

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Wanted: An Act to Protect Heritage in Private Hands

In the last decade or so, successive Governments in Tamil Nadu have done their bit for protecting public heritage. And by this we mean heritage of more recent provenance, the kind that was dismissed as colonial till then, and therefore robbed of basic maintenance and condemned to demolition. But, of late, there has been a change of heart. Heritage buildings in the hands of the government, and even those that are in the hands of government undertakings, seemed to be seeing a better future. On the other hand, it is heritage that is in private hands that seems hugely threatened. The absence of any law to protect these has resulted in much loss and the government would do

well to ponder over what it can do to salvage the situation.

Consider the facts. Many government and other public buildings that would come under heritage lists are now being protected. Modernisation, when taking place in public buildings, is making sure that heritage is left untouched or

● by **Sriram V.**

is being made use of as part of the new planning. Purists may not agree with the restoration and also the wholesale decision to convert most old buildings into museums but it cannot be denied that the structures themselves are surviving for the sake of posterity.

On the other hand, you need to just look at what has happened to private heritage buildings. Madras that is Chennai had several beautiful bungalows that could have well been preserved had there been a law that rewarded owners for continuing to retain heritage. In the absence of such regulation and due to complete lack of awareness in many cases, heritage buildings have bitten the dust. The next aspect of private heritage that needs looking into are artifacts: paintings, sculpture, books, maps, manuscripts, and various articles of everyday use.

A few years ago, when racketeering of a higher order in

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Showcasing our strength in the start-up space

Tamil Nadu is recognised as one of the leaders in the start-up ecosystem space in the country today. The state has traditionally had a strong industrial ecosystem hub thanks to its policies far ahead of their times. The growth story of the start-up scene adds to showcase its economic development and reiterates its position as one of the country's most industrialised states.

The number of start-ups being incubated in the state has grown over the last four years from just 2000 to over 10,000 indicating a robust structure in place. Its growth has been

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

much higher than the national average. StartupTN (officially, the Tamil Nadu Start-up and Innovation Mission), the nodal agency founded in 2018 with the goal of fostering an innovation ecosystem in the state to help incubate start-ups and help them find their feet, has undertaken several initiatives in this regard. The state has 12 sector-specific policies that have a specific focus on start-ups, including the flagship Start-up and Innovation Policy.

Recently, the State Planning Commission has also brought out a comprehensive report titled the *Start-Up Ecosystem in TN: Opportunities and Challenges*. The publication was the outcome of a nine-month study undertaken by the Centre for Research on Start-ups and Risk Financing, IIT Madras.

The excitement about the growth potential of the start-up ecosystem can be gauged from the success of the recent Global Start-up Summit 2025 held in Coimbatore

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HERITAGE WATCH

Law College Restoration



We at *Madras Musings* are all chuffed that yet another heritage landmark of the city, namely the erstwhile Law College building has been magnificently restored. William Satish has sent us this pic of the building as it now is, in all its glory. More details in pages 6 & 7.

WANTED: AN ACT TO PROTECT HERITAGE IN PRIVATE HANDS

(Continued from page 1)

antiques was exposed, the police and the government went to town on how there were laws that required people to register antiques in their possession so that they could not be surreptitiously traded in. After that there has been complete silence and what is more, the government infrastructure itself is woefully inadequate if every owner of an item of historic interest were to come forward to have it registered. Informed sources have it that there is only one person who is allotted the task of approving what can be considered a genuine antique, and you can imagine the backlog. There is no system in place beyond good intentions.

When modern technology has made it possible for nations to have porous borders, it is very likely that heritage will soon find its way out of this state and

the country. The state government would do well to begin preparing itself on how to protect private heritage. The steps required are manifold. Firstly, there must be a mechanism of evaluation of what is of heritage value and what is not. Secondly, there must be a system of acquisition by the government if it feels that an item ought to be nationalised. Valuation then must be correct, not to the detriment of the owner. Thirdly, if the government feels that the item can be traded then it should be forthcoming with certification so that the owners of private heritage are not harassed for no fault of their own. After all, a lot of heritage in private hands is inherited. Lastly, heritage by way of property and real estate needs to get a fair deal especially when owners are willing to continue protecting it.

Showcasing our strength in the start-up space

(Continued from page 1)

earlier in October 2025. Held to showcase the emergence of Tamil Nadu as a leading hub for innovation-driven entrepreneurship, the two-day event saw more than 72,000 footfalls, with a whopping 429 sessions held. It saw participation of delegates and organisations from over 45 countries.

One of the key areas of the above-mentioned report is with respect to addressing the challenges to unlock the state's full potential in the arena. By virtue of being the state's capital, Chennai accounts for more than one-third (with more than 4,300 start-ups) of the total start-ups incubated thus far, with other districts such as Coimbatore, Kanchipuram and Madurai lagging far behind. While this lopsided growth is understandable, with the concentration of start-ups in larger cities as compared to other parts, a trend seen across many other states, it is imperative that steps are actively taken to address the imbalance.

Yet another aspect relates to funding, with private investment being low. It is heartening to note that recognising the need for participation of more

venture capitalists, the Chief Minister announced the allocation of Rs 100 crores for a fund of funds at the Coimbatore event, which would be used to form venture funds in every big city in the state. Bureaucratic procedures that impede easy access to government support need to be reviewed and simplified, particularly with respect to the application process. There is also a need to create more awareness with respect to availability of various sources of funding, particularly with respect to state government funding, eligibility criteria, etc.

The state has set a target to become a \$1 Trillion economy by 2030 and has seen the growth of the start-up space as being integral to achieving this objective. While undoubtedly it has gotten off to a strong start, as is evidenced by its Best Performer recognition by the Government of India in Start-up Rankings 2022 and the fact that it is recognised as the country's third largest startup ecosystem today, it is important to recognise the obstacles and take suitable corrective measures to ensure that the early successes are consolidated and that it continues on its smooth journey.

Museums All – In Letter and Spirit

In Letter and Spirit

You cannot deny, that ours is a city that is most dynamic. And in the eyes of *The Man from Madras Musings* nothing can be more representative of this than the current craze to develop museums among the various government departments. They seem to have come a long way from the time when they wanted to demolish and destroy anything of heritage value that they possessed to now when they not only want to restore but also convert them into museums. MMM, who has been called in very often for his views, has expressed himself very clearly. At a time when the best of museums in the city are unable to attract footfalls chiefly owing to poor displays, lack of circulation of artifacts, and no vision on how to attract people, what can several more museums do? But his words have thus far fallen on deaf ears.

Having decided to protect their built heritage, and then having decided to convert it into a museum, the powers that be are now puzzled over what to populate these museums with. MMM learns from credible sources that it is only now that the government departments are waking up about heritage not being just buildings but also a lot by way of photographs, files, and a thousand other things that a historic city can actually be in possession of! The problem is that much of these have been thrown away over the years as worthless and have no doubt made some scrapdealer into an antique dealer. The net result is that the government departments are now scrambling for displays that they can put into their museums.

It is interesting that many seem to think that MMM may be having something that concerns their history. Many of them get their minions to call MMM and ask for strange things such as newspaper clippings, photographs, and what have you. In fact, 'what have you' is the correct description because the general telephone conversation always goes that way after the ubiquitous greetings of "Saar" and the hope that the saar is doing well. And when saar replies in the negative, deep dejection and despair follow. There is always a tight deadline with a minister arriving for inauguration and so can something makeshift be done? Some of them even ask MMM albeit ever so gently, as to how he can call himself a historian, when he does not seem to

be in possession of what they want! To this MMM has to say that he is only a historian by accident and that even if he is one, his intention is only to collect information and not artifacts.

From what little MMM knows of these departments, he is fairly certain that tucked away somewhere in their vaults is everything that they need to have to put up in their museums. It is just the usual bureaucratic sloth and the lack of awareness as to where all their archival material is stored that prevents them from searching. A good place to begin for instance in MMM's view would be the Tamil Nadu archives where every unwanted paper of the government ends up never to be seen again. The same is true of bureaucrats as well.

Why can't all these government departments have

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

an archivist who can work towards protecting their history and heritage? That way the government would also be giving employment to several students of departments of history and archaeology in the various universities and colleges.

MMM is glad that these government departments are now waking up to heritage. They also now need to realize that it is more a journey. Protecting the building is just the first step. Protecting what you have by way of other artifacts is a never-ending journey.

A Hairy Tale

The Man from Madras Musings was working away as usual when he got an urgent message on his mobile phone. A well-wisher had suddenly panicked and sent a message. Was MMM aware, asked the Good Samaritan, that some lottery company in the United Arab Emirates was making use of a video of MMM for marketing its products? The sender had also forwarded the link and asked MMM whether the whole video was generated by AI. He also suggested that MMM ought to take steps to protect his identity in future.

MMM was not perturbed and neither was he flattered. After all, as you know, MM has fans in China and so what is the UAE? But he nevertheless decided to go and take a look at the link. It was not a video of MMM. The only

similarity was that the man who was speaking in that genuine video for a lottery agency was completely bald just like MMM is. And he was wearing spectacles. Having had a hearty laugh over it, MMM sent a message to the person who had alerted him about the possible fraud saying that that bald head was another bald head and not MMM's bald head. The sender responded thanking MMM and said that he had been taken in by a passing resemblance. That ended that story!

But that was not all. Last week MMM received a call from the printer of MM. An old friend of MMM's is this man and his father was a close friend of the late chief's. In fact, many a time has MMM accompanied the chief to the printer's office when printer senior was still around and has been privy to the interaction between the two men. They would sit opposite each other, drink cups of tea and not exchange words, and after a while the chief would leave. But the goodwill between the two was palpable. The same can be said about the relationship between the printer junior and MMM. Occasionally he will call MMM or the other way round and exchange the news of the day. There is yet another commonality between the two – both MMM and the printer are what you may call, challenged in matters of hair, not possessing any where it ought to be.

The printer called MMM to register a formal complaint! Did MMM notice that two photographs of MMM had been published in the September issue of MM asked the printer. MMM said that he was aware and asked him as to what the matter was. The printer then replied that one photograph was taken from the rear of MMM showing the back of his head and the other was taken from the front showing the front of his head and both of them had appeared side by side. The printer said that these were not aesthetic photographs and could MMM make sure that the quality of what goes into MM gets a little attention. MMM is now left wondering – is it the face or the back of it that was not aesthetic in the eyes of the printer or is it the fact that there was no hair on it that had offended him? MMM thinks that it is the latter, and on that hairy note MMM lets the matter rest.

– MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Buying tickets is a painful experience

For the past few decades, ATP tennis matches are being played in Madras (except in some intervening years). In the early years, tickets were sold only across the counter. Later, online ticket sales were introduced side by side. The counter sales were very convenient for tennis fans especially seniors.

This year when the fans went to buy tickets at the counter, they were dismayed to find that the time tested practice had been changed, only online sales was available. That too after booking online, one had to approach the ticket counter to exchange for printed tickets!

What a degradation! Many, especially seniors, who do not have online facility were at a loss on how to go about it and they had to request their near and dear ones to help them. Not only that, in addition to the actual ticket price they had to shell out an additional Rs.125 or so, as service charges! Fleecing and what a pain!

Already half the stadium is empty of spectators. By resorting to such unfriendly and thoughtless measures, they drive away even the few who want to see the matches.

You can buy trains tickets online as well as at counters; similar is the case for cinema tickets. Even for airline tickets both online and counter sales are available. So for matches too please restore counter sales of tickets along with online sales!

* * *

Another disaster in the making?

To develop 2000 acres global city in Madurantakam is a myopic, thoughtless and ill advised proposal. The Madras, Chingleput, Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur corridors are already bursting at the seams. Only a few water bodies and lakes remain and whatever little is left

of agricultural land and groves will also disappear! Citizens are already suffering due to traffic congestion, lack of adequate storm water drains, accumulation of garbage, frequent power cuts, etc. Lack of adequate parking facilities has resulted in most vehicles being parked on the platforms or on the roads itself. A global city will certainly add to several acres of concrete, further adding to the citizen's woes. It will also add to traffic congestion, air and noise pollution. The immediate need is to stop further construction in this corridor.

One also wonders from where will you get construction materials like sand and stones in the state as most of the water bodies have already been deeply excavated and half the hillocks plundered by the land mafia. The idea of a global city in the Madurantakam belt should be buried fathoms deep!

The non agricultural and dry lands available in the southern parts of the State may be considered for the development of a global city in Tamil Nadu.

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Rethink area development

As a senior citizen who lives in Chennai, I had facilitated MMDA during the establishment of Manali Neighbourhood scheme since I was working in the public sector in Manali Area. We extended all help. Having seen the growth of neighbourhood development, I fully endorse the views of the editorial on this.

In my considered view it has to be in places, as suggested, outside Chennai so that there is development in that region besides also reducing congestion in the city. I hope the planners will rethink before finalising.

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Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks upto August 2025.

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The Forty Umbas and the Guava that started it all

It began, quite innocently, on a WhatsApp chat.

My friend had written to me about one of her pet peeves – how people often assume she's the strong one, the one who can manage on her own, while they rush to "rescue" someone else. I told her I understood. "Not always the strong one," I had typed back. "But I'm supposed to be the always-happy-one."

And she, in her trademark clarity, asked, "But who decides what you're supposed to be?"

I smiled when I read that. Because just a couple of weeks earlier, I had a similar moment of reckoning – over something as ordinary as guavas!

* * *

We were on the highway, heading to visit someone. The road was lined with fruit sellers, and my eye caught a pile of plump, perfect guavas. I said, "*Pazham vaangindu ponumba, illaya? Highway la koiyya thaana irukku*" (We are supposed to buy fruit when we visit no? There are only guavas on the highway.)

The husband didn't even look up from the wheel. He said, "*Koiyyalaam kudukka koodathumba*." (You are not supposed to gift guavas, they say)

That's when I blinked. "Who?? Who is the umba this time?"

He grinned. And that was it – I had my answer, my coinage, and a full-fledged theory.

The umba-s had made their appearance.

* * *

Now, "umba" is entirely my creation. My friend calls them the *naalu per* – the proverbial "four people" whose invisible verdicts govern everything from what we wear to what we gift.

But I've started to think it's not four anymore. It's forty. Maybe four hundred! A whole army of invisible umba-s, walking around in our heads, whispering uninvited opinions.

They have rules for everything:

- *Pannakoodathumba*. (They say you must not do that)
- *Sollakoodathumba*. (They say you must not speak like that)
- *Seiyyanumba*. (They say you must do that)

And now, apparently – "*Koiyya kudukka koodathumba*."

* * *

I remember laughing so hard that morning. "It's fruit!" I said, "You're giving it to a friend. If they like it, they eat it. If

not, they'll give it away. Why are we consulting the umba-s about guavas now?"

He joined in the laughter. There was no conflict – just that familiar, ridiculous moment when both of us knew how deeply the umba-s had infiltrated our lives. We'd grown up with them. They were always around.

The umba-s think I must serve coffee only in the "good" steel tumblers when guests come. That sambar should never be poured over rice directly – it must be ladled gracefully. That pyjamas shouldn't be seen by outsiders, even if it looks better than my actual clothes. That I must smile at all times, because a calm, cheerful woman somehow makes the world feel safer.

And when I forget? They sulk. I can almost hear them cluck their tongues in disapproval, muttering among themselves about "standards dropping these days."

* * *

But here's what's changed.

I've learned to let convenience win.

If the rice cooker doubles as a serving bowl – so be it.

If I send someone off with guavas because that's what I have – excellent, they are healthy too!

If I laugh too loudly, leave the kitchen messy, or stay quiet when I don't feel like smiling – the umba-s can stand in a corner and sulk.

Because life isn't meant to be lived under their constant scrutiny.

* * *

My friend, when she first read my message, asked, "What's an umba? Are they the four per?"

And I told her, "*Adhe naalu per!* Only, I think they're forty now."

She wrote back, laughing – "Smaller things, four. Bigger ones, umba."

That line sealed it for me. The umba-s have hierarchy too!

But they have also become my favourite comic relief. They pop up everywhere – in my head, in conversations, in social situations – and instead of letting them decide how I feel, I now enjoy watching them squirm when ignored.

There's something deliciously freeing about that.

So, to all the umba-s who still hover – watching, judging, and sighing at my careless happiness – I have only one thing to say:

You had a good run.

Now please step aside.

The guavas are staying.

Cauvery Kesavasamy
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● Tamils in Delhi

When Tamils made Delhi their Home, amid Struggle and Hope

The 1920s saw a noticeable trickle of Tamils to Delhi from the erstwhile Madras Presidency (which covered present-day Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka besides parts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana). The numbers migrating to the distant north kept rising steadily, so much that a Tamil school opened in Delhi in 1923. By the time India won independence in 1947, there was a mini army of Tamils working for the central government, perched mostly in lower echelons but secure and pensionable jobs.

My now late father, MA Raman, and mother, Raji Raman, made Delhi their home in 1948 when it resembled an overgrown village. Delhi was then dominated by Punjabis, who swelled its population after fleeing Pakistan in large numbers following the bloodbath that came with the partition of the sub-continent.

Most Tamils – they constituted the overwhelming bulk of the south Indians in Delhi in that era – were hard working, efficient and honest, qualities which quickly won them respect and led to ready acceptance. North Indians preferred to rent out their homes to south Indians and Bengalis, the two communities who accounted for up to 40 per cent of Central government jobs for many years. Shopkeepers did not mind giving them goods against monthly instalments, fully aware that no Tamil would ever cheat.

One reason the Tamils were preferred in the bureaucracy was because they had a more than working knowledge of English

and knew typing and shorthand well. Hindi language was an issue, at least initially. They were of course good at Tamil, which was spoken at home. Those from Palghat, like my parents, were proficient in both Tamil and Malayalam although they leaned on the former. The men quickly came to grips with Hindi because of colleagues, although it took time for their homemakers – women to catch up.

So as not to be too far from their place of work, the Tamils settled down in areas around government offices, taking small houses on rent. The first mode of transport was the bicycle. Two-wheelers came much later when salaries began to go up. Once children were born, everyone suffered a space crunch. It was in the 1950s that the government began building and allocating houses for its staff in places like Minto Road, Gole Market, Lodi Road, Sarojini Nagar, Netaji Nagar, Lakshmi Bai Nagar, Nauroji Nagar, Moti Bagh and RK Puram. This was a great boon. One early concentration of Tamils was in Karol Bagh, a commercial and residential area near the heart of Delhi. It is no wonder that a string of schools launched by the Madras Education Association (later Delhi Tamil Education Association) came up strategically in places close to where the Tamils lived.

While a great majority of the Tamils in Delhi worked for the government, the passion of the just-won independence ruling their hearts, steady numbers also made it to the private sector. In the 1940s and 50s, a majority of the Tamils in Delhi were

Brahmins. One by one, Tamil temples began to come up. The first, which still exists, opened near the iconic Rivoli cinema in Connaught Place, the capital's main commercial district for decades. Others followed, mostly in central and south Delhi. In the absence of other attractions, the temples became a strong cultural glue for the Tamils, particularly during major festivals which drew hundreds of men, women and children.

Whether they were temples or schools, while the efforts to build them were consistent, the progress was slow given the limited resources. Temples came up brick by brick, step by step and shrine by shrine – literally and otherwise. The Vinayagar temple at Sarojini Nagar raised funds by selling a notional 'brick' each for a fixed amount. The Uttara Swami Malai temple (locally known as Malai Mandir) similarly sold a notional step leading up to the primary shrine atop a hillock. The primary shrines came up first and the sub-shrines followed.

The MEA (later DTEA) schools too started as a cluster of tented accommodation for various classes before buildings were erected. Often, the tented schools could not function during heavy rains leading to unexpected holidays. Even after the schools shifted into newly constructed building(s), many parts remained incomplete leading to mishaps and accidents.

Eager to stay in touch with their roots and culture, the Tamil community established a number of socio-cultural organizations. D Ranganathan recalls that his



The Vinayagar temple at Sarojini Nagar. Picture courtesy: YouTube for Cycle Traveling Delhi vlog.

father, KN Doraiswamy, and a few friends started the Karnataka Sangeetha Sabha and held its maiden concert by inviting the Nagaswara Chakravarthi, Thiruvaduthurai Rajaratnam Pillai, no less! Almost in parallel, another organisation with similar intent, the Shanmukhanda Sangeetha Sabha, came up. Both groups over the years

ular magazines such as *Ananda Vikatan*, *Kumudam*, *Kalki* and *Kalaimagal*. Their annual Deepavali bumper issues were a major draw. The Delhi Tamil Sangam, still flourishing, was born in 1954 to foster and preserve Tamil culture, language and traditions. One by one, similar associations sprouted.

Many Tamils made regular

hand-me-down clothes, text books and notes, passing them from the elder brother/sister to younger siblings. Like others serving the government, Tamil families depended on food and groceries rationed by the Jawaharlal Nehru administration to ease the cost of living.

New dresses were bought only during Diwali. For the festival, families made their own sweets and savories, partly due to economic reasons and because only north Indian eats could be bought from the market. Those in school were constantly cautioned not to lose their pencils, pens and lunch boxes because replacements cost valuable money. If slippers or shoes suffered damage, they were mended as often as they could before a new pair could be sought. The kids were warned not to waste a single morsel of food on the plate. The hand to mouth existence which Tamil families endured helped create respect and value for money.

Like others, my parents grappled with shoestring budgets for a long time. One reason was that my father, initially with All India Radio, sent money every month to his aged mother in Palghat and to an elder sister in Bombay who housed him and his wife for long months before he journeyed to Delhi. A small amount was sent every month to our family temple, called *Kavu*, in Palghat. With house rent slashing the income further, there was often very little left in the last week of the month.

This is when my parents sold one stainless steel utensil each month to bring in badly needed extra cash. One night, while on his way to the market, a policeman accused my father of

possessing stolen property. He was allowed to go only after he blurted out the family's dire daily tribulations.

In 1949, my father picked up from the street a small discarded tin in which cigarettes were sold. A non-smoker himself, he gave it a good wash and dried it under the sun. He then told my mother to use the tin – which still exists in our house! – to scoop out raw rice and dal. They could not afford to buy ladles.

Many other families had near similar experiences. Architect AR Ramanathan recalled that many Tamil families had savings accounts in the Palai Central Bank, headquartered in Kerala. This bank was suddenly ordered to close by the government on the recommendation of the Reserve Bank of India compounding the already delicate and fragile financial condition. The impact of the closure cast a shadow on the financial wellbeing for several years after.

The story of NA Parasuraman, who came to Delhi from Palghat in 1946 at age 17 was no different. Recalls his son NP Eshwar, now in Bengaluru: "It used to be a hand-to-mouth, salary-to-salary kind of existence. In the early years, the hearth was kept hot with coal and wood. Over the years, the family graduated to kerosene to fire up the stove. The gas cylinder came much later. My mother Meenakshi not only made sure there



Government built houses like these in which numerous Tamil families lived for long years, thanks to the government jobs held by the head of the family. Many of these houses have been now razed by the current government to make way for high rise apartments.

was enough food on the plate for everyone but would make varieties of sweets and savories, come any festival. Hardships were apparent, but happiness was latent."

Delhi's freezing winter – which in that era lasted four full months, from November to February – was the first shock to those who came from that part of the south where woollens were a rarity. In the process, many ended up suffering their first winter in cotton clothes before everyone pressured them to go for sweaters, socks and gloves. They did not come cheap, though. And every member of the family had to have a separate set of winter

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Rivoli cinema in Connaught Place. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.



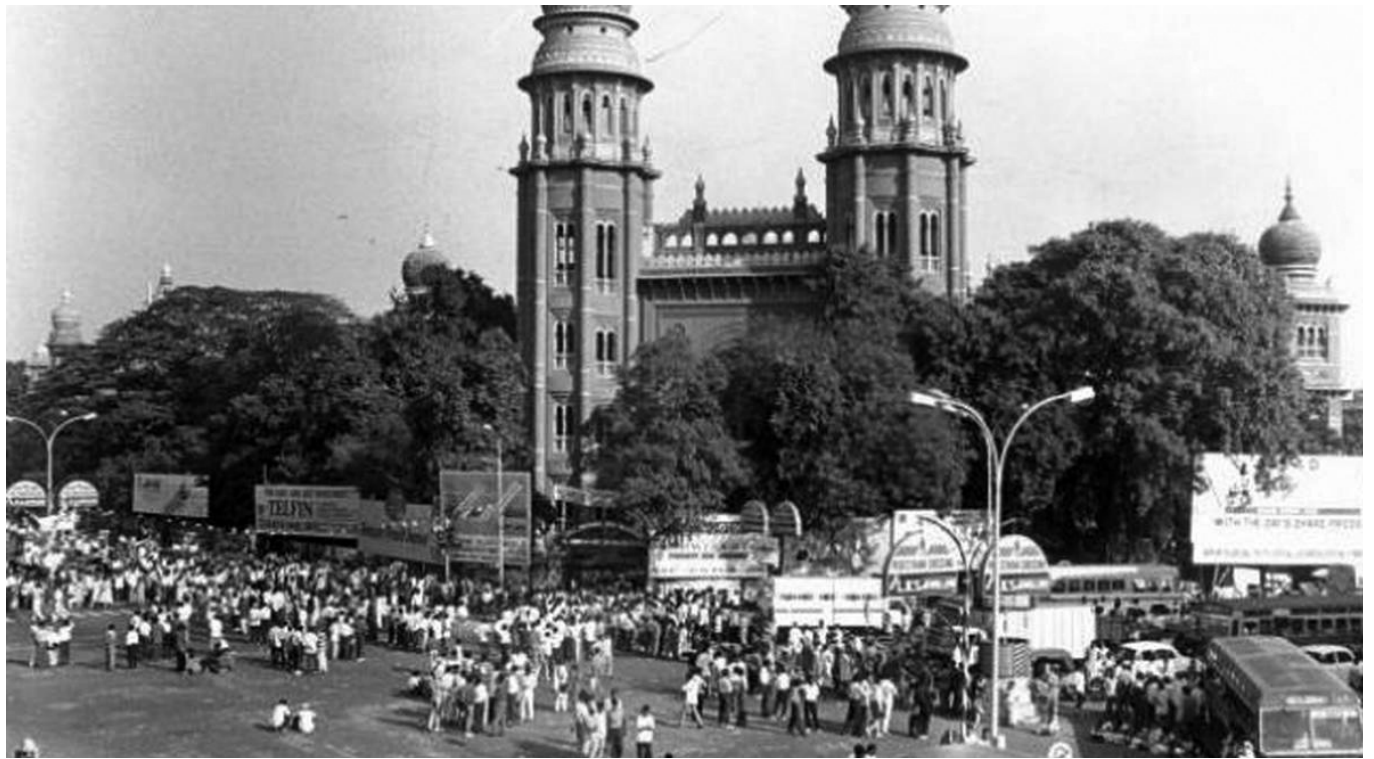
Sree Swaminatha Swami Temple at the Malai Mandir Complex in Delhi. Courtesy: Wikipedia.

Unearthing the Foundations of the Law College

It is not always that our city has cause to celebrate in matters of heritage, given its dismal track record of protecting and giving a fresh lease of life to structures that have played an important role in its history. It must be acknowledged however that today there seems to be a bit more awareness, especially amongst the corridors of power on the need to conserve its rich legacy. Coming on the heels of the successful restoration of

● by
Karthik Bhatt

the *Victoria Public Hall* is the recent restoration of the old Madras Law College building and its declaration as an additional heritage campus of the Madras High Court. Over the last decade or so, the Madras High Court has undertaken several noteworthy activities to showcase its heritage, such as a well-maintained museum, restoration of the second light-house of Madras which stands in its campus, and throwing open its campus to heritage



An older view of the Law College. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

walks (initiated and led by NL Rajah, Senior Advocate). The recent restoration of the magnificent erstwhile Law College building adds yet another feather to its cap.

The Madras Law College was established in 1891 in place of the old law classes of the Presidency College which were

not found to work satisfactorily. Initially, lecture hours were confined to morning and evening, as most of the professors were practicing lawyers and the students occupied during the day in government and private offices. Progress on this type of arrangement was deemed unsatisfactory and around late

1896, the course structure was remodelled. Parallely, steps had been taken to move the college to a separate building, on the site adjoining the Madras High Court to its west. The site was originally the old British cemetery of Madras. Excavations for the foundations would bring to light several old skeletons. The duo of Henry Irwin (as the architect) and JH Stephens (as the engineer), who had been involved in the new buildings of the Madras High Court which had moved into its current campus in 1892 were involved in the execution of the law college building as well. Designed in the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, the Law College moved into its new campus in early 1899.

In 2015, the heritage structure suffered damages due to the metro rail project and was declared unsafe, necessitating relocation of the law college elsewhere. The institution was subsequently bifurcated and relocated to the Tiruvallur and Chengalpattu districts in 2018.

A search on the internet on the construction of the Law College buildings threw up a fascinating note on its foundations, as reported by the *Engineering Record* journal, in its issue dated Oct 27, 1894. It was a summary of a series of articles published in the *Indian Engineering* magazine on the features of the building and is worth reproducing in full.

It is interesting to note that the Law College was a forerunner by way of its butterfly pattern, ideally suited for corner plots. This would be later put to good use by Sir Edwin Lutyens when he designed the houses of Maharajahs all around Princes' Place in New Delhi.

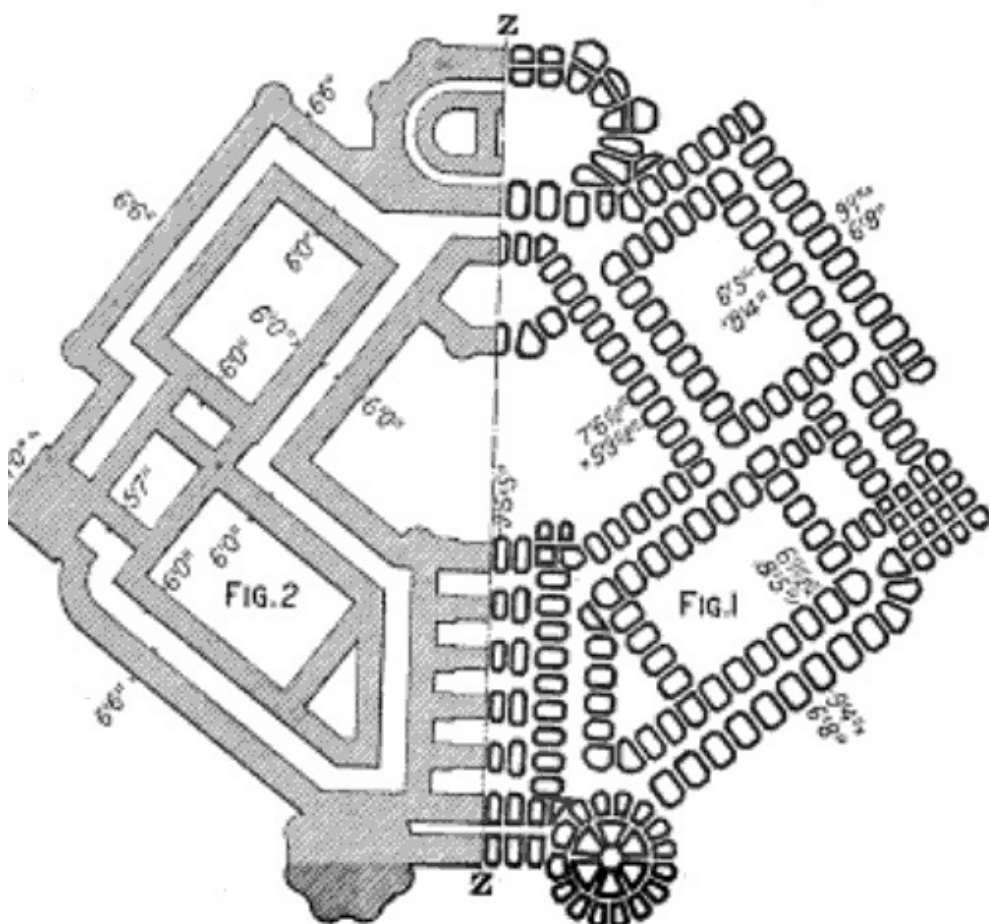
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Foundations for Madras (India) Law College

"The English Law College at Madras is a massive masonry structure, two stories high, built at the intersection of two important streets and having an ornate central entrance gate flanked by high towers and corner pavilions and domes. It was designed by Mr Irwin, CIE, consulting architect to the government of Madras, and as the ground was wet and soft, the heavy walls were built on the brick well piers, characteristic of the country. From a series of articles in the *Indian Engineer*, we have prepared a description of the characteristic features and principal data of the foundations.

The wells had to be sunk 14 feet below the surface of the ground or 8 feet through black ooze and slush till a good bed of sand was reached. The natural springs commenced about 6 feet from the surface, so that a head of 8 feet of water had to be dealt with in lowering the wells.

Altogether 404 wells were built and sunk, and each one was made so as to fit exactly the



FOUNDATIONS FOR THE MADRAS (INDIA) LAW COLLEGE.

(Continued on page 7)

Unearthing the Foundations of the Law College

(Continued from page 6)

position it was to occupy in the building. The sizes and arrangements of the wells as shown in Figure 1 and a half-plan of the concrete footing above them is shown in Figure 2, both figures being half plans, symmetrical about the centre line ZZ. The octagonal form was found more suitable than the square, as it better resisted the pressure of the external earth while sinking. The curbs were all of wood, but wedge shaped and a foot deep. A dozen or more curbs forming one well were fixed in position and the walls built on them to a height of 4 feet. After about a week's drying these were gradually sunk to the level of the soil and the second section of 4 feet raised, after another week's drying this also was lowered.

The triangular wells gave the greatest difficulty in sinking and the larger wells of all shapes gave more trouble than the smaller ones. For sinking, the professional Madras well sinker, as well as Bull's dredges and Fouracres well excavators were used, but it was found, probably on account of the comparatively small depth and oozy nature of the soil, that the well sinker with his basket and ropes worked quickest and cheapest; but the other methods were kept on, merely to show the well sinkers that the work was not entirely dependent on them.

The length of the wells was regulated by the breadth of

the walls above them, and the breadth of the wells made so that two men could work easily in them as well as to fit a certain number of wells in every length of walling or area of tower. The wells, arranged like the conventional lotus, form the foundations of the large east towers. It will be observed that the larger wells form the inner circle and the smaller ones the outside area. It is believed that this arrangement will make the foundations stronger than if the reverse had been adopted, or if all the wells had been made of one size. Round wells were not adopted on account of the larger spaces which have to be left between them. The wells were fitted, after being sunk, by sea sand, clean flinty silica, incompressible in its nature, and which will carry almost any weight when securely housed. Such a filling may not answer for bridge works in beds of rivers, where the sand may be even indirectly exposed to scour or current, but in a building far away from such influences, where the sand will remain undisturbed, it is claimed to be appropriate. A bed of 4.5 feet of concrete comes over the wells, and 1.5 feet of brickwork over the concrete will bring the foundation to the ground level. The wells took four months to make, sink, and fill. The concrete was made of broken granite and surkhee mortar laid in 6-inch courses."

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– THE EDITOR

Musings on learning beyond marks

"Ma'am, if we already know the answer, why write it again in the test?" one child asked me. Before I could blink, another said, "Perhaps teachers just like handwriting practice."

There it was: philosophy, wit and rebellion – all before the first bell.

We often confuse **teaching with learning, grades with education, and certificates with competence**. What we get is mechanical repetition – like chewing the same piece of sugarcane long after the juice has gone.

In Chennai terms, we value the idli (logic, calculation, memory) but forget the sambar (creativity, rhythm, intuition). And honestly, what's an idli without sambar? Dry, dull and only half the joy.

The real trouble is that schools tell children **what** to learn but rarely **how**. The word 'education' comes from the Latin 'educare' – "to bring out". Instead, we pile in facts as though children were MTC buses at peak hour. Cleverness becomes the goal; intelligence is left at the bus stop.

As J Krishnamurti said, "The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and therefore intelligent."

Some of my favourite classroom moments have been sparked by questions that silenced the room:

"What is happiness?"

"Why do people lie?"

"If cows could talk, what would they say about Chennai traffic?"

You don't always find answers. But isn't that the beginning of real learning – curiosity without fear?

And the memories that stay aren't of exam marks. They're of field trips where children leaned on each other, of laughter on a tough trek, of whispered life-stories under a shady tree.

So here's my question to you, dear reader: "Does life prepare us for life – or do we prepare life for ourselves?"

And just between us, would you have passed school if sambar had been on the syllabus?

– Priyanka Soman

When Tamils made Delhi their Home, amid Struggle and Hope

(Continued from page 5)

clothes to survive in Delhi. In those bone-chilling winters, the occurrence of ground frost was common.

Tamil boys and girls studying mostly in DTEA schools – where good quality education was virtually free considering the low fee structure – got either no pocket money or 5 to 10 paise on select days. This amount might sound silly now but it helped to buy small eats in the school canteen and from street vendors.

Some boys who did not use the school bus added to their income by paying only half the fare in city buses; the rest was pocketed by the conductor who would not issue tickets in return. This was probably an early instance of corruption! Only the wealthier boys owned cricket bats and tennis balls. If the owner got miffed for any reason and went home, the game would end!

For long years, Tamils in Delhi were addressed – or taunted – as Madrasis. Most north Indians had no knowledge of the southern geography, and viewed everyone from the south of Vindhyas as a *Madras*. As

the Tamil pioneers' children were growing, it caused tension between the locals and Tamil boys. Finally, in the 1970s, aggressive Tamil boys, who had no love for the timid nature of their parents, began beating up Hindi-speakers who made fun of their language, culture and cuisine. This was probably the first sign of Tamils asserting themselves in Delhi.

Those who had trooped to Delhi from before and after India's independence, leaving the comfort zone of their villages, largely began to retire in the 1970s and 80s – after over four decades of loyalty to the government. It was a period when the first Tamil settlers adapted to climate, language and culture of north India. A sizeable number returned to south India, with or without children. The majority, however, struck roots in Delhi and stayed on, also due to pressure from their children who were as conversant with Hindi as with Tamil.

Eventually, many of the children found well-paying jobs, becoming doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, architects, lawyers, civil servants, soldiers, executives in private

and public sector companies and so on. Many of their own children, the second-generation Tamils born and raised in Delhi, ended up marrying outside the linguistic barrier, bringing into Tamil homes daughters – and sons-in-law from Punjab, Delhi, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It was nothing short of a socio-cultural revolution.

This was a far cry from the pre- and Independence era when Tamils in Delhi suffered from loneliness because they could not easily communicate in Hindi. Now, when their children and grandchildren speak in Hindi, north Indians find it difficult to believe that they are Tamils! All this was made possible due to the way the first Tamils brought up their children with good values and beliefs, says K Vishwanathan, now a resident of Chennai, whose father KG Krishnan embraced Delhi in 1954. "Hats off to their resilience and determination to succeed," he says of his father and mother, echoing a widely held view among those who remember their parents with utmost respect.

Joshna Chinappa defies age, wins another PSA title

Joshna Chinappa and Indian squash have been great partners for long and the journey continues. Her first exposure to squash was as a child when she would accompany her father Anjan Chinappa to the MCC and watch him play there. At

the tender age of seven she first laid her hands on a squash racquet and the rest, as they say, is history!

Joshna grew up to become one of the formidable players that India has ever produced and her career speaks for her

greatness and fame. She has bagged medals at the Asian championship, the Asian Games, the Commonwealth Games, and the World junior championship, and in India she has set a record winning 19 national championship titles – something that is going to stay for long.

over a player nearly half her age speaks of her fitness and as much of her continuing excellence on the court. It has been magnificent.”

The Chennai girl laughs it away when reminded of her age and her continuing excellence. “I am just enjoying my game. I respond to what my body tells me and that keeps my drive

Japan, the unseeded Joshna, a former top-10 player but currently ranked at 117, beat her Egyptian opponent Haya Ali, the third seed and ranked a 53 in the world. Interestingly, just six months ago, Joshna had lost to the same Egyptian in the Bermuda Open in a five-game thriller. The Japan success has certainly hardened her resolve but she has decided to take things step by step. “Pick and choose tournaments,” will be her way and as for looking ahead, it is the next Asian Games in Japan that she has targeted. When asked what about the next Olympics where squash is making its debut, Joshna is clear “That is not in my time frame as of now.”

A Deputy Director (Sports) with the Tamil Electricity Board, Joshna Chinappa has indeed come a long way. She is thankful to everyone in the Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI) and the Squash Academy who have supported her right through and inspired her all the way. For the iron lady of Indian squash, the journey has not ended, there is a lot more to achieve. It would be apt to quote the famous line of Robert Frost “miles to go before I sleep”.

● by S.R. Suryanarayan

But what has now brought her back in the news is her latest success at the Japan Open Squash tournament – her 11th PSA tour title at age 39 plus! It is doubtful if any other player in the world has this record of winning such a title at her age. And importantly, this latest success comes after a gap of 10 years!

There is no doubting her desire to excel, her keenness to remain fit and above all her continuing hunger for success on the squash court. As the former national coach and now the Secretary General of Squash Rackets Federation of India, Cyrus Poncha says, “It has been an incredible journey for Joshna. Her Japan success

going,” explains Joshna when asked about her high quality play. In a physically exhausting sport like squash, fitness is the key and Joshna must be specially commended for it.

Coming from an injury and surgery phase after the last Asian Games in 2023, Joshna was inspired by her doctors who told her she could return to the courts like earlier times. She started slow and steady, and early this year she partnered the current national sensation Anahat Singh to win the women’s doubles title in the Asian championship. That perhaps set the tone for her work ahead.

At the Yokohama event in



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