senthil to set up Real Image, introducing non-linear editing with Avid and digital cinema sound with DTS. I was a reluctant starter as I was more creative than a businessman. But soon we started enjoying introducing new technologies into the country like Avid, which did to editing what word processing did to typewriting – DTS brought back audiences to movies with 6-track sound, and digital cinema changed the economics of a movie release; it made very wide release possible, bringing enormous collections right up front."

Once Real Image (now called Qube Cinema) hired a CEO, Jayendra went back to making films. But not ad films. He made two feature films titled *180* in Tamil and Telugu, and later, another Telugu film titled *Na Nuvve*. He made two experimental Carnatic music films titled *Margazhi Raagam* and *One*.

Jayendra says, "For *Margazhi Raagam* I came up with the idea to shoot a concert with 13 red cameras synched with each other (for the first time in the world) and recorded the sound live and mixed it in 6-track surround sound. For the first time, people watching this in the theatres got a glimpse of

(Continued on page 7)

## SHORT N SNAPPY

### Mails from Far and Near

(Continued from page 2)

that the Corporation had not yet decided on a formal inauguration of the statue and so was keeping it under wraps. And why the shelter overhead? That was to prevent other birds from sitting on this bird and defiling it. Clearly this is a bird of exalted status. MMM hopes to be around when it delivers whatever is distending its abdomen – he is quite sure it will be a golden egg.

### Madras Nuisance

'Rags' Raghavan, an old friend of the Chief's and also of *The Man from Madras Musings* once related how he was sent on a photography assignment by the boss and on reaching his destination was welcomed as the person from Madras Nuisance. MMM did not know whether to believe this or not. But that Rags was speaking the truth was made evident to MMM when he led his annual heritage walk at Fort St. George late in August. The security guard at the gate, having scanned all the papers then called her boss on the walkie talkie and said there was a group from Madras Nuisance that wanted to come in and could they be allowed. Mercifully, despite that introduction, MMM and team were permitted. Miracles never cease.

– MMM

● by R.V. Rajan  
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real action was in Bombay, he packed his bags and left for Mumbai. He joined Clarion McCann Advertising, where his friend Chax was already employed. As budding copywriters, he and Chax began working on all the national accounts of Clarion. They soon became the talk of the town. People spoke of the two young writers from Chennai who were making a difference in Clarion's creativity.

Jayendra is a restless, creative guy. He says, "I was a writer for 8 years. I switched 14 jobs. If the environment was not congenial for good creative output, I left. Once, I joined a national ad agency as creative group head. It was my fourth day in office. Sitting in my cabin, I was reading a book as I had not yet been assigned any work. An elderly man with a grey beard walked through the room. He saw me reading a book. I

hands with his schoolmate PC to start JS Films in Chennai in 1986 which got its first project from Mudra Communications to do a film for a national brand. Soon, Mudra's chairman Mr. A.G. Krishnamurthy – by now impressed with all the good work – decided to give all the film jobs from the Ahmedabad, Mumbai, and Delhi offices of Mudra to JS Films.

This included projects for brands like Rasna, Vimal, Apollo Tyres, and many more. Based on the success of the films for Mudra, Balki, the creative director from Lintas (Lowe) started giving film assignments for Lever brands. Pretty soon, the JS team was doing ads for many Mumbai agencies. The tables had been turned. From Chennai agencies going to Mumbai for their films, Mumbai agencies started coming to Chennai for their films. There was no looking back for the JS team.

# CLOTHES AND CONSCIOUSNESS

(Continued from page 3)

they wore the clothing, they discovered that there was no going back. There was also the added delight of having a matching blouse of the same dye and print. I confess that I was no businesswoman – I had no idea when it came to pricing and simply kept my prices low. A small profit margin suited me just fine, and the satisfaction I

derived from steering women to better choices suited for the hot weather was enormous. It more than compensated for the low earnings. We made up with the high turnover, though. The unprecedented success spurred me to take take my designer sarees on exhibitions to all the metros and smaller Indian cities, as well as Colombo.

Encouraged, I ventured slowly into woven handlooms – typically South – and began working with the weavers and suggesting small changes to suit the market. Four years later, I opened my boutique Amrapali in Fountain Plaza. I had my own hand block printing and dyeing units, along with a team of tailors and artisans specialising in ari embroidery, hand embroidery and machine

embroidery. Soon enough, we launched our hand-block printing unit, which made designing easier for me. It was possible to create exclusive sarees good enough to wear for special occasions. I introduced in the eighties silver jewellery, which women in Madras typically would not deign to wear, but the resistance soon wore down. I started designing salwar kurtas which would be easy to wear on casual occasions and for working women. And because the prices were kept low this was a big hit as well. Once, a woman from a “respectable” Tamil household would not condescend to wear a North Indian outfit and she could not be seen in anything but a saree; but the winds of change were sweeping through the conservative city.

I introduced mismatched blouses in weaves and prints, first in Bombay and then in my

hometown. We had about 30 captive looms scattered all over India, and my boutique saw an amalgam of textures and different handlooms from various parts of the country.

By the time Madras became Chennai, the trajectory of change had swept the fashion scene too. Chennai women were making a statement through the clothes they chose to wear and were no longer cowed down by the stringent rules of convention. They had begun to enjoy a freedom that they had not enjoyed before. Blouse sleeves became shorter, and they dared to sport sleeveless blouses and dipping necklines. The age of women's empowerment had begun and textiles played a key part in the story, too. In fact, the industry has a principle role in the history of India – after all, the British rule began and ended

with textiles. There can be no better reason for why hand-made textiles must always be nurtured and given the status they deserves.

In about five years since my own journey had begun, other enterprising women took the cue and successfully opened their own clothing stores. I have never resented this, even though it meant working harder to remain one step ahead. Women were now open to ideas as long as the styles were exclusive and enhanced their personality. I had achieved a little, at the very least, of what I had set out to do – encourage a whole new perspective to clothing and fashion. Chennai will always remain the city that helped me express myself creatively and break stereotypes, for which I will always be grateful.



Sabita Radhakrishna.

## A socially conscious filmmaker

(Continued from page 6)

how much was possible for the presentation of our concerts. Bombay Jayashri and T.M. Krishna partnered my friend Srikanth (Aghal films) and me in this initiative.”

For *One*, Jayendra got T.M. Krishna to sing amidst nature without any accompaniments. This was not a concert but a

musician exploring his music. Again, Srikanth of Aghal Films produced this film as well.

Recently, Qube Cinema set up a Virtual production stage in partnership with Annapurna Studios in Hyderabad. This will help films to be made in controlled conditions. Be it a location in the Alps or a busy stand in Koyambedu, the image is created on a LED wall, and

when the camera moves, the background moves in sync as if the actors are actually at the location. This avoids complex post-production and VFX, which are time-consuming and expensive.

Jayendra is also well-known in the industry for his deep involvement in social work. What inspired him to take social causes?

“I have always been interested in helping people. On the spur of the moment, I started Bhoomika Trust in 2001 with my wife Sudha and some friends as our response to the Gujarat earthquake.” Over the years Bhoomika Trust has worked extensively with victims of disasters like the earthquake in Gujarat, the Tsunami in South India, the Uttarakhand floods, the Jammu & Kashmir floods, the Chennai floods of Dec 2015, Cyclone Vardah, Odisha floods, Floods in Assam, Bihar, Kerala and Cyclone Gaja, providing immediate relief such as ration kits and vessels, as well as helping with long term rehabilitation such as building houses, schools and helping people restart their livelihoods.

During the pandemic, when the film industry came to a standstill, Qube had zero business for two years with about 1,000 employees to support. At the same time, film industry workers who depend on daily wages faced the risk of starving with their families. With Mani Ratnam, Jayendra conceived the anthology *Navarasa* for Netflix. Everyone in the industry came together to do the project pro bono. A sum of Rs.

17 crores was raised through this initiative and given to the workers in the industry. Each worker was provided a preloaded credit card which could be used in grocery stores and was topped up with Rs. 1,500 every month for 6 months. The initiative covered 12,000 workers and the distribution of the cards was handled by Bhoomika.

Besides providing help during disasters, Bhoomika also offers scholarships and assistance to deserving students. Its initiative Let's Learn is a Remote Learning Program for Government School Children. It also has a learning platform for maths called “I Wanna Learn” in partnership with Altius Foundation. Bhoomika also has a division called True Gifts which provides a gifting alternative to celebrate weddings or other occasions – instead of material presents, you can gift a True Gift Certificate that informs the recipient that their special day was celebrated with the funding of a worthy cause such as a child's education or an eye surgery for a villager. The giftee is thrilled, of course, and a deserving cause is supported.

Jayendra is on the board of the Altius Foundation, which runs computer math labs in government schools; Jeevan, earlier a blood bank and now a public stem cell bank, crucial for treating blood cancer; and Sankara Eye Foundation, which performs free eye surgeries for the rural poor and runs ten hospitals across the country.

Friends mean a lot to Jayendra. His very close friend and classmate Sriram, married and

settled in Canada, died in a car accident on a visit to India. It shook Jayendra and disturbed him very much. Unable to see Sriram's wife Sudha and 2-year-old son Ashwin go through agony, he decided to visit them in Canada and see how he could help. During the visit, he ended up proposing to Sudha. The couple got married to her in February 1990, and the family returned to India. That was one of the best personal decisions Jayendra has ever taken in his life because not only are they happily married, but Sudha has also been a pillar of strength to him both in his professional and social activities. Sudha managed JS films, and later moved on to head Human Resources at Qube Cinema. She is a co-founder of Bhoomika Trust. She is equally involved in all social initiatives of Jayendra.

Another example relates to his dear friend Mahesh, a music director who had worked on many of his films. Mahesh died of cancer at a young age, leaving behind a will in which he had expressed a desire to help Adyar Cancer Institute. Jayendra and his friends started Mahesh Memorial Trust in 2002 and conducted a mega fundraising event with A.R Rahman offering his services for free. With the money thus raised, the Trust built the Paediatric Ward at the Cancer Institute, which it continues to support.

I have always admired Jayendra for his constant endeavor to innovate and also for his limitless energy for serving society. God bless him!

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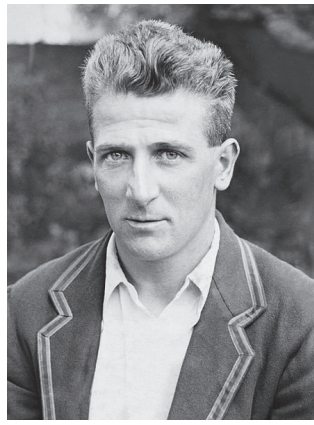
– THE EDITOR

# Chepauk – 90 years later

**With the opening ODI between India and Australia in the forthcoming series scheduled at Chepauk, for October 8 this year, we thought it is a good time to feature this story on the first official test that was played here, 89 years ago.**

The first official team to tour India, from the Marylebone Cricket Club, was Douglas Jardine's in 1934. It was his last series as Captain and

indeed, after the notorious Ashes tour of 1932/1933 where he had unleashed bodyline tactics against the Australians, using Harold Larwood as his hitman, everyone was keen to see him go. Jardine's team toured India and he succeeded in getting on everyone's nerves, including those of the Viceroy Lord Willingdon. In the end he did not return to England with his team, staying on in India for some time, this being the country of his birth and also because



Harold Larwood. Picture courtesy: Wikipedia.

he was attracted to Hinduism. At Chepauk, Jardine's team played three matches – the Europeans, the Governor's XI and the Presidency team – the last being the first Test to be played at Chepauk. The visitors won all three.

The mathematician Alladi Ramakrishnan, then 11, watched the Test and forty years later, claimed to remember "every ball and every stroke, the style and personality of various players of that famous test match at the MCC grounds in Madras in January 1934. I can still see before me (Nobby) Clarke the fast left arm bowler from Nottingham skittle the wicket as our local hero, (AG) Ramsingh nervously stepped back a few paces to avoid the whistling missile, the masculine Amarsingh, India's effective medium

pace bowler delighting the crowds with sparkling sixes, the elegant late cuts of (Fred) Bakewell who partnered the immaculate (Cyril) Walters as the opening batsman, the wily wizard and medium spinner (Hedley) Verity wiping out the Indian batsmen off the field and above all the imperterbable Jardine! And all this on one of the most beautiful cricket grounds in the world at Chepauk fringed by lush tropical trees, the spacious elegance of the MCC pavilion symbolising the leisured comfort of the English middle class for whom afternoon tea was the hallmark of a preserved way of life. The

the 1934 Test in Madras he took seven wickets giving only 12 to 28 runs apiece. He was the first Indian to be retained as a professional in England. A.G. Ram Singh is of course the local legend, still fondly remembered and the founder of the "first family of cricket" in Tamil Nadu. Though he did not play Test cricket, he dominated the Presidency matches and also had a very impressive Ranji record. "Playing 27 Ranji Trophy matches without a break, spread over fourteen seasons, he was the second cricketer, after the legendary Amar Singh to complete the double of 1,000 runs and 100

● Extracted from  
**175, Not Out! The History of the  
Madras Cricket Club**

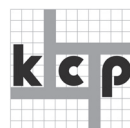
lowest ticket cost four annas which allowed one to watch either sitting or standing a few yards from the boundary line. The chairs near the pavilion cost Rs. 5 or Rs. 2 and Rs. 20 for the season and one could order lunch for Rs 3, served by bearers in colonial style." Two names deserve highlighting from the passage above. Amar Singh or Lala Amar Singh or Nakum Amar Singh Ladha, had he not died at the age of 29 or pneumonia, would have been a legend. In

wickets in the championship," writes Ramachandra Guha. Reverting to Alladi Ramakrishnan's memoirs, we find that the account concludes with the following statement – "Only a privileged few could sit inside the pavilion at a time when it was accepted as quite logical that English clubs would not admit native Indians as regular members." But then, even as the Test was being played, some of the MCC members appear to have had second thought about this apartheid.



Alladi Ramakrishnan from our Archives.

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