

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXXIV No. 19

January 16-31, 2025

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Giving Legal Rights to our Rivers

How would it be if the Cooum, the Adyar and the Buckingham Canal and the rest of our long-suffering waterways and waterbodies were to sue us in court? The imagination boggles at the possibility. And yet, this may be reality if not tomorrow then certainly in a few years. If this were to happen, it may force a sharp rethink as regards the way we treat our water resources and extending from that, our other natural resources as well.

Nature has traditionally been viewed as a resource to be exploited. This was the capitalist way of thinking and challenge to it came from Professor Christopher D Stone, who was with the USC Gould School of Law and is considered the father of environmental advocacy. It was he who in 1972 first mooted the idea that environment ought to be given legal personhood, just as corporate entities are, with humans acting on their behalf having the right to challenge in courts of law any act that is

destructive or damaging. There have since been debates galore with many opposing points of view, but many countries have been taking steps in keeping with Stone's postulate.

Ecuador began the trend in 2008, when it gave Nature rights that were enshrined in the Constitution. Others have since followed suit – and most recently, Canada gave

● by **Sriram V.**

its Magpie River nine rights, including the rights to flow, safety from pollution, and legal status. Magpie, or its guardians can sue in a court of law. India too has taken very tentative steps. In 2017, the Uttarakhand High Court gave legal person rights to the Ganga, the Yamuna, their tributaries, glaciers and catchment areas. This was subsequently stayed by the Supreme Court but that



The Adyar at Maraimalai Adigal Bridge.

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Civic body earmarks funds towards cow sheds to tackle stray cattle

To tackle the persistent issue of stray cattle, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has earmarked a budget of approximately Rs. 12 crores towards the establishment of new cow sheds and the renovation of existing ones. New sheds will reportedly come up at Shenoy Nagar, Tondiarpet, Madhavaram and Sholinganallur while renovation will take place for current sheds at Nolambur and Kodungaiyur.

The cattle sheds are expected to help remove stray cattle

by offering owners a place to shelter and feed their animals for a charge. The solution is being proposed in preference to levying fines on cattle owners who allow their cows to wander.

The push for cow sheds as a solution to remove stray cattle from the streets has come about because fines appear to have had little impact. Last year, the civic body reportedly caught 2,627 stray cows and collected fines amounting to Rs. 1.31 crores. However,

● by **Varsha V.**

complaints continue to come from Triplicane, Koyambedu, Arumbakkam, Thiruvanniyur, Mylapore and Nungambakkam; and the recent past saw at least two reported cattle attacks - two stray cows attacked a woman in Ambattur, and Nandambakkam saw a woman lose her life to a traffic accident caused by a bolting cow. The animals themselves

are clearly under stress from being exposed to the din and chaos of traffic. It appears to be rather cruel to allow them to wander thus, scavenging waste – including plastic – from roadside bins. Given that a lack of space is the reason why owners are allowing the animals to roam the streets, the civic body hopes that cow sheds will serve to be a long-term solution to the problem.

However, questions arise. The current inventory of cow sheds do not appear to be used

to full capacity – for instance, news reports observe that Triplicane has a cow shed, despite which the area continues to struggle with the menace of stray cows. One reason lies in the growing population of cows – while sheds can shelter some of the herd, the rest must go back to wandering the streets. Another reason is that cattle owners appear to be loath to tether the animals for prolonged periods – they

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GIVING LEGAL RIGHTS TO OUR RIVERS

(Continued from page 1)

did not prevent the Punjab and Haryana High Court in 2020 from giving the Sukhna Lake outside Chandigarh full legal rights. Our city's rivers may still have hope.

If that were to happen, we may find it a little more difficult to brand all our waterways as Coom and make fun of their 'gabbu' as though they were responsible for the foul odour that emanates from them. Similarly, it will not be easy to write headlines such as 'levels of faecal coliform found in the Adyar are ten times above the standard safety limit' – you could imagine that the river was generating all of the faecal coliform. The rivers may also be able to question in courts of law matters such as rampant encroachment of banks, discharge of untreated sewage, and seek redress when crores are spent on cleanups with no evident change in their condition. And they may want to know why enormous masonry

pillars have been dug into their beds for transport projects.

At present, letting off foul odour, harbouring mosquitoes and flooding the neighbourhood every once in a while are the only forms of protest that the rivers seem to have. Perhaps legal status will help them in stalling our exploitation in more impactful ways. At the same time, granting of such rights is not easy. There are questions of impact on other states where the same rivers flow. This is not an issue for the Adyar or the Coom but the Buckingham Canal certainly flows from Andhra. Secondly, if rivers become legal persons, then can they also be sued. What happens if victims of water-caused accidents take the custodians of the river to court? Whatever be the doubts, it is clear that our conventional outlook that Nature exists only to be exploited for the benefit of mankind, has to change. And our city's rivers may see better days.

Civic body earmarks funds towards cow sheds to tackle stray cattle

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say that cows must be allowed to roam. In fact, cattle owners have reportedly been asking the Corporation to allot grazing lots for their herds – lands they say they do not have the financial resources to buy.

The truth is that the civic body itself seems to lack the requisite resources to frame and implement a permanent solution to the problem. Take cow catchers, for instance, who help impound stray cattle. According to Corporation data, the city has only 25 cow catchers employed under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission. This is a small number, given that an exercise like capturing stray cattle needs a daily routine especially in affected localities. Further, the workers too have complaints of their own – not only do they receive no formal training to do their jobs, which exposes them to risks; their employment is not permanent, either.

It appears, then, that the administration – which, to its credit, has mooted a number of solutions to clear the streets of cows, including digital tools like RFID-based microchips

to surveil the animals – still has some work to do in addressing glaring lacunae. For instance, if impounding stray cattle is key, then the scale of the problem requires a larger team that is duly equipped to carry out the work. Likewise, if the owners feel that their cows cannot be restrained to a shed for too long, then the mere provision of cow sheds is less likely to solve the problem – wandering areas need to be accounted for, too. Perhaps it is time to consider a collaborative course of action that brings together all involved to devise a sustainable solution – owners, workers and possibly non-governmental bodies too. For instance, there were plans earlier to accommodate stray cattle in temple goshalas. There does not seem to be a reason why this line cannot be pursued alongside the provision of new cattle sheds.

The removal of stray cows from the streets is perhaps not as straightforward as it appears. But surely, a concerted effort should make it possible. Indeed, for a city aspiring to hold its own against global megacities, this should be a non-negotiable.

Song and Dance

The Season of Music ended on January 1, and then came the Season of Dance. *The Man from Madras Musings*, very much a music buff, usually gives the dance performances a wide berth but not so this year. His good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, has a great fascination for matters terpsichorean and decreed that she would be in attendance, MMM in tow. And so MMM toed the line. And he enjoyed it all.

And as he tried to keep time and at the same time follow all the leaps, prances, pirouettes and glances, he also managed to take a good look at fellow members of the audience. And it gave him considerable food for thought. As MMM tagged be-

to getting around to visiting one day. This group is largely of those on the right side of thirty and texting is their way of communicating. It would be infra dig to be seen making calls or receiving them. They live mainly on social media and as for the canteen, they would flock to it only if it had bubble tea, decaf or black coffee. When it comes to dress, haute couture or dernier cri would be the mot juste, though MMM has to admit that seen from the rear it is very difficult for him to identify the preferred pronouns of those in attendance. This group is never seen again in the vicinity of Sabha-s until the next dance season that is and MMM assumes they seek other forms of entertainment when dance is not on offer.

MMM – What about?

V – Hanh? Hmmm...Er... To be sure yes, What about... good one sir Ha ha, er... hmmm....

MMM decided that this had better be cut short for it was all eating into his precious forty winks time. And so he repeated his question.

V – Sir, let me get back to you.

MMM was left wondering as to why the person had even called. MMM flattered himself by assuming that the caller had called on a whim and an overwhelming desire to hear MMM's voice. A sobering thought then came that this was probably one of a series of calls the person had to make and other recipients of such calls perhaps get so excited at a sound byte

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

hind his good lady, he could not help reflecting on how the audiences for music and dance seem to be from two entirely different worlds.

To begin with, the music audience seems to be wholly comprising those east and south of Gemini circle. These people are essentially on the wrong side of fifty, with a brooding air of having heard better music in the past. They also have their mobility and bladder issues judging by the number of comfort breaks they take before, during and after performances. They are clueless about cell phone etiquette, mostly having them on volume. When the phone rings, they either get all flustered about silencing it or are quite blasé about answering it and speaking loudly even as the concert progresses. They love the canteen, feasting on what is on offer, possessing no doubt digestions of cast iron. In attire they are traditional – the men bordering on the fastidiously neat to the shabby, and the women bringing in old world charm. MMM must also add here that this audience is the salt of the earth as far as the music world is concerned, for it is this group that keeps the art alive, such as it is.

Contrast this with the dance audience, which seems essentially from an alien world, by which MMM means to the west of Gemini and from those new localities that MMM has always meant

The modes of address too vary. To the music world everyone is a *saar* or a *madam* or at worst a *dei*. But in the dance world everyone is an *amma* or an *akka*. MMM who is at the age where *thatha* would be the preferred mode of address, rather likes being called *amma*. And as for the speed at which the dance lovers move – deer could take their lessons from them. Music audiences saunter and after a heavy go at the canteen seem to slow down to a crawl. And when they do, they, like king Claudius, demand light in darkened Sabha interiors. Their age calls for it. The dance audience makes do with their cell phone torch.

MMM hopes to expand on this topic after attending a few more years of dance. He takes leave of this season with the above thoughts.

Short Term Memory Loss

It was one of those nice December afternoons that Chennai that was Madras seems to be having fewer of in recent times. *The Man from Madras Musings* had just nodded off when his phone buzzed. MMM answered it, and this is what ensued –

Voice – Is that the historian MMM?

MMM – Yes. Who is it please?

V – I am calling from TV Channel so and so and we would like your sound byte.

request that they rarely ask as to what it is all about. In fact MMM is reasonably sure that most people interviewed by channels rarely ever know what they are talking about.

The caller, to give him credit, was soon back. It was regarding an announcement by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu that a reward of one million US dollars would be given to anyone who deciphered the Indus Valley script. The caller wanted MMM's view. MMM said he had none. There was a stunned silence.

V – Why sir?

MMM – Why do I need to have a view?

V – But sir, this concerns history. What is your take on Indus Valley?

MMM – I know nothing about it.

V – But sir you are a historian, you should know.

MMM hung up. He thought it would be too much of a waste of time to explain that there are areas of specialisation in history and someone who speaks on city history need not know anything about Indus Valley. And that there is nothing wrong in admitting to ignorance. In this MMM knows he differs markedly from some commentators who hold forth on just about everything on TV channels and social media.

– WMM

Jambavan's Festive Arrival: A Pongal Tale from Chennai



Chennai, the city where tradition and modernity dance in unison, comes alive during Pongal. Streets are adorned with vibrant kolams, the air is laced with the earthy aroma of sakkarai pongal simmering on stoves, and every corner echoes with joyous greetings of "Pongalo Pongal!" Amid this celebratory chaos, an annual guest arrives, carrying not just bells and garlands but a legacy of cultural heritage.

This year, it was Jambavan's turn to grace us with his presence. An ox with the swagger of a movie star and the charm of a seasoned performer, Jambavan was no ordinary visitor. Draped in a kaleidoscope of colours – blue, green, and pink – his forehead sparkled with intricate patterns of cowrie shells. Around his hump jingled a garland of tiny bells that sang with each confident step.

Jambavan didn't just walk into our street; he strutted in, head held high, as if he owned the bustling lanes of Chennai. Children squealed in delight, while elders paused from their chores to marvel at the spectacle. His owner, Manikandan, a wiry man with a thick moustache and a twinkle in his eye, played the perfect showman.

"Shake hands!" Manikandan commanded with a dramatic flourish. And, as if rehearsed a hundred times, Jambavan raised his forelimb, eliciting cheers and laughter from the crowd. When asked to perform a namaskaram, however, the star ox drew the line, bobbing his head in protest. Manikandan, ever the diplomat, grinned and defended his companion's refusal. "This is cement, Amma. Jambavan only sits on soft mud!"

Manikandan, a native of Tiruvallur district, seemed as much a storyteller as a caretaker. "This is our season of joy and hard work," he said, his Tamil seasoned with hints of Telugu. "We start early, walking from villages near Tambaram, Medavakkam, and Kelambakkam, stopping at each street to share Jambavan's blessings." His tales painted vivid pictures of moonlit nights spent resting in parks and the camaraderie of other cattle-rearers he met on these journeys.

But his eyes clouded briefly as he added, "The city has changed. People don't stop to notice us anymore. During Pongal, we earn Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 a day – children feed Jambavan bananas and take pictures. But on ordinary days? The streets are silent, and people are too busy even to glance our way."

Jambavan, meanwhile, was the quintessential diva, demanding attention. A generous handout of bananas was devoured with gusto, followed by an exaggerated lick of Manikandan's hand, as if signalling that it was time to move on. With a pat on Jambavan's forehead, Manikandan bade us farewell, and the majestic ox strutted off, bells jingling and heads turning in his wake.

As I watched them disappear down the street, I felt a pang of realisation. For years, I had seen such visitors from my balcony or while rushing to work, but rarely had I paused to engage. Last year, it was a middle school project on livelihoods that finally made me step out and talk to Manikandan. This brief conversation had left a mark, yet it was Jambavan's theatrical arrival this year that truly drove home the richness of this fleeting tradition.

In Chennai's fast-paced life, such moments are reminders of the city's soul – the deep, unspoken bond between its people, their animals, and the land they inhabit. Jambavan wasn't just an ox;

Stormwater drainage project in Chennai must be revisited

For over three years now, the stormwater drainage project has been the talk of the town. It was said that the project would encompass 559 roads, covering a distance of 1033 kilometres at the cost of approximately Rs. 4,070 crores. Since the time the scheme was announced and the design publicised, experts have expressed considerable skepticism about its success. Questions have been raised about the various technological options available – alternate ways for laying the stormwater drains have been examined, taking into account local conditions such as rainfall intensity, periodicity of flooding, the extent of flooding, existing road constructions, traffic intensity as well as the density of population in the area.

Experts observed that the same design has been uniformly adopted for the entire city without considering these local conditions. For example, it was pointed out that such projects are not quite necessary in Besant Nagar and surrounding areas – being close to the seashore, they have looser soil which allows floodwater to percolate swiftly.

The design proposed in the scheme has also been questioned, as the stormwater drains are constructed in such a way that it stands roughly one foot above the road level in most places. Consequently, any rainfall will cause water to enter the homes in the area by dint of the drainage structure being above the floor level of the houses. Indeed, in several places, residents have had to spend considerable amounts to raise the floor levels of their own compounds to be in line with the drainage structures. I myself have spent a lakh to raise the floor in my house. Further, as part of the project, the roads were dug up to a depth of about three to four feet and a width of about two to three feet. The drains were constructed using steel-reinforced cement concrete with two walls on either side, with provisions for manholes, chutes etc. This has been done in front of several houses, leaving little space between the gate of the house and that of the drainage structure.

There has also been criticism in several places about the lack of supervision as well as the non-maintenance of the gradient which enables the free flow of water. The government has reacted to all these criticisms by simply stating that the design has been approved by professors from IIT Madras.

In November 2022, the government announced that 95 per cent of the work was complete. There were assurances that flooding would not be a problem in Chennai any longer. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, of course – there have been many storms and heavy rains since then, and most parts of the city have experienced quite the same level of flooding as they had in the pre-stormwater drainage era. This implies that the entire stormwater drain project that has been designed and implemented has to be revisited to learn the right lessons for the future.

A careful evaluation of the various factors at play is necessary so that alternate methods can be devised for future projects that are both cost-effective as well as quick so that residents are not subject to inconvenience. As such, it appears that the authorities have chosen the most expensive and time-consuming way of laying stormwater drains – by digging deep into the soil and using steel-reinforced concrete, chute pipes, manhole covers, inlet chambers, retaining walls etc. Experts say that instead, in a crowded city like Chennai, drainage pipes could have been laid underground. There are PVC and HDPE pipe options, both of which have become extremely popular in drainage applications in recent years, the world over. They are resistant to collapse as well as chemical corrosion and have both flexibility and durability. While PVC pipes are easy to install, HDPE pipes are generally the better choice for high-pressure systems. Suitable provisions can be made in the pipes for regular connections, inspections, cleaning etc.

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he was a custodian of stories, resilience, and the enduring spirit of Pongal.

As I returned to my kitchen, where the sakkarai pongal bubbled away, I felt a quiet gratitude. Jambavan's visit wasn't merely a spectacle; it was an invitation to pause, celebrate, and reconnect with the timeless traditions that make Chennai the vibrant mosaic it is today.

– Priyanka Soman

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Munro Statue

With regard to the picture of the statue of Munro published in MM, September 16th, 2024. Decades ago by the mid-1950s – this narration about the Munro statue used to be told:

"A very proud British officer took his son – aged less than ten years – daily to see the Munro statue. He wanted to instill his son proud British values. He would say – See Monroe, how majestic he looks. After a fortnight of this routine, his son asked – "Who is the person sitting on Munro?"

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Botanical Paintings from Tranquebar

Niels Studsgaard Fuglsang, born in the small Danish village of Holeby, pursued studies in philology, theology, and medicine in Copenhagen. Following in his father's (Hermann Jørgensen Fuglsang) footsteps he became a vicar. At the age of 33, Fuglsang expressed a desire to spend time in Tranquebar, then a Danish colony in present-day Tamil Nadu. He applied for the position of pastor-cum-astronomer, previously held by Henning Munch Engelhart, who had died while surveying the Nicobar Islands in 1791. Fuglsang left Denmark aboard the ship *Disco* in October 1792 and arrived in Tranquebar on September 15, 1793.

Although no records indicate that Fuglsang conducted astronomical measurements during his time in Tranquebar, he officiated at ceremonies in the Zion Church, including baptisms, confirmations, and weddings. He quickly mastered reading, writing, and speaking Tamil. A keen observer of local life, Fuglsang spent nearly a decade in Tranquebar before leaving on March 28, 1801.

When he returned to Denmark, Fuglsang brought back over 150 artifacts, which his family later sold to the King of Denmark. These included approximately 70 hybrid Indo-European style paintings now housed in the National Museum of Denmark and over 40 Tamil and Grantha palm-leaf manuscripts available for study at the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Among his possessions were also 400 exquisite

paintings of South Indian plants, mainly medicinal species, compiled into three volumes. These botanical drawings, forgotten for decades, were either donated or sold to the Museum of Natural History in Copenhagen.

Historian Simon Rastén, working with Martha Ann Fleming in Copenhagen, rediscovered these drawings in autumn 2023. Labels affixed to the back of the paintings contain the names of most plants in Tamil alongside brief Danish comments in Fuglsang's handwriting. However, the paintings lack details about the artist or the dates of their creation.

This rediscovery brings us closer to unravelling a historical enigma. Were these paintings merely a collection, or did they reflect a deeper collaboration between Fuglsang and local Tamil artists? The vibrancy of these illustrations contrasts with the lack of clarity about their origins, inviting us into a world of mystery and speculation.

Botanical-art historian Henry J. Noltie (Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh) has described various botanical illustrations by artists like Rungia, Govindoo, Lakshman Singh, and Vishnu Persaud. Telugu-speaking moochy artists who migrated to Tanjore also contributed to this tradition, transitioning from miniatures to real-life depictions. Savithri Preetha Nair praises the skills of the Hindu moochy artist, Coopan Sithar, and the Christian artists Kiruba Samuthiram and Ayya Pulley, while William Dalrymple's *Forgotten Masters* high-

lights Yellapah of Vellore. These works, produced between 1805 and 1860, are recognized for their precision. Fuglsang's collection likely dates to between 1790 and 1800. Though less precise than later artworks, they remain remarkable achievements.

The origins of these artistic developments around Tanjore can be traced to the Halle missionaries in Tranquebar. Johan Gerhard Koenig, a pupil of Linnaeus, joined the Halle Mission in Tranquebar in 1768, while Christopher Samuel John arrived in 1770 and displayed a keen interest in natural sciences, excelling in astronomy, botany, and zoology. Other notable missionaries included Johann Peter Rottler, who arrived in 1776, and Johann Gottfried Klein, born in Tranquebar and later educated in Copenhagen, who returned in

field emphasises how Benjamin Heyne in Samarlakota, as well as Rottler and Klein in Tranquebar, were the key figures interested in the flora of the region.

Fuglsang's life in Tranquebar becomes even more intriguing when viewed alongside clues from his diary, which he maintained from 14 September 1800 until 24 December 1802. The diary includes vivid descriptions of plants and trees in and around Tranquebar. Yet, it remains tantalizingly silent on the botanical paintings. Did Fuglsang commission these works with a collector's foresight? Were they intended as gifts for Danish patrons? Or were they a serendipitous acquisition during his stay?

Two paintings from the collection serve as examples. In one set, plants feature ribbons tied around them – a technique likely

inspired by European/Chinese practices rather than Indian traditions. This stylistic detail suggests that multiple painters were involved. Fuglsang likely knew these artists, either directly or through an intermediary, and they may have lived near the Mission Garden, enabling consistent and timely work. Completing 400 paintings would have taken years, pointing to a dedicated, long-term effort. The lack of vernacular inscriptions on the paintings implies that the artist(s) may not have been literate in Tamil.

Figure 1: A painting of a pomegranate plant with fruit. Fuglsang had written 'மஞ்சள் பழம்' on the back. Figure 2: A painting of a turmeric plant. At the top, Fuglsang had written 'மஞ்சள் கிழங்கு' and in Danish: 'bruges til at gøre Busci med og til Tegn og til Karri og mange Ting' (= Turmeric used for puja and curry and other things).

Correspondence from the missionaries to Halle in 1790 before Fuglsang's arrival in Tranquebar highlights the region's artistic talent. They noted that two adult Portuguese boys were requested by an English engineer-captain to work as draftsmen, with the captain funding their drawing lessons. The missionaries also remarked on the extraordinary skill of local Telugus and Moochies, particularly in painting exquisite miniatures. In Tanjore, one artist stood out for

his ability to replicate masterpieces with such precision that even experts struggled to discern the copies from the originals. This artist, known for his mastery in depicting plants, animals, and insects with exceptional detail after proper instruction, was employed by the king of Tanjore. Could the two Portuguese boys, whose names we do not know, be behind the paintings?

A review of the 1790 census of Tranquebar and its surrounding villages reveals two other potential candidates for the artist or artists behind the botanical paintings. (The census from Tranquebar can be viewed on the homepage of the National Archives at www.sa.dk.) One is "Velajudam", a resident of "Kottu Pallemam Kudeanna Teru" near the Mission Garden, who identified his profession as an artist or illustrator (Tegner). (The names are cited as found in the census.) Another intriguing figure is "Letchumanan", described as a "Moochien" – a term that may denote a painter or craftsman. (According to Hobson-Jobson, "The name and caste are also found in S. India, Telug. muchche. These, too, are workers in leather, but also are employed in painting, gilding, and upholsterer's work.") Many served in the court of Raja Serfoji of Tanjore as artists. Fuglsang had indicated on many of the drawings that the plants are from the Mission Garden that leads us to believe that the artist/s were from the region. Adding to this narrative is Fuglsang's Tamil teacher, Tella Muthu, who might correspond to "Tille Muthu Pulle" from the census. Residing near Velayudam, Tille Muthu owned a garden on "Avatarna Setti Teru" and may have connected Fuglsang with local painters.

The botanical paintings from Tranquebar are far more than mere illustrations; they are fragments of a forgotten narrative, imbued with cultural intersections and personal ambition. Fuglsang's meticulous collection not only showcases the natural beauty of South India but also reflects the complex relationships between Danish colonists and Tamil artists. Despite the mysteries surrounding their origins, these works endure as captivating records of South India's botanical richness and artistic heritage.

I acknowledge helpful suggestions from Simon Rastén, Henry Noltie, Savithri Preetha Nair, and Ananthanarayanan Raman.

The Madras Literary Society



The majestic facade – a blend of colonial charm and timeless design.



The Madras Literary Society, an architectural gem.

The Madras Literary Society (MLS) in Chennai – known for its vast collection of rare publications across genres – is one of India's oldest libraries with a catalogue exceeding 50,000 books. It was established to promote the study of science, art and culture with a focus on South India. "Madras Literary Society began in 1812 as a small library on the DPI campus," said Uma Maheshwari, the current librarian. "The current building was completed in 1906."

There's much to admire about the heritage structure, rightly regarded as a gem in Chennai's crown. The architecture is a blend of the Indo-Saracenic style – a synthesis of Islamic and Indian elements, developed by British architects during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – and the classic Rajasthani style, which brings together structural components from

Mughal and Hindu architecture. The placement of the windows and doors, together with the lime plaster, Madras terrace roof, and cruciform structure of the wall produce a distinct acoustic effect, and the sounds inside the library have a distinct clarity. The MLS building is embellished with arches and intricate *jalis* (lattice-work) to let in ventilation and natural light. *Jharokhas* – overhanging, enclosed balconies – add to the intricacy of the building's aesthetic and provide both ventilation and shade. The natural light allows for a range of shades and tints, resulting in a dynamic play of light and shadows. The double-layer windows right beneath the roof, large windows and doors of solid wood and three-level terraces provide ample cross ventilation and helps keep MLS cool even in summers. The unique combina-

tion of lime, natural stone and bricks as building material have made it especially adaptable to the climate. Even the furniture at MLS is heritage and made of teak wood – and stands firm till date.

The oldest book in the impressive catalogue housed by the MLS is a 1619 copy of Aristotle's *Opera Omnia*. "There

also preserves letters written by Subash Chandra Bose and Annie Besant.

Over the years, members and patrons of the MLS have included – apart from Subash Chandra Bose and Annie Besant – Nilakanta Sastri, F.W. Ellis, Benjamin Guy Babington, and Walter Elliot. The first Indian to procure membership at the

care, such as rebinding or other basic restoration; and grade 3 books are those that need full-fledged restoration and expert handling, such as de-acidification and fumigation.

MLS isn't just for serious readers and historians. The institution is actively working to engage young readers and casual enthusiasts as well. MLS holds activities almost every week – from heritage walks and stamp workshops to displaying their collection of rare books, the library makes sure there's something happening every Saturday. Visitors can also contribute to the library's work of preserving and restoring heritage by 'adopting' a book or furniture – they can simply donate the amount towards the cost of the work and MLS will take care of the rest.

Visiting the Madras Literary Society isn't a simple jaunt to the library – it's about forging a connect with the city's heritage and love for knowledge. Whether one is leafing through a seventeenth century manuscript or soaking in the ambience, MLS has the extraordinary power to transport its visitors to a different era.

● by Geethanjali Rajakkannu

are also books related to the Buckingham Canal project and some publications of Albert Einstein," reveals Uma. The history buff has much to delight in – the library boasts a collection of vintage pictures of Pudukottai, Trichy, Thanjavur and Madurai captured by Captain Tripe; it

MLS was Kavali Lutchmiah, who served as an assistant to Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor General of India. In 1834, when J.C. Morris was the Secretary, the library saw the publication of the first-ever issue of the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*.

Much effort is expended to preserve the rare, vintage books at the Madras Literary Society. The books in the catalogue are classified into three grades based on the care they require. Grade 1 books are those that require basic dusting once in a while; grade 2 books need a little more



Every shelf tells a story.



History and Knowledge: The Madras Literary Society stands as a testament to Chennai's rich intellectual legacy.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

The T. Nagar Vegetable Market – A training ground to develop fellowship

Last issue, we carried a covid-era piece on Chennai's suburban trains from Karthik Nagappan. In this issue, we present Karthik's take on the vegetable market at T Nagar.

– Associate Editor

At the bustling vegetable market at T Nagar, you must keep your wits sharp when you shop, lest you're put on by a veteran selling his wares in peak hour. You see, you must create an impression with the vendors so they don't fail to recognize you as a 'regular' – frequent customers are greeted with a warm smile, and the chances of buying fresh vegetables are considerably brighter. No one wants to go home with sad veggies! The repercussions will be made known in the kitchen and your mother (or wife) may not be gentle in their critique – you'll have to stomach commentary like *un moonja paathaale thalaila molaga arachiruppanga!*

I've learnt, though, that shopping becomes a more fulfilling experience when you build a nice relationship of mutual respect with the ven-

dors, driven by appreciation, feedback and trust. In a busy market with plenty of outlets, I buy vegetables only from five shops. Of these, one is a sort of general shop where I buy most produce including onions and tomatoes; one where I buy coriander and mint; and one where I buy nothing but cauliflower. I share a special camaraderie with each vendor – they know exactly how many days it has been since I last visited their shop and always ask why I've been missing for so long. If they think I look dull, they express concern over my health and ask after my well being. I do the same to them, too. If a particular dish came out well because of the freshness of the vegetables, I make sure to let them know; I notice their new look when they change their hairdo, compliment a new shirt, and wish them on special occasions. Often, our discussions go deeper – we chat about the economy, the state of politics, societal issues and more. I pick and choose the veggies I need during our conversation, and am never hurried – I even choose ladies fingers one by one! I get insider tips too – I am warned to avoid

vegetables that may not be so great on that particular day, and sometimes even told to return the next day when fresh stocks are expected. I feel so pleased with my networking skills when this happens!

The shop at which I buy assorted produce is run by three partners. Of them, the anna has grown quite close to me. He was

● by
Karthik Nagappan

missing for a while and I kept asking the other two where he was. I was told that he was unwell and may not return. I was not dissuaded though – I kept asking after him every time I went to the shop. He returned this month and I was so happy to see him! He said that the boys told him that I would often ask about him. That's it you know – that is all he needs to treat you as a special customer! He never gives me old stuff. I have to ask him for the bill ten times before he replies. '380 sir!' I make the payment, thank him and leave. That is what is expected as a sign of trust and mutual respect.

The sales guy at the shop where I buy coriander has the best sales pitch I've come across so far. Depending on how close a customer is to his shop, he either plays up or plays down his pitch – but not once has he failed to draw a buyer into his shop. We had our little chats where he described how he built this tactic over some time. I actually miss these people if I don't see them in the market when I go! When coriander was selling at Rs. 25 a bunch, he said '*Kammi dhan na, 25...*' The prices dropped to Rs. 10 on my following visit, and I couldn't help teasing him. *Saar, andha kammi vela kothamali evlo?* I asked, and he broke into a smile. Where the prices are Rs. 25, or 5, the fact is that he makes sure that I am given the best stuff. He always asks me about it on the next visit, too – Anna, *pona vaati pucca dhaana?* How sweet!

My favourite of the lot though is the bro at the cauliflower shop. He has such style and swagger! He has this distinct way of picking one sample, cutting the base and tossing it into the customer's bag, one that I greatly enjoy watching. 'You'll make Rajini Kanth jealous – *neenga semma mass bro!* I

keep telling him.' On his part, the guy never fails to give me feedback on my new beard or moustache – styles that I enjoy changing! We don't speak much but we both share an amazing chemistry. The recent summer left cauliflowers in a sad state indeed, but I love the vegetable and refused to lose hope – I swung by his shop every time I went to the market. The guy was so honest though, that he waved me away even when he saw me approaching from a distance. 'Sad stock, anna!' he would call out. 'I'll let you know!' I'd smile in return and turn back. When I went today, I found the man conducting roaring business – all with his usual brand of swag, of course. The veggies are super fresh, some of the best that I'd seen in the past two months. He flashed a smile at me when he saw me, one that toothpaste ads would vie for; '*Semma poo na!*' he said and proceeded to pick out for me the very best of the lot. My vegetable purchase thus ended on a stylish and satisfying note indeed. Which supermarket can give one an experience like this?

Season Peeves

Now that the Margazhi music season is behind us, and the sabha-hopping, canteen-hopping rasikas and foodies are revelling in their experiences, it's also time to pen some of the peeves of the season.

Let me list some of them, they are in no particular order.

Parking Facilities:

Many of the iconic sabhas are located in the congested areas of the city, some in narrow by-lanes, and reaching them in the evenings, especially if the artist is a top-rated one, is a nightmare.

Can we have some kind of a public transport pick-up facility near the Sabha, or an arrangement with some schools for parking, at least for some of the evenings when crowds are expected?

Canteens and Loos:

Addressing the lesser needs of the rasikas – The canteens are touted as a food festival – with caterers churning out creative new dishes along with traditional fare. Yes they provide convenience to the visiting public and are certainly worth a try – till you go to the

hand-wash area of some of the canteens, it makes you wish you hadn't eaten – delectable taste notwithstanding.

Loos – Can we have a janitor posted at least on days of large footfalls? Of course the visiting public is to be blamed here for not following basic hygiene etiquette.

Sabha Seats:

Auditoriums that have been renovated in the last decade or two have focused on good acoustics, but ergonomics has definitely not been taken into account as far as the seat design is concerned.

The seat width is not for a 'healthy adult' (read obese) – one is forced to keep the arms and elbows folded within the armrest or adjust with the neighbour.

Some sabha seats are at a folded acute angle when empty, and sitting on them means firmly pressing – your legs on the seat, your back against the back rest, and your feet to the ground. Any relaxation of either of these will cause the seat to revert into its acute angle. I notice that some people are seated at the front edge of the

seat because they cannot keep the pressure, while others are sprawled and sink their entire being into the seat at an awkward angle.

The gap between rows is so narrow that late entrants have to struggle squeezing their derrieres past the seated rasikas and grabbing the back rest of the seat in front as they navigate, pulling a few strands of hair of the people in front as they go.

The balcony seats at one place is at such a steep gradient that you might get vertigo when

● by Sujatha
Chandramouli

looking down from above – it's almost as if the powers that be are saying; 'Serves them right – the lesser paying public!'

Music for the Connoisseurs only?

Why is it that many artists do not mention the raga and composer of the song they're rendering, even after the rendition? Agreed, a knowledgeable audience, but there may be some learners out there – like

my son – who prods me in the knee to check if his guess of the raga is right. Also sometimes the artists sing dual pallavis in allied ragas, much to the delight of the gathering, but what about the aspiring music rasikas who may want to know if they have identified correctly?

Lengthy Speeches:

This often happens on the inaugural day or on the validation function day. The chief guest, the host, the chairperson and other eminent dignitaries who grace the dias are all stars in their own fields – but brevity and speaking extempore as the occasion demands does not seem to be their forte. You will often have almost all the dignitaries singing the same adulations of the chief guest, listing the same awards and citations they have received, or at other times the history of the great institution hosting the event, or still worse reading out the programme that follows the next ten days, which anyway is at hand with the audience who have picked up the flyer at the entrance and are fanning themselves with it, waiting for the event to move on.

Why-pay-anything Rasikas?

Not all peeves are from the organising side, some are from the rasikas too.

There are some sabhas which host events in the suburbs. They provide a platform to promising artists, while also bringing music closer to the homes of people who cannot travel upto the city centre. The tickets here are priced very nominally. In spite of that I see some rasikas peering through the doorway and discussing with the doorman: 'The hall is empty, why should I pay?' Or buying a Rs.100 ticket and asking why they cannot sit on a Rs. 500 ticketed seat if it's empty? Some even go in for the freebie seat and sit loftily in the front row because they found the seat empty!

I feel really ashamed and quickly show my ticket at the door lest I am mistaken to be part of the ilk.

Now enough of my rantings! I will end saying one thing:

Margazhis will come and Margazhis will go and the Chennai Music Season will go on forever!

From Strife to Strength: How Sports Transformed Kannagi Nagar into a Hub of Hope and Empowerment

● Kannagi Nagar is a resettlement colony along the dusty and busy Old Mahabalipuram Road. Once regarded as a place for impoverished people with high unemployment and social problems, Kannagi Nagar is now learning to soar on the wings of a new identity owing to the tremendous influence of sports.

Recent strides taken towards sports infrastructure and programming have begun to transform this community from a locality with strife to one bubbling with vigour. Among other things, these initiatives cultivate sporting talent, address social and economic issues, and enhance hope and unity among residents.

The Kannagi Nagar Police Boys and Girls Club

The Kannagi Nagar Police Boys and Girls Club, established in 2011 is as a community initiative supporting the involvement of youth from marginalized backgrounds in constructive activities. "This



The Man behind breaking the stereotype – Coach Raji, Kannagi Nagar Kabaddi Club

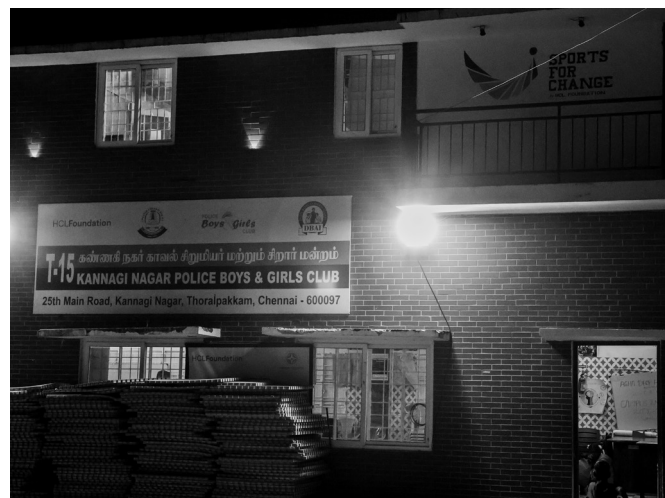
club is under the police station, and the inspector is in charge, and so am I," said Tamil Alagan, coach. The club is partnering with HCL Foundation and provides facilities for sports such as kabaddi, football, and cricket. Among the many achievements is the construction of a 39,272 sq ft multi-sports complex, established in October 2022, which contains sporting facilities for gymnastics, rugby, and 100-metre athletic activities, aimed at benefiting children

from nearly 1.7 lakh families in the vicinity.

The club has nurtured abundant talent - many girls from Kannagi Nagar are proud members of teams in the Pro Kabaddi League. Tuition classes are also run within the club, and students are improving academically. Other than sports and studies, there is a complete focus on overall development, namely summer camps, computer classes, and training in traditional arts. The programs engage the youth and reduce delinquency while creating a positive relationship between the public and the police.

The Kannagi Nagar Kabaddi Club

Another major initiative is the Kannagi Nagar Kabaddi Club, which boasts an all-girls team. Founded in 2018



imal resources, the team is doing a great job, practicing in public parks without any specialised equipment yet. But they're excited about building a world-class sports academy in Kannagi Nagar, one that can

offer athletes better facilities and opportunities in training.

The Kannagi Nagar Kabaddi Club thus brings to light the fact that sports can change lives because dedication and support from community members can not only beat adversity but also help redefine the way people look at the latter. These young talents are courageously breaking gender norms and societal barriers by competing in a sport

● by Geethanjali Rajakkannu
Pictures by Thamayandhi R.

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– THE EDITOR

by trainer K. Raji, the club has challenged some stereotypes surrounding the resettlement area, empowering its members through sports. As of 2024, six players from the club have represented Tamil Nadu in national competitions, and two have been sent to national camps, also taking home a gold medal in the Chief Minister's Trophy. The team has steadily increased its prowess in the sport.

The success of the club has played an important role in redefining how Kannagi Nagar is perceived, which normally carries a negative connotation. The team tries to rebrand their locality through kabaddi and is armed with the determination and talent of its residents. Besides sports, the club also focuses on life and personal skills, fostering respect, a sense of discipline, and purpose in young minds. Raji is an English literature graduate, blending life skills education into the training module, enhancing the holistic upbringing of players.

The club is social media savvy, and it actively updates its audience about its activities, achievements, and its endeavours. Their Instagram page depicts their journey and accomplishments. With min-



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How Sports Transformed Kannagi Nagar into a Hub of Hope and Empowerment



(Continued from page 7)

that has been traditionally dominated by males. For these girls, kabaddi isn't just a game – it's a proclamation of self-empowerment and respect. "I have been playing kabaddi for seven years," said Abinaya, a member of the Kannagi Nagar Sports Academy.

This is not only a club for developing technical skills but also for confidence building

and resilience. By achieving recognition in competitions and from the community, players have become a source of inspiration for young girls to take up sports as a means of expressing their individuality and achieving personal growth.

Impact of Sports on Kannagi Nagar

Kannagi Nagar has a long history of high crime and substance use rates. However,

with the involvement of sports programmes, there has been a major turnaround among the youth. "Our club was started to decrease the crime rate of Kannagi Nagar," said Tamil Alagan. Sporting activities require time, focus, and commitment, and go a long way in preventing youth from falling into bad habits. Many youths involved in the local NGOs report they have shown considerable behavioural change and

reduced involvement in illegal activities.

Sports initiatives are not only transforming lives on the field but also off it in Kannagi Nagar. Training programs for coaches, referees, and sports facility managers have opened up job opportunities for the community. The increasing recognition of athletes from Kannagi Nagar is also starting to attract notice from sponsors and recruiters, establishing

new avenues toward a career in sports.

Sport has become a game-changer in a community where traditional notions of gender often undermine the chances for women and girls. "People usually think kabaddi is played by boys; if we girls play the game, many other girls will be inspired to play, which will break the stereotype," said Abinaya. The victories of the all-girls kabaddi team are an indication of women's potential once provided with opportunities. Their feats break stereotypes and create an impetus for families to encourage their daughters to pursue sports.

As the sports hub has transformed within Kannagi Nagar, it has brought about community pride among the residents. Lively murals of athletes now brighten the area as symbols of inspiration and aspiration. Sports events draw crowds from within and outside of Kannagi Nagar, creating a sense of unity and belongingness.

Source involved:

Members of The Kannagi Nagar Kabaddi Club.

Tamil Alagan, coach in the Kannagi Nagar Police Boys and Girls Club.

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