

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Throwing children under the political juggernaut

The last few weeks have seen nothing but the slugfest that is ongoing between the Centre and the State over the National Education Policy (NEP). Enough and more has been said on the subject and we at *Madras Musings* would not like to take sides on the issue. But what we would like to appeal for is that children need to be protected from the political headwinds that seem to be blowing their way.

For those who have been around in the 1960s this may seem like déjà vu. The parallels are very much there for everyone to see. A party in power

at the State for long, wanting to once again win the coming elections. Another party in the Opposition that sees the NEP as an opportunity to grab power. The only difference is that this latter party is in

● by Sriram V.

power at the Centre right now. In the 1960s it was a conflict between a party that was in power in the Centre and State and a younger outfit that saw its opportunity. The youth played a considerable role in

swaying public emotion then; most notably the teargassing of protesting college students proved a turning point. Both contenders right now may be hoping for such a flashpoint to occur, one way or the other.

Language is the core of the issue right now, as it was then. The fear of imposition of an alien tongue is real. At the same time, how are people from the State to contend with fluency in a language that is understood across a wide spectrum in the country? Will it impact mobility across borders and also employability? The

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Gig workers inclusion in State Budget a welcome move, but not enough

The 2025-26 Tamil Nadu budget has earmarked funds towards the welfare of gig workers in the State. In his speech, Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu announced that 2,000 gig workers registered with the Gig Workers Welfare Board would receive a subsidy of Rs. 20,000 to purchase new e-scooters, and that approximately 1.5 lakh gig workers would be covered under a group insurance scheme that will provide compensation for accidental death or disability. Further, the administration proposes to set-up in key metro cities such as Chennai and Coimbatore, lounges equipped

with essential facilities for the convenience of gig workers on the move.

Gig workers work on flexible timings and are often associated with multiple service

● by Varsha V.

platforms. According to reports, Tamil Nadu has lakhs of gig workers and most of them struggle with unstable incomes and poor working conditions. While it is welcome that the State Budget has made provisions for their welfare, it will take more than funds to

address their struggles. In particular, it is hard not to question the effectiveness of the e-scooter subsidy – given that the city does not have robust EV charging infrastructure, how useful can it be for workers who often travel more than a hundred kilometres a day?

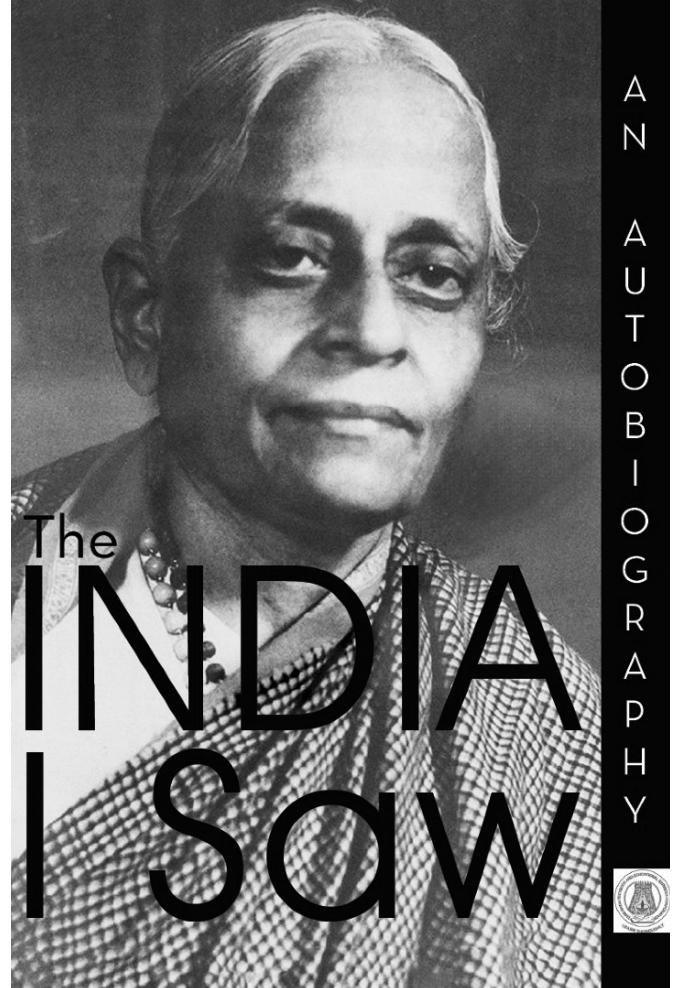
It is a sad fact that though gig workers endure gruelling hours – especially when it is the primary source of income – their nature of work falls outside traditional employment norms that typically safeguard social security. The distinction is, in fact, acknowledged by the Code of Social Security 2020

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH

Reliving the Freedom Struggle

S. AMBUJAMMAL
Translated by Sriram V.



The life of patriot S Ambujammal is hugely inspiring. Born into a life of privilege, she instead chose to follow Mahatma Gandhi. Realising through her journey in the freedom struggle that her true calling lay in social service, Ambujammal founded the Srinivasa Gandhi Nilayam, to help women and children in need. The organisation continues to do its good work, quietly. Towards the end of her life, Ambujammal penned her biography. Titled *Naan Kanda Bharatam*, it is a ringside view of the freedom struggle, with Ambujammal herself being an active participant.

An English translation of the book by Sriram V was released earlier this month. Published by Rupa Publications and supported by the Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, the book is available on sale at Amazon and also local bookshops. Proceeds from the sale go to benefit Srinivasa Gandhi Nilayam.

THROWING CHILDREN UNDER THE POLITICAL JUGGERNAUT

(Continued from page 1)

Centre for its part seems to have climbed down somewhat – previous regimes insisted on Hindi while the present one gives an option for language of a neighbouring State. But the question is, do children have to bear this burden of one more language?

Learning languages is best left to the ebb and flow of market forces. If there is a demand for a certain tongue, people will learn it anyway. This is exactly how English became a language of choice in a country where languages and dialects are a dime a dozen. Likewise, Hindi anyway will be learnt by those who feel they need it for job opportunities elsewhere in India. Chennai residents too are now learning it, given that they need to communicate with the many from the North who have come here seeking employment. And this latter group is fast learning Tamil.

As for protecting a language from vanishing, it is up to the State to ensure this. It can-

not be done by insisting people learn it anyway. The State needs to ensure that it has universities and research facilities that work on the language concerned, and this includes making sure it has a vocabulary that is current. What we have said above, applies to Hindi as well. The Centre needs to have a holistic approach and make sure it promotes all languages. That will take care of all such issues.

And so, let us not burden children with learning additional languages, one way or the other. They will anyway learn their mother tongue/the language of the place where they live, and English. Let us work towards making them competitive by instilling in them a love for learning and keeping alive a spirit of enquiry. They will take care of other aspects, including language, by themselves. In the short term, let us not ask for boycotts of schools and strikes by teachers to support our political aims.

Gig workers inclusion in State Budget a welcome move, but not enough

(Continued from page 1)

which specifies that gig workers are owed social security schemes from gig employers; however, enforcing the mandate has proved a challenge due to the lack of understanding around prevailing ground realities. Gig workers are not quite covered in terms of minimum wages, workplace safety or wrongful termination. The challenges they face on the ground are not quite acknowledged, either – for example, a gig worker typically goes uncompensated for traffic jams or diversions, which eat into the margins he/she makes. Consider, also, the prospect of taking up gig work in the summers; they risk the hazards of working in the heat but receive no safety provisions or commensurate benefits from gig employers. The lounges proposed to be built under the current Budget, therefore, stand to deliver more than comfort and convenience – they could well be lifelines. It is arguable that such crucial initiatives ought to fall within the purview of gig employers. It is unfortunate that they are unburdened by the responsibility of caring for their hires; after all, they appear to have a disproportionate gain

from the work arrangements they strike with gig workers.

Tamil Nadu constituted a Gig Workers Welfare Board in December 2023, but the Board has reportedly received only 4,000 registrations. A report in *The Hindu* states that the OTP verification of Aadhar numbers has proved a challenge for workers, and that the civic body plans to use a biometric system to shore up registrations. While ensuring coverage, it would augur well for the administration to also focus on framing State-level regulations that can be enforced to ensure that gig workers too receive from their employers fair leave policies, health insurance, maternity leave and workplace safety. Efforts must also be undertaken with respect to data gathering and analysis. If it is to conduct an accurate analysis of the working conditions of gig workers, the administration must work on compiling varied streams of data across platforms and government bodies. As for the platforms, it must be incumbent on them to be transparent about the remuneration models, benefits and grievance addressal systems they extend to the workers in their employ.

Who Enforces Law on the Law?

Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes is a Latin phrase that *The Man from Madras Musings* had picked up somewhere and stored for showing off in future. And the opportunity it seems has come. Translated into English it says, “Who will guard the guards?” and that is what came to MMM’s mind when he read a news item concerning regulating the police force in our city of Madras that is Chennai.

Apparently, the latest misdeed from up top in the force is that the constabulary in charge of traffic ought not to congregate under trees in small groups waiting to pounce on traffic violators but to focus more on regulating traffic by standing in ones and twos at various hotspots. As to how this latest in an already existing list of regulations will fare is anybody’s guess. MMM is of the view that this too will pass and remain in the books for future generations to wonder at. Of course, if it does get implemented in letter and spirit, there will no happier person than MMM who has often been pounced upon for imagined violations.

MMM wonders if you have noticed it but of late, the enforcers of law have taken to forming collectives, most often under shade-bearing trees. MMM is the last to look askance at this behaviour for in his view these men and women are more to be pitied than censured. They are forever in the heat and dust dealing with wanton violations of traffic rules and yet earn the ire of just about everyone. Who would want to work like that? And yet they do. And so, if they collect under trees, may they do so by all means is MMM’s considered view. But it is their habit of stalking their prey and pouncing on them out of nowhere that MMM has much to complain about.

The *modus operandi* is quite good and even in this there is a pecking order. The seniormost in the herd, and often this person is the bulkiest, prefers to remain seated on a two-wheeler deep in the shade of a tree. He/she is seen engrossed in conversation with a couple of middle-order constables while the hunter-gatherers peer through the branches at the approaching traffic, their khakhi forming a perfect camouflage against the tree trunk. As the traffic lights change, these foot soldiers brace themselves, await-

ing the first wave of violators. As they approach, these brave linesmen and women jump on them and steer those caught away to the tree. You could be in the deepest of Africa watching the migration of wildebeest.

An interrogation of sorts then begins, the senior person raised from torpor with amazing alacrity conducting it, with the others around him/her acting as yes-persons. There is necessity for transactions to be conducted with speed for there is a line of victims awaiting judgement and as this grows, some of them make good their escape, confident that the worst that can happen is an e-challan for violation which any day is to be preferred to the endless wrangling that can happen under the tree, subject to the heckling of the yes men,

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

the snarky comments by the senior policeman and the interested gaze of passersby.

All of this, if we are to believe that latest law, will soon be a thing of the past. MMM wonders if our roads will not become a tad dull, without this daily dose of drama unfolding under our very noses. But then violators and violations will still continue to give us plenty of local colour.

Singara Posters

Our Chief Minister was the one who gave us the slogan Singara Chennai and much did we rejoice in it. To give the man due credit he did do his bit but where he failed rather spectacularly was in reining in his party beloveds from splashing the city with posters of him and his family, apart from due honourable mentions of themselves of course.

Now such an opening statement from *The Man from Madras Musings* will he is sure have the party beloveds jumping on his neck. What about Mater Dei they will ask. And what about World Preceptor? Have their parties not indulged in poster wars? To this MMM has a few answers – he railed against Mater Dei and Old Man when they were in power, and he has also ranted against WP and his local reps when it comes to posters. But that the very person who went to town on Singara Chennai should look the other way when it comes to the poster

menace makes MMM wonder somewhat.

The latest in this continuing soap opera is the TANGEDCO beautification attempts. MMM is not sure if you have noticed it, but our transformers are going mod – they are now slim and svelte and also have acquired some glamorous grilles in which they are enclosed. These are painted in Benneton colours as well – pastel greens, gold and blue. And they have holes cut in them to allow for ventilation. All very well no doubt but what is of interest is that these provide enormous flat surfaces which is like honey to party beloveds. All of them had posters during the recent birthday celebrations. And after it was all over, MMM saw TANGEDCO employees going around tearing the posters off the doors. Is all of this really warranted in a so-called world class metropolis?

MMM also notices that where party worthies reside, their compound walls are remarkably free of graffiti and posters. No doubt because they are firm votaries of the Singara Chennai concept. The same is not applicable to their neighbours, all of whom have to bear the brunt of the neighbourly spirit – each day their walls play host to several posters and on some days they also become convenient supports for large cutouts and banners. All in the name of ‘adjust please’ (or else) no doubt.

That said, MMM rather enjoys reading the captions and texts of the various posters. They always give him a good laugh. ‘Papa of the State’ read one which MMM would perhaps rank the best. But there were several others, mostly in highly feudal panegyrics, which makes MMM wonder as to which era he is living in. Of course mind you, MMM still feels that posters today are hardly what they were during Mater Dei’s time. That was their golden era – daft slogans galore, pictures designed by hugely creative minds (there was one that showed world leaders propitiating Mater Dei), and of course enormous cut outs and banners.

But even then, there was the proverbial fly in the ointment – a tiny man called Traffic Ramaswami. He may have gone but MMM is sure other crusaders will come up. MMM lives in hope.

– MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



The Case of the White Water, Black Water and Brown Water

In the year 1978, the CMWSSB (Metro Water) was spun off from the Corporation of Chennai and became an independent department. It came to be in charge of water supply and sewerage, namely the white water and the black water.

The Corporation retained storm water drains, namely the brown water. In addition, it retained the work of laying and maintenance of roads and other constructions. Storm water drains and roads were built through tenders, contracts and contractors, and accounted for enormous cash flow. These projects were undertaken sporadically and on an ad hoc basis.

The CMWSSB on the other hand had permanent structures with occasional additions. It was also beset with problems of maintenance on a round-the-clock, day to day basis.

The CMWSSB in a way outwitted the Corporation by conveniently using storm water drains as sewer lines, rather than doing the work of maintaining and upgrading the sewers. If not for storm water drains, the people of Chennai would be wading through ankle deep sewage on their roads every day.

Both the Corporation and CMWSSB blithely assumed that the old channels of sewers and storm water drains built nearly a century ago in the British era had infinite capacity and would remain adequate for the present and future. As a result, rain in the last three decades has been causing floods in several localities. Sewer lines are clogged and there is extensive overflow from manholes. Massive road cave-ins have been reported when these old lines break down.

Recently, CMWSSB has announced a major revamp of the sewer lines in the city after a study and recommendations by an expert body, which will take three years to implement.

The Corporation also seems to have reached a standstill as far as rainwater management is concerned. Flooding of several areas is now the norm. Water enters homes and buildings, taking days to drain, causing widespread suffering and loss to citizens. The main canals in the city to drain rain and flood water are choked with debris, garbage and encroachments. As desperate measures, the Corporation has tried to shunt the water from one area to another, with even worse results. SWDs are built in haste with no proper survey or planning and the construction itself is of varying quality, creating more trouble.

It is obvious that the problems of the white water, black water and brown water have got out of hand, and the Corporation and CMWSSB seem to have reached a point with no clear solution or plan of action in sight. They appear to be blind to the major causes of flooding.

In the last three decades, road levels in the city of Chennai have risen by two to three feet. This is apparent in every locality where older buildings and houses have, in effect, sunk far below road levels. This is the

major and primary cause for flooding during rains. To expect all the rainwater in the city to be drained through inadequate storm water drains is irrational and impractical. In these circumstances, roads are the longest and widest channels to carry rainwater to the nearest water body and need to be sloped towards them to enable faster flows. Prior to 1990, this was how rainwater found its way to the sea.

Is there any way out of this impasse?

Let me now indulge in a Utopian dream. This is when the roads, water lines, utilities and all related units come under a single government umbrella department named Roads, Utilities and Services, RUS in short. The city would be divided into zones and each zone handed over to a reputed private company, which would be responsible for the building and maintenance of

1. Water mains
2. Sewerage lines
3. Storm water drains
4. Pavements
5. Roads
6. Conduits for utility cables
7. Street lighting

And anything else on, under and on the sides of the roads.

In the era of permit, licence and quotas, production and trade had languished. Free market is reported to have brought about a boom in productivity in several walks of life today. Likewise, by bringing in private companies to various zones of the city, the Corporation and RUS will not be burdened with problems they can no longer handle.

It took the Corporation several decades to realise that collection of garbage in the city had reached gargantuan proportions and the work needed to be outsourced. Several private firms were engaged, effectively on a trial-and-error basis, until the work became more or less streamlined.

In the same manner, the building and maintenance of underground channels for the white water, black water and brown water can no more be dependent on the vagaries of tenders and contracts awarded by government officials to private contractors with no uniformity or supervision in the quality of construction or maintenance. Privatisation in the construction of utilities as noted above, under one RUS umbrella, might rescue and redeem the city of Chennai from flooding and sewage.

Once that is in place, the fogging machines will go into disuse as there will be no mosquitoes in free-flowing storm water drains, sewage will be treated and there will be boats sailing on the Cooum and all the freshwater canals in and around the city. There will be no more flooding anywhere as all the roads would have been re-graded and maintained at the levels they were twenty-five years ago.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan
Venus Civic Exnora

Chennai Connection

You can take a man out of Madras but not Madras out of the man. When I heard at a carpentry workshop in New Zealand that its proprietor had been to Madras in the early 1970s, I

jumped at the opportunity to report the matter to MM. Coppice Crafts is Bill Blair's baby. He is a woodworker, mind you not a carpenter, who grows willow and handcrafts trugs (fruit baskets) at Oamaru, a seaside town on the Pacific coast, on the Queenstown-Christchurch route in South Island. He was at work that afternoon late this February when we walked into his cabin in a desolate spot. A traveller at heart, he had visited Madras, reaching India by road from Afghanistan and



Pakistan. Among the many place in Mera Bharat, he dropped in at Madras for a week or so. My probing did not yield much as Bill was travelling from place to place to place and had caught dysentery in Nepal. He gave me a nugget though. He took back a Shiva statuette carved from sandalwood while looking around in Madras. Incidentally, he quietly praised our craftspeople who work wonders with their hands. In this connection, he shared that he loved the tea served in earthen cups (kullhads) he had in rail stations in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. I went through a high looking at his trugs as opposed to looking at the ubiquitous merchandise in supermarkets, sadly even in souvenir shops, made in countries other than NZ.

T.K. Srinivas Chari
Palmerston North

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Sd. Rohini Ramesh
(Publisher)

Hundred Years of a Masonic Temple

This article was written for a special souvenir released by the District Grand Lodge of South India to commemorate the centenary of Freemasons' Hall and is published here with kind permission.

— Sriram V

It was on February 26, 1925 that Lord Goschen, then Governor of Madras, declared open the Freemasons' Hall in Egmore. It was a dream come true for the brotherhood in Madras. Just three decades earlier, the Rev. C.H. Malden, writing his *History of Freemasonry on the Coromandel*, had despaired of the DGL of Madras ever having a home of its own. "...nor does it seem likely that such a building will ever be erected in Madras," was his last lament on the subject. And yet, a decade after that book was written, everything fell into place. The DGL moved to its first home in 1905 and then to its second and permanent home in 1925.

Before we move on to how the DGL came to acquire the land and then put up its iconic Masonic Temple in Madras, a quick survey of all the places that it used earlier would be of interest. The Fort was definitely where Masons met, and as documented elsewhere, there clearly was a Temple in the premises, though its whereabouts cannot

be identified with any certainty now. HD Love in his *Vestiges of Old Madras* states that there was a Masonic Temple in Egmore, on the site where the St. Andrews Kirk stands today. Nothing is known of this building either. That there were meetings elsewhere, particularly at the Old Jail premises (below) at the end of Broadway is also documented.

The Lodge of Perfect Unanimity (PU), which was primus inter pares among all the Lodges first met at the Fort and later General Collins Road, Vepery. The man after whom the road takes its name was a Mason too and in 1799, the earliest date to which the minutes of the DGL can now be traced, was acting Provincial Grand Master (PGM). The first recorded meeting of the DGL, which took place on July 9, 1799, was held at General Collins' house and so we can assume that this was the DGL's address then.

In 1800, Lodge PU began meeting at the Pantheon, on Pantheon Road, the premises now occupied by the Museum, Connemara Public Library and the Museum Theatre. The DGL, or PGL as it was then, conjointly hired the premises. The monthly rent was 15 pagodas, which Lodge PU paid in full and levied a charge of five pagodas on the DGL as a sub-tenant. But such



St. Aloysius Convent, old Cotgrave House, Vepery.

was its impoverished condition that the DGL was continuously in arrears over its rent. In 1811, we find Lodge PU sending a bill of 280 pagodas to the DGL, for rent due for over five years! In the interim the DGL appears to have rented a house by the Spur Tank for use as its office. However, the Pantheon, being the principal venue for all social entertainments in the city, appears to have been the place where all Masonic activity took place. A letter in 1812 shows that the Lodge of Unity and Friendship met "at a bungalow at Egmore,

formerly occupied by Lodge St. Andrew, immediately in rear of the Pantheon". The next move by Lodge PU, the DGL in tow, was to *College House* in College Road. This building still stands, in the campus of the Directorate of Public Instruction.

Lodge PU took the lead in building a temple, by the beach in the late 1830s. When this location proved unpopular, it rented out the place and shifted to Mount Road and from there to Vepery. A tenant at the beach premises was the Madras Police and they liked it so much that

they bought the place off the PU and it is now the headquarters of the Tamil Nadu police. The office of the Director General of Police still has Masonic symbols on its cornice.

Was the Vepery premises the same address at which the DGL was meeting as late as 1861 when Pitt Macdonald was the DGM? We do not know for in those spacious days, an advertisement in *The Times* and the *Athenaeum* that the Lodge met in Vepery was sufficient for people to know where the exact place was. In 1869, we find that Lodge PU was meeting at Vepery, though the precise location here too is not known. Lodges Pitt Macdonald and Universal Charity were allowed to use the same premises too, this marking perhaps the first instance when Lodges in Madras shared a common temple. In 1872, Lodge PU moved to *Cotgrave House*, also on General Collins Road in Vepery. The other two Lodges preferred to remain at the earlier premises. The Lodge Carnatic joined them there and from its history we learn that the property belonged to a Jaganath Moodeliar who levied a monthly rent of Rs 21 on each of the three Lodges. Soon however, the Lodges Pitt Macdonald and Universal Charity moved out, to *Cotgrave House*. The co-tenancy there, with Lodge PU as owner was not harmonious, for the latter had rented the ground floor to the Duke's Own Artillery Club, later the Madras Guards Institute, for Rs. 30 a month. The immediate proximity of solemn Masonic rites with rowdy artillerymen raising Cain in the ground floor

was a sure recipe for trouble. In June 1882, Masons of the Lodge Universal Charity decided they had had enough and gate crashing the Club, forced its bar to close. The Lodge PU saw the light. It apologised to its fellow Lodges and served notice to the Club which vacated a short while later.

By the late 1870s, Vepery was yielding to Mount Road as the Masonic choice. In 1877, Lodge PU was on the lookout for premises on that principal thoroughfare of Madras. The short lived Lodge Pilgrims of Light had literally shown the way, for its premises, on property belonging to Mr. Garratt, the tailor was available. Negotiations took another six years and in 1883, Lodge PU purchased the building for Rs 18,000. The first meeting there took place on January 7, 1884.

A proper Masonic building was put up here, courtesy the brilliant architect R.F. Chisholm who was a Mason himself, belonging to Lodge PU. But the property proved a cash guzzler.



Masonic symbols in the DGP's Chamber.

Debentures were issued for Rs. 3,000 in 1896 to fund new repairs and a further borrowing of Rs. 2,000 was resorted to in 1899 for building a compound wall. By 1897, with more money being needed for further repairs, the Lodge PU was at its wits' end. It could have rented the place to other Lodges but it was not entirely comfortable with sharing its premises. Thus when Lt. Col Sir George Moore suggested that the then under construction Victoria Public Hall be part funded by Masons so that one wing could be used as a Masonic Temple, it was the Lodge PU that refused, thereby aborting the scheme. It attributed "the present indifferent accommodation to the fact of the rooms being



The Museum Complex, where the Pantheon stood.

used in our absence by other Lodges," and cited this as the reason for not helping out with building a common Temple. This stubbornness would however change in the new century.

Lodge Carnatic moved to Mount Road too, in 1885, to the upper room of "Book Mooneappa's Library". Its furniture and fittings were of such a high order that the DGM Lt. Col. Sir George Moore expressed a wish that all other Lodges would attain the same standard. However, the new landlord was not an easy person to do business with and kept hiking the rents, an act that Lodge Carnatic put

up with 1897 when it decided to move to the Masonic Hall, Vepery. But the idea of having a temple on Mount Road was not given up. This was around the time that the Lodge PU began to come around to the idea that a common Masonic Temple may not be so bad after all. It offered its property to the DGL. Negotiations commenced and in 1905, hands were shaken in agreement. The property of 55 grounds (roughly three acres) was valued at Rs 80,000 of which Rs 5,000 was to be paid at once in cash, Rs 10,000 by means of debentures at four percent payable in 1921 and Rs 65,000 by means of

interest-free debentures payable in 1956.

The DGL took over the property in 1905 and the minutes of April 29 recorded its gratitude to Lodge PU—"DGL hereby places on record its grateful sense of the liberal and Masonic spirit in which Lodge PU has come forward and placed its property at the disposal of DGL thereby making the scheme for a Masonic Temple practicable, and conferring a lasting benefit upon Freemasonry in the District."

The building however needed several improvements and so the Masonic Hall at Vepery became the temporary residence for the Lodge PU and the DGL till repairs were completed. But even then, the building was found to have several design defects. However, the idea of a common Temple had taken root and so now the question was of either building a new modern facility on the same land or move elsewhere together.

In 1914, Bro. H.B. Pierce, who was then District Grand Superintendent of Works (DGSW), studied the building then in use and gave a report that concluded that it would be better off to sell the place. In 1916, a committee was formed to study the alternatives. It unanimously recommended selling the Mount Road premises and moving to a new property available at Egmore. The new site had been located by Pierce who also gave a sketch for a proposed building at that location.

(To be continued next fortnight)



Old Jail Premises, Broadway.



Old College House.

Talkie Film Studios from the 1930s – Part II

Meenakshi Cinetone and Sundaram Sound Studios

Meenakshi Cinetone conducted its operations in the place Dr M.G.R-Janaki College is currently located at Adyar. The site belonged to the Nawab of Arcot. Initially, film director C.V. Raman rented the place and set up a studio that had only one floor. The film *Pavalakodi* was shot there and released in 1934. Later, the studio's name was changed to Sundaram Sound Studios and came to be owned by P.S. Sathappa Chettiar. Initially, none but Sathappa Chettiar's films were shot in the studio; other projects could not rent the place. The first film to come from Sundaram Sound Studios was *Athiroopa Amaravathi* (1935) which had C.V. Raman as the director, Sundar Rao Nadkarni as the cinematographer and P.K. Viswanath as the sound recordist.

Sundarabharathi Studio

Sundarabharathi Studio was established in 1935 at Sathuvachari, Vellore by Vajravelu Mudaliar upon his purchase of the equipment from Jayavani Cinetone Studio. It was there that Sesaiah produced a film titled *Sati Ahalya*, in which R. Balasubramaniam, Mayavaram

Pattammal and others acted. The film went unreleased. The studio also had to shut down. A 1936 document makes mention of Sesaiah's passing away. No further chronological information appears to be available on the subject.

National Movietone

National Movietone was a large studio that functioned from 71, Poonamallee High Road, Kilpauk since March 1935. It was owned by Devakottai S.P.L.P. Chidambaram Chettiar. 80 acres of land was purchased at Aminjikai to facilitate outdoor shoots. *Radha Kalyanam* was the first film to be shot here, which went onto to be released at the end of 1935.

Initially, Jiten Banerjee was the cinematographer, but he later left. Harikrishnan was the lab-in-charge, Jadhav the sound engineer and T.S. Mani, the art director.

For a time, the studio was leased to R.M. Krishnaswamy, Zaveri alias Navinchand Heerachand Zaveri and Chandubai Vakil and was renamed Praveen Studios. The films *Krishnakumar*, *Manthiravathi* and others were shot there during this period.

Where the studio once stood now functions a school called Bhavans Rajaji Vidyashram.

Motion Pictures Productions Combines (MPPC)

A film company called Mahalakshmi Studios, which operated under the aegis of M.S. Ramasamy Chettiar, functioned from Spring Garden, Cathedral Road. It was there that the studio called Motion Pictures Productions Combines (MPPC) was established, on July 26, 1937. It was the first studio set up by a group of film company owners, and was equipped with all the modern facilities of the time, including soundproofing. The studio also had another name – Movie Land.

The directors M.S. Ramasamy Chettiar (Mahalakshmi Studios), N.M.R. Venkatakrishna Iyer (Royal Talkie Distributors) and K. Subramaniam (Madras United Artist Corporation)



Radha Kalyanam.

included cameraman Sailen Bose, assistant cameramen Kamal Ghosh and Ellappan, sound recordists P.K. Viswanath and Jyotish Sinha, art director K.R.

uation abroad, T.R. Sundaram returned home, and began to work in film production with a few others. He later went on to found Modern Theatres Studio. The establishment was equipped with all the modern facilities of the day and the first film shot here was *Sati Ahalya*, which was released in 1937. The first Malayalam talkie *Balan* was shot here as well.

The German duo Bodo Gutschwager and Bayes were the cinematographers while Eshwar Singh was the sound recordist. Other notable staff members include art director A.J. Dominic, costume designer Arthanari, B.V. Modak from the lab and D.V. Chari who worked on the story, dialogue and direction.

Coimbatore Premier Cinetone

Coimbatore Premier Cinetone was the first studio to be

● by S.A. Muthuvel

took charge. It is to be noted Madras United Artist Corporation was a film production company that was established on September 13, 1935 and its partners were K. Subramaniam and S.D. Subbulakshmi.

Because K. Subramaniam had conducted a shoot in Calcutta, many local technical artists from the East India Film Company were employed in MPPC. The technical artists worked with great enthusiasm and commitment because a share of profits were also given to them. The technical staff

Sarma, make-up artist Haribabu, Dharam Veer from the editing department and Sudhir Dhir from the lab. Raja Chellapalli was the General Manager. The first film shot there was the Telugu *Balayogini*. Notably, the first Hindi film shot in South India, *Premasagar* (1939), was an MPPC creation.

The company was acquired by S.S. Vasan on December 21, 1940 and went on to become Gemini Studios.

Modern Theatres

After completing his grad-



A still of R. Balasubramaniam (Sundarabharathi) from the film *Sati Ahalya*.



A still from *Sati Ahalya* (1937) featuring Subbaiah and Thavamani Devi.

TALKIE FILM STUDIOS FROM THE 1930S – PART II

established in Coimbatore. The partners of the company were A.N. Marudachalam Chettiar, V.M. Abirama Chettiar, T.S. Swaminathan Chettiar and L. Nanjappa Chettiar. Notably, L. Nanjappa Chettiar worked on the story, lyrics and dialogues for the film *Kanda Leela*. The studio was later renamed as Kandan Studio.

Prem Chetna was the film director, Sundaram the lab in charge, J.S. Patel and D.G. Gune were the cinematographers and Ramanathan was the sound recordist. D. Balaji Singh was the manager.



Karthikeya Films

Karthikeya Films was a studio established by Murugadosh, K. Ramnath and A.K. Shekhar under the banner Chandrakala Films. All three were working partners with M.V. Thiagarajan Chettiar as the owner. It was later renamed as Karthikeya Films.

K.V.Reddy started the studio at Bishop Garden in Adyar. The first film shot here was *Sundaramoorthy Nayanar*, which was released in 1937. The studio was later leased by Mureshwar and was renamed as Pragjyothi Studio. The films *Abalai* (1939), *Kalamegam* (1940), and *College Kumari* (1942) were shot in Prakjyothi Studios.

Kovai Central Studio

Kovai Central Studio started operations on January 25, 1937, at Trichy Road, Coimbatore at a cost of Rs. 16 lakhs. It was one

of the largest studios in India with two floors and a lab. The management team comprised Sriramulu Naidu (B. Rangaswamy Naidu), Samikannu Vincent, and R.K. Ramakrishnan Chettiar, who was brother to the famous R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar. The first film shot here was the Telugu *Tukaram*.



B.N. Rao alias B. Narayanan Nair.

The Tamil version of *Tukaram* was released in March 1937. It was here that B.N. Rao and T.C. Vadivelu Nayagar jointly directed *Rambaiyin Kadhal* (1937) which went on to become a huge hit.

G. Ramaseshan, who was experienced as the General Manager of Calcutta Aurora Films, played an important role in the studio.

Newtone Studio

Newtone Studio operated from Kilpauk Garden near Kushaldas Garden. Cinematographer Jiten Banerjee (who had, by then, some amount of experience working with other studios), sound recordist Dinsha K. Tehrani, art director F. Nagore, actor M.K. Thiagaraja Bhagavathar, managing director R.M. Ramanathan Chettiar, L. Natarajan Chettiar, and A. Veerappa Chettiar were its partners. The studio appears to have been established on January 3, 1938.

Andhra Cinetone

Jeypore Raja, Kirlampudi Raja, Bobbili Raja, and P. Ramachandra Reddy established this studio at Vishakapatnam in 1937. A.M. Gopalaiyar was the General Manager. He had already worked as a manager at East India Film Studio in Calcutta. The Telugu and Hindi versions of the film *Bhakta Jayadevar* (1939) were shot at Andhra Cinetone. The team



On the sets of *Thalli Prema* at Newtone Studios. Seated from left to right: Mr. Sarathy, Miss Hemlata, Miss Kannamba, Miss Carlyle, Mr. B. Patel and Mr. Ramanatham Chettiar. Standing from left to right, 1. Dinsha K. Tehrani and 2. Jiten Banerjee.

comprised sound recordist S. Chatterjee, cinematographer G. Singh, lab manager K. Roy, and managing agent Rao Bahadur Jagannatha Raju. The studio shut down in 1940.

In addition to this, Travancore Studios appears to have been set up by Assandas in Travancore State in April 1938. Also, Mysore Sound Studios Limited was set up at Malleswaram in Bangalore, where films such as *Naveena Nirupama* (1937) and *Mayurathvaja* (1938) were shot.

A studio called Sri Durga Cinetone was also operating in Rajahmundry.

Kubera Films



Telugu actress Kanchanamala.

Venkaiah (not Raghupathi Venkaiah) was a very rich man from Nellore. Being an ardent fan of Telugu actress Kanchanamala, he established Kubera Films Limited with the rather niche purpose of producing films that starred the artiste. The office was located at 141, Poonamallee High Road and the studio was located at Landon's Road, Kilpauk, Chennai. It was here that Telugu films such as *Mahiravanan* (1939) and *Chandrasena* were shot. However, he abandoned the studio as things did not work out as he had hoped.

The machinery and materials of Kubera Films was purchased to establish Navajyothi Films Studio in Mysore, whose shareholders were T. Janakiraman, O.R. Embaraiiah, Bindu Madhavan and sound engineer Ramaswamy. Navajyothi Films



R. Nataraja Mudaliar.



K. Subrahmanyam.

Studio produced Kannada and Malayalam films.

Kalidas Films

This studio belonged to the Erode-based company Kalidas Films Limited. The first film shot here was *Kannappa Nayanar* (1938). *Bombay Mail* (1939) was also shot here. There is written documentation that refers to the establishment as an 'open space' rather than a studio. The owner was Keshavlal Kalidas Seth, notably one of the producers of the film *Menaka*. The studio closed down within a year.

Jaya Films Studio

It appears that there was once a studio called Jaya Films which operated from Alwarpet, Chennai. It is clear from evidence that the 1939 films *Vimochanam* and *Manmadha Vijayam* were shot there.

The stories of film studios are akin to the stories of empires. When the Second World War erupted in September 1939, all the studios operating out of Chennai were closed. Some establishments migrated to other places. However, none of the studios that were begun in the 1930s exist today – they have transformed into commercial complexes, educational institutions and residential apartments. Only the main gate of Modern Theatres studio still stands on the road leading to Yercaud in Salem, a symbol of ancient glory as well as trepidation for the future.

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– THE EDITOR

Bangaru Babu – The Father of Carrom

Bangaru Babu recently turned 99. Celebrated as the Godfather of Carrom, he has more than 75 years of Carrom to his credit, which includes multiple National championship wins. His moniker was not lightly earned; but for this Chennai icon, Carrom – recognised today as an International sport – would have remained little more than a pastime. *Madras Musings* spoke to him at his house in Shenoy Nagar, aptly christened ‘Carrom Villa.’

Babu’s golden run with Carrom began in 1948 in Chennai, a city considered home to the game ever since it grew in the bylanes of North Madras. Initially an amusement, Carrom’s emergence as a competitive sport was heralded by the numerous clubs that sprouted as its popularity swelled. These clubs – and sometimes modest hutments – offered Carrom enthusiasts boards for rent, by the hour or based on performance. Bangaru Babu, along with a group of like-minded players, saw the potential to develop the game into an organised sport. By January 1950, the Madras State Carrom Association (MSCA) was founded. The MSCA had the distinction of being the first-ever Carrom association to be formed anywhere in the world, and was

inaugurated by the then Mayor of Madras. MSCA conducted the first league championship in 1951. It went on to conduct the first State-level tournament in 1954, an event which saw the emergence of many talented and ranked players. Thus with the unflagging efforts of Bangaru Babu and his team, Carrom flourished into a sport and shortly, the All India Carrom Federation was formed on March 4, 1954.

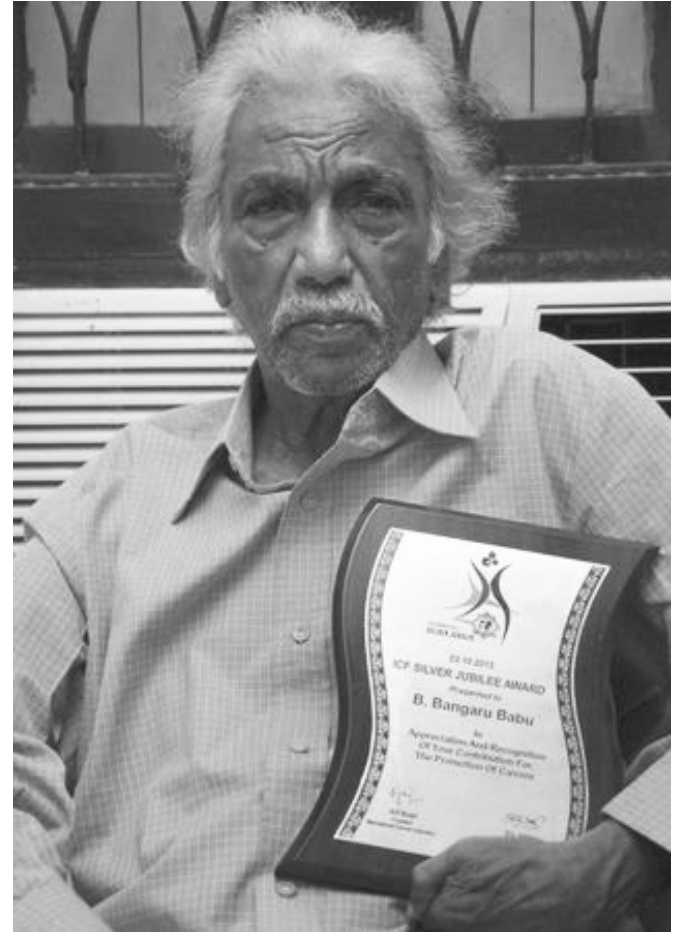
● by
V. Venkataramana

In 1957, Babu himself served as the General Secretary of the MSCA. By then, the game saw a profusion of talent – men and women, both – appearing all across the country. India had begun to host National championships in the sport. But Babu’s dreams were bigger – his new goal was to propel Carrom into an organised sport at the International level. Carrom’s first brush with global popularity took place in Sri Lanka, where the game gained favour in the 1950s. And so, in December 1960 Babu led a team from MSCA to Sri Lanka to play an invitation tournament. His team defeated the Ceylon Whites in

the finals, emerging the winner in both the men’s and women’s categories. Only two players from the historic contingent are alive today – Babu, and one other. Babu’s continued efforts to make Carrom an international sport bore fruit during the first Asian Games that took place in New Delhi in 1982.

The event hosted an exhibition match featuring Indian talents Dilli and Lazar. The demonstration was quite successful – Japan, Korea, Thailand and Indonesia responded favourably and expressed interest in promoting Carrom in their countries. In 1985, Babu and his team went to Zurich to compete in the first-ever Intercontinental Carrom Test Tournament. Apart from Babu, the contingent included Arun Gaddar and Maria Irudayam. The team also visited Berlin and played in team tournaments.

Chennai, October 1988 saw a historic day in the sport – Babu succeeded in forming the International Carrom Federation (ICF) with delegates from the United States, West Germany, Switzerland, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, France, Spain and India. The Federation was instrumental in laying down standard laws and guidelines for international competitions. Thanks



to Babu, Carrom had evolved into an International sport. His unparalleled service to the development of Carrom is hailed as a great achievement. David Ravikumar, a seasoned sports administrator from Tamil Nadu who worked alongside Babu up

until the formation of the ICF says that it is unfortunate that Babu had to step down from being an active officer bearer in deference to the tenure rules. “Every sport needs a great mentor like him for promotion and development,” he says.

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