

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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Trouble in Paradise?

What the Samsung labour issue portends for TN Industry

Samsung is once again in the news for the wrong reasons. The strike by a section of its workers owing allegiance to its labour union, which in turn is backed by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), entered its third week. Even as the impasse threatens to spillover by way of affecting industrial peace in the State, the Government would do well to take speedy steps to resolve the matter. For it is Tamil Nadu's image as an industrial hub and a model for employer-employee relations that is at stake.

The present crisis is over the suspension of some workers owing allegiance to the union, but it is merely yet another manifestation of the simmering tension that has lasted for

around a year. It was in June 2024 that Samsung workers decided to form a union at the Kanchipuram plant. This they declared was to fight for better working conditions. They also claimed that the company did not have any clear labour policy. It is to be noted here that this was the second union ever to be formed in Samsung operations worldwide, the first being in Japan. The management objected and there were protests and stoppage of work in the months of September and October 2024.

The State Government unfortunately let the matter get out of hand by delaying its mediatory role which when given, was – according to the union – extremely biased in favour of

the management. In the meanwhile the company filed a case objecting to the use of its name by the union which called itself Samsung India Workers Union (SIWU). It claimed that this was in violation of trademark laws. Even as this was being argued, following Government mediation, the management

● by Sriram V.

agreed to recognise the union, pending court decision on the name. Unfortunately for Samsung and the Government, the judgement went in favour of the union. Six weeks were granted for registration formalities.

If that was in December, what caused the Government to dither over the registration till the very last day of the court deadline remains a mystery. It was only on January 27th that SIWU was formally registered. This unexplained delay only exacerbated what was already a stressed scenario and within a week of registration, fresh trouble as explained above erupted. The workers, backed by CITU have now called for a pan-industry strike on March 8. Earlier, workers in factories in Oragadam held a token protest to express solidarity. In short, trouble seems to be spreading.

While the usual accusations of political interference, outside influence, etc, are being

bandied about, there is risk of the seriousness of the matter being lost sight of. Samsung may need counselling given its meagre experience in dealing with trade unionism and that too only in a highly regimented culture like Japan. Indian labour is different and so are the labour laws. The Government itself seems caught in a bind and seems infirm of purpose. Last heard, a State Minister has been asked to mediate.

Speed is of the essence. When even backward states of India are jumping on the industrial bandwagon by offering huge incentives, what still makes a high-cost hub like Tamil Nadu attractive is

(Continued on page 3)

Hundred Years of Freemasons' Hall

Freemasons' Hall in Egmore completed a century on February 26, 2025. It was on that date in 1925 that Governor Lord Goschen declared the building open. A Neo-Classical masterpiece designed by the architect firm of Jackson & Barker, Freemasons' Hall remains in active use, as does its annexe, designed by J.W. Madeley. To commemorate this historic structure's centenary, we bring you a few pictures, Old and New.

Our first OLD is an image of the inauguration ceremony, which gives a panoramic view of the Branch Elphinstone Hotel (later Chesney Hall) at the far left and Freemasons' Hall at the far right. Another OLD picture is a photograph of the building taken on the day of the inauguration. Both pictures are courtesy The District Grand Lodge of South India.

Our NEW, taken in 2017 by K.S. Anwar is of Freemasons' Hall as it stands now. A detailed article on the construction of this building will be published in our next issue.

HERITAGE WATCH



Chennai's flyovers command big budgets, but what of the impact?

According to news reports, the new flyover at TIDEL park junction has caused a significant amount of traffic disorder. The U-shaped flyover is meant to offer commuters a direct connection from SRP tools junction to Madhya Kailash but has proven itself poorly designed. Access to the flyover is reportedly part of the problem, with motorists facing delays on the one-kilometre stretch between the Thiruvanniyur Railway Station and SRP Tools junction. *The Times of India* reports that some commuters resorted to removing barricades to make space for their two-wheelers, prompting the traffic police to do away with the new restrictions and revert to the old system. The new flyover is said to have cost Rs. 89.6 crores, and the U-bridge inaugurated on the same line in 2023, Rs. 18.5 crores.

Flyovers are regularly presented as a solution to ease traffic congestion and are much-touted infrastructure projects. But even when well-designed their utility has always been subject to debate. Not only are they enjoyed by a disproportionately small percentage of road users (viz. vehicle owners) but their benefits often turn out to be short-term gains – with the number of vehicles on the road burgeoning every passing year, it is only a matter of time before the need arises for a fresh solution. Most experts agree that flyovers simply don't solve the problem of traffic. The global trend in fact is to spend more on public transport infrastructure and roll out initiatives that discourage private cars on roads. But Chennai, it seems, is planning otherwise.

The city has several flyovers under construction, many of which are also delayed, to boot.

Some projects that have swallowed investments and remain incomplete include the partially-opened Rs. 52 crore Pattabiram flyover which has been under construction for nearly six years; the Rs. 226 crore Vyasarpadi-Pulianthope flyover that is only 40 per cent complete since the past two years; the Rs 96 crore Korukkupet-Kodungaiyur flyover which has been stuck for two years; and the Rs. 130 crore flyover between Anna Salai and Panagal Park which was to have been completed last year. These are but a few examples. Between the heavy budgets and the traffic restrictions that accompany construction, it is the city exchequer and commuters who are paying a steep price.

It is expected that the Comprehensive Mobility Plan will be updated in the second week of March this year. It would serve

● by Varsha V.

the public well if the focus were to shift away from the relatively small population of vehicle owners. What the city truly needs is a vast mass rapid transit network with great last-mile connectivity; and given that many residents have reportedly put forth demands for better bus and rail services in their localities, such a plan is likely to be warmly welcomed by the people as well. A strong public transport network will not only prove sustainable in the long run but will also align with the green initiatives that Chennai must hold steadfast to if it intends to be resilient to climate change. It is certainly a worthier use of the exchequer's money than flyovers.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE?

(Continued from page 1)

its pre-existing industrial ecosystem. If that is to be vitiated by labour unrest it may be a strong deterrent for potential investors. And those here may begin evaluating the shifting of their plants. If it has happened earlier in West Bengal, it can

happen in Tamil Nadu as well. And then attracting investors back will be an uphill task. The State Government will do well to appreciate that it has a crisis on hand and work towards a speedy and most importantly, amicable resolution.

Address stress

The Woman from Madras Musings had just put up her feet when the doorbell rang. It was the postman, an elderly gentleman with large whiskers who appeared rather reproachful as he held out a brown paper package. It transpired that the postman had a devil of a time identifying the building due to the lack of a nameboard. WMM apologised, admitting that the task was a long-pending one. The postman clucked disapprovingly and left, but not before dispensing an ominous warning – he would retire this week, he said, and the postman who would replace him is not known to be as gentle and understanding as self. WMM was left fairly rattled.

gargoyles decorating its facade – not even a depraved canvas can compete with that. So, Big Brother – a.k.a the watchman – is invariably asked to draw the attention of these hapless couriers while they're wandering up and down the street. BB treats these instances with monstrous enthusiasm – he pops off with a glint in his eye, like a hunter on the loose; and then proceeds to linger proudly at the doorstep when presenting the lost (and deeply aggrieved) deliveryman. And so, there has never been a sense of urgency around putting up a nameboard – after all, matters have somehow managed to resolve themselves thus far.

However, the latest warn-

the main road closer to home. For a while, it appeared to be a good decision – the traffic was perhaps a couple of vehicles denser than usual, not more; and it was moving along reasonably quickly. So imagine the surprise when the car turned into a street that was decked with lights and party flags! The political gathering that S had desperately tried to avoid was in progress at the far end of this very street, stage, mic, chairs and all. S was thunderstruck, but he really needn't have worried so. It is said that the eye of the storm is calm, and it was much the same situation here, too – the traffic was hardly noticeable, and the car had a relatively easy path

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Those are not words one wants to hear from a dauntingly moustached gentleman.

The mystery of the missing nameboard is a long-pending issue in WMM's apartment. The building is a new one and somehow no one ever got around to the job. In place of a nameboard is a brightly coloured canvas with the building number hastily painted on it in large black letters; this terrible piece of art is draped across the entrance gate with an insouciant air and it flaps obscenely at passers-by when the breeze is strong. The building facade also lacks pumpkins and other artefacts that ward off the evil eye, so WMM suspects the canvas is meant to be a clever two-in-one-solution.

However, gentlemen like the postman above are regularly confounded by the state of affairs. Delivery personnel ride up and down the street in search of the apartment, and are always puzzled when asked to search for 'a building with a bright canvas across the gate.' When they do arrive, they come huffing and puffing up the stairs, resentful of the runaround they've been put through. Only a rare few find the whole experience novel and are left quite amused. However, some are unable to even spot the canvas. It doesn't help that a flat down the street has large

ing from the retiring postman has left WMM rather worried. It has been a week since she reached out to the association with a plea to affix a nameboard to the building. She is told that they've only just managed to come to a consensus about the name. Meanwhile, WMM is nervous about the post and not just at the thought of missing important letters, either – she doesn't think she has it in her to face the stern new postman, especially if he proves to be magnificently whiskered like his predecessor.

Strange traffic

The Woman from Madras Musings was on her way back home with the Eternals after visiting a few friends. It was late evening and the Pater was looking forward to his favourite chair. So everyone was rather disappointed when the car ran into unusually dense traffic. Presently, an entourage of policemen appeared ahead, re-routing vehicles and two-wheelers. S the driver rolled down his window and asked what was going on. It transpired that a political gathering was underway in the environs, and would continue till late evening.

Deciding that the diversion would be just as packed, S turned the car towards another short-cut that would join

to navigate. Commuters, it seemed, had done so well in avoiding the gathering that they had left it quite free. It was only when S returned to the main road that the traffic grew slower and denser.

WMM wonders whether this story has lessons for the party or the traffic planners. It is likely both.

Que sera, sera

Like the rest of the world, *The Woman from Madras Musings* has been closely following the debate around the NEP's three language policy. Frankly, WMM herself loves to learn new languages and is unconvinced by the politicisation of their study. But much has been said on the topic, and WMM will not venture into the dispute.

What caught her eye, however, are the demonstrations that have cropped up in the state against this perceived language imposition – specifically, the blackening of railway signboards. It is reported that one of these incidents saw a ruling party functionary painting over the English script instead of the language under protest. WMM doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at the news. Que sera, sera, as they say.

– WMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Politicisation of Heritage

The politicisation of our heritage... as pointed by the Editor (MM, February 1st) was, definitely beyond any doubt, an unnecessary evil at any time. It is a sort of polished parochialism rooted firmly in provincialism by the shrewd politicians aiming at creating an enlarged vote bank. Earlier, on another

occasion, a singular political leader at the helm of the State Government claimed that TN is the pioneer in improving the status of women forgetting conveniently that Kerala has long since attained greater heights in that aspect. As for the heritage matter, the recent discoveries dating back to the Iron Age

shows India should be proud of TN's contribution to that era instead of making it a subject matter for exhibiting and igniting parochial sentiments .

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Senior Citizens and Children at the mercy of stray dogs now?

When a passer by is challenged by a stray dog on the street, the option for the person is to throw a stone at the stray dog to keep it away or run away from the scene. This strategy is not possible for senior citizens and children and therefore, they have become vulnerable to any possible attack from stray dogs.

According to media reports, around 11,704 people in Chennai city and around 48,583 persons in Tamil Nadu have been bitten by the stray dogs over the past year alone. Let not anyone view that such incidents of dog bites are very miniscule considering the population.

It is further reported that as per the census carried out in the year 2018, there were 59000 stray dogs in Chennai city. According to a media report from 2024, the number of stray dogs in Chennai city have gone up by nearly three times to around 1.8 lakh.

As each female gives birth to four to six puppies at a time, (which depend on the breed of the dog), the number of stray dogs in Chennai city would multiply to around at least 5 lakhs by the year 2030. It is said that stray dogs are being sterilised but this is taking place in a painfully slow rate which will have no impact on the growing number in the city. I am unable to visualise the scenario when 5 lakh stray dogs would be loitering on the streets in Chennai city alone.

I am a senior citizen living in Fourth Cross Street in Besant Nagar for over forty years now. This is not a lengthy street and has just around 5 blocks with each block having four flats in one row only.

Around 18 months back, there were no stray dogs in the street. Then, two or three dogs were spotted and now the number has multiplied to ten with dogs loitering around all the time. They are so used to the place now and they sit on the middle of the road and enter the houses when the gates are open and sometime big dogs jump over the wall and enter the house. They rarely move when vehicles pass by and pedestrians and vehicles have to navigate to avoid the dogs. So far, these dogs have not bitten anyone but I am not sure about the future.

With number of senior citizens living in the street, in the evening hours, when the street lights do not cover the entire area, there have been occasions when they have stepped on the dog unknowingly and on one occasion one person fell down on the road and hurt himself. Of course, the barking of

the dogs, particularly during the night hours, disturb the sleep, particularly of senior citizens

In the entire Besant Nagar area, there appears to be very few streets where there are no stray dogs. In the Elliotts beach in Besant Nagar, I have counted 61 stray dogs sharing space with the visitors on the sand and platform.

It appears that all these dogs are well-fed as the dog lovers, not only local residents, but also outsiders regularly feed the dogs. Such dog lovers come mostly at stipulated time in car, two-wheeler or by walk and the dogs seem to be waiting for them. One noteworthy fact is that when these dogs are provided biscuits and other items by throwing them on the street by the dog lovers, a number of crows also gather around. But, the dogs never allow the crows to have their share. The dog lovers also do not seem to care about the crows which remain disappointed.

One of the stray dog lovers who feed the dogs regularly argued that such feeding is necessary, so that the stray dogs would remain calm and not bite the people!

As the problem is almost similar all over the city now, this issue cannot anymore be ignored by Chennai Corporation, which gives an impression that it is helpless and clueless.

In this scenario, there is recent news item that Chennai Corporation has earmarked around Rs.12 crores to build cow sheds in a few locations to tackle stray cattle. This is a proactive step. Why not similar plans to tackle stray dogs also?

Certainly, it should be possible to identify a few locations in the outskirts of the city to create dog parks, where the dogs can be left. They can be taken care of partly by Chennai Corporation and partly by dog-lovers; and certainly, the hundreds of dog-lovers in the city who run behind stray dogs to feed them would be happy to feed such dogs in the dog parks. The dog-lovers can also form an association for themselves, collect food items for the dogs on a day-to-day basis and send it to the dog parks. Then, these dogs will not be termed as stray dogs and this will make dog-lovers supremely happy.

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Thirukkural: A celebration of music, art and inspiration

by Muhilan Murugan

The Madras Literary Society recently hosted a unique and enchanting event, titled *Thirukkural: A Celebration of Music, Art, and Inspiration*. It brought together music, art, and literature in a mesmerising display of creativity and inclusivity. Held on February 15, the event featured a range of performances and activities that celebrated the timeless wisdom contained in the *Thirukkural*. The audience was also treated to a fascinating talk by Adhavan Sundaramurthy, who shared the story behind his *Thirukkural*-inspired podcasts.

There were musical renditions of *Thirukkural* verses by Jyothikalai, who sang from memory and took requests from the audience. Jyothikalai's soulful singing brought the audience to their feet, and her ability to recall and sing *Thirukkural* verses from memory was truly impressive. T. Jaisakthivel presented postal souvenirs based on Tamil art and literature, and Soumya (The Iyal Collective) showcased stunning paintings inspired by the *Thirukkural*, and shared her creative journey with the audience.

One of the highlights of the event was its inclusive nature. Sign language interpretation was provided by Nithya. There was also a demonstration about how sign language works for poetry. The organisers also put together a tactile postcard activity, which allowed everyone to participate and experience the joy of creativity. As a special gesture, Jaisakthivel gifted each attendee with a unique cancellation postcard, making the event even more memorable.

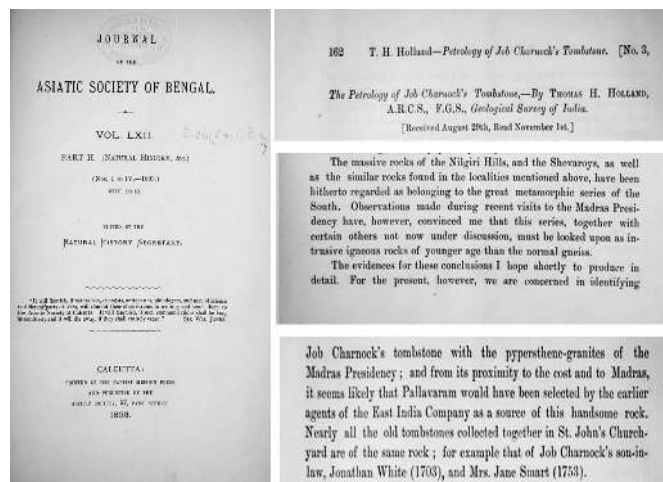
Notably, the event was curated by the MLS team as part of their fundraiser initiative. As a member of MLS, it is great to be part of a community that brings people together through heritage, art and literature. This particular event was a truly unforgettable experience and I am grateful to have been a part of it. If you're like to support MLS too, you can contact them at madrasliterarysociety@gmail.com.

Charnockite from St. Thomas Mount

Propos Faisal Abass's Preserving Tamil Nadu's geological legacy (*Madras Musings*, February 1st, 2025) , I felt like alerting readers of MM about charnockite, originally quarried from St. Thomas's Mount.

The story as below: Thomas Henry Holland (1868–1947, Director of Geological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1903–1910) named the dark, quartz-feldspar rock as charnockite in 1893, since Holland found it a newer kind of granite (see extracts of relevant details of and from Holland's article published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1893, attached figure). Thomas Holland studied Job Charnock's memorial plaque in the mausoleum erected by Charles Eyre (Charnock's son-in-law) in St. John's Church yard, Calcutta. The rock material studied by Holland was quarried from St Thomas's Mount–Pallavaram region, Madras and transported to Calcutta by land. Geologist Holland found the quartz-feldspar rock to be different the previously known granite and named it Charnockite, since his material source was Charnock's mausoleum.

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Cupid's Bow – Where Romances Blossomed

Valentine's Day has just passed, and I felt that this may be an appropriate time to look back at a lost landmark of our city – a place where romance was always in the air to such an extent that it came to be known as Cupid's Bow though it had no official name. The story of the place, and what it has become today, is an interesting thread in the fabric that is Madras history.

The British, for almost the first 150 years of their existence in the city, rarely ventured beyond Fort St George. Weekend homes, in reality garden bungalows, began coming up on the banks of the Adyar from the 1760s but during the week life revolved around the Fort. During summer, and for much else of the year, this could be stifling and one of the pastimes was to take the air in the evening. The equestrians among the residents rode and others set out in carriages. Their destination was a wide space south of the Fort, not even a kilometre away, just by where the Cooum entered the sea.

In many ways, this was the outer bound of Madras as far as the 17th century British were concerned. Beyond it lay a narrow strip of sand by the sea and this was the site of the future Marina Beach and after it was the Portuguese town of San Thome. And so, this was where they set out from the Fort, each evening, to relax, enjoy the sea breeze and make small conversation. And with it came romance. There were mild flirtations, serious relationships and the occasional bitter break up. It was no wonder that the place came to be known as Cupid's Bow. It is very likely that Robert Clive romanced Margaret Maskylene here as did Warren Hastings with his Marian.

Cupid's Bow was no mere roundabout. It had certain rules – you had to be in full formal dress here. Allen's *Evening Mail*, April 28, 1869 is quite clear on this – full morning dress was de rigueur and the "malcontent can betake himself to the club where all sorts of coats are admissi-

ble." It is ironic that today we associate the clubs with crusty regulations on clothes. There are no details of what women were expected to wear to Cupid's Bow, and we can only assume that they were to be "decorously attired" as the Madras Club reminds ladies even today.

As the place became increasingly popular, amenities were provided. Ornamental lamps were put up and there were moans and groans in the administration reports of the Corporation about how they rusted rapidly owing to the salt air and had to be replaced frequently. That quintessential British feature, the bandstand, soon made its appearance and that gave rise to two road names that are now forgotten. Band Beach Road was so named as it connected Fort St George to the bandstand and Band Practice Road was the one that connected it to the Island. Today Band Beach Road is merely the southern end of Rajaji Salai and Band Practice Road is Flagstaff Road.

that Madame Novikoff got to understand British diplomacy. Arriving in England in 1868 she soon became so well connected that Disraeli referred to her as the MP from Russia!

But let us get back to Cupid's Bow. As power came to the British they became more adventurous. The Portuguese were gone and by 1750, Mylapore, San Thome and what lay beyond was all Madras. The British began preferring riding over greater distances. The construction of the Cenotaph at the intersection of Teynampet village and Mount Road provided a new location and then, beginning with 1875, the beach began to widen owing to the construction of the harbour. A new promenade, namely South Beach (present Kamaraj Salai) came into existence. Cupid's Bow was no longer considered fashionable.

The emptying of Fort St George as a residence, which began in 1799 seems to have contributed to the further decline of Cupid's Bow. Houses

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

The Governor's Band performed each evening at Cupid's Bow and a letter from Lord Napier and Ettrick, Governor of Madras in the 1860s, refers to it – "The sun has just set. The world begins to breathe. I fancy that the musicians are just tuning their instruments at the bandstand. Round the bandstand there is a curved walk which is called Cupid's Bow, but, alas! The god never draws it." Interestingly, the roundabout was connected across the Cooum to the south by a bridge named after Napier. Its successor is still called Napier Bridge. Even more interesting, Napier's letter was addressed to Madame Olga Novikoff, a Russian to whom he may have been linked via ties warmer than mere friendship. It was through him, in St Petersburg in 1862,

came to be built in far-flung parts of the city and there were plenty of other venues and outlets for amusement and the odd dalliance. Even South Beach seems to have had only a short burst of popularity for in 1907 the *Journal of the Society of Arts* says that both venues were no longer hot spots, "the gentler sex finding more welcome at the Madras Club than was once accorded and having the full liberty of the Adyar Club and its grounds."

The First World War brought about the final transformation of Cupid's Bow. A committee of influential citizens was formed to create what was termed a Victory Memorial. There were debates galore on a suitable site and finally, it was Cupid's Bow that was selected. Work began quickly enough for we read of



War Memorial. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

the same day. Of these, only the Prince of Wales Ward for Children became reality.

In the meanwhile, work on the Victory Memorial as originally planned continued desultorily. It is not clear as to who designed it but the central pillar, which was all that was originally planned, was completed in 1933. Three years later, the Committee handed over the memorial to the Corporation of Madras, together with a fund of Rs 50,000 for its maintenance. And when Second World War ended, the circular corridor of stone was added. Since then, several additions have been made to the structure, along with some modifications to the text in the dedication to reflect that India is no longer a crown colony but a republic.

War Memorial is how the place is spoken of today, which is ironic considering its origins as a place for romance. Even more ironic is the name Cupid's Bow War Memorial as it is referred to in recent books that seem to rely more on Wikipedia.

Namma Ooru Thiruvizha, Chennai Sangamam: A celebration of Tamil Culture

Chennai Sangamam was inaugurated by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on January 13 at the Ekambaranathar temple grounds on Periyar EVR Salai at Kilpauk. As it does every year, this Pongal-special festival presented a spectacular homage to Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage. It was conducted at eighteen locations throughout the city and saw more than 1,500 artists delighting the audiences with classic, contemporary and folk performances. Chennai Sangamam showcased more than fifty traditional folk-art forms including Karakattam, Silambattam, Devarattam, Villupattu, Therukoothu and more. Each venue also played host to a food festival, where visitors could enjoy traditional delicacies from across the State. People enjoyed eating spicy Chettinad curries, Ilayappam and jaggery, Pongal and various other sweet and savoury dishes native to Tamil Nadu. The venues also offered people the chance to play traditional games.

The team behind Chennai Sangamam this year were Kathir who was the art director; Meera Krishnamurthy, Nellai Manikandan and Palani, who were the dance coordinators; P.M. Sivakumar was the programme co-ordinator; Kumaravel, was the script writer; and Pravin Kannanur, was the programme director.

In a brief chat with *Madras Musings*, Pravin said that the festival's name 'Chennai Sangamam – Namma Ooru Thiruvizha' drew its inspiration from a famous quote by former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi – *Naan endru sonnol udhadugal ottadhu; Naam endru sonnol thaam udhadugal ottum* ([In Tamil] The lips do not come together when we say 'I'; they do when we say 'We.') That is, unity is a powerful thing to have when working towards noble endeavours.

True to the essence of the iconic quote, the inaugural show was a vibrant gathering that showcased myriad dance forms in Tamil Nadu and brought together around 250 artists to perform on stage. Meera, who participated in Chennai Sangamam for the first time, put together the Bharatanatyam sequences. A special feature of the inaugural event was a sign-language performance presented along with other shows by the Toda, Irula, Kurumba and Kota tribes. It wasn't just traditional and folk dances, either – the event also showcased the city's talent in contemporary dance forms like hip-hop.

The show also had performances by artists from the transgender community to sustain its theme of inclusivity. The live music was conducted under the supervision of Paul Jacob, who was the music producer at the event. The artists – and other performing talents – were chosen based on auditions conducted in several locations in the city. Nellai Manikandan says that future shows will include performances by the differently abled, as well.

Chennai Sangamam has grown vast over the years, indeed. This year, its reach extended beyond Chennai with similar festivals held in eight other cities – Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Salem, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, Kanchipuram, and Vellore.



The event shone a spotlight on Tamil Nadu's traditional musical instruments.



Bharatanatyam by Meera Krishnamurthy's group.



Kalaiyaattam: Where rhythm takes fights as dance.



Karagam: A dance that flows like water.



Feel the pulse of "Periya Melam".



Above: A display of balance and grace through Puravi attam. Below: The spirit of the hills: A dance native to the Kota tribe.



The unsung heroes of Chennai Sangamam (left to right): Ilango, Bharath, Kathir, Elango Kumaravel, Paul Jacob, Pravin on stage with artists.

● Article by Geethanjali. Pictures and captions by Thamayandhi R.

Talkie Film Studios from the 1930s – Part I

Film studios need land by the acre to function. In the beginning of the 1930s, things were more complicated – the technology of the time allowed only live sound recording, so the location had to be chosen such that noise interruptions like traffic etc. had to be minimal. The Chennai of those days was largely confined to dense localities like George Town and its neighbouring areas. Beyond that, there were small villages of groves and garden – namely, Teynampet, Adyar etc where the studios were established. It can be understood that studios paved the way for the expansion of Chennai city. In this article, we will see details and new research-based information about the talkie studios that functioned from 1934 to 1939.

The importance of film production studios

Film studios have played a significant role in the development of cinema, and are a crucial subject when discussing the history of the silver screen. After the advent of talkies, studios served as the single production unit that made films from scratch to completion. In the 1930s and 40s, a studio's name was included when advertising the release of a film. Studios of that period were massive set-ups. Most of the films shot in the first twenty years or so of cinema were grand epics and legends; so studios had to plan many factors including the expansive stage sets, myriad costumes and more. It was common for studios to employ a large number of permanent workers.

Before 1934, it was necessary to travel to North India to make talkies. Studios were then established in various towns in Madras Presidency. An analysis of the pioneers behind these efforts, and the towns in they chose to set-up studios can offer a fair indication of the social circumstances prevailing at the time.

In the first twenty years, South Indian studios employed film professionals from Northern and Eastern India as well as overseas, as they were well-trained. Many workers from Madras Presidency learned the craft and technologies involved from these skilled experts. Studios provided these aspirants with such an opportunity.

Not only did studios do away with the necessity of travelling to North India to shoot, they also improved the rather poor quality of locally produced films. They flourished so well

that Hindi films began to be made in Madras. Why, even the credit for blazing a new trail in Sinhala language films goes to studios in Madras Presidency!

Talkie cinema halls

In those days, Kilpauk and the surrounding neighbourhood formed the centre of the film industry. These areas have been home to many studios since the silent film era. Initially, films were shot without the facility of electric lights and had to rely on sunlight. So the direction and layout of a studio were planned in such a way that a shoot could avail sunlight throughout the day without being impeded by shadows. The early history of Tamil cinema records that films were made with great difficulty till 1936 – shooting had to take place when the sunlight was plenty and bright, and come to a halt when the light was low. Back then, there were no transport facilities to commute to studios located in areas like Adyar and Vepery. People had to travel on foot, and rarely used vehicles like cars and jhulkas.

Everyone at a studio worked together as equals in a family. There was no discrimination. They identified the tasks that had to be completed and worked as much as they could without a break. In those days, the prevailing custom was to stay in the studio until a film was wrapped up. Sets and other equipment put up in a studio were made use of for a very long period. So it was not unusual to see these setups in many films.

Since film reels were highly flammable, studios back then carried a high risk of burning down. There are many stories of such studios being lost to fire, an example being R. Nataraja Mudaliar's studio which had the distinction of being South India's first studio. When talkies appeared, the number of exterior shots began to diminish, and entire films were shot inside the set.

Srinivasa Cinetone

It is common to see the words 'tone' or 'sound' appended to the names of studios and companies that produced talkies, which had to synchronize a film's sound and visual.

A. Narayanan worked in the film industry as a sales representative for silent films and related equipment through the company 'Exhibitor Film Service.' He also produced and released silent films through a studio and film company called 'General Pictures Corporation.' When talkies appeared, he

established a film production company called Srinivasa Cinetone, named after his son. He is also credited with setting up Sound City, the first studio in South India with the facility to produce talkies. Sound City was established on 1.4.1934. (Many people tend to confuse Srinivasa Cinetone and Sound City; however, records show that the Srinivasa Cinetone was established before Sound City.)

Srinivasa Cinetone was located at 107, Poonamallee High Road. The entrance was located on Poonamallee High Road and the back gate was on Flowers Road. A. Narayanan's wife Meenakshi trained at Srinivasa Cinetone from 1936 and emerged as India's first female sound recorder. The



Mr. C.P. Sarathy, Mr. M.T. Rajen and Mr. Jayantilal Thakore.

hand-held camera to shoot the first couple of films.

Jayavani Cinetone

When A. Narayanan sold his silent film studio at Tondiarpet – General Pictures Corporation

who worked there were art director O.R. Embarayya, sound recordist C.E. Biggs, cameramen E.R. Cooper and D.T. Telang, lab manager Rudrappa and general manager Rajasigamani Mudaliar.

The managing director of Vel Pictures was M.T. Rajan alias M. Thiyagaraja Mudaliar. Even today, there is a small street in Chennai named after him. The partners were C.P. Sarathy alias C. Parthasarathy Mudaliar, P.V. Doss from Krishna district and others.

A group consisting of A. Muthusamy Iyer alias Murugadasa, K. Ramnath and A.K. Sekar went to Prabhat Studio in Pune (at the time, it had relocated its premises from Kolhapur) to shoot *Seetha Kalyanam* (1934). After gaining some experience, director Murugadasa joined Vel Pictures in the company's early days along with K. Ramnath and A.K. Sekar. The first film produced at Vel Pictures Studio was the Telugu *Seetha Kalyanam*.

Murugadasa, K. Ramnath and A.K. Sekar worked on the first three films produced by Vel Pictures – *Seetha Kalyanam* (Telugu), *Krishna Leela* (Telugu) and *Markandeya* (Tamil) – as director, photographer and art director respectively. The trio left the studio in 1934. There are claims that Murugadasa was one of the owners of Vel Pictures, but it is untrue.

Seetha Kalyanam (Telugu) was released on 15.12.1934. Vel Pictures' fourth film *Pattinathar*, directed by T.C. Vadivelu Nayagar, was shot in 1936 on a budget of Rs. 31,000. It amassed an unexpectedly huge collection, prompting the studio to purchase land in Guindy as well as a camera worth Rs. 30,000.

The studio shifted premises to Guindy in early 1937. Vel Pictures later became Narasu Studio and came to be owned by V.L. Narasu alias V. Lakshmi Narasimhan, the owner of Narasu's Coffee.

(To be continued)

● by S.A. Muthuvel

studio's first film was *Srinivasa Kalyanam* which was released on June 30, 1934. Since the crew consisted of talent only from South India, it can be said that this film was a truly South Indian production.

A. Narayanan, R. Prakash, T.C. Vadivelu Nayagar, and Ramkumar (a.k.a The Man of a Thousand Faces) were the film's directors. T.V. Krishnaiah was the cameraman. R. Prakash had trained abroad and was already experienced with producing silent films in his studio, so he was well-versed in cinema techniques. He contributed greatly to all work related to the film's production.

Apart from the films of his own company, A. Narayanan made Srinivasa Cinetone available to shoot films made by other production companies as well. Unfortunately, none of the films made by A. Narayanan saw much success. The reasons appear to be two-fold – one, he shot these films in a very short period of time, sometimes as little as ten days; two, the studio lacked adequate facilities. In fact, the crew had to use a

(GPC) – all the equipment was purchased by A. Seshaiyah. He had acted in GPC's silent films and had received training in film direction. He directed the talkies *Ramayanam* and *Savitri*, which were released during the period 1932-33. The studio Jayavani Cinetone was founded by him and a few others.

The film *Dasavatharam* which was released in 1934 was shot at Jayavani Cinetone which belonged to Jayavani Films in Tondiarpet. It was the first film in India to have been produced at a native sound recording unit called Boopathi Sound System, which was established by an engineer named Boopathi Nayagar. He ran a Chennai-based college for sound recording.

Vel Pictures

Vel Pictures Studio was established around the same time as Sound City. It later had an inauguration ceremony as well. It was set-up on 21.06.1934 at Dunmore House at Eldam's Road, Teynampet which was once the Pithapuram Maharajah's palace. The technicians

VEL PICTURES LTD.,

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Picture Producers & Distributors.

Managing Director: M. Theagaraja Mudaliar (M. T. Rajan.)

Directors:

C. PARTHASARATHI MUDALIAR.

P. VENKATA DOSS.

A. MUTIUSAMI B.A.,

M. A. VENKATRAMANA NAIDU,

Secretary.

Legal Adviser.

A magazine devoted to Agriculture

Jegadhabhi Ragupathy Rangaraju, or J.R. Rangaraju as he was popularly known was one of the pioneers of the detective genre in the world of Tamil novels. His works, such as *Mohanasundaram*, *Rajambal*, *Chan-drakantha* and *Anandakrishnan*

were bestsellers and went into multiple reprints. Several drama troupes of those times such as Nawab Rajamanickam Pillai's Madurai Devi Bala Vinoda Sangeetha Sabha dramatised his works with great success. What is however interesting to note and is a lesser-known facet of his personality is the deep interest showed by him (and his family) in agriculture. Marking the 150th year of his birth, this column features *The Agriculturist* or *Krishikan*, the magazine that was brought out by his family.

Rangaraju was born in Palayamcottah in April 1875 as the third son of J. Sriranga Raju, a postal inspector and Lakshmi Ammal. His elder brothers, J. Dharmaranga Raju and J. Selvaranga Raju were in government service. Having graduated from the Saidapet Agricultural College in 1888, Dharmaranga Raju started his career as a clerk

Societies. Selvaranga Raju followed Dharmaranga Raju in the Saidapet Agricultural College and graduated with a first-class degree. He started his career with a stint as a farm supervisor of the college and went on to serve the Agricultural Department for more than thirty years. He retired as its Deputy Director in the 1920s. Both brothers were awarded the Rao Bahadur title in recognition of their meritorious services. While details about Rangaraju's early life and education are sketchy, it probably could be inferred that his interest in agriculture was inherited from his brothers.

Dharmaranga Raju had a keen interest in agriculture and undertook several experiments in his own lands. He was an active member of the Madras Agricultural Students Union, affiliated to his alma mater and served as its Vice-President. He was instrumental in educating



J.R. Rangaraju.



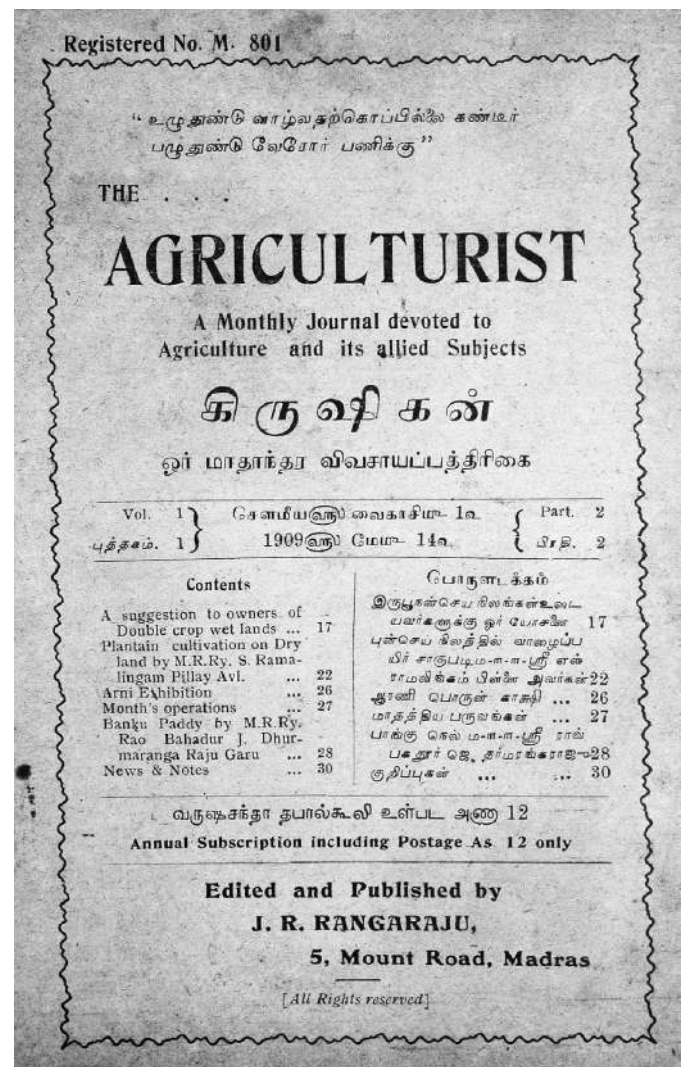
J. Selvaranga Raju.

● by Karthik Bhatt

in the Revenue Department in Tirunelveli and rose to the grade of a Deputy Collector in the early 1900s. He also had a stint as the Dewan Peshkar of the native state of Pudukottah, before being appointed Assistant Registrar of Co-operative

ryots about agricultural developments such as the working of the iron plough during his tenure as Assistant to the Director of Agriculture in his native district of Tirunelveli. He recognised that the ryots had to be educated about newer methods and innovations, which would help them better their productivity. He hit upon the idea of starting a magazine for this purpose which would be made available at a highly-subsidised rate of 12 annas per annum, so that it could reach far and wide. Thus, was born *The Agriculturist*, or *Krishikan*.

The first issue of the magazine was published in April 1909. It was a monthly, with every issue coming out on the first day of the respective Tamil month. While Rangaraju was credited as being the editor and publisher, it was really Dharmaranga Raju who was the heart and soul behind the running of the magazine. He contributed several articles every issue, with ballads and simple verses on different aspects of agriculture such as ploughing methods, economic transplantation, gorus (seed drills) etc. being his specialty. He also popularised these ballads amongst children of elementary schools, singing them as action songs. Another interesting aspect of the magazine was that subscribers communicating the non-receipt of any issue within a week of its



publication were sent a copy of that issue again free of cost. Dharmaranga Raju's active involvement in the magazine continued right up to his untimely death at a relatively young age of 49 years, in November 1914. Following Dharmaranga Raju's demise, Selvaranga Raju took on a more active role in the functioning of the magazine.

By this time, Rangaraju had individually made progress in his agricultural pursuits. He reared cattle which were superior in breed and high in milk yielding capacity. In 1902, he began a dairy on Mount Road, a venture which was credited as being the first of its kind. He evinced a keen interest in growing vegetables and the family's garden in Saidapet, opposite the main entrance of Raj Bhavan became home to several rare plants and trees. As late as the 1970s, it was known in local parlance as "Raju Thottam". Rangaraju was also in-charge of the gardening department of the Theosophical Society in the 1930s.

Krishikan continued to come out until 1917 or so, when its publication came to a halt. The reasons for the stoppage, as seen in a later advertisement for the magazine make for interesting

reading. Rangaraju's fame and interest in agriculture seems to have spread far and wide, for his services were requisitioned by the Government (of Madras?) to grow vegetables for soldiers fighting in Mesopotamia in World War I, and his decision to go to the war-front meant that the magazine had to be wound up. According to the advertisement, an immediate restart after the cessation of the war could not happen due to various circumstances, including the rising cost of newsprint. It was not until 1926 that the magazine started its second innings. It seems to have been published for a few years after that, before ceasing completely in the mid-1930s.

The story of the magazine does not end there, for it re-emerged in a different avatar a good two decades later, in 1951. The man behind its rebirth was A.S. Venkata Rao, who ran an agricultural welfare organisation called the Payirthozhil Pannai in Villupuram. The first issue in the new series fittingly plays tribute to the contribution of the Raju brothers in bringing out the magazine.

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– THE EDITOR

C.D. Gopinath – The oldest living Indian Test Cricketer

He has been the oldest living Indian Test cricketer since Dattajirao Gaekwad of Baroda passed away in February last year. Chingleput Doraikannu Gopinath who turns 95 on March 1 played eight Tests from 1951-52 to 1959-60 with moderate success in a fragmented career but he was the champion batsman for Madras in the fifties. With a record of 2349 runs at an average of just over 51 with six hundreds and a highest score of 234 in the Ranji Trophy he would be an automatic selection for an all time Tamil Nadu XI as a middle order batsman.

Born in Madras Gopinath made his first class debut in 1949-50 (he got a pair in his first Ranji Trophy game against Mysore) and in a comparatively short career that ended with the 1962-63 season because of business interests he scored 4259 runs at an average of 42 with nine hundreds. But more than the impressive figures it was his elegant batsmanship that caught the eye. A cultivated stylist Gopinath was an elegant right-hander who charmed the ball away from the fielders. He played pace and spin with equal felicity and old-timers recalled with a glint in their eyes his majestic 175 made for South zone against

the New Zealanders on their 1955-56 visit.

Shrugging off that inauspicious start to his first class career, Gopinath showed that he had everything – talent, technique and temperament and the selectors showed infinite wisdom in rushing him on to the international stage. Within a year of his first class debut, he was playing for India in the fifth unofficial Test against the strong second Commonwealth team at Kanpur. He straight-

● by
Partab Ramchand

away showed his class and skill scoring an unbeaten 66 in a losing cause. Mushtaq Ali who shared a century partnership with him during the innings recalled in his autobiography "So far I had been a junior partner to Vijay Merchant but now I had to take full responsibility, not the least, that of keeping Gopinath away from the bowling. But I need not have worried about the youngster. From the moment he came in he batted with all the aplomb of a veteran. There was no trace of immaturity and nervousness of a newcomer at all. In 75 minutes we rattled up a hundred runs. Gopinath

in his maiden Test appearance remained unbeaten with 66 – a truly glorious performance. He seemed capable of getting the 77 runs which stood between victory and defeat." India set to get 440 for victory were all out for 362.

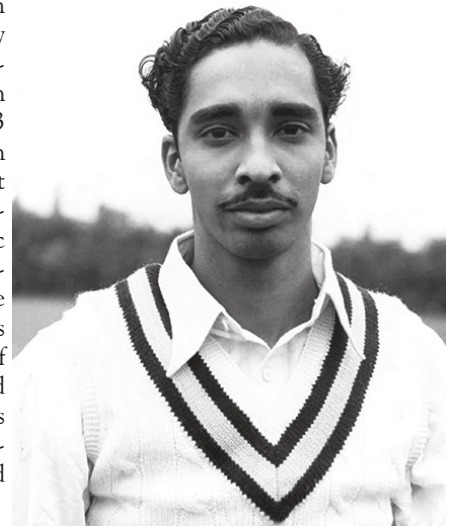
A year later Gopinath made his Test debut against England at Bombay and performed commendably in two very different shades. In the first innings, he came in at 397 for six and remained unbeaten on 50 when Vijay Hazare declared the innings at 485 for nine. In the second innings, it was a very different role he had to play. England 29 runs behind on the first innings hit back to take six wickets for 77 early on the final morning. It was at this ticklish situation that Gopinath entered. A seventh wicket fell at 88 and the crisis was severe. However, not at all overawed by the quick fall of wickets, Gopinath played in a calm manner.

Batting with the assurance of a seasoned campaigner he steered India out of troubled waters sharing an eighth wicket partnership of 71 runs with S.W. Sohoni. By the time Gopinath was out for the top score of 42, India had virtually saved the match. In the final Test of the same series in his

hometown, Gopinath proved his worth by scoring 35 and helping Polly Umrigar in a partnership of 93 runs for the seventh wicket which went a long way in culminating in a historic triumph. It was Gopinath who took the final catch to dismiss Brian Statham off Vinoo Mankad and that heralded India's maiden Test victory by an innings and eight runs.

Against this background Gopinath's final Test record of 242 runs at an average of 22 must be termed disappointing. He could not command a regular place in the crowded middle order though he toured England in 1952 and Pakistan in 1954-55. He played his last Test against Australia at Calcutta in 1959-60 scoring a stroke filled 39 (top score) and a duck. Gopinath's first class career started with a duck and his Test career ended with a duck but what joys he provided in between! He was one of the main architects of Madras' maiden Ranji Trophy triumph in 1954-55 and captained the state team for several seasons.

After his playing career was



C.D. Gopinath. From our Archives.

over Gopinath kept in close touch with the game. First he had nine straight terms from 1968-69 to 1976-77 on the selection committee, the last five of them as chairman. In 1979 he managed the Indian team to England. As an elder statesman Gopinath has remained graciously affable and polished in his behavior while spending much time on the tennis courts and the golf course besides indulging in his various passions like hunting, fishing, sailing and horse racing. For more information on him, also refer: *Beyond Cricket – A Life in Many Worlds – Madras Musings Vol. XXXIII No. 1, April 16-30, 2023.*

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