

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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# Fort St George to lose more heritage

– *The ASI is up to its usual denotification tactic*

Reliable sources have it that Fort St George is to soon be freed up of valuable space, occupied hitherto by unwanted heritage buildings. That these structures were anyway in various stages of decay is another matter altogether. By the simple expedient of denying them even basic maintenance, they have been brought to a state where it is easy to declare them structurally unsound and therefore demolition-worthy. That the Archaeological Survey of India has managed to take shelter under this expedient time and again, and get away with it, is shocking to say the least.

As many as three heritage structures within Fort St George are to be cleared away. The biggest is Wellesley's House, which remains partially standing, a section of it having collapsed in the early 1990s and allowed to remain as debris for over 25 years! The second is the so-called Clive's Library, in

the control of the Navy, which was held in place by a huge tree that grew out of it and which finally collapsed earlier this year. The third is an un-named barrack, which will apparently be demolished to make way for a car park. The status of the barrack is unclear but Wellesley's

● by **Sriram V.**

House and the Clive Library were 'protected monuments' as per the ASI. It should be noted here that yet another 'protected monument', namely Last House on Snob's Alley, collapsed last year.

There is now a pattern in the way Fort St George is being denuded of its heritage. The first is to clamp down on maintenance, barring the showpieces namely the Assembly and Secretariat, the Church of St Mary's, the ASI headquarters, Fort Museum, and a couple of buildings belonging to the army



Left top: Wellesley House, left bottom: Rear view of Kings Barrack. Above: Houses in state of collapse.

and navy. The rest rapidly go to seed and then are demolished. This was exactly how an entire area, namely Portuguese Square, was done away with in the 1980s to make way for the Namakkal Kavignar Maligai. Then Post Office Square, which was at the end of St Thomas' Street, and which was

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# The Marina Ropeway – Can we prioritise the basics instead?

Plans are afoot to establish a solar-powered ropeway along the Marina beach. The proposed project will stretch from Anna Square to the Lighthouse, with stations at Anna Square, Kannagi Statue, Vivekananda House and the Lighthouse. With the number of weekend visitors to the beach reportedly touching one

lakh, the project is expected to help manage crowds and also boost foreign tourism as the ropeway will offer passengers 'panoramic views of the coastline.' There are hopes too that it will emerge as a convenient mode of transport for commuters as the stretch will encompass an area dotted with public

● by **Varsha V.**

offices and colleges. The price of the project is pegged at Rs. 285 crores, of which consultancy services are estimated to cost Rs. 25 lakhs.

The proposal has met with mixed reactions, and rightly so. Ropeways are a sustainable and eco-friendly mode of transport at tourist spots, but a beach is a rather unusual choice to establish one in – they're usually operated across terrains that are difficult to navigate, like snowy landscapes, moun-

tains, hills or rivers. As for the touted panorama, while it is undeniable that an aerial view of the Marina Beach will make for a pretty sight, one can't help but point out that the city hasn't made the most of its terrestrial view in the first

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## FORT ST GEORGE TO LOSE MORE HERITAGE

(Continued from page 1)

perfectly clear of vegetation till the late 1990s, was allowed to go to seed leading to the collapse of the Parson's House and also much later, Last House. The flagstaff was cut into pieces and replaced by a steel mast and nobody knows where the remnants of the old one are. And in between we had the collapse of Wellesley's House. Going by this, historic King's Barracks is next in line given its state of maintenance.

That the ASI should choose to remain silent and watch all this happen is truly shocking. Surely its officials ought to be making a hue and cry about these developments and demanding funding for maintenance? And on what basis do they declare a building as being suitable for denotification? This procedure seems to be wrapped in masonic secrecy

and smacks of complete complicity with the other bigger and vested interests in the fort. A few months ago, it was reliably learnt that the Army was being pressured by the ASI to handover the buildings in their possession to it but they were resisting chiefly because they were concerned that the ASI would immediately denotify these structures and allow their demolition.

Fort St George, for all that it is a historic precinct and one that has been the seat of governance for three centuries, is not treated that way. The place is full of mounds of garbage, lacks basic amenities and wild vegetation, apart from places that see pedestrian and vehicular traffic. It is an apology for a heritage complex. And soon, we will have fewer markers left to show up its historicity.

## The Marina Ropeway – Can we prioritise the basics instead?

(Continued from page 1)

place. The beauty of the beach remains marred by litter and a profusion of vending stalls, not to mention ill-maintained public facilities. These must be addressed if Marina Beach is to acquire the much-coveted Blue Flag accreditation, a globally recognised certification of high environmental and quality standards. In fact, a recent Government Order has mandated the implementation of Blue Flag standards across much the same area as the proposed ropeway – Anna Square to the Lighthouse – and funds to the tune of Rs. 6 crores have reportedly been allocated for the exercise. Blue Flag plans are said to include the establishment of solid waste management and solar power plants as well as new toilets, changing rooms for men and women, and a jogging track. Additionally, the number of vendors will be culled to 900, in line with the Madras High Court order, and more dustbins will be installed to manage waste disposal. As such, the Blue Flag project appears to address fundamental barriers to tourism unlike the proposed ropeway.

As for the commuting services the new ropeway is expected to provide, multiple apprehensions arise. Will cable cars be able to withstand bad weather conditions at the beach, like cyclonic winds and rain? Also significant is the fact

that ropeway transport systems require regular, high-quality maintenance – an area in which the city's track record leaves much to be desired. It is also to be noted that the ongoing metro rail works already include the extension of services along the beach with a stop at the Lighthouse.

The idea of establishing a ropeway along the Marina Beach isn't new. It was initially proposed in 2022 under Singara Chennai 2.0 but failed to take off for reasons unknown. It has now resurfaced at a time when the administration already has its hands full with multiple large-scale civic projects, including at least one large proposal for the Marina Beach. Under the circumstances, it would be prudent to shelve new vanity projects and focus on resolving fundamental issues such as keeping the beach litter-free, augmenting public facilities like clean toilets and making provisions for drinking water. As for boosting tourism, there is much else that can be done at significantly lesser cost to the exchequer – for instance, there is scope to encourage water-based activities like boating or parasailing, or even to establish regular heritage walks in the area given that it has deep cultural and historical significance. The world's second-longest beach doesn't need an expensive ropeway to attract tourists. We just need to get the basics in place.

## Stand Aside MMM!

**T**he Man from Madras Musings is not sure about you lovely people out there but in matters of deadlines, MMM is of the kind who likes to plan well in advance and ensure everything is in order. In this he differs markedly from his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, for whom last minute chaos is the preferred modus operandi. That she manages to meet all her commitments, and often better than MMM despite all his planning is of course a tribute to her ways of getting things done – chiefly through her eye like Mars, which threatens and commands.

But this episode has nothing to do with She. MMM was travelling by flight, and two days before his journey completed check in, received the e-boarding pass and tried

repeating the query no matter how often the mom tried to shush it. After everyone else had boarded and MMM was left like Mariana of the Moated Grange, three senior officials came – all apologetic. There was some glitch when MMM had checked in online they said, and he had been checked out by the software but no worries, for his ticket was not cancelled and so he could board. This happens they said, when you check in too far ahead of the flight. They were very contrite and so decided that they all needed to accompany MMM to his seat.

And so it was that a procession of five – two security officials leading the way, MMM in the middle, and two bringing up the rear, came on board a full flight. There were

Musings is viewed with suspicion for no reason. Close on the heels of the above incident, MMM was returning to our beloved city on another flight (he does get around quite a bit does he not?) and met a close friend on board. She very kindly offered to drop MMM at his house as her chauffeur was coming to receive her anyway. MMM accepted gratefully.

The journey home was uneventful except that just within a few hundred feet of chez MMM, the driver decided to jump a traffic light, and the car was duly scooped up by the long arm of the law. The policeman in charge strolled up to the driver, asked him to lower his window and gave him a long lecture on obeying rules of the road. All the while he kept gazing at

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

to upload it on the digiyatra app only to find it being rejected repeatedly, much to the puzzlement of MMM, upload he no matter how wisely. MMM, in the midst of many other pressing matters forgot all about it and on the day of the journey reached the airport, was allowed in on the strength of the e-boarding pass, and not having any baggage to check in, reached the boarding gate in good order.

It was only when boarding was announced that trouble began. MMM joined the queue and on reaching the kiosk where they check your boarding passes before allowing you to get on the bus, was asked to stand aside. MMM, being of the law-abiding kind, duly did. Other passengers filed past, several giving MMM a pitying and sometimes suspicious look, curious no doubt to know on what grounds he was being detained. But all was well shortly thereafter and MMM was waved on, and he too boarded the bus, fully aware that by now he was being eyed askance by several in the vehicle.

At the boarding point, the same drama was repeated. The airline staffer looked at MMM's boarding pass, registered dismay and then having looked MMM up and down, asked MMM if he would kindly step aside to allow others to board. By now, the whispers were becoming loud. A kid with a squeaky voice asked its mother if that uncle was a hijacker and kept

loud buzzes of conversation as MMM was escorted to his seat and the officials left. The flight took off amidst an atmosphere of tension. Fortunately it was a short one and landing was soon announced. But just before that, the airhostess came along and in a hushed whisper asked MMM if he would care to stand by once the aircraft had landed. MMM being of the law-abiding kind, as said earlier, agreed.

But he had to get up as there were passengers seated to his right who could not be kept waiting. And so MMM walked up to the airhostess and waited by her side even as the passengers filed past. One of them suddenly said in a loud voice to his companion that he had recognised MMM and this was the man who spouts on city history. The other, imagining that she was whispering wondered as to what MMM had done.

MMM too had the same query. The air hostess fished out a beautiful greeting card.

"We have seen you often on this route sir," she said. "And so, season's greetings."

MMM accepted the card gratefully and left. But he would have much preferred being given it in front of all other passengers and not in such a cloak-and-dagger fashion.

### Discretion, the better part of valour

**T**his is that fortnight when The Man from Madras

MMM, in the hope no doubt that MMM would join in, so that 'commercial' negotiations could begin.

MMM preferred to remain silent. The way he reasoned it out was like this – here was he, MMM, being driven home in a car that was not his, by a driver who was not his employee and in the company of a woman who was linked to him only by ties of friendship. MMM felt all of this put him in a very weak spot, and policemen, coloured in their views by the nature of their profession, are apt to be suspicious. And so MMM remained silent.

The driver got off and went away with the policeman to a nearby tree and from where MMM sat he could see fierce negotiations ongoing, punctuated every now and then by the policeman gazing hopefully at MMM. But no, MMM was sphinx-like. Eventually, tiring of the hold up, MMM's friend got off the car, strode up to the policeman and with a few straight words settled matters. The trio was soon back and the policeman, all smiles now, waved the car onwards, but not before remarking that it was strange that the Ayya did not say anything or react in any way. He must have no doubt thought that MMM was a prize imbecile who preferred to let others deal with matters that he ought to be concerned over.

– MMM

## OUR READERS WRITE



### Stop it

They start their rounds early in the morning, around 5 am. They appear every fifteen or twenty minutes, going round and round, one after the other; they make an unbearable noise and spew the air with dirt and gaseous pollutants. Many road rage deaths take place, to boot. We're talking about the heavy-duty concrete mixer lorries that ply on both the main roads and the service roads. Each trip they make garners the owners enormous profits at the cost of the public and others who use the streets.

We were under the impression that roads are meant to facilitate the transport of goods and people, commuters and pedestrians alike! I wonder whether these concrete mixers pay exorbitant road taxes to ply; but even very high rates do not justify the presence of these heavily polluting vehicles on public roads when they can do their business at their respective sites. They're simply another contributor to global warming – a phrase that makes people look at the sky, each of us conveniently forgetting our own role in the matter.

Globally, each country promises to reduce their contribution to global warming by a certain percentage within a certain period, India included. I wonder whether these targets are also defined at the state level - it must be, for all-India targets cannot be arrived at without state-level targets – and if so, what is TN's share and how is the state to achieve it? At any rate, stopping these monstrous vehicles from plying on the roads will certainly contribute to the cause, and as such should be our immediate aim. Stop it now.

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### Elusive officials

While the websites of Greater Chennai Corporation, Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Tangedco provide the names and mobile numbers of key officials with a view to help the public to get in touch with them in case of any issues, the reality is that most of them do not even pick up the calls.

Even when a WhatsApp message is sent, one does not get a reply. While it is incumbent upon them to respond to calls as they are public servants, do they think that it is below their prestige to talk to the public? The officials must remember that they get paid for the so called 'services' they render from the taxpayers money. The officials are supposed to act as a bridge between the government and the public but in effect they keep aloof from the public. This does not augur well for the functioning of the government which is wedded to the welfare of the public. The same applies to the elected representatives such as councillors, MLAs and MPs.

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## Website Comments

### Heritage Watch: Once Upon a Bank Building

(Vol. XXXIV No. 16, December 1-15, 2024)

Sir, the old picture must be a photograph taken around 1855. The church at the far end is the college chapel of the Madras Christian College. The Anderson church was constructed around 1859 above the Octagonal structure before it.

Parantharami Mani  
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**Editor's Note:** While we agree with reader Parantharami Mani on the chronology, we would like to point out that the Agra Bank building featured in the photo was completed only in 1871 and so that photo must certainly date after that. And so it is very likely that the church is Anderson's Church.

### Notification of apartment development rules paves the way for residential benefits

(Vol. XXXIV No. 15, November 16-30, 2024)

While the new Apartments Act is helpful, Tamil Nadu must follow the rules of Maharashtra where the land belongs to the Association. For some apartments in Chennai constructed about 40 years back, the UDS has not been calculated properly.

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## Seeing the world in a better light



As I sit down to write about Ravi and Rani, the quote 'Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about,' comes to mind. So if everyone has to be treated with kindness, what is special about Ravi and Rani who live in Shenoy Nagar as I do, and are also in their late 50s and early 60s? The couple are visually impaired and cannot see me, who has been their friend for more than 20 years. If I see Ravi walking in the neighbourhood – by which I mean taking one cautious step at a time – and decide to not help, he must walk on by himself. Would you believe that some people cluck their tongues in disapproval to see them stepping out of the confines of their house and walking alone in the open? It isn't unusual for them to get hurt in the bargain. Despite this, the couple – who live alone – do not rue their fate and stay indoors. They have the courage to step out to go to work, buy groceries, or collect the government's monthly maintenance allowance from the PO. They accept help when it is extended to them but have learnt to be independent and tend to their cooking and cleaning over the years. The number of blind persons in the city may not be large, but even so, the awareness of their needs is abysmal.

Around 1971, a temple priest – the go-to person in villages who helps people with various ailments – squeezed lime juice into Rani's eyes and damaged her sight; and in 1993, a pastor hurt Ravi's eyes with his nails and damaged what little vision he had. Mind you, both incidents were meant to invoke the curative powers of God.

On the brighter side, it was the village school's headmaster who went to much effort to take Rani from near Arcot and enrol her in the Government Higher Secondary School for the Blind at Poonamallee.

"In 1993, I worked for a week at the Madras Institute to Habilitate Retarded Afflicted (MITHRA) near Shenoy Nagar, which schools children whose brain, limbs and speech are impaired and are barely functional. I felt I was in a much better place," Rani told me. She continues to work there in the envelope-making unit and in addition mentors children with mental and physical disabilities. She has successfully completed a telephone operator's course and is a craftsperson.

Some things help ease the challenges faced by the blind - the other senses of perception they possess, modern technology, and societal awareness. When the last one is lacking, even the educated among the blind become vendors on trains because employers shun them, Ravi and Rani tell me. So much for the aspirations of the blind to be treated with dignity! When the couple were looking for a house in October 2020, one of the reluctant owners checked with Rani's employers whether the couple could keep the house clean. Their own rundown 223 sqft one-room flat has been demolished and is being reconstructed by the Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board (formerly Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Housing Board). There, it was more often than not the 'rowdies' who helped them carry water to the third floor. The two observe that it is the people in the suburbs, not in the well-to-do neighbourhoods, who help and are sensitive to their needs - such as reading to them documents that are available only as written or printed text and not in braille. Ravi has completed a course in Light Engineering, and teaches spoken English and learns Hindi online. Screen reading software has emerged as a boon that helps them use computers and smartphones.

I recently Whatsapp'd Ravi the song Que Sera Sera from the film *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956). He sent me back an old Tamil film song from the 1957 film *Aravalli*, which was inspired by the former. During my visit to their place when it was time to take leave, Ravi used the Uber app to book a motorbike to take me home. So much for friendships that help them see the world in a better light. Ravi can be contacted on 9841394775/helloegravi@gmail.com.

T.K. Srinivas Chari

## The Charm of Ponytails: A Perspective on Individuality and Imitation

One fine morning, my daughter Meenakshi stood before me, her eyes gleaming with determination.

"None of the kids in my class have a ponytail," she declared. "I want a nice ponytail coming right out the back." There was something endearing about her request. It was a pure expression of self-confidence and expressed a desire to be herself. So, with a gentle touch and a mother's love, I gave her the ponytail she wanted. It was proud and playful, a reflection of her individuality.

When Meenakshi went to school, the reaction was sharp and immediate. "Ugly, ugly, very ugly," her classmates chanted. Yet, an unshaken Meenakshi responded, "It's my ponytail, and I like it." Her words were simple, yet they carried the strength of self-assurance. But what happened the next day surprised us both. When Meenakshi walked into her classroom, she found every girl sporting a ponytail just like hers. Archana, one of her peers, couldn't help but exclaim, "You're all a bunch of copycats. You do whatever I do."

This little story, while charming, reveals a deeper truth about why girls – and perhaps children in general – are drawn to something as seemingly simple as a ponytail. It isn't just about the hairstyle itself; it's about what it represents. For some like Meenakshi, a ponytail is a personal choice, a way to express themselves. It's a little banner of confidence, tied up neatly with an elastic band. For others, it is a symbol of belonging. Imitating a trend can be a way to connect and feel included in the invisible bonds of shared style.

But why do girls – and children especially – care so much about these expressions of individuality and imitation? It's because growing up is a journey of finding who you are while figuring out how to fit in. A ponytail can be both a declaration of "Look at me!" and a whisper of "Am I part of the group?" As a parent, I see this dance between individuality and conformity play out often. Meenakshi's ponytail taught me that encouraging self-expression doesn't just empower a child – it also sets an example for others to follow. It's a small but beautiful reminder that individuality, when embraced confidently, can spark a chain reaction of self-acceptance and creativity. So, why do girls like ponytails? Perhaps it's because, whether worn proudly or in imitation, they carry the power to unite us through a shared language of style while celebrating the unique charm of every individual who wears them.

– by Priyanka Soman



# Mysore Vasudevachar at Kalakshetra

DECEMBER MUSIC SEASON  
SPECIAL

Three generations of ardent connoisseurs of the Kalakshetra Ramayana productions say they feel a thrill when the first lines of the Balakanda of the *Ramayana* are sung at Kalakshetra's Sita Swayamvaram in the *Ramayana* series.

"When Veena Sambasiva Iyer heard this song, he said to Vasudevacharya, "If only I were a Maharaja, I would present you one crore of rupees for just that composition alone." So *Ramayana* began under such tremendous auspices," Rukmini Devi Arundale wrote in her tribute to Mysore Vasudevachar during his centenary celebrations.

He was 88 years old when Rukmini Devi went to Mysore to invite him to come to Madras to compose music for the production of the Valmiki Ramayana that she wanted to choreograph. When she enquired if he could come, he replied, "Certainly I will come, but I must make sure that His Highness the Maharaja would allow me to go because my first duty is to him." When Rukmini Devi asked him if he would come if the Maharaja allowed him, Vasudevachar said, "Of course, I will come, but even then, I shall consider myself an *asthana vidwan* of Mysore."

It was Tiger Varadachariar who had spoken to Rukmini Devi Arundale about Mysore Vasudevachar. She had asked him if there was anyone else besides him who truly represented the music of Patnam Subramania Iyer, the great composer of the 19th century. He answered that there was only one such *sisya*, and it was Mysore Vasudevachar. Within a few days after this conversation, Tiger Varadachariar came rushing to her, saying that Vasudevachar was in Madras. Rukmini Devi writes that she was witness to the most beautiful way in which the two great *vidwans* greeted each other, prostrating each before the other. She was completely charmed by him. Vasudevachar turned out to be easily approachable, humorous and a gracious individual. At his concert at the Madras Madhwa Sangha, his music thrilled her. She writes, "His voice was full life and grace and his singing with such a strong voice, in perfect adherence to pitch was most remarkable considering his age. Not only this, he sang with the greatest ease so that one had the feeling that one could go home and sing exactly the same way. This feeling he always conveyed



Mysore K. Vasudevacharya.

even at the age of 96 when he was still singing. Only when one tried, did one find how deceptive this ease was. I told Tiger that we must somehow see that Vasudevacharya was invited to sing in Adyar."

Vasudevachar sang at the Sangita Shiromani concert in Adyar with complete mastery. His *tanam* was marvellous, describes Rukmini Devi and that she had never heard the likes of that before or after. Vasudevachar was able to produce more sound effects with his voice than Tiger himself who told Rukmini Devi that this was the real ancient way of singing *tanam*.

Tiger had wished that Vasudevachar should come to Kalakshetra while he was there, but unfortunately, this did not happen because Vasudevachar could not live in Madras without some member of his family to look after him. After Tiger passed away, Rukmini Devi went to Mysore to personally invite Vasudevachar. When he wanted

his grandson S. Rajaram to come with him, she moved heaven and earth and got Rajaram, who was working as a jalatarangam artist in AIR-Dharwad, a transfer to All India Radio-Madras.

At the age of 88, in 1953, Vasudevachar arrived in Kalakshetra and was housed in Krishna cottage in Damodar Gardens. After acclimatizing himself to the atmosphere of Kalakshetra, he got inspired and began composing for *Valmiki Ramayana*. He always impressed upon his grandson Rajaram that the work being done in Kalakshetra, had a divine purpose.

His way of teaching was charming and simple in many ways, and he was very particular, no matter how advanced his pupils were in music, that they should sing the fundamental exercises. He had many original, clever ways of teaching his pupils, and he would quote from the ancient works bringing the *sastras* alive for the students. Soon he became the beloved 'Pachchai



With a galaxy of administrators, teachers and students at Kalakshetra in 1959. Sitting second row L to R: V.P. Dhananjayan, D. Pasupathi, Rukmini Devi, Mysore Vasudevachar, Mylapore Gowri Ammal.

Thatha' to all the students and teachers of Kalakshetra because of the green shawl he wore on his shoulder; the great *vainika* Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer was the 'Sivappu or Scippu Thatha' for his red shawl! While young students like C.P. Shanta would walk to their class in front of his cottage, he would teach them small songs in Kannada with rhythm. Rukmini Devi writes that the enjoyment he showed in teaching was remarkable, and he put his whole heart and mind into his teaching. He would wait for the students and would be disappointed if they did not come on time. V.P. Dhananjayan recalls playing the *tambura* while others were learning from *thatha*, and he would get a whack if a student made a mistake as he was the closest sitting near him! M.S. Subbulakshmi came to Kalakshetra to learn *thatha's* composition *Brochevarevarura* from him. Playing the *tambura* in those classes was a special privilege for these sessions.

Early students of Kalakshetra describe Vasudevachar as a meticulous man. He would carefully pick up the *tambura* with remarkable grace, look at it, wipe it with great affection with a cloth

and then tune it with devotion. While tuning, nothing short of perfection would do. Every bead must be in its place, all in a row; not placed up and down untidily. The threads for giving *jiva* to the strings had also to be aesthetic and beautiful in the right and harmonious colours. The pupils too had to maintain their posture in a graceful and dignified manner worthy of the music. Slouching, leaning on the *tambura* or beating the *tala* on the *tambura* were all anathema to

● by  
V.R. Devika

him. Rukmini Devi says that for Vasudevachar, *bhava* or emotion was the life and soul of music. To that end, he channelled all his efforts in untiringly demonstrating to his pupils so that they could absorb from him what he had absorbed from his guru Patnam Subramania Iyer.

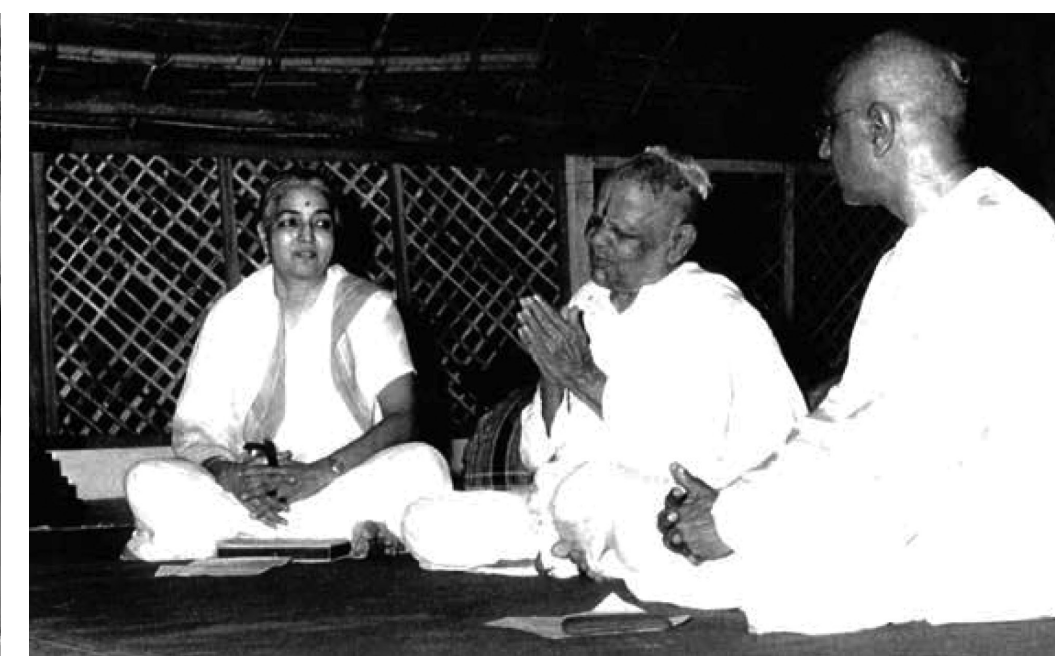
The Maharaja of Mysore, Jayachamaraja Wodeyar had a soft corner for Vasudevachar and remembered him affectionately.

He was a student of Vasudevachar and recalled that nothing gave his guru greater pleasure than talking about the subtleties of music and musical compositions. The Maharaja observed during the centenary celebra-

tions of Mysore Vasudevachar, "He would be the first to join any cultural group that chose to discuss music. He always preferred to be a *nadopasaka* (worshipper of music), which made him obey the traditional laws of *sadachara*



Sankara Menon, Mysore Vasudevachar and Rukmini Devi.



With Musiri Subramania Iyer and Rukmini Devi.

(righteousness) scrupulously. When he was not composing, the *acharya* chose to read a Sanskrit classic or a literary work of a high order in the regional language." The Maharaja also said that his guru's scholarship and artistic sensibilities enabled him to impart the necessary literary touch to his compositions, which made them most charming. The Maharaja spoke about the two books Vasudevachar wrote in Kannada: *Naa Kanda Kalavidaru* (Artists I have seen) after turning 90 and *Nenapugalu* (Memories) at the ripe old age of 96! Musiri Subramania Iyer has described his association with Vasudevachar

describing how each *sangati* composed by Vasudevachar expressed the details of the mood in the lyrics of the composition. He marvels about the simplicity of *thatha* who would wash his own clothes even at the age of 95 not allowing anyone else to do so. Vasudevachar unfortunately passed away after composing the music for only four of the six Ramayana productions at Kalakshetra, ending with Sabari Moksham. Rukmini Devi was devastated. She recounts the last music class she had with him. He told her that the last song he would be teaching her was *Sankarinee* in Begada. He was becoming very weak due to old age. But after what was supposed to be her last class, he asked her to attend some more classes. He told her that he could not live without teaching. He developed fever and when she went to see him, he held both her hands and told her not to expect anything more from him in this life. She however remarked that she expected him to complete his century. He smiled and began to sing the *Viriboni varnam* in *Bhairavi* and demonstrated how Patnam Subramania Iyer sang it. The last thing he said was that he wanted to live because he wanted to go once more to Tirupati and sing. Unfortunately, that wish could not be fulfilled.

On 17 May 1961, he continued with his daily routine. After his morning *sandhyavandanam*, he taught a student called Indrani, his favourite *Ata tala varnam* in *Bhairavi*. After lunch, he recited the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the evening, some of his scholar friends came to chat with him.

They all conversed happily and in earnest until 7 pm; there was plenty of humour, as expected.

As the friends departed, Vasudevachar summoned Budalur Krishnamurthy, the veteran artiste and told him that the purpose of his birth had been fulfilled. He told him that he would be departing soon and requested him to convey his last *pranams* to all the music greats however younger or older than him, they may be. "Maybe Sarada Devi may grant music to me at least in future!"

Budalur, on his part, told Vasudevachar not to talk like that and that they would celebrate his century. Vasudevachar then asked Dr. Gopalan, "Doctor, how is my health?" The doctor smiled and said, "You have perfect health *Thatha*. Hundred years guaranteed. All parameters are fine."

Vasudevachar smiled and replied that he was well aware that he would get this positive reply till he closed his eyes. After the 7.30 pm *mangala arati* was performed in his puja altar, he went for a short walk and came back. He told his daughter-in-law that he was not hungry and would drink just a glass of milk. At 8.25 pm he called out to Rajaram to bring his *tambura* and asked him to sing as he himself lay on the mat listening to the sound of the *tambura*. He propped up but exclaimed that he was feeling slightly giddy. He then lay down and took a deep breath – his last, even as the room was filled with the sweet *sruti* emanating from the *tambura*. – (Courtesy: *Sruti Magazine*, August 2022.)



# Portrait of a Chief Justice

(Continued from  
last fortnight)

## The Memoirs of Justice Natarajan, Part III

The fourth Judge, but by no means the least among the eminent personages with whom I had sat, is Chief Justice K. Veeraswamy. He succeeded Chief Justice M. Ananthanarayanan in the middle of 1969. While practising as a lawyer, he had served as Government Pleader and was then elevated to the Bench. In the course of time, he attained seniority and became the Chief Justice. He was a very competent Judge who knew all branches of law. He was extraordinary skilled at grasping the arguments of lawyers, and he could straightaway go to the crux of the matter even in complicated Civil, Constitutional and Taxation Law Cases. In addition to being a versatile Judge, he had the capacity to dictate judgements extempore on the Bench itself, as soon as the hearing of a case was over. Because of all this, there was no need for the lawyers to argue for long, even in complicated cases. Another remarkable feature was that all his judgements were short and brief. Where others would have dictated a judgement running to six or seven pages, Justice Veeraswamy would render his in two or two and half pages without sacrificing any of the relevant details of the case, the arguments put forward by the counsel, the questions of law involved in the matter, and the rationale laid down in earlier judgements of the Supreme Court, High Courts, etc., in similar cases. His legal acumen and competence and capacity were appreciated and respected by all members of the Bar, including giants in the legal profession.

The working hours in the High Court are from 10:45 am to 1:15 pm, and from 2:15 pm to 4:15 pm. However, Justice Veeraswamy took his seat in Court only at about 11:15 am, and rose by about 1:00 or 1:15 pm. He would again take his seat in Court at 3:00 pm and rise at 4:00 pm. Despite his late sitting and early rising, his disposal would be in the hundreds. That was because of his extraordinary capacity to go into the heart of the matter in every case and

deliver judgements immediately after the hearing was over. He never shirked taking up heavy and complicated cases involving constitutional issues or intricate questions of law.

Though Chief Justice Veeraswamy was such a competent and learned Judge, he was accused of one failing: Judges and members of the Bar felt that he did not respect the junior Judge sitting with him in the First Bench of the High Court, and that therefore it was a one-man show. In fact, V. K. Thiruvengkatachari, Advocate General, used to make fun of his treatment of his brother Judges by saying that any decision rendered by Justice Veeraswamy in the First Bench of the High Court could be overruled only by an 11-Judge Bench, joking that Justice Veeraswamy was number 1 and his brother Judge was zero, and therefore the first Bench consisted of 10 Judges, hence the judgements of that Court could be overruled only by an 11-Judge Bench!

It was, and continues to be, the practice for the Chief Justice of a High Court to make his brother Judges sit in rotation with him in the First Court and decide cases. My tum to sit with the Chief Justice came after two and a half years of my elevation. Some members of the Bar and a few of the Judges warned that I would be a mere dummy in the Court, and that I should therefore give some excuse and avoid sharing the First Bench with him. I felt that since the choice of constituting Benches is with the Chief Justice, I could not plead any excuse, and that it was up to me to see to it that my dignity as a junior Judge of the First Bench was not degraded in any manner. Brother Judges and members of the Bar were not convinced by my assurance.

On the very first day I sat with Chief Justice Veeraswamy in the First Court, we heard several matters. After hearing the cases, the Chief Justice dictated the judgements in open court. In one case, I noticed that he made a mistake in the statement of facts and the plea of the appellant before the lower Court. However, I could not correct that mistake immediately, because the correction in open court would have interrupted the dictation of the judgement. During lunchtime,

the stenographer brought the judgements dictated by the Chief Justice to my chambers for my signature. The practice was for the Chief Justice to sign the judgements and then send them to the junior Judge for his signature. When the judgement relating to this particular case was given to me, I told the stenographer that I would sign it after discussing the matter with the Chief Justice. The stenographer was aghast, and told me that it was a judgement of the Chief Justice and that I had no option but to sign it. I pointed out to him that it was a judgement of two Judges, though dictated by one, and that I would not sign unless the error contained in it was rectified. I then called my stenographer and dictated the relevant portion in the judgement which required to be corrected. I took the typed note to the Chief Justice and pointed out that there was an error in his judgement which needed correction. He was visibly annoyed and told me that he had never dictated an erroneous judgement, and that he read the papers relating to each case thoroughly. I told him that I had no doubt about it, but I too read the papers thoroughly, and there was a factual mistake which required correction, for otherwise the judgement would be flawed. He took the note prepared by me with contemptuous reluctance and said he would look into it at home. The next morning, when we assembled in his chambers, he profusely apologised, thanked me for pointing out the mistake in the judgement, and told me that thereafter if there was any correction to be made, I could do it myself without referring the matter to him. I told him that that was not the correct way of doing things, because I too could commit mistakes, and that if at all any were found in future, I would bring it to his notice and have the matter set right. From that incident onwards, Justice Veeraswamy gave me all the respect and consideration which a junior Judge sitting with him in the First Court was entitled to have.

In fact, there were some more occasions where Chief Justice Veeraswamy's special treatment of me was evident. In the First Bench of the High Court, Writ Appeals against



Chief Justice K. Veeraswamy. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

Orders passed by single Judges in Writ Petitions come up for admission. If there was merit, the Writ Appeal would be admitted. Otherwise it would be refused admission and dismissed. Before I joined the Chief Justice's Bench, I was told that the admissions and dismissals of Writ Appeals were a one-man show, i.e. the Chief Justice alone decided whether a Writ Appeal should be admitted or dismissed. However, after I started sitting with him, there were occasions when my views differed from those of the Chief Justice. Whenever a Writ Appeal deserving admission was called, and the lawyer stood up to present the appellant's case, I used to gently tell the Chief Justice that there was some merit in the Appeal and that the matter required consideration. He would then grant admission to that Writ Appeal. On one occasion, V. P. Raman, Senior Counsel, started arguing a Writ Appeal for admission. The Chief Justice told him that he did not see any merit in that Appeal. Notwithstanding such a statement by the Chief Justice, I told him that there was some force in the contentions and that the Writ Appeal could

be given admission for further consideration of the matter. The Chief Justice then told the Counsel in open court as follows:

*Well Mr. Raman, I do not see any merit in the Writ Appeal, but my brother sitting with me feels that it deserves consideration. I am therefore admitting the Writ Appeal for detailed hearing."*

All the lawyers in the Court were surprised, if not stunned, by what the Chief Justice said. Later, I came to know that never before had the Chief Justice said in open court that in spite of his own views, he was granting admission to a Writ Appeal just because the junior Judge sitting with him felt that the Writ Appeal deserved admission. From that time onwards, the lawyers openly stated that I was not a silent member of the First Bench headed by the Chief Justice.

In yet another incident, the Chief Justice treated me differently and paid heed to my suggestions. In a matter relating to the State Housing Board, a Writ Petition had been filed against its officials for violation of rules and procedure. The

(Continued on page 7)

# PORTRAIT OF A CHIEF JUSTICE

(Continued from page 6)

Writ Petition was heard by Justice Ismail, and he allowed the Writ Petition. He also passed strictures against the State Housing Board officials. The State Housing Board preferred a Writ Appeal, and Govind Swaminadhan, Advocate General, appeared for the Writ Appellants. He raised a point which had not been urged before the learned single Judge. It was a very valid one, and on that ground we allowed the Writ Appeal. When the Chief Justice was about to conclude the judgement, Mr. Govind Swaminadhan said that the learned single Judge had unnecessarily passed strictures against the State Housing Board officials and sought that they be set aside by the Appellate Court. Immediately the Chief Justice, without consulting me, added a few more lines as follows:

*It has been the tradition and practice of this Court not to pass strictures unnecessarily, because harsh words break no bones. Therefore, we direct expungement of the strictures from the judgement of the learned single Judge.*

After the judgment was typed, the Chief Justice signed the same, and the stenographer brought it to me for my signature. I took the judgement to the Chief Justice after the lunch interval and told him

that the portion relating to the expunging of strictures against the State Housing Board officials did not need to be there, because we were allowing the Writ Appeal on a new point which was not raised before the single Judge. I further told the Chief Justice that perhaps, on the materials placed before him, the learned single Judge may have been justified in passing the strictures. I also told the Chief Justice that Justice Ismail, who had passed the strictures, already had a grievance about the Chief Justice, who had written in an earlier Writ Appeal (decided before I joined the First Bench) that "Writ jurisdiction should not be exercised in a hackneyed manner." That observation was made regarding a case where a Writ Petition had been allowed by Justice Ismail but later dismissed by the First Bench in Writ Appeal. Justice Ismail had taken this remark to heart, and said in open court several times that he only knew how to exercise Writ jurisdiction in a hackneyed manner, and that if anyone felt aggrieved by his orders they may go in Writ Appeal to the First Bench and have justice done to him. I mentioned this fact to the Chief Justice, and suggested that the offending portion in the Writ Appeal judgement be deleted. Justice Veeraswamy looked at

me for a minute or two and said, "Judge, you are right." He then took his pen and struck off those two or three lines, and asked me whether I was satisfied with the correction in the judgement. I thanked him for the correction and signed it.

In the evening, while returning home, Justice Ismail asked me whether we, i.e. the First Bench, had sermonised in our judgement that his remarks against the State Housing Board officials were not justified and that harsh words break no bones. Obviously, some lawyers who were present in the First Court and had heard what the Chief Justice had dictated had carried tales to Justice Ismail during the lunch interval. I assured him that the First Bench had not made any such remarks, and that I would have the judgement sent to him for his perusal. The next morning, I called for the judgement and sent it to Justice Ismail. He was surprised to find that the offending two or three lines had been scored off and initialled by the Chief Justice. Justice Ismail then told me that he could hardly believe his eyes, because he was of opinion that the Chief Justice was so arrogant and self-opinionated that he would not change any portion of his judgement for the sake of anyone. Thereafter, Justice Ismail also began to tell other Judges that I was perhaps the only junior Judge in the High Court who could make Justice Veeraswamy change his opinion or make changes in his judgements.

Justice Veeraswamy could have and should have gone to the Supreme Court, as he was a fairly senior High Court Chief Justice. However, he was an egoist and did not want to give up his primacy of place in the High Court and become one among the 21 Judges (the then strength) of the Supreme Court. He always used to say that "Chief Justice is Chief Justice," and perhaps therefore he felt that he would lose his importance and individuality if he went to the Supreme Court. He was thoroughly wrong in his opinion, because a judge of the Supreme Court, though equivalent in rank to a Chief Justice of a High Court, enjoys a slightly higher status and can be in office till the age of 65, unlike

Chief Justices and Judges of the High Court who can remain in office only till 62. Judgements of the Supreme Court are the final verdict in any case, and they are binding on all the High Courts in India and become the law of the land. On the other hand, a judgement of the High Court will have binding force only in the state where the High Court is situated, and therefore may or may not be accepted by other High Courts. From that point of view, the Supreme Court has a special status as the Apex Court of the country."

In not going to the Supreme Court, Justice Veeraswamy erred in more ways than one. As Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, he purchased a house in Kodaikanal and renovated it. During his frequent trips there, he took a liking to a woman belonging to a different caste and married her, an act that was questioned, by his family and friends, the judiciary and the public. On top of this, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) also started an investigation against him for acquiring assets beyond his known sources of income. In spite of the CBI investigation, he might have been allowed to continue in office till his retirement in April, 1976, if his son-in-law Justice V. Ramaswamy and some over-zealous lawyers not initiated moves to install a life-size marble statue of him in the High Court premises at the time of his retirement. The news of this move reached the Supreme Court, and the Chief Justice of India came down heavily and asked Justice Veeraswamy to go on leave at once in February or March, 1976. He had to comply, and then he was prosecuted under the Prevention of Corruption Act. After a long number of years, he was cleared of the charges framed against him. Thus came to an inglorious end the judicial career of Justice Veeraswamy.

Though I had high regard and respect for Justice Veeraswamy, I had the unpleasant task of heading a Full Bench which was constituted to hear a petition filed by him for quashing the FIR filed against him by the CBI. I must mention this very special case from my tenure of office as a Judge of the High Court. The matter was referred to a Full Bench of three Judges

headed by me. Justice Mohan and Justice V. Balasubramaniam were the other two Judges in the Full Bench.

There were six Judges senior to me, namely Chief Justice Rama Prasad Rao, Justice M.M. Ismail, Justice P.R. Gokulakrishnan, Justice G. Ramanujam, Justice V. Ramaswamy, and Justice C.J.R. Paul. Normally, the Full Bench should have been constituted with three Senior Judges, headed by the senior-most judge, but for one reason or the other, the seniors did not want to hear the case. Of course, Justice V. Ramaswamy could not have been a member of the Full Bench, because Chief Justice Veeraswamy was his father-in-law. Thus, it came to be that I was asked by Chief Justice Rama Prasad Rao to head the Full Bench. The members of the Full Bench took up the assignment because we felt we were not called upon to decide whether the Chief Justice had acquired assets disproportionate to his earnings or not, but only to give a finding on the constitutional and legal questions raised by him. There was also the fact that our decision would not be the final verdict in the case, because the matter would be taken to the Supreme Court by one party or the other. So our Full Bench heard the case and decided by a 2:1 majority (Justice Mohan and I constituting the majority and Justice Balasubramaniam constituting the minority) that the FIR could not be quashed, and the investigation had to be proceeded with. Years later, the majority view taken by me and Justice S Mohan was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Reference to Chief Justice Veeraswamy will not be complete if I do not mention that despite all this, he took the judgement in the correct spirit and did not feel embittered and continued to have a cordial relationship with me. This was perhaps because he had realised that his petition for quashing the FIR filed by the CBI was not a legally sustainable one. He attended my Satabhishekam (80th birthday rituals) and blessed me with long life and good health. I too reciprocated his good feelings by attending the wedding reception of his son and congratulating the couple.

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– THE EDITOR



# When W.V. Raman broke a 44-year old record

In 1944-45 Rusi Modi amassed 1,008 runs during the Ranji Trophy season while playing for Bombay. It was a stupendous feat for he played only five matches. This not only set a new record for the premier national competition but also turned out to be 'Mission Impossible' for the batsmen who followed. Over the next 43 years even with the proliferation of matches no other batsmen came close to it though several breached the 800-run mark. Finally in 1988-89 Madras-born W.V. Raman did the impossible – he surpassed Modi's long standing record.

A left-handed batsman and a left arm spin bowler the tall and talented Raman first attracted notice with his bowling skills after making his Ranji Trophy debut as a 17-year-old in the 1982-83 season. In fact he earned the distinction of dismissing the great Viv Richards not once but twice. The first time was in 1983-84 while playing for the Indian Under-22 side against the touring West Indians. Raman bowled him for one and four years later he got rid of the great man for six when he came over as captain of the next touring West Indian squad while playing for the Board President's XI.

All this time Raman's batting too was improving and a notable feat came about in

1986-87 when he and Bharat Arun added 221 runs for the seventh wicket in the Duleep trophy final against West Zone to help South Zone overhaul the opponents' imposing first innings total of 516. Arun got 149 and Raman 95 and by this time he was in the selectors' books for the Test series against West Indies the following season. Sure enough he made his debut in his home town and straightaway showed his class getting an elegant 83 at No 3 against the likes of Courtney Walsh, Patrick Patterson and Winston Davis. By the end of the season he was also a member of the Indian ODI squad.

And so to the 1988-89 season which saw Raman break the famous 44-year-old record of Modi. Before playing the Ranji trophy games he figured in the first Test against New Zealand but was out to Richard Hadlee for three. Dropped for the rest of the series he now concentrated on trying to make it another successful outing for Tamil Nadu, the side having regained the Ranji Trophy the previous season after 33 years.

Raman started modestly enough and there were no indications that he was to rewrite the record books by the end of the season. In the first game against Hyderabad he had scores of 45 and 19 not out. He followed this up with 90 against Kerala and

41 against Andhra. He then scored 36 against Karnataka. In four games his tally was 231 but the floodgates really burst wide open in the final South zone league match against Goa. TN led off with a total of 860 for six which was boosted to 912 with 52 penalty runs thanks to Goa bowling 13 overs short in the stipulated time according to the rules prevalent then. It was the joint highest total in Ranji Trophy history and leading the run-riot was Raman with 313 the highest score by a TN batsman in the national competition and the first triple century. L. Sivaramakrishnan the

Raman's aggregate for the season had now leapt to 544. He was confidence personified as he approached the quarterfinal against Maharashtra and stroked his way to an unbeaten 200 in the first innings following it up with 36 the second time around. His run tally was 780, the highest by a TN batsman in a season.

With TN winning by 39 runs he had a maximum of two matches left but first up was the semifinal against Bengal at the Eden Gardens. The home team led off with 596 for eight declared but as soon as Raman went in to bat on the third morning this total seemed anything but formidable. In his most commanding display yet he did pretty much what he liked with the bowling. He cut, drove, pulled and hooked his way to 100 and then 200.

He added 100 runs with Diwakar Vasu (46) for the second wicket and was then associated in a third wicket partnership of 253 runs with P.C. Prakash (75). There was just no way he could be dismissed and by end of the third day TN were 351 for two with Raman on 231. By this time he had gone past 1,000 runs for



W.V. Raman. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

the season and broken Modi's record.

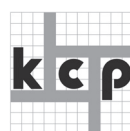
TN were favourites going into the final day. They required 246 runs to overhaul Bengal's first innings total but they had eight wickets intact and Raman was batting like he would never get out. However his dismissal for 238 was a devastating blow from which TN never really recovered and they were bowled out for 535. It was Bengal not TN in the Ranji Trophy final but the talking point in cricketing circles all over the country was Raman's rare feat of surpassing a long standing record.

He ended the season with 1,018 runs at an average of 145.42 culminating in a blaze of glory with scores of 313, 200 not out and 238 in successive matches.

● by  
**Partab Ramchand**

TN captain kept the innings going till midway through the third day even though it was a three-day game and Raman and Arjan Kripal Singh made the most of this opportunity, the latter remaining unbeaten with 302 at the declaration. The two added 356 runs for the sixth wicket and it provided the only instance in first class cricket of two players getting triple hundreds in the same innings. Raman batted 575 minutes, faced 411 balls and hit 31 fours while Arjan batted 560 minutes, faced 400 balls and hit 20 fours.

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