

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Better Public Discipline Needed at Mylapore Temple Festival

The Kapaliswarar Temple festival has just concluded and as is usual, it witnessed attendance by thousands and on certain days, lakhs. Over the years, the administrative machinery has certain SOPs in place that serve it well. And this year was no different. Fire services, conservancy workers, public health facilities and police personnel were all in attendance and worked tirelessly to ensure smooth conduct of the processions despite all the challenges – Metro rail work included. What therefore jars is the increasing lack of discipline among the public. It is time they do not take civic services for granted and behave with responsibility.

This of course is not unique to the Mylapore festival or for that matter any other temple. All religious places in India, barring perhaps those of the

Sikhs, are a byword for civic hygiene violations when their festivals occur. But that this should be the case at Mylapore, which ought to be leading public thought and action in the correct direction is saddening.

How else then do you explain the vast mounds of garbage that collected endlessly, even as the conservancy

● by Sriram V.

workers kept cleaning without pause? They were a familiar sight even at places where crowds were the greatest, sweeping and gathering despite all the pushing and shoving that went on. It would be no exaggeration to say that they kept their cleaning activities ongoing even while the pro-

cessions were in progress, and their diligence we are sure must have earned them the blessings of the deities who watched. But the public did not seem to care.

There are certain ways in which the administration can step in to inculcate discipline. The first is to make sure that the area is entirely out of bounds for vehicular traffic for the ten days. Residents and shopkeepers can be given passes to allow them access and even they need to make sure they are not driving about when the processions happen. In the just concluded edition, while vehicles were not allowed during the processions, they were permitted later, and this posed a huge challenge as the pedestrian population was high and the roadsides were all taken up by hawkers.

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HERITAGE WATCH

Department of Posts celebrates GPO while continuing to neglect the building

The Department of Posts has brought out a special pictorial cancellation featuring the Madras GPO. This is a welcome



development as it brings into focus one of the celebrated heritage landmarks of the city. Unfortunately, all is not well with the building itself. After a fire swept through it in 2000, the structure underwent a restoration that can only be described as shoddy. Its interiors are in a terrible state though the building itself is in use and so is subject to minimum maintenance.

Last heard, which was a year ago, the Department had said it was tying up with INTACH for a detailed restoration. Not much has been heard after that. We only hope that the project

is in some state of progress and has not stalled in the proposal stage itself. (Picture courtesy: T. Jaisakthivel.)

Parandur airport proposal receives approval, faces mixed reactions

The proposal to build Chennai's second airport at Parandur has received an in-principle approval at a recent meeting attended by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the NITI Aayog, AAI, AERA, the India Meteorological Department, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Defence. The total project cost is estimated at Rs. 27,500 crores, with the first phase alone commanding a budget of Rs. 11,445.54 crores. The Parandur airport will reportedly have three midfield terminals and two parallel runways and is

expected to commence operations in 2028-29. With the potential to support 100 million passengers a year, the new facility is expected to improve the city's capacity to serve a greater volume of flight traffic. It is not intended to replace the existing facility at Meenam-bakkam, which will continue to function.

The announcement has, by and large, been afforded a warm welcome. Though the current Chennai airport is the fifth busiest in the country, it is perceived as lacking in convenience and is often rued for its poor maintenance.

It is said to compare poorly with the airports at Bengaluru and Hyderabad, which have upgraded their infrastructure over the years and now handle a much larger volume of

● by Varsha V.

passenger traffic. There is an urgent requirement for the city to develop a second airport given the anticipated growth in air traffic, as failing to do so will blunt its competitive edge. The proposed Parandur facility is expected to not only

boost the city's capacity to serve more air passengers, but also promote trade, commerce and tourism in the region. It will also provide employment opportunities to local skills, both during the construction and operation phases.

However, the Parandur airport faces pushback on account of environmental and social concerns. An airport in an area with a significant portion of wetlands may lead to increased flood risks in Chennai, say environmentalists. The Parandur airport is also opposed by civic activists and locals, as 1,005 families stand to be displaced

by the project. Media reports say that the community plans to challenge the proposal in court.

A piece in *The Hindu* quotes G. Sundarajan of *Poovulagu Nanbargal* thus – "Displacing thousands and destroying a fragile ecosystem is not the solution to Chennai's infrastructure problems. There are alternatives. The OTA land, if acquired from the Defence Ministry, could resolve the existing constraints. A satellite terminal could enhance capacity without causing any environmental damage." He

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Better Public Discipline Needed at Mylapore Temple Festival

(Continued from page 1)

The administration also needs to earmark hawking zones and not allow sellers to set up shop and display wares on the road itself. This is hazardous from all points of view – for the vendors, the shoppers and others on the road. The Corporation, which permits the setting up of thanneer pandals ought to restrict them in number and also enforce they only dispense water and cooling drinks such as buttermilk. Presently, most kiosks become makeshift kitchens with roaring fires, adding to the dangers already present by way of overcrowding and vehicles.

The removal of solid foods will also reduce the crowds that gather at these kiosks, thereby freeing up road space. It will also bring down food wastes that need to be cleared. There was an era when we were a

starved nation and dispensing food at public events was a much-appreciated gesture. In Mylapore, what is seen is that people view these kiosks as sampling centres. They jostle their way to collect what is given, taste a spoonful of it, throw the rest away and go on to the next kiosk. Such wastage is best avoided.

Care also needs to be taken to minimise the sale of plastic goods and promote handicrafts such as clay pots and dolls, palmyrah fans, beads, and paper products. The profusion of plastic toys, in particular hooters which were blown to maximise noise, was distressing. These too were thrown away after a few minutes, adding to the garbage.

If all the above were to be controlled, the festival will be an exemplar for not just the rest of the city but to the state and the country as well.

Parandur airport proposal faces mixed reactions

(Continued from page 1)

also points out that a crucial hydrogeological report has not been made public yet, the contents of which he feels will shift perspectives on the project's feasibility. It is to be noted that the approval meeting saw the DGCA highlight the need to address obstructions, including waterbodies; it is reported that waterlogging emerged as a major point of concern in the discussion, as the region was accepted to be flood prone. TIDCO (Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation Limited) is said to have agreed to implement mitigation measures. Also, the pre-feasibility report published by the administration states that there is no Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), biosphere or critically polluted area within ten kilometres from the proposed site. It also says that forest clearance is not required as no forest land is involved.

While some political leaders are calling for another feasibility study, it must be noted that the current report has also published the reasons why there were no viable alternatives in place of Parandur. According to it, the Padalam site falls under the restricted Tambaram Local Flying Area which is under the control of the Indian Air Force and the resulting restrictions on flight operations would have shrunk the capacity of the new airport. Thiruporur is adja-

cent to the restricted area as well. This, as well as additional reasons such as the proximity of the Kalpakkam Nuclear Plant, preclude these sites from consideration. As for Pannur, though it is on par with Parandur with regard to connectivity and adequate land availability, it is said to have several Extra High Tension Towers (EHTs) as well as seven active industries. The report indicates that the social cost of establishing an airport in Pannur will be higher – it would displace 1,546 families.

To navigate these issues, some have mooted the idea of building regional airports in cities like Trichy, Coimbatore and Madurai instead. But there's no question that Chennai city needs a new airport. The current facility is struggling with congestion as it is, and passenger volumes have remained largely stagnant compared to other Indian metros. Other key cities such as Mumbai and Delhi have more than one airport; in fact, Telangana is reportedly building an airport at Mamnoor to decongest its facility at Shamshabad. The need of the hour, then, is to engage all stakeholders – including environmentalists and the local communities – in open discussions to identify and address legitimate concerns against the Parandur project plan. A transparent, inclusive and humane approach to implementation will help the State balance much-needed development and social fairness.

Knifing Madras Musings

The Man from Madras Musings is all of a twitter. By that he does not mean he is addicted to X (formerly Twitter), though why all articles quoting that social media platform have to add that piece of parenthetic information MMM fails to understand. What he means is that he is quivering like an aspen and trembling like a leaf. You see, Madras Musings, whose soul is as pure as driven snow, has received a threat. And that is why MMM is flustered, unnerved and disconcerted.

The mailbox of Madras Musings is one of those oases of peace only occasionally disturbed by the sound of incoming messages. These broadly pertain to changes of address, complaints of non-receipt of MM (we cannot help it that postmen are so fond of it that they stick to it like glue) and the sporadic com-

the content for your meaningful review.

Best wishes,
Gabriel Quintuna

Now, Mr/Ms/Mx (God knows what is their preferred pronoun) G Quintuna seems to be a reasonable person at first reading. The good person wants to gift MM a knife of Damascus steel. What is left unsaid however is what if MM and MMM choose not to reply? Do they still get the knife then, placed strategically into the body? And since MM is not a human, will MMM run the first risk? These and other such questions rapidly ran through MMM's mind (if you could call it that) even as he pondered over what reply to send. But then, you can never keep a good man down. A second reading revealed that this email, which had passed five AI review tools as mentioned

firm or reputable individual that could help him channel some funds into a profitable investment where he could get a good yield for his money. Due to the sensitive position he holds in his country and the unstable investment environment, my client has decided not to retain any of his assets in his country. Kindly let me know your acceptance of this offer to enable me to brief you further.

Sincerely,
Kelvin Slanga

MMM wonders as to which country it could be. A Google search on Kelvin reveals others with surnames such as Sabao, Mosha and Agbarakwe, all pillars of the legal profession in Africa but Slanga seems to be of an extremely retiring disposition. And it is very difficult to deal

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

ments/rejoinders on articles we publish. Every once in a while, our fans in China send us messages to cheer us up. Threats have never loomed large on our horizon. Which is why when these come, the MM rule book has no procedure to deal with them.

For sake of clarity, MMM posts the message as received –

Good Day
madrasmusings,

I hope this email finds you in high spirits! I am Gabriel Quintuna with SAKUTO KNIVES. We make exceptional Damascus Kitchen Knives. We've admired madrasmusings, for a considerable period, and We're always astounded by the engaging and informative content you post every time.

To collaborate with you, we'd love to send you a first-class Damascus Chef Knife (Priced at 199. 99) as a small token of gratitude for a deserving bac klink. Here's a win-win proposition: We'd gladly send you a premium Damascus Chef Knife free of cost.

We write a meticulously curated article (authored by our team members high-quality content) that has completed five A I Review tools and Previously unreleased. If it sounds interesting to you, reply with your official mailing address, and and we'll gladly send you(madrasmusings) the knife and

in it, no doubt had overlooked that it was sending a message to an official email ID and was yet asking for an official email ID. And so, if MMM does not choose to reply, all is well. AI and this knife maker will be baffled.

An added point to ponder is the number of typos in the mail, which AI seems to have overlooked.

Enriching Madras Musings

In sharp (pun intended) contrast to the above mis-sive was the other that filled the Man from Madras Musings with delight. Firstly, it impressed him no end that MM, already a hit in China, as readers of the paper and more importantly, this column are doubtless aware, has now become popular in Africa as well. And that millionaires there are wanting to park their funds with MM. Witness this email –

Good day, I was searching for a business associate in the business directory, and I came across your profile. Hope this email finds you well. I am Kelvin Slanga, a lawyer by profession; however, this correspondence is private. I am the financial consultant to an investor from a mineral-rich African country with a political background who wants to invest outside his country. My client had approached me with a mandate to seek a

with such shy individuals. MMM may have to allow this attractive offer to pass. That particular line which provided an option of either a firm or a reputable individual almost swayed MMM. Why let MM walk away with the loot he opined when he, MMM, was there as a reputable individual. But then as MMM said earlier, he has opted to let it pass. Not for him a life of luxury in Lower Bartentoland or wherever else this Kelvin Slanga is based.

MMM wonders if Slanga is in any way connected with Augusto Nandu Savimbi of Angola who at one time kept writing to MMM about a legacy of US \$ 35 million that he wanted help in taking out of his country. And then there was the wife of a former dictator who was terminally ill and wanted MM's help in transferring her assets out of her former country. MMM has often wondered as to why all these people made a beeline to this paper. He concluded that it was entirely due to its transparency, its unwavering stance and the quality of its writings. After all, merit does count.

Compared to all of these, an email requesting MMM's help in an ongoing project on the Colonial Heritage of China seemed interesting but then it transpired that China was an autocorrect for Chennai!

– MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Demonte Lane: Officialdom apathy

Contents of letter addressed to GCC and CMWSSB:

The photographs reveal the following:

1. Construction activities have ruined the road by movement/parking of heavy vehicles and abandoned vehicles. They should be made to relay the road at their expense prior to GCC handing over the Completion Report.
2. Sewage is overflowing due to blockage forcing Super Sucker to be employed regularly. Health hazard is waiting to hit the public patronizing the licenced food vendors on the lane. CMWSSB and Health Dept. please note and act.
3. Food vendors have damaged the storm water drain and are dumping plastics, waste, etc. into it. This is bound to cause flooding during rains. Apart from permitting rodents to hide.
4. Storing construction materials like bricks, gravel, steel rods, sand etc on public roads is not permitted in cities. Why are concerned agencies not acting?
5. CMWSSB is aware the sewage pipes under the road cannot take the load of the new buildings. If action to replace is not taken, the sewage is bound to overflow and cause health issues.
6. Please appreciate the problems being faced by senior citizens to anticipate the traffic congestion and other obstacles mentioned above.



**Commodore Premkumar
VSM**
cmdepem70@gmail.com

Various issues

As you have rightly remarked in your issue dated Feb 16th, it is a bad habit in Chennai to troop in late for performances, particularly by VIPs. Perhaps they feel that it shows their importance. But TN Seshan defined the VIPs as “Velai Illadha Pasanga!”

I went once to the famous Scala Theatre in Milan. Noticing me as an Indian looking for a cheap ticket, the man at the counter told me that it was not permitted to go in late and come out at any time except during the interval or if there was an emergency. He advised me to buy the cheapest ticket, go up to the standing gallery – no sitting – and come out at any time I liked! May be we could think of something like this without reserving seats in the front row only.

Raman, Ananthanarayanan from Australia has rightly pointed out the atrocious pronunciation. This is not their fault. It is the phonetic problem of Tamil. Molony, ICS and Cho Ramaswamy had suggested a solution. But it is rather difficult to implement. But I have suggested a simple solution amenable to computer, which was also published in *Madras Musings* and *DinaMalar*. I gave it to the Govt of TN too. But they do not seem to be inclined to implement. As a result, this atrocious pronunciation continues. A friend of mine pronounces BJP as Pichepee; a leading astrologer pronounces ‘Guru’ as ‘Kuru’.

Dr G.Sundaram, IAS(R)
drgsundaram@yahoo.com

Ilai Sappadu

*When your friends from the north come a-calling on you
To showcase the South Indian hospitality what do you
do?*

*Take them to the best restaurant in town
Where a ilai sappadu is served – it wins hands down!*

*Every item in its place, a place for every taste
When the servers file past, there are no guessing games
The foodie, the faddish or the frugal eater
Is served as their need, wastage is less here
No queues, excuses, and small courtesies
Here there’s an air of back-slapping geniality
The sashaying pallu and the bejewelled potli
Can be placed at your side as you take your seat
No balancing act as you tug at your naan
Or to refill your plate navigate an uneven lawn
You can slurp your rasam, crackle your aplaam and lick
your fingers clean
The repast can be enjoyed as it is meant to be*

*A certain caterer with a high reputation
No relation to any viceroy – I say with confirmation
Served ilai sappadu throughout the season
The crowds at lunchtime were there for good reason
As the artist and the day’s menu were discussed with the
same animation!*

*Be it a wedding, a ceremony, or a simple meal
The ilai sappadu is the real treat
A South Indian wedding may be out to a destination
But a thalai vazha ilai sappadu is always in the
celebration!*

– Sujatha Chandramouli

Moore Market memories

I was sitting in my car in the Central Station car park this morning waiting to collect my granddaughters coming by the Shatabdi from Bangalore, when I noticed this replica of Moore Market behind my car. It brought back a flood of memories of a time gone by. However I was saddened to see that this replica of Madras’ first shopping mall is derelict and uncared for.

Is there some way it could be maintained? For those of us born before the 60s it was the go to place for birthday presents and all kinds of amazing knick knacks.

Mallika Gulvady
mgulvady@gmail.com



Overhead cables

Most overhead cables that disfigure our roads seem to be redundant ‘dummies’. Could the GCC find a way to clear them?

Mohan Raman
9 (old 5), Srinivasa Avenue Road
Chennai 600028

Through The Lens: The Art, Spaces and Stories of Chennai Photo Biennale Edition IV

It was the 16th of March, a bright and oppressively hot Sunday, and I had only one thing on my agenda: gallery hopping – and for good reason.

As I stepped into the Lalit Kala Akademi, I was taken aback by the transformation of part of the gallery into the ruins of an old, dilapidated hotel room – cobwebs included. This installation accompanied a series of photographs from Nandini Valli Muthiah's collection titled *Liminal Spaces* (2011), which documented the then-iconic landmark of Chennai – Hotel Dasaprakash – in its state of decay and imminent demolition. The series was a poignant meditation on the ephemerality of time, the nostalgia it evokes, and the impermanence of grandeur.

Another segment of the gallery, dedicated to her series "Wedding", was adorned with makeshift archways bearing fluorescent-lit "Welcome" signs, reminiscent of the typical Tamil wedding decor. Inside, a collection of photographs captured sumptuously decorated wedding halls – opulent yet devoid of any human presence. The initial eeriness of this gradually gave way to a layered exploration of nostalgia, societal expectations, and the lavishness of wedding culture. Nandini Muthiah's mas-

terful use of colour and composition is deeply rooted in Tamil visual aesthetics, yet her true brilliance lies in transforming these elements into powerful storytelling devices – both profound and ingenious.

Upstairs, another compelling exhibition, *It's Time. To See. To Be Seen.*, featured photographs by female artists from around the world – spanning Kochi to Brooklyn to Gaza. Their works explored themes of freedom, identity, heritage, and the presence of women in public spaces etc., offering an essential reflection on contemporary society.

These exhibitions were part of the fourth edition of the Chennai Photo Biennale (CPB), which concluded on the 16th of March. Launched in 2018 in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut, this year's edition was its most ambitious yet. What set CPB apart was its commitment to exhibiting visual lens-based arts in public spaces, ensuring unrestricted access to art. "Public art and art in public spaces have almost been the foundational principles of what we do at CPB," says Gayatri Nair, Founding Trustee and curator at CPB.

One of the most well-received exhibitions of the season was *Maasaru Katchiyavaruku* (*Those with Pure Vision*), featuring archi-



A portion of 'Its Time. To See. To Be Seen.'

val photographs by on-set photographer T. Lakshmiathan. Unseen images from the sets of legendary Tamil films such as *16 Vayathinile* and *Alaigal Oivathilai*, featuring the icons and beauties who defined Tamil cinema of the past, were displayed at the Tiruvanmiyur MRTS station-free for anyone to walk in and experience. Visitors spoke of how the exhibition transported them back to their youth, rekindling cherished memories of cinema's golden age.

The Government Museum at Egmore housed two particularly

compelling exhibitions. *What Makes Me Click* was a collection of photographs by children. It had over 200 photographs taken by children from across the world, offering a window into the beautiful and infinitely complex realm of their imagination, curiosity, and artistic experimentation.

Perhaps the most groundbreaking exhibition of the season was *Love and Light*, a retrospective of Sunil Gupta, India's first openly gay photographer. Displayed at the Egmore Museum with the encouragement of Commissioner Kavita Ramu, IAS, the exhibition was publicly accessible and widely attended by individuals of all ages, genders, and sexualities. Its presence

by
Lashman

in a government museum was a landmark moment for queer representation in Indian art, making it an eloquent response to this edition's overarching theme: *Why Photography?*

A remarkable feature of this edition was the architectural ingenuity embedded in many of the outdoor exhibitions, designed by The Architecture Story and CPB. "They are wonderful collaborators," says Gayatri, "working closely with artists and curators, understanding the collections, and ensuring cost-sensitive execution." The scale of public engagement this season was noteworthy.

their studios, displayed at the Raw Mango outlet – or the exhibitions at the Egmore Museum, the spatial design enriched the narrative.

One particularly evocative example was *Love and Light*, whose exhibition layout, when viewed from above, resembled an onion – a fitting metaphor for the many layers within Sunil Gupta's work. This marks the third year of collaboration between The Architecture Story and CPB. "They are wonderful collaborators," says Gayatri, "working closely with artists and curators, understanding the collections, and ensuring cost-sensitive execution."

The scale of public engagement this season was noteworthy.



Maasaru Katchiyavaruku (*Those with Pure Vision*), unseen archive of T. Lakshmiathan. PC- artindiamagazine.

thy. *Vaanyerum Vizhuthugal*, exhibited at VR Chennai, drew an astounding 90,000 visitors

– a figure partly attributed to the mall's role as one of the few third spaces in urban life, attracting

millions of people each month. Relatability played a role too; the Tamil cinema exhibition at Tiruvanmiyur was inherently more accessible to a broader audience than the Baswani showcase at Raw Mango. However, CPB's diverse curation extended an open invitation to audiences of all backgrounds. As Gayatri points out, a visitor drawn to the Tamil cinema exhibition or the children's showcase might be encouraged to explore other exhibits, fostering a deeper engagement with themes that may be unfamiliar to them. Surveys reveal that 85 per cent of attendees were first-time visitors, with 7-8 per cent travelling from abroad – clear evidence of the event's expanding reach and influence.

For centuries, Chennai has played a vital role in shaping Tamil Nadu's artistic and cultural identity. However, contemporary visual arts have not received the same recognition as performing arts and cinema. This might explain why many Chennai-based artists choose to showcase their work in other prominent art cities like Mumbai or Delhi. Yet, collectives like CPB are changing this very narrative. With an open call for submissions, CPB provides a crucial platform for local artists, ensuring that Chennai's vibrant and current artistic voices are heard. By fostering accessibility, innovation, and dialogue, CPB is not just enriching Chennai's contemporary art scene – it is putting the city on the global map, one exhibition at a time.

Chennai insect tales – Micro Monarchs of Chennai: The insect empire at work

My paatti always said, "Listen, kanna, the real rulers of Chennai are not the politicians, not the film stars, not even the auto drivers who can fit into traffic gaps thinner than my mami's kolam lines. No, the true emperors of this city are the insects! Without them, the whole world would collapse faster than an umbrella in Marina Beach winds."

I still remember one evening, sitting in our old thinnai, when Paatti waved her pallu dramatically and started her tale.

"Long ago – okay, maybe just last week – our garden was in crisis. Your thatha kept complaining about too many insects, and he wanted to spray everything with that strong-smelling poison. But I told him, 'You do that, and you'll be the one buying mangoes from the market instead of plucking them from our tree!' Because, you see, these little creatures may be small, but they run the whole operation. Let me tell you about them."

The Matchmakers of the Plant World – Bees and Butterflies

"Ah, those bees and butterflies! They are like the gossiping aunts of our kolam competition – always flitting about, making sure everyone is introduced properly. Thanks to them, our jasmine creeper finds a match, our mango trees get their blossoms, and even that lazy thottaaladi (creeper plant) gets a purpose in life. So, the next time you see a bee buzzing near you, kanna, don't panic and run like you've seen the electricity bill. It's just busy with its matchmaking duties!"

The Silent Bodyguards – Spiders and Wasps

"Spiders, I tell you, are like the strict patti of the insect world. They don't talk much, but they catch all the wrongdoers – mosquitoes, flies, pests – and wrap them up so neatly, it would put my Murugan mama's banana-leaf folding skills to shame. And wasps? Ayyo, they may look scary, but they are our natural pest control officers. No need for those expensive chemical sprays. Just let them do their job, and all will be well!"

The Clean-Up Crew – Ants and Beetles

"And then, we have the ants and beetles – the kuppai thotti workers of nature! They take away all the dried leaves, fallen fruits, and other mess, turning it into nice, rich soil for our plants. If we keep squashing them, who will do all the cleaning, huh? Your appa? Pah! He can't even find his own socks, let alone clean the garden!"

Paatti took a deep breath and adjusted her spectacles. "So, kanna, if you want your garden to thrive, remember these things:

1. Plant a Variety of Flowers – If your garden is as boring as thatha's evening news channel, the insects will leave. Grow some native flowers, make it a happy place for our tiny guests.
2. No Pesticides During Flowering Season – Spraying poison when the flowers are in bloom is like offering free sambar and then locking the kitchen. Not fair, right?
3. Save the Big Trees – They are like five-star hotels for bees. Don't cut them unless absolutely necessary!
4. Keep Old Bamboo & Mud Walls – Solitary bees love them. Think of it as affordable housing for our buzzing buddies.
5. Let the Leaves Lie – Fallen leaves are nature's version of a thattu kadai meal – free food for insects and a rich buffet for the soil!

She leaned back and smiled. "Remember, kanna, insects may be tiny, but they rule the world. Without them, we wouldn't have fruits, vegetables, or even a clean garden! So, next time you see a butterfly, give it a silent 'thank you' and let it flutter by. And for the love of madisar, don't try to hug a wasp! You'll regret it faster than eating molaga bajji without water!"

And that, my dear, is how my grandmother taught me to respect the real kings and queens of Chennai – our tiny, mighty insect warriors!

Priyanka Soman
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A portion of *Vaanyerum Vizhuthugal* shown at VR Chennai. PC – artindiamagazine.



Liminal Spaces (2011), Nandini Valli Muthiah.

GS Boxing Club: Shaping Champions, Changing Lives

The Genesis of GS Boxing Club

Founded by U. Govindaraj in 2017, the GS Boxing Club is not just a training school but a veritable sanctuary for youth who yearn to make it big in the boxing world. Sprung from humble beginnings, today the institution shines as a testimony to resilience, discipline and

the same spirit and discipline to the younger generation," he says. What began as a small initiative to teach boxing to local boys and girls has now grown into a full-fledged academy. Govindaraj places great emphasis on developing not only a child's boxing skills but also their character to ensure they become law-abiding and responsible citizens.



Founder and coach of GS Boxing Club – U. Govindaraj.

hope. An economics graduate, Govindaraj was encouraged by his father to establish the club. "My father was a boxer, and that had a great impact on my life. I wanted to pass on

Training at GS Boxing Club

The club operates out of a Corporation Gym at Cox Colony, Chintadripet, and conducts training inside May Day Park.



Early morning stretches at the Club.

Students are charged a small fee of Rs. 750, but it is often waived for those who cannot afford it – GS Boxing Club ensures that a child's natural talent is not limited by eco-

nomic considerations. Training sessions take place twice a day in the mornings and evenings. The club already has over 35

students ranging in age from 7 to 22 years. At the heart of the institution are the ethics of effort and discipline. The training regimen includes physical conditioning

for competition. "It's not just brute strength; there's strategy, endurance, and mental toughness. We prepare these kids for life beyond fighting," says Govindaraj. It's true – beyond boxing techniques, the training sessions help children pick up key life skills like patience, focus, and resilience. Govindraj explains that the club also emphasises the importance of discipline, as any misuse of their boxing skills outside the ring can spell serious consequences.

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

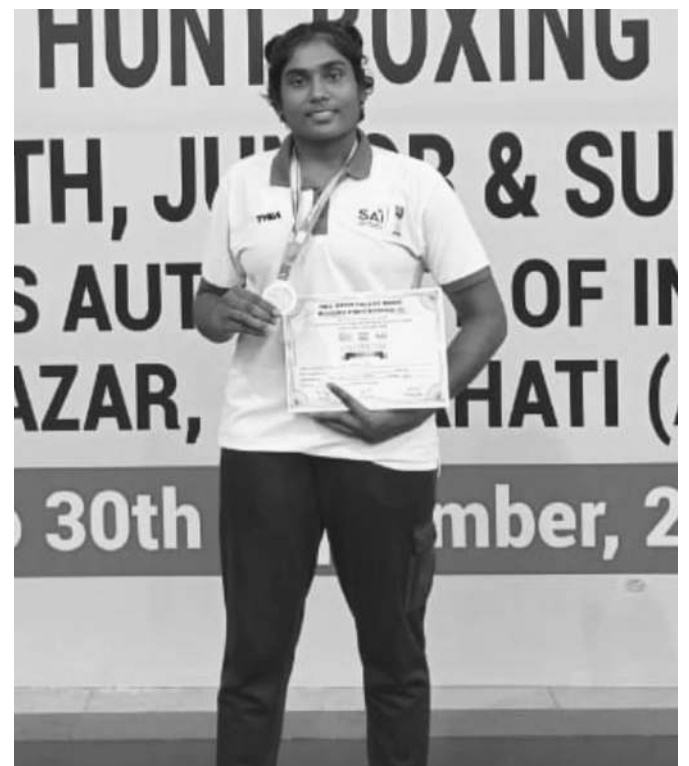
from running exercises to body-weight training as well as boxing drills and sparring sessions. These prepare the students

These prepare the students

(Continued on page 7)



The accolades show its commitment to boxing.



S.M. Durga Sri who won gold at the National Junior Girls Boxing Championships in 2022.

(Continued from page 6)

Championing success

The GS Boxing Club has produced some brilliant fighters. C. Yuveshwaran won the Bronze medal in the National Junior Boys' Boxing Championship held at Sonepat, Haryana, in 2021. E. Sivasankar represented Tamil Nadu in the All India University Boxing Championships four times in the years 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022. GS Boxing Club also has the credit of nurturing the prodigious talents of S.M. Durga Sri, who went on to bag the Gold at the National Junior Girls Boxing Championships in 2022. Her win was a landmark achievement for the State – she created history by becoming the

first-ever medal winner in that category from Tamil Nadu and also brought the gold back to TN after 21 long years. Durga Sri's success is nothing short of inspiring – she has proved that if you are determined to achieve a goal, one can certainly do so if supported by good training and a firm will.

The GS Boxing Club continues to participate in District, State, and National competitions. The awards and accolades testify to the commitment and discipline shown by the students of the institution, and serve to inspire the juniors to aim for perfection.

Challenges

Despite its remarkable achievements, the GS Boxing Club is in no small trouble.



4 kids participated and won 2 gold at the State Sub-Junior Boxing Championship 2022 held at Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu.

With sponsorship remaining a great hurdle, it must deal with

a rented location, which means that it cannot possibly admit too many students. Govindaraj wishes to obtain for himself a permanent space with better facilities so that he can expand training sessions. "If we have our own space, we can train more students and give them better opportunities. That is my vision, my dream," he says.

A Vision for the Future

Govindaraj looks toward a future where GS Boxing Club stands tall as the best boxing academy in India with world-class athletes. Within the next five years, he wants to lead the training of at least 100-150 students, comprising both male and female athletes. Depending on the willingness of corporates to provide financial support, he aims to offer scholarships for aspiring boxers while upgrading their training programs as well as equipment. "I want to see our students competing at the international level. They have the potential, they're just needing the right support," he affirms.

The club is also keen on increasing female participation in boxing. With women now being represented in boxing in international arenas, GS Box-

ing Club wants to draw in more girls to the sport to break the glass ceiling. "Boxing is not just for boys. We want more girls to come forward and show their strength. Durga Sri has proved that they can succeed too," he exclaims.

Beyond the Ring: Boxing as a Lifeline

For many students of the club, Boxing is not merely a game but a means of survival. Most hail from severely constrained economic backgrounds and see boxing as a future to build on. "Some of our kids have come from very difficult situations. Boxing gives them hope and purpose," Govindaraj says. The discipline and work ethic taught within the club go far beyond the ring and trickle into studies and schooling. Parents and the surrounding community have acknowledged the club's influence and see it as a reputable institution that helps keep the kids away from negative influences.

Sources:

Govindaraj – Founder and coach of GS Boxing Club.
GS boxing club website.



E. Loshan who was selected to represent TN in the Khelo India Youth Games 2023.

an unclear state of funding. Infrastructure and equipment remain a challenge. "We do not have the best facilities, but we make do with what we have. More than anything, it is our students' determination that keeps us going," says Govindaraj.

Confined space is another limitation. The club works from

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Please email all your letters, comments, additional remarks, brickbats and bouquets to editor@madrasmusings.com

– THE EDITOR



Students of the club practicing.

Fort St. George and I

It was November 1960. I had just returned from my annual leave spent in Madurai to join the ship I was sailing in – an apology of a ship as it was an old mine sweeper of WWII vintage that was transferred to the Indian Navy after Independence. Just about 110 ft long, it rolled and pitched so much that even a hard-core sailor would feel miserable while sailing. A few days later after joining the ship, I received a signal (usually messages are referred

to as signals in the Navy) asking me to report to Mumbai HQ as I was selected to man the first Indian Aircraft carrier, launched as *HMS Hercules* and rechristened as *INS Vikrant*. Incidentally, *HMS Hercules*, a Majestic-class light fleet aircraft carrier, was launched in 1945 but never completed by the Royal Navy. Taken over by the Indian Navy, the construction was completed in the Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast, North Ireland. It

was commissioned as *INS Vikrant* in 1961 and served the Indian Navy until 1997. I was deputed to the Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast, as part of ship procurement crew to stand-by during its construction.

There was, as usual some delay for certain clearances and I had to wait for a while. It was then that two super-speed fast boats (named *Sarada* and *Sukanya*) fitted with

36-cylinder Mercedes engines imported from Germany, to safeguard the Gulf of Mannar against insurgents and illegal transportation, arrived at Madras harbour. They were to be taken charge of, and I was asked to proceed to the then Madras for that purpose and was given accommodation at *INS Adyar* which was housed inside the fort, with a foul-mouthed Punjabi, Commander Sonpar as its head. I took an instant dislike to this man. He

● by
K.R.A. Narasiah

had an old Chevrolet car and that needed some repairs. Cdr Sonpar asked me if I could set that right as I was trained as an artificer in *INS Shivaji*. I told him that there are dime a dozen motor mechanics in the city who could be asked and not a marine engineer like me. That put him on the boil, and he informed the headquarters that I was a bad influence on the ship's company and should be immediately drafted elsewhere. Since I was already drafted to join *Vikrant*, I was sent to *INS Circars* in Visakhapatnam to wait for a call to proceed to the UK.

When the call came, I wanted to teach a lesson to Cdr. Sonpar and so I asked the

drafting centre in Bombay to send me to *INS Adyar* where I had my belongings. When I went to Madras, I purposely went to see Cdr. Sonpar. He was surprised but showing no emotions asked me if I could carry a package for his sister who lived in London. I told him (I distinctly remember even now) "How do I know you are not giving me some contraband stuff so that I can be caught?" He was yelling at the top of his voice but I didn't care and left.

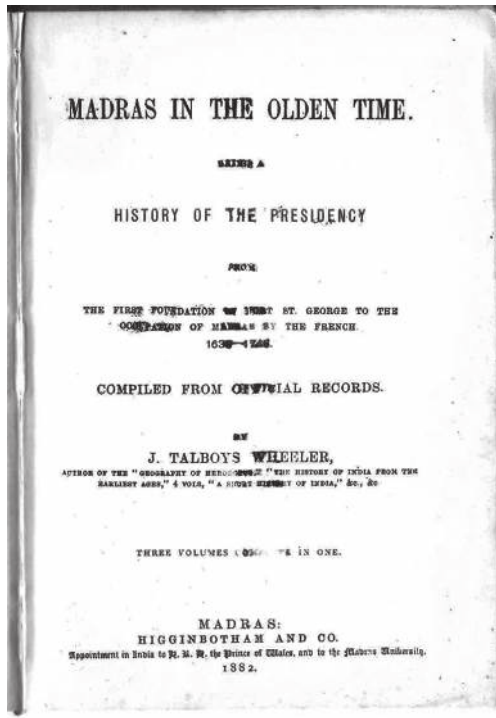
It was from Fort St George that I went to Belfast in Northern Ireland on deputation to join the commissioning team headed by Cdr. Mahindroo, the commanding officer and was given the prestigious post of Chief of flight deck and served till I left the Navy in 1963.

The experience in the Fort, though short, was unforgettable for many reasons, but the feeling that I was living in a place from where the English started their rule in a small way but soon took over the entire sub-continent made me to go around and see it in detail. Those days the fort was totally dark at night as the lighting provided by incandescent light bulbs that were struggling for their existence was pathetic. Still, I used walk around and use the Wallajah gate to go into the city to have my dinner. It was scary when I returned as apart from the sentry at the

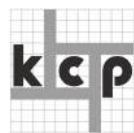
gate there were no persons anywhere!

But these walks around the fort led me to study it. My maternal uncle 'Chitti' Sundararajan, then the chief newscaster at All India Radio had some books and I read with interest the way English lived in the fort and of Clive getting married in the church there. My uncle guided me to the Connemara Library where I could lay my hands on J. Talboys Wheeler's *Madras in the Olden Times* and Col. Love's three volumes on Madras.

Unfortunately, my study was cut short when I was asked to report to Bombay to proceed to Belfast leading a team of 30 sailors as part of commissioning crew of *Vikrant*. Since I was trained as a trainer, on my retirement in 1963, I was selected to be the head of National Institute of Port Management in Madras. But the then shipping minister Jagdish Tytler did not favour my appointment, due to a difference of opinion on a ship building contract earlier. However I was asked to be a visiting faculty in the Institute, by the Secretary, Ministry of Shipping and therefore relocated to Madras. Thus once again I got interested in Madras as a city and started researching on the same and I can say that I am indebted to Fort St. George for my interest in Madras history.



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